



THE TREE OF TIME AND THE TREE
OF BOOKS
LUCIA RONCHETTI

Born in Rome in 1963, Lucia Ronchetti is a composer dedicated to music theater projects, opera, and dramaturgical choral works with commissions from the most important European institutions, Artistic Director of the Biennale Musica festival in Venice, and Professor of Composition at the Conservatory of Salerno. In 2023, the new opera *Das fliegende Klassenzimmer* made its debut at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein under the direction of Ilaria Lanzino, and the Staatsoper Hannover presented new performances of *Pinocchio's Abenteuer* under the direction of Maria Kwaschik. The choral opera *Chronicles of Loneliness*, commissioned by ACHT BRÜCKEN | Musik für Köln, premiered at the Kölner Philharmonie; Thomas Guggeis conducted the premiere of *Studio di ombre* for orchestra, commissioned by the Frankfurter Museums-Gesellschaft for the Oper Frankfurt; and the vocal ensemble The Present performed *Albertine* and *Blumenstudien* in their projects for the Neuköllner Oper. Two new opera productions will be presented in 2024, *Searching for Zenobia* for the Münchener Biennale and the Staatstheater Braunschweig directed by Isabel Ostermann and *Der Doppelgänger* directed by David Hermann for the Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele and Staatstheater Luzern. Website: www.luciaronchetti.com. – Address: Dipartimento di Teoria, Analisi, Composizione e Direzione, Conservatorio Statale di Musica “Giuseppe Martucci”, Via Salvatore De Renzi 62, 84125 Salerno SA, Italy. E-mail: luciaronchetti@gmail.com.

In my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg, I always worked starting in the early morning at a table placed in front of the large glass window of the balcony on the fourth floor of Villa Walther, the rectangle of light framed by the brown stone columns of the terrace in front of the extraordinary entanglement of the branches of the old linden tree towering above

the iridescent blue of the Koenigssee. I learned day after day to follow the intricate lines of the intertwining of branches, which enclosed leaves of the golden yellow and orange colors of sunset in September and progressively shed their leaves until November, revealing an ancient and deep grey, an existential color that seemed to be a quotation from Mondrian. The branches were then mantled in a candid white snow in December, before giving way to a layer of shining ice, reflecting the steel blue of the sky during the coldest period. In the awakening of spring, the tree's branches magically covered themselves with soft and warm emerald-green moss, a vegetable fur, and finally with a new green pregnant with buds and leaves, an explosion and luxuriance of new life that invaded the entire window in the last summer months of my stay.

This tree of time and life lived its metamorphoses day by day as the pages of my table filled with signs and symbols, pages stretched and piled up in the silence of my writing, my compositional despair and happiness. I composed every day, accompanied by this extraordinary evolution, invaded by the constant vision of the iridescent mosaic of the stained glass window historiated by a severe, ritual, and complex nature. These are works that I consider representative, such as *Chronicles of Loneliness*, a choral work for 100 male voices for ACHT BRÜCKEN | Musik für Köln, *Studio di ombre* for the orchestra of the Oper Frankfurt commissioned by Thomas Guggeis, and the chamber opera *Searching for Zenobia* for the Münchener Biennale and the Staatstheater Braunschweig requested by director Isabel Ostermann.

On the other side of the large room on the fourth floor of Villa Walther, another large table, where I always sat with my back to the large window, a table occupied by a tower of books progressively arriving from all the libraries in the world, requested by and searched for me by Anja Brockmann, angel of the library service of the Wissenschaftskolleg, one of the great wonders of our world. Anja researched for me all the texts that could highlight the evolution of new technologies related to listening to digital sound and to the artificial intelligence techniques related to its processing, thereby enabling me to prepare myself for the *Micro-Music* festival that I conceived for the Biennale Musica 2023 in Venice. The table of books with shimmering covers, new or worn spines, bindings thick and stiff or torn and curled by time, began to fill up in September 2022 and reached its maximum expansion in January 2023. Then it gradually faded down as I read and returned the volumes. It became my hourglass of books, my Tower of Babel, my tree of books, and it accompanied me until the official presentation of the festival in April 2023 in Venice. Between these two distant and antithetical tables, in the religious silence of the *Turris*

eburnea that the Wissenschaftskolleg offers its residents, I spent beautiful hours, dramatic hours, ferocious hours, and feverish hours; and I think that this room, with the tree of time on one side and the tree of books on the other, will remain with me forever.

But the Wiko is not silence, it is a soundscape made up of voices, many voices with marvelous inflections, accents reminiscent of millenary cultures and enlightened vocabularies, the voices of the many residents arriving from all parts of the world and from many different linguistic Babels. Their voices, during my stay, were interwoven and intertwined like voracious climbing plants united in unheard and unprecedented dialogues, generating enthusiasm and melancholy, moments of linguistic and intellectual shipwreck, and moments of joy and discoveries. Listening to these voices, I have travelled the world, space, and time; I have made journeys I would never have imagined, such as the one to the bottom of the oceans and of the international laws and treaties that regulate it in the virtuous, elaborate, and enveloping language of Surabhi Ranganathan; journeys into memory through the fascinating linguistic networks and deep poetic meshes woven by Maria Stepanova; journeys into the ideal society, chiseled by Susan Marks' rhythmic voice, structured and illuminated by precise conciseness, in search of the chrism of human dignity and its universal recognition; journeys into pure speculation through the elegant logical and linguistic labyrinths unveiled by Lorraine Daston with a crystal-clear and sculptural hyper-English.

Also impressive for me were the voices of Shai Secunda in his reconstruction of the Babylonian Talmud, a luminous, complex, sibylline language interwoven with linguistic grey stones, ancient Semitic words that seem to fall into the English grammatical net like sonorous diamonds; the profound, passionate, and prophetic voice of Thomas Kaufmann and his extraordinary reconstructions of the modernity of the use of the press in the Reformation; the eclectic, shining, dramaturgical voice of Njoki Wamai in her political search for "lessons and dilemmas" in the prevention of African conflict. The English that we all spoke together turned out to be an elastic, metamorphic, and living language that united in a polyphony of individual diversities a group of wonderful people who had landed on this salvific temporal ark of the Wissenschaftskolleg.

For me, the Wiko was a laboratory for experimenting with the voice, not only for listening to the extraordinary and virtuosic "arias" that are the Tuesday Colloquia, but also because its spaces became places of rehearsal, experimentation, and vocal performance for my new scores. With the complicity and support of Frank Nörenberg and Petria Saleh, I was able to record vocal samples and work with the soloists Olivia Stahn and Hanna Herfurtner, the Syrian vocalist Mais Harb, the countertenor Jan Jakub Monowid, and the

vocal ensemble *The Present*. In the spaces of the Wiko, I was able to discuss the dramaturgies of my future works with directors Isabel Ostermann for the Münchener Biennale, David Hermann for the Schwetzingen SWR Festspiele, Tobias Kratzer for the Hamburg State Opera, and with dramaturges such as Konrad Kuhn of the Oper Frankfurt, Keith Stonum of the Staatstheater Hannover, and Sarah Grahneis of the Staatstheater Braunschweig.

Isabel Mundry, in 2002/2003 the first female composer to be a resident at the Wissenschaftskolleg, marked my residency with her extraordinary presentation of my *Gesprächskonzert*, and Liza Lim, the composer in residence the year before mine, returned to the Wiko for her important Berlin premieres, and I was able to share my impressions and emotions with these two composers.

An important presence for me, since his return from New York in January 2023, has been that of Luca Giuliani, a former Rector of the Wiko and a person of extraordinary and profound culture. With him, I was able to appreciate the beauty of the Italian language, when it is purified and distilled thanks to its Tuscan origins, its distance from Italy, and the accurate and incessant study of archaeological antiquity: his Italian is a mechanism of high precision, analytical and creative at the same time, an instrument of intellectual telescoping that allowed me to understand much better what I was experiencing. With Luca Giuliani, I talked about my compositional projects, the treatment of different texts, and the risks and problems associated with different languages and historical references in musical dramaturgy. We discussed the reference to pre-existing scores, the sound modulation of words, the subtle distinction between the meaning and form of each linguistic sign, the potential melodic motion of each sound inherent and sculpted within words and their origin. As an archaeologist of enlightened and acknowledged experience, Luca Giuliani knows the weight of responsibility of every linguistic and compositional decision, even the apparently innocuous ones that every composer takes on when dealing with language, exposing and amplifying it in musical form; and talking with him about it was a necessary and founding therapy.

This extraordinary communicative experience within such a small, densely populated realm as the Wissenschaftskolleg is possible only thanks to Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, a democratic Rektorin but an absolute reference for all of us, because as a refined historian of modernity, she is an intellectual who discreetly and lucidly coordinates and supports the extreme diversity of thoughts and research and generates a constant basis of possible dialogue between all residents through an inclusive and analytical vision that seems to me to be the sign, synthesis, and deepest and permanent meaning of the Wissenschaftskolleg.