

LORENZO DONATI
“*Neomadrigalismo italiano*”:
To study the old to renovate the new

Choral production in Italy in the 20th century, from the rediscovery of the Renaissance style to the research for new expressive forms: the birth of a new vocal style.

[SECOND PART]

The connection between compositional research and that musicological has characterised, as we have seen, an important line of thought in the early twentieth century: we need only remember the musicological researches of Raffaele Casimiri and all the scholars who participated in the journal «*Note d'archivio*». This desire for the rediscovery and appreciation of the musical patrimony of Italy could perforce not also involve compositional considerations: in particular, of those composers who from reasons of study or personal interest had approached the vocal ambience. An interest in compositional processes of the Renaissance and early Baroque, while not being defined precisely as a style or a school, became fertile ground to cultivate, and a meeting place for many scholars and composers. Some of these played an important role, both in the field of musicology, with the discovery and valorisation of the patrimony of the Renaissance, and in that of composition, amongst whom we find one of the most important composers of the years following the Second World War, Gian Francesco Malipiero.

Amongst the compositional processes found most stimulating for the new styles we can focus on:

- The study of counterpoint, which gained ever more relevance in the renewed use of imitative processes;
- Madrigalisms, placing importance on the relations between sign, sound and meaning;
- The study and use of harmonic processes based on the modes.

The use of the modes was, together with other diatonic ways of avoiding the harmonic strategies of the tonal system, a valid and innovative return to the past which opened its doors to contemporary choral music.

In this process of re-elaboration and valorisation of the musical patrimony of the Renaissance and Baroque, particular attention is paid to the choice of texts which the composers decide to use for their works. In both sacred and secular works, composers often make use of liturgical forms which are antiquated, and no longer common in non-liturgical choral music, such as Responsories (see Ghedini or Petrassi), but also madrigal texts of the sixteenth century, or the *lauda* (see Bettinelli or Dallapiccola). If within the ambience of secular music these works were initially intended for performance by only a few ensembles able to cope with this new expressive language, within the realm of sacred music connections with the traditions and thus the rediscovery of Renaissance techniques were to be more commonly faced by choirs and their directors. From Ildebrando Pizzetti's *Requiem* and the *Responsories* of Giorgio Federico Ghedini, to the works of many other writers who composed for the liturgy, an evermore direct and explicit relationship with Renaissance music was considered an added value in sacred music, even if in contradiction to the stylistic tendencies to be found in the world of opera.

The musician who has some knowledge of the Renaissance repertory will recognise without difficulty in the *Responsories* of Ghedini, or the madrigalist compositions of Bettinelli – but also successively in the works of Petrassi, Dallapiccola and Berio – many of the musical characteristics cited previously, all closely connected with compositional and aesthetic analysis of Renaissance polyphony.

TRE RESPONSORI PER IL SABATO SANTO

1. RECESSIT PASTOR NOSTER

Giorgio Federico Ghedini
(1892-1965)

Lentamente, con dolore

Soprani
Re - ces - sit pa - stor no - ster, fons a - quae vi - vae, ad

Contralti
la frase è costruita in modo da non poter definire una tonalità

Tenori

Bassi
Re - ces - sit pa - stor no - ster, fons a - quae vi - vae, ad

cu - jus tran - si - tum sol ob - scu - ra - tus est.

cu - jus tran - si - tum sol ob - scu - ra - tus est.

Nam et il - le cap - tus est, qui cap - ti - vum te - ne - bat pri - mum

Nam et il - le cap - tus est, qui cap - ti - vum te - ne - bat pri - mum

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I GIÀ MI TROVAI DI MAGGIO

(Come una Canzonetta)

Testo di Matteo M. Boiardo

BRUNO BETTINELLI

Allegretto (♩ = 160) quasi in uno

S. *mf* *imitazione (variata)* Già mi tro- vai di mag- gio u- na mat- ti- - na

C. *mf* Già mi tro- vai di mag- gio u- na mat- ti- - na

T. *mf* Già mi tro- vai di mag- gio u- na mat- ti- - na

B. Già mi tro- vai di mag- gio u- na mat- ti- - na

viene evitata spesso la risoluzione fa#-sol, il brano è comunque impostato in Tetrardus

en - tro un bel pra - to a - dor - no d'o - gni flo - re

en - tro un bel pra - to a - dor - no d'o - gni flo - re

en - tro un bel pra - to a - dor - no d'o - gni flo - re

en - tro un bel pra - to a - dor - no d'o - gni flo - re

mp so - pra un col - le - la - to a la ma - ri - na, che tut - to tre - mo -

mp so - pra un col - le - la - to a la ma - ri - na, che tut - to tre - mo -

mp so - pra un col - le - la - to a la ma - ri - na, che tut - to tre - mo -

so - pra un col - le - la - to a la ma - ri - na, che tut - to tre - mo -

la - - va di splen - do - - re e tra le *mf*

la - - va di splen - do - - re e

la - - va di splen - do - - re e

la - - va di splen - do - - re e

rall. *mf a tempo*

segue parte in stile imitato a 4

It has been written that this stylistic approach can be traced back to a neologism: "neomadrigalismo italiano". Some have found this term exaggerated, and perhaps even inappropriate, but it is certain that, while it does not refer to a precise 'school', the choral compositions which have been described thus do have similar characteristics in common, even though coming from the pen of composers with very varied experiences. If it is not a question of adhesion to a stylistic or cultural 'manifesto', it regards an amalgam of compositional attitudes and relations – more or less prevalent – which have some characteristics of Renaissance musical techniques. These Italian composers – whether from inclination or by reason of their formation – will approach the Renaissance motet and madrigal in many different ways, but they were almost all fascinated by the enormous expressive potential released by the rediscovery in modern guise of some particular characteristics of the polyphonic style of the sixteenth century.

If we take our point of departure from the most "faithful" imitators of the antique style, we can indicate some works relating to the realm of liturgical music, such as the motets of Domenico Bartolucci, who for his whole life professed his passionate aesthetic relationship with the music of Palestrina.

If we distance ourselves a little from the scores of Bartolucci, they might at first sight seem Renaissance works for their vocal ranges, phrase lengths, linearity of melodic invention, construction of phrases, and overall relations between the sections. Certainly, listening to them, it is at once clear that the harmony and some of the phrasing belong to a later epoch, but the Palestrinian model remains easily understood, and is proposed with refined and masterly counterpoint. The same Bartolucci also produced secular compositions and popular songs, in which, however, in contrast to his contemporaries, although liberated from some of the formal and functional obligations of liturgical music, he did not dare to venture into the search for unusual timbres. His secular works, often on texts by Pascoli or other contemporary authors, can thus be defined as modern madrigals because of their vicinity to the sixteenth century model, even if they lack that element of radical change which will be the

Caligaverunt Domenico Bartolucci

Moderato mosso
mf

Soprano
Ca - li - ga - ve - runt o - cu - li - me - i a fle - - - -

Contralto
Ca - li - ga - ve - runt o - cu - li - me - i a fle - - - -

Tenore
Ca - li - ga - ve - runt o - cu - li - me - i a fle - - - -

Basso
Ca - li - ga - ve - runt o - cu - li - me - i a

6 *rall.* *a tempo*

S
- tu me - o qui - a e - lon - ga - tus

C
tu me - o qui - a e - lon - ga - tus est

T
tu me - o qui - a e - lon - ga - tus est a me qui -

B
fle - tu me - o qui - a e - lon - ga - tus est qui - a e - lon -

distinctive characteristic of other composers of the twentieth century who will share the choice of this model.

As with the Tuscan musician, one time *maestro* of the Cappella Sistina, many other composers have been fascinated by the equilibrium and perfection of the writing of the motets of Palestrina, or by the madrigals of Marenzio and Monteverdi, with the result that a great many sacred and secular works of the twentieth century have been dedicated to the ideals of these great masters. How can we not think of Bruno Bettinelli, Italo Bianchi, Renato Dionisi, Orlando Di Piazza, Giorgio Federico Ghedini, Luigi Molino, Carlo Florindo Semini, Silvio Zanchetti, Terenzio Zardini and many other composers who have dedicated a large part of their choral production to the research for that stylistic purity which they had discovered and admired in the works of the great composers of the Renaissance, to whose cadences or motives they are called to imitate: formal

Elastico (in rec.) $\text{♩} =$

p dolce *rall* -----

LIE - vi VO - LA - NO NON POR - TA - TI DAL VENTO

VOCALIZZATO

VOCALIZZATO

VOCALIZZATO

a tempo

mp

LIE - vi CA - DO - NO

VOCALIZZATO

VOCALIZZATO

VOCALIZZATO

SILVIO ZANCHETTI, *Lievi volano portati dal vento*

equilibrium, feasible vocal extensions, attention to the comprehensibility of the texts, and a prevailing diatonic language.

However, not all the music of these composers may be easily deciphered, as one might think from an initial superficial glance. Many of these composers, in fact, carried out intense studies of harmony and counterpoint which an attentive reader can certainly recognise in the choice

Domine Jesu Christe

RENATO DIONISI

Calmò

p sentito *cresc.* *mf* sonoro

soprano Do - mi - ne Je - su Chri - ste Rex glo - ri - ae

contralto Do - mi - ne Rex glo - ri - ae

tenore Do - mi - ne Rex glo - ri - ae

basso glo - ri - ae

5

li - be - ra a - ni - mas om - ni - um fi - de - li - um de - fun - cto - rum de poe - nis in -

li - be - ra a - ni - mas de - fun - cto - rum de poe - nis in -

li - be - ra li - be - ra a - ni - mas de - fun - cto - rum de poe - nis in -

li - be - ra li - be - ra a - ni - mas de - fun - cto - rum de poe - nis in -

9 *p* sentito **sesta eccedente**

fer - ni li - be - ra e - as de o - re le - o - nis

fer - ni *p* sentito li - be - ra e - as de o - re le - o - nis

fer - ni *p* sonoro *p* sentito et de pro - fun - do la - cu: li - be - ra e - as de o - re le - o - nis

fer - ni *p* sonoro *p* sentito et de pro - fun - do la - cu: li - be - ra e - as de o - re le - o - nis

of that which we may call modern modulations.

From the point of view of harmony, many of these compositions are based on an effort towards alienation from the tonal system. In some cases the detachment is gradual – we can still recognise some harmonic conjunctions of the tonal system – but other scores, which while remaining close to some of the early *styles*, tend to distance themselves more clearly from the tonal system. Tonality is used eventually for the purpose of “modulation”, or to create tensions in a harmonic panorama which remains almost completely modal, composed intrinsically of melodic cells which imitate each other, converging as true madrigalisms. The harmonic processes are studied with care within a balancing of forces which are the consequence of a profound study of harmonic and rhythmic procedures of classical harmony. Even the range and movement of the parts recalls that kind of early music which has an elegant respect for the prosody and the accents of the words.

The composers most connected with the sixteenth century styles approached with diffidence the compositions of their contemporaries. This does not mean that they do not venture into “modern” compositional techniques, but, above all in the choral and vocal contexts, they showed some reluctance to insert timbric, rhythmic and harmonic elements which were of complex nature in performance. The same use of declaimed texts unaccompanied by music, fairly common in composers of other nations, was certainly not an attraction for these composers, who preferred to avoid those stylistic choices, described – sometimes in a negative manner – as “effetti” or “effects”. We can say that the greater part of these composers were fascinated by the theories of “affetti”, and cared very little for those of “effetti”. It will be the contact with the new choral culture of Eastern and Northern Europe which will offer new and more congruent answers for the possibility of making music with sounds beyond those vocal. Thus, even in the vocal works of those composers known to be innovators, the vocal ambience of the early twentieth century will not be affected by experimentation of timbre.

Amongst all the composers that we might define as being innovators of the Italian choral compositional style, while still relating to a certain Renaissance tradition, the first to seek new stylistic paths and new stimulus from the texts was undoubtedly Goffredo Petrassi. Petrassi's *Nonsense* still remain today innovative choral compositions, sometimes even more

'modern' than the compositions of today, if by 'modern' we mean with a certain approach to dissonance and timbral refinement. The choice of the texts, original, and without historical or cultural ties with Italy, offers the composer the possibility of separating the words of the text in such a way as to justify certain stylistic choices by the "nonsense" expressed by the text itself. This work is a challenge to Italian choral music, and to music in general, full of a reflections on the existence and historical-musical connections. Petrassi rediscovers 'games' in music, and offers them in their most natural musical contexts: that is, with the texts. It is a "game" which the Renaissance had discovered through the works of Banchieri, Vecchi, Croce and Striggio: thus, a music which could break the rules, and propose something quite different from that of the realm of secular music. After Petrassi's work, the madrigal could thus open its doors to a choral repertoire, which, through the setting of particular texts, could pass from the theme of love to the theme of "games"; from songs of amorous games, to "games" in themselves, and thus the "scherzo".

It was above all in the secular ambience that the great Italian composers searched for strategies that would be innovative with regard to themes set to music, and thus the texts and forms chosen. Luigi Dallapiccola,

The image shows the title page and the beginning of the musical score for 'NONSENSE' by Goffredo Petrassi. The title 'NONSENSE' is prominently displayed at the top, with 'PER CORO & CAPPELLA' underneath. Below the title, there is a small illustration of a figure holding a long pole. The score is for four vocal parts: SOPRANI, CONTRALTI, TENORI, and BASSI. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto mosso (♩ = 120)'. The first system of music shows the vocal lines with lyrics in Italian, such as 'non degno, quasi estorcito'. The score includes various musical notations like dynamics (p, f), articulation (acc), and phrasing slurs.

ver the passage of a sound or a timbre between one section and another, or manage to reduce the density of harmony while still remaining atonal, we can attribute these qualities to the intuitions of Luigi Nono.

With regard to those composers that we might define “progressive” amongst the Italians who approach the choral ambience, we cannot overlook the visionary percep-

tion of sound and intonation that Giacinto Scelsi offers us. An attraction for the essence and mysticism of sound that we can perceive in the *Tre preghiere latine* practically represents a modern re-writing of Gregorian chant. But to uncover reminiscences of the Renaissance in the works of Scelsi we must enter the profound labyrinths that concern the equilibrium of the voices and the re-elaboration of the connection between motive and word in the sixteenth century and the romantic image. Instead, a relation with Renaissance forms is much more open and explicit in Luciano Berio’s *Cries of London*. Composer of infinite culture, who for all his life searched for an expressive syntax which did not distance itself too far from the great traditions of the history of music, Berio tried to find, through an intense and refined relationship with these traditions, an expressive voice which was innovative without alienating his audience. With his *Cries of London*, written for the six voices of the *Kings’ Singers* and re-elaborated some time later in a definitive version for eight voices, Berio offers us a very interesting example of a relationship with the late Renaissance madrigal. The same title of the work in itself recalls Clement Janequin’s *Les cries de Paris*, and in particular, refers to all those sixteenth

SAUH IV

pour quatre voix de femme ou multiples

Giacinto SCELISI

The image shows a musical score for 'SAUH IV' by Giacinto Scelsi. It is written for four female voices or multiples. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows a vocal line with the marking 'intento' and a 'v-o' label. The second system shows a vocal line with the marking 'meno f' and 'v-u' labels. The accompaniment consists of three staves in each system, likely for piano and other instruments.

century works which had a relationship with the sounds of "reality": *La caccia*, or the *Ciclamento delle donne al bucato* by Alessandro Striggio, and many works by Orazio Vecchi, Adriano Banchieri and Janequin. This music, which is amusing and often irreverent, dealt with popular subjects, and inserted into the texture sounds which derive from rural or urban settings. In particular, Berio pays homage to all those works which recall the cries of the market place, as the title emphasises: the acoustic panorama of a London market. As an acute observer of formal and structural equilibrium, he does not overlook in this work the various scenes of a complex whole made up of a variety of parts, the necessities of the voices, melodic references, some indications for intonation, and a careful attention to vocal ranges. We have thus another masterpiece of twentieth century choral music, which forms, together with *Nonsense* and the *Cori di Michelangelo*, an extraordinary trio for a *cappella* choir.

If Berio's relationship with popular tradition is also evident in other of his vocal works, it remains central to that of the popular themes which he writes for voices in the *Cries of London*. Amongst these themes, there is one – the first – which is based on a Sicilian song. The same theme, this time with a text in Sicilian dialect, reappears in a much simpler composition dedicated to Umberto Eco. *Si fussi pisci* is a brief piece, in which the popular element is the principal protagonist. It is a rare example of a work by an Italian composer which was dedicated to a very popular genre within the

cries of london
for eight voices (1974-76)

to gisela and frans von rossum

♩. = 64 Simply, like a folk tune,
with a touch of ecstasy

1

luciano berio
(1928)

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

S
A
T
B

these are the cries of London town

“ghetto” of composers of choral music: the re-elaboration of a popular melody. Very few of the great Italian composers of the twentieth century made use of popular songs: amongst the avant garde composers one might count them on the fingers of a single hand, while the production of such music was – and still is – enormous. If in Hungary, England, France and all of northern Europe the arrangement of popular melodies became a stimulus for composers – also those who composed for the great festivals – in Italy only Berio and a very few other composers had the courage to make use of material deriving from traditional music. This lack was remedied, and is still being so, by an ample production of music which, however, has rarely aspired to musical research, even if it is of a fascinating vocal and expressive nature. We are left wondering what might have happened if – as with Poulenc, Britten and Kodaly – our great composers had left some works for chorus based on popular themes – as in fact, did also Brahms and Schonberg.

Another important meeting point between ancient compositional techniques and modern sensibilities can be found in monodic music. If for the realm of popular music the evolution of composition is somewhat disadvantaged by the pressure which many choirs have imposed on composers – which is to say, not to distance themselves from models considered original – for those that involved the elaboration of Gregorian chant has been – and still is today – a great expressive resource for composers, and from the first examples – such as the *Concerto gregoriano* by Ottorino Respighi, a work for violin and orchestra, but above all, Ildebrando

pour mon cher ami Henri Scarpes
CHANSONS FRANÇAISES
pour chœur d'homme à cappella
Francis POULENC

4. CLIC, CLAC, DANSEZ SABOTS

Rondement $\text{♩} = 138$

TÉNORS
BARYTONS
BASSES

T
Bar
B

T
Bar
B

1. Mais com-ment me-ner la dan-se Quand les fel-les n'y sont pas. Quand les bel-les

Pizzetti's *Requiem*, already cited – has given great results. The modal material, the attention and respect for the words which Gregorian seems to impose, with its aura of fascination and mysticism, its malleability, and its roots deeply established in the culture of our civilisation, are some of the elements which still attract Italian composers today. If we add to this the fact that for choirs – even those which have no connection with liturgy – churches remain a privileged setting where Gregorian chant or its new elaborations resound in a wonderful manner, and thus provide another point of contact with the history of composition in the Renaissance.

Gregorian melodies have been re-elaborated in a number of ways. Whoever wishes to study the sacred choral repertoire – even if disregarding that which is predominantly liturgical – will find, from after the Second World War, a myriad of compositions which have some relation with the Gregorian melodies relating to the texts they are setting. A research of this kind should certainly underline some notable composers who have used certain methods of re-elaboration or use of Gregorian chant. To outline some of these methods, we can be helped by important examples to be found in the music of the great French composer, Maurice Duruflé, who dedicated a part of his compositional production to the elaboration of Gregorian chant.

Example: *Ubi caritas*

All those works in which the Gregorian melody is easily perceived, mostly – but not always – placed in the highest voice.

Example: *Tota pulchra es Maria*

Works in which the Gre-

I. Ubi caritas
pour 4 voix mixtes
(Deux chœurs d'Altes alternés)

U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi est.

Andante sostenuto (♩ = 64)

SOPRANOS
(Div.) 2^{es} Chœur d'Altes
U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

ALTOS
U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

TÉNORS
(Div.) 1^{er} Basses
U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

BASSES
U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

est. U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

est. U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

est. U - bi ca - ri - tas et a - mor, De - us i - bi

gorian chant is fused with other elaborations similar to the principal melody, in such a way that it becomes less recognisable.

Example: *Tu es Petrus*

All those works in which the incipit, or other parts of the chant become material for its elaboration, thus creating a single entity between the principal chant and its reworking.

Example: *Tantum ergo*

Works in which the Gregorian chant is given to the soprano and the other voices in. such a way that they accompany, sustain and colour the principal theme in an autonomous manner.

Beyond these examples of reworking, which clearly can be found together in the same composition, in the last decade some procedures have developed, which derive from the study of expressive, sonorous and spacial effects offered by the voices of a choir. The four examples from Duruflé can thus be amplified by the use of an aleatoric element which we might call “example *Ponetemente*”, with reference to

A tutti loro...

Requiem aeternam

per coro misto a cappella

Franco Dominutti
(1995)

Musical score for *Requiem aeternam* by Franco Dominutti (1995). The score is for a mixed choir (S.1, S.2, T.1, T.2) and includes piano markings like 'pp' and 'p'. The lyrics are: *Qui - sedes ad dex - te - ram Pa - tris, tu - so - lus, ge - ni - tus, et con -*

Cruce fidelis (introduzione)

Vesanzio Fortunato (sec. VI -
Giovanni Bonato (1961)

(spazializzato)

N.B. Il segno  indica il prolungamento, con diminuzione, del relativo suono.

Musical score for *Cruce fidelis (introduzione)* by Vesanzio Fortunato (sec. VI - Giovanni Bonato (1961)). The score is for a mixed choir and includes staccato markings. The lyrics are: *1. Cru - ce - fi - de - lis, inter omnes Ar - bor vi - va no - bi - lis. Nulla tu - lem sil - va pro - fert, Fron - de, fo - re, ger - mi - na.*

the work of the same name of my own composition; the process of "delay" which we might call *Dominutti* with reference to the technique used in the *Requiem* by Franco Dominutti; or *Bonato*: the series of elaborations and reverberations of modal material proposed by Giovanni Bonato.

For a complete analysis of such results – in some cases, extraordinary – that contemporary Italian choral music offers, a far greater research will be necessary: one that does not fail to take into account the many liturgical compositions which incorporate a specific reference to a Gregorian melody. But this study intends simply to emphasise how this production related to the melodies of a very ancient tradition – particularly important in Italy – had most excellent roots amongst the composers of the Renaissance, who are recognised today as models even by those who chose more extravagant elaborations.

There are many Italian masters who have left a heritage – as choral directors and composers – an enormous fund of compositional experience and art. A testimony which choral directors and composers cannot overlook, by dragging us into a sickly-sweet neo-romanticism which has a relationship with the consumer music we hear daily, but which has not the vital vigour of Italian and European culture. These great masters leave us as a resource the attention established in the equilibrium between motive and word. A motive-word which leaves the composer free to express himself, and find the means of expression which he will find the most correct, while well aware of the fact that cultural roots are not dead wood to cut way.

Another great inheritance which comes with the twentieth century and the rediscovery of the Renaissance is the theme of sound, and thus the voice with which the singer must perform these new compositions. If Pizzetti's *Requiem*, or the works by Dallapiccola and Petrassi can be tied to a professional vocality, and thus referring to the epoch in which the works were written – to a vocality of lyric ambience – many of the works of the second part of the twentieth century oblige – and have obliged – choral directors to face the problem of sound. If this music refers to the Renaissance, perhaps also the voice should be imposed following the example of vocal lines that we have been trying to establish in Italy for at least thirty

years. Thus the visionary works of composers, as often happens in creative ambiances, had foreseen the future and for at least sixty years endeavoured to oblige directors and composers to reflect on vocality.

To begin with, in the performance of contemporary music of northern Europe and Renaissance music in England, an attempt was made to find an answer, through a vocal technique with less vibrato, with a *canto fermo* that privileged control of intonation. For some years in Italy, too, this road has been followed, without losing our particular Latin expressivity, and today, a choral director who approaches contemporary music in the correct manner can rightfully ask himself which is the most appropriate kind of sound with which to best interpret a work. Now we have the instruments, and often, on a vocal level, they are means which are close to those of Renaissance choral music. Thus, we can close a circle of history which brings us back to a more natural relationship with breathing.

And now we can only await Humanism – that neo-Renaissance of which Giorgio Gaber sang in the last of his songs. To take our departure from choral music is an excellent way of re-discovering Man.

(English translation: Kathryn Bosi Monteath)