

*L'arpa moderna* by Lucia Bova examines harp writing in the solo and chamber repertory from the 16th century till today.

The approach adopted by the author is based on the idea that every instrument has its own nature which does not lead simply and exclusively to the structural characteristics of the instrument but to something more complex, arising from the interaction between the instrument and the physical attitude of the player. This physical aspect has been modified over the centuries to match the metamorphosis that the harp has gone through and to meet the respective changes in style and in performing practices. For this reason the book often contains the expression "idiomatic writing" by which it means the writing that is expressly conceived for a particular instrument, for the physical attitude of the player and the acoustic result obtainable, to the extent that it becomes so inextricably linked to the instrument as to be almost unthinkable on others. As often happens with certain expressions typical of a language that in translation lose their nuances, subtle references and part of their meaning, a piece that is genuinely idiomatic for the harp can only be adapted to another instrument at the expense of quality in terms of timbre and dynamics, colours and gestures that are an inexorable part of the musical discourse.

The most significant moments in the evolution of writing for harp are explained and illustrated by numerous examples taken from important pieces of the repertory in the history of western music. From this point of view *L'arpa moderna* tries not only to tell the "minor" stories of harps and harpists, but also aims to trace the presence of the harp throughout the history of music at large, showing how it was used in the works of some of the greatest composers in the western historical tradition. A vast array of examples taken from pieces by Varèse, Maderna, Berio, Petrassi, Donatoni, Takemitsu, Crumb, Henze, Scelsi, Carter, Ferneyhough, Holliger, Bussotti, Birtwistle, Gubaydulina, Jolas, Schnittke, Yun, De Pablo, Boulez and Stockhausen (and many other contemporaries) and composers from the historical tradition such as Mozart, Fauré, Ravel, Debussy, Stravinskij, Schönberg, Webern, Britten, Dallapiccola, Malipiero and Puccini, allow the reader to approach the writing for harp with great awareness and to appreciate the complex interaction between the structural peculiarities and the physical attitude of the player.

Various books exist that deal with the history of the harp, covering the transformations that took place over the centuries from an organological point of view and examining the numerous attempts made by the instrument-makers to transform the harp from a diatonic instrument into one that is able to play and modulate in all keys. Many of them are an exclusively historical texts and focus on the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whereas the 20<sup>th</sup> century and modern writing is completely overlooked. Other texts which devote only a limited amount of space to the 20th century and

contemporary music, do not deal with the development of writing for the harp but concentrate mainly on organological aspects.

There are very few works dealing specifically with the writing for the harp. Some of them cover the traditional forms of writing without describing the characteristics of the instrument and consequent linguistic particularity. Other texts, on the contrary deal exclusively with experimental writing, limiting themselves to listing the various ways of performing without giving any deeper explanations or providing musical examples.

And then there are the numerous books about orchestration in various languages, but having to deal with all the instruments of the orchestra they dedicate just a few pages to the harp and are useful for writing an orchestral part, but totally inadequate for anyone wanting to compose a solo work or a chamber piece where the harp plays an important role.

*L'arpa moderna* by Lucia Bova is divided into three main parts: the first three chapters deal with the history of the instrument and its solo and chamber repertory from the 16th to 20th century, and will thus be of interest to those wishing to deepen their knowledge of the history of the style and writing adopted for this instrument (students, harpists, composers, historians and musicologists); chapters IV to VIII look into the characteristics of the instrument and of traditional writing for the harp, making ideal reading for composers and arrangers interested in understanding the peculiarities of the instrument and of harp technique; chapter IX, takes a detailed look at new ways of performing, with explanations, examples of notation and technical charts and will be particularly helpful for harpists, harp students and composers interested in the most recent forms of musical expression.

Lucia Bova's book fills in a long-standing gap in the international publishing scene and is therefore of interest not only to students but also to professional players, musicologists, teachers and composers. In addition, the vast quantity of information and examples, and the wide span of time covered, will probably make the book difficult to replace even in the future.