



***Mondo - Interview with Maestro Alberto Firrincieli, a lifetime dedicated to Music, a bridge between different worlds and cultures***

**Dal nostro corrispondente a Bangkok - 09 giu 2022 (Prima Notizia 24) He recently received the prestigious honor of Cavaliere**

**della Stella d'Italia for his work in uniting Italian and Thai youth through one of his creations: the Ityo - Italian-Thai Youth Orchestra.**

A lean physique, passionate about martial arts, a face marked by sunny disposition, veiled by a certain shyness. A great personality devoted to the study and teaching of Music, lavished lavishly, with special attention to the world of the young and very young. A vast experience looking East, Music that crosses borders and connects different peoples and cultures. Can you give us a quick rundown on your background in terms of studies and teaching experiences? I approached piano study at the age of 8. Without any pretense, I started taking music lessons because my grandmother played piano, and she hoped that some of us grandchildren would go on to a musical career. It was my turn; my cousins chose other paths. I liked music from the very beginning, and from a very young age I devoted myself to the piano practically every day. So, as was the custom at the time, my teacher decided to have me take exams at the conservatory, and at the age of 20 I graduated in piano, under Sebastiano Cannizzo, a pianist and teacher from Ragusa, thanks to whom I undertook the study of music professionally. Meanwhile, at the end of high school (I attended the High School Liceo Scientifico), having arrived at 18, it was a matter of choosing which university to attend. For a while I was undecided between engineering and musicology. Science and computer science were (and are) my other great passion, so it was a matter of choosing whether to devote myself to music and pursue computer science as a hobby or the other way around. I chose the faculty of musicology based in Cremona, and graduated with Albert Dunning, a Dutch academic whom I always remember very fondly. In Italy, university and conservatory were then separate courses of study, and consequently it was possible to attend both at the same time, unlike today. So while on the one hand I spent my time studying in books for university exams, on the other hand I devoted myself to studying piano. After finishing the piano diploma, on the one hand I realized that my musical knowledge of some historical periods was still very limited and lacking, on the other hand my curiosity and desire to learn pushed me to study something else, so I enrolled in harpsichord courses with Maria Pia Jacoboni first and Francesco Barone later, electronic music with Francesco Giorni and Marco Biscarini, and composition with Pieralberto Cattaneo and Giorgio Tosi. After a few (many actually) years, I reached the related diplomas. The last one, that of composition, at about age 30, under the guidance of Giorgio Tosi, a profound teacher and composer, whose lessons were from time to time musical and human discoveries. I was

always fortunate to study with good and qualified teachers. Even today I often recall with my students my lessons with these teachers. All of them were extremely qualified people and, above all, of remarkable human depth. Yet I still felt that something was missing in my training. As sometimes happens, you meet a person who manages to shake your existence to its foundations. I met teacher Christa Bützberger, who allowed me to put some "order" in my studies and, above all, allowed me to understand that music, beyond legitimate personal opinions, has a sense (understood as meaning), a beginning, an unfolding and an end. (All of which were actually already anticipated by other teachers, but I was probably the one who was not yet able to grasp them.) The concept that soon became a constant in my activity as a teacher and performer is quickly stated: within a composition there is a pathway that can be explained and understood by all, with the appropriate knowledge. Basically, music can be "explained," understood and comprehended, and on the contrary even played without the slightest knowledge of what one is doing. Exactly like a language. This I believe is the most important teaching I have received and strive to pass on to my students. As teaching experiences, although I have taught piano in private schools in Italy, I think my most important teaching experiences are abroad. For almost 13 years I have been teaching at the music entrepreneurship department of Assumption University in Thailand, and for about 12 years at a Yamaha school, and I regularly give masterclasses and workshops in several Asian countries. For the past two years in "online mode," but fortunately we are at the end of this period. How come and by what ways did you then decide to live in Thailand? Actually it was not my choice, but a proposal from my wife. When I was in Italy I met and got engaged to a Taiwanese girl who later became my wife. She was the one who proposed that I go and work in Asia. Having studied in Italy, she told me, it might be easier to find work in Asia. We were already familiar with Thailand, we had been there as tourists and liked it very much, so it was our first choice, and we were lucky. We contacted various international universities and schools, and I was hired by Assumption University (where I still work), by then-department head Jacopo Gianninoto, my close friend and mentor, as well as a fine musician and author of several world-class cultural and artistic projects. You founded an orchestra composed of young and very young Italians and Thais, part of the merits through which you have won prestigious honors even from the Italian Embassy in Bangkok. Can you tell us about that? This is probably my most ambitious project, but not the only one. This orchestra was born in 2018 thanks to the support of Italian Ambassador H.E. Saverio Nisio, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the signing of treaties between the then Kingdom of Italy and Kingdom of Siam. This is a young orchestra-now we are already in the second generation-composed mainly of strings, which from time to time have the opportunity to collaborate with internationally renowned Italian soloists and conductors. At the moment we had one or two performances a year, and then a forced break because of the virus. We resumed in March, thanks to the support of Ambassador H.E. Lorenzo Galanti, and hope to intensify our activity in future years. Apart from the orchestra, another big and important project of mine in Thailand is the Bangkok International Piano Festival, thanks to which in the last 10 years or so I have invited 7 or 8 international artists every year, a good part of them Italians. This festival also came about thanks to the generous support of the director of the Yamaha school at which I work, Mr. Tanyalux Luanghvisut (without whom to tell the truth many

of my projects could not have come to fruition) and also thanks to collaboration with several embassies in Thailand. Thanks to these projects, along with my teaching and concert activity (often as a performer of Italian music) over the past 12-13 years, I received the honor of Knight of the Star of Italy. And almost simultaneously, I was appointed Assistant Professor in my university's department. Your experience in teaching provides an excellent observatory for interpreting Thai youth interested in learning to play an instrument in a planned and solid way. What can you tell us from this perspective? This I think is my best experience, in both human and professional terms. In general Thai youth, but more generally I would talk about Asian youth (at least the ones I am in contact with), starting from four- or five-year-old children, have always shown a lot of curiosity and keen interest in our music and in our art in general. Despite what one may believe, cultural diversity is not a problem at all, on the contrary. I am clearly talking about a first approach. With the right knowledge and awareness, my students are able to deal with classical repertoire and improvisation exactly like their Italian or European peers. What they need, and what is often lacking even in our youth, is teaching that provides criteria, on the basis of which one can then build and develop one's own creativity and uniqueness. To go into a little more detail and to make what I am saying a little more understandable: not a study of music based only on a mechanical and sterile reading of notes without any attention to the meaning of the music, but on the contrary, criteria that first explain how music works and its rules, and then deal with the reading of notes and all the various other aspects. No more or less like the study of a language. When you approach a language only by studying its pronunciation but ignoring its meaning, it will be impossible to speak it; at most you will be able to read it. But as will have happened to so many of you, if a person reads something in your language without understanding what is being read, you would notice perfectly well. I have been developing these concepts for more than a decade in my academic articles and in the conferences I attend, and I do not deny that I normally receive acclaim and stimulate questions that were previously ignored. What are your upcoming plans? First of all, to be able to return to a normal life. To be able to return to traveling for concerts, lectures, master classes, as I used to do until a couple of years ago. To also be able to resume organizing the Bangkok International Piano Festival by inviting artists from different countries. Also, to carry on the collaboration that has arisen in recent weeks with the iClassical Academy. For this academy, I have already made a series of 15 pedagogical videos on piano teaching-which will be followed by many more, explaining the most common mistakes that are often made while studying piano, and how an incorrect or ineffective method can only lead to wrong results and erroneous beliefs. Among other things, I am looking forward to returning to university life not only as a kind of examiner to which the online mode has unfortunately forced us, but by carrying out and promoting projects with students and teachers. As for the other projects in the pipeline, I prefer to wait for them to take hold, partly because these past two years have taught us that everything can change overnight and without warning.

*di Francesco Tortora Giovedì 09 Giugno 2022*