

Viv Corringham's small treasures

My encounter with Viv Corringham's singing took place during “The Snails' Wrath” project in a long-abandoned stone cabin at the beginning of the path along the right bank of the Pellice river that leads up to the Prà basin [Conca del Prà].

As soon as I entered the stone cabin, the contrast between the brightness of the clear, early morning sky and the darkness inside the place, illuminated only by small windows, almost dazzled me. Then, a little at a time, as my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, my ears perceived the sounds in the place. The thick walls muffled the external sounds, fading into a silence that soon gave way to a soft buzzing, like an insect but too regular to be ‘natural’, mixed with the light pitter-patter of feet on the floor of that rarely frequented place. After a few moments my brain ‘forgot’ about that pitter-patter, becoming mesmerized by an electric buzzing which gradually seemed to fill the whole space. Upon a closer look, I saw small speakers, a few cables, and a CD player arranged as if they had been a part of the place for a long time, and I understood that it was an installation by Rolf Julius. After a while, added to that discrete but mordant succession of high-pitched sounds, there came a deeper sound, at first quite softly and then stronger and stronger until almost exploding: it was the voice of Viv Corringham trying to dialogue with the sounds of Julius’ installation by alternating silence and singing, exploring the response of the small and somewhat oppressive space in which we found ourselves.

Viv continued this game with sounds and space for a few minutes, then she came out in the open, and we spectators followed her once again into the light and the rustling of the leaves. She walked towards the path and went beyond it, until she was in front of the Pellice river where she began her *melopoeia* which was almost drowned out by the roar of the water and the rustling leaves. Viv sang facing the landscape, with her eyes closed and arms outstretched as if to embrace it, or with her arms alongside her body in a composed position of listening and respecting the ‘auditory breathing’ of the place.

After a while she returned to the path to resume her walk up to the Prà basin, and would sometimes stop and sing. Who was this song without words for? For us spectators, for the trees, for herself, or for the landscape? Her vocalization was made up of held notes, rapid or gradual ascents, and abrupt or slow descents. It was a modulated singing, sometimes like breathing or a wafting, at other times almost onomatopoeic as if interacting with the sounds of the elements. But always done with great attention paid to listening to whatever the place, the partner of her vocalizations, was ‘saying’, thus, perhaps implying that it is mankind, from a position of humility, who must listen to nature.

Viv Corringham's performance took place on the morning of Friday, July 22, 2016. In the previous days, Viv had acquired her own experience of that path thanks to the walks she had been able to take, both on her own and with other people who had been frequenting those places for years and who had told her their experiences, information, and stories. So her singing had been nourished by the words of those witnesses and her personal experiences of the place, thus confirming that the knowledge a person has of a place and the emotions it triggers are the result of a short circuit between the immediate present and the past, which in turn is the result of the accumulation of previous experiences, whether visual, auditory or emotional, that are filtered by memory.

Walking along the path, Viv sang the walk itself and it was the song of that landscape, or the landscape of that song, or in any case, the coexistence of song and place which created the experience. And we watched and somehow also participated through her song in that exchange between Viv and the landscape. An exchange, however, which was not limited to the sounds of the moment, because in order to form the landscape as a whole, the colors, shapes, and even the meteorological conditions of the place at that very time had to be integrated.

During her various walks up to the Prà basin, both the ones on her own or else with her ‘informers’, or the one with us spectators on July 22nd, Viv recorded the words of those ‘witnesses’, her singing, and the sounds and noises of the place, thereby creating different

layers of memory. All these audio materials, separated temporally from each other but which combined, restore to us at least a part of her experience in the Pellice Valley, came together in *Small Treasures You Can Find*, a six-channel sound composition presented on April 13, 2017 in Turin. It is made up of the sounds of the environment in the Pellice Valley (birds, water, wind, the cowbells of grazing cows ...) and her singing, mixed with the words of her 'informers' in the form of fragments of responses, not of a dialogue (we do not know the questions that Viv asked them and she intervened with only a simple "yes" or "really?"), becoming phrases repeated over and over as if instead of the literal meaning of those words, what mattered to her was their sound value. On the evening of April 13th, the diffusion of the sounds in six different points of the room to obtain a more immersive result was accompanied by the video footage of her walks up to the Prà and a live performance of her singing, in turn transmitted by two other speakers. The present (the new present) becomes mixed, like a comment, with the memory of the past, without erasing it.

After several listening phases (the place, the 'informers') and other moments that were mostly improvised - because they were created at that very moment and in reaction to it - Viv summarized and 'set' her experience and her emotions in the Pellice Valley, albeit temporarily since a new song was being added to the previous ones, in a composition where every sound has its place. To be convinced, just look carefully at the score of *Small Treasures You Can Find* (<http://www.estatic.it/content/viv-corryingham-small-treasures-you-can-find>), where small rectangles of paper representing different fragments of the recordings are arranged according to a precise order established by the composer: each one at the desired moment and on the audio channel intended for it.

But, as we have seen, Viv reacted to the diffusion of *Small Treasures You Can Find* with a new singing performance that was integrated with the previous result. This possibility of reacting in the present to a past event, in addition to creating a new work, allows us to think, literally, of an almost infinite 'work in progress' (because this chain reaction is not obligatory) where each step is derived from the previous one and may in turn be the basis of the following one. This is not so much an idea of the *unfinished* but rather of the *never finished*. Like the new day that proceeds and follows the old one.

Giuseppe Furghieri, 2017 (translated by Laura Culver)