

Remembering Butch Morris (1947-2013)

Marco Cappelli (February 01, 2013)



He somehow represented what I came to look for in NYC: a bridge between classical music tradition and improvisation, a logical connection between knowledge and soul, a natural transition from a deep intellectual approach to music and spontaneous creativity.

It was the end of last April, I was playing a gig at Accademia Filarmonica in Bologna, Italy, with my classical music trio ABC (with Lucia Bova, harp and Avi Avital, mandolin). I knew Butch was in Bologna, he might have said something to me about a contract he was going to sign, for a long term residency with an orchestra, and I might have told him about my gig.

The gig was not an easy one, with the premiere of a new composition and some other difficult chamber music pieces: I was nervous as I usually am when I get on stage to play complex music with



not enough rehearsals. But when I saw Butch (with Massimo Simonini, Alberto lo Foco and Cristina Zavalloni) in the first row of seats, in front of the stage, I felt immediately better. Honored. And happy.

I did not immediately ask myself why his presence in the concert hall gave me such a feeling. I just enjoyed it, and played, just trying to make music, forgetting the complexity of it and the few rehearsals.

After the gig we hugged and talked shortly: I was so glad to see "such a piece" of my New York life in Italy.

Then I was going to dinner with the Accademia Filarmonica's people and he was going to dinner with Lalo and Massimo to talk about his residency. I think my dinner was definitely more boring than his. But we met later at Cantina Bentivoglio, where some live jazz music was happening. We had several drinks chatting about life, New York, Italy and the fake jazz we were listening. We had a great time, he was so happy about the idea of living in Bologna. Coming back home late at night, with my thoughts cradled by some good whiskey, I got it why I had been so happy to see Butch at my gig. He somehow represented what I came to look for in NYC: a bridge between classical music tradition and improvisation, a logical connection between knowledge and soul, a natural transition from a deep intellectual approach to music and spontaneous creativity (you can run this one in either direction).

That was the last the time I saw Butch. During this past fall I thought many times about going to see him, and feel bad that I never found the courage to just go...I thought about involving him in a project, commissioning to him a piece for guitar. I thought this would have been a better way to interact with him while he was ill: doing some music together. I thought I had more time.

And today I can't forgive myself for not having just said "ciao Butch".

P.S. I met Butch in 2005, playing during Black February in occasion of the 20th anniversary of his idea of "Conduction". Since then I played occasionally with Nublu Orchestra, and, despite his "not always easy" behavior, I consider Butch Morris one of the most inspiring musicians I met in New York. Here I want to play for him this piece by Fabrizio De Rossi Re. It is a video recording of the premiere piece from the gig of that night, and Butch liked it. I think he was seating a little more on the left: just imagine the back of his head, in the first row seats.

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