

Luigi Verdi

Aleksandr Skrjabin, Prometeo il poema del fuoco, op.60. Programma di sala per il concerto del 18 settembre 1999, Genova, Teatro Carlo Felice.



Aleksandr Skrjabin started composing Prometheus in April 1909 in Brussels, where he had stayed after a long series of concert tournées. Skrjabin was going to devote himself completely to a new imposing symphonic work, but he had not perceived its structure yet, just writing a chord or a theme as they would come to his mind occasionally. He had already been noticing for some time that when listening to certain sounds, corresponding colours used to develop in his mind: after learning about the experiments of the English scientist Wallace Remington, who had built a special keyboard based on the association between sounds and colours, Skrjabin then matured the idea of using a similar instrument in his new symphonic work. He used to attend the members of the Belgian Theosophic Society and in particular painter Jean Delville, with whom he had established a close friendship; being a guest at the painter's study, Skrjabin noticed a painting representing the figure of Prometheus, the mythical bearer of fire; being

fascinated by the ambiguity and the symbolic wealth of the painting, Skrjabin decided to dedicate Prometheus his new composition and asked his friend Delville to provide the drawing for the score cover; then he set to the composition with alacrity, by working all over the summer and the autumn 1909. Back to Moscow in January 1910, Skrjabin completed the orchestration of Prometheus in October of the same year: the big orchestra, composed of about a hundred elements, includes the woodwinds at 4, 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 2 harps, organ, piano, celesta, colour keyboard for the "Light" part, a solid group of percussions, mixed 4-part choir, strings (at least 60). The piano has got a particularly important role, since it works out and develops the themes which are little by little presented by the orchestra.

For the realization of the "Light" part, Skrjabin decided to entrust the building of a specific device to Aleksandr Mozer, photographer and teacher of electromechanics at Moscow Advanced/Senior School of Technical Instruction; Mozer set right a similar device only a few months after the first performance of Prometheus (15 March 1911) which, consequently, lacked one of his fundamental components; Mozer's device consisted of 12 colour lamps placed circularly upon a wooden stand, which would be lit by push-buttons; today this object is shown at Skrjabin's Home Museum in Moscow.

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