

## **The lesson of Ahronovich** **A talent far away from the star system**

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With Yuri Ahronovich's death there has disappeared not only a magnificent, enthusiastic and generous musician but also a streaming piece of history of which he was a witness and a protagonist. It was enthralling hearing him tell about the daring vicissitudes of his life, of the times when he was a young devoted pupil of Prokofiev and Shostakovitch during the dark years of the Soviet regime, and saved from destruction some scores of Rachmaninov, about his deportation, and his reuniting with Israel to face up a new youth.

Chance had it that he unexpectedly passed away in Cologne on October 31, far away from everything, at sixty-nine years of age. His resting place is now Jerusalem, the land of the ancestors. In his heart, however, in his nostalgia, his soul was deeply, incurably Russian; typically Russian was his destiny of exile with no return and no forgiveness. In him there lived together the spirits of Gogol and Dostoyevski, the comic and the tragic side, something childish and mature as if hanging over the abyss: he looked like a character who had come out from a painting by Chagal. A musician with genuine and unrestrained talent, of the kind of Russian Jews naturally predestinated to music, he had never sharpened, unlike many of his colleagues, the weapons of shrewdness and cunning, if it were only to legitimately affirm his own right to be recognized and appreciated. In fact he was not a part of the star system and lived on the fringe of the big international circles. It is not that he had not entered it in some cases and that he did not have artistic requisites, but his figure was, so to speak, too little fitting to the rules and conventions of the system to establish himself within it. Too straightforward, too spontaneous, too modest not to appear as chronically naïf. Too little composed and externally inelegant, in fact almost comical when holding his very long rough wood baton to personify the demiurgic image of the orchestra conductor of our times. The unfailing series of gestures that accompanied the end of every concert, of every opera performance – the hug of each musician, the score raised from the music stand and pointed at to the applauses of the audience – roused tenderness, in a sense lowered the aura of the rite to a sort of intimate and familiar scene, almost indecently exposed. Suddenly, all barriers fell down and it became clear that we had to thank all the performers without exception, and above all the composer, for what we have just heard, whereas the conductor remained almost an ethereal speck in the background. Too true, too open, not to be even suspicious. However, Ahronovitch did not bluff. The trials, the suffering that had marked him profoundly, his loneliness, had a surprising result: a candid and positive optimism, a much-praised serenity, the simplicity of whom, happy to have survived the horrors without rancor, looks with a grateful soul, after having weighed them up, at the values of life. It remains to say specifically about the conductor, now that his career has ended, that the exuberance of the musician made sometimes less important the technical qualities,

which were nevertheless remarkable, anything but superficial, on the contrary, entirely conscious. Behind an appearance at first glance of an impetuous and passionate person, intent on creating a musical tension of uninterrupted breath (he belonged to the old school of conductors for whom the synthesis counted more than the single details), hid a human and intellectual wealth that was transmitted to the orchestra internally, of which the gesture was an indicator of signals that were first and foremost emotional, but without prejudicing the unity of the whole and the skill of the professional performance. With him, the musicians felt spurred and protected at the same time, put in the condition to express themselves according to their own qualities. It was, if anything, this sense of responsibility, which Ahronovich appealed to without imposing it authoritatively, the cause for not being correctly understood and supported at times. He once said during a rehearsal: "*You must play every note as if it were a moral choice. Our entire life is in every note we play.*" Said by such a sprightly, good-natured little fellow, who almost seemed to apologize every time for being up there conducting, who loved company and was full of kindness for everybody, it could look like an exaggeration, and in fact some people smiled. But he was indeed just like that.