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Vespers, Sicilian and otherwise

The CDs reviewed here form a conspectus of sacred music in early modern Italy. They range geographically from Venice and Lombardy to Sicily and temporally from the late 16th century to the end of the 17th. Stylistically, they cover the ground from simple villanella-style laude and Palestrinian counterpoint to recitative and sacred opera.

The revival of the Monteverdi 1610 Vespers in the mid-20th century established the concept of a composite liturgical reconstruction, represented here by **Claudio Monteverdi: Mariavesper** (Rondeau ROP7012/13, rec 2010, 93'). The performance, under the capable direction of Jörg Breiding, features a conglomeration of no fewer than five ensembles: Vox Werdensis, Himlische Cantorey, Knabenchor Hannover, Concerto Palatino and Musica Alta Ripa. The liturgical items provided in the 1610 print—opening response, psalms, hymn, a litany substitute, Magnificat, and small concertos as antiphon-substitutes—are completed by chant antiphons, here sung by a male choir, chanted readings and prayers (texts are given only in Latin and German translation). The chorus numbers about 45, with boy sopranos and altos, and the vocal solos are sung by mixed voices. Instrumental forces for doubling and ritornellos comprise a group of strings, recorders and continuo and a consort of cornets and sackbuts which provides some nice ornamentation. The result is a very satisfactory mainstream early music performance.

When is a Vespers not a Vespers? The liner notes of **Giovanni Paolo Cima: Vespero della Beata Virgine** (Pan Classics PC10316, issued 2015, 62'), performed here by Musica Fiorita under the direction of Daniela Doci, imply that this ranks as the 'other' 1610 Marian Vespers. Cima (c.1570–1630) was organist of an important church in Milan. The contents of the CD are extracted from his *Concerti ecclesiastici* (Milan, 1610), which comprises a

variety of sacred works in a fairly conservative style and more advanced instrumental pieces. The resulting selection is not a Marian Vespers but a series of chant antiphons for the Assumption followed by appropriate motets and instrumental canzonas. Taken without inflated claims, however, the programme makes sense. Some of the vocal execution is brilliant, the continuo realizations are interestingly varied and the instrumental performances, which include works by Giovanni Paolo's brother Andrea, are lively. (In all of the CDs under review the level of performance on such difficult instruments as the cornett is commendably high.)

Of the many treasures of St Mark's in Venice perhaps the greatest is the Pala d'oro, the immense golden retable of the high altar, which escaped the tenacious rapacity of Napoleon only because he could not believe it was real. Under the *Serenissima*, the Pala was uncovered on precisely designated occasions, and 'every time that the Pala door is opened, they are obliged to perform Vespers in two choirs, with psalms set for eight voices' (Bartolomeo Bonifacio, *Ceremoniale*). Bonifacio further specifies that the double-choir psalms be divided between a choir of four soloists and a second four-part ripieno choir. Far from being separated stereophonically, soloists and ripienists were jammed together in the 'tub' (*bigonzo*), the porphyry pulpit on the Epistle side of the rood screen, giving the *coup de grâce* to a lot of musical science fiction about polychoral performance in St Mark's.

Owing to this liturgical requirement, composers of St Mark's published no fewer than four collections of double-choir psalms in the 17th century. The last of these, Francesco Cavalli's *Vesperi à otto voci* of 1675, comprises psalms and a Magnificat for feasts of the Virgin Mary, for Sundays and for the uniquely Marcan *Vespero delle cinque laudate*. The Sunday psalms (the standard five of the Roman breviary plus eight others for occasional use) have been recorded by Coro Claudio Monteverdi di Crema and La Pifarescha under the direction of Bruno Gini as **Francesco Cavalli: Vespero delle Domeniche** (Dynamic CDS7714, rec 2014, 69'). The recording somewhat expands the original forces (none of the above information on performance in St Mark's is included in the liner notes). A second solo choir is added, as well as a second ripieno choir, employed in various combinations. The choirs are doubled by two ensembles of cornett plus three sackbuts (there are no independent instrumental parts), supported by (single) organ continuo. Like the Cima 'Vespers' the title is a misnomer. The Cavalli *Vespero* consists of 13 psalms that would never have been

performed together in the same service plus a concluding Magnificat, with none of the other items of a liturgical Vespers. I fear that anyone familiar with the brilliant concertato of Cavalli's 1656 *Musiche sacrae* will be disappointed here by what is essentially high-class liturgical *Gebrauchsmusik*, no matter how competently and appropriately performed.

By now Chiara Margherita Cozzolani (1602–c.1677) is hardly an unknown quantity to readers of *Early Music* (cf. the reviews of her *Vespers of the Virgin Mary*, *Messa Paschale* and *Dialogues with Heaven* in *Early Music*, xxx/4, pp.637–9). A nun of the powerful Benedictine monastery of St Radegonda in Milan, she published four collections of sacred music, of which only two survive complete. The earlier recordings of Cozzolani were organized into a composite Marian Vespers and a composite *Missa Paschale*, both drawing on works from both of her surviving volumes as well as other sources. The present CDs, featuring Magnificat under the direction of Warren Stewart, offer both collections in their entirety, resulting in a certain degree of overlap: **Chiara Margherita Cozzolani: Complete works vol.1: Salmi a Otto Voci Concertati (1650)** (Musica Omnia M00401, issued 2010, 144'); **Chiara Margherita Cozzolani: Complete works, vol.II: Concerti Sacri (1642)** (Musica Omnia M00410, issued 2013, 69'). Twelve of the 1642 motets and two psalms and a Magnificat of the 1650 *Salmi* were not recorded on the previous CDs.

The *Salmi* are scored for the same eight-voice medium as the Cavalli psalms, but the results are far different. Cozzolani has no compunction about playing joyfully with the psalm texts, rearranging, snipping, expanding, repeating, interpolating. The voices are handled in an infinite variety of solos and combinations, many of them featuring dazzling vocal virtuosity. The motets display a similar originality, with such touches as an indicated diminuendo to depict the Christmas angels returning to heaven. These performances confirm that Cozzolani ranks with any of her contemporaries as a composer of sacred music, including—yes, Virginia—Monteverdi himself.

A recent recording by Ensemble Seicentonovecento under the direction of Flavio Colusso features **Giacomo Carissimi: Complete motets of Arion Romanvs** (Brilliant Classics 94808, issued 2014, 185'). The *Arion Romanvs* is a collection of 28 motets attributed to Carissimi (1605–74) for one to five voices and continuo plus occasional obbligato instruments. It was published at Constance in 1670 and survives in only one copy. The rather pretentious liner notes include a scholarly study of the sources of the motet-texts but fail to provide the texts

themselves. (They can be found, with effort and without translations, on the internet.) The notes also provide little hard scholarly information on the contents of the collection, omitting for example the fact that three of the motets are not by Carissimi and four other unica are doubtful.

The motets, settings of paraliturgical Latin texts, are mostly multi-sectional works combining recitative and aria style—sacred cantatas, in effect (at least one is a *contrafactum* of a secular cantata)—with an encyclopaedic variety of measure and affect. They are well performed here by a variety of singers, and despite the relentless succession of voicing in the originals (S, SS, SA, SB, AB, SSS, SSA, SSB, SST, etc.) there are always surprises and delights owing to Carissimi's acute sensitivity to the texts, which renders their absence in the liner notes all the more annoying.

Giovanni Battista Bassani: Armonici entusiasmi di Davide (Tactus TC 650290, issued 2015, 123'), features performances by Nova Ars Cantandi (dir. Giovanni Acciai) of works from *Salmi concertati a quattro voci con violini e suoi ripieni* (Venice, 1690). Bassani (c.1657–1716) became *maestro* of the Accademia della Morte in Ferrara in 1683; at the behest of the Bishop of Ferrara in the years 1710–12 he produced Proper settings for 76 feasts, an astonishing total of more than 250 compositions. Unlike the Cima 'Vespero', the *Armonici entusiasmi* does not claim to be a Marian Vespers but has most of the elements of one: eight Vespers psalms (without antiphons) for Sundays and the Virgin, a Magnificat and a litany of the Virgin. The forces are relatively modest—SATB (all male), two violins and continuo—but Bassani deploys them in every possible combination from individual soloists in cantata-style movements to through-composed settings for the full ensemble.

In approaching a collection of unfamiliar music there is always the hope that we will stumble on an unknown masterpiece. We come close to this in **Bonaventura Rubino: Messa de Morti à 5 concertata, 1653** (Tactus TC601803, rec 2014, 75'), performed by Cappella Musicale S. Maria in Campitelli with Studio di Musica Antica 'Antonio Il Verso' under the direction of Vincenzo Di Betta. Although a Lombard, Rubino (c.1600–68) became *maestro di cappella* of the cathedral of Palermo, where he was succeeded in 1665 by Vincenzo Amato (1629–70), Alessandro Scarlatti's uncle. Rubino was famous for a *Vespero dello Stellario* (Palermo, 1644), a Marian Vespers for twelve choirs and instruments (a complete performance of the reconstructed *Stellario* is available on the internet). Rubino would be of interest if only for the number of his surviving printed collections: seven

volumes, 1645–58, totalling 117 pieces of sacred music (compare Cozzolani's meagre oeuvre of two surviving publications). Rubino's *Opera quarta* of 1653 contains motets and a Requiem, which is reconstructed here as a composite liturgical entity like the Monteverdi Vespers. Additional chants and Propers are taken from contemporary sources; organ interpolations are performed on a 1635 wing-shaped continuo organ, of which there were some 200 in Rome at the time. Rubino's most extended and impressive setting is the concluding responsory *Libera me*. Like the *Stellario*, the Requiem must have been intended for one of the grandiose public ceremonies—many of them designed by Vincenzo Amato's brother Paolo (1634–1714), typical of Sicily-Spanish official taste. The spirit of Rubino's Requiem is summed up in an account of a 1685 state funeral in Palermo: 'The whole thing had the appearance at once of a funeral and of a triumphal magnificence'.

The up and coming Ensemble Odyssee, directed by Andrea Friggi, have added to their growing discography with **Gaetano Veneziano: In Officio Defunctorum: Nocturns for the Dead** (Pan Classics PC10319, rec 2014, 68'). Veneziano (1656–1716) studied with Francesco Provenzale 1666–76 at Santa Maria di Loreto, one of the four great Neapolitan musical conservatories. In 1704 he succeeded Alessandro Scarlatti as *maestro* of the Neapolitan royal chapel, where he remained until his death. Veneziano set the three Nocturnes (c.1694) from the Office for the Dead, three lessons each from the *Book of Job*, for solo voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass and two sopranos in the final lesson), strings and continuo. In a liturgical performance they would have formed a minor element in an enormous complex of psalms, responsories and readings. Veneziano's settings consist of many smaller sections, mostly in an unbroken continuum but contrasting to match the highly affective texts. The overall effect of the Nocturnes is richly ceremonial rather than emotional—perhaps the best way to appreciate them is to imagine them as part of some state funeral, like Rubino's Requiem.

As the title indicates, **Gregorio Allegri: Opere inedite dai manoscritti della Collectio Altæmps** (Tactus TC550007, issued 2014, 74') features 'unpublished works from the manuscripts of the Altæmps Collection'. Allegri (1582–1652) is best known for his legendary *Miserere* for the Cappella Pontificia, but he also formed part of the musical entourage of Duke Giovanni Angelo Altæmps (c.1586–1620). The duke—himself a composer—so prized his three collections of musical manuscripts that they carried a sentence of excommunication for misuse. This

recording, by Musica Flexanima under the direction of Fabrizio Bigotti, takes from the duke's *Collectio minor* five canzoni of Allegri, three canzoni of G. F. Anerio and the double-chorus motet *In lectulo meo* of Pietro Bonomi (c.1555–1617); two Cappella Sistina manuscripts provide Allegri's Mass *a8* on the Bonomi motet, his Ascension hymn *Salutis humanae sator* (1629) on a *cantus firmus* and two *Lamentationes Jeremiæ* dated 1640 and 1651, rather surprisingly performed with instruments in contradiction to the normal practice of the Cappella Pontificia. Both Bonomi's motet and Allegri's important Mass (a good half hour in performance) reflect the continuing creative influence of Palestrina in the imaginative alternation and interweaving of their two choirs.

From Ensemble «Les Nations», we have **Giovanni Paolo Colonna: L'Assalone** (Tactus TC630302, rec 2012, 63'). The Bolognese Giovanni Paolo Colonna (1637–95) was not only a composer but also an organ-builder. His oratorio *L'Assalone* (Modena, 1684), written for the Duke of Modena, is based on the story of King David's beautiful and rebellious son. To the forces SSATB, strings and continuo Colonna adds a bellicose Bolognese obbligato trumpet. Stylistically, the work is typically late mid-Baroque. The arias are rather short-breathed, often simple strophic da capo structures with an embellished second verse. The emotions of the text are painted in primary colours, as it were; the rather naïve warlike effects or the sea-storm aria, 'Fra tempeste al mare in seno', prefigure later Baroque devices. The most moving moments are David's lament over Absalom and his recitative *scena* with its arioso refrain, 'but for my son I must suffer', opposing his love for his son to his royal duty.

So far, this is all music that was conceived for professional performers and formal occasions. 'But the poor, what did the *poor* sing?', to paraphrase Tolstoy's dying words. **Sacred music for the poor at Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome** (Christophorus CHR77373, rec 2013, 67') attempts to answer that question. The present church of the Vallicella was built in 1575–7 as the permanent home of St Philip Neri's spiritual exercises for the sanctification of the laity. Music insinuated itself into the services gradually: around 1576 simple vernacular *laude* followed the sermons to refresh the weary congregation; at the turn of the century the music was advanced enough to require hiring outside performers; by 1630 the tuning of the instruments was drowning out the sermon. The success of music in Neri's Oratorian movement was reflected in a spate of publications: 13 volumes in 1563–1600 by Giovanni Animuccia (d.1571),

Francesco Soto di Langa (1534–1619), the crazy Giovenale Ancina (1545–1604) and Giovanni Francesco Anerio (c.1569–1630), all of which are represented here in performances by Concerto Romano directed by Alessandro Quarta. The collections range in style from simple three-part devotions (some of them performed here in folk-like timbre and ornamentation) to sacred contrafacta of art music such as Marenzio madrigals. A new musical style was featured in Anerio's 1619 *Teatro armonico spirituale di madrigali a cinque, sei, sette, & otto voci* for the Oratorio: no longer *laude*, but a collection of 94 spiritual madrigals, one of which is performed here. Among other works the CD also contains an excerpt from the *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo* of Emilio de' Cavalieri (c.1550–1602), a sacred opera premièred at the Oratorio in 1600, and a frottole from a cantata of Virgilio Mazzocchi (d.1646). A word of caution that applies to all the recordings under review here: it is always wise to consult the texts in their original language, when available in the liner notes: 'Pulchriora sunt ubera tua vino' ('Your breasts are more beautiful than wine') is not quite adequately rendered in the translation provided: 'how much better is thy love than wine'.

Websites

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Noel O'Regan

Italian madrigals, secular and spiritual

There has been a healthy flow of recent recordings of madrigals and other music written by Italian composers between c.1580 and c.1640, a problematic period for music historians in not fitting neatly into either the Renaissance or Baroque. Attempts to introduce an intermediate Mannerist period have not been successful, but there is no doubt that much of the secular vocal music of composers from Marenzio to late Monteverdi

has particular characteristics which challenge performers. Each of the groups reviewed here responds to those challenges in its own way, seeking to bring the music to life for a modern audience while reflecting the ethos of the period and building a coherent programme for a single disc or group of CDs. Among those challenges are coping with the somewhat exaggerated Italian language of poets like Giovanni Battista Guarini and Giambattista Marini, assigning voices and vocal ranges to the parts on the page, and deciding on pitch and transposition. Approaches to the text have been helped by the genre's repatriation over the past 20 years or so by Italian groups who have brought new insights to interpretation, based on their intimate knowledge of the language. There are three Italian groups reviewed here, as well as ensembles based in England, France and Israel/Switzerland; they range from the long-established to the relatively new, with members coming from an international pool whose cross-fertilization is an important factor in their success.

Soprano Angela Alesci is accompanied by lute players Domenico Cerasani and Massimo Lonardi in the recording *Luca Marenzio e il suo tempo: Madrigali, villanelle, danze e fantasie di fine '500* (Tactus TC531302, rec 2013, 56'). They present an attractive package of madrigals (from the *Primo Libro a cinque voci* of 1580) and villanelle by Marenzio, arranged for solo voice and two lutes, interspersed with original lute pieces and arrangements by Orlando di Lasso, Vincenzo Galilei, Fabrizio Caroso, Cesare Negri, Giacomo Gorzanis and Lorenzino del liuto. Reflecting the sophisticated palaces of Roman cardinals and aristocrats, as well as the villanella's Neapolitan origins, the repertory lends itself well to this type of performance. The singing is mostly assured in the villanelle, if occasionally a bit uncomfortable at the top of the voice; tuning slips a bit in the more complex madrigals, particularly *Dolorosi martir*. The lute playing is stylish and well coordinated with the singer. The song texts are available only on the Tactus website, and only in Italian, not in the CD booklet.

Although founded relatively recently, the Italian group La Compagnia del Madrigale draws on 20 years of experience in this repertory: three of its five members have been part of both Concerto Italiano and La Venexiana and note this in the CD booklet. In so doing they are associating themselves with the emphasis placed by those groups on using appropriate pitch and tuning, well-honed ensemble and a strong commitment to putting across the text, taking their cue from the principles of the *seconda pratica* as