

NICOLA PIOVANI BIOGRAPHY

Nicola Piovani was born on May 26, 1946 in Rome, where he has lived and worked ever since. He is a musician (pianist, conductor, composer of film and theatre scores, songs, chamber music and symphonies).

He received his piano diploma from the “G. Verdi” Conservatory in Milan.

Among those who encouraged him in composition was the greek composer Manos Hadjidakis. Nicola’s father Alberico, used to play in the local band when he was young, in his hometown of Corchiano, near Rome. There was always music in their house: accordions, mandolins, trumpets, guitars, an authentic amateur family passion.

<<” I remember an accordion teacher who used to come and teach at our home. From our balcony, I would see him drive up on an old Guzzetto moped, with the accordion slung over his shoulder. He used to teach me some paraphrases from Traviata, arrangements of Pasodoble and a very pompous unforgettable march called, if I remember correctly, “Pietro ritorna”.

I watched him play with a kind of Dionysiac admiration.

Years later, memories flooded back when I found myself on the Island of Crete for the Heraklion Festival. I was to perform a concert on the evening following Astor Piazzolla. The rehearsals took place during the evenings, due to the high temperatures by day.

I was invited to watch Piazzolla’s rehearsals, with strings and percussions, conducted by Manos Hadjidakis. I was mesmerized watching the great artist’s fingers running all over the keyboard. Inebriated by the strong scent of jasmine, my mind went back to that teacher, on the moped so many years ago, with his candour heroic yet ordinary. By now, I was listening with less candour but with a greater ability to analyse. I was in front of one of the greatest musicians of the century, but the wonder and the excitement were just the same as they were when I was a child. All this was due, of course, to these two sublime artists, Piazzolla and Hadjidakis.”>>

Much of Nicola Piovani’s work has been dedicated to film and to theatre, between which his passion is divided. Initially Film took up most of his time, but, over the years, he conceded himself the *luxury* (as he defines it) of dedicating his time to performing music in theatres, which now occupies most of his time.

<<” I hadn’t yet turned five, when I was taken to a type of Variety show for the first time. I still remember the venue, the Cinema/Teatro Castello, at Porta Castello, a stone’s throw away from Saint Peter’s Basilica. During the shows I would sit by the Orchestra pit...drums, piano, trumpets... a cornucopia of childlike wonder and sacred emotion which left me feeling far more elated than even the attic of Adrian Leverkühn by Thomas Mann.

At sixteen I discovered Film, known as the Seventh Art when, by chance, I went to a “Cinema d’essai”, where I saw, the “Seventh Seal” by Bergman for the first of many times. This ignited the Spark, the Passion and the Desire: what could be better than being involved in Film? After only a few years, Good Luck helped me to achieve what I wanted most”>>

His first soundtrack dates back to 1968. It was written to accompany documentary footage of the student movements connected to the faculty of Philosophy where he was a student.

The footage was made by a students' collective under the direction of Silvano Agosti. Piovani's debut in full length soundtrack was to take place the following year with "*NP il segreto*" by Silvano Agosti.

<<" The title of the first feature film for which I composed the music corresponded with my initials, NP, however this was only a coincidence. Agosti never revealed the reason for such a title, which he had already chosen before he engaged me to write the music. I am not superstitious, except in jest, but I still hold that coincidence in my heart like a lucky charm which has brought me good fortune.">>

After *NP*, Nicola began a career which led him to write scores for more than a hundred and fifty films, and to collaborate with the most important Italian directors. Amongst others Bellocchio, Monicelli, Taviani brothers, Moretti, Loy, Tornatore, Benigni and even Federico Fellini, who engaged the composer for his last three films. Foreign directors with whom he has collaborated include Ben Von Verborg, Pál Gábor, Dusan Makavejev, Bigas Luna, Jos Stelling, John Irvin, Sergej Bodrov, Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, Philippe Lioret, Danièle Thompson, Xavier Durringer.

He won an Oscar for the soundtrack for Roberto Benigni's "*La vita è bella*". He has also received various Italian Awards: three David di Donatello, four Colonna Sonora, three Nastri d'Argento and two Ciak d'oro. In France, he was nominated twice for the Cesar Awards; at the "*Musique et Cinema Festival*" of Auxerre he received an Award from the Public and a Special Mention by the Judges.

<<" I am very proud of this award, which gratifies in part my provincialism and in part my snobbery">>

During the Seventies he was active as a song writer. He composed two albums with Fabrizio de Andre': "*Non al denaro, non all'amore nè al cielo*" and "*Storia di un impiegato*". In 1995 he wrote three songs for Roberto Benigni's theatrical Tour, including "*Quanto ti ho amato*"

Initially Piovani worked in film as well as theatre, writing the stage music for Carlo Cecchi's productions and also for those of Luca De Filippo, Maurizio Scaparro and Vittorio Gassman. In 1989 he created "*I sette re di Roma*", a musical staged at the *Sistina Theatre* in Rome with Luigi Magni and Pietro Garinei.

<<" Theatre is the language of the future in my opinion. I don't want to be provocative, anything but: theatrical communication, in which artists, in flesh and blood act, sing and dance in front of a live audience, is part of a two thousand year old tradition, which dates back to the beginning of our civilisation. I believe too, that the advances in technology for music production, which now happens at an exponential speed, and the possibility of listening to music anywhere, at any time, with perfect accuracy and with no effort, renders, and will continue to render, a live performance all the more precious.

Within a few centuries' time our CDs, DVDs, Blue Ray, iPods... will be up in the attic alongside other antiques from various ages. But I'm certain that someone will be playing or singing in a theatre, in front of a live audience.

Anyway, I prefer to listen to music without a remote control in my hand.">>

At the end of the eighties Nicola started to collaborate with Vincenzo Cerami, and together with Lello Arena they founded the "*Compagnia della Luna*", with the intention of creating a product that had no place on the Italian stage at that time: a type of theatre where both music and words have ample space, and can interact on an expressive level. The first two creations from this collaboration were "*La cantata del Fiore*"(1988) and "*La cantata del Buffo*" (1990). These two works were subsequently combined to become a single piece, and ran for almost two hundred performances all over Italy. "*Il signor novecento*"(1992) followed, and then "*Canti di scena*"(1993). In this last production, the authors are on the stage accompanied by a small orchestral ensemble, three singers and the actress Norma Martelli. This toured for six seasons. In "*Romanzo musicale*"(1998) Cerami and Piovani retell stories from classical mythology, as seen by modern eyes.

In 1998, the first production of "*La pietà*" took place at the *Mancinelli theatre* in Orvieto: a "*Stabat Mater*" for voce recitante, two singers and an orchestra of twenty three musicians. Here Piovani collaborated again with Cerami.

At Easter , on receiving an invitation from the Palestinian National Authority, "*La Pietà*" was offered to the town of Bethlehem as message of peace to the peoples of the Holy Land. In 2004 the production was performed twice, in both Bethlehem (Palestinian territory) and in Tel Aviv (Israeli territory).

<<"Often I am asked whether music could do anything for peace, or for other forms of solidarity; my reply is no, music cannot do anything in reality. But reality is not all that there is, often history tells us that significant conquests are preceded by poets' verse. Idealism has often been the wind in the sails of reality (real or what?) political and historical conquests.

If I am asked to play for a worthy cause I don't refuse, even if it's only to remind myself of what side I am on. Then, when there's a peace march, there's always someone drunk on realism, ready to say how useless it all is. However, I think that the contrary would be far worse: seeing young people marching in favour of war, which has sadly happened in the past.">>

In the year 2000 "*Concerto fotogramma*" was produced, in which Piovani abridges and adapts film score, taken over a thirty year period of his career, recasting them into a theatrical form. "*Isola della luce*" is a score for voce recitante: two singers and orchestra, playing music from the Ecclesiast and passages by Homer, Sicilo, Byron, Einstein, Seferis, Mesonmede of Crete, and Vincenzo Cerami. This was commissioned by Greek Government and took place amongst ruins on the Island of Delos, as part of the opening ceremony for the Olympic Games in Athens. Another commission from *Chaillot's National Theatre* saw the birth of "*Concha Bonita, création musicale*"; this production is halfway between opera and musical, based on the libretto by René de Ceccatty and Alfredo Arias. It was much appreciated during the 2002-03 season by the Parisian public. In 2005, Cerami and Piovani translated the script for the Italian version, which was staged at the *Ambra Iovinelli theatre* in Rome and then toured Italy for four seasons.

<<" There's a serious prejudice against musical theatre here in Italy. For years it has been considered as a way of escape, light and of cultural insignificance. The Italian predominant conformist culture has always seen musical theatre as rooted in two kinds of extremes: on the one side Opera (serious theatre) the custodian of tradition, and on the other side Musicals with dancers kicking and artists who entertain. All this had done is to hinder research into the expressive potential that word and music, when joined together, could have in theatre, whether it be comic,

dramatic or tragic. The so-called cultural theatre of the Teatri Stabili and even experimental theatre, have concentrated far more on the visual aspect of theatrical productions, than on sound and theatrical language.”>>

In 2006 Piovani composed and directed “*La cantata dei cent’anni*”, to commemorate the hundred years since the birth of the CGIL Trade Union.

In 2007 he composed an orchestral suite entitled *Epta*, inspired by the number seven.

In 2009 Piovani wrote the symphonic cantata “*Padre Cicogna*”, for a script by Eduardo de Filippo. This was performed at the *San Ferdinando Theatre* in Naples, to commemorate the twenty fifth anniversary of his death. On stage was Luca de Filippo (voce recitante) and the orchestra of the *San Carlo Theatre*, conducted by Piovani himself.

<<” I consider this as one of my most rewarding pieces of work, to be able to use a symphonic key on a script by Eduardo while collaborating with Luca de Filippo.

Among the many symphonic performances for film scores, two are particularly memorable: one in *Johannesburg* in 1994, when for the first time in South African history, Piovani saw an orchestra of all white musicians and one black singer together on stage; the second was at the *Cannes Festival* in 2002, on the occasion of a “*leçon de musique*” that Piovani had dedicated to the music of Fellini’s films. The most recent piece of film music written by Piovani, recorded in December 2010, was for a French film called “*La conquete*” by Xavier Durringer, which charts the rise to power of Nicolas Sarkozy.

<<” I’ve been thinking about a new musical work for some time, with the hope of staging it in 2011. The piece is a suite, for a small group of instruments and recorded voices, inspired by the voyages of Ulysses, and by the pointed contemporary, or maybe timeless, relevance of the hero and his manifold wit. His travels still have so much to tell us, and continue to cast fresh light on our own everyday journeys.”>>

The work was performed for the first time on the 28th August 2011 at the Ravello Festival under the title 'Viaggi di Ulisse'; it is a musical story for orchestra and recorded voices, which recite lines from Joyce, Kavafis, Homer, Saba and Tasso.

In 2008 Piovani was nominated *Chevalier dans l’ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the French Minister of Culture: an honour conferred upon such persons who have distinguished themselves with their artistic and literary creations.