

## All'aure in una lontananza

Bára Gísladóttir

### INTRODUCTION

*All'aure in una lontananza* (1977) is a piece for solo flute, alto flute or bass flute. It is the first piece of seven in Sciarrino's *Opera per flauto I*, released in 1990.<sup>1</sup> This collection contains a combination of research and exploration regarding new sounds for the flute and was a springboard of contribution to the catalogue of extended techniques for the flute in contemporary music.

The title *All'aure in una lontananza* derives from a sonnet from Giambattista Marino's (an Italian baroque poet, 1569-1625)<sup>2</sup> poetry collection *La Lira*.<sup>3</sup> It is a title whose meaning can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand as *Air in a distance*, and on the other hand as *Aura in a distance*. Both translations can be helpful when analysing the piece. For instance, understanding the title as a topic of air gives a stronger emphasis on the piece's different objects, primarily the first object introduced which consists of harmonic timbral trills whose audibility is controlled by the natural in- and exhales of the flutist. The piece does not have a specified tempo but is to be played according to breath.

When analysing the piece, it is important to do it from an aural point of view, not solely from the visual parameter of the score. The main reason for this is that the piece's process of form, with its durations and proportions, is in a way up to the performer, since it is to be played according to breath not a metronome. Therefore the score is not of a big help alone, but serves well as a guidance while listening to the performance.

### OBJECTS, STRUCTURE AND FORM

*All'aure in una lontananza* features a form of AABA', where the second A is a complete repetition of the former, marked with a repetition mark. The piece's material consists of three objects,

---

<sup>1</sup> Sciarrino, Salvatore. *Opera per flauto I* (Italy: Ricordi, 1990)

<sup>2</sup> Lanz, Megan R. "Silence: Exploring Salvatore Sciarrino's style through L' opera per flauto" (PhD Thesis, University of Nevada, 2010), p. 33

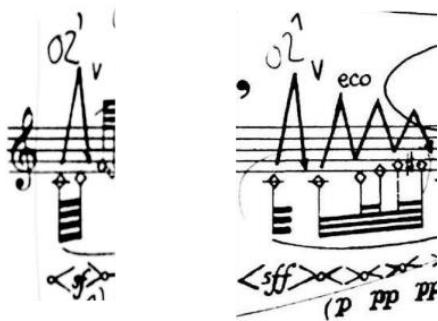
<sup>3</sup> Borgogni Incoccia, Tina. "Poesia della sovrabbondanza nel secolo d'oro", *La Repubblica Letteraria Italiana*, 2004, accessed 01.12.15, <http://www.repubblicaletteraria.it/GiambattistaMarino.html>

hereafter referred to as O1, O2 and O3. O1 being the harmonic timbral trills, O2 the jet whistles and O3 the aeolian sounds. Not only do these objects form the musical material, but perhaps more importantly, the piece's gestures.



Figure 1: O1: Harmonic timbral trills<sup>4</sup>

O1 (see Figure 1), the harmonic timbral trills, has a main role in the piece for several reasons: it is the object whose repetitions are most frequent; it is also the object whose time span is the broadest – being the protagonist of AA – and then reoccurring in A' a semitone lower like an old memory. Harmonic timbral trills are performed by using the fingerings for the diamond-shaped notes and consequently producing the upper notes. The parentheses indicate that there will be a delay before the first note and after the last note has sounded, as a bridge to and from *niente*.<sup>5</sup> According to Sciarrino, “[t]he notes in parentheses indicate the extension of the moment where the note is to be heard”.<sup>6</sup> At these moments, the sound is very airy, textured by the rather rhythmic key clicks of the diamond-shaped notes, which the performer is allowed to continue between breaths, thus connecting the gestures together and adding another layer to the effect of this technique. Thus, the sound effect of the harmonic timbral trills is a multiple one, where we hear several pitches windily flowing simultaneously, creating the dimensional polyphony Sciarrino is known for. In his work there exist blocks of textures that he refers to as spatio-temporal *dimensions*, composed of singular gestures that alternate in various ways to form the substance of the piece. In his manner of thinking, each piece of music is actually a multi-dimensional organism and the discontinuous dimensional juxtapositions are windows between these dimensions... Each dimension co-exists with every other dimension, and the formal discontinuity – the interruptions – each a



Figures 2 - 3: O2, jet whistles in various manifestations<sup>8</sup>

“window” into another dimension – is a representation, or acting-out of that reality, and of the reality of memory's work in the cognizance of musical form. This process creates what Sciarrino calls ‘dimensional polyphony’.<sup>7</sup>

O2 (see Figures 2 - 3) is a certain contrast to O1, rupturing this previous object with quick, and often, aggressive jet whistles.

O2 essentially breaks up A and marks the shift into the B section. After this, O2 is prevalent throughout the piece, gaining power and

<sup>4</sup> Sciarrino, Salvatore. *Opera per flauto I* (Italy: Ricordi, 1990), p. 1, 2nd line

<sup>5</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 34

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Bunch, James. “Anti-Rhetoric in the music of Salvatore Sciarrino” (USA: unpublished article, 2011), p. 24

<sup>8</sup> Sciarrino, Salvatore. *Opera per flauto I* (Italy: Ricordi, 1990), p. 2, 9<sup>th</sup> line

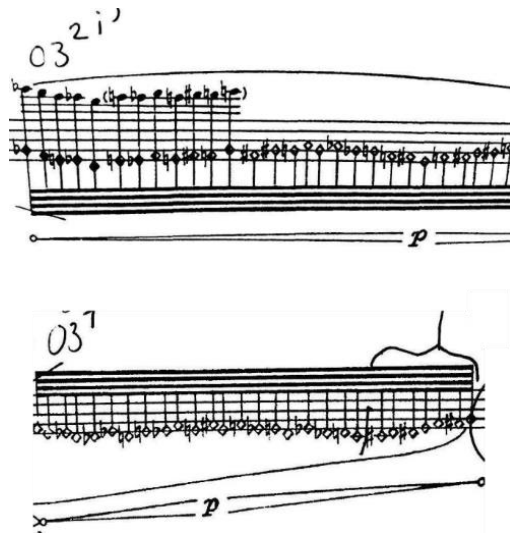
frequency with its occurrences, and hence finally not serving only as a contrast between loud and soft but renewing our sense of perspective with a freshness of focusing. O2 also becomes an element we know and accept as a peer to the other objects within the piece.

O3, the “aeolian sounds are extremely quiet, as only the air moving through the flute is audible. These sounds are often made more delicate by combining them with soft dynamics and *niente* effects”.<sup>9</sup>

As seen in Figures 4 - 5, O3 is presented with specified pitch fingerings, however, the blurred quality of this airy and quiet effect complicates the perception of pitch. O3 is the only object never being repeated exactly as it was before. It appears however always as the same gesture with slightly different shapes. It is further varied as the rest of the objects, in the form of dynamics, length and shapes.

Sciarrino creates a lot of variations on these three objects and uses every imaginable combination. One could say that *All'aure in una lontananza* is a very well recycled piece where nothing goes to waste. Despite the overall soft dynamics (except for the jet whistles), the objects occasionally boast stronger dynamics in the range of *mf* - *ff*, functioning as ‘poles’ carrying the otherwise thin threads of quiet gestures.

The same applies to the variation of the objects as the pitch material; some elements are used less than others with the effect of contrasts. The pitch range consists mainly of a limitation from C4 - B4 with the simple explanation that the techniques demonstrated in the piece work most effectively in this range. The use of the pitch range is implemented in a manner of contrasts, some of them used in a very limited quantity having the impact as turning points, and with more pitches present at the end, as an examination of what we have heard and learned so far.



Figures 4 - 5: O3, Aeolian sounds in various manifestations<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to the piece’s structure, it is interesting to look back at Giambattista Marino’s sonnet, which goes as follows:

A l’aura il crin ch’a l’auro il pregio ha tolto,  
sorgendo il mio bel sol del suo oriente,  
per doppiar forse luce al di dascente,  
da’ suoi biondi volumi avea disciolto.

<sup>9</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Sciarrino, Salvatore. *Opera per flauto I* (Italy: Ricordi, 1990), p. 1, 6th line

Parte, scherzando in ricco nembbo e folto,  
piovea sorva i belgi omeri cadente,  
parte con globi d'or seri già serpente  
tra' fiori, or del bel seno or del bel volto.

Amor vid'io, che fra'lucenti rami  
De l'eurea sua, pur come sole,  
tendea mille al mio cor laccioli ed ami;

e, nel sol de le luci uniche e sole,  
intento, e preso dagli aurati stami,  
volgersi quasi un girasole il sole!<sup>11</sup>

In brief, the sonnet tells us how a woman, beautiful as the sun, loosens her golden hair in the sun. At this point the poet wonders what is brighter than the sun, and from this reflection develops an overly decorated sonnet rich in metaphors, phonic games and virtuosity.<sup>12</sup> The form is as the traditional one of the Italian sonnet, with the first two verses of four lines, both represented in an ABBA form, forming a proposition that describes a problem or a question, followed by two three-lined verses containing a CDC form, representing a resolution to the prior events. Traditionally, the ninth line serves as what is called the turn, or *volta*, which plays a principal part in the resolution of the former proposition.<sup>13</sup> In this poem for instance, the focus flickers from the poet's observation of this beautiful woman to his observation of her own observation of the circumstances.

Sciarrino claims that *All'aure in una lontanza* contains "...a certain amount of 'melancholy lyricism, [much like] an elegy', and that its sounds are ambiguously mythical and ancient. He also describes the piece as being 'the characteristic perspective of [his] musical thought'".<sup>14</sup> Hence, we ask ourselves: is there a clear link between the sonnet form in all its glory, and the piece itself? Is there a *volta* or a turning point in the piece resembling that of the sonnet? When looking at the form AABA' itself, A can certainly be seen as a proposition followed by B containing the resolution and the *volta*. These are, of course, only speculations.

*All'aure in una lontanza* does not only contain a clear reference to the sonnet when it comes to its philosophical imagery, but what is at least equally interesting is the piece's structure. This is most concrete in the first movement where O1 functions as a main role. The object is set up in motives of four and three, namely as 2x4 followed by 3x3, quoting the structure of the sonnet (2x4 lined verses followed by 2x3 lined verses). As shown, Sciarrino's citation does not exactly match the sonnet's form when it comes to the latter motives (3x3 vs. 2x3). The reason for this is unclear, but perhaps it is just in order to make the connection between the poem and

<sup>11</sup> Borgogni Incoccia (2004)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Sonnet: Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet" (Wikipedia), accessed 28.11.15, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonnet#Italian\\_.28Petrarchan.29\\_sonnet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sonnet#Italian_.28Petrarchan.29_sonnet)

<sup>14</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 34

the piece not too direct as it might not be a subject of big matter.

Let us come back to the form itself. As mentioned earlier, it is in the manifestation of AABA' with its structure of gestures quoting the sonnet form. Chiefly there are two questions that come to mind when speculating about the form: Is there a connection to the sonata form? Could the form be a so-called rupture form?

There are some elements of *All'aure in una lontananza*'s form that could be linked to the sonata form, first and foremost in the way AA could serve as an exposition and A' as a recapitulation. On the other hand, looking at B as a development is easier said than done. What exactly is happening in this movement? B, like the other movements, contains all of the three objects, but with a change of value. O3 is the most prominent, yet O2 with its powerful development (becoming longer and more frequent) is the most critical. Through the B movement we hear glimpses of O1. Despite its small supply in frequency and length its value is rather grand because of its strong impact in AA. It pulls us back to the dreamy threads we have come to know so well, and through the piece this will always be what we see as the main theme. However, these short glimpses of O1 are suffocated by the frequent O3 and the dominant O2, especially their combination in a structure of overwhelming gestures. Does this smothering process represent a *rupture*? Inspired by the jump cut editing of filmmaking,<sup>15</sup> Sciarrino is known for using this so called *rupture form* as an opposition to rhetoricality in music.<sup>16</sup> Typically, his utilisation of the form goes as follows: The objects forming the initial structure of a piece "...are gradually interrupted and replaced – in an increasingly dense manner – by a new object...The structure eventually becomes overloaded with material at which point, it reaches a 'rupture'".<sup>17</sup> The purpose of this must be to upend the listener's expectations by providing a new perspective on how the music is perceived. Thus, B can be seen as a rupture of A, where O1 is ruptured by different combinations of O2 and O3. Consequently, we are led to the breached A', where O1 again plays a principal part but has now been broken into shorter durations, appearing as fractions of a memory, semitone lower than in the beginning. O2 and O3 are still there but are now elements we have accepted in our presence. O2 only occurs twice with a broad distribution and never appears in the last set of gestures before the end. O3 has no longer any aggression to it and is shaped into gestures of calm and quiet softness.

Regardless of our conclusion of the form, it should be kept in mind that in Sciarrino's work:

*Form, and more fundamentally the narrative structure, become something much more like "shape", a visual concept that presents these processes as forces synthesizing the material into sonic objects rather than – as Sciarrino had remarked – "containers" which render the autonomous non-referential actuality of each gesture moot in the service of a language of subjection.<sup>18</sup>*

Thus, when it comes to the former speculations about the sonata form, it is important not to categorise the piece as such a form, but rather see if there are any links of mutual content and

<sup>15</sup> Bunch (2011), p. 7

<sup>16</sup> Bunch (2011), p. 6

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Bunch (2011), p. 10-11

characteristics.

If *All'aure in una lontananza* features a rupture form, is it then an anti-rhetorical piece? To be able to answer this question we must ask ourselves: What is the meaning of 'anti-rhetorical' in this sense? In his work, Sciarrino seeks to "...reject and redefine...listening expectations, hierarchic syntax or structure by nomenclature, and traditional temporal thinking...".<sup>19</sup> Anti-rhetoric acts as a 'weapon' and the utilisation of rupture form belongs to this 'weapon'. In this way, the piece is anti-rhetorical, but do we as listeners experience it as such? With this question the author has finally moved on to some very thin ice, whereas it is impossible to draw conclusions, since they depend on every listener's perception of the piece, those being as varied as they are numerous. In any case, the term we experience as "rhetoric" has obviously changed throughout history. What was defined as "anti-rhetoric" when Sciarrino wrote *All'aure in una lontananza*, does not necessarily have to be so now. It seems logical that the continual development of contemporary music goes hand in hand with an elimination of rhetoricality.

#### THE SPACE BETWEEN SOUND AND SILENCE

One of Sciarrino's main compositional characteristics is the exploration of silence where the listener is obliged to lower the threshold of listening, which will eventually lead to hearing more. This he implements by using "the effect of a perceived lack of sound to intensify the listener's awareness of their surroundings".<sup>20</sup> This kind of listening experience is produced by extremely quiet facets of sound performed with extended techniques through long periods of time.<sup>21</sup>

It should be kept in mind that in this sense, silence is not the absence of sound, but the fullness of every sonorous possibility, like white is the sum of all colours. For Sciarrino, the aim with *All'aure in una lontananza* is to immerse the listener in a primary perceptive dimension. The listener should clean its mind and consequently create a void inside to make room for the unknown.<sup>22</sup>

*First quietness. Then sound, like the breath of the silence [...] Hence accustoming the ear to the imperceptible. The pianissimos that I require have to be placed at the limit of what man is really able to hear. While we are listening we become uncertain: something is coming, but what? Does the sound exist or not yet? The sonorous transfiguration of the indistinct produces the most anxious of magics, no longer being able to distinguish between presence and absence.*<sup>23</sup>

These are Sciarrino's own words about *All'aure in una lontananza*, helping us to understand the piece as research on the space between sound and silence, being mainly demonstrated by the use of *niente* crescendo and diminuendo signs (seen in all figures above). This use of dynamics

---

<sup>19</sup> Bunch (2011), p. 30

<sup>20</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 8

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Misuraca, Pietro. "Salvatore Sciarrino: The Sicilian alchemist composer", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology* (2012), p. 78. <http://hdl.handle.net/10593/8667>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

---

and the very subtle timbre changes can “produce the effect of experiencing an event from a distance, recalling a memory, or hearing a distant echo of sound after it has begun to dissipate.”<sup>24</sup> The feeling of distance resulted by the use of silence in the piece leads us back to the speculations of the title’s twofold way of interpretation, either if it is the sound of air in a distance, an aura in the form of an old memory, or both.

## CONCLUSION

As a hallmark of *All'aure in una lontananza*, the “...extremely reduced dynamics and continuous use of *niente* allow the performer to portray the infinite beginnings and endings (the *lontananza*, or infinite distance) in this piece”.<sup>25</sup> The musical process is formed by the introduction and combination of the different gestures. There is the calm introduction characterised by the harmonic timbral trills whose audibility comes and goes with the flutist’s breath. Then there is the active middle part, the *volta* of the sonnet, creating a rupture whose consequences are followed by the relatively calm final movement with glimpses of prior events, serving as an examination of the gestures’ distribution: some have got transposed, some have gained further development, some have been combined in yet a new way. They are recognisable but not the same.

---

<sup>24</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 13

<sup>25</sup> Lanz (2010), p. 34