

Two Late Works by Niccolò Castiglioni: Twelve-Tone Materials and Musical Poetics in *Sette* and *Schönberg demeure*

Alberto Delama

*Independent Researcher**

THE ‘TRIPLE TRACK’

In an interview with Luigi Pestalozza on 30 October 1995, Niccolò Castiglioni, then sixty-three years old, proposed a threefold classification of his compositional output, distinguishing three main stylistic strands:

- ‘pieces with a crystalline sonority and a marked preference for the high register’, also described as “limpid” works; referring to this category, Castiglioni quotes *Tropi* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, percussion and piano (1959), *Inverno In-Ver* for orchestra (1973, rev. 1978) and *Fiori di ghiaccio* for piano and small orchestra (1983);
- ‘expressive pieces’, such as *Trostlied* for soprano and string quartet (1994) and *Abendlied* for soprano and small orchestra (1995); and finally
- the third line, characterised by ‘a more playful element with flashes of humour’; here Castiglioni does not name specific works, but delves into some important conceptual aspects.¹

ARCHIVAL NOTES

Source Studies in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Music, No. 10 (2025)

© Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia | ISSN 2499-832X | DOI 10.69125/AN.v10.n02.31-49

The division into three ‘lines’ is also found in two letters to Paolo Castaldi, a close friend of the composer; the letters are undated, but clearly belong to the same period, since Castiglioni cites works from 1995, such as *Abendlied* and *La bella estate* for mixed choir. In these missives the composer proposes three ideal programmes which, in stylistic terms, show different aspects of his musical output; the three threads are organised differently compared to the aforementioned interview: indeed, it begins with the ‘expressive pieces’, the least favourite (even ‘substantially repudiated’ in the second letter), described as ‘Schönbergian’ and ‘mellow’.² Although Castiglioni does not favour this ‘line’, it nonetheless remains an integral part of his poetics, includes important compositions and offers interesting archival sources for analysis. In this article I focus on this ‘Schönbergian track’, considering manuscripts, sketches and drafts from Castiglioni’s last years of life; among these sources, twelve-tone preparatory series are the clearest documents attesting to poetic intentions. I present here two compositions from 1995 which, in my view, summarise well some of the composer’s working methods and, in retrospect, his poetic legacy.

BACK TO SCHÖNBERG’S SCHOOL

Referring to this specific trait of his musical style, Castiglioni affirms that he sought a certain expressivity ‘where a Webern emerges who is very different from the “official” avant-garde Webern, a Webern who is rather Schönberg’s pupil, a Schönbergian Webern’.³ The composer clearly declares what he considers to be his model, and for several reasons this sounds original, although his statements would benefit from more context. Firstly, it is interesting to consider a chronological detail: Castiglioni is speaking in the 1990s and is looking both to the very roots of the Second Viennese School (i.e. the beginning of the twentieth century, conceptually) and to the musical avant-garde from the 1950s. Secondly, he is referring to a specific avant-garde interpretation of Anton Webern that dates back to a certain reception in the 1950s, and is therefore rather dated compared to the moment when he is speaking.⁴ The reader will later see an unpublished work where some of these aspects are summarised.

The return to the Second Viennese School concerns both the original atonality and the twelve-tone method. In his preparatory material, Castiglioni organises the tones with particular care for interval relations: he is not interested in serialising other sound parameters like dynamics, duration, timbre, register or mode of attack. At the same time, the composer shows elasticity and freedom when choosing whether to use the prepared musical material or only parts of it; the reasons behind these choices are not always easy to discover, even though such flexibility is fairly common in twelve-tone compositional practice. However, the formal struc-

tures are clear and demonstrate the constructivist thinking behind the compositions through well-defined sectional boundaries and well-defined overall shapes and developments.

DODECAPHONY AND TONAL GESTURES

Concerning the use of dodecaphony, a good example from Castiglioni's later years is the second movement of *Sette* for soprano and small orchestra, dated Spring 1995. In the work as a whole, the composer sets Latin verses from various Psalms to music, and the second movement is based on the opening of Psalm 41 (42). It has a three-part structure, which can be summarised as shown in TABLE 1:

Text	Bars	Time signature	Musical technique	Tempo indication
Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, [As the deer pants for streams of water,]	1–5	6/8	Dodecaphonic	 = 66
ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. [so my soul pants for you, my God.]	6–20	4/8 9/8 (last bar)	Pseudo-tonal	 = 66
Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem, vivum; quando veniam, et apparebo ante faciem Dei? [My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?]	21–32	6/8	Dodecaphonic	 = 66

TABLE 1. Formal structure of the second movement of *Sette*.

It is evident that the composer structures the piece according to a traditional ternary form, based on contrasts between sections (such as A–B–A'). However, as shown by the bar count, the structure appears quite disproportionate and asymmetric, the central part being longer than the outer ones and A' twice as long as A. This suggests that Castiglioni deliberately draws the listener's attention to B, which, in fact, is characterised by a marked contrast with the other two.

Preparatory tone rows used in the extreme parts of the piece appear on the back of page 27 of the autograph manuscript (FIG. 1).⁵ As in the case of the other work from 1995 that will be considered in this article, Castiglioni chooses not to transpose the series chromatically, but instead arranges the tones of row 1 vertically; this allows him to obtain the same tone sequences both horizontally and vertically. However, the composer does not apply the same treatment to the inversions, which, in fact, do not present the same solutions in both directions. In the prime

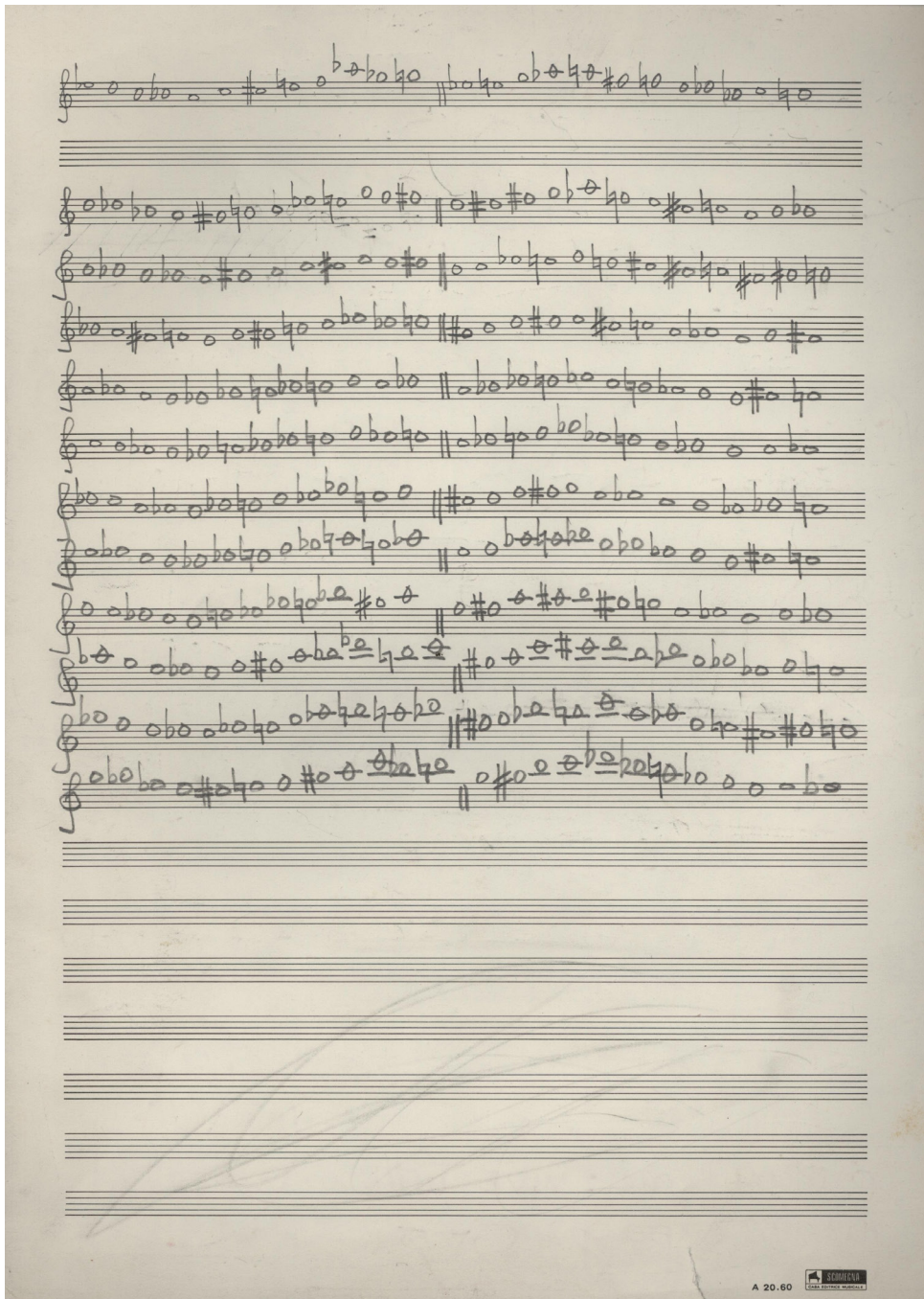


FIGURE 1. Preparatory tone rows for the second movement of *Sette*.
Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (FGC), Castiglioni Collection.

rows, this particular choice of transposition clearly recalls serial compositions from the 1950s, such as *Structures I* for two pianos by Pierre Boulez, even if the similarities are only partial. Indeed, Castiglioni is not interested in deriving matrices from this preparatory material in order to extend the serial principle to other parameters: the fact that he does not apply the same method to the inversions, partly shows his limited interest in applying serial principles. The series itself is naturally lyrical, being based on minor seconds, minor thirds and a major second.

In the first part, all aspects of row 1 are used: prime and inversion in bars 1–2 and the corresponding retrogrades in the following two. From the moment she enters, the soprano sings continuously. The instrumental writing is restricted to only a few pitches, allowing Castiglioni to explore constantly changing timbral combinations from one bar to the next: clarinet, oboe, soprano, cello (b. 1); soprano, two violins, cellos (b. 2); soprano, harp, flutes (b. 3); soprano, suspended cymbal, glockenspiel, celesta, harp (b. 4). Only in the fourth bar does the composer bring the voice and instruments together in a dissonant sonority, assigning contrasting rhythmic figures to each: quaver triplets in the celesta, semiquavers in the glockenspiel, and a quaver septuplet in the soprano. Bar 5 prepares the second section: the suspended cymbal alone plays a dwindling minim and, after a silent quaver, celesta and glockenspiel play an eight-note cluster (D₄–E₄–F₄–F₄–B₄–C₅–D₅–A₅); immediately afterwards, the triangle closes the section with a semiquaver that is left to resonate. The cluster does not appear to derive from any of the rows associated with the piece. Rather, it functions as a final flash of the first section before giving way to the second, which introduces a different instrumental palette and a markedly different stylistic character.

Part two is basically composed of two contrasting elements: a static one, formed by tonal triads, and a mobile one, consisting of melodic figures which, together with the triads, evoke polytonality. Soprano and crotales play throughout the fifteen-bar section, while different instruments combine with the voice and the percussion in every bar. Choosing the instruments, Castiglioni follows a precise scheme mainly related to instrumental families (EX. 1): vibraphone, celesta, harp (bb. 6–8); flutes, oboes, clarinets (bb. 9–11); violin, cellos (bb. 12–13); harp, vibraphone, celesta, glockenspiel (bb. 14–17); oboes, clarinets, flutes (bb. 18–20). Each instrument plays two notes which, together with the soprano's note, form a different tonal triad in each bar. Here again, Castiglioni establishes a recurring pattern that is repeated in the second half of the section. The sequence of triads is as follows: E $\flat$ major, D $\flat$ major, B major, E $\flat$ major, F major, F $\sharp$ minor, E($\natural$) major (the $\frac{6}{8}$ final bar presents a C major triad). In the whole section, the crotales keep playing a three-bar rhythmic scheme that repeats four times (only the final $\frac{6}{8}$ bar is modified in order to connect to the third part); the first bar hosts a quaver quintuplet, the second a crotchet triplet and the third quavers. These rhythmic changes

The image displays a musical score for the central part of the second movement of Niccolò Castiglioni's *Sette*. The score is written for soprano (S.) and small orchestra (C.). The tempo is marked as $\text{♩} = 66$. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 6 to 12, and the second system covers measures 13 to 19. The vocal line (S.) is in the bottom staff, and the instrumental parts (C.) are in the top staff. The instrumental parts include vibraphone (vib.), celesta (cel.), harp (hp.), flute (fl.), oboe (ob.), clarinet (cl.), and solo violin (solo vn.). The vocal line has lyrics: i - ta de - si - de - rat a - ni - ma me - a ad te, De - us,.

EXAMPLE 1. Niccolò Castiglioni, *Sette*, for soprano and small orchestra, second movement, central part, © Casa Ricordi 1995 – All rights reserved.

create an impression of instability and fluidity in what is, in fact, a fundamentally static section, based on fixed triads shared between the voice and the instruments.

Even from this brief information, it is evident that several schemes intertwine and give solidity to the musical structure; this section really seems to diverge from the first one: neither the triads nor the pitch succession in the crotales is generated from the rows. Overall, this passage suggests that Castiglioni sought to create a fundamentally static musical texture, shaping the sonic surface through tonal materials – predominantly major triads – while evoking a sense of polytonality through the recurring cymbal figures. This reliance on major triads reflects a broader feature of his mature style, as Castiglioni himself explained in a 1995 interview:

in *Salmo XIX* [1979–80] there's a long choral passage based on perfect major triads. These triads are not linked in any tonal, harmonic sense, but atonally [...] it's natural for a musician to have a predilection for the sound, the timbre, the colour, the particular perfume which is a major triad. There's a mellowness in the tonal chord for which no atonal chord can be a substitute.⁶

Castiglioni shows a meticulous care for the creation of sound and its continuous change in terms of chord quality and timbre. Major triads and melodic figures create two sound levels in the high register, with crotales in the upper octave. (Only in the last bar, the triads reach the upper octave to create closer dissonances

with crotales and to connect to the last part of the piece.) Generally, the section creates an ethereal effect and stresses the meaning of the text: the soul's desire to meet God. EXAMPLE 1, partly taken from the composer's manuscript, shows the whole section in concert pitch.

In the third part, the composer returns to twelve-tone writing. Although the outer sections are closely related, he neither restates the opening material nor continues its serial development from the point at which it was interrupted (i.e. with row 2). Instead, he proceeds directly to rows 4 (bb. 21–24) and 8 (bb. 25–31). A first hypothesis for the use of row 4 at the beginning of part three considers the connection to the previous section: in this case, we may see the initial B $\flat$ as the endpoint of the melodic cue of the crotales, which completes an E $\flat$ minor arpeggio. A second hypothesis may consider the rows used in the piece organically and interpret them by considering other important compositions and stylistic features of the composer. The first tone series starts with E $\flat$, row 2 with B $\flat$ and the eighth with E $\sharp$: the extreme tones have capital importance in Castiglioni's mature aesthetics and frequently recur in his output since the late 1970s. (A paradigmatic example is the first movement of *Sonatina* for piano composed in 1984, where the two poles of E–E $\flat$ are often juxtaposed;⁷ see also the same stylistic feature in the second part analysed before, where E $\flat$ major triads coexist with melodic lines recalling E major). From this perspective, the choice of these particular rows in the construction of the second movement of *Sette* may reflect a 'poetic' rationale. The movement is, however, remarkably concise and does not draw on the full range of precompositional material. In addition, Castiglioni confirms his 'predilection' for E $\sharp$ in this movement as well: in bb. 26–27 the soprano comes to rest on E $_4$, and in the following bar she sings E seven times, with accents – a number that may not be coincidental, given the title of the composition.

In the final section, Castiglioni is slightly less strict in using all aspects of the series, a fixed order and (in one instance) every corresponding tone. Generally, this is how they are used:

- row 4: prime form (b. 21); inversion (b. 22; considering the second tone given to the violas, it is curious that there is a difference between the manuscript, where there is A $\flat$, following the dodecaphonic scheme, and the printed version in which we read E $\flat$; probably the final version is a typo by the composer); retrograde-inversion (bb. 23–24);
- row 8: retrograde (bb. 25–26; the second tone [G] is missing); prime version (b. 29); inversion (b. 30); retrograde again (b. 31).

As in part one, Castiglioni wants to create fluid timbral mixtures, this time combining various instruments from different families together with soprano; as

in the beginning, Castiglioni mixes timbres from different instrumental families into a new emergent timbre.

The second movement of *Sette* is interesting because it is one of the few examples in which Castiglioni uses more than one of the prepared rows. Nevertheless, it is evident that he works from a well-defined pre-compositional framework while also feeling free not to employ it in a rigid manner. At the same time, the internal contrast between twelve-tone technique and tonal gestures in the central section heightens the tension and enables the listener to clearly perceive the different sections of the composition.

'A COMPOSER TOO OFTEN DISRESPECTED BY THE SO-CALLED AVANT-GARDE'⁸

On 23 January 1995, Castiglioni started composing a 'neo-Romantic piece' for cello and piano, entitled *Schönberg demeure* (FIG. 2).⁹ Much of the information regarding this work, such as the title, the dedicatee, and the preparatory material, creates certain expectations about it. Yet these expectations will be ironically disappointed, since few, if any, elements make the piece distinctly neo-Romantic: rather, they reveal the composer's own distinctive personality and approach. The following discussion focuses on the most significant aspects of the piece. (An initial point of interest concerns the title page of the manuscript, where the composer transcribes his name as 'Nicolò'; it is, however, known that 'at certain periods Castiglioni preferred this spelling of his name').¹⁰

Firstly, Castiglioni's title intertwines two well-known writings by Pierre Boulez: *Schönberg Is Dead* (1952)¹¹ and *Stravinsky demeure* (1951)¹². In a 1995 interview, Castiglioni directly quotes both texts:

As regards Stravinsky, a slightly artificial situation has been created in avant-garde circles (for example at Darmstadt), because composers like Henri Pousseur – a very fine composer – used a sort of catchphrase vis-à-vis the Stravinsky-Webern relationship, i.e. the obligatory 'Viva Stravinsky!' but also 'Schönberg is Dead' (to quote the unhappy title of Boulez's famous essay). Stravinsky Remains, but Schönberg is Dead: these were the partisan slogans which in my view ended up distorting even the message of Stravinsky.¹³

With *Schönberg demeure*, Castiglioni seems to offer, some forty years later, an ideal and private response to Boulez's polemical writing of 1952, the work having remained unpublished: although Schönberg may no longer be alive, his legacy endures and continues to inspire. The choice to evoke the content of two of Boulez's most renowned writings from his period as a combative essayist invites further reflection. The interviewee appears to maintain a historically outdated perspective, since, after the aforementioned vibrant early writings, Boulez's thinking (as well as Pousseur's) continued to evolve over the following decades, producing further

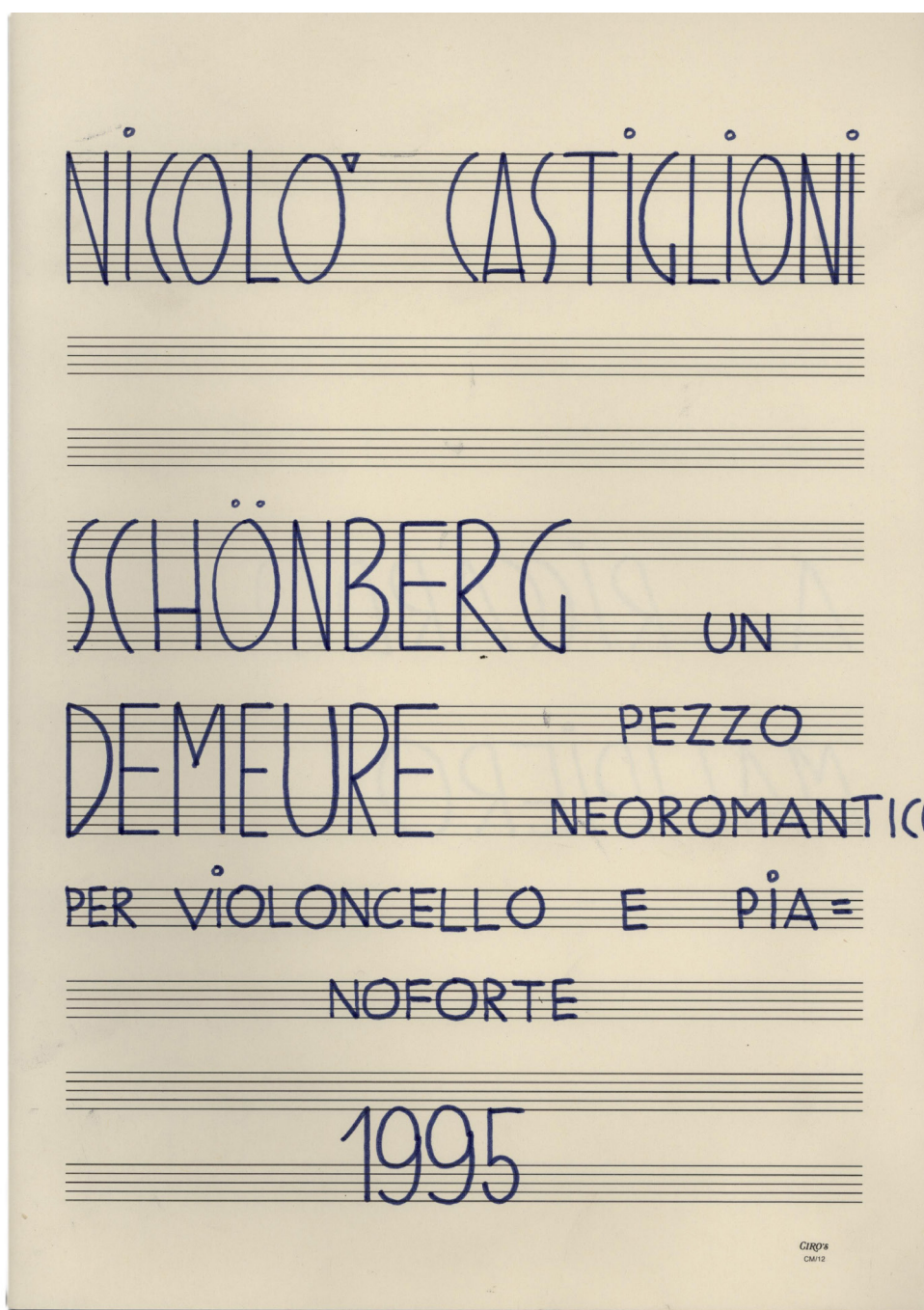


FIGURE 2. Niccolò Castiglioni, *Schönberg demeure*, autograph manuscript. FGC, Castiglioni Collection.

contributions on Schönberg, Stravinsky, and Webern. It is difficult to determine whether Castiglioni simply revisited, with an ironic attitude, the titles of the two renowned essays by Boulez for his own musical composition, or whether he was out of touch with recent musical criticism. This is not the appropriate venue to address this issue, as it would divert from the objectives of the article, and, moreover, the selected sources do not shed light on the matter.¹⁴ (Nevertheless, it is known that Castiglioni had read at least one other later writing by Boulez, as he recommended *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*¹⁵ to interested readers, describing it as a 'clear and straightforward' text).¹⁶

Schönberg demeure is dedicated to Riccardo Malipiero, one of the twentieth-century Italian composers most closely associated with dodecaphony. Moreover, the autograph manuscript includes preparatory tone rows. Taken together, these elements seem to leave little doubt about the aspects of Schönberg's output that Castiglioni intends to celebrate. Why, then, does he call his piece 'neo-Romantic'? Throughout the work, there are no themes, melodic gestures, or stylistic features that evoke a Romantic idiom. Should this designation therefore be understood as an ironic or poetic statement?

As noted above, the piece remained unpublished; this circumstance may support the hypothesis that Castiglioni conceived it as a private response to Boulez and as a personal reflection on the aesthetic issues of that period. At the same time, several features suggest that Castiglioni regarded the work as a sketch rather than a finished composition. Firstly, five of the six fragments lack both tempo and metronome markings. Secondly, dynamic and expressive indications are extremely sparse: the first movement is the only one with several such details, while the fifth contains only a few indications in its final bars, all assigned to the piano. Finally, the last movement presents distinctive characteristics and appears to have been composed at a later stage than the remaining fragments. The sixth movement incorporates two musical quotations, which Castiglioni wrote in colored marker rather than pencil, as he had done in the preceding fragments. In addition, the writing style looks completely different from that of the previous movements and makes this part appear as an appendix to the work, even if it contains a quotation by Schönberg that helps to understand the whole work. Finally, the fact that the composer does not include it among the 'expressive pieces' may indicate that Castiglioni ultimately decided not to preserve it as a representative work.

We shall now examine the structure of the piece and the interaction between the two instruments. The work consists of six short movements, which combine both shared and contrasting features. The first five movements are newly composed, whereas the final movement is constructed as a collage of two musical quotations (TBL. 2).

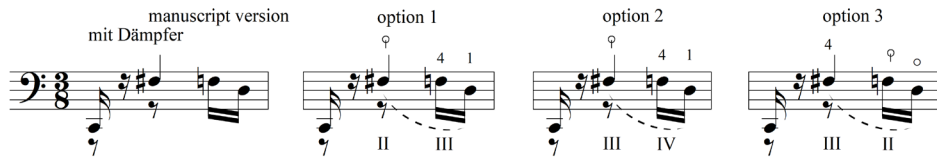
Movement	Bars	Tempo indication	Main musical features
1	20	$\frac{3}{4}$ [changes to $\frac{4}{4}$ only in b. 4]	total chromatic
2	19		dodecaphony
3	21	$\frac{3}{4}$	total chromatic
4	9		
5	23	$\frac{3}{8}$	dodecaphony
6	6	$\frac{3}{4}$	other authors' quotations

TABLE 2. Main features of the movements in *Schönberg demeure*.

This takes us back to the poetic statements quoted at the beginning of this article, which referred to a conceptual return to the Schönbergian tradition. In fact, the six fragments appear highly concise and sharply characterised in stylistic and expressive terms; these two aspects clearly recall Webern's early output, in which only a few bars can evoke different atmospheres with remarkable concision and effectiveness. The composer strictly controls the twelve pitch classes in two main ways: through dodecaphony or through aggregate completion, that is, by employing all twelve pitch classes without subjecting them to serial ordering.

As is well known, Castiglioni was an excellent pianist and his output of piano music has been constant and varied throughout his career;¹⁷ therefore, the piano part of *Schönberg demeure* is idiomatic and requires an expert musician. (For example, movement three presents a rapid and mechanical articulation and before the ending of the fifth fragment, there is a typical piano gesture, where both hands lightly reach the extreme registers starting from the middle of the keyboard). The uniqueness of *Schönberg demeure* derives from the fact that, according to existing catalogues¹⁸ and lists of published works, it is the only composition for cello and piano by Castiglioni; moreover, it had remained unknown until now. The composer sometimes uses the cello idiomatically, especially in lyrical passages that, at first glance, seem to justify the term 'neo-Romantic' in the title – for example, the central section of the second movement, the entire third fragment, the ending of the fourth and the quotation from Schönberg's Op. 11 in the last one. Generally, the cello part does not present particular difficulties or experimental attitudes; rather, dramatic gestures can be found in single parts or in strict dialogues between it and the piano (like in the fifth movement). The beginning of the first piece is quite evident: the cello plays a descending chromatic scale from C to G#, but Castiglioni transforms the semitones into major seventh intervals, so the cello rapidly covers four octaves (C₁–B₁–B₂–A₃–G₄). Movement five presents

an interesting feature that, at first glance, may seem unplayable; during the composition, the first bar is repeated twice, in b. 6 and b. 11, and in its last part the two semiquavers (F2–D2) must be played together with the previous crotchet F#2. There may be three ways to play this passage, all proposed in EXAMPLE 2; they all present uncomfortable positions and require expert cellists with a big left hand. The third proposal, even if it is the most uncomfortable, is theoretically achievable and preferable, considering that, in the end, it permits the second string to be played open, giving resonance to the sound despite the mute. In any case, the fact that the passage opens with C1 (the fourth open string), permits the player to have enough time to get prepared. It may also mean that the piece should not be fast, either.



EXAMPLE 2. *Schönberg demeure*, fifth movement. Fingering proposals for the passage at bb. 1, 6 and 11. Transcription from the autograph manuscript. FGC, Castiglioni Collection.

On the back of the page with the draft of movement one, we find the preparatory tone rows. As in the case of *Sette*, Castiglioni does not list the different transpositions of the row in chromatically ascending order, but in such a way that the first pitch classes of the transposed rows, read from top to bottom, form the prime form itself. However, like in the other work, the composer does not use much of the pre-compositional material, but only a very small portion of it.

The second and the fifth movement are based on the first row; in the second piece, we can find the prime form (bb. 1–2), its inversion (bb. 3–4), and the retrograde version of the prime form (bb. 5–6) and of the inversion (bb. 7–8). After a pause, a new section begins that appears unrelated to dodecaphony: the cello repeats its lyrical line in the high register for four bars, while the piano mainly creates major-seventh sonorities. This suggests that Castiglioni intended to divide the piece into two parts: in the first, dodecaphony plays a primary role, whereas in the second it is set aside in favour of harmonic results and expression.

Movement five is a little stricter in dodecaphonic terms, even if the composer uses less material than the second piece to portray a more playful atmosphere. This time, only the prime form of row 1 is considered and, after a complete exposition by the cello (bb. 1–5), Castiglioni fragments it through a joking dialogue between the two instruments. From bar 6, the piano plays and its interventions ‘disturb’ the dodecaphonic part in order to interact during long notes, during pauses or to

create dissonances, as in bar 10 (piano: A–B $\flat$ together; cello: B and G $\sharp$, ending the row). From the second repetition of the dodecaphonic line, the cello and the piano complete each other in its exposition: at bb. 13–15 the piano continues the row while the cello plays rapid demisemiquavers and, again, in the final bar they create a great dissonance (cello: A; piano: B $\flat$ –B and a G that should be $\sharp$ in order to complete the row: probably, Castiglioni forgot to add the accidental). During the final exposition of the line, at b. 17, the piano solo plays the dramatic gesture mentioned before, where two demisemiquaver sextuplets and a septuplet permit the pianist to reach the extreme registers of the keyboard (EX. 3). Both hands move by semitones: the first septuplet follows a chromatic progression, whereas the other two groups contain several different intervals. The right hand outlines minor and major thirds, while the left hand mainly presents minor thirds, together with a major second, a perfect fourth, and a major third. Once again, this gesture may suggest that Castiglioni initially seeks to control all twelve pitch classes, but then deliberately abandons this procedure in favour of a freer treatment of intervallic material.



EXAMPLE 3. *Schönberg demeure*, fifth movement, b. 17. FGC, Castiglioni Collection.

The remaining movements – except for the sixth, which stands apart from the others – show both Castiglioni's will to play with speculative material and freedom from rigid schemes. For example, at the beginning of the first movement, both instruments present all twelve notes of the chromatic scale. However, in b. 3, when the cello completes the aggregate with the remaining pitches, the piano repeats notes already heard. A vertical analysis of the resulting chords reveals that the emphasis is not on twelve-tone completion itself, but on the creation of dissonant sonorities, especially major sevenths. Again, in the last two bars, the piano alone plays all twelve tones, but the attention should focus on the right hand, which plays four descending major thirds with a minor third interval among them. As in the case of *Sette* analysed before, Castiglioni suggests tonality with consonant sounds: in this example, a sort of diminished seventh. From bb. 9 to 13, the cello

plays a *crescendo* fragment that repeats *diminuendo* in the following five bars; the instrument always plays crotchet quintuplets: simple permutations of C#, D, E, F, G and a mobile F#. Once more, there is a free evocation of serial procedures. The fourth fragment has similarities with the first one, even if it is the shortest among the original pieces. In this case, too, Castiglioni controls every tone at the beginning and at bar 7; in the end, for the first time he gives artificial harmonics to the cello.

As mentioned above, the third movement is the most mechanical and the hardest for the pianist; in this case, too, there is Castiglioni's will to dominate all tones of the chromatic scale, even if its understanding is not immediate. The piano part presents constant semiquaver quintuplets: this may suggest a fast tempo; analysing the quintuplets, we find out that Castiglioni structures a sequence of forty-eight notes (EX. 4) that keeps repeating throughout the fragment, even if the seventh presentation is incomplete. The number forty-eight is unlikely to be accidental and seems to evoke dodecaphonic practice; however, an analysis of the sequence of pitches does not support this interpretation: the sequence contains repeated pitches and, most importantly, includes only nine of the twelve pitch classes. Considering the cello part, it keeps playing three notes: A, B and C, i.e. the missing ones; thus, both parts control together all twelve tones of the chromatic scale. The cello plays in the high register, which is particularly lyrical, even muted; the rhythmic scheme given to the cello is free, too: the composer does not play with combinatorial possibilities of the three notes but tries to give variety even if some figures recur. For example, Castiglioni does not exploit the possibility of combining A, B, and C without repetitions within a single bar. The following scheme can be found in these bars: b. 1 (C–B–A); b. 4 (C–A–B); b. 13 (A–B–C); b. 15 (B–C–A); b. 17 (B–A–C); b. 19 (B–C–A); b. 20 (C–B–A). The A–C–B combination is missing. Once again, the composer does not seem inclined to employ overt serial procedures. The piano sequence is not always repeated in the same way: with each repetition the starting note shifts forward by one position, appearing as the second note in the first repetition (b. 4), as the third note (b. 7), as the fourth note (b. 10) and as the last note (b. 13). From bar 16, the sequence returns to its original form, but displaced by a crotchet; the repetition (b. 19) is incomplete and breaks off abruptly at the forty-first note. Apart from the clarity of the speculative



EXAMPLE 4. *Schönberg demeure*, third movement, piano part. Transcription from the autograph manuscript. FGC, Castiglioni Collection.

process, this means that the passage will sound differently each time, even if the listener has no awareness of it.

The epigrammatic ending of *Schönberg demeure* is both a clarification of the work as a whole and a baffling surprise. As mentioned above, it consists of two musical quotations written in a style markedly different from that of the preceding fragments. It remains uncertain whether Castiglioni conceived these quotations as an integral part of the composition from the outset or introduced them at a later stage. In either case, their presence fundamentally alters the perception of the work: the quotation from Schönberg provides a retrospective key to its meaning, revealing the deeper connection between the composition and Schönberg's legacy, while the first quotation introduces an unexpected and humorous element that resists a straightforward interpretation.

Already in the first quotation, Castiglioni clearly identifies its source: a note on the right-hand side of the score indicates that it comes from *Ciuffettino*, a children's opera composed by the organist and composer Luigi Ferrari Trecate.¹⁹ In fact, the title is incorrect: the work is actually *Ciottolino*, premiered in 1922. Castiglioni quotes two verses sung by Ciottolino's grandfather: 'As one plus two equals three | Ciottolino is made king'.²⁰ (Here too, the text is slightly altered).²¹ How should this quotation be interpreted? It seems to function as a deliberate contrast with the preceding movements, dissolving their serious tone through an unexpected humorous gesture.

After the quotation from Ferrari Trecate, Castiglioni returns to Schönberg, although the manuscript evidence suggests that he initially worked in the opposite order and only later reversed the sequence of the two quotations in the final version (see the numbers written on the left-hand side in FIG. 3). As mentioned before, the presence of dodecaphony, the dedication to Riccardo Malipiero and the title itself seem to indicate clearly which aspect of Schönberg's legacy Castiglioni wishes to evoke. However, he does not quote a serial work; instead, he assigns the opening notes of *Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 (1909), to the cello. This choice is particularly significant, as Castiglioni had a particular affection for this composition:

one should look at the early piano works of Schönberg, such as Op. 11 (which in my view is his pianistic masterpiece) to study its harmonic aspect – not to see if there are foreshadowings of serialism, which doesn't interest me – but rather the harmonic thickness, the physicality of sound.²²

This quotation is particularly helpful in understanding the movements of *Schönberg demeure* in which dodecaphony is not employed: here Castiglioni seems specially concern with 'the harmonic thickness, the physicality of sound', achieved through chords based on major sevenths and other dissonant sonorities. Return-

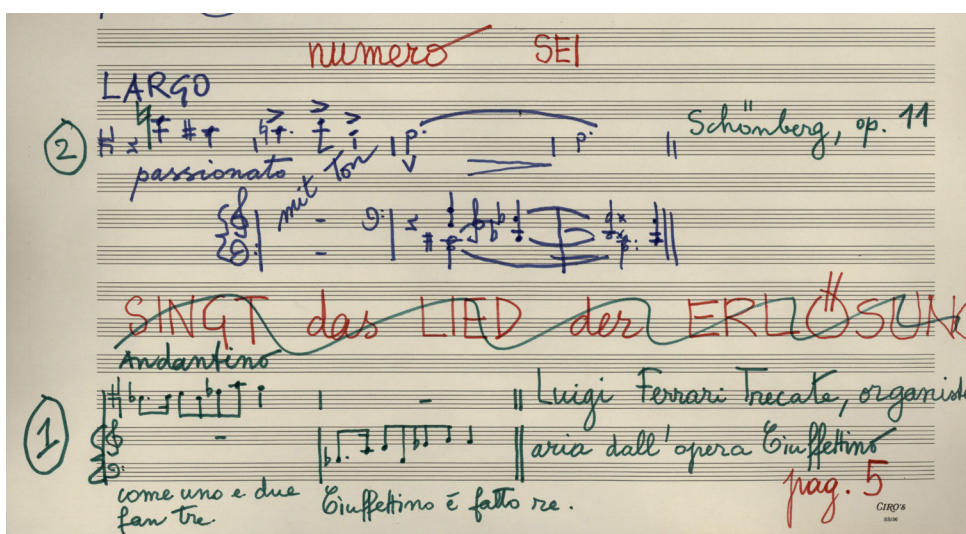


FIGURE 3. *Schönberg demeure*, autograph manuscript, last page. FGC, Castiglioni Collection.

ing to the poetic intentions mentioned above, the composer thus looks back to the very roots of the Schönbergian tradition, namely the emergence of atonality, rather than to the avant-garde image of Webern's serialism that had been constructed and interpreted by later generations of composers.

Between the two quotations, the composer had also written another phrase that he later deleted: 'SINGT das LIED der ERLÖSUNG' [Sing the Song of Redemption]. As with the title *Schönberg demeure*, Castiglioni appears to combine two different conceptual references in a humorous way, although the mechanism is less immediately recognisable here. In fact, the phrase seems to refer to a Christian devotional book by Andrea Schwarz, *Singt das Lied der Erlösung*, which was published in the early 1990s and which Castiglioni may have encountered at the time.²³ Castiglioni had a strong Christian spirituality and in those years he had set to music religious verses from German mystics and poets like Angelus Silesius (born Johann Scheffler, 1624–1677),²⁴ Gerhard Teerstegen (1697–1769),²⁵ Joseph Victor von Scheffel (1826–1886),²⁶ Georg Trakl (1887–1914)²⁷ and Edith Stein (1891–1942).²⁸ Later, during his last year of life, he would also use German translations from Psalm 45, passages from the Bible and from the Song of Solomon;²⁹ therefore, it is highly likely that he read that book. In this respect, this third quotation may be interpreted as a humorous invitation to sing a childish melody after the seriousness of the preceding movements.

CONCLUSIONS

In his last years, Niccolò Castiglioni worked with twelve-tone pre-compositional material and explicitly declared a poetic affinity with Arnold Schönberg's school among the three principal 'tracks' he identified. The analysis of scores and sketches has nevertheless shown that these materials were not employed as a strict compositional system. Rather, Castiglioni used them as a starting point for a freer exploration of musical possibilities, combining twelve-tone procedures with other principles of organisation and with a strong concern for harmonic and timbral results.

The accuracy of the preparation of the rows raises a fundamental question: why did Castiglioni devote such attention to a method that he would subsequently employ so freely? The interpretation proposed here is that dodecaphony and serial principles functioned less as techniques to be applied systematically than as historical, poetic, and critical references.

At the same time, one of the most interesting aspects to emerge is Castiglioni's research into the creation of sound, his attention to timbral results, to the nature of chords, and to other musical vocabularies. Even these brief examples from his late works testify to his care for details and to the thoughtful reflection behind his choices. In this respect, Castiglioni can be viewed as a musical master who is still able to teach, inspire, and surprise.

Notes

- * This article draws on research conducted during a residential fellowship at the Centro ‘Vittore Branca’, during which I consulted the Niccolò Castiglioni Collection at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. I am grateful to Gianmario Borio (Director of the Institute of Music) for helpful discussions, to Francisco Rocca (Curator of Musical Archives) for his assistance in identifying and consulting relevant materials, to Marco Uvietta for his comments on earlier drafts, and to the staff of the ‘Nuova Manica Lunga’ library for their support and for facilitating access to the documents.
- 1 Richard Causton, ‘Niccolò Castiglioni in interview, 1995 by Luigi Pestalozza’, *Tempo*, 63/248, 2009, pp. 12–20: 15–16.
 - 2 The two letters to Castaldi are transcribed in Alfonso Alberti, *La rosa è senza perché: Niccolò Castiglioni, 1966–1996*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2012, pp. 190–191. This book is a valid introduction to the composer’s mature output and to his biography. See also: Alfonso Alberti, *Castiglioni, Niccolò*, in: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2019: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-castiglioni_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-castiglioni_(Dizionario-Biografico)) (accessed 1 September 2025).
 - 3 Alberti, *La rosa è senza perché*, p. 198; partially translated in Causton, ‘Niccolò Castiglioni in interview’, p. 16.
 - 4 Pietro Cavallotti, ‘Bruchstücke der Webern-Rezeption. Die unveröffentlichten analysen von Pierre Boulez’, in: *Ereignis und Exegese. Musikalische Interpretation. Interpretation der Musik. Festschrift für Hermann Danuser zum 65. Geburtstag*, hrsg. von Camilla Bork, Tobias Robert Klein, Burkhard Meischein, Andreas Meyer und Tobias Plebuch, Schliengen: Argus, 2011, pp. 695–707.
 - 5 Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (FGC), Castiglioni Collection, dossier 47.8; second movement at pp. 25–28.
 - 6 Causton, ‘Niccolò Castiglioni in interview’, p. 17.
 - 7 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Sonatina*, for piano, Milano: Ricordi, 1984, pp. 1–6.
 - 8 ‘[...] Schönberg: un compositore al quale a mio avviso si è troppo spesso, da parte della cosiddetta avanguardia, mancato di rispetto!’ Castiglioni’s presentation of *Romanze* for string quartet (1990), in: *Niccolò Castiglioni: 1932–1996*, Milano: Ricordi, 2005, p. 50.
 - 9 FGC, Castiglioni Collection, dossier 47.1.
 - 10 Alberti, *La rosa è senza perché*, p. 182n.
 - 11 Pierre Boulez, ‘Schönberg Is Dead’, *The Score*, May 1952.
 - 12 Pierre Boulez, *Stravinsky demeure*, in: *Musique russe, études réunies par Pierre Souvchinsky*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953, pp. 151–224.
 - 13 Causton, ‘Niccolò Castiglioni in interview’, p. 18.
 - 14 For Castiglioni’s perspective on Webern, see the opening section of the interview with Pestalozza: Causton, ‘Niccolò Castiglioni in interview’, pp. 13–14.
 - 15 Pierre Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd’hui*, Genève: Gonthier, 1963. In Italy, the volume was published sixteen years later as *Pensare la musica d’oggi*, trad. Luigi Bonino Savarino, Torino: Einaudi, 1979.
 - 16 Alberti, *La rosa è senza perché*, p. 96.
 - 17 In 2022 and 2024, the Grand Piano label and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini made a significant contribution to the dissemination of Castiglioni’s piano output, with two recordings of both published and unpublished works. For details of the two albums, see <https://grandpianorecords.com/Album/AlbumDetails/GP862> and <https://grandpianorecords.com/Album/AlbumDetails/GP863> (accessed 1 September 2025).
 - 18 Alfonso Alberti, *Niccolò Castiglioni: 1950–1966*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2006, pp. 269–276; Alberti, *La rosa è senza perché*, pp. 263–277.
 - 19 ‘Luigi Ferrari Trecate, organista | aria dall’opera Ciuffettino’.
 - 20 ‘Come uno e due fa tre | Ciottolino è fatto re’. Giovacchino Forzano, *Ciottolino*, fiaba musicale in due atti e tre quadri per la gioventù /

- musical fairy tale in two acts and three scenes for youth, music by Luigi Ferrari Trecate, Bologna: Bongiovanni, 1923, p. 10. The libretto is available at the following link: <http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/viewschedatwbca.asp?path=/cmbm/images/ripro/libretti/02/Lo02639/> (accessed: 1 September 2025).
- 21 'Come uno e due fan tre'.
- 22 Causton, 'Niccolò Castiglioni in interview', p. 17.
- 23 Andrea Schwarz, *Singt das Lied der Erlösung: mit Gott das Leben feiern*, Freiburg im Breisgau–Basel–Wien: Herde, 1990.
- 24 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Cantus planus*, for two sopranos and seven instruments, Milano: Ricordi, 1994 (composed in 1990–1991); Niccolò Castiglioni, *Les harmonies*, for orchestra and light soprano, Milano: Ricordi, 1994.
- 25 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Terzina*, for contralto and eight instruments, Milano: Ricordi, 1993 (the composer later also published a version for soprano and eight instruments).
- 26 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Abendlied*, for soprano and small orchestra, Milano: Ricordi, 1995.
- 27 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Trostlied*, for soprano and string quartet, Milano: Ricordi, 1994.
- 28 Niccolò Castiglioni, *Liedlein*, for children's choir and instruments, Milano: Ricordi, 1992. A later version for female choir and small orchestra was also published by the composer.
- 29 See the unpublished sketches from 1996, which are based on texts from the *First Book of Samuel*, the *Song of Solomon*, *Psalms 45*, and the *Book of Judith*. FGC, Castiglioni Collection, dossier 47.10.1.