

ROULETTE

Gryphon Rue Plays Giusto Pio *Motore Immobile* and *Ananta*

April 10, 2024
8pm



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Gryphon Rue organ and voice
Benjamin Katz piano and organ
Odetta Hartman violin
Score transcription by Mauro Hertig and Gryphon Rue

Gryphon Rue: Solo piece for 4-track tape and ceramic flute, 2024 (World Premiere)

- Intermission -

Giusto Pio: Motore Immobile and Ananta, 1978 (US Premiere)

PROGRAM NOTES

Carefully passing an orb of water...

We organists share the orb, and the overlap of our chords creates a dovetailing effect. Each phrase is held for an intuitive length.

The musical scheme goes: organ 1, organ 2, vocalist, violin, repeat. Each note is gently held by the vocalist, like a hummingbird sampling the chambers of a flower. It is possible to hear an implied harmony haunting the triads; the outline of a geometric pattern. The frozen world of the organs contrasts with the oddly detached violin.

Motore Immobile refers to a concept of Aristotle's which provides a backdrop to Pio's music: a "prime mover" or "motionless engine" which generates all the motion in the universe. A perfect being absorbed in a state of self-contemplation, the embodiment of stillness and the precondition of motion.

Imagine the rotating mechanisms of any motor: as you move from the periphery to the center, towards the pin of the wheel, the movement decreases. Thus moving towards the center of a sound decreases the dynamic sensation, until a maximum of energy is released from a maximum of static nature.

Pio is also describing the behavior of a spiral, and by extension the coils of the inner ear. In musical terms, how does he achieve the movement from the periphery of a sound to its center? The arctic *Motore Immobile* rewards us with Ananta; rapid-fire piano scales terminating in sustained chords. We twist through corridors, interiors, ladders climbing up and down, a bit of light and shadow. Each chord flows seamlessly with the swell of an organ in a manually performed crossfade. The illusion is that the piano has infinite sustain, as if the piano had a magnet resonating its body. The organ has blended perfectly with the decay of the piano strings. The effect is one of a quiet acoustic phenomenon. A small wonder.

Mauro Hertig and I took great pleasures and pains to prepare a score for this performance based on the original recording. It feels as if we are plunging into a tiny mysterious history. Or as the philosopher Gianluca Magic wrote of *Motore Immobile*,

It is like penetrating inside a Sri Yantra, the Indian visual tool meant to foster the process of meditative absorption...To get to the center of the Yantra: to that still Point (bindu) – neither flesh nor fleshless, neither arrest nor movement where past and future are gathered – that center around which the world turns and dances.

- Gryphon Rue

After a nearly 30 year career as a concert violinist, Giusto Pio composed his first solo works upon entering a spiritually-charged circle of musicians in 1970s Milan coalescing around the singer/composer Franco Battiato. Pio first began his long-running collaboration with Battiato co-writing an inscrutable score to a TV documentary on Filippo Brunelleschi (rejected and released as Battiato's *Juke Box*) and in 1978 premiered "Motore Immobile" and "Ananta" with Battiato, Michele Fedrigotti and Danilo Lorenzini at Milan's Teatro Out Off. A Battiato-produced LP of the pieces recorded for Gianni Sassi's label Cramps followed shortly, issued alongside Fedrigotti and Lorenzini's *I Fiori Del Sole* and Raul Lovisoni and Francesco Messina's *Prati Bagnati Del Monte Analogo*. In this highly ritualistic grouping of compositions, we see the acts of composing and performing placed outside of aesthetics, a refined methodology for interfacing with the sublime, a way of opening the door.

The works credited to Pio and Battiato during this period are often categorized under a nebulous, ill-defined banner of "Italian minimalism", framed as a trend that arrived in the aftermath of the American minimalists as their pieces made their way through European concert halls and the dominance of serialism deteriorated. Whether or not Pio and Battiato's pieces from this time classify as capital M minimalism is perhaps, as Paul Hillier said of Arvo Part's music, a moot question, one which "depends on what meanings are collected under such a heading, and who is asking." Battiato himself found allegiance with Glass, Reich and Riley due to their focus on the material, sonorous aspect of sound (in opposition to the theoretical), but like Part's work the structural form and resulting cognitive states differ greatly.

Both pieces here are of a directly metaphysical nature, dealing with notions of the infinite mirrored across a west/east religious axis. *Motore Immobile* refers to Aristotle's concept of the *prime mover*, the eternal force which ignites the motion of the universe: "that which is first in complete reality is the cause of all things." Similarly, *ananta* is a Sanskrit word that refers to a notion of endlessness or boundlessness. In Hindu cosmology, it represents an infinite state with a discernible beginning, an aspect of the Supreme Brahman that is not omnidirectional but positioned from a fixed starting point outward. Considering this, the work of Battiato's circle in the late 70s can then be further contextualized by a blossoming interest in Armenian mystic George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. Battiato was introduced to Gurdjieff's writings in 1978 by Roberto Calasso, a prolific Italian

writer and husband of Fleur Jaeggy (who herself had just penned lyrics for *Juke Box*). Gurdjieff believed that the spiritual paths of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism were incompatible with modernity and sought a unified practice that did not depend on renouncing worldly life. However Battiato and his circle did not devote strictly to Gurdjieff's teachings - Pio himself remained a devout Catholic his entire life, and the duo's creative work in the late 70s also drew from other pan-religious thinkers like Egyptian/French esotericist René Guénon. One could also theorize that it was Guénon (who addressed both the *prime mover* and the Hindu concept of *ananta* in his writings) that inspired the transcultural spiritual mirroring present between "Motore Immobile" and "Ananta".

Beginning with a triumphant C major chord, "Motore Immobile" continually pivots and re-positions into different mechanics of the mover's mechanism. Pio envisioned moving closer into the center of a gear, where the force of the rotational motion increases as the relative speed decreases: as we move closer inside of sound, its spiritual power focuses and deepens. The electric organs form different tonal centers which are explored by the violin and voice, tracing the overtones in search of the sound's essence, searching for the center of the wheel. In "Ananta", we hear an investigation into the piano as a sonorous object, a tool which the performer uses to unfold an efflorescence of tonal color. The piece is structured around a technique developed by Battiato in his pieces "Za" and "L'Egitto Prima Delle Sabbie" ("Egypt before the Sands") in which piano chords are struck with the damper pedal held down, followed by a long fermata to allow the strings resonate and shimmer into clouds of overtones. Required is a form of listening which Battiato later defined as "meta-analytic, in favor of an atemporal non-spatiality". Which is to say that time expands within the long silences between strums, drawing the mind to the act of listening itself and focusing a microscope on the inner details of sonority. With "Ananta", Pio expands on the idea further by extending these resonances with held notes of electric organ and gentle piano figures that trace around the resulting drone's harmonic edges. As with "Za" and "L'Egitto Prima Delle Sabbie" the score dictates the technique and actual gestural aspects of the work, but it is the after-image that arises in their wake which the listener is drawn to focus upon.

- Spencer Doran

BIO

Giusto Pio (1926-2017) was an Italian musician, composer and songwriter. He studied music in Venice, and later he was engaged as violinist in the RAI orchestra of Milan. In the late 1970s and early 1980s he became popular as a long-standing collaborator of singer-songwriter Franco Battiato, by whom he was initially hired as violin teacher.

Gryphon Rue (b. New York, NY) is an artist and musician. In June 2024 Rue will release a new album, *4n_Objx*. Recently he presented *The Struggle of the Magicians: What is Italian Minimalism?* on Montez Press Radio, where he has a regular program.

His music is featured in many recent films by Keren Cytter, and in collaborations with artists Robert Buck, B. Wurtz, Abigail Child, Benton C Bainbridge, and others. Rue's performances span international venues such as Fondazione ICA Milano, Hauser & Wirth, de Young Museum, Vector Hack Festival, Lafayette Electronic Arts Festival, Roulette Mixology festival, New Media Art & Sound Summit, Experimental Arts Intermedia. He performs in the audiovisual duo Rue Bainbridge and in duo with Merche Blasco. As a curator, Rue has organized numerous interdisciplinary exhibitions in institutional and non-traditional venues. He manages the legacy of the painter Elsa Rensaa (current solo exhibitions at James Fuentes Gallery LA and NY).

Ben Katz plays early and new music on harpsichord and other keyboard instruments. He has appeared in NYC venues including BRIC, Columbia University's St Paul's Chapel, the Owl Music Parlor, and ISSUE Project Room where he curated two evenings featuring new music for harpsichord. Katz has performed with groups including A Far Cry, the Knights, and Tiny Glass Tavern, and Palaver Strings. He has collaborated with writer Kalliopi Mathios and composer Steve Long on a program for Montez Press Radio in 2021. In the early music realm, he has presented his work on historical musical improvisation as a guest lecturer at The New School and Stony Brook University and performed with many accomplished artists including vocalists Sophie Michaux, Ariadne Greif, and Julianne Baird, baroque violinist Julie Andrijeski, and baroque cellist Phoebe Carrai. Future projects include performances and recordings of partimenti (semi-improvised baroque keyboard works) and previously unknown and unexplored 17th and 18th keyboard and chamber music, and further performances of new music for early keyboard instruments.

Odetta Hartman (violin) is a musician & educator, born & based between downtown Manhattan & upstate NY. Alongside her sister, Camellia, she is the co-founder of the burgeoning arts community & healing homestead, Ladybug Land, located in the western Catskills. Hartman's eclectic musical journey has garnered critical acclaim, high calibre collaborations and international touring opportunities. In addition to session recordings & live performances, she has released three solo albums: 222 [2012]- Old Rockhounds Never Die [2018] – swansongs [2023]. As a multi-disciplinary artist, Odetta has played violin in several experimental theater productions, including Heather Christian's award-winning Oratorio For Living Things, as well as Penelope & The Blues of Achilles. She has had the pleasure of collaborating with Bard College classmate Gryphon Rue for over a decade.

SPECIAL THANKS

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