

lolini represents a new breed of electroacoustic composer who puts his heart as well as his intellect into his work...

by Bill Tilland - BBC Experimental Music Review
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Judging from the evidence on this CD, Australian composer Robert lolini's two preferred musical forms are (or were) conventional chamber compositions, and electroacoustic pieces assembled in the studio, several of which were designed for radio broadcast on Australian public radio.

lolini's featured chamber work is sprightly and melodic, with contrapuntal sophistication and rhythms that draw upon African source materials. The four short pieces (written for four players) compare favourably with the work of Gavin Bryars or Michael Nyman; the worst that could be said about these pieces is that they don't really suggest an original voice.

Electroacoustic music is an under-appreciated form, due in part to its legacy of academic sterility; even at its best, it can make major demands upon the listener. But along with Italian Lorenzo Brusci's *Timet*, and a few other brave souls laboring in the wilderness, lolini represents a new breed of electroacoustic composer who puts his heart as well as his intellect into his work, and composes from a broad cultural perspective.

"Edwin Armstrong," an excerpt from lolini's *Edwin Armstrong Overture*, made me wish that the whole work had been presented. Somehow, lolini has managed to suggest the pathos of Armstrong's life with an instrumental narrative constructed out of a melancholic grand piano and treated piano samples (representing Armstrong), and sampled short-wave radio carrier chatter (representing RCA, and Lew Sarnoff, its president at the time). (Armstrong, the inventor of the FM broadcast medium, was denied his patent rights and royalties by RCA Victor, which made the first commercial use of the medium, and he eventually committed suicide.) This is a haunting, highly evocative piece of work.

Equally impressive is "City in Between," a 1997 composition dedicated to China's takeover of Hong Kong, which represents, in lolini's words, "the trajectory of a city and people whose destiny remains unknown." Bringing together and shaping a disparate collection of vocal and musical samples lolini creates a rich cultural portrait that succeeds both conceptually and aesthetically.

"Secrets & Breaking the Seal" is quite different in methodology but equally compelling. This excerpt is taken from *Vanunu*, a narrative radiophonic opera that tells the story of the Israeli worker, Mordachai Vanunu, who was tried by the Israeli government for treason after his conscience compelled him to divulge information about Israel's nuclear stockpiles. lolini's opera includes a sung libretto, plus contemporaneous soundbites from radio newscasters and eloquent statements from Vanunu himself. Of course, there is little dramatic action in this crisis of conscience (everything is internal), but in the richness of its political and moral implications, lolini's work compares favorably with John Adams' oratorio, *The Death of Klinghoffer*.

It is to be hoped that ReR, or some other adventurous label, will give us a more complete representation of Robert lolini's electroacoustic compositions. But in the meantime, this CD whets the appetite, and is definitely worth checking out.