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Composer Fausto Romitelli. (Supplied photo)

Modern Music Man: Talea explores Fausto Romitelli at EMPAC

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TROY, N.Y. -- The Talea Ensemble's Alex Lipowski says the group's upcoming residency at RPI -- recording and performing the works of contemporary classical composer Fausto Romitelli -- is simply in keeping with the group's mission of supporting modern music by offering it for wider public consumption.

But, the New York City based musician admits, the sometimes-challenging, 1960s psychedelic rock influenced works by Romitelli's are a taste treat for musicians, as is working in the acoustically delicious concert hall at EMPAC.

The audience can join the feast Saturday, March 31, as the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Curtis R. Priem Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center presents the Talea Ensemble's "Music of Fausto Romitelli" -- and they can get a take-home portion a little later when the recording is released.

"The ensemble's attraction to the works is more from a perspective of wanting to represent an artist's music who we really believe in. Romitelli's voice is unique and fresh," Lipowski said in an email interview this week. "We enjoy challenging music and believe that the challenges inherent in the music create a special energy too. The fact that the works require extra practice and rehearsal is something we embrace because of our passion and dedication to supporting any kind of contemporary music. We don't think of it as a muscle building contest. Composers write what they want and it's our goal to bring it to life."

Composer Romitelli, according to supplied material, took the power of psychedelic rock and the sonic analysis techniques of the French spectral school and twisted them together to create a deformed, artificial sound world.

Romitelli was born in Gorizia, Italy in 1963. He first studied at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena, and later at the Scuola Civica in Milan. He continued his "investigations of sound" at

Ircam in Paris, and with the musicians of L'Itinéraire. He is credited with breaking down the barrier between art music and popular music. "An Index of Metals" (2003), a video-opera for soprano and ensemble, was Romitelli's final work. He died in 2004, after a long illness.

According to the Talea Ensemble's website, in music, the term "talea" (literally, "cutting" in Latin) refers to collections of repeating, cycling rhythmic patterns. Most often, these patterns are associated with the "ars nova" period of Medieval music in which new techniques of musical composition were emerging.

The Talea Ensemble has been called "... a crucial part the New York cultural ecosphere" by The New York Times, has given many important world premieres of new works by composers such as Pierre Boulez, Tristan Murail, Jason Eckardt, Pierluigi Billone, Hans Abrahamsen, Stefano Gervasoni, Marco Stroppa, and Romitelli.

Part of bringing Romitelli's music to life will be the ability to practice, record and perform the works over a several-day span starting next week.

"EMPAC has one of the finest acoustics of any venue in the world," Lipowski said. "It is a controlled environment, too which makes it ideal for recording. The project is under the best circumstances for performance and recording."

The Talea Ensemble will make world premiere recordings of five of Romitelli's works during their residency and will perform "Domeniche alla periferia dell'impero" (2000) for violin, cello, flute, clarinet; "La sabbia del tempo" (1991) for violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, bassoon, keyboard; "Amok Koma" (2001) for violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, piano, percussion, keyboard, live electronics; "Nell'alto dei giorni immobili" (1990) for violin, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, piano; "Blood on the floor, Painting 1986" (2000) for 2 violins, viola, cello, flute, clarinet, electric guitar, keyboard; and "Trash TV Trance" (2002) for electric guitar.

The ability to rehearse, record and perform in the same space is rare.

"Recording and presenting a concert, back-to-back, is a true luxury," Lipowski said. "The ensemble has recorded in similar situations, where we present a piece and then record it, but an opportunity to record a full-length CD of an entire concert's repertoire is rare. We are fortunate and grateful to EMPAC for all of its support to help us eternalize this music."

After the ensemble "internalizes" Romitelli, the audience at EMPAC will be able to share in the externalized pleasures of both the music and the venue.

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The "Music of Fausto Romitelli" will be presented March 31, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$18, \$13 for seniors. Park in the Rensselaer parking lot on College Avenue. For information call 518-276-3921 or visit empac.rpi.edu/events