

The Music Folder #1 Alvin Curran

Interview by Veniero Rizzardi, Milan 21 November 2019

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VENIERO RIZZARDI: 'I remember once we were together at a festival, we were sitting one next to the other in Portogruaro, at the festival dedicated to Russolo'.

ALVIN CURRAN: 'I remember this, yeah'.

VR: 'There was a concert with the *Intonarumori*.¹ And there was a new piece, or sort of a new piece, that was composed by Sylvano Bussotti and when he operated the devices of Russolo's *Intonarumori*, and he made some gestures also on the piano, I remember you saying this beautiful line "Oh, this is the good old avant-garde!". Which is not a contradiction per se, but it means that once – I mean Bussotti is somehow older than you and he started working in the late 50s – yet, he had, I would say, preserved in his way of performing and acting, a touch, a specific approach to the gestures, to the instruments which you aptly dubbed as "good old avant-garde". This probably is what you were meaning about that.

AC: 'Exactly. Not only, and in the case of Bussotti it would be more like a, and I would say this in Italian, "un gentile terrorista musicale", a sophisticated musical terrorist, of great taste. Because this music in his time had the power to shock, had the shocking power as Stockhausen, as did Ligeti, Xenakis. These people brought music that everybody was like "Oh my God!".

VR: 'And that was at the time when the audience looked for surprises'.

AC: 'They were expecting something new. And this is why, I think, this terminology... that's become universal now: *New Music* – I mean all music is new, even every time you listen to Mozart it's new. But the new music which is made under the "rubrica", the title of *New Music*, of course, is a continuation of the classical art music of the past, but we think of it as new because we're living in a time when we're not sure what is new and what is not anymore. That's because the entire repertoire, as all of these archives will demonstrate, is still living today. Perhaps living more than the music which is produced by living composers today, and this has become a problem for people like myself, who are living composers. Beethoven and Mozart never had this problem, they were the composers of their time for a certain class of people and for a certain cultural life, activity. Today, on the other hand, there's an immense, –and I would use the Italian word – "intreccio", there's a coming together of so many strands of musical culture which is dominated in large part by economic forces that we have no control over, and even so sometimes cultural forces. So, let's say, a small sector like country & western music, which I like a lot, you wouldn't think so, but I do.

VR: 'I think that you like everything, or almost everything'.

AC: 'So this music, which is essentially a music of folk origin, is now one of the leading at least in some parts of the world, especially in central southern and western United States, and you will go to Japan and you will go to China, you will go to Indonesia and you will go to Alaska and the far reaches of the corners of the world, you'll hear music which is very much like country & western music. So, this music is everywhere, and yet it's only a small little folk music, but it has an enormous economy: it's worth billions of dollars, it produces enormous amounts of money for the producers. I am the worst most uninformed economist in the world, but it's not uninteresting that two of the most interesting books ever written about

¹ The concert happened on Oct., 27, 2007, see

http://win.edisonstudio.it/ciardi_files/popup_files/carap/immagini/WRussoloFlyerLite.pdf

contemporary music are written by French economists. You know what I'm talking about, [Jacques] Attali² is one, and the other more recent economist has talked about the same thing. And this is really interesting because they, economists, see music in a different way. While we see it as something immaterial, they see it as material: this is the interesting thing. And part of the problem of the avant-garde is the refusal of the avant-garde – for philosophical reasons, for political reasons and maybe spiritual reasons – to deny, at least in their imagination, that music and money had anything to do with each other. I mean, case in point *Musica Elettronica Viva*, a perfectly, classical radically politically left group founded on individual equality and collective action, and sharing everything. And yeah, we had another idea about what to do with our material earnings and how to share those things. But no one ever thought that there could be money produced by this music, especially not even the composers. Although, gradually as this music began to become not popular but began to acquire its own place in society, composers like Berio, Nono, Ligeti, Stockhausen, Boulez and so on, they...'

VR: 'Yes, but those became established composers because there was an important public support provided by radio stations, festivals, publishers' ...

AC: "Editori".

VR: '...while, when you're talking about *Musica Elettronica Viva* which was kind of a subversive endeavour in a way... But this came from a very specific and also historically very unique situation that happened in the mid-sixties among a community of expatriates in Rome. I always reflected upon this because this was really a unique situation and to me it also it does sound political nuances and not casual, because there was a moment in which some individuals like you, like Frederick Rzewski, Richard Teitelbaum and all the others that went into that group and formed that group, came from the United States, came from serious musical studies in the universities of the Ivy League'.

AC: 'Very serious, yeah'.

VR: 'Would you like to summarise it a little bit now, how was this situation? Because I noticed that simply looking at your website, when you start your biography, you say that everything begins in 1965 in Rome, as if nothing had happened before!'

AC: 'This is interesting because you bring up something that I have also written about quite seriously in my writings and that is the gradual recognition that... the postwar Italian composers, many of them I got to know personally and especially the composers in Rome. I can speak of Franco Evangelisti, Domenico Guaccero, Egisto Macchi and people whose names may not resonate very widely but the group who were originally the founders of *Nuova Consonanza* which as a cultural institution, as a musical avantgarde institution was clearly a living and important presence in the history. So I came into this picture, as you say, with a bunch of American young and energetic expatriates, we didn't think we were going to change the world but we didn't deny the possibility that we could. And this is in the context of the entire global, world revolution of youth in the middle and late sixties. And underlining that enormous and rich history of artistic practices that were happening at the same time. Just to name one: solo performance, where a composer or a musical person, let's say, Diamanda Galás for example, presents herself as her music, just her, she plays, is, lives, promotes her music all alone. La Monte Young: same idea, and so on. This became also for economic reasons: it's much easier to travel as one person, it costs less than travel with an orchestra. And yet, at the same time, we have Steve Reich and Philip Glass who form small orchestras and ensembles and travel with them. I actually performed with, not both of them but with Steve Reich several times'.

VR: 'Did you perform with Steve Reich?'

² Jacques Attali, *Bruits. Essai sur l'économie politique de la musique* [1977], Paris, Le livre de poche 2008; eng. tr. *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*, University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

AC: 'Yeah, I did one summer tour, I think it was in '67-'68.'

VR: 'As a keyboard player?'

AC: 'As a keyboard player, yeah. One of his keyboardists got sick and I met him in Rome, and he said "Hey, are you free?" and I joined the group. It was the group with Gavin Bryars and Michael Nyman that played *Drumming* for the first time.³

VR: 'Also Cornelius Cardew was involved'.

AC: 'Oh yeah, Cardew was there, it was an incredible ensemble. I mean, this is a piece of history that could even make a little book of itself. Just those characters all together in one place, all due to Steve Reich. So, I'm getting far afield here'.

VR: 'Oh no, we'd like to go back to that moment in Rome. But also I would like to know something that is sort of unrecorded which means your American formative years. There is a fantastic picture of you as a child'.

AC: 'I don't know which one' [he slightly chuckles].

VR: 'This guy that's probably in uniform'.

AC: 'Oh, with the trombone!'⁴

VR: 'With the trombone. So, basically you came from, your family background was musical'.

AC: 'My father, yes, and then my mother, my mother played the piano, she actually played music for silent films when she was young. She did that for work and my father was a multi-instrumentalist, primarily trombone but also, he sang, he had a beautiful tenor voice and sang in many local choirs, synagogue and here and there and had his own dance band. This is why the music of dance band is always in my music'.

VR: 'This happened in New England, right?'

AC: 'It happened in Providence, Rhode Island. So, we're bringing in many threads of my past, you're going back to my childhood roots, but those childhood roots were still very much alive when I found myself living in this exotic, Mediterranean wonderland, as I say. A wonderland because for Americans of that time, young people like myself it was a place where literally one could live on one dollar a day, as far as money was concerned. So, it was cheap, and it was a lively place and the elements mixing in and out from Cinecittà to, let's say, the *Nuova Consonanza* world produced someone like Morricone who was doing both: improvising on his trumpet with the *Nuova Consonanza* and writing film music for Sergio Leone. And so, it was lively, it was – I'd say – exotic... yes, of course it was exotic! There were serious things going on, and no one could imagine their own future development but there was I would say a clear command and by command I say not "comandamento" or "ordine", but there was an understanding that we had the power, potential power to change things. By things I mean the political and cultural equilibrium between men and

³ The European tour of *Drumming* actually took place in 1972, after the U.S. premiere at the New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1971. Reich couldn't afford to bring over his own entire New York ensemble, so he decided to hire a few European musicians, who happened to be mostly composers. See Russell Hartenberger, *Performance Practice in the Music of Steve Reich*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

⁴ No trombone involved here, anyway this is the picture mentioned:
http://www.alvincurran.com/Curran_bio.html

women, between money and no money, between a life of working slavery or slavery work that most people carry out in their normal daily lives, and a life of a more open, and free, almost more spiritual – without the religious connotation – a more spiritual life through making unusual sound. Simple as that.

VR: 'That is very interesting and fascinating, and I think from an historical perspective, for me, I always wonder how and why this discovery from your part and the other Americans for example – I'm thinking always of Frederic and Richard – how this happened once you were in Rome, in that particular moment. Because I always talked with another Alvin, Lucier, who told me – he was older than you, and he also came to Rome'.

AC: 'He lived in a one room studio which I later rented after he left'.

VR: 'Ah okay'.

AC: 'Yes. It was one of the poorest, I think it was a room no bigger than this'.

VR: 'Ah, you mean the place?'

AC: 'Yes. Anyway, those are details we can save for another time, but it's curious that we did overlap'.

VR: 'He told me that he was trained as an academic composer, he wrote neoclassical pieces. And once he was in Italy and he had experiences at the "Studio di Fonologia" in Milan, for example, [and] for the first time he witnessed the music of John Cage, he discovered the music of John Cage in Italy. That's curious, and that changed his life, and his way of conceiving and making music. It's interesting because this happened here and not there'.

AC: 'I could say the same for myself'.

VR: 'So, there must be something special that was going on at that moment'.

AC: 'Well, I mean I can tell you that I had met John Cage in fact – this is a very interesting point – at Yale University where he was invited, not by the music department, who refused to invite John Cage, but by the department of philosophy. So, Cage came and did the concert, of course it was scandalous and it was produced by the philosophy department, and later I had many occasions to meet and actually work with Cage in Europe on projects of my own and projects of his, through the Westdeutscher Rundfunk [in Cologne] and various things with Klaus Schönig.⁵ But what I'm saying here is that these encounters, more importantly our meeting, a very important meeting with two important events in the history of MEV and mine personally. Not only with La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and the whole American school, who was imported by Fabio Sargentini in those years as an almost permanent presence in Rome.⁶ This was incredible. I didn't have to go to SoHo in Manhattan to experience that or be with my colleagues, because they were colleagues of mine, or young people like me, they came to Rome. Yet more importantly was meeting Anthony Braxton, George Lewis, The Chicago Art Ensemble and all of the powerful Afro-American improvisers and radical improvisers, radical people...in Rome! And in Europe, in general. And if I wanted to go so far as to say thanks to the Italian Communist Party who brought them here every month in a certain period, in the seventies'.

VR: 'Yeah'.

⁵ Director, author, producer, curator, Klaus Schönig was until 2001 the editor in chief of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk's "Studio Akustische Kunst" in Cologne, which he also founded.

⁶ The gallery "L'attico" was founded in 1957 by Bruno Sargentini with his son Fabio, who later was responsible for new music series at Simone Carella's "Beat 72" club, always in Rome.

AC: 'This was a policy'.

VR: 'Absolutely'.

AC: 'This was a party policy run by Filippo Bianchi, and then you have a very interesting political cultural musical history, which is incredible. We didn't go as far as it could have gone, but there was more Afro-American music of the free jazz, so called free jazzed kind, in Italy than there was anywhere else in the world at that time. Unbelievable'.

VR: 'Yeah. Even better than in France, where there was another strong community of black American expatriates in the sixties, late sixties, I would say'.

AC: 'That's right'.

VR: 'But it's curious, this concentration and this coming together of young American well-educated musicians like you and like Frederic, Richard and the others...'

AC: 'Thank you for the compliment. I like the well-educated part'.

VR: 'Yeah. You were. You are. And you came here just because there was a policy of the State Department of the United States to encourage exchanges in a way, but probably what the American government didn't expect is that you became revolutionary individuals'.

AC: 'And opposed to American political policy. Okay, let me just be clear. Only Richard Teitelbaum was actually sponsored by the Fulbright Exchange Program. Both Frederic and I, Frederic for different reasons, moved to Rome with his wife and family, but reasons were, he was already in the early sixties the accompanist of [Severino] Gazzelloni and playing all of the music of Boulez and Stockhausen'.

VR: 'I understand that he came with an exchange programme to Berlin first, I think'.

AC: 'The DAAD, that's right. And so did I, but the DAAD is not an official American thing, it was a German programme, cultural programme, exchange programme which at that time invited Elliott Carter in 1964, and Elliott Carter in turn had the option to invite two or three young composers to accompany him in this DAAD programme; and chose were Frederic and myself. So, anyway to Berlin, that was purely a German creation and a very first year of that DAAD programme. I personally came to Rome purely, let's say, speculatively, just looking for, you know, a nice warm place in the sun and good food after spending one year residency in Berlin at that time, in the early sixties which was very sad, cold and dark'.

VR: 'There must have been something really attractive in the Rome environment'.

AC: 'Oh yeah'.

VR: 'I mean, from a musical point of view'.

AC: 'Well, yes, from a musical point of view. I would say, not only was there this very strong presence of the *Nuova Consonanza* group but there were also within the RAI radio world possibilities for commissions and performances. At that time the Italian radio was very much like all the other European radios and they were producing new music, producing it themselves with their own musicians and in their own recording studios. So, this is before the powers of television completely wiped out the classical music world even in the radio, so all the money went to television and the radio was just left, well, surviving – it still survives. So, there was a kind of a normal musical life that offered some kind of hopeful possibilities for young composers. Not

that they could make a life alone in Rome with their music, but at least there was a community, a general culture and a welcoming spirit’.

VR: ‘There was also an art community’.

AC: ‘A very big art community, and a very important one. This also had very strong, at that time not so much in music with the exception of this exceptional Fabio Sargentini and his gallery who centred their focus on American experimental visual artist dance and music. So they took all of the aspects, there was no dance in Rome at that time, no modern dance, almost none, but anyway the whole “Downtown scene” came: Joan Jonas, Trisha Brown, with whom I was associated. For many years, and also with Joan Jonas, and all these people I met in Rome and later collaborated with in the following, in the succeeding years. So, there was a rich and vital “something” going on, I couldn’t, I can’t put my finger on it but all of these things from the improvised music situation, all forms of experimental art and especially: let’s not forget the very vital scene that was going on in Rome in experimental theatre with Mario Martone, Memè Perlini... I can’t think of all of the names. This provided for me personally continuous work, making music for these experimental theatre events which were largely focused on image rather than on the word. So, the spoken word was less interesting, less used and image and sound were the new elements that were very strong, especially in the work of Perlini. Anyway, yes, all of these things came together as a rich broth, “un brodo” really’.

VR: ‘Zuppa’.⁷

AC: ‘Una zuppa that really fed us all. I mean, no one thought that they would become rich for many of these, but the possibility to live from day to day, yes, that was happening. This was extremely important. And even in the early MEV years, of course MEV was self-supporting and we became very quickly recognised especially in the European area through the European radios who all wanted the latest, newest radical sounding crazy improvisations which were not at all happening in the European classical avantgarde music world’.

VR: ‘Speaking of this, I would like to point out how were the relationships between what emerged from your community, mostly non-Italian musicians in Rome developing this concepts of free improvisation and the Italian or almost Italian group of *Nuova Consonanza* who was born somehow a little earlier than you, but more or less in the same time’.

AC: ‘They were maybe ‘65, we were ‘66. Just a year of difference’.

VR: ‘Exactly. But do you think that there was just one movement or two separate ideas?’

AC: ‘Well, no we were already aware that, and then quickly there were groups in France, in Spain, less in Germany, but there were other groups beginning to appear who were really very good improvising groups. And the differences between *Nuova Consonanza* and MEV were very simple: MEV were anarchists and *Nuova Consonanza* were traditional or under a traditional rigorous idea of leadership of Franco Evangelisti who had the idea and insisted on a kind of a musical purity in a discipline. MEV insisted on none of those things, they were completely dedicated to the liberation of themselves, their instruments, their ideas from all of that tradition of a leader, score, having a “partitura” and..’.

VR: ‘And even instrumental technique?’

AC: ‘And even instrumental technique, yes’.

⁷ In September through October 1968, every night at their studio MEV organized performances of a work entitled *Zuppa* (or Soup), with audience participation.

VR: 'Because when I think of your path, of your background as a pianist as Frederic was and still is of course, and Richard too, you all broke the rules, you left the piano, the temperate system and everything and that had a permanent impact on the music that you had done after that'.

AC: 'Absolutely. In fact, Frederic symbolically and realistically abandoned the piano by announcing "I'm never going to play the piano again". And he took up a piece of glass in the shape of a piano and began to scratch the glass that was his "glass piano" and this became the symbolic break with the past where he really left the piano'.

VR: 'But we know...'

AC: 'Yeah, we know he went back to the piano. And he was quickly playing Beethoven again'.

VR: 'Because also he made a living with it'.

AC: 'He made a living with it, yes, that was his life! And still is'.

VR: 'Which leads me to another question. Of course, at that time life was very cheap, but how did you make a living when doing all this non-economically rewarding activities?'

AC: 'We made a living, I mean the MEV group itself provided a continuous five years while we were continuously together from 1966 to 1971 in Rome, before Frederic left for New York and Richard left for Toronto and he went to study, and eventually he went out to California to California School of the Arts. The truth is we were living from day to day, just like, as they say in Rome "alla giornata", and this suited us and there was no problem because the request for our performances in Northern Europe let's say Switzerland, Austria, Germany, France, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, I mean these became constant requests so there was always money coming into the group and this money was enough for all of us to live on. Even those with family, or well, most of us didn't have children. I would personally supplement my money by doing... Actually I was introduced to a small but important company in Rome that at that time was doing animated films and I was writing scores for animation. Occasionally I would be called, this was more in the early seventies, to do recordings let's say [by] RCA to play a synthesizer part'.

VR: 'I mean, you worked like a studio musician'.

AC: 'I played for Gianni Morandi, in a recording. It was a song that Morandi was presenting at Sanremo and you know it's all about winning and the prize. He did not win, I forgot who won the prize that year. It would be interesting to find out this Gianni Morandi piece'.⁸

VR: 'Yeah, we can'.

AC: 'I would love to hear that again because I was very impressed by the arrangement, but I must say the synthesizer part which was only playing a kind of bass tuba [imitating the sound], these kind of sounds that were really great on the synthesizer. Anyway, I supplemented, and I began of course in the early seventies when MEV already was not living anymore together in Rome, we were working around the world, but we were not all in Rome. So, I was working in the early seventies of course, mostly with the young experimental theatre people and you know it wasn't big money, but I was living okay. And I was even doing a little film music, a little bit of this and that, you know'.

⁸ After the interview, we went back to this moment of our talk and actually found the song, which is *Vado a lavorare*. It finished fourth at the 1972 Sanremo Festival of the Italian Song, and it was subsequently included in the Gianni Morandi album *Il mondo cambierà* (LP RCA Italiana PSL 10569, 1972).

VR: 'So, after the initial outburst of liberation, liberating the score, liberating the instruments you went quickly back to writing music'.

AC: 'I never stopped. Never, ever. No in fact, there was no contradiction, because and to be honest – this is one of the themes maybe I actually hinted at in my email to you – but one of the important themes in this whole period at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century is this fusion – or not fusion – between composition and improvisation. And this place in time and in space and in the cultural mind of our time where these two things which were considered totally contradictory are now becoming thought of as almost one and the same, at least by myself. I, as you stress continuously, aptly, I am a cultured, trained composer: I studied with the great Elliott Carter and then being inspired by the early music of Luigi Nono for example, he was one of my first inspirations, Luciano Berio at the same time, the piece called *Circles*... I thought "Man, this is the kind of music I want to write!". And I saw the score and looked at this beautiful graphics, beautiful notes, also a mix of improvisation and a mix of written thing, a long flowing timeline: "This is music!". And this music now is in fact the still very powerful underlying foundation of musical composition today. When you go to the conservatory if you're lucky you learn these scores. I discovered this music... I don't know how I discovered this music! The music that interested me the most was in fact the Italian avantgarde, period. Even Petrassi, the whole world, Dallapiccola, I loved his music'.

VR: 'Was there a circulation of this music in the States?'

AC: 'We had all the scores. America's a rich place and the universities grabbed these materials immediately, so that music was available when I was a student, I don't know how but there it was'.

VR: 'So, you mean that getting to know the music of the Italian composers of that time through the scores...'

AC: 'Scores and recordings'.

VR: 'So score and recordings that were available at the university was an important factor in prompting you to have the idea to come here'.

AC: 'Absolutely, for sure. Not the original, not the idea of coming here of course was more seeing the Italian realist cinema of the post-war and this gave me...I don't know, *Rocco e i suoi Fratelli*, all these films take place right here in Milano. And I didn't understand what all of this was about, a young American could not understand what the World War II was except some heroic victory for the United States. I had family who came back with a German pistols in their... Yeah, they fought in the war. My father nearly had to go fight, but he was thirty-five years old and they said "Okay, you stay here" and he had to work in a factory which in fact made rifles, he was making pieces putting rifles. But our conception of what this war was, was completely like a Hollywood fantasy, we had no idea what this meant, we didn't know about destruction and death. I mean, all of those things... everybody knew because the bombs were falling here... and not so much on Milano and Genova or whatever but anyway there were huge problems here and it was inconceivable. None the less my attraction to the Italian cinema was something that was, I think, more on an emotional level, some powerful expressiveness about the people who were clearly not living this luxurious life of the 1950s that we did in the United States, were in possession of a consciousness and a creative energy that we knew nothing about'.

VR: 'So there was a curiosity about this different culture and this way of outliving the war'.

AC: 'Yeah, and not only. There was something about the Mediterranean in general, there was an attraction as if, yes, we all belong here, we all come from here like if I lived here I could feel at home and so I have for fifty-five years, in which I lived here'.

VR: 'But you didn't think at that time that you eventually...'

AC: 'Of course not, never, no. This is even further confirmed by my youthful attraction to Luigi Nono's *Canto Sospeso* and particularly Lucio Berio's *Circles*. These pieces were "Oh my God, this is beautiful music!" I was not so much attracted to Elliott Carter's music which is much more difficult and complex and let's simply say unlyrical, not-lyrical. Whereas the atonality of Nono and Berio was like "lirico", it was singing, "cantabile", it was another thing, and it was beautiful. It was beautiful music'.

VR: 'But you didn't have a real relation with those composers. That's a curious aspect'.

AC: 'No. Well, the weird thing is I actually did receive a Fulbright scholarship to study with Berio and he accepted me and at that time he was living I believe either in Milan or was he in Venice? I don't know'.

VR: 'No, Berio moved to the United States [in 1962] because he taught for a couple of years at the Mills College'.

AC: 'At the Mills College, that's right. But in any case, he was not at Mills College because he was to be in Europe, but I don't know, it was 1964, end of 1963, and then this is when Elliott Carter telephoned me and said "I'd like to invite you to Berlin" and so I had to "disdire" with Berio. This is interesting. Meanwhile, Richard of course who was my roommate at Yale went to study with Nono'.

VR: 'And he actually was one of the very few pupils, but I know he didn't last'.

AC: 'They didn't get along'.

VR: 'I know, I know. I heard of it from the other part... But it's curious to say that in those years, maybe this is not very well known but this is a side observation that we can make, while those two families of musicians didn't get along, there was precisely a time when Nono started working with improvisation and actually from the mid-sixties on his pieces of composition were largely based on acts of improvisation by the vocal performers and also instrumentalists that he worked with'.

AC: 'Is that so? This I'm unaware of, I didn't know that, but I'm happy to hear that'.

VR: 'Yeah, but because it was a moment when improvisation was starting to be important, I mean Stockhausen. He absorbed some energy.'

AC: 'Oh yeah I know. Stockhausen came to Musica Elettronica Viva, he came to hear us in Dortmund or Düsseldorf, and he said "Aha". That was 1967 when he formed his own group, but it was a group conducted by Stockhausen, controlled by Stockhausen. Again, he never relinquished control to the real improvisers. He was composing with them and on them and by them, through them. Anyway, all of this I find extremely interesting that these little details of times and overlapping and influences and of course I think Franco Evangelisti himself in the circle of Italian composers was clearly out there. He was a very powerful attracting force in his idea about liberating the music from the score, from the written page. In fact, I always tell the story of when I came to Rome and Evangelisti was one of the first people I met and he said "Ah, tu sei compositore" – he gave me "tu or Lei" I don't remember - and I said "Sì, sono compositore" and he replied "Ma non sai che non c'è più musica da scrivere?". He said that: "Don't you know there is no more music to write?". I was like "Wow". This was my first meeting with this guy. He was really out there, he believed... because it was more like a faith, a "fede", it was a philosophy, he had to change the system, he wanted to change the system – just like Christian Wolff's piece *Changing the system*'.

VR: 'But probably, you were more successful in changing the system...'

AC: '...MEV certainly...'

VR: 'Your practice was radical in another way, because also you were more open to bring together other cultures'.

AC: 'Yeah'.

VR: 'I was listening to one of your last records which is the *Endangered Species* which is fascinating because it brings together many things...'

AC: 'Oh yeah!'

VR: '... here is your more recent work with samples...'

AC: '...well, that's thirty years...'

VR: '...technically I mean, the latest development of your working with samples'.

AC: 'Bravo, yeah. Thank you'.

VR: 'And together there is a strong piano playing but in a vein, which is not exactly experimental, not per se, it's just a reinterpretation of standards'.

AC: 'Absolutely'.

VR: 'Which brings together also the tradition of the musical but also jazz improvisation'.

AC: 'Absolutely. I have more than one musical foundations, of course I have the classical *continuity* from wherever you want, start from Hildegard von Bingen to the present. And I also have the history of American jazz in my own blood, that's much closer to me than the European classical music because this music – not only did I have it in my family but it was the music that enabled me to pave my way through my studies, university and things like that. I was playing all the time in dance bands like a big band, big bands, small bands, but anyway this kind of music. Like many people: Terry Riley, La Monte Young were all jazz players, and it was shocking to me people later in life that I admired so much like John Cage and my dear friend Elliott Carter who hated jazz. They didn't hate jazz but for them it was not part...'

VR: 'It was not viable'.

AC: 'Yes, even for Cage it enters into his music in one or two pieces, I forget an early piece of 1940s...'

VR: '*Credo in Us*'.

AC: '*Credo in Us*, thank you very much. I'm losing memory. You get old and...'. 'Anyway, I remember going to dinner with the Carters in New York because I saw them all the time and liked to meet with them. We went to a restaurant and we were eating and suddenly a trio piano bass and drums starts to play. "The hell" he said "That music, they always have to have a beat" [bangs rhythmically on the table]

VR: 'That was also Cage's problem'.

AC: 'The beat, yeah. Because their life was dedicated to destroying the beat, which they successfully did... especially Cage. *Atlas Eclipticalis*: you can't have more no-beat music [than that]...it doesn't exist, "non esiste", you have to be crazy if you could hear a pulse in that music. But, coming back to what you said

about *Endangered Species* I was simply saying, restating the fact that American popular music is one of the most important parts of my musical education. Simple as that, period. [drinks some water]

VR: 'Well, I think we should... "dobbiamo andare avanti a parlare'.

AC: 'Sarebbe bellissimo'.

VR: 'Sì, mettere insieme...'

AC: 'Fare una serie. No, perché tra interviste quali ne ho fatto centinaia. I'll say this in English: talking with you is like talking with someone who knows what I'm talking about'.

VR: 'Thank you, thank you'.

AC: 'Seriously, it's wonderful'.

VR: 'I think I shared some part of the experience, also'.

AC: 'I think you do, I think you share a lot'.

VR: 'Okay'.

AC: 'Good'.