

### **Marino Zuccheri & Friends**

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“Let’s call each other by name and forget titles – otherwise it becomes too complicated.” With these words, spoken in dialect by Bruno Maderna to Marino Zuccheri in 1955, a little Venetian Republic was inaugurated in the heart of Milan. A former wartime wireless operator turned resistance fighter, Zuccheri had started work at the Italian national broadcaster Radio Audizioni Italiane (RAI) five years earlier. Initially working in broadcasting, in 1955 he moved to the recently established Studio di Fonologia, where he soon found himself deep in a heady atmosphere of cigarette smoke, magnetic tape, bawdy humour, avant garde music and Venetian dialect. “Only [Luciano] Berio comes from Liguria,” another resident Venetian Luigi Nono would rue (in dialect, of course). One

imagines the composer of *Thema (Omaggio A Joyce)* in a perpetual struggle to keep up with the impenetrable banter of his colleagues from the northeast.

*Marino Zuccheri & Friends* is an essential collection of documents relating to the RAI Studio – birthplace of such masterpieces of 20th century electronic music as Berio’s *Thema*, Maderna’s *Notturmo*, Nono’s *La Fabbrica Illuminata*, as well as John Cage’s *Fontana Mix*, Henri Pousseur’s *Scambi*, and many others – and, in particular, to the studio’s principal technician and “true soul”, Marino Zuccheri. It was Zuccheri who, from 1955 to the studio’s closure in 1983, actually manned the controls, spliced the tape and tweaked the knobs on all those works – hence Umberto Eco’s playful testimony (included here) that Zuccheri was in fact one of the “most extensively performed” electronic music composers in the world.

Back in the summer of 2016, I visited Milan’s Museum of Musical Instruments

inside the battlements of the city’s Castello Sforzesco to see a temporary exhibition of documents, photographs and equipment from the Studio di Fonologia. In a handful of large display cases, tucked at the back of the museum, away from the ophicleids and crumhorns, stood everything from the original bank of nine oscillators to the old studio ashtray. The present volume, published by Die Schachtel, gathers many of the documents and research materials relating to that show. But it is more than just an exhibition catalogue. *Marino Zuccheri & Friends* includes invaluable testimony from its subject’s friends, relatives and colleagues, reproductions of Zuccheri’s own Miró-esque graphic works, and even diagrams of all the studio’s equipment, painstakingly drawn out on graph paper by John Cage while he was there producing *Fontana Mix*.

*Marino Zuccheri & Friends* makes an important contribution to a burgeoning

historical awareness of the significance not just of great artists and composers but also particular locales, the people who worked there and the working culture they nurtured, alongside Sanne Krogh Groth’s book on EMS in Stockholm, David Bernstein’s book on the San Francisco Tape Music Center, and Georgina Born’s classic ethnographic take on IRCAM in *Rationalizing Culture*. But what comes across most strongly in the present volume is the warmth and camaraderie fostered by Zuccheri’s presence at the Rai Studio. Whether it’s Nuria Schönberg Nono reminiscing about summer boat trips with Zuccheri and her husband ‘Gigi’ (Luigi Nono) or John Cage recalling late night games of bocchette (a cueless, pocketless variant of billiards), we get a sense of the Studio di Fonologia as an enchanted, almost magical place, with Zuccheri – in Eco’s words – its “magician”.

Robert Barry