

Andrea Centazzo

Musician Without Boundaries

- I One Dream, Two Chances**
- II Music At Last**
- III Indian Tapes**
- IV Mitteleuropa**
- V Percussion Research**
- VI Beyond the World of Sound**
- VII New Seasons**

I - ONE DREAM, TWO CHANCES

Centazzo: an outsider by choice and independent by necessity. His multidisciplinary approach to music has kept him excluded from the mainstream of labelled genres, but for an artist such as Andrea Centazzo this has been twenty years of calculated risk, of specific life-style choices, of carrying out an impossible mission. In the day to day management of his artistic life rugged track which leads to the summit, despising the easy route. Obviously, such behavior rarely allows one the opportunities to attain mass popularity, however deserving; but it is the mark of Centazzo - the man and the artist. To examine his work, you must first acknowledge whose work it is, we begin with his there is pragmatism, but the aura of romanticism, typical of the musical researcher, is everpresent too. A lonely, secluded figure who expresses himself nearly exclusively through his work, and shuns the superficiality of "society" and of "show business". As though whenever faced with a choice between an uphill struggle and a downhill ride, Centazzo has invariably chosen to clamber upwards along the openness to the possibilities of diversity, anomaly and extraneousness, and his perpetual desire for growth and change.

"I believe in the artist as homo faber, as 'he who creates'. We are free to interpret this creation by various standards. The artist in contemporary society has an identity and an aesthetics of life which enter into his work, which in turn become social - in the communication of messages and the opening of new spaces, and anti-social - by introversion and self-indulgence. It is difficult to find an artist who is not a bit of both. Even Leonardo, who foresaw a thousand years of history, was egotistic and narcissistic. The important thing is to live one's art responsibly, and not as if one were God. Furthermore, I believe in the total artist, the 'transgressor'. These days it's impossible to create art exclusively for the final product, which is condemned to a rapid fossilization given the frenetic evolution of mass media and multi-media technology."

From adolescence his bright mind was intuitively attracted to art in all its forms: literature, plastic arts, theatre and, finally, music. Each alternately aroused his interest, replacing one another in turn, or were temporarily shoved aside by his strict classical studies. Ultimately, the art of sounds won (even though it was in its most amateurish and basic of forms), with his discovery of jazz and "beat music" (early rock) in the early '60s. Centazzo's home town of Udine, a small town in northern Italy, was a far cry from a cultural center. Lacking any didactic or professional musical institutions, Udine entrusted its musical life to groups of

willing amateurs whom Centazzo joined. He began by attending jam sessions and small jazz concerts, and listening to rare records.

Generally in those days to be interested in jazz had a specific meaning.

It meant going against the current, cutting one self off from the rules of the bourgeoisie society which governed everyday life in the provinces. As if to drive home his commitment to music, and especially to jazz, after a brief unsatisfactory experience studying clarinet at the music high school, Centazzo began banging a drum kit in a group formed with various school friends. The group, "The Messengers", played at student parties and in dance halls, aping in microcosm the rituals and trends of the great youth music revolution of those times, signified by the songs of the Beatles and other beat groups, followed by rhythm and blues, and rock.

"Even if it was just a Kids' game" says Centazzo, "My enthusiasm and determination for my musical vocation was already apparent. In fact, I was the one who got the contacts for the gigs. I was the one who looked after the technical requirements of the band (instruments, amplifiers etc.), and I was the one who was always looking for new ways to promote the band. I even managed to persuade my three buddies to come with me to Rome to audition for the legendary RCA. But while I was dreaming of a future in music, my friends were happily on the way to becoming middle-class doctors and architects. For them music was just a hobby."

This short chapter in his musical life came to an end with his finishing high school. Following in the family legal tradition, Centazzo enrolled in School of Law at the University of Trieste. His hope was to somehow reconcile law studies required by the family with his desire to pursue music. Despite the fact that the legal studies were more time consuming than he had imagined, they did not succeed in diverting his attention from music, nor from his eclectic interests in art and literature; on the contrary, the desire to dedicate himself completely to music, and especially jazz, grew ever stronger.

Unfortunately, in those days Udine was, and remains, anything but artistically stimulating. It was more or less completely lacking in cultural institutions of a musical nature and, geographically, it was poorly situated to derive benefit from other great cultural centers. At that time there were many limitations to small town life. The occasional local musical events had a tendency to be either classical or folkloristic. To yearn for more required diligence, work and imagination. Centazzo still fondly recalls an eight hour train journey to Milan to see a concert given by Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald. This was not the only daring expedition undertaken to see artists who at home were the stuff of distant legends. It was nearly impossible to find contemporary and avant-garde jazz records but, with a bit of patience, you could get these by mail-order. Which is precisely how Centazzo began to explore new worlds of sound, excited more and more by free jazz. Not only was the musical content stimulating, but there were new intellectual arenas, and elements that broke with the predominant musical ideology.

On a cultural and existential level this was a trying period for Centazzo. Until this time, his passion for music had been nurtured alone. He was self-taught and struggling to continue to satiate his appetite for more creative input, but the lack of didactics and formal, artistic points of reference were daunting, as was his aversion for bourgeois mentality and for his future life as a lawyer as preordained by his family. But without direction, Centazzo found himself scurrying feverishly along ever more desperate paths, sometimes even down blind alleys, alienating him from his family and the society around him. Life as a professional musician seemed an elusive dream.

The turning point came in 1970 when he read in an industry magazine, Musica Jazz, that the Swiss Jazz School was organizing a summer holiday

Jazz Clinie in Wengen. He decided to enroll and attend the drum course held by Pierre Favre, Peter Giger and Stu Martin. Centazzo found the atmosphere at Wengen particularly open and stimulating, both because of the teaching of Pierre Favre, and because of the opportunity to meet artists like Peter Giger and Stu Martin, as well as Johnny Griffin, Slide Hampton and many others. This fertile experience fueled and defined his ideas of music, and it was due to the impetus of this galvanizing experience at Wengen, that he decided to dedicate himself completely to music.

Indeed, Centazzo would return to Switzerland in 1972 to attend the Swiss Jazz School in Bern on a full time basis. His artistic relationship with Pierre Favre became ever closer; taking private lessons from Favre at his studio in Zurich to supplement the group lessons at the school. This was an intense year, burgeoning with experience, and during which Centazzo, dedicated himself to his instrument for up to twelve hours a day, in an attempt to make up for the "non-musical" years of his adolescence. "It was my first experience of artistic trance," recalls Centazzo, "looking into my drum set, the world around me disappeared. In the tiny practice studio I was given, time lost all meaning, fatigue would disappear, and sleep was just an optional extra. For weeks on end I would only see the light of day when I interrupted my studying for a quick bite of food. Otherwise, I entered the school at dawn and would leave in the middle of the night." It was during this period that Favre became a cornerstone in Centazzo's artistic development; a guru who imparted to him essential truths and values through a fluent dialectical relationship. "For me Pierre became more than just a teacher of percussion technique. Obviously he was that too; an amazing tutor! But what fascinated me most about this man was his conceptualization of music: jazz, improvisation, African music, contemporary percussion - everything came together in him in a clear creative aesthetic stream in which I dipped my open hands, trying to fix these concepts in my mind as an artist and in my hands as a performer. I truly believe it was Favre who taught me to use my sound and my technique in the pursuit of a precise musical idea. In other words, he taught me to create music rather than to just play an instrument."

Although totally immersed now in music, in order to reconcile this new found love with his conscience, he finished his law studies then immediately enrolled at the School of Musicology at Bologna University (known today as D.A.M.S.) to research musical Paleology. "The choice of Paleology," explains Centazzo, "was really something of a necessity, given the trends in musicology then. But there was a certain shrewdness in my choice, I knew full well that within the faculty there were open-minded professors like Mario Baroni, I managed to extract the most out of the course, broadening my studies to include contemporary music, and eventually graduating with a thesis on Edgar Varèse."

At 25, an age at which most musicians have their debut performance well behind them, Centazzo embarked on his new career.

Centazzo gave his first concert at the Palamostre in Udine on the 31st of March 1973. Fronting a quartet with Franco Feruglio, Armando Battiston and Virginio Zanbelli, he explored possible contaminations and multiple stylistic directions in an experience to which he gave the name Jazzrockconcert One. In the program notes to the concert Centazzo explained that this intriguing title had been chosen for various reasons, among them "the desire to go beyond the innate diffidence of the consumer when faced with an unknown product..." he went on to say, "This music is not intended to be just jazz (even if the program includes some pieces which are strictly from the jazz tradition), nor just rock (a music which is a cultural sub-species), it is intended to be simply an experience, without a label, which should partly reflect that which is the current

trend in musical sensibility; while earnestly trying not to fall into the trap of mystification for commercial reasons - the usual formula for 'popular' music."

Centazzo, here as exiguous prophet, has synthesized some of the fixed and salient points to characterize all the philosophy of his music and his future musical creations. Careful analysis reveals that all Centazzo's work, from his debut to the present day, offers a musical experience without labels, even if the critics stubbornly persisted in trying to saddle him with a label. Instead of being caged into a single area, Centazzo's music exists to roam free.

Meanwhile, his fascination with the sounds of percussion led him to continue an in depth research, as a performer, into the tone-color and melodic aspects of percussion, and as a musicologist, into the foreign texts on the subject. With great obstinacy and determination he managed in the first three years to present himself in a whirlwind of concert activity, appearances which would increase in number exponentially as the years passed. In addition to the performances, came album, radio and television recordings, writing for industry magazines, critiquing for the newspapers and work as a music consultant for the RAI (Italian state radio and television). As though in these first years he was trying feverishly to make up for the lost time of his non-musical education, and his years of doubt and insecurity.

Following this first successful concert came many others with Armando Battiston - a duo which was hailed by the critics as the "revelation of the year in the sleepy world of Italian jazz." Together they confronted the challenge of their first record "Ictus", a collection of pieces which still haven't lost anything to the passing of time; a substantial music not only because of the evocative power of the creative melopeia and the smooth jazzy echoes, but also the refinement of its expression and techniques. Franco Fayenz, music critic and producer of Ictus, wrote "I was struck by the creative vigor of Centazzo with his percussion that was so varied and innovative." Fayenz, the Pygmalion of this emerging talent, carefully oversaw Centazzo's work, and put him in touch with Giorgio Gaslini, then the polestar of the Italian jazz scene, who was looking for a new and original percussionist. Gaslini was immediately impressed and excited by Centazzo's intimate approach to music as well as Centazzo's extraordinary drum set. So impressed, in fact, that Centazzo was invited to join saxophonist Gianni Bedori, bass player Bruno Tommaso, and Gaslini himself, on piano, to form the celebrated Quartetto Gaslini.

II - MUSIC AT LAST

Centazzo's remarkable debut with the Quartetto Gaslini took place on the 23rd of November 1973 at the Piccolo Scala in Milan. Gaslini had chosen this concert to introduce his new concept for making music: the Total Music Concert. Gaslini explained, "Mine is a different way of conceiving music, it's more open, it takes in a whole series of experiments. It is the passing from a sectorial musical mentality to one that is completely open to the totality of possibilities available."

Centazzo was in the limelight from the start, due to the originality of his contribution to the group's music. New tone colorings and sound experimentation enriched the Gaslinian vocabulary. Two months after this debut, in reviewing their concert at the Teatro Delle Arti in Rome, one critic wrote "What is remarkable about this surprising young Centazzo is not only the variety of percussion he uses, but his completely new way of accompanying the solos of his colleagues." A chorus of approval greeted

Centazzo in this first phase of his career as percussionist. "He has brought new energy and freshness to the music of the group His drumming presents remarkable characteristics, and wholly personal traits He has brought to the percussion of the quartet a variety, an opening to a new and very pertinent dimension."

Important album recordings were added to this touring activity in Italy; Concerto della Resistenza, Concerto della Libertà and Murales were released in the space of just two years.

The '70s in Italy (and Europe, in general) were times of extreme political tension charged with subversion, terrorism and bombings. In this climate of heightened emotions, fear and hope there came about an era of music of the left, dominated by the avant-garde which was associated with the cultural revolution taking place. Artists would show their commitment to the cause both by keeping up with current events in the world, and by translating these facts into their work, in an ever closer linking between thought and action: for the songwriters it was their lyrics, for instrumentalists through avant-garde composition or jazz. There were considerable opportunities for giving concerts, and in the most unlikely places too; in factories, in psychiatric hospitals, in public squares as well as the typical theatres and concert halls. From 1973 to 1977 Centazzo involved himself in these cultural politics of the left, and through new and provocative musical language demonstrated his social commitment, creating cultural debating situations on the social function of music. Political commitment was the predominant theme of the Quartetto Gaslini concerts in which Centazzo performed. Concerts such as Fabbrica Occupata (occupied factory) of 1974 declared itself a "musical offering with the intent of opening up a debate on the function of music and the arts in relation to the workers' and students' struggles."

Looking back at those times, Centazzo remarks on how demagogic it was to have played that type of music in those situations, where the public, although always numerous, was present for political motives rather than from any real desire to hear the music itself. But the very act of listening to that music was part of an identity for a certain type of public. They were almost ashamed to listen to pop songs or conventional music. To be part of a certain Politica group meant adopting a certain series of stereotypical attitudes. Musical performances were given titles which would identify their motivation; claiming the right to 'spaces', to a 'Politica price' for the entry ticket, denouncing the 'subculture of consumer industry' or offering themselves as an "anti-concert of cultural counter-information".

Driven ever onward by the manic necessity of experimenting variations of interpretive and compositional language, Centazzo concurrently increased his solo activity and created around himself a network of new and stimulating situations to play with musicians "on the same wavelength as myself". The album Fragmentos evolved from these experiences, inspired by the poetry of Pablo Neruda; the album includes with solo selections, a trio with Centazzo, bassist-Bruno Tommaso, and saxophonist-Maurizio Giammarco, a formation that also performed in concerts.

Centazzo went on to record with Giammarco Davanti e oltre la soglia (Before and beyond the threshold) where together they explored all the technical and expressive possibilities of the instruments used, charging across the "threshold" of their cultural conditioning.

Working as percussionist in the Quartetto Gaslini, although bringing Centazzo a great deal of work as well as the vast acclaim of the public and critics, was an artistic sphere too restrictive for his creative appetite, which by now was unequivocally headed for the furthest regions of total improvisation. The desire to push the boundaries became a source of conflict with Gaslini which grew in intensity until the final break in

March 1976.

"Unfortunately the experience with Giorgio Gaslini came to a traumatic end, leaving me with a bitter taste in my mouth. This was truly a shame, since for me it was an exciting period musically and not simply because of the very essence of the music (which, in my opinion was the best that Gaslini has written in his long creative life). As is often the case, it wasn't the musical differences that divided us but personality conflicts. Effectively the age difference continually brought us to an unresolved father-son conflict, which went beyond the purely musical considerations to invade the everyday aspects of our lives. In final analysis, Giorgio wanted to recapture the classic values of jazz: the theme, melody, swing, four-four scansion; whereas I was going through a period of considerable cultural and political unease and wanted to get as far away from these things as possible. Giorgio was aiming to reconstruct the music and I, in turn, to disintegrate it."

"In March 1976, I took a month's leave to go to Paris to cure my right shoulder which had been giving me trouble for years, despite numerous, unsuccessful treatments. Nothing had prepared me for the sudden painful changes about to occur in my life: I recall sitting one morning in a cafe in Montparnasse with a steaming café no lait and the Italian newspaper, Corriere Della Sera. I opened to the arts page and what did I read? 'This evening the debut of the new Quartetto Gaslini'. You can imagine my reaction on reading this. It practically put me back to square one with my career, I had to create a system of survival out of nothing, to make contacts, to represent myself and my work in my own name. I began again virtually from zero, with great difficulty, but great determination.

Fortunately, I was supported during this trying time with a tremendous amount of love and understanding by my first wife, Carla Lugli. Just two months into this new regimen, everything was once again reduced to nothing by the disastrous earthquake which hit Friuli, destroying my house and nearly all my desire to make music. From both emotional and realistic perspectives, working on my music in the face of this human tragedy was impossible for nearly a year (when we moved to Pistoia). Yet it was during this terribly trying period, in 1976, that one of the most important musical meetings in my life took place - I met Steve Lacy."

The first meeting with Lacy took place in Paris during the period of treatment, and Centazzo took the opportunity to ask the saxophonist to listen to his first records. Upon his return to Italy, Centazzo was excited to have received a letter from Lacy in which Lacy said he would be willing to undertake a tour with Centazzo.

Centazzo confesses in an interview of that time, "The idea of playing in duo with Steve - with his complicated, spiky music - worried me. After his arrival my anxiety increased - this man was always thinking, but never spoke. For three concerts I couldn't figure out what he wanted from me, until finally we managed to talk things through right before the last performance. The concert was recorded and the result was the best thing I had done to date, because I was so stimulated by this exchange of views with Steve, who sees music as a mystery to be discovered every time you play, and I managed to play in a truly free and creative way." Centazzo had asked Lacy how he should intervene with the percussion behind Lacy's thematic statements and subsequent improvisations; the enigmatic Lacy replied, "Play what you feel." Since then, this has been the guiding principle behind each work of art and everyday action of the artist.

Arrigo Polillo writing in 1974, had observed that this type of music, in reaching a very wide public meant that "In Italy too, young people are discovering jazz, real jazz-jazz which is worth something. It should, however, be said that in order to get their enthusiasm there are certain prerequisites: that the music is objectively very modern and above all

that it is, or pretends to be, socially and politically committed. Sometimes this commitment is strictly in the title of the piece, or in the words of he who present it."

One sector of critics never failed to zero in on the titles of the pieces, almost ignoring any possible connection with the music. There was also a lot of mystification, and in the middle of the storm in 1976 Centazzo had the courage to point out that "In Italy those who make 'committed music' often talk too much. If your album is horrible there's no use in calling it Free Chile or suchlike because it will still be what it is the title doesn't change anything."

The recording scene of the time was fairly discouraging. Record companies were not interested in producing "committed music", and in order to be released this music found its way out through small musician - owned labels. Centazzo took another bold step and created his own label: Ictus Records, the first Italian label to solely distribute music on the cutting edge of improvisation.

Ictus was born to be a forum for music that the institutionalized market refused, and, also by design, was a hands on operation; one that encouraged the artist to express himself freely, without restrictions, and to have control over all the phases of production of the record. All this was possible due to the dedicated work of Carla Lugli, who saw to the daily operation of the record label.

The Ictus Records experiment started where all the other attempts at self management had finished on the Italian scene. "The driving need to make our music, and the fact that we were the only link with those who wanted to get to it, brought about the creation of Ictus, which was born not as a commercial but as a cultural operation." Distribution of the records was carried out through certain music magazines, and by mail order at a rigorously 'political' price. (Which meant an accessible price to allow everyone to recover their expenses, with what little profit was made being re-invested in new productions). Because of the prestige of the two artists, the entire operation caught the attention of the Italian press. The first record on the Ictus label was Clangs, produced by Centazzo and Carla Lugli and taken from those live recordings of the concert with Centazzo and Steve Lacy. Here we witness the felicitous encounter between the richness of Centazzo's percussion language and Lacy's musical universe.

Next the Lacy Centazzo duo were joined by double - bassist Kent Carter for along tour and the Ictus album, Trio Live, which was hailed by the critics as one of the saxophonist's finest recordings, and brought Centazzo to new expressive and interpretive capabilities.

Soon the Ictus catalogue was swollen with albums by many important artists including John Zorn, Tom Corra, David Moss, Lol Coxhill, Andrew Cyrille, Evan Parker, Alvin Curran, Giancarlo Schiaffini, and overflowing into the world of contemporary classical music, John Cage, in an exceptional album which contains pieces for percussion by Cage written between 1937 and 1943, interpreted by the Percussione Ricerca ensemble from Venice. The pieces fitted in well with Ictus' character as a research label: they mark the meeting of the "noise" of the Universe with refined western music. In addition, Ictus released Centazzo's entire recording catalog from 1976 until 1984.

Centazzo explains: "Musicians joined the innovative Ictus with an enthusiasm dependent on where they came from: the Americans, who had little experience of our political style of management asked for, albeit modest, payment; the Europeans, in general, were willing to record for the pleasure of making music together; and the Italians even co-produced the albums, sharing costs and profits with us. All the activity revolved around my small but efficient recording studio, which gave us the

possibility to record cheaply. Carla oversaw the distribution, production and pressing meeting the company run smoothly and, in doing so, left me the peace and freedom to concentrate my efforts on the artistic side. We passed on simple sleeve designs at the start preferring a more refined product many of the albums featuring original artwork or photos by ourselves, or with the collaboration of designers like Ferruccio Moritanari and, chiefly, Danilo Papa who did his finest job for Ictus on the cover of the triple album, boxed set Indian Tapes. With this product we moved at last from the noisy but inexpensive record pressings of the small workshop to the pure vinyl presses of Polygram, the finest on the market at that time."

III - INDIAN TAPES

1980 saw the release of a project that illustrated the multiplicity of the musical experience: compositional creativity, percussion virtuosity, study, research, and performance. This was Indian Tapes, a self-produced, three record box set of a substantial body of solo works surpassing all Centazzo's previous releases. This was not just improvised music but a selection of compositions and sound fragments recorded over the years - nurtured, developed and re-recorded over the prior seven years, the realization of a precise, clearly conceived sound project.

Indian Tapes is not, as one might be led to think, an album inspired by the music of native Americans (which consists mostly of simple monodic and monorhythmic forms of expression) but an original work of art which pays homage to these peoples, to their philosophy of life, and to their relationship with nature.

It was on the banks of Lake Michigan in 1976, on seeing the monument to the Native Americans, the first inhabitants of those lands, that Centazzo decided to undertake his next impossible mission; to alone produce a work dedicated to the Native Americans. On his first U.S. tour in 1978, Centazzo visited the Indian reservations in search of a legend that had always fascinated him. "Ever since I was a small child, I hated John Wayne and the adventurers of the West-it always seemed that the Indians were the victims of one of the most devastating injustices in the history of mankind. As no adolescent I read all I could find on the subject, in order to get closer to the philosophy of that people."

It was two years after his fateful visit before he could begin this extensive musical work-using all the audio-technical means at his disposal, re-discovering old recordings, re-elaborating them, and composing new material.

The preparation had actually begun in 1973, when at the outset of his musical career, Centazzo started experimenting in his home-built recording studio, using percussion and early electronic musical instruments. It had been a spontaneous project, without preconceptions, where random factors and artistic determination met and blended (with the help of reels and reels of tape) in experiments of all kinds. The resulting recordings were stored away to await fruition at a later date.

For the first time, the texture of the music is enriched by noises and natural sounds, chants from other cultures, bird calls, crickets, frogs, in communion with sounds from their natural world and sounds created by the musician.

Armando Gentilucci wrote, "In Indian Tapes Centazzo appears to lay himself open to all the possibilities of the situation, accenting the anomaly of the percussion instruments, on their belonging to diverse musical cultures and territories. It is the wealth of instrumentation that leads us to

different echoes, tickles the layers of one's memory, induces different images, yet despite all this there is a clear synthetic force and working cohesion. Therefore, we are not witnessing a mixture of musical genres in the sense of a collage, but the presentation of diversity, of heterogeneity.';" This imposing work, full of music that is technically strong, mysterious, pluralist, encompasses "all the creative musical experience, ex-machina, avant-garde, jazz and more, that Centazzo has accumulated in a year of untiring activity." I Indian Tapes was awarded the Italian Record Critics' prize for its "noteworthy artistic and publishing enterprise and its commitment to the furthering of research in the field of percussion."

Immediately thereafter the famous American publication, Downbeat gave Centazzo First Place in its poll for Best Solo Percussion Record, classifying him the Nino Rota of percussion.

"With Indian Tapes, Centazzo enters into a wide open space, justifying this freedom with a series of truly noteworthy poetic creations, musical propositions, and technical solutions which give weighty validation to the 19 compositions. It seems as if Centazzo is principally an untiring researcher, if one can intend by this term a mentality which moves the musician to perceive and reorganize every type of sound event, to provoke emotions via artificial or natural means.

On the three records the percussion instruments are mixed with voices, natural sounds, synthesized sounds, all captured by a manifestly attentive ear, which fuses these thousands of everyday impressions into a coherent argument.

You can actually physically feel the close ties between the day to day life that Centazzo leads in his home studio and his travels around the world in search of new musical experiences; the link between the artist and the recording studio kept under his pillow at night. On listening to these records one has the sensation of making a long journey, going far off into abstract worlds, yet at the same time remaining in the company of our own innermost reality. Thus, we meet the 'Indians', in a fabulous and somewhat hallucinatory way. Yet the encounter is filtered by the patient and creative use of instrumental technique and recording equipment."

In view of its particular use of ambient sounds, and the fact that it represents itself as a creative link between environmental issues and musical composition, Indian Tapes could well be considered a New Age work (ahead of its time and the first actual New Age work in Italy). By now Centazzo had chosen to follow the path of the unlimited experimentation, collaborating with musicians on the contemporary improvising music scene, underlining the more varied tendencies, and using the most disparate approaches to sound material.

One of the many approaches Centazzo employs, was to work in collaboration with other artists on their own exploratory, journeys. As early as 1977, when commenting on working in duo with artists such as Alvin Curran, Derek Bailey, Pierre Favre and others, he summarized: "The composite experience of the New American School, the particular expression of 'free music' and, finally, the creative universe of percussion represent for me three new ways to consider the use of music, of one's instruments, and a new way to offer oneself to the public.

Music that is therefore not for gratification, not a commodity, but an attempt at mutual growth, a stimulating and difficult aural form that is obscure yet useful and essential for the widening of the dialectical semantics of mass communication. "Why the duo? The answer is simple. Duo is meeting, it's conversation, trying to make oneself understood. Duo is friendship, reciprocal gratification, direct experience. Lastly, duo is the willingness to stimulate each other and to assimilate (going beyond the tired conventions of soloism) the stimulation of who is listening to

you."

From this point of view, it is easy to understand the prodigious activity of concerts and recordings in duo. Percussionist David Moss, saxophonist John Zorn, violinist La Donna Smith, trumpeter Toshinori Kondo, saxophonist Evan Parker, guitarist Derek Bailey, and many others, are the co-protagonists in an artistic adventure, individualistic in its stylistic coherency and, at the same time, pluralist in its inspiration.

This was an exciting period. Music was played everywhere, from the little theatres to the large arenas like Villa Borghese Park in Rome, where Centazzo in duo with Guido Mazzon was enthusiastically applauded by a crowd often thousand. In those days the involvement of the audience was complete and stimulating. These were not just musical events, but also, and most importantly, social happenings. The music was the element of cohesion, as testified by a remark made to Centazzo on one of these occasions: "I don't understand much about music, but I understand that with You-Your instrument is alive and talks."

Another duo collaboration was added some years later (1982), that with clarinetist and saxophonist Gianluigi Trovesi, in which Centazzo searched for new solutions and openings towards a more "Italian and accessible" approach to improvisation. (Trovesi would later become one of the most important soloists of Centazzo's Mitteleuropa Orchestra; a brilliant collaboration from which would evolve the Ictus album, SHOCK! which is discussed in subsequent pages.)

The last chapter in the improvisation saga came from the area of contemporary composition. "Solo" de la passion selon Sade, written by Silvano Bussotti, was rearranged by Centazzo for soloists and percussion, taken on tour to major contemporary music festivals and, ultimately, recorded on LP. On adapting himself to Bussotti's cryptic language, Centazzo explains in the sleeve notes that: "from the vibrant mists of creative improvisation procedures, and the genetic matrix of my musical persona came the inspiration and impetus for this interpretative reinvention of Bussotti's score."

In the composer's notes on the same sleeve, we find Bussotti's reply: "The free interpretation for similar instruments of my old work, Solo, brings about a new and unexpected definition, which I believe we can call scientific since it puts in evidence the analysis for this music, the writing proposes for interpretation fleeting and ambiguous traces, a process of awareness equal to the challenge of working Solo."

This exciting period of improvised music (from '76 to '83) saw Centazzo active not only in Italy but also, and with great success, touring the United States on three occasions, and on tour in Europe in England, Austria, Germany (West and East), Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, France, Portugal, Yugoslavia and Holland. Concurrent with the frenetic concert activity abroad, there was a corresponding period of decline for avant-garde music at home, during which Centazzo performed less and less in Italy. Artists were no longer given the spaces or the opportunities to present their work. Centazzo comments, "The fact is that around 1977, the Left realized that even in music pecunia non olet, and with its festivals and other events (sausages, polenta, matryoshkas, flags, Russian watches, Vietnamese carpets, the International Anthem, The Red Flag, folk dancing, tortellini, records by leftist singers and friends and everything else!) discovered rock concerts.

The definitive collapse of music of the political avant-garde took place at Bologna Stadium in 1977 where thousands of delirious left wing activists came to see a tone-deaf idiot named Patty Smith. Since this young lady from New York was manifestly unable to sing or play, the critics dubbed her a poetess of rock! Somehow overlooking in the wake of these few banal texts, everything from Ginsberg to Kerouac, the real

American rebel poets. From that moment, for creative musicians (both the genuine ones and the fake ones with just the party membership cards in their pockets and the clenched fists) the good times of big audiences and cultural consensus were over.

Sometimes dreams do come true. While musical avenues were evaporating at home, Centazzo found himself on the eve of his first United States tour, October 19, 1978. Centazzo's mind was filled with the mundane problems of everyday life as well as with hope and aspirations for the tour but without particular expectations. Prior to Centazzo, with the exception of a few concerts by Pierre Favre and Han Bennink, no European percussionist from the jazz sector had ever been invited to the States to perform as a soloist. Yet another of Centazzo's adventures born from his willingness to delve into all new experiences.

Centazzo first stopped in England, where he gave a series of solo percussion) concerts at the request of the English Drum Association, with the sponsorship of Premier Drums. Then he made the big leap, and arrived in New York on a cold November's day, to be greeted by the musicians with whom he was to work: John Zom, Eugene Chadbourne, Polly Bradfield, Toshinori Kondo and Tom Corra. The concert activity of these months was intense and the recordings prolific. Among other performances, these artists performed a live concert for radio station WKCR, which would later become the Ictus release, Environment For Sextet. After concerts at the Erievron, the temple of the New York avant-garde, Centazzo headed to Virginia, then on to Alabama, where he appeared with guitarist David Williams and violinist/vocalist La Donna Smith in Tuscaloosa.

Centazzo won great acclaim shortly after at the University of Birmingham, where at the end of his concert he was given a ten minute standing ovation. After this southern concert tour, he visited the Creative Music Studio at Woodstock to conduct a seminar on new improvisational techniques.

In California, he worked with Henry Kaiser to record the album Protocol, and recorded the album, The Bay with the Rova Saxophone Quartet. He went on to work with Alex Cline, Diamanda Galas and to perform as soloist in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco.

The Calgary Herald described his music as a "Surprising new language" and in a subsequent interview Centazzo explained, "In fact, the Calgary Herald has defined it as a new language precisely to underline the commitment I have put into organizing the music to be performed in the research for new sounds, new types of tone colors and instruments, and in the quest for an expressive equilibrium which is always organic. My music is avant-garde. It even breaks the jazz tradition. It is creative music. It is precisely at the point of creation that I live to the fullest the most important moment of my music. It is for that point that I am stimulated to create and to continually search for that which is new."

Centazzo's first tour experience in the United States is chronicled on the album USA Concerts, released on Ictus in 1979. Only seven months later he was on tour again in the United States, giving seminars performing in concerts and recording, among which was a two hour recording of a live performance with clarinetist John Carter and saxophonist Vinny Golia on radio station KPFK in Los Angeles entitled, Special Live. Centazzo also performed as percussionist in a 14 piece ensemble directed by John Zom at Columbia University in New York.

A third United States tour ended his great creative turmoil. Once again, he went to the Creative Music Studio in Woodstock, where he conducted a course in the history and use of percussion instruments, instructed in technique of improvisation and collective performance exercises, and held an orchestral workshop.

He played and recorded with David Moss and Tom Corra, and at CBGB, the

icon of New York punk rock, he experimented with electric rock improvisation with guitarist Eugene Chadbourne. Finally, he recorded a new album for Parachute Records with the participation of the high priest of noise guitar Fred Frith (ex Henry Cow).

In Europe a very different wind was blowing, so much so that any artists were abandoning this genre for good. In fact from 1977, as has already been noted, large scale commercial interests began to prevail, and avant-garde music was pushed to the sidelines while more and more space was given to rock concerts.

"The experiences of 1980 were truly conclusive for me," says Centazzo

"After ten years of passionate dedication to jazz and everything that revolved around it, after years of the American Dream, I suddenly realized that this was not what I was looking for; I understood how much of my cultural background had been sacrificed in order to arrive at a language that wasn't mine; I saw the originality and intensity of European music, both composed and improvised. I rediscovered my roots and wanted to study and compose at home. To put it simply, I realized how much it pleased me to live and play in Europe, even if not particularly in Italy.

I turned down various invitations from musicians for me to stay in New York; even saying no to the offer of a free apartment. Bringing to a close, this phase of my personal and artistic life."

IV – MITTELEUROPA

From the moment he embarked on his artistic career, Centazzo was performing a balancing act between improvisational and compositional structures. From the early '80s he began to move away from improvised music in order to dedicate himself to so-called contemporary music in the European classical tradition, and to music of ethnic inspiration, studying composition both intuitively and with the guidance of professors such as Armando Gentilucci.

Initially his approach to composition was something akin to a "dreamlike trance" in which he left aside technical considerations in order to leave space on the score for a creativity which drew its life force from his work as an instrumentalist. Being a self-taught composer takes on a particularly interesting aspect when one considers that his principle points of reference were Gentilucci and Bussotti. In the early '80s Centazzo composed principally for the Mitteleuropa Orchestra, an orchestral grouping born out of a commission from the City of Bologna and the local Music cooperatives, to give a series of concerts in the capital of Emilia Romagna.

The name for the ensemble came not only from the cultural background of its members but also from the middle-European mold of the music written for it. In the Mitteleuropa Orchestra, Centazzo brought together the finest artists in the field of creative music on the European scene at that time: the Austrian trumpeter-Franz Koglmann, the Portuguese violinist-Carlo Zingaro, saxophonist-Roberto Ottaviano, multi-instrumentalist-Gianluigi Trovesi, and clarinetists-Carlo Actis Dato and Teo Jorgesmann, as well as occasional guest appearances from trombonist-Albert Mangelsdorf, bassist-Mark Dresser and french horn player-Martin Mayer.

The formation was flexible and variable, depending on the performance requirements, but it retained its essential characteristics thanks to a fixed nucleus of musicians. The orchestra's physiognomy distanced it from the "classical" jazz big bands and aligned it more with contemporary chamber music formations. Using his experience of music making in small combinations, with strong tone-color characteristics, Centazzo achieved a

fusion of diverse cultures, (western classical, oriental and Afro-American) in a rigorously controlled musical structure, integrating written orchestral passages with aleatoric sections, creating ample space in which soloists could improvise in "controlled" situations.

Within the orchestra the various personalities of the artists, interacted to create a particular stylistic mix which became the hallmark of his ensemble. *Mitteleuropa* gave its debut concert in Bologna in the Summer of 1980, and in December of that same year recorded *Mitteleuropa Live*, an album taken from live recordings at the Testoni Theatre in Bologna. (A benefit concert for victims of the Irpinia earthquake.) The four extended compositions on the record use pulsating thematic inventions, collective multiphonics, long solo cadences, improvised chamber music interludes over fixed frameworks; in trio, quartet and quintet, and in dialogues between percussion and soloists. This first performance was a precursor to many other concerts and recordings of material written and directed by Centazzo. The Italian Radio and Television ("RAI") invited the orchestra to Rome to record the ensemble's repertoire live. In 1983, Centazzo conducted *Mitteleuropa* at the international festival "Ravenna Jazz" in a performance of *Doctor Faustus*, a suite which remains unpublished, written in honor of trombonist-Albert Mangelsdorf, who was a soloist with the orchestra for the performance.

A month prior to the festival, Centazzo had entrusted to *Mitteleuropa* the first performance of his *Cjant-Concerto for Small Orchestra*, which is preserved in a double album *Ictus* release.

Cjant is also a fully structured composition with precisely controlled opportunities for improvisation, and was commissioned by the town council of Udine for their 1000th anniversary celebrations. Despite the pompous, ceremonial function of the work, *Cjant* has the freshness and enthusiasm of a spontaneous work. Centazzo fuses various influences: Mahlerian symphonic style, hypnotic minimalistic sequences, echoes of archaic fanfares and reminiscences of jazz, and percussion language from orientalisms through to the contemporary.

The instrumentation of *Mitteleuropa* in *Cjant* is enlarged with the addition of a string section, whereas for *Omaggio a Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Homage to Pier Paolo Pasolini), written in 1985, commissioned by the commemoration committee for the tenth anniversary of the poet's death, the orchestra is joined by a soprano singer and a narrator. In the latter, Centazzo paid homage with his music to Pasolini, an artist with whom he shared Friulian origins and a close connection with the city of Bologna. Centazzo's interest in Pasolini was not just the result of these circumstances, the composer had been inspired by the artistic and intellectual unquiet of Pasolini for some time and was intimately familiar with both the literary and cinematic works of Pasolini. Centazzo's study of Pasolini's poetry, in Friulian dialect, is very much part of the music. A provincial tongue which through Pasolini takes on a literary dignity. Prior to this time, "Friulano" had been practically limited to oral tradition.

"Pasolini said that to write a word that had never before been written, would give a new consistency to the sound, would move that sound toward the territory of meaning; a meaning of full bodied sounds, and a truly natural sensuality." Centazzo's music in *Omaggio a Pier Paolo Pasolini* is aimed at the recovery of that sound; he put to music seven lyrics in Friulian dialect taken from *Poesie Dimenticate* (forgotten poems) and from *Tal Cur Di Un Frút*, re-inventing traditional sonorities with "new" instruments, in a compositional tapestry which consciously balances minimalist episodes with echoes of the European contemporary orchestra, entrusting the texts to the narrator and the voice of the soprano.

This work has been presented outside of Italy in 1987: in Munich, Germany at the Gasteig, home of the Philharmonic Orchestra; and at the Expo in

Seville, Spain in 1992, when Centazzo presented a re-organized Mitteleuropa enhanced by the presence of the finest soloists on the contemporary Italian scene. *Omaggio a Pier Paolo Pasolini* was performed in large part due to Roberto Manuzzi's zeal. This very gifted musician had performed as both a saxophone and keyboard soloist in nearly all Centazzo's productions since the formation of Mitteleuropa Orchestra. A fortuitous encounter which would provide Centazzo with no invaluable collaborator to this musical adventure. Summing up his activity as a composer Centazzo says, "I am truly happy that, as a composer, I have never suffered from the typical syndrome of the classical composer who writes only for ideal instrumental combinations, for ideal criteria, in ideal forms. My objective has always been to be able to hear my music performed immediately. This is why I have always written for specific musicians, for existing ensembles, with soloists I know. In some cases the ensemble has been formed first, and then the music to be performed created around it. I have never felt this to be a limitation, on the contrary, it is a stimulus to obtain something new each time, mixing instrumental sounds in the most daring and unconventional ways possible. Even today, when my writings intentionally aimed at a rediscovery of the traditional values of harmony and melody, I am always striving for unusual tone colorings, and that stylistic touch which imparts a different value to the musical undertaking. The proof of this is that my music, despite its close conformations to conventions, is still considered today not commercially viable by many record companies."

The third of Centazzo's large scale works is *Il Canto di un Giorno*. The world premiere of this work was held at Lignano, at the Hemingway Convention, sponsored by the American Hemingway Society. In this work Centazzo confronts the tormented personality of Ernest Hemingway. The text written by Marco Maria Tosolini (music critic and author) takes us through the last twenty-four hours of Hemingway's life, ending with Hemingway's suicide.

In a series of rapid and vivid flashbacks, Hemingway's anxiety and obsession with life and death are represented, with the effect of giving his anguish a universal validity. Centazzo's music, the foundation of the entire performance, controls the sequence of narrations, sections sung by the soprano and baritone voices, and dance movements created by Luis Bernardo Ribeiro, (choreographer and dance teacher, who at that time was also a star in Roland Petit's company).

A work not limited by categorization but one which embraces many modes of expression; recitation, song, music and dance. "This is not a performance come to life only on the stage but rather it is something that existed beforehand where every expressive element and compositional parameter has been preconceived, written into the score and integrated into the whole. The creative force of this compositional experience is due precisely to the influence of many branches of the great river of music; not intended to be, in itself a musical genre, but a stimulating, and I believe provocative experience. It would prove useless to try to classify this composition; a riverbed from which various currents flow, without musical allusions to other worlds, enrichment through gesture, movement, musical strains that search for a unifying form of expression *Il Canto di un Giorno* becomes a language which evolves from primitive research into the nature of sound to the more problematic one of the methodology of making art as a semantic experience." Through the enrichment and expressive layering of the song, the music, and the dance, there comes into being that abstract mental condition in which Hemingway passed his last intimate and secret hours. "A mad mosaic with the pieces all mixed up." *Il Canto di un Giorno* is an attempt at a synthesis of various musical and theatrical components, without imposing at the onset, a defined result.

Throughout its single act, we find distinctive elements, or elements recognizably isolated, but the determining nature of the performance and the "historic" artistic material is never demonstrably resolved into a precise genre.

Centazzo gives rigorous support in his score to the emotive context of the text. Working on a level of refined melody—here expansive, there virtuosic, supported by an orchestral writing dominated by the use of primary colors (low stings, clarinet family, brass and percussion in which we hear highly refined roots, suggestions of and substantial passages of minimalism brought together in a tonal and rhythmic design of which the musical result is loaded with suggestiveness. This eclecticism, while not new to Centazzo, makes the writer's progress recognizable and brings it to the forefront in the visual aspects, nevertheless it provides a point of serious reflection along the way to connect various expressions of artistic communication with the desire to hold them together on a plane of absolute reciprocal biological equilibrium."

The catalog of Centazzo's first twenty years of work is completed by a considerable collection of small ensemble works, and other pieces for Mitteleuropa. A path of his progress can be observed from his earliest works in 1973 to the present concert pieces for strings, and works in progress for larger ensembles.

The early trios (for piano, percussion and double bass, and far trombone, clarinet and percussion) are layered polymelodic structures, in which themes and counterpoints stimulate improvisation and give its development vibrant support. Then, too, there are more wide-ranging works, including Tagelied for brass quartet— noteworthy for its mixture of techniques of execution, Allarmi for flute and violin—full of quotations of and references to everyday noises, and Visita Al Cimitero Degli Ebrei— an effective monogram for trumpet and magnetic tape. The inspiration for this last work came when Centazzo visited a small abandoned cemetery while filming the video Tiare. Works for Mitteleuropa, in addition to those already mentioned include Doctor Faustus, Suite For Duke, Musica Schema 1 & 2, Chirimia, First & Third Environments, and Situations. It is interesting to note that with the broadening of compositional technique comes the narrowing of improvisational space, signifying an ever greater control over the musical content, and an abandoning of old styles of expression and many life-styles.

Mention should also be given to the body of compositions for percussion, which are still performed today throughout the world. From the solo passages of Indian Tapes, Just Back, Tiare and Situations to the ensemble pieces Not alone, Trisaghion, Ifix-Action and others, we encounter a fantastic series of allusions, explorations into sounds from other cultures, a synthesis of languages from which the mannerisms of contemporary percussion embrace the rhythmic pulse of primordial drumming and the ethereal atmosphere of oriental gongs.

V - PERCUSSION RESEARCH

It can be said, without fear of contradiction, that few musicians have done as much for the perfection, re-invention and diffusion of their instrument as has Andrea Centazzo for percussion. Paralleling his twenty years of composing and performing, Centazzo has endeavored to continuously research, delving into performance techniques and the technical construction of his instruments.

These same instruments have rendered some of his finest works; the works, in turn, are dedicated to the instruments. His love for percussion was

born in his initial contact with the world of music. Centazzo said in an interview in 1980, "I started out from jazz and, therefore, the drum set as an element of rhythmic propulsion was the point of departure for my musical development. The second thing to fascinate me about the world of percussion was the variety of sounds. Even today I find it strange how the percussionist can often be considered a second-class musician, when in reality he is the only one, in the entirety of the orchestra, able to produce such a variety of sounds, each sound so different from the other, and produced with myriad different techniques. We should remember that a percussionist has to play the vibraphone, the marimba, the drums, the snare, the timpani, etc.; each instrument requires a different technique of execution. It was this fascination with tonal colors that moved me to broaden the horizons of the drum set right from the start. I augmented the conventional drums with bronze metallophones, gongs, tam tams and other metal instruments, which are related not only in sound, but also philosophically to the music of the Far East."

Centazzo immediately commenced in-depth studies in the performance techniques and concepts relevant to musical interpretation, working with other musicians, and alone, to develop that particular philosophy of the focused sound he first discovered with Pierre Favre.

Centazzo adopted this philosophy early and enriched it with knowledge and influences drawn from listening to oriental music, with particular attention to the instruments typical of these cultures; the gamelan, Chinese gongs, Indian and Japanese gongs became everyday points of reference. Many ethnic instruments came to make their home in his set, priming his music with suggestiveness, creating in live performance a natural landscape in which he moved like a demiurge.

Driven by inexhaustible curiosity and by his desire for complete knowledge, he experimented with new sounds, using instruments in original ways and creating his own new instruments. Centazzo's instrumental set started to take on its own unique form. To the old Ludwig kit, left over from his youthful experiences, which had already been expanded in the drum department, were added a gong adapted from an old tray, alpine cowbells, orthodox and unorthodox cymbals, and anything else capable of producing an interesting sound.

In short order, his supplier became UFIP, a small workshop in Pistoia, Italy that produces percussion instruments. The proprietors, Luigi Tronei and Carlo Biasei, being familiar with Centazzo's work, and particularly his experimentation with instruments offered to collaborate. Centazzo happily accepted and within a few years they entered into an official business relationship. In 1976 he moved from Moruzzo, a small village near Udine where he had his base, to Pistoia, to assume management of their music programming at the invitation of local ARCI (Italian Recreational and Cultural Association). Centazzo went on to organize a series of concerts and seminars dedicated to jazz and improvised music; the first of their kind in Italy.

Many new instruments were born from this new collaboration with UFIP, they were produced on a commercial basis. Today they are still used by important percussionists throughout the world. The trademark, Ictus 75, was put on a series of new and original instruments for the world market. Premier of England, another famous percussion manufacturer, also approached Centazzo with an endorsement offer. Centazzo's intense concert activity meant his instrumental needs were constantly evolving, and it was Premier who would create two "custom made" instruments designed by the artist. Centazzo's new "drum kit" (by now the term was inaccurate, and quickly becoming irrelevant) had shallower drums, capable of producing a more nasal sound, and others that were deeper, to produce particular resonances. (For example, it was possible to tune one of these drums to

produce a roll with a bass drum, using one hand and one foot-a new and precise technique Centazzo developed) Also with Premier, Centazzo designed and built a kit that when dismantled its components would fit inside one another, like Chinese boxes, simplifying transportation. This idea was adopted by various large-scale manufacturers.

Despite this solution, the problems of transporting Centazzo's set have never fully been solved. Even to this day when touring the world, he still uses his own particular set consisting of a multitude of pieces.

Consequently, he worked on various solutions for containers and supports with Mario Villotta, a genial artisan from Udine; solutions he continues to use. "Meeting Mario Villotta was of fundamental importance." recalls Centazzo, "At the age of seventeen I took him my first cymbal to repair! Mario has the manual aptitude combined with the imagination of a true artist." By 1976, together we had already developed instrument mountings which were duplicated by the industry and marketed some ten years later. Many of my musical technical solutions have come from the possibilities offered by these special supports which can bring together instruments of different sounds. For a percussionist the positioning of instruments is of vital importance, and often the performance is inhibited by the clutter of instruments and their supporting structures. "Mario has always been able to resolve any problem with incredible wisdom: problems like how to have a tiny drum balanced perfectly next to a 45 pound bell - without any sound interference." remarks Centazzo. Villotta was also responsible for the frames on which Centazzo arranges his instruments in the order he needs them; like the keyboard of a piano. Centazzo has never left anything to chance, and this quality is one of the many that make his performances special. It seems every thing he uses or plays is uniquely his; it is perhaps from this particular practice that comes his strong relationship with these sound objects.

Centazzo is an authentic explorer of sound, attentive to all the possibilities and nuances locked away in the instruments. He prefers the evocative sound of a gong in a Tibetan monastery to a showy display on the drums, because it is loaded with philosophy and cultural validity.

Centazzo has always been fascinated by instruments linked to oriental musical philosophy, where between one stroke and another one has the pleasure of hearing the sound flow slowly along as the harmonics diffuse. "Man becomes merely the agent of release for the voice of the instrument, which is silent when at rest and speaks when agitated." says Centazzo. He maintains that the singularity of the percussionist lies in the touch, the capacity to strike an object and let it vibrate; the ability and the technique to produce the right sound at the right place and time. "Machine gun bursts are certainly not the measure of a performer. Often in letting off steam in such technical displays he musical nature of the instrument is denied."

Centazzo's fascination with sound objects has induced him over the years to collect instruments from all over the world. And since his very first record, *Ictus*, (PDU EMI, 1973) his instrumentation has been open to the use of electronics, and, in recent years, has been considerably augmented with the employment of digital production systems alongside traditional percussion. He was the first Italian artist to use the Moog drum controller, an obscure accessory to the famous Minimoog synthesizer and, since 1987, he has revolutionized his set and his concerts with the addition of the Simmons Silicon Mallet, and later the Kat; both controller keyboards, set up similarly to a marimba, with rubber keys which transmit impulses via music industry digital interface (MIDI) to a computer programmed to realize sounds in real time. The whole fabric of the sound is created by no expander and other sound modules, supported by a series of digital effects. Everything is passed through a mixer where also the

amplified sounds of the conventional percussion instruments are blended in to create a homogenous sound.

It may seem a contradiction that an artist of natural sounds such as Centazzo should make use of electronic sounds that don't exist naturally. Nevertheless, as Edgar Varese wrote forty years ago, "The new instruments will have to be able to provide a variety of sound combinations, and not just remind us of things we have already heard, and heard again. After all, instruments should be only a means of temporal expression." Making music, Centazzo is able to extract from every instrument, both the traditional and the most state of the art; a personal style. Centazzo has developed a poetry of ethereal atmosphere, of pulsating vitality, such as to be considered the first New Age artist in Italy, by combining the purity of acoustic percussion sonorities with the use of electronics, computer, and digital recording. (Indian Tapes has previously demonstrated how Centazzo had anticipated the New Age aesthetic.)

"Now, using this technology," Centazzo reveals, "I have liberated myself from the limits of the percussion concert. My shows are performances realized via percussion technique, representing a sound universe that contains colors which are absolutely alien to the world of percussion. From purely monodic polyrhythmic percussion solos, I have progressed to an expansive and more complete orchestral dimension. The solo percussion pieces I play now have become more interesting, because they are presented in a more encompassing sound context, with the result that they are better delivered and are more appreciated."

The music takes on such a strong stenography validity, that the music demands to be "seen" as well as heard. Such a massive instrumental set brings with it the stage management and scenic considerations to complete the performance; enabling it to assume a multi-media character... with the addition of video, projected images flow with the music.

Centazzo's cultural background, his studies, and his inner desire to explore new paths of interdisciplinary research led him to a vast production of musicological essay writing, which has found no important place on the international publishing scene; starting with *Guida Agli Strumenti A Percussione* (A Guide to Percussion Instruments) published by Il Formichiere, Milan 1979.

This was the first text in Italian on this subject, and is still considered today to be the standard text. A lively work, of great technical interest, the Guide has been adopted by many conservatory and university libraries. The book was the result of studies into ethnic musics, at the point where jazz, folklore and classical ancestries meld into a continuous interpenetration, where the mastery of instruments, which were once used for sending messages, for rituals or warnings, became an obsession for the composer. In the course of nearly two hundred pages, the reader is led on a musical and anthropological journey from the idiophones at the dawn of history, across continents and different cultures, to arrive at the modernity of classical European percussion, and to the commerciality and popularity of the drum set in rock and jazz.

"In our culture a great number of musical uses and meanings only survive as fossils. Think of the instruments used in the Catholic world; the church bells, the little bells of the mass; these are pallid reflections of what was once percussion activity, arid in some cultures still is. That is, the underlining of ritual moments and collective action. Centazzo's book explores these aspects of percussion instruments. They are the fundamental first moments of sound production of the human race, not only because of their simplicity but also because they establish the temporal scansion: rhythm. With the resources of archeological research, from the findings at the digs, to the reading of figurative designs, to the study of peoples still living in primitive cultures, we can assemble an ample

catalog of what man has created to play, beating two objects together or one object with a hand.

The book goes on to present a vast range of instruments, arranging them according to the usual classifications, that is by their method of sound production. The pages are completed by photographs which give names to familiar objects, or images to familiar names. The appendixes too are useful, containing a glossary and a list of abbreviations and of symbols used in orchestral notation, followed by a bibliography and a brief discography."

"This book sets out to make known a very specific world, a world which even the aficionados of art music do not know in depth: the vast spectrum of everything that can be called percussion, of everything that from this percussion makes a sound, a sign with its precise significance and musical meaning. Centazzo's voyage commences from any point on the globe. Anywhere where there is a trace of man; first you hear him, then you see him. Centazzo's approach is an easily accepted viewpoint if you consider the terribly beautiful attraction of the Aeolian organs of the Pacific islands. At the outset of the tempest, the tubes of this organ emit an agonized alarm call. What was it that guided the instinct of the aborigines to create this exceptional instrument? Obviously, it was the need to be warned of danger. This serves to further prove that everything that is percussive serves to communicate, but with whom and where? The answer lies in the labyrinth of estheticism of the most immediate of the instincts. Communicating by sound requires instruments, and actions which signify man's presence to another man, (and to the Gods). The bibliography and discography will help the reader to further his knowledge of a world where even the clatter of a typewriter is percussion."

With *Strumenti Per Fare Musica* (Instruments for Making Music), published by Gammalibri, Milan 1982, Centazzo enlarges his scope to deliver a study of all the families of musical instruments. The text sets out to be a guide to the history, aesthetic, technical, and cultural knowledge of musical instruments. This is a popular anthology, yet capable of presenting the synthesis and analysis of the instruments; freely transverse the vast geographic and historic panorama of the musical world. Centazzo reviews instruments from both popular and refined traditions, ancient and modern, from the most disparate of cultures. Furthermore, ever attentive to the real world and what is happening on today's music scene, he doesn't neglect to consider, with equal seriousness, modern electronic technology and the electric instruments, beginning from the first union between music and electricity in 1730. On the book Luca Cerchiari has written: "Until today the only serious text available, in the Italian market, on this subject has been *The History of Musical Instruments* by Curt Sachs. If only because of the stature of the German author and the expected comparisons, the task Centazzo has set himself would have seemed considerably difficult. But he seems moved by such a fascinatingly complex challenge, to write a 'popular' history of musical instruments that is up to date, clear and useful; our percussionist has hit the bull's-eye. Centazzo has created a work which is eminently readable, bringing together research and theory of a branch of study which until now was only practiced in countries with deep-rooted musicological traditions; those of the German and Anglo-Saxon languages. Centazzo's book is of a completely different style from the historical writings of Sachs, and seems to start where the last chapter of the Berlin academic leaves off. That is, with the enlargement of instrument classification from four families (aerophones, chordophones, idiophones, and membranophones; where clearly the definitive criteria is the method of sound production) to five, with the adoption of electrophones; instruments which function electrically or which use electrical means to amplify or modify their

sound. With his direct approach to the subject the author avoids organizing his chapters into epochs or styles along the lines of Sachs' school of musical study (later to be developed by André Schaeffner and Francis Galpin), and the result is indeed stimulating; updated by the genres nearer to Centazzo's own experience and way of life, including jazz and pop, and open to the traditions of many continents. The work is accompanied by numerous illustrations, designs and photographs which will be of use to those interested in all types of music."

"La Batteria, Stili, Protagonisti e Tecniche" (The drum set, styles, players and techniques) published by Muzzio & Co, Padova, 1982, is the only book on the international market to analyze scientifically all the inherent aspects of this instrument, which has become the most popular of percussion instruments in western music of this century. Even if there are numerous study methods published for drums, rarely has a book been dedicated to the history of the instrument, it has been practically ignored by official studies of musical instruments.

"And yet what sharpness, what intelligence, how much work, how much history there can be behind a drum solo when the drummer is a true master! That history has rarely been told, or rather it has been told between the lines, incidentally, with some hurried sparse footnotes in the complex history of Jazz."

Centazzo's book fills this void, follows a complete discourse on the origins and evolution of the drum set, with ample space for the stories and the styles of the artists who have made a particular contribution to the evolution of the various percussion languages. Furthermore, Centazzo confronts the problems of drum technique, clearing the field of the simplistic and erroneous identification of technique with speed, volume and show. This is a precious volume, not only for drummers but for those who want to understand the philosophy and history of this instrument.

"Centazzo has said everything there is to say about the drum set, he begins from the origins and the first developments, and arrives at the various methods of approach. He passes through a careful study of the history, the styles and the players; from Baby Dodds and Zutty Singleton to the most recent percussionists; of the techniques, the study, the gimmicks one can use when confronting this not - so - easy means of expression. There is a brief English - Italian dictionary of drum terminology as well as a discography, a bibliography and a very precise and analytical index to complete the book which fills a definite gap in the Italian editorial market. The historical part is most interesting and presented with great attention to detail. Centazzo detects in some passages of drumming by the originators something of that spirit and those forms which have contributed to the development of the so-called drum set, which already figures as a phenomenon of pluriform percussion technique, and is filled with cultural signifiers from the Africanism of their shapes to the western substance of the musical message. From this encounter the drum set has had motive and opportunity to fill a cultural void, and to this end the second part of the book, sets out a gallery of famous names to further discuss the various styles and techniques, so many and varied despite how much the fascination lies on the rhythm itself, and it serves as a frame work for a significant approach to the public of modern music, not only jazz, but rock and pop as well. We should not overlook the section regarding transcriptions. There are many very interesting ones which will be useful to those wishing to know more about the mysteries of the rolls of Max Roach, Roy Haynes, Kenny Clarke or Art Blakey."

"La Percussione - Nuove Tecniche" (Percussion-New Techniques) published by Ricordi, Milan in 1983, is a book aimed at a broadening of the teaching methods of percussion in conservatories and universities. Centazzo examines and explains the various technical performance solutions, from

the most common to the most unusual, to be used with percussion instruments, and as used by performers of contemporary music in Europe and the United States. "The book opens with a reference to the classification of musical instruments by Curt Sachs, since the treatment is carried out on the basis of the families: idiophones, membranophones, cordophones, electrophones; each instrument is described in a clear, synthetic manner (classification, form, origin, materials used). Then the various available models are analyzed, the technical resources, performance problems, notation used, with continued reference to existent studies, and many examples drawing on works by Centazzo himself and others, from the pre-war period: Mahler, Varese, Stravinsky, Cowell, Chávez, Walton, Gerhard, Satie, Orff, Stravinsky, Berg; and post-war: Berio, Cage, Stockhausen, Nono, Boulez, Pennisi, Kagel, Haubenstock - Ramati Bussotti and others. The author includes even the car springs from *Laborinthus II* by Luciano Berio, the rolled bronze sheets from *A floresta e'jovem* by Luigi Nono, the anvils from Johann Strauss, Jr.'s *Freuerfest*, the electric saw discs, frying pans, metal ice - cream tubs from Satie's *Parade*, the straw brooms from Berg's *Wozzeck*, toys, newspapers, dried peas, and more." Moreover, the book expands upon the technical and sound possibilities of bronze idiophones; the fruits of his research and collaboration in the manufacture of these instruments. Two closely related volumes confronting the practical aspects of music making with percussion are *Il Batterista* (The Drummer) published by Gammalibri, Milan. 1982 and *Il Batterista Intelligente* (The Intelligent Drummer) published by Nuova Carisch, 1993. Of the first book Marcello Pirash as written: "Centazzo takes a very interesting point of view with respect to the subject; percussion is considered a global experience totally absorbing the individual. As such, he discusses the drummer from before he even picks up the sticks in his hands, the author talks about muscles, suggests physical exercises (with illustrations) and even talks about the drummer's diet. In actuality it is 45 pages before we read about the music, and yet these are perhaps the most original pages of the book. The last two parts of the book look at the choice and arrangement of equipment, and problems that can arise in the recording studio. Here are precise rules to which one must adapt oneself, and which are better to know in advance to avoid unpleasant surprises. This section is therefore particularly useful, even for the student who has not yet entered a recording studio." "In both *The Drummer* and *The Intelligent Drummer* there are pragmatic suggestions for the development of technique, and strength in execution. Furthermore, Centazzo takes on the variety problems presented by amplification, recording and modifying the drum set: from large rock concerts to recording in the home - studio.

It would be impossible here not to mention the volume of didactic and seminar activity which has accompanied Centazzo's artistic life. With his kind disposition, Centazzo has gathered around him, students and collaborators who today, thanks to these encounters, shine in their own light on the international scene.

From the first didactic concert given at the Venice Theatre in Venice, 1973 to the first seminars on creative music for the ARCI in Pistoia, to his intentional activity in Austria, Portugal, France, Germany and the United States, Centazzo has cohesively and coherently developed a didactic itinerary based not only on his considerable record production, but, most importantly, on his day to day experience as an artist and his re-examination of the new and old, studied and neglected, approaches. "Even though I loathe school as an institution (most of all Italian schools!), he says, I have always regretted not having had the opportunity to follow a specific course of pragmatic musical study, such as that of the conservatory an institution which is clearly falling apart at the seams.

Unfortunately, the conservatory is the only institution offering a professionalism even to the non-creative musician. Therefore, I have always advised my students to go there, and to my great satisfaction I have been able to see the favorable outcome of this choice. I would like to mention one student in particular, Marco Malatesta, an excellent percussionist who specializes in ethnic instruments. We met when Marco attended my seminars in Bologna in 1979. A strong bond of friendship and mutual artistic respect and cooperation has flourished through the years. Marco even played on *Cetacea* (Index 0050,1990) and has been an essential and precious collaborator on many tours and recordings, not to mention his invaluable technical assistance in my numerous videos. I have a somewhat different attitude to students abroad, where the schools work better and the students have more choices. It's not a coincidence that I studied in Switzerland, even though I admit that Italy too has private institutions today on a high level." One particular episode in his didactic research has been to teach young children using percussion instruments. "It is here in fact, that one witnesses the synthesis of creativity play and exploration," explains Centazzo, "Beating time, simple motor movements provoke direct sensations in the child which are amplified by the resulting sound, and move him to a continual analysis of his immediate surroundings." Experiments of this type carried out in Austria, Portugal, Italy and Germany have surprisingly produced the same results, and testifies to how ill-fated the cultural stratification of the individual is in musical education. Boldly ignoring the generation gap, Centazzo has used this infant didactic method with interesting results at the D.A.M.S. (Bologna University); it is as if to say percussion can take you back to your infancy in a process of self liberation. With the exhibition *In Battere* (On the beat) at the Valli Theatre in Reggio Emilia, and the seminars for *Musica Nel Nostro Tempo* (Music in our time) in Milan, Centazzo succeeded in his ambitious project, a complete retaliation of the percussion interments against the indifference of public and critics. The birth of the International Association of Percussionists; PULSUS, of which Centazzo was chairman, and the publication of the journal of the same name, gave further contribution to the cause. Sadly, the association folded after only two years, torn to pieces by a growing, obsequious trade-unionism (typical of Italian orchestral musicians) and the chronic lack of funds and arid volunteers.

VI - BEYOND THE WORLD OF SOUND

Moved by his eclectic curiosity Centazzo, finally came face to face with the challenge of working with the visual image in the early '80s. He explained this new artistic direction in the presentation notes for his first exhibition at the Bonomo Gallery in Bari, March 1984."In my solitary and aboriginal research into expressive techniques, languages, syntheses of artistic creation, I have corrupted various musical phenomenologies; from the contamination of the most opposed styles, to the least predictable choice of musical instruments - everything has always served to create a new relationship in sound with my past experience. It is not a coincidence then, after his long and arduous journey, that the musical symbol, depository of the sound action and of the strict observation of this feverish and frantic way of composing in order to get back to the rigorous sound on paper was lost, but finally the note appeared again, transformed now into a silent trace, able to stimulate sound - emotions in those adventurous enough to turn and look at it. As far as the musician is concerned, the are still a musical neume, even if now imaginary ones which

he will have to recompose in his real life, through the art of improvisation, which has been so dear to me in all my years of artistic adventure. Symbols and images intersect here in an imaginary microcosm open on two sides; the music helps to understand the symbol and the symbol to understand the sound. The experience is immobile, but ever moving in musical time, or if you prefer, in a musical experience held fast forever by the mute gesture of a band on a page."

Centazzo's gesture here is with essential aesthetic taste, never excessive in color nor in material. The musical handwriting becomes poetry, visual art, an eighth note becomes a Japanese ideogram. The symbols seem to come from a different universe and make sounds in the picture, pictures in the sound. His works have been exhibited in the major galleries of Italy and abroad, and at high level cultural events including the exhibition of scores, 'Das Grafische Bild von Music', at the Museum of Modern Art in Vienna, 'Musicphilia 85' at Jesi, Interart' 85 at Villach, Udincand Lubiana. Designs, colored pages, musical maps, scores, pages of staves have the chromatic validity to reveal the visual flavor of sonority, and its fluctuation in time is transmitted across the succession of pages of the exhibited works, from the three dimensional variations of the page by means of crumpling we derive an opening to interior world attentive to the aesthetic vibrations and to suggestiveness. Chromatic valence, illuminated and homogenous, alternates with rarefied tints and shadows, to give or take substance from the work; building up tension they free themselves in poetry. Centazzo's works are capable of moving even the layman. They seem to lead to the perception of the wave of sound locked away in the emblematic and silent scripture, and then swamp the spectator in the dissonance of a music that seems to want to capture the sounds of the world. It is interesting to note how often the music designed on these pages is accompanied at the exhibitions by the sounds of the same works, diffused in the galleries, in an attempt at a double perception.

Centazzo progressed from this period dedicated to "painting", strengthening the link between image and sound using the language of video; making first video installations, then video art. He then felt the need to reimpose the musical on the pictorial, and did so through a unique experience of video performance. Using appropriate technology, he translated his sound and the dynamism of concert performance into variable and fascinating images, concurrently controlling the musical and visual material. A rich, picturesque percussion section, electronically amplified and synthesized, was accompanied by images in turn synthesized by the percussive movements of the performer, while being filmed simultaneously by video cameras.

Percussion rhythms translated into forms and colors, were projected onto a monitor or video screen which pulsed in the dark of the concert hall.

Such performances recalled the 'Concerti Fluxus' of the early '60s avant-garde. "As an artist I have always been attracted by multimedia." says Centazzo. "At my core I am a Renaissance spirit. Like those artists, I love to express myself in different languages, even if the music is the element from which everything else takes its cue. After having experimented with the distortion of musical notation in a pictorial context, and after having used video technique to give color and form to sound, in 1984 I wanted to go one step further, sticking my neck out again, as I have always done to keep the creations alive and growing. On the other hand, my determination and my desire to take risks are two essential parts of my character. The idea that was fermenting in my brain was one of creating no audio - visual poem, something that could communicate not only the audio sensations, but also the visual ones, in symbiotic relationship. Furthermore, I was undergoing important changes in my private life, and I wanted to reflect on these changes through my work.

I bought a small professional video set-up and started out, as if guided by some supernatural hand, going around Friuli-the places of my childhood, filming everything that evoked emotions, memories or simply curiosity. In addition to the expressive outlet provided by video, it served to display my music to those film and video producers who had long overlooked my music. The combination of events determined that I would produce and film my own sound track! Truly in *Tiare*, as the work came to be called, as in all my other videos, the images have always commented on the music, contrary to the usual practice in cinema and television. I was fortunate to have had the support and constant inspiration of Margherita Viola on this production. It's funny to think how the success of *Tiare*, instead of bringing me closer to writing music for cinema and video, took me further away. In fact, the vast majority of the hundreds of reviews which were published, the critics were attracted to the video side, and I found myself suddenly in the role of a promising young director. For a few years I actually had more offers to make films than I had to give concerts or write music. This was one of the reasons why I had to slow down my activities as a film maker, to the point of nearly abandoning it, in order to dedicate myself full time to my life as a composer and performer. It is a sad commentary on our contemporary society that there is no room for artists with multiple abilities in means of artistic expression. The roles have been assigned to be played: if you achieve credibility in one, then the other areas fall back to take a poor second place. Pasolini's literary work, for example, has been neglected by the mass media, in direct proportion to his great success as a film director. I have learned not to present my own videos to producers, and even worse to directors, when they ask me for examples of my musical work with film. It's almost as though the quality of my video work discredits my music."

Writing in *Cinema Nuovo*, critic Ivo Franchi said: "An innovative and intelligent work by Andrea Centazzo, composer and percussionist who has moved from totally improvised music to 'classical' composition balanced between electronics and minimalism. His first video work, *Tiare*, has won several awards and been included in various film festivals, as well as having been broadcast by the national television, is nothing other than the latest fruit of a continued research into various expressive methods, relating to music. From his altered and colored manuscripts, the first stage on a journey toward the visual, to performances in which, via tele-camera, live sounds and movements are translated in real time onto a screen, with the help of a microprocessor.

Tiare, instead is a sort of symphonic poem dedicated to Friuli (the artist's Heimat) and in certain ways can be compared to *Koyaanisquatsi* by Reggio and Glass. It begins with the music to arrive at the image. Centazzo, instead of writing a soundtrack for his film has inverted the situation, and onto a score for percussion, magnetic tape and electronic sounds has recorded a series of images. "I haven't set music to images, but in a certain sense I've put images to music; music which was born out of an independent creative process" explains the artist.

This experiment, conducted in complete solitude, with a minimum budget and equipment is extremely interesting. Driven by music recalling deep ancestral sonorities Centazzo's film tells the story of places and people tied to a land (*Tiare* meaning "land" in Friulian dialect) and to a culture which remains rich with suggestive stimuli. This work, in its most lyric moments seems to be an implicit homage to Pasolini, and exhibits a cyclic structure divided into three parts, almost a mythical voyage: history, departure from the city, and return to the roots. In this emotional repertoire of places, faces, and traces of human life, *Tiare* comes to a close with the opening images, while a voice recalls in dialect how only

in oblivion is it possible to keep a link between past and future, between tradition and innovation. The most authentic roots will be found in what will be, albeit with the awareness of a past which has not been ignored. It is not a coincidence that this first video work by Andrea Centazzo, an artist balanced between different but not opposed tendencies, should indicate a journey in this direction."

In the short span of eighteen months, Tiare won the "Golden Seagull" at the Festival of New Italian Cinema, the 'Excellence Award' and 'Special Merit Award' at the Tokyo international Video Festival, 'Special Mention' at the Music Video Festival in Warsaw, The French Cultural Ministry Prize at the Montbeliard Festival, and a prize from the RAI (Italian national radio and TV) and the CNR (National Research Committee) at the Milano Scienza Festival. The following year, 1985, Centazzo made nine video-portraits of contemporary artists, presented on video by the art critic Gillo Dorfles, for the RAI .

"The idea to create these portraits in music came to Centazzo in the wake of a video made for him for an exhibition by the painter Carlo Patrone. Following this experience Centazzo resolved to clearly define the terms of the operation, proceeding simultaneously along both tracks of music and video, limiting the words of the artists wherever possible. Centazzo created his own interaction of suggestions, and the artist's voice, when it appears is often electronically altered in order to constitute a further sound element. Altan, Cecere, Celli, Ciussi, Marassi, Onofri, Palli, Patrone and Zavagno, have all accepted roles as characters, who with only their appearance and their actions, tell of themselves and their personal human and artistic dimensions. Appearing with his own characters (Cipputi, Pimpa and Ernesto) is graphic artist Francesco Altan, with his blond ironic smile.

The experiment represents a step forward from the video artists of recent years, who limited themselves to filming performance, often with fixed camera, without any characters or machine movements. Centazzo's videos intelligently makes use of the most up to date video techniques, continuing in video his tradition of doing the undoable. This is most apparent in Centazzo's use of light, movement of the camera, and in certain effects obtained with the mixer, adapting this however with coherent simplicity to his primary inspiration, which is the music."

At the completion of Futuro Antico, commissioned by the Arúsans' Board of Friuli, and once again a work of music with images, Centazzo found himself confronting a new challenge, his first thematic video film. The project was dedicated to the castles of Friuli and entitled, Arx. It takes its inspiration from the documentation of an inquisition which took place in Friuli in 1745, imagining that in that year a wizard-chemist created and experimented with a time machine. Thanks to his machine, the wizard sets out on a journey through the history of the oldest castles in the region. The story of this invention, Arx, becomes the plot of the film in which Centazzo presents the narrated episodes in a splendid display of his abilities as video maker and musician. The strong narrative, the taste for iconology, and perfect equilibrium between music and film give Arx a place of honor among Centazzo's prolific creations: the story proceeds with a minimum of dialogue, an action video where music substitutes for the word. The scenery has a determining role, along with an intelligent direction of light on the internal scenes and the use of costumes and make up, make Arx a small miracle of video art and of productive talent.

The Institutions of Bologna were next in line to request Centazzo make a video, this time a presentation of the city and its surrounding landscape. So was born I colori di un sogno (Colors of a dream), a new work which once more propelled the artist forward on his journey.

Critic Libero Farné wrote on the presentation of the video "I colori di un

sogno is a radically multimedial aesthetic product, which in its author's conception, and successively, in the perception of the viewer, presupposes no interdependence between visual exposition and musical development which is closer here than in *Tiare*, where the images came from the music establishing their realization (following a process which is the exact antithesis of the process normally utilized on the soundtrack of a film). On the contrary, this Bolognese video, although starting out from a musical idea, is the fruit of a more articulate and complex procedure of continual comparison in which rethinking and stimuli, modifications and clarifications move from the manipulation of the camera to the realization of the sound, and vice versa.

The most interesting characteristic of this music, which is fundamentally conceived by computer, is that it mitigates the fastidious artificial results usually achieved by the slavish use of a sequencer, by combining with it the use of acoustic instruments playing melodic lines. The result is a sort of symphonic suite in parts of a minimalist flavor, lasting thirty-five minutes, in which melodic themes and rhythmic ideas are chasing each other, imposing themselves on one another, alternating unusual sonorities, complicating themselves paradoxically and then, unfolding in accents of infantile and enchanting serenity; they disappear into nothing only to re-emerge later like the waters of an underground river.

Getting back to the video in its entirety, these melodies and these rhythms find an instantaneous visual translation in the very slow sequences, in the color alterations, in the dissolving of recurring images which make up the natural environment, the urban structures and the atavistic human behavior of a thousand-year culture, without overlooking the pressing social problems of modern life which transcend the Bolognese dimension. The Friulian artist, in conclusion using all the latest sophisticated technology, with cunning self-confidence, has given a personal and more than convincing solution to a problem which has obsessed many musicians on a theoretical level in the past, Scriabin above all." *Visions* (filmed in Mauritius and winner of Video Magazine's Videopremio), *Le Pievi in Carnia* and *La Val Pesarina* (winner of first prize at the Videofestival Nazionale Ecoclip) are short but intense works which bring us to a work on a broader scale, dedicated to the city of Molfetta in the Puglia region, and entitled *Madre Di Pietra* (Mother of Stone). Here Centazzo embraces the New Age aesthetic, expanding the poor expressive vocabulary of this genre with his own syntax of cultural stratification, multi-directional experience and technical accomplishment. This audio visual poem almost brings to an end the artistic experience described by Vittorio Boarini in this way: "Centazzo is no example of how it is possible to produce a work of art wherein its character is defined by the means employed. This seems to me the most revealing aspect from a theoretical point of view; no example of an artistic product derived specifically from the techniques used, and therefore not in danger of repeating or imitating existing examples, in respect to known techniques or the application of those techniques to date.

The precise use of electronic techniques is achieved in the discourse, the sequence of images, the type of narrative cadence, each owing to the use of certain innovative techniques. Specifically, how does Centazzo make use of these electronics in a narrative context, producing an aesthetically revealing exposition? I believe that it is fundamentally his experience as a musician, and not just because the music is the guiding element in his movement across images and vice versa, which is not true. In reality, the originality of techniques used by Centazzo in a linguistic sense, is that of establishing a difficult equilibrium between sound and image, which on this difficult watershed where image tends to revolve in sound and sound

to revolve in images, he succeeds in maintaining an equilibrium which is in my opinion extremely interesting. Sound and color flow together in equal measure in the colors have a decisive function, underlined by the way in which they are used, that is a typically electronic technique which produces a fantastic in infinity of colors, determining in large measure the emotional content of the images. This equilibrium results from his special aesthetic instruments, joining images suspended between color and sound, which unfold with rhythm and logic in an intrinsically narrative form, without worrying about the external reality, but with respect to their own inner logic.

One thing is certain, the creative and inventive freedom of the artist; this equilibrium which Centazzo has established so very often collides with a recognizable reality, which functions as a limit.

Every time we come up against this pause, this collision with reality, always unexpected because it doesn't re-enter into the logic of the formal development, Centazzo is able to bring the development back to life, to take it to the peaks of fantasy, right on to the next hurdle, to the next encounter with reality.

We can count Centazzo among those few artists who use electronic instruments in a way that is not repetitive nor imitative of production techniques of iconic themes!" The complete the picture of this first productive phase of "functional" music, there remains only to mention the video work *Deserto* (desert) of 1982, a bizarre piece by the painter, designer and cartoonist Renato Calligaro.

The succession of images, (moving and still) is answered by an excitable soundtrack based on the use of electrified percussion and synthesizers, in which we detect the seeds of what could become the electronic style of the future.

VII - NEW SEASONS

The music of Andrea Centazzo defied labels. Music critics today however tend to put him in the New Age category. New Age appeared on the international scene around the mid '80s. Not so much a musical genre as a "container" where various heterogenous musical experiences can converge. It is characterized by a widespread use of acoustic instruments, of digital technology, and of simple musical language made up of themes inspired by ethnic and minimal musics, and of natural sounds which help to create suffused, dreamy sonorities. Just as New Age was starting to enjoy a certain popularity in Italy , Centazzo in a timely interview, made it known that: "Twenty years ago I was making the same music as I'm making now, but in the early '70's New Age hadn't been invented yet, and if someone made use of unusual sonorities he was immediately filed away under jazz".

Centazzo reflected, "My problem has always been one of labels: I have lived through a whole period of my career with my music having the wrong name - jazz. In 1973 I gave my first concerts, three quarters of the jazz critics turned their noses up. Unfortunately at that time Jazz was the only "container" possible, even if my music has very little jazz in it. That's the reason why today defining my music New Age isn't a recycling operation, but a sort of historical revenge. In my opinion, New Age is visible today, but it has always been there; it's essentially a revolution in the marketing of music, not in music itself. For many musicians, including myself, to be New Age means finally having a market dimension having a physical presence in every record shop, even if limits in the market persist."

Centazzo maintains that New Age is, "A free port, the only unoccupied space at the moment in which the experimenters can cross paths with the makers of ambient music."

There is a straight line connecting *Indian Tapes and Visions*" (completed ten years later) and received by the critics as a New Age work. In *Visions*, Centazzo synthesizes his personal musical experiences creating a journey into the world of percussion, electro-acoustic instruments. Divergent styles, genres and musical cultures; creating fascinating sound portraits with influences of the minimalist avant-garde, the voices of Dervish singers of simple melodies clothed in exotic ethnic fabrics. This is multiform and evocative music, supported by the sounds of nature; music which goes beyond the expressive limits of the so-called New Age, to arrive at a complete communication project. These factors "place the work head and shoulders above the usual, widely acclaimed New Age works." Centazzo broadened his musical research horizons even further, and in yet another new direction, with the creation of *Cetacea-Odyssey of Lost Sounds*, a work inspired by and dedicated to the marine mammals living in the Mediterranean. Centazzo, ever sensitive to ecological issues, demonstrated, once again through his music, his concern as an artist for the world around him, as Franco Fayenz had already noted years previously in an article of 1975: "Centazzo's music is the portrait of the artist, of his lively but dry humor, full of the pains and contradictions of everyday life. The etymology is jazz, but nothing is excluded and therefore you have rock experience, classical musical education, an openness to the electronic means and overdubbing techniques. The titles taken from history and from newspaper headlines: *Per Nazim Hikmet, Stampa specchio di carta, Chi parla del Cementificio di Lestans?*; reflect the ideology of the composer and his colleagues. They are part of the compositions, of their meaning, underpinning their motivation."

Through New Age atmospheres, clothed in references to other languages, Centazzo contributes with *Cetacea* to our awareness of serious problems, of man's destruction of the sea and the environment. The *Odyssey of Lost Sounds* was made to promote and finance the activities of the *Cetacea* Foundation in Riccione. "I am interested in communication on all levels," explains Centazzo, "animal calls, human voices -the sounds, but also the colors. The evocative aspect and the visions provoked by images, are each ways of expressing something, of communicating." The voices of the marine mammals used as a leitmotiv in *Cetacea* are so particular as to seem not sounds produced by animals, but by electronic or percussion instruments. The voices fit in perfectly to the journey through "Lost Sounds", guided by Centazzo with a simple musical language of great communicative power. "I have tried to adapt the music to the character of the animals, not creating a catalog of sounds which would have been artistically banal, but a sing and emotive approach. The pilot whale, for example inspired in me a sad, melancholy movement, whereas the striped dolphins gave me the idea of frenetic, rhythmic animation. I have put the accent on simplicity in order to make the music more immediate. First I put down a solid rhythmic base, using percussion in a new way. *Cetacea* offers a profusion of ethnic percussion instruments, mostly from Africa. The rhythmic parts are very elaborate and the polyrhythms unfold to the listener almost in the form of a dance. Secondly, I have made use of melodies that are singable, in homage to the theme of the Cetaceans. They are melodies which stay in your mind from the first time you hear them, and consequently they have a more immediate communicative effect than my previous works. The whole maintains however a subtext of tone-color and structural experimentation; in fact the pieces do present particular problems in execution, especially for the percussionists."

Saverio Francesco Sasso has said this of *Cetacea*: "The starting point for

Andrea Centazzo's work is the sounds and voices of the marine mammals living in the Mediterranean. These sounds in their new context take on a truly musical validity, and go further; they represent the moment of conjunction between the cultures of all the peoples who inhabit the shores of the Mediterranean. And it is in this element that Centazzo establishes the basis for the creation of a sort of musical poem, full of epos where the song of the Cetacean recalls the voice of the aedo.

Musical sensibility and classical culture combine perfectly here to give life to musical pieces of profound poetic resonance, in which the new heroes are these last depositories of the epics of the Ancient World; the dolphin, monk seal, balenottera minore, sperm whale and all the other cetaceans living in the Mediterranean in continual risk of extinction. The titles of the pieces mark the chapters of this engaging tale of travels across the mythical shores of Mare Nostrum: from A nord dell'Egeo (North of the Aegean) to Danze del Nilo (Dance of the Nile), from Isole del vento (Islands of the Wind) to Isole di pioggia (Islands of Rain), from In vista delle colonne d'Ercole (On sighting the Columns of Hercules) to Il capodoglio parla in sogno ad Ulisse (The sperm whale talks to Ulysses in a dream). The Odyssey of Lost Sounds unfolds, chapter after chapter, transiting vanished civilizations and ancient histories, where the Cetaceans are the last living creatures to conserve the biological and symbolic cultural memory of what was the Mediterranean.

In his work Centazzo offers, among other things, a genuine occasion for reflection on how the "ecological thought", to use Edgar Morin's definition, can be the catalyzing element in artistic production in this case, the music. Centazzo's use of the sounds and voices of the cetaceans transcends the mere coloristic considerations to take on a strongly symbolic and profoundly evocative connotation. With his homage to the ocean and the stupendous animals that still dwell in it, Andrea Centazzo offers no exhilarating musical contribution to the maturing of our conscience, towards a new perception and way of living in our environment." The pendulum swings in Centazzo's artistic growth again, taking him back toward the direction of film and theatre, and from still another direction. Since 1985, Centazzo had continued to expand his artistic experience with composition for theatre and cinema. "My relationship with the cinema," he says, "has always been controversial, and has gone in alternating phases. For some periods I have been actively interested in it, then sometimes I have completely ignored it for other projects. In the early years of my career I even used the term 'film music' in a derogatory sense, to indicate music lacking in cultural depth, without content, just there to fill in the spaces in a story told in images. On the other hand, I have always sought the challenge of other modes of artistic expression, and as I have already said, it was just this that moved me to make my first videos.

It was practically impossible for somebody with a solitary and introverted nature like mine to get into the world of cinema; a world where appearances, politics, high society and work are all so intermingled as to make access prohibitive to someone like me with a weak stomach for such behavior. It was a very lucky coincidence that opened up the doors to working with cinematic and theatrical producers and directors; and the story merits being told. I had been invited to give a solo percussion concert (a program of difficult pieces by Gentilucci, Cage, Bussotti and myself) in Suzzara, a little town in the province of Mantova where a very courageous Arts Officer on the town council organized concerts of contemporary music. At the end of the concert I was complemented by two very pleasant people from Milan, who asked me for my phone number. These turned out to be none other than the talented director, Massimo Mazzucco and the renowned producer, Gianfranco Sacchi who were on a gastronomic

visit to Suzzara! They contacted me few days later, and from this chance meeting was born a friendship and collaboration which continues to this day."

Centazzo's first experience in writing for film was indeed with Massimo Mazzucco's film, *Romance*, which had great success at the Venice Film Festival in 1986. The film starred Walter Chiari in his great, last performance as an old father and Luca Barbareschi, actor and director, who went on to become a highly successful television personality. Centazzo's music for *Romance* moved away from his usual exploration into sounds, and entered a language of communication and support to the images, where the principle elements of Centazzo's language nonetheless reemerge dominantly giving the work a particular stylistic stamp which differentiates it from the usual Italian film soundtracks. It was on the set of *Romance* that Barbareschi and Centazzo met and swapped ideas on the relationship between film and music, and so an idea grew to take that type of music onto the stage.

All Barbareschi's theatrical productions since 1986 have had music written by Andrea Centazzo. "These days writing for theatre is a part of my work to which I give particular attention," says Centazzo, "My old love for literature and theatre, born in the high school classroom has returned stronger than ever! Music written for the theatre has been historically poor in inspiration and in production because nobody wants to spend money on something that is considered an accessory. Most of the time the music takes on the role of an indistinct background, almost disturbing the theatrical action. Right from the start I conceived my theatrical pieces as structurally autonomous compositions, with their own expressive vocabulary, inspired by the text and supportive of it; music that truly reinforces the action.

I believe that music for theatre should be complete in itself in order to be able to have a life of its own away from the theatrical context. Consequently, my pieces for theatre have been released on record and are performed in concerts without any stylistic or contextual discrepancy between them and pieces written specifically for concerts. This desire of mine to impart my personal stamp on the music I write, at any cost, for the stage and screen could perhaps exclude me from the world of rich pickings, but that scene tends to be artistically very limited, and work has always brought me great artistic satisfaction."

There is an inventive freshness evident in Centazzo's music for theatre and cinema, all of which has the integrity of character to be performed independently in a situation free of literary connotations with equal success. It is inspired by the text, supporting the drama with an appropriate sense of equilibrium, built on structures that are complex and whole, rich with suggestion and tone-color effects, realized with the customary instrumentation that Centazzo utilizes in his concerts.

In fact, from his music for theatre, Centazzo has further evolved his personal style utilizing a more immediate language, which is less complex, if still filled with references to other genres and cultures.

Centazzo's first real theatrical challenge came with *Jacques E Il Suo Padrone* which had its debut at the Duse Theatre in Genoa, December 1986. The piece based on the text by the Czechoslovakian writer Milan Kundera, recalling Diderot, followed the adventures of Jacques and his master, full of detached and disillusioned wisdom. The music, using a rich variety of percussion and samplers unfolds into eleven thematic fragments of simple and arioso melodic structure, in which precious musical icons are set, dominated by the voice of the soprano saxophone. Centazzo and Barbareschi continued with their development and research into new formulas linking music and theatre, to the point of creating the interesting experience of the monologue "All men are prostitutes", a free adaptation by Barbareschi

of David Mamet's, *Sermon*. The piece was presented in the series *Concerti In Prosa* at the 30th Spoleto Two Worlds Festival in 1987. In this new dimension the stage is shared by the actor and the musician, and the protagonist's monologue is contracted and challenged by the music. This conflict between words music proceeds on the level of a theatrical dialogue with a flexible musical core, giving the performance the air of a working-progress. It is a piece in which the rhythm of the words and the pauses between them have more significance than the single words themselves, where the music assumes the role of protagonist capable of entering into dialogue with the actor. The work has been widely acclaimed, described in one review as: "a concert in the fullest sense ... a serious examination into how to make new theatre.

Today, for the first time the music is not just a soundtrack adding superfluous comments... the literary significance of the text locks into the rhythmic vibrations of the brushes and sticks on the cymbals and drums, to the pertinent din produced with a thousand devilish tricks by the man/orchestra alongside the actor." Surprisingly, the jazz idiom, albeit in an appropriately stylized context, makes its appearance in the music for David Mamet's *Speed The Plow*", which was given its European premiere at the 31st Spoleto Festival in 1987. "I had composed some chamber duets and trios with a strong jazz influence for *Speed the Plow*, then various dramatic considerations forced me to re-evaluate my ideas, and the result that there remains today an independent suite for saxophones and bass clarinet entitled "*Speed the Plow*", and inspired by that text."

The music takes on a particularly leading role in "*Henceforward*" written by English, comic playwright Alan Ayckbourn, and produced by Luca Barbareschi. On this production, Centazzo also created the video which is projected onto a large screen at the centre of the stage. In the video, Centazzo, himself, appears in the role of *Lupus*, a mysterious and disgusting jazz drummer, and in so doing has added to his artistic achievements yet another role, that of actor! The magic sequence of notes played by the protagonist Jerome, a composer, and the music of the show, are written in such a way as it not just be a mere musical comment, but a genuine, integral part of the text.

August Strindberg's "*Fróken Julie*", presented at the Stabile Theatre in Calabria in 1989, was a difficult challenge with the tragedy of its text, and the expressive sedimentation produced by the multiplicity of its scenes. "It is a tragedy," explains director Enzo Siciliano, "based on the reality of the unconscious; the premonition of the senses into which Freud would later investigate. My work in adapting this piece consisted of no intervention on the words. I have stripped down the dialogue to rediscover the expressive power of the letter." For the first time in the music Centazzo uses a string quartet and a string ensemble. In the musical texture are wind echoes of minimalism and surrealism which trace the halo of a nightmare, to the point of touching at times a pained song-like atmosphere, giving way to a broader harmonic relaxation.

A charming musical air, veiled in melancholy nostalgia pervades the music of "*Dear Liar*", a play by Jerome Kilty based on the forty year correspondence between George Bernard Shaw and actress Stella Campbell, partners in life and in art; such a complicity has linked Giorgio Albertazzi and Anna Proclemer for years, making them the perfect pair for this drama. Commenting on the music, Giorgio Albertazzi had this to say, "With the exception of the music of Duke Ellington for the texts of Shakespeare in my production, with the music performed by Giorgio Gaslini, I don't ever remember in my career having worked with music that was so stimulating and so in tune with the literary meaning."

A dreamlike atmosphere instead wafts through the music of the novella *Casanova's Journey Home* by Arthur Schnitzler, adapted for the stage by

Tullio Kezich and given its premiere at the 12th edition of "Cittá Spettacolo" in Benevento in September 1991, before departing for a European tour. Once again, Albertazzi was the protagonist in a work in which Centazzo's music takes on a particular importance, not only because of its continual flow, but also because of the live performance with the on-stage presence of tbc musician. This experience was followed by "The Poetry of Attilio Bertolucci in Music" at the Asti Theatre in 1990. "The poems of Attilio Bertolucci, one of Italy's greatest contemporary poets, have always inspired in me a great feeling of serenity; they are slices of simple life. I decided to write simple indicative pieces and to find sounds to serve as accompaniment yet at the same time reinforce in sound what the words were saying." said Centazzo. "This has been an extraordinary experiment," commented actor-director, Sergio Fantoni, "because we have rediscovered the power of the living word and of live music. Theatre is not theatre without performance; it is the task of the actors to give a sound to the words so they can become images. Here we have performed the poetry in music."

Centazzo continued his prolific work composing for all arenas but in 1992 two changes would herald the newest direction of his ever fascinating career. Warner Chappell signed him to a world-wide publishing contract in recognition of the importance and appeal of Centazzo's great body of work accomplished to date. Shortly thereafter, Centazzo was invited to return to tbc United States to score and perform the theatrical soundtrack for The Odyssey Theatre Ensemble of Los Angeles' production of Euripides' "The Bacchae".

The opportunity touched his deep affection for literature again, especially for a work he had long admired and enjoyed. Centazzo accepted the offer and headed once more to the United States. "In The Bacchae," says Centazzo, "I have the chance to reimmerse myself in the barbarisms of pure percussive sound, in the musical primitivism where everything is explicit, and the interaction with the text renders it choral. The willingness of the director Ron Sossi and of the entire cast to experiment, had made this a fascinating experience of contemporary antiquity." Centazzo had experimented in the presentation style of the music becoming another actor within the dramatic fiber of the play while in Europe; the style was an innovative experience for the theatre going public of Los Angeles. The production was so enhanced by Centazzo's music and performance, as to move Sylvie Drake of the Los Angeles Times to write: "An evocative score composed and performed by Andrea Centazzo on gongs, drums, cymbals, a xylophone and synthesizers. It serves as a spine for the play."

The theatre, therefore, remains for Centazzo, even now on his new American adventure, his great passion; and he has since written music for Tom Dulak's *Incommunicado* (based on Ezra Pound's imprisonment), Nick Dear's *The Art of Success* (based on the life of English artist, William Hogarth); both projects again with the prestigious Odyssey Theatre Ensemble, and at the time of this writing, is preparing work on Gogol's *The Inspector General* for the Odyssey, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the premiere performance at The Ivy Substation in Los Angeles and has signed to be the resident composer for a trilogy of Shakespeare's works for The MET Theatre of Los Angeles.

Unlike his earlier tour experience in the United States, this relocation did not break or interrupt his European ties nor limit the areas for his performance. On the contrary, his collaboration with Massimo Mazzucco continued with "Hidden Lens" a film which thinly disguises its inspiration by the philosophy of photographer Oliviero Toscani. The music takes on a more urban character with the use for the first time of electric and acoustic guitars in solo roles, and with the appearance of songs, which

although melodically and harmonically complex, put Centazzo in the mainstream of sound track composition. Centazzo and Mazzucco are working together on Mazzucco's feature film, *Enigma*, currently in production. As a matter of fact, Centazzo is also scoring his first American films which include *Vicky*, an action-adventure feature film for McAdam Productions of Los Angeles and the film short, Chris Barden's *Fish Stories*. These days Centazzo can be found, just as he was in the earliest days of his career, in a flurry of activity-still prolific, still pressing the boundaries of musical artistry and communication; this time on an intercontinental basis. Hardly the end of his story-rather the mark of a new path in his continuing remarkable journey.