

# Daniele Lombardi: Virtual Music

Spazio Italia at **iic**

March 31 - May 5, 2000

Monday through Friday, 11 am - 5 pm



Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Los Angeles  
Italian Heritage Culture Foundation, Los Angeles



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## Daniele Lombardi: Virtual Music

The Italian Visual Music movement, which arose in Florence in the mid-1960s and has remained active ever since, was initially influenced by two important movements: the ground-breaking theories of John Cage, who brought tools provided by emerging technologies into the realm of music, and the artists of the Fluxus movement, who performed "concerts" that transformed music into provocative practice.

Using different tools and with different goals, the Italian composers of the Visual Music movement found common ideological ground in inter-media forms of expression that totally integrated musical and visual sources. Daniele Lombardi is one of the most interesting figures among the composers and pianists who have emerged in Italy in recent decades, and has increasingly gained recognition for his experimentation in visual music.

Lombardi's musical career is a continuous exploration of new possibilities; his piano production is vast, and includes work that employs multiple pianos in a gigantic ensemble. In the 1960s, Lombardi began to produce a body of graphic work consisting of constellations of forms and colors with inherent musical values that need neither acoustics nor instruments to be "heard." Lombardi's graphic scores designed for silent performance arose from a social consideration: the audience for contemporary music is becoming smaller due to the complexity of the works and composers are perceived as elitist artists using a jarringly dissonant idiom. Lombardi saw an idiom of signs — graphic renditions of sounds, symbolic ideograms capable of relating visual form to musical meaning — as the only way to re-create a vital relationship between the composer and the public.

Lombardi's "social" intentions are made clear in the ambitious project Piano Laboratory of 1976-78. This undertaking was an attempt to break down the barriers between contemporary music and a non-professional audience, thus making new music more "accessible." Piano Laboratory is articulated in three phases: performance, composition, and improvisation. The first phase, "L'apprendista stregone" ("The Sorcerer's Apprentice"), consists of a one-page score for piano, which provides simple instructions on how to use it and how to translate Lombardi's graphic symbols into sounds. "To Gather Together," the second phase, is an attempt to create a collective composition. Fifty white cards, measuring approximately 12 x 8 inches, are handed out to an equal number of participants. Each person draws his or her own graphic map, from left to right, freely choosing the given symbols in an attempt to foresee the musical outcome. A pianist plays each one of the cards. Later, he gathers them in the order in which they have been handed to him. The event concludes with an uninterrupted performance of all the scores. The third and final phase, "Self," a recorded piano performance involving at least sixty people, consists in giving each participant twenty seconds to play brief piano improvisations. All scores are replayed at the end without interruption, thus achieving the theoretical objective, which is to reject the conventional, academic prejudice, based on different levels of merit.

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Sound returned to Lombardi's works of the 1970s in a large group of piano compositions. In these works, the interplay between sound and its visual configuration is often enacted in video or slide projections during theater performances, thus enabling the audience to identify the musical structure of the work. The visual notations corresponding to sounds that the composer creates by giving free play to his imagination consent the spectators to reach a deeper instinctual place within themselves. Says Lombardi: "The visual, the aural, and the gestural are all contained within a creative space that allows for a continuous transcoding, a series of shifts from one field to the other, leading one to hear with the eyes and see with the ears...Today's advanced technologies allow us to explore the mechanics of sound in its virtual potentiality, and to perceive a new dimension of sound and sight."

Included in the exhibition are an oil painting on canvas, "Musica Virtuale n. 7," 1998 (7'16" x 32'8"); five small mixed media 1998 "Studies" (31 1/2" x 23 1/2"); and two watercolors on paper, "Musica Virtuale n. 8, 1998" (5' x 15'4") and "Musica Virtuale n. 12," 1999 (29" x 15'4"). These works are powerful manifestations of Lombardi's concept that the experience of hearing is no longer purely acoustical; an intent state of listening leads to evocations that are spatial metaphors for the temporal experience of sound.

The 1998 Studies anticipate the execution of Lombardi's recent monumental paintings. Each of the compositions is a musical microcosm in which freely invented formal and chromatic elements are charged with the cadenza of percussive shifting rhythms. "Musica Virtuale n. 7," 1998, is a carefully constructed representation of a Minimalist work. Consisting of graphic elements overlaying a field in warm shades of yellow, the composition is dominated by the themes of movement and repose, as in a modern musical language that draws on the consonance and repetition of Minimalism. "Musica Virtuale n. 8," 1998 depicts an intricate, asymmetrical series of beats; deconstructed forms move over the surface of the painting with increasing rapidity as the interval between the performed sounds becomes shorter. Dissonant colors of varying intensity add dramatic emphasis to an aggressive piano style and affect our senses like sounds being played with increasing intensity.

A series of musical compositions by Lombardi will accompany the exhibition. By activating a CD player located in the gallery space, visitors will be able to listen to the music for up to three hours. Lombardi's recent exhibition/performances include *Labirinti* (Labyrinths), 1998 at Museo Pecci in Prato, and *Babele* (Babel), 1998-99, at Palazzo Fabroni-Arti Visive Contemporanee in Pistoia. Lombardi has made numerous recordings (Edipan, Fonit-Cetra), obtaining the 1987 award from the Italian recording critics with *Musica Futurista*. He is the editor of 1985 *la musica*, a Rome-based magazine on contemporary music, and teaches piano at the G. Verdi Conservatory in Milan. Lombardi lives and works in Florence.

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