

Salvatore Martirano (1927–1995)

The following discourse, though perhaps of little syllogistic coherence, is offered with the thought that Sal Martirano's artistic being allowed him to make sense out of inspired nonsense and the God of Vice and Verses permitted him, too, to do the opposite, that is to riddle perfectly good sense into a shrieking Swiss cheese–like gibberish of merely babbled inconsequentials.

The search for eloquent realization in coherent continuity is essentially desirable and apparently still necessary in today's digital maelstrom, yet artistically difficult as ever to sequence. Sal knew that. Might it be a sort of cabalistic secret algorithm, the quest for which eventually roughs up the edges of mathematical certainty, screaming out a direct order to breathe unkempt and unpredictable life into the calculations of perfection and thereby pulsating that life into a suggestion of spiritual sustenance and a succession of tangible corporeal meanings? To chance inconsistency for its own sake, as was Sal's method after processing the world he saw, rather than trading in the sterile incentives of rigid certainty should not inadvertently divert anyone's attention. Worst of all, he would aver, are consequences that manufacture oceans of rejected meaningless statistics and truckloads of aesthetic junk mail. Nevertheless it was necessary for him to fight the fight. And he did, right up to the end. The metaphorical madhouse, within which we all reside, is perhaps redeemed occasionally and momentarily by a flashing insight lodged into the memory of the beholder and thereafter pondered about as if it offered a comfortable and workable paradigm of what life is all about. The delusional memorable moment serves, for better or worse, as generator of false hope and/or real creative accomplishment. At least it keeps one working, no matter how slow the pace. Sometimes the pace was extremely slow.

Sal was surrounded by facts as numbers, numbers as presumed facts either as closed and systematic formulae exhibiting abstract beauty of logical models, or, those which progress randomly in search of some unattainable measure of comprehensibility. Ratios of deception tax the attention span and deflect one away from the profundities (or inanities) of existence. What does it mean that Sal Martirano, builder of the SAL-MAR Construction (he who was also known early on as ork-leader Sonny Martin and later in comic fulfillment of a dreamed-up buffoon-like persona, the boastful, I-am-the-greatest King of Spain)—what does it mean that Salvatore Martirano labored for more than fifty years in search of artistic fulfillment? Does the integer "50" resonate in its own terms? For those of us who quietly accelerate toward the darkness at the end of the tunnel it seems like a long time, a lifetime. Why, it is about one-fifth of the total time that has elapsed since the establishment of this country—more than one-tenth since Columbus, on commission from Ferdinand and Isabella discovered circles in Manhattan and capitals in Ohio. For mere mortals 50 years is a hefty chunk of time. Closer to the incivility of Abraham Lincoln's reputation then historiographical prudence should permit us to allow. Knowing someone and having a broad view of their output over that long a stretch establishes patterns that make perception of the human relationship involved prone to carefully molded generalizations that are, alas, not always true. e.e. cummings called them "skillfully stuffed memories," but they are crammed, too, with unverifiable impressions. Time has its way of confirming, but also of confounding, confuting, and confusing. The Martirano *Mass* deals with a text that may be close to 2,000 years old. That integer changes perspectives fast enough. We, as mere humans, try humbly to confront the measurements of life as though they were functionally identical with the life itself. But isn't the World

without end, and indeed if not, at least hundreds of millions of years old and represented by a trebly trembling troubling sing singularly rare prime number not yet computed?

Sal was a rambunctious ex-Marine who had worked in his teens with some second-rate dance bands like those of Shorty Sherrock and Johnny Bothwell. He was a wholly committed bebopper of the first wave. He talked the talk and took long slow walks, and often discussed the notions relating to, as was then perceived to be the case, the soldiers at the frontiers of musical art—Bud Powell, Stravinsky, Miles, Bird, musicians like that. Though other matters and maestri came into his purview as his life progressed in the years that followed, Sal, though he considerably expanded his outlook and critical posture, maintained unwavering loyalty to the early subject matters. His interest in them never faded.

Sal was a committed artist from the start. He never even mildly suggested an alternative to the life and career he had chosen. Of course his more than thirty-year tenure at the University of Illinois permitted him to be, concurrently, an inspiring teacher to a large number of students, but he never taught out of anyone's syllabus but his own. He was professionally self-absorbed but found it easy to share the hard information he had mined. He had, it would seem, actively found his metier previously, but is it possible that the muses sought to present him with a unique flair and temperament in order to sustain his calling in the hurried years bestowed upon him?

Sal was from beginning to end devoted to his family, first and foremost. He always spoke with great warmth and respect of his mother and father; he spoke with affection of his brother and sister. In the later years, the home Sal shared with his wife, Dorothy, and their two sons, Alex and John, was always filled at any hour of the day with relaxed warmth, which often included the company of a myriad of hanging polyplanar speakers, honored guests, walk-ins, provocative talk, music instantly composed by the madcap automatic pilot/intruder/golem, the SAL-MAR Construction, jazz, and of course moonlight cocktails and remembrances of things pasta washed down with a robust and sensible chianti.

Sal was not prolific by conventional standards, unless we count the thousands of sallies introduced by the SAL-MAR automaton. But let be mentioned some of the conventionally notated works: Their names each stir up interior rumblings and playbacks inside the head, because of their artistic force, forward outlook, and unshakable integrity.

***MASS - CONTRASTO - CHANSONS INNOCENTES -
O, O, O, O, THAT SHAKESPEHERIAN RAG - OCTET - COCKTAIL MUSIC - L's GA -
LON/DONS - BALLAD - UNDERWORLD - STUCK ON STELLA - ISABELLA -***

These works and the others which he composed are most assuredly the inspired produce of a lifetime, a legacy for the uncertain future that lies ahead and a corpus of inspiration for a world that really needs it.

COCKTAIL MUSIC (1962)

It would be out of place in so short a space to divulge the recipe of the virtuosistic *Cocktail Music* for piano. If perhaps it might whet the imagination to contemplate the intricacy of said concoction, let it here suffice, to wit: The imagination of the composer worked overtime to coordinate the multitudinous cerebrative constructs—all the while a baser metabolic process demanded a slaking of its thirst (a thirst, moreover, that decries symmetry and arid regularity). What are the "external" influences

on the work—crystal gazing, Art Tatum, Domenico Scarlatti—*The Joy of Cooking?* Preposterous??? Read Irma Rombauer's written direction therein:

The cocktail is probably an American invention and most certainly a typically American kind of drink. Whatever mixtures you put together—and part of the fascination of cocktail mixing is the degree of inventiveness it seems to encourage—hold fast to a few general principles.

OCTET (1963)

By all means see and/or hear *Cocktail Music* for piano (1962): with the deadline for a work commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation at hand, the D. Scarlatti–Art Tatumesque virtuoso keyboard concoction is metaphrased into *Octet*, and becomes, for quite a long stretch, the last of completely full "classically notated" compositions to be purchased at the SalMart. This opus, first performed in 1963 by eight youngsters in the Berkeley, California, public school system, delicately sings its combinatorial song, gently exposing and weightlessly espousing the doctrine of significant differences. As with Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin* settings, it offers the orchestrationophile an olio, the recipe for which, unraveled, delights the F–G-cleffed palate. The sonorities allotted to and created by mixes utilizing contralto clarinet, bass clarinet, contrabass, and cello at the one extreme with flute, violin, and celeste at the other (all freshly seasoned by the striking Mr. Marimba), are tasty enough to be recommended to the more gay Gourmet (no hex on heterosex). There are time changes aplenty (this, remember, was written right before Times Changed) but despite the formidable performing difficulties, admirable accuracy was achieved by the ensemble featuring Lee Duckles and Dorothy Martirano, whose primary orientation is "classical"; Ron Dewar and Howie Smith, whose outlook keys in on "jazz"; Tom Fredrickson, Tom Howell, Rick Kvistad, and Art Maddox—all of whom (conducted by the composer), one might say, travel in "semi-classical orbs." As we leave the serenely settled world of *Octet*, as we must (a low *ha-ha*), need there be any hesitation in saying that the composer has ended a significant phase of his career?

EARLY, MIDDLE & OVENLATE *WE ALL FISH WITH LUDWIG'S BAIT*

Henceforth newer ideas, for example electronic extensions (cords + chords) and performer liberties (the blowing of neoteric changes) will be central concerns of Sal's conscious creative adventures.

In this regard it would be subjunctively constructive for the listener to be familiar with other works, not represented on this disc, in the Getting S. Mart Oeuvre such as:

UNDERWORLD (1965)

This is a transitional work that begins with tightness and strict control reminiscent of the total serial box but by gradually uncrinkling its flakes to much lower intensity levels, it permits the option of snap, crackle, and popping of a more relaxed nature to intrude (extrude). One notices in this work the entrance of sound generation by computer. *Underworld* is available and talked about elsewhere, as is the flammable *L's GA*.

CHANSONS INNOCENTES (poems by E.E. Cummings) (1957)

In the Fifties it was a rite of passage for many young artists to be attracted to the seductively charged poetry of E.E. Cummings. In particular the *Chansons Innocentes* have been set by a whole host (and some hostesses) of composers. Be it the lyrically romantic sentiments expressed in the poems, the imaginative distribution of syllables on the page, or brazen ironies opposing "mud-luscious" and "puddle wonderful" with lame-footed balloon persons that led to compositional musical setting. There were ladlefuls of suggestiveness to set one's mind to conjuring up musical transmogrifications.

In short, there is an over-arching palindromic structure, which equalizes the roles of the two participants, voice and piano. Note an exploration of contrasts—particularly those associated with dynamics and range. Apparent as well is the physical function of the pianist's hands and how they "fit" together. Sal wrote for piano and voice from the inside. He loved to sing his music for voice, belting it out perhaps so as to understand its mechanisms better; or maybe just to get it off his chest; he was a sensitive pianist as well.

BALLAD (1966)

Which brings us to *Ballad* of 1966. (All bad, lab lad?). Becoming further removed, the return home continues. Back to the "tunes" and the "standards." The mythos of tonal propriety (semantic misdirection imbedded in the tantalizing timbre of existence) is exploded as Chicks emanate from eggs fertilized by a larger than life Royal Rooster. The Buds sprout. Life is being lived on its own Dizzying terms. How sweet it truly is. But underneath there is still the autonomic nervous system high-blood-pressuring the unique metabolic reactions which give rise to grave Chtonian fancies. ALL IS NOT WELL THAT HAS TO END. The dues are paid, you see, but this is immaterial in the grinding bass interplay of linear textual consequences. Think it through:

"You are too beautiful, my dear, to be true . . ."
"This I promise you, a love that you can treasure . . ."
"For all we know, we may never meet again . . ."
"I love you baby, but you won't be fair . . ."
"Lost and I'm calling, baby won't you please come home . . ."
"I'm gonna move to the outskirts of town . . ."
"Baby, don't you weep for me . . . don't you weep for me . . ."

This is a progression chromogenically conceived and arranged to be in contradiction *prima facie*. But the sounds wail out the fundamentals (yes yes yes) confounding the demons of indirection and demand no paraphrase. Irony? Why, not at all. This is for Don Smith and other friends (John-Jon-Ron-Tom-Tom et al). *Ballad* is not Proustian recall . . . (no no no), that is yet to come; just a swim in pleasant waters (or as pleasant as waters muddied by history can be. Can one step in the same river twice?) So in some meaningful way the continuity of the human race from Bunk to Monk, from Irving Berlin to Jan Savitt continues apace.

STUCK ON STELLA (1979)

Sal Martirano let it be known to those attending a Composer's Institute held at Cal State Long Beach in June of 1986 that *Stuck On Stella* was suggested by a passage from Dante (*The Divine Comedy*, Canto XXXIII, lines 127 to 146) and a Von Weber *Konzertstück*. In a later conversation with pianist Robert Shannon he went further in acknowledging the influence of Dallapiccola, Rachmaninoff, and of course the jazz standard *Stella by Starlight*. Shannon reports the composer's continuing embroidery of intent

thusly: "'Look,' he said, 'the work was meant to please. Whatever you have to say about it is as valid as anything I could write.'" Emboldened by Martirano's invitation to him to comment, Shannon makes the following observations, "nor would he clarify the deliberately ambiguous tempo indications. *Stuck On Stella* is . . . a nocturnal fantasy with many shifts of mood and narrative incidents. Passages of nostalgic longing and scampering flirtation progress to an orgiastic and rather difficult drum cadenza. Midnight is announced by tolling left-hand octaves, followed by a chordal passage reminiscent of Debussy. The piece ends with a whiff of *Gaspard de la Nuit*." Robert Wildling in his unpublished monograph comments further as to *Stella's* Harmony and Form and adds a few other apparent influences: Stravinsky, Bartok, and Miles Davis(!).

O, O, O, O, THAT SHAKESPEHERIAN RAG (1959)

In the mind of Salvatore Martirano there is a cogent musico-dramatic reason to associate the Loss of Love's Labor with the Waste ravaging the Land. In his choral settings, *O, O, O, O, That Shakespeherian Rag*, he proceeds directly from Shakespearian texts, qualifies them with the title from T. S. Eliot ("It's so elegant, so intelligent"), adds a profound understanding of the Verdi-Boito Shakespearian endeavor, and assembles a group of instruments (clarinet in A —doubling E-flat, alto saxophone, trumpet, tenor-bass trombone, double-bass, piano, percussion) which would not be strangers to Birdland. (What does the composer mean in bar 64 of *Winter* when he writes in the score, "twelve for Bird"? Is he referring to the owl of the text or does the demiurgic alto saxophone sound conjure up a vision of Charlie Parker, a brooding Bird in the snow?) The result of this amalgam of influences is a compelling re-exposition for our recklessly desolate, despairing jazz age of the relevance of a Shakespeare.

In the *Rag* we witness an unrelenting four-part melodrama in the Wasteland of modern times. Specifically Love's Labor is Lost during the unfolding of a retributionary story based on a somewhat tarnished Golden Rule: The adulterer, who in doing unto others, ultimately finds himself to be a cuckold, done unto. At the beginning, behind the seemingly cozy imagery of *Winter*, for mixed chorus (sung by Costard in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, Scene 2) the staring owl (a Shakespearean symbol for the adulterer) sings his diabolical note. The ominous gossipy whispers of the chorus portend, within an atmosphere of seeming red and raw merriment, that a sin of commission has occurred.

The second setting is a Lullaby for women alone (sung by Titiana's Fairies in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* (Act II, Scene 2), wherein one can sense the discomfiture of a guilty insomniac, as sleep eludes. In a haunted twilight zone of snakes, newts, spiders, and snails alarmingly alive, there is musical rendering of exquisite and tortured fantasies, back to back.

By the time we reach the third setting, Warning, for men only (sung by Ariel in *The Tempest*, Act II, Scene 1), sleep has come and with it, a decisive turn of the screw. If one hears in the snores of the tenors and basses a reference to *Wozzeck* this should not surprise, for there most certainly is an allusion to this most well-known cuckold of the twentieth century musical stage. But a less apparent and more relevant allusion is to Beethoven's Opus 31, No.2 ("read Shakespeare's *Tempest*"), what with the use of the arpeggiated piano, the structural fermate, juxtaposition of tempi, and the subtle dependence on the pitch class D. And so it is that "opened-eyed conspiracy" prepares the way for the denouement.

In the final setting, Spring, for mixed chorus (sung by Moth in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Act V, Scene 2), the world is less "mud-luscious" than "fear in a handful of dust." The cruel month of April has seen another complete turn of the wheel: the cuckoo mocks married men. All married men: In the coda of

You Are Too Beautiful (Rodgers and Hart; publ. Warner Bros.–7 Arts Inc., ASCAP)
They Say That Falling in Love Is Wonderful (Irving Berlin; publ. Irving Berlin Music Corp., ASCAP)
This I Promise
For All We Know (J. Fred Coots–Sam M. Lewis; publ. Cromwell Music & Leo Feist, Inc., BMI)
I'd Rather Drink Muddy Water (Eddie Miller; publ. Duchess Music Corp., BMI)
Lost in the Lookin' (L. Jordan-Alexander; publ. Kags Music Corp., BMI)
I'm Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town (William Weldon; publ. MCA Music, ASCAP)

Cocktail Music program note originally published on Advance Records FGR 3. *O, O, O, O, That Shakespeherian Rag* program note originally published on CRI 164. *Ballad* and *Octet* notes originally published on Polydor 24-5001.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Electronic Dance No. 1. Centaur CRC 2266.
Jest fa Laffs. Tim Lane, flute; Eric Mandat, clarinet; Michael Cameron, string bass. Centaur CRC 2170.
L's G.A. Michael Holloway, politico. Centaur CRC 2266.
LON/dons. Cleveland Chamber Symphony; Edwin London, conductor. GM GMR 2039.
Look at the Back of My Head For Awhile. Centaur CRC 2266.
Mass. The Ineluctable Modality; Edwin London, conductor. New World 80210-2.
Sampler: Everything Goes When the Whistle Blows. Dorothy Martirano, violin. Centaur CRC 2045
SATBehind Demo. Centaur CRC 2266.
Thrown. Tone Road Ramblers: John Fonville, flute; Eric Mandat, clarinet; Ray Sasaki, trumpet; Morgan Powell, trombone; Jim Staley, trombone; Michael Udow, percussion. Einstein Records 007.
UIUS. Tim Lane, flute; Eric Mandat, clarinet; Michael Cameron, string bass. Centaur CRC 2170.
Underworld. Centaur CRC 2266.

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SALVATORE MARTIRANO (1927–1995) 80535-2

1 *Cocktail Music* (1962) (publ. Smith Publications) 6:18
Marilyn Nonken, piano

2 *Octet* (1963) (publ. Sal-Mar Construction) 6:56
Ronald Dewar, bass clarinet; Thomas Howell, flute; Howard Smith, contra-alto clarinet; Arthur Maddox, celeste; Dorothy Martirano, violin; Lee Duckles, cello; Thomas Fredrickson, bass; Rick Kvistad, marimba; Salvatore Martirano, conductor

Chansons Innocentes (1957) (publ. Schott & Co. Ltd., London)
3 I In Just Spring - piano solo/voice solo (2:46)
4 II Hist Whist - piano and voice together (1:44)
5 III Tumbling Hair - voice alone, piano alone (1:58)
Jacqueline Bobak, soprano; Vicki Ray, piano

6 *Ballad* (1966) (publ. Sal-Mar Construction) 11:36
Donald Smith, singer; Ronald Dewar, tenor sax; John Garvey, viola; Thomas Howell, flute; Thomas Fredrickson, bass; Morgan Powell, trombone; Charles Braugham, percussion; Rick Kvistad, percussion; Salvatore Martirano, conductor

7 *Stuck on Stella* (1979) (publ. C. F. Peters Corp.) 13:04
J. B. Floyd, piano

O, O, O, O, That Shakespeberian Rag (1959) (publ. Schott & Co. Ltd., London)

- 8 Winter (6:03)
- 9 Lullaby (7:26)
- 10 Warning (4:09)
- 11 Spring (5:11)

University of Illinois Chamber Choir and Madrigal Singers; Salvatore Martirano, conductor

All titles ASCAP.

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