



Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736)

Sinfonia Lo frate 'nnamorato – Cantate Nel chiuso centro – Concerto for violin – Stabat Mater



Giovanni Nacciarone (1833-1929), *The last hours of Pergolesi* (Naples, Museo di San Martino)

2010 was the year the musical world celebrated the 300th anniversary of **Giovanni Battista Pergolesi** (1710-1736), one of the few Baroque composers whose works (albeit just a handful) have been continuously admired and performed right up to today. We can only imagine the impact his music would have had if he had not died quite so young – only 26 years old! The quality of his compositions, all written within a period of barely six years, seems all the more miraculous for a musician apparently afflicted with a physical deformity and tuberculosis, the illness that would ultimately take his life. Pergolesi received his training at the *Conservatorio dei Poveri de Gesù Cristo* in Naples during the 1720s, and then rapidly gained fame as an opera composer. His greatest contribution was to the early development of *opera buffa*, but the field of sacred music also proved extremely suitable for expressing the fullness of his genius.

The first half of this program is devoted to parts of Pergolesi's oeuvre we are perhaps less acquainted with in modern concert life.

The introductory *Sinfonia* is drawn from the comic opera *Lo frate 'nnamorato*, which was first performed in 1732, and immediately enjoyed unprecedented success. Both the zestful liveliness of the fast movements, as the touching lilt of the slow movement are most representative of the typical airyness of *opera buffa*.

The fact that Pergolesi was as effective in serious theatrical music is amply demonstrated here by one of his very last works: the cantata *Nel chiuso centro (Orfeo)*, which actually forms a sort of mini *opera seria*, displaying a full array of contrasting affections and accompanying compositional techniques.

One of Pergolesi's few surviving instrumental works, the brilliant *Concerto* in Bb major for violin and strings reminds us that the composer had benefitted above all from a virtuosic violin training. The two fast movements are written in the typical Neapolitan Galant style of the early symphony, while the slow *siciliana* reflects a more vocal, operatic pathos.

The *Stabat Mater* has inspired several composers, and seems to have produced some of the most poignant pages in music history – hardly surprising for a text of which the keywords are grief, tears, sobbing sadness, devastation, despondency, torture, torment and death. How could one remain unmoved by the suffering of a mother witnessing the death-throes of her own son? Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's setting of the *Stabat Mater* is surely one of the most celebrated; offering us an eminently dramatic version, in a mature Galant style, ornate and distinguished, and vividly moving.

Programme

Sinfonia in D major from *Lo frate 'nnamorato*

Cantata *Nel chiuso centro (Orfeo)* for soprano, strings and continuo

Concerto in Bb major for violin, strings and continuo

Stabat Mater in F minor for soprano, alto, strings and continuo

Ensemble (18)

Les Muffatti under the direction of Peter Van Heyghen

Soloists: Céline Scheen (soprano)
Damien Guillon (alto)
François Fernandez (violin)

Orchestra: 6 violins, 2 violas, 2 cellos, double bass
harpsichord, organ, lute



Contact

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