

Musical Theater

Original article

UDC 782.1

<https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2025.2.069-081>

EDN WWRODM



From Nono's *Prometeo* to Ferneyhough's *Shadowtime*: An Evolution of the Idea of the "Dramma in Musica"

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Abstract. The article focuses on two musical performances, the premieres of which were separated from each other by two decades: the “tragedia dell’asciolto” [“tragedy of hearing”] *Prometeo* (1984–1985) by Luigi Nono and the musical-stage action *Shadowtime* (2000–2004) by Brian Ferneyhough. A comparison of the concepts and their implementation in the musical space of compositions makes it possible for us to conclude that the evolution of the historical genre of *dramma per musica* into a unique modern phenomenon “dramma in musica” (Jürg Stenzl) is objective in its nature, associated with the tendency clearly outlined in the second half of the 20th century to return opera drama to the experience of the first Italian operas, which are often not distinguishable from the early oratorios. This conclusion is supported by examples from the music composed by some of the leading 20th century composers. In particular, the numerous connections are analyzed between the opera project *Hyperion* by Bruno Maderna and *Prometeo* by Nono, on the one hand, and between *Prometeo* by Nono and *Shadowtime* by Ferneyhough, on the other. Within the framework of comparative analysis, accents are made the nature of the libretto, the methods of interaction between the textual and the musical content, as well as the peculiarities of the textural organization. The study allows us to come to the conclusion that the development of the opera genre possesses a unique alternative evolutionary line, which led to the emergence of a static opera performance from the point of view of the visual element, marked by an active dynamization of its sound solution.

Keywords: Luigi Nono, Brian Ferneyhough, opera, *Prometeo*, *Shadowtime*, choral texture, text and music

For citation: Ryzhinsky A. S. From Nono’s *Prometeo* to Ferneyhough’s *Shadowtime*: An Evolution of the Idea of the “Dramma in Musica”. *Russian Musicology*. 2025. No. 2, pp. 69–81.

<https://doi.org/10.56620/RM.2025.2.069-081>

Translated by Dr. Anton Rovner.

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Luigi Nono's *Prometeo* and the Genesis of the "Dramma in Musica"

The two productions of Luigi Nono's "tragedia in ascolto" ["tragedy of hearing"] *Prometeo* (in Venice in 1984, then in Milan in 1985) may be counted among the most important events in the musical world in the 1980s, the significance of which has not been fully assessed up to now. Therefore, it is no wonder that 14 years after the work's premiere, Raymond Fearn, not without some reservations, included an analysis of *Prometeo* in his monograph devoted to Italian opera theater of the second half of the previous century: "Indeed, it is possible to sense certain qualms regarding the inclusion of *Prometeo* into this research: after all, it cannot be examined in any sense as a 'stage work,' since it had never been set up as a production in the customary sense of the word, and it would be inappropriate to attempt to do this." [1, p. 195]

In Nono's musical works, the conception of "tragedia dell'ascolto" underwent a gradual maturation. From *Intolleranza 1960* through *Al gran sole carico d'amore* to *Prometeo*, there accumulated the tendency of a gradual disentanglement from a discernible plotline with any linear logic of development, from customary opera scenes consisting of episodes with soloists, vocal ensembles and choruses. The position of the traditional libretto was replaced by a literary montage including texts in different languages (in *Al gran sole carico d'amore* there was a combination of Italian, French, Spanish and German; *Prometeo* featured Italian, German and Ancient Greek), the protagonists were presented by solo vocalists, as well as vocal ensembles or chorus (such as, for instance, Tania Bunke and Deola in *Al gran sole carico d'amore*, Io and Prometheus in *Prometeo*). And, most importantly, — in *Al gran sole carico d'amore* (in part) and in *Prometeo* (in full), not only the action in the customary sense of the word disappeared,

but also scenography as such. *Prometeo* presented an example of an absolutely static composition consisting of soloists, reciters, chorus and orchestra, unchangeable during the entire so-called production. The only "hero" of the tragedy the action of which the audience members were supposed to follow turned out to be Sound itself.

When explaining the artistic goal fulfilled in *Prometeo*, the composer noted: "Opera theater in Italy aspired towards a total neutralization of space. On the other hand, for me the relation between sound and space is the most important one, i.e., [I am interested in] the way sounds correlate to each other in space, how they transform. In other words, how sound reads space and how space discloses sound." [2, p. 133] The departure of the action from the visual-auditory level solely to the auditory leads to the birth of a new genre — that of a tragedy, the content of which is comprised of sound events. This feature of the composition was characterized very concisely by Jürg Stenzl: "From *dramma per musica*, as opera had been called for a long time in Italy, Luigi Nono arrived at *dramma in musica* — to drama within the music, which rejected all the visual elements, having become an invisible theater, a drama-for-hearing." [3, p. 109]

When examining the genesis of the "dramma in musica", it is important to mention the genre of radio-opera, as well as the experiment carried out by Bruno Maderna (1920–1973) in his project of *Hyperion*. The examples of radio-opera that remain the most well-known at the present day appeared during the 1950s and the 1960s. Among the main composers who worked in this genre were Bernd Alois Zimmermann (*Des Menschen Unterhaltsprozess gegen Gott*, 1952), Hans Werner Henze (*Ein Landarzt*, 1951), Niccolò Castiglioni (*Attraverso lo specchio*, 1961), Bruno Maderna (*Don Perlimplin*, 1962) and a number of others. These radio productions

demonstrated for the first time the possibilities of the existence of opera outside the realm of visually perceivable stage action.

When starting his work on the project of *Hyperion* (1964–1970), Maderna clearly derived his vision from the experience of radio-opera, which is testified by the fact that among the nine versions of the opera, only three have received manifestations on stage, while one of the redactions of the opera — *Hyperion IV* — was conceived for broadcast on the radio. [4, p. 96] The genetic closeness of *Hyperion* to the genre of the radio-opera is also written about by Raymond Fearn: “It is important to emphasize that the *invenzione radiofonica* ‘Don Perlimplin’ and the *lirica in forma di spettacolo* ‘Hyperion’ presented two aspects of one and the same experiment.” [1, p. 85]

Maderna’s *Hyperion* is comparable to Nono’s “tragedia dell’asciolto” not only in its “triumph of imagination,” [5, p. 165] replacing the visual perception of a concrete scenic solution, but the very approach to the formation of the literary basis of any particular musical composition. Along with the main text of Friedrich Hölderlin’s *Hyperion; oder, Der Eremit in Griechenland* [“Hyperion or the Hermit in Greece”], which, it must be emphasized, is not used a lot, the composer incorporates other versions of this novel,¹ as well as works by other writers and poets — Sappho, Ibycus, Wystan Hugh Auden,

and Federico García Lorca. In other words, Giorgio Ferrari fairly observes, “Maderna did not create a libretto on the basis of the novel’s text, but the novel itself was used as a source of inspiration for the entire composition.” [6, p. 120] Whereas the texts of the Ancient Greek poets are presented in translations into Italian by Salvatore Quasimodo, the fragments from Hölderlin, Auden and Lorca are given in the original versions. Thereby, similar to Nono’s *Prometeo*, here a polylingual textual set is presented, the perception of which is complexified, in several instances, by the superimposition of the texts on each other, which may be observed in the “Psalm” from the redaction of *Hyperion* of 1968, bearing the title of *Hyperion et la violence*, wherein text sources in English (Auden’s poetry) and in Spanish (Lorca) are sounded out simultaneously.

It is particularly from Maderna that Nono derives the experience of connection of various independent texts into a peculiar literary mosaic, the text fragments of which are chosen according to the principle of correspondence to a particular theme. In the “tragedia dell’asciolto,” the composer, along with the author of the libretto Massimo Cacciari, brings the number of literary sources up to thirteen,² organizing large-scale intertextual dialogues connected together by a main theme — the idea of a new human perception freed

¹ Along with the main text of Friedrich Hölderlin’s novel *Hyperion; oder, Der Eremit in Griechenland* (1797–1799), a certain amount of fame in literary circles was acquired by separate fragments of the novel created by Hölderlin during the course of three years (1794–1796): “Talia-Fragment,” “Metric Variant,” “Hyperion’s Youth,” “Lowell-Version,” “The Next-to-Last Redaction” (the list of the fragments is cited from: Prikhozhaya L. I. *Roman Gelderlina “Giperion”: forma i smysl: dis. ... kand. filologicheskikh nauk* [Hölderlin’s Novel “Hyperion”: Form and Meaning: Dissertation for the Degree of Cand.Sci. (Philology)]. Kaliningrad, 2004, pp. 79–106).

² Lydia Jeschke in her large-scale work devoted to *Prometeo*, providing a detailed analysis of the quotes and allusions present in the text, enumerates the following sources of Massimo Cacciari’s libretto: 1) *Theogony* by Hesiod, 2) *Works and Days* by Hesiod, 3) *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus, 4) Pindar’s Sixth Nemean Ode, 5) *History* by Herodotus, 6) *Alcestes* by Euripides, 7) Goethe’s *Prometheus*, 8) *Hyperion* by Hölderlin, 9) *Achilles* by Hölderlin, 10) the libretto of Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron*, 11) the text of Schoenberg’s choral piece *Das Gesetz* op. 35 No. 2, 12) *On the Concept of History* by Benjamin, 13) *Maestro of the Game* by Cacciari. [7]

from the “massification of the auditory sense” (to use Nono’s expression [8, p. 260]) and, consequently, from the massification of consciousness. The Prometheus as expressed by Nono is “a person with an eternal thirst for new lands and boundaries,” [9, p. 124] a hero calling upon humanity towards unswerving spiritual self-perfection. The composer wrote: “I presume that the human being possesses the opportunity, as well as the capability of learning, opening up new paths, so as to discover a pinnacle higher than the sky, other spaces, other lands, other abysses, other fantasies.” [10, p. 38]

Luigi Nono's *Prometeo* and Ferneyhough's *Shadowtime*: Points of Contingence

At present, it would be possible to speak of the utopian character of the new musical theater discovered by Nono in his *Prometeo*, labeled by Stenzl as “a theater of ideas,” in reference to the composer, [11, p. 124] had the phenomenon of the “drama in musica” not received its continuation in the opera cycle *Shadowtime* (1999–2004) by outstanding British composer Brian Ferneyhough (b. 1943). The connection between the two works is indicated by the researchers of Ferneyhough’s music, [12; 13] as well as by the fact that the composer himself defined his composition as an “opera of thoughts” or an “opera of ideas,” (!) [12, p. 273] in which, similar to Nono’s *Prometeo*, we encounter a particular theme, inspired not by a real, but a mythological story of the tragic end of German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892–1940).

What is it that brings both compositions closer together? First of all, the complex

character of the literary source, synthesizing the librettist’s authorial texts with quotations and allusions to a set of various sources³ called upon to elucidate a sum of ideas grouped around the compositions’ central protagonists: Prometheus in Nono’s work and Walter Benjamin — in Ferneyhough’s work.

Second, both in *Prometeo* and in *Shadowtime*, a significant role is played by the chorus, which, unlike in Ancient Greek tragedies, does not as much carry out the function of the commentator of a conventional action as it presents the main character himself expounding the most important ideas of the composition. In combination with static scenography, this endows *Shadowtime* with features of an oratorio, which was emphasized to a certain degree by the composer himself in his comparison of his opera with Emilio de’ Cavalieri’s famous oratorio *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* (1600), on the basis of which Lois Fitch arrived at the conclusion about Ferneyhough’s special interest in the very first operas and oratorios appearing in Florence at the beginning of the 17th century: “The history of opera as such was of little interest to him [Ferneyhough. — A. R.], with the exception of those early specimens of operas and oratorios, which, initially differing little from each other, appeared in one and the same context (i.e., at the Medici court in Florence).” [12, p. 276] Fitch’s supposition of the influence of early opera on the conception of Ferneyhough’s composition is also indirectly confirmed by the analogy of the separate plot devices between *Shadowtime* and Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo*: Benjamin, similar to Orpheus, voluntarily descends into the Underworld, undergoes trials

³ Among the sources of Charles Bernstein’s libretto for *Shadowtime*, we must enumerate the basic ones — they are Walter Benjamin’s works *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), *Lehre vom Ähnlichen* (1933), and *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940, published posthumously). It is noteworthy that the last of the listed sources is also present in Massimo Cacciari’s libretto for *Prometeo*.

when confronting on his way with the spirits of Hades (furies of sort) interrogating and tempting him, gains a moral victory over them and achieves immortality in human memory.⁴ Such intersections are very symbolic, since for Ferneyhough, just as, prior to him, for Nono and Maderna, the Ancient Greek plotlines had retained their relevance, symbolizing the connection between the historical eras on an idea-based level.⁵

Third, *Shadowtime* and *Prometeo* are brought closer together by the “modular” principle [12, p. 277] of the compositions’ structures, according to which sections created independently from each other may be performed separately from the entire production as self-sufficient musical compositions. And while the premiere of the “tragedia dell’asciolto” [“tragedy of hearing”] was anteceded by performances of solely two sketches of the future musical production — *Das atmende Klarsein* (1980–1983) and *Io: Frammento dal Prometeo* (1981),⁶ the premiere of *Shadowtime* in May 2004 was preceded by demonstrations of four relatively autonomous sections of the work.⁷

The modular principle of construction of opera composition also brings to our memory Karlheinz Stockhausen’s famous heptalogy *Licht*, the premieres of the constituent parts of which took place during the course of 30 years — from 1981 to 2011.⁸ However, as the earliest example of the realization of this principle, we must name Maderna’s *Hyperion*, all the more so because this composition impacted to a considerable degree the conception of Nono’s *Prometeo* and, consequently, indirectly Ferneyhough’s *Shadowtime*. The inner constituency of each of the nine versions of *Hyperion* is variegated. Inherently, here we have a set of independent compositions (vocal-orchestral, orchestral, choral, and electronic), unified within the framework of yet another solution of *Hyperion*. Parallel with this, there appeared compositions that in the long run were not included in any of the versions of *Hyperion*, but were connected with the overall conception.⁹ The relatively autonomous status of the constituent parts of *Hyperion* leads to the result that in the lists of Maderna’s compositions they appear in

⁴ It is not by chance that in her article devoted to Brian Ferneyhough, Tatiana Tsaregradskaya names, along with British composers John Dunstable and Thomas Tallis, the names of the Italian masters Giovanni Gabrieli and Claudio Monteverdi. [14]

⁵ Altogether, 20th century choral music, as noted by Olena Batovska, Natalia Grebeniuk and Hanna Savelieva, is characterized by a constant tangency with the history of the Renaissance and the early Baroque period disclosing itself not only in the turning to Ancient Greek subject matter, but also in a constant engagement with the music of the masters of this period. [15, p. 205]

⁶ Nono’s musical output has the characteristic trait of inclusions of previously composed works into the structure of the new oeuvre: *Intolleranza 1960* included a fragment of the cantata *Il canto sospeso* (1955/56), while *Al gran sole carico d’amore* included musical material from the vocal-orchestral composition *Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt* (1971).

⁷ Let us list the premieres of the scenes of *Shadowtime* in chronological order: Scene 3 “The Doctrine of Similarity” (September 2000), Scene 4 “Opus Contra Naturam” (October 2000), Scene 7 “Stelæ for Failed Time” (June 2001), and Scene 6 “Seven ‘Tableaux Vivants’ Depicting the Angel of History as Melancholia” (January 2004).

⁸ The premiere of the opera *Donnerstag* took place in 1981 in Milan; the premiere of the final opera *Sonntag* was carried out in 2011 in Cologne.

⁹ Let us remember, for example, *Gesti* for chorus and orchestra. The composition was written during the period of work on two versions of *Hyperion* both created in 1969 — *Hyperion IV* and the Suite for soloists, chorus and orchestra from the opera *Hyperion*.

various groups in terms of the instrumental and/or vocal ensembles, as a rule, with the indications of the respective concrete version (versions) of *Hyperion* in which they were included. The continuation of the “modular” principle of structure in Ferneyhough’s opera is testified by the fact that its constituent scenes were both composed and performed not in the order of their succession within the overall construction of the composition.

Fourth, Nono’s *Prometeo* and Ferneyhough’s *Shadowtime* are related by the application of spatial effects connected not only with the peculiarities of the compositions’ textural makeup (the use of the resources of stereomony, as well as diagonal and antiphonal texture), which will be discussed later in this work, but with the implementation of electronic means.

It must be kept in mind that while for Nono live electronics in the 1980s presented the most significant technological resource for most of his compositions, which made it possible for him to elongate the time of its sounding, to change its volume, dynamics and even the direction of the sound in space, for Ferneyhough the incorporation of electronic instruments is rather a tribute of respect for Nono, who opened anew the spatial effects of the music of the old Venetian masters. According to Hye-Eun Uh’s reasonable observation, “Luigi Nono never left early music out of account, in particular, the music of the Renaissance era, and his avant-garde compositions were created on the basis of the music of the late Renaissance and early Baroque periods.” [16, p. 241] And while above there was mention of the crossings of the plotline of *Shadowtime* with Claudio Monteverdi’s opera, here it is possible to note the connection of Ferneyhough’s opera with the Italian music of the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries on the level of the sound manifestation, as well, which is confirmed by the very concrete utterances of the British composer of his

musical predilections. When Paul Griffiths asked Ferneyhough, which was it that he desired to listen to in his free time, the latter responded: “Almost everything from the Italian Renaissance music, first of all, Monteverdi, Gabrieli and their contemporaries. The rapturous exultance regarding the *architectural playing of the sound masses in the latter’s music* [my italics. — A. R.] and the mannerist intensiveness of each detail in the former’s works, not to mention his remarkable sensation of time, always emanated a most powerful tension.” [17, p. 247] In regard to the latter — Ferneyhough’s interest in operating with time as it is present in the works of Gabrieli and his contemporaries — most illustrative is Jean-Pascal Chaigné’s observation about the connection between the works of the British master and the masterpieces of the Renaissance in the notation of the changes of tempos: “...many of the proportions employed here [in Ferneyhough’s *Kurze Schatten II*. — A. R.], determine the different levels of swiftness of sound, and in this case they possess the same function as in the music of the Renaissance where the element of proportion presented the only means of bringing into the notation the change of the tempo of performance.” [18, p. 285]

The Means of Interaction Between the Textual and the Musical Elements in Nono’s and Ferneyhough’s Compositions

An important argument testifying in favor of the opinion once expressed by Arnold Whittall, according to which “when planning his *Shadowtime*, Ferneyhough had the example of Luigi Nono’s opera — the ‘tragedia dell’asciolto’ *Prometeo* before him,” [13, p. 52] is the character of Ferneyhough’s work with the literary text created by Charles Bernstein. Let us point out in advance that in this case he was referring not only to *Prometeo*, but also to the other compositions in which Nono’s ideas in the sphere of the interaction of the literary

and the musical elements had realized themselves. Thus, in the choral score of *Shadowtime*, it is possible to meet the technique discovered as far back as Nono's cantata *Il canto sospeso* (1955–1956) – that of splitting words into its constituent syllables with the subsequent distribution of the latter among the different voices of the texture (Examples Nos. 1a, 1b).

The superimposition of several independent textual elements with the aim of strengthening the semantic polyvalence constantly applied in Nono's vocal compositions continues its development in Ferneyhough's opera, as well. For example, in "Amphibolies I" and "Amphibolies III" from "The Doctrine of Similarity" (the third scene of *Shadowtime*), the composer by integrating into the textual set Bernstein's autonomous texts obtains a new textual set endowed with a semantic content differing from that of the poetic sources. Also present is a literal repetition of that situation which Luigi Nono spoke of, when analyzing his choral piece *La terra e la campagna* (1958): "The combination of both texts thereby creates

an intersection for the semantic content, as the result of which they obtain a function that simultaneously complements itself." [19, p. 43]

We must also mark out the technique of implementing a literary text into the texture of an instrumental work, which has its origins in Nono's famous string quartet *Fragmente — Stille. An Diotima*. While rejecting the idea of an actual sounding out of the fragments of Hölderlin's texts, the composer assimilates them into sorts of expressive textual commentaries, which, although being perceived solely by the musicians playing the quartet, are capable of creating an impact on the emotional side of the performance, at the same time not presuming any figurative concretization of program music. In addition to the quartet, Nono also makes use of this device in the *Tre epittaffi per Federico Garsia Lorca* (1951–1953), as well as in his composition from 1962, *Canti di vita e d'amore: Sul Ponte di Hiroshima*. An unsounded text is also present in the score of the aforementioned radio-opera by Maderna *Don Perlimplin* (1962). The composer places over the flutist's part in parenthesis words that

Example No. 1a

Luigi Nono. *Prometeo*. Prologo, mm. 132–135

The musical score for Example No. 1a, from Luigi Nono's *Prometeo* Prologo, measures 132–135. It features a complex polyphonic texture with overlapping syllables across multiple vocal and instrumental parts. The parts are labeled S, O, L, I, C, O, R, O and A, T, B. The score is in 4/4 time and includes dynamic markings such as *ppp*, *f*, and *p*. The lyrics are fragmented and distributed across the parts, creating a dense, layered semantic effect.

Example No. 1b

Brian Ferneyhough. *Shadowtime*.
"The Doctrine of Similarity". "Cannot Cross", mm. 1-3

$\text{♩} = 44$
Largo desolato

S. 7 Wh(en) **B. 1** (o)f **T. 4** ch(ange) **S. 6** g(ong)(g)on(e) **S. 1**

S. 5 (Wh)c(n) **B. 4** (cha)n(ge) **B. 10** (o)f

A. 8 (wi)n(ds) **S. 11** (a)re **T. 3** (b)l(ast)s

A. 3 (w)i(i)nds **A. 6** (g)on(e) **T. 5** o(f)

S. 9 (win)ds **A. 10** (bla)sts

S. 10 w - i(i)nds **A. 2** (ch)a(n)ge **B. 11** o(f) **T. 11** (bl)a(st)s

B. 12 (Whe)n **T. 10** a(re) **T. 1** bl(ast)s

A. 4 (chan)ge **A. 1** (b)l(ast)s

pertain to the main protagonist, but are not sounded out, thereby, concretizing the meaning of the musical phrase for the flutist. Similar to Nono's compositions, this text is inaccessible

for the perception of the listener, since its aim is to help the performer come closer to the realization of the dramaturgical goal set by the librettist and the composer.

The personification of the solo instrument obtains its continuation in the second scene of Ferneyhough's *Shadowtime* — "Les Froissements des Ailes de Gabriel" (2003–2004) for guitar and 13 instruments. As a matter of fact, here the allusion arises to the genre of the instrumental concerto, in which the solo guitar "acts in the name of" the main character of this part — the Archangel Gabriel. In *Shadowtime* the tendency of implementing the text into the score of instrumental compositions, traced in the works of the Italian masters, also receives its development. In the fourth scene of *Shadowtime* "Opus Contra Naturam" (1999–2000), designated for the piano, the performing musician also acquires the additional function of a reciter. The emotional utterance of Walter Benjamin's text demonstrates itself as a reaction to the meaning contained in it. At the same time, the piano part is not simply compelled to avoid a literal "sounding" of the text, just as in the case of Nono, but aspires to an opposition, and even, as the composer writes, to a confrontation with it: "The texts are pronounced in a confrontation between the textual and the musical elements. In particular, it becomes necessary to choose the tone of the voice, the range and the means of replicating the text for each 'vocal' insertion. The text must react to the musical context." (Cit. ex: [20]) Thereby, here we find a literal continuation bestowed upon the polyphony of the textual element, as demonstrated by the reciter, and the musical element, as

demonstrated by the piano, characteristic for *Prometeo*, complementarily strengthened by acoustic effects, which, according to the composer's thoughts, had to be created by the piano pedal: "The pedal in the score is not indicated, for the sake of providing the freedom in the choice of acoustic improvisation for the performers." [Ibid.] Along with the inclusion of texts into the musical scores of instrumental compositions, the techniques of polytextuality and the syllabic splitting of words, stemming from the experiments not only of Nono, but also of the other representatives of the Darmstadt school — Maderna and Stockhausen (for more detail see: [21]), Ferneyhough also makes use of the resources of phonemic composition.¹⁰ In "Stelæ for Failed Time" (2001) — the conclusive scene of *Shadowtime*, there are short phonemic insertions, unexpectedly busting into each of five scenes of the composition (corresponding to the five sepulchral columns, or stelæ, of the exhausted time of the blighted Walter Benjamin), which, in all possibility, is what symbolizes that "ironic energy" about which the composer writes, when providing a characterization of the opera's finale: "Le temps, en termes musicaux, est le plus complètement, subversivement et triomphalement lui-même quand il rompt son accord tacite de solidarité avec ces matériaux musicaux, dans le but de s'offrir lui-même comme une présence soudaine d' 'énergie ironique'"¹¹ (Example No. 2).

¹⁰ Let us highlight here the special role of Karlheinz Stockhausen's experiments in the choral parts of the heptalogy *Licht*. Typical for the German master is the interaction between "verbal-musical and phonemic composition, when through the intoning of the text with the aid of additional attacks of durably extended vowel phonemes and a continuous intoning of velar, explosive, fricative consonants, the composer achieves a choral sound that is diverse in its timbral content." [21, p. 87]

¹¹ Ferneyhough B. *Stelæ for Failed Time*. URL: <https://brahms.ircam.fr/en/works/work/22667/> (accessed: 15.03.2025).

Example No. 2

Brian Ferneyhough. *Shadowtime*.
"Stelae for Failed Time." Scene 5, mm. 1–4

tumultuoso

Soprano 1
Soprano 2
Soprano 3
Alto 1
Alto 2
Alto 3
Tenor 1
Tenor 2
Tenor 3
Bass 1
Bass 2
Bass 3

Lyrics (Russian):
Soprano 1: m-----z-----x-----m-----
Soprano 2: f m-----hi-----
Soprano 3: f m-----hi-----
Alto 1: -----
Alto 2: tk ss o tk ss o tk ss hm-----
Alto 3: tk ss o tk ss o tk ss hm-----
Tenor 1: -----
Tenor 2: -----
Tenor 3: -----
Bass 1: -----
Bass 2: -----
Bass 3: -----

The Peculiarities of the Textural Organization of *Prometeo* and *Shadowtime*

There are plenty textural crossings between *Prometeo* and *Shadowtime*. Similar to Nono, Ferneyhough actively applies the resources of antiphonal texture, organized in three main variants: a.) juxtapositions of male (four- or six-voice) and female (four- or six-voice) choruses, or b.) juxtapositions of two mixed choruses. The latter variant comes closer to what is incorporated in Nono's compositions with the adherence to the early Venetian principle of "*cori spezzati*" (literally: "torn apart" choruses).

To a similar degree, an extensive usage in Ferneyhough's compositions is applied to diagonal texture, characteristic for Nono's choral music, beginning with *Liebeslied* (1954) and ending with *Prometeo* and *Caminantes... Ayacucho* (1987) (Examples No. 3a, 3b).

Whereas, in regard to the antiphonal writing, it is possible to speak about a certain disposition on the part of Ferneyhough, as a British composer, to it constantly being applied in choral music (it suffices to recall, as one example, the diverse antiphons in the *Missa brevis* for 12-voice chorus), the choral diagonal textures present an obvious consequence of that impression the composer received from his familiarization with Nono's *Prometeo*.¹² This conclusion is also arrived at from the understanding of the aims pursued by the Italian and the British composer, consisting in the aspiration towards a maximal timbral mobility of the vocal lines (or, to be more precise, — the melodic diagonal textures) and the harmonic sonorities.

Example No. 3a

Luigi Nono. *Prometeo*. Prologo, m. 52

Example No. 3b

Brian Ferneyhough. *Shadowtime*.
"Stelæ for Failed Time." Scene 2, mm. 23–24

¹² Ferneyhough demonstrated a great amount of attention to the works of late Nono, in particular, to his string quartet and the "tragedia dell'asciolto" *Prometeo*, in his conversation with Jeffrey Stadelman, which took place in 1992. See: [22].

Conclusion

While drawing our conclusions, let us emphasize, once again, that the musical projects of *Shadowtime* and *Prometeo* are remote not only from what may be conventionally called staginess, but, on the whole, from theatrical action, as such. For this reason, the conclusion arrived at by Stenzl, when he spoke of the discovery of a new genre in *Prometeo* — the “dramma in musica” — is equally applicable to Ferneyhough’s composition, as well.

The viability of such a musical-dramatic action turned out to be connected not only with the musical discoveries of Nono and of his predecessor Maderna, but also of those who, stemming from the experience of these two composers, arrived at an understanding of the reality of the type of opera genre

in which the drama or, to be precise, the tragedy is unfolded solely on the auditory level, in the form of “sound choreography,” [23, p. 29] carrying out the super-objective of which Nono had once spoken: “Presently, it is important, once again, to learn to listen to silence, again to perceive the beauty of *piano* and *pianissimo*, situated on the boundary of silence, and, finally, to return to the human being the capability of discerning the sounds of nature — the noise of the wind, the murmur of water, the rustle of falling leaves, the murmur rain.” [8, p. 260] A solution of this super-objective on a new level is what Ferneyhough’s opera project *Shadowtime* pursues, thereby proving that the musical theater in the 21st century is continuing its never-ending evolution, extending already for over 400 years.

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Received: 17.03.2025

Revised: 16.04.2025

Accepted: 12.05.2025