

THE SWISS CLARINET ORCHESTRA

by Susanna Frasnelli

After the success of the 2018 Clarinet Day in Lugano, Switzerland, the Swiss Clarinet Society (SCS) commissioned Marco Santilli to conduct the newly formed Swiss Clarinet Orchestra with the intention of bringing together instrumentalists from all over Switzerland. The SCS is relatively small, as Switzerland is a small country. There are around 170 active members. The orchestra currently consists of about 45 players. The first performance of the group was held on November 2, 2019, at the Bern Conservatory during the annual symposium of the SCS. Works performed at this concert, including selections by Bernard Hermann and Clare Fischer, can be heard in videos posted by the orchestra on YouTube.

Marco Santilli was born in Locarno (Switzerland) and grew up in Giornico. After receiving diplomas for orchestra, teaching and clarinet soloist (Premier Prix de Virtuosit  at the Conservatories of Zurich and Lausanne), he devoted himself to improvisation and composition by mixing various influences for a style that escapes classifications. He has published six albums under his name and has performed in Europe, Asia and

the U.S. As well as working as arranger of the cycle "Geschichten erz hlen mit Musik" at the Zurich Opera House, he is also the conductor of the newly founded Swiss Clarinet Orchestra and is a member of the SUIA Distribution and Works Committee. On November 26, 2019, Santilli was interviewed in Zurich by Susanna Frasnelli about his role with this new group.

SUSANNA FRASNELLI: *Marco, it's been a while since we have seen you conducting. What prompted you to hold the baton again?*

MARCO SANTILLI: After the 2018 Clarinet Day in Lugano, where I conducted a clarinet choir from across Switzerland and a clarinet big band for the first time, the committee of the SCS decided to entrust me with the newly formed orchestra. I missed this dimension, thanks to which I always discover a hidden side of me.

SF: *Do you have any role models?*

MS: Not exactly. In my opinion, it is favorable for a director to be also an instrumentalist, arranger and composer to better interpret a score and put themselves in the shoes of the individual musicians. In this sense, I

have great respect for Andr  Previn, Duke Ellington and Leonard Bernstein.

SF: *Who are the participants in the Swiss Clarinet Orchestra?*

MS: There are 45 clarinetists between 17 and 87 years old, from the various Swiss linguistic regions, of various levels and with different musical experiences, 75% amateurs and 25% professionals. They have in common the fact of being motivated, eager to learn and well prepared.

SF: *What is the sound of a clarinet choir for you?*

MS: You can get more than one sound! Citing the works we performed, in *Koyanisqatsi* by Philip Glass, the sound comes close to that of the original organ. In the *Prelude from Psycho* by Bernard Hermann (originally for strings), the low-medium registers seems to sound like violas and cellos. In other pieces, when the alto and bass clarinets play in the high register, you get closer to the brass. It is important to have a wide palette of colors, especially in a group of instruments of the same family.

SF: *For the first concert you weren't alone on stage...*

MS: I happened to hear the talented Bernese beatboxer Marzel (Marcel Zysset) live and it was immediately clear to me! For a couple of tunes, he was our special guest, giving us a very important rhythmic contribution.

SF: *The rehearsals are held in three languages. How come?*

MS: There is a lot of talk about multilingualism in Switzerland, a wealth that is not sufficiently valued. Rehearsing in German, French and Italian, I want to give a concrete sign. After all, we are still an orchestra with people from all over the nation. They seem to appreciate the idea.

Inquiries from players who would like to join the Swiss Clarinet Orchestra may be addressed to: marco.santilli@me.com



Marco Santilli conducts the Swiss Clarinet Orchestra