

Laudario di Cortona

Manuscript No.91, Biblioteca del Comune e dell'Accademia Etrusca, Cortona, Arezzo, Italy

During the course of the Middle Ages, Italy turned to the commune as a form of social and political organisation capable of replacing the feudal tradition that had variously held sway up to the 12th and 13th centuries. This period of change was accompanied by the production of musical manuscripts that bear witness to such ongoing cultural innovation. Because music, both religious and secular, is always rooted in everyday life, it reflects society and provides us with some remarkable insights into the aesthetics of a given period, and the role that music played in it. Within the communal cities, secular brotherhoods were created comprising various strata of society, though members mostly belonged to the middle classes from which the exponents of the city 'guilds' largely derived. Encouraged by the support of the mendicant orders, especially the Franciscans whose theological and mystical ideals could embrace the concept of secular charity, the brotherhoods of the 13th century produced a highly significant amount of musical manuscripts for paraliturgical use. These consisted of texts in the vulgate that explained the images and symbols of the Christian religion in medieval Europe. Each brotherhood pledged responsibility for sustaining and helping the poor, and for glorifying its patron saint, after whom the confraternity was often named. Moreover, these bodies also strove to preserve places of worship and their appurtenances, many of which are still an important feature of Italian cities.

One such medieval city is Cortona in the province of Arezzo, which has managed to preserve a remarkable example of paraliturgical musical output produced by the Brotherhood of Santa Maria delle Laude at the Church of San Francesco.

It is not easy to date this collection precisely: certain sources suggest that it was composed around 1250, whereas others indicate a slightly later period, between 1270 and 1290. Discovered in 1876 by Girolamo Mancini, the manuscript represents one of the very few cases in which a *laudario* (a laud – a hymn or song of praise) consists of both text and music. An appreciation of the content of the Cortona Manuscript No.91 will clarify its importance. The pages comprise monodic pieces of Marian devotion, references to Franciscanism, texts pertaining to morality, and references to the liturgical calendar. Much of the manuscript is specifically devoted to the subject of worship of the Virgin Mary, which was relatively common in 13th-century Europe, where there was a widespread

urge to produce literary and musical works specifically dedicated to the Marian cult. One explanation for this clearly lies in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, when Pope Innocent III fortified the ideal that the Spirit should prevail over the flesh. The Council intended to focus its efforts on opposing heterodoxy, and in so doing greatly encouraged Marian devotion by co-opting it as part of the battle against heresy.

The *Laudario di Cortona* consists of 171 parchment pages containing 47 lauds, of which 46 contain texts and music at the first verse, and one (No.5) with text alone. The monodic pieces relate to particular aspects of paraliturgical subjects: Marian devotion, the Nativity, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, and devotional references to certain saints, including St Francis, St Anthony and St Catherine. From the way they are written it is clear that they were intended for liturgical feast days and particular devotions. Thus they come across as a collection of pieces and poems that were effectively used throughout the year (which was not necessarily the case with coeval documents of this sort).

By using the vulgate of the 13th century, the brotherhood was able to take part in extra-ecclesiastical devotion relating to the most important religious subjects within the liturgical calendar. The aesthetics, research and popularisation of aspects of the laud in the vulgate of the 13th century are of particular interest to present-day musicologists, and indeed to those who study the social history of the period as well, because they reveal to what extent the Middle Ages were the fruit of a cultural revolution. The aim of this recording of the complete works as they appear in the manuscript is to understand what medieval devotional chant means for us today, and how we can best interpret the repertoire to make it accessible to the taste and sensibility of modern audiences. Granted, there is a degree of philological licence implicit in using female voices for parts that were originally sung exclusively by male voices, and in adding an accompaniment using instruments based on copies from the period. But we believe that this is justified by the meticulous philological study underlying the transcription and the interpretative understanding that derives from in-depth knowledge of the Gregorian repertoire and 13th-century mensural notation. The outcome thus not only conjures up an image of the period, but also reveals the degree of continuity in the history of Western music that connects the present to the rich aesthetic heritage of the past.

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Translation: Kate Singleton

Armoniosoincanto

Founded in 1997, Armoniosoincanto is a vocal ensemble usually made up of female voices. Since its inception, the group has striven to perfect a form of vocal purity that recreates how Medieval and Renaissance music would have sounded as accurately as possible. This vocal purity is characterised by the linearity and the distinctive timbre of the singers' voices, which transmit a precise clarity of sound that recreates the essence of prayer and the word of the ancient holy texts, amplified by the sound of ancient melodies. The singers' research has led them to explore Carolingian codexes, Medieval lauds and ancient texts – both sacred and secular – from the regions of Umbria and Tuscany in particular.

In 2010 the ensemble was awarded first prize in the Monodic Christian Chant category at the International Polyphonic Competition 'Guido d'Arezzo', together with a special mention for the most interesting programme of musical research. This award followed other prizes from the same competition in 2002 and 2006, together with second prize in the Gregorian Chant category of the International Competition of Choral Singing 'Seghizzi', held in Gorizia, in 2001.

The ensemble regularly gives concerts not only in Italy but also abroad, in Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Hungary, Austria and in the USA. They have recorded many CDs: *Ufficio Ritmico di San Francesco di Assisi*; *O Roma Nobilis* (pilgrimage songs); *Ave Donna Santissima*, a musical exploration of the figure of the Madonna during the Middle Ages; *Requiem*, featuring Gregorian Chant and secular music; *Cantiones Duarem Vocum*, featuring music by Orlando di Lasso; Couperin's *Messe pour le paroisses* and *Messe pour les couvents* with organist Adriano Falcioni, recorded for Brilliant Classics (94333); and Monteverdi's *Canzonette a tre voci*.

In order to consolidate their research, the ensemble has organised various seminars and workshops on Gregorian Chant and ancient music, with experts in this field. The ensemble regularly collaborates with internationally renowned musicians and has given world premieres of musical works.

www.armoniosoincanto.it



Armoniosoincanto

Caterina Becchetti, Elisabetta Becchetti, Paola Bianchi, Paola Incani, Alessandra Ligori, Francesca Maraziti, Francesca Piottoli, Andreina Zatti, Roberto Beltrame, Riccardo Forcignanò, Emilio Serio

with the participation of **Anonima Frottolisti**

Massimiliano Dragoni, Emiliano Finucci, Fabrizio Lepri, Luca Piccioni, Mauro Presazzi, Simone Marcelli

Soloists

Caterina Becchetti (CD1: 1–3, 8, 11; CD2: 2, 9; CD4: 3, 4, 9, 10)

Elisabetta Becchetti (CD1: 2, 4; CD3: 1, 9)

Paola Bianchi (CD4: 4)

Paola Incani (CD1: 6, 12; CD2: 4–6; CD3: 5–7; CD4: 5)

Francesca Piottoli (CD1: 6)

Andreina Zatti (CD1: 4, 6, 10, 11; CD2: 1, 3; CD3: 1; CD4: 7, 10)

Roberto Beltrame (CD1: 4, 6, 7; CD2: 9; CD3: 9, 12)

Luca Piccioni (CD1: 9; CD3: 4, 10; CD4: 9)

Mauro Presazzi (CD2: 11; CD3: 4; CD4: 2, 8)

Simone Marcelli (CD2: 8; CD3: 11)

Special guests

Rosanna Fedele *narrator* (CD1: 5)

Mauro Borgioni *voice* (CD2: 7, 10, 12; CD3: 2, 3)

Peppe Frana *lute* (CD2: 10, 12; CD3: 3)

Musicians

Giovanni Brugnami *flutes* (CD1: 3; CD2: 1, 8, 12; CD3: 5, 9; CD4: 2, 4, 5, 11)

Andreina Zatti *harp* (CD1: 1, 2; CD2: 2; CD3: 3, 5–9, 12; CD4: 3, 5)

Luca Piccioni *lute* (CD1: 9; CD2: 3; CD3: 10; CD4: 4)

Emiliano Finucci *vielle* (CD1: 4, 6, 7; CD2: 4–6; CD4: 1)

Fabrizio Lepri *vielle* (CD2: 11, 12; CD3: 10)

Massimiliano Dragoni *psaltery, hurdy-gurdy, carillon di campane, square frame drum* (CD1: 3, 8; CD2: 9; CD4: 1, 6)

Matteo Magna *psaltery, square frame drum* (CD2: 8; CD3: 9; CD4: 2, 4, 10, 11)

Piercarlo Fontemagi *hurdy-gurdy, gaita* (CD2: 8; CD4: 11)

Franco Radicchia *portative organ* (CD1: 10, 11; CD2: 1, 9, 11, 12; CD3: 3; CD4: 3, 4, 6, 7)

Il progetto è dedicato alle delicatissime e onoratissime Suore Clarisse del Monastero di S. Agnese di Perugia; una dedica speciale alla figura di Suor Chiara Michela, Madre Badessa morta il 25 dicembre 2012, che ha vegliato sul nostro lavoro.

The project is dedicated to the highly gracious and venerated Poor Clares of the Sant'Agnese Monastery in Perugia, and in particular to Sister Chiara Michela, the Mother Superior, who watched over our work and passed away on 25 December 2012.

Recording: November–December 2013 & January–February 2014, Chiesa del Monastero delle Suore Clarisse di S. Agnese, Perugia, Italy

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