

La foresta dei violini

The violins forest

by Benoit Bories and Francesca Bolognesi¹

Genesis of the project

Initially, there is a documentary sound creation produced by the Radio Suisse Italienne entitled "La foresta dei violini", the release of which is scheduled for autumn 2020. I thus spent the entire month of June 2020 in the Val di Fiemme in the Dolomites. I followed the men of this region making sound an endemic species of fir trees in order to choose the essences that will make their future violin instruments. The subject lends itself very well to sensitive sound writing. By surveying the mountain paths for a month, recording the different sound elements of the environmental and social landscape, collecting certain anecdotes of the inhabitant / environment relationship through the sound dimension, it seemed natural to me to propose a more musical form, thought as a sound stroll through the Val di Fiemme. "La foresta dei violini", in its performative form, tells about the strong links between the people of a valley and their close environment, through the prism of the sense of hearing.



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General sound writing principle

“La foresta dei violini”, is experienced like a concert in a immersive sound system all around the audience (binaural for podcast or 8.1/12.1 for live session performance). It is a sonic journey made of the musicality of the landscapes of the Val di Fiemme. At times, voices are heard, incorporated into the rhythm of the composition. The didactic, analytical tone is prohibited here. Words always arise to tell an anecdote, an experience evoking the sensitive link of an inhabitant of the region with their close environment via sound. Giuliano, ranger, describes his imitation of the call of the male of the white partridge, when he is in counting operation. Marcello has accompanied a number of luthiers in the region and developed a special sense of hearing in contact with the forest in order to find the best species.

A composition thought of as a stroll through eight sound universes of the valley

“La foresta dei violini” is composed in such a way as to visit seven distinct places / acoustic spaces specific to Val di Fiemme and to the relationship of its inhabitants with their environment, more specifically the forest.

- **Silence.** A first approach of the zone all in depth with a strong sound dynamic. A bumblebee gathers flowers. In the background, herd bells are ringing. Little by little, a music seems to emerge from the landscape to disappear almost immediately. Certain characters make us enter the place thanks to certain striking sound experiences.
- **Forest.** Marcello lets us hear his technique of finding resonance wood. The musicality of the forest by day unfolds.
- **Wood working.** The artisanal and industrial sounds of wood are gradually organized into a strange symphony.
- **Village.** A return to calm at sunset in the village. The bells then ring the call of the night.
- **Night.** The sleeping village, we return to the forest where a second sound, nocturnal world wakes up. The party ends with a thunderstorm scene in the high mountains.
- **Water.** After the storm. Water is everywhere in the valley. Depending on the geology of the place, its runoff takes on different intonations.
- **Mineral world.** We finish a little higher still. In this mineral world, the hissing of groundhogs responds to crows. Stone is everywhere and punctuates the landscape. We end up finding the bumblebee foraging on its flowers. The reverie is over.

English script

« La foresta dei violini »

Marcello: Imagine that, for friends, the trees have silence.

Marcello: The infinite silence of the forest and the mountain. The one that penetrates you throughout your body.

Marcello: A silence that you get by closing your eyes.

Marcello: And that makes you feel every vibration of the forest.

Marcello: The rustle of the wind, the murmur of a torrent. I feel like I'm entering the forest now ...

Marcello: A bird singing in the distance.

Marcello: In this silence, you realize that the nature that surrounds you is an orchestra.

Marcello: With a thousand voices, with a thousand voices ...

Twigs, crows

Marcello: Each forest has its own sounds.

Marcello: In the spring, you can hear the cuckoo everywhere. That's wonderful.

Marcello: I look forward to it every year.

Marcello: I look forward to him in the spring hoping he will continue to sing.

Marcello: We need to hear spring return. Absolutely.

Rhythmic sounds of wood manipulation. Marcello is coring into the trunk of a soundwood.

Marcello: We can listen to the sound of the strike on its bark.

Marcello: Dry.

Marcello: We can also put our ears down.

Marcello: These trees woke up from their winter slumber just a few days ago, maybe a week or so.

Marcello: Today it's mild but in general it's still cold.

Marcello: Now, as we core the tree, we'll start to hear, strictly speaking, the soundwood part.

Marcello: And here it is. A very regular sound,

Marcello: rhythmic too.

Marcello: This is the sound part of the tree.

Marcello: Let's approach a tree.

Marcello: Let's touch it.

Marcello: Let's put our ear against its bark.

Marcello: Let's close our eyes and listen to everything around us.

Marcello: The tree helps us to observe. He still does. And tomorrow, he will give his own music to be heard.

Marcello: We're fine. We are really good here.

Stridulations of birds.

Mr Ognibeni: Regarding the selection of tonewood, when I started to work, I knew absolutely nothing.

Mr Ognibeni: In choosing the wood, we had to ask Giuliano Mick, who is now deceased, for assistance. We asked him if he could, as a courtesy, help us continue the activity by accompanying us in choosing the wood during the fall period.

Mr Ognibeni: And, for three years, I was lucky enough to be able to learn by following him.

Mr Ognibeni: I remember the first moments. It was very difficult for me to know by examining a trunk and its harmonic table if I could have pieces that could make a beautiful instrument. He, on the contrary, had this ease of observation.

Mr Ognibeni: But he was very patient with me in passing on his knowledge to me. I did my best to learn and assimilate all this knowledge.

Mr Ognibeni: Subsequently, I went alone to choose the resonance wood. And ten years ago, I began to take with me the foreman of our company, who was available and talented. Since then, I will gladly choose the wood with him if we can go together. Otherwise, we take it in turns.

An awakening of the birds.

Marcello: The Val di Fiemme is the valley of the fir, and in particular of the red fir.

Marcello: But there is also a particular wood, coming from trees that I would define as magical.

Marcello: What is so special about these trees?

Marcello: The wood rings are very subtle.

Marcello: It's a light wood, light but strong.

Marcello: This tree, and in particular its harmonic table which is the soul of the musical instrument, has the ability to transmit and amplify the sound vibration emitted from a string.

Marcello: And he does it in a way, I still use the word, magic.

In the village of Predazzo.

A child: But why do you have headphones on?

Benoit: Because I record with microphones.

A child: Ah! Do you listen to music then?

Benoit: Yes, street music.

Bells.

Marcello: We are clearly in the valley of the forest. And the link between the forest and the inhabitants has always been very strong.

Marcello: I would say that is a sign of the identity of this territory.

Marcello: What does the forest represent for the Val di Fiemme?

Marcello: First and foremost, it's the clothing. Because when you get here, you see trees everywhere.

Marcello: But it is also the soul of this land. Over the past centuries, the forest has forged the economy, history, but also the culture and traditions of this land.

Marcello: I'm not a native of here. And when I got here, something came to my mind. When people spoke of the forest, they always used the expressions "our forests", "our woods".

Marcello: And in using this "we", I felt that I was an essential resource but at the same time owned by everyone and by no one in particular.

Marcello: The people of Val di Fiemme have always used this resource taking into account its fragility, keeping in mind the limits that should not be exceeded. Never take more from the forest than it can give you. This could sound like a philosophy of life.

Crickets.

Giuliano: "I lived in the forest. I was killed with an ax. Now that I'm dead, I sing. This quote is about wood. When the tree lives in the forest, it is silent. Then he is cut down with an ax. Once dead, the tree begins to sing like a musical instrument. It's a quote from Virgil.

Marcello: Trees speak if you take the time to listen to them, to observe them well. You have to approach them closely.

Marcello: While maintaining a certain humility.

Marcello: Because even if they don't have the use of speech, they have their own language, that of forms.

Marcello: The shapes of their branches, foliage and rings. They tell you all about their past lives, their relationship with other trees, with us humans as well as with animals.

Marcello: They tell you about times gone by. Their rings are crowns that have recorded the past seasons. They tell you a lot of things.

Rhythmic melody.

Giuliano: I sometimes take beautiful walks in the forest. In these moments, I regenerate myself on the physical and psychic level.

Giuliano: For me, the best time of day is waking up, then going to the office. If I'm outside then I'm entitled to a bird concert, a forest concert.

Giuliano: I really like hearing the water too.

Thunderclap.

Giuliano: On October 28, 2018, I was on duty. It had been raining heavily for three days. It was windy, the showers were very intense. During the afternoon, we made small interventions on the road with a team of workers. Then at one point the rain was so heavy that I ended up saying to the workers, "Go away, I have time to close the construction sites and I am going too." "I ended up leaving at nightfall to head for Bellamonte, the village where I was staying.

Giuliano: On the road, there were small torrents which had already carried construction equipment. I managed to get through so as not to get stuck. We were already beginning to hear the first trees falling.

Giuliano: Around nine in the evening, there was a terrible sound of wind. In front of my house, on the Lagorai mountain range, we heard a huge noise from the crashing of the falling trees. And the wind that continued to howl.

Giuliano: And two hours later, around eleven in the evening, the wind suddenly died down. It was then a moment of great calm. I was glad it stopped because I was scared. Still, I am not generally impressed by natural events. At dawn, when I woke up, we could start to see the damage done during the night.

Rain, aquatic sounds.

Mr Ognibeni: I went to a place where I used to bring luthiers, journalists, television crews. It was a forest with magnificent trees, upright like columns, with a ground covered with moss. For me, it was an eternal, easy-to-access place that I had always known since my beginnings. He had always been there.

Mr Ognibeni: That morning there was still a little fog. I went up to this place by car. On the last stretch of road, there is a bend where you cross a bridge. Right after, there is this forest. That morning, I knew I was in the right place, but I didn't feel like I was there. Because all the trees were on the ground.

Mr Ognibeni: At the time, I was very confused. It took me a while to realize the situation. I even started to cry because it is such an important place to me. I have a lot of memories, photographs linked to this place. I realized that this place, which I considered eternal, would not only no longer exist but that my grandchildren's children would never have the chance to see a forest like this. Because a forest with trees of this kind needs 150 to 200 years to create. And if we do the count, the children of my grandchildren will not be able to have time to see her regenerate. A forest like this must generate itself, naturally. The forest has its own temporality.

Pebbles

Marcello: The character of these trees is due to an evolution that is thousands of years old. These trees have never been planted by humans. If we try to understand the reasons for their so specific characters, we can already say that they live in a difficult environment.

Marcello: At an altitude between 1,600 and 1,800 meters above sea level where it is always cold. They can only grow for a few months from mid June to mid August. No more.

Marcello: Then, a long sleep, with the ground covered with snow from November to May.

Marcello: Given these conditions, these trees risk little. They have an important longevity.

Fly

Marcello: Today we have mature trees that were born around the time Stradivarius chose these soundwoods.

Footsteps in the forest.

Marcello: They are very long-lived. How long do they live?

Marcello: A question that a little girl once asked me.

Marcello: “Always”, I replied. For the violin is the tree's second life. These trees are eternal like the beautiful music they offer us.

Marcello: It's like that.