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CLASSICS

DURANTE
REQUIEM
IN G MINOR

ASTRARIUM
CONSORT

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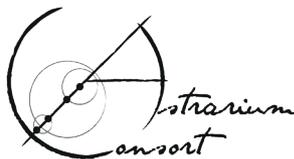
FRANCESCA CASSINARI
ELENA CARZANIGA

ROBERTO RILIEVI
MATTEO BELLOTTO

Francesco Durante 1684-1755
Requiem in G minor

Introitus		Offertorium	
1. Requiem aeternam	4'59	10. Domine Jesu Christe	2'14
2. Kyrie	1'16	11. Hostias	2'59
Gradualis et Tractus		Sanctus	
3. Requiem aeternam – In memoria aeterna	4'03	12. Sanctus	1'09
		13. Benedictus	0'51
4. Fuga in C minor	3'49	14. Toccata (Anonymous, Naples, XVII sec.)	3'52
Sequentia		15. Agnus Dei	0'48
5. Dies Irae, dies illa	5'11	Communio	
6. Recordare Jesu pie	2'04	16. Lux Aeterna	3'24
7. Ingemisco tamquam reus	3'09	Exitus	
8. Confutatis maledictis	2'39	17. Libera me Domine	8'38
9. Lacrymosa dies illa	2'28		

Francesca Cassinari *soprano* · Elena Carzaniga *contralto*
Roberto Rilievi *tenor* · Matteo Bellotto *bass*



Luca Alfonso Rizzello *violin I* · Aki Takahashi *violin II* · Marlise Goidanich *cello*
Cecilia Medi *bassoon* · Elisa La Marca *theorbo* · Carlo Centemeri *organ and conductor*

Among the numerous sacred compositions attributed to Francesco Durante, six requiem masses have been preserved. Of these, only three have been definitively attributed to him: the first, the Requiem in a minor mass is the only one lacking a date of composition. It exists in two non-autograph manuscripts and is scored for small forces: three voices (SSB), two violins and continuo, nevertheless, the composition is clearly in Durante's style. The second mass is likely the oldest one, the g minor mass here recorded. The autograph is preserved in the Biblioteca Statale Oratoriana dei Girolamini, in Naples, dated on «Die 27 Msis 9bris 1738». It is scored for four voices (SATB), two violins and continuo. The third mass, and undoubtedly the most famous, is the «Messa de' morti a più voci con instrumenti in Do minore», which includes in the autograph organ part the date «1746» and was premiered in Rome on Sept 15th, 1749 in the «Regia Chiesa de SS. Giacomo, ed Ildefonso della Nazione Spagnuola» (Royal church of S. James and S. Ildephonsus of the Spanish nation), in Piazza Navona, to commemorate the death of Philip V of Spain, who had passed away on July 9th of the same year. It is scored for eight voices in two choirs (SSATB/ATB), strings and two Trombe da caccia that play only in the Tuba Mirum. Its autograph is today in the British Library.

These funeral ceremonies, solemn and opulent affairs, flourished *ad abundandiam* in Italy during 17th and 18th centuries. State funeral were as much an opportunity to display of wealth and power as they were occasions for grief and mourning, and the various nation-states (in particular in Rome and in Naples) would compete with each other through splendid services to show their supremacy. Funeral rites were also exalted liturgical gestures enhanced by rich and ephemeral architectures designed by the greatest artists of the day and featured an exceptional pomp, in particular in the churches related to the homeland of the deceased person. The presence of diplomatic, dynastic or aristocratic representatives could transform the regular obsequies into a privileged space, where power and its transfer and maintenance was of equal priority to seeing off the dead on their final journey.

For the purpose of such a game, blending ephemera and eternity, these sumptuous and solemn memorial services became another opportunity to advance political and social advantages. Different symbolic meanings could be associated with death, but frequently they could sum up, as a kind of magical or healing sanctity originating from the middle ages, or as the disembodied sacredness that was part of the newly acquired state of the deceased, now become a higher entity.

Thanks to his solid training in the Roman tradition, Durante concentrated on sacred music rather than the opera favored by other Neapolitan composers, (his name appears in the 1718 register of the masters and professors at the Congregazione e Accademia di S Cecilia in Rome. He frequently employed elements of renaissance polyphony in his requiem masses: a complex counterpoint constructed of canons, fugues, *cantus firmus-like* textures, the use of the plainsong and various rhetorical elements (such as the descending chromatic hexachords) placed into a context where Palestrina's original style remained only as a dogmatic reference.

These archaic processes are used by Durante in other sacred music as well: for example, the *Messa col canto fermo sull' Antifona di San Michele*, which includes the antiphon *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus* and the hymnus *Iste Confessor*, both part of St. Ildephonus first vespers, or the *Messa alla Palestrina*, whose Sanctus and Benedictus were included in the c minor requiem mass as well.

Obviously, the references to the *stile antico* and Palestrina do not imply a renaissance musical language: Durante uses a thoroughly 18th century language but his way of treating multiple choirs was different from the approach of Ugolini or Benevoli, where choirs were clashing or opposing their voices using the churches' reverberant interiors to impress the audience. Durante, instead chooses to use a complex counterpoint, dissonance or striking instrumental effects to impress his hearers.

However, it was the rite, as a performance and a ritual that would influence the way these masses were written, and for all pomp and politics, the requiem was above all else, a *Missa pro defunctis* – a Mass of the dead offered for the repose of the soul of the deceased.

At the rites conclusion, the priest would lead the funeral procession of clergy around the casket. Only at this moment does the choir chant the “Libera me Domine”, while incensing the *castrum doloris*. At the end, the singers chant the three responsories (Dies Illa, Requiem aeterna, and the reprise of Libera me), plus the final Kyrie: some of which could also be repeated. Durante always conceived of these pieces in a very practical manner, both in terms of length and functionality. As seen from several period prints, the casket was in front of the musicians in the main aisle, at the center of the church: it was in fact a fundamental object both in artistic and in symbolic terms, being a moral portrait of the departed who was, in other terms, the beneficiary of the funeral feast. The catafalque represents the absence-presence of death itself and becomes a functional object into the real world. Durante's music, with its expressiveness and skill, masterfully reflects its meaning.

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From the musician's point of view

Durante's Requiem Mass in G minor comes down to us through an impressive number of manuscript copies, with editions found in the private collections of many prestigious music lovers, among them the music collector Fortunato Santini, and composers Giovanni Battista Martini, and François-Joseph Fétis. Copies are also preserved in libraries in Italy, Germany, Russia, and Switzerland. In Durante's native Naples no less than five contemporary copies are still extant. Among them, two are particularly noteworthy in that they include a complete set of parts compiled in the 19th century, evidence that this mass was still in the repertoire almost one century after its premiere (in 1732): moreover, one of these copies has parts for horns and bassoons added by a certain “*Mastro Lillo*”, in order to adapt Durante's orchestral sound (but not its music) to the tastes of the moment. Even a casual glance at the score clearly shows why Durante was greatly sought after as a counterpoint teacher

and, also, why composers so different in time and style (from Pergolesi to Paisiello) can be numbered among his pupils. In this score the composer displays an astonishing ability to create incredible effects with limited means and while later editions added winds and brass, Durante's own manuscript allowed the violin parts to be omitted entirely – an option that was actually exercised it seems: the performance copy in Einsiedeln library lacks string parts altogether! As a practical musician himself, it is easy to understand that Durante's aim to compose a score that could work in a variety of circumstances, even with a very small number of performers (ideally, four singers and an organ would be enough).

Despite this flexibility many important interpretative are left unanswered when studying the score. For instance, how to deal with the division of the vocal parts in *solo* and *tutti* sections: neither Durante nor do the later copyists provide any clue, and while there are no independent solo episodes (like arias, ariosos, duets, etc) a number of short solo-like passages of a few measures do appear and from an purely aesthetic perspective, do not seem to be likely to be sung by a choir section. Another question is how to deal with the “call-and-response” effects, where Durante employs the voices in pairs (e.g soprano/bass versus alto/tenor)? This is an effect based on vocal color and sound projection that works equally well with four solo singers as with a chorus. On this basis, the use of soloists was preferable. Performing this mass with a small group, as we did on this recording, highlight the madrigal-like qualities of the music, in conformity with a general atmosphere of “stile antico” that gradually came to dominate 19th century liturgical music. It is quite interesting to note the *cantus firmus* approach in the opening phrase of the sequentia (in c minor, with its later reprise in g minor), built as a harmonization over a bass line strongly related to the *Dies Irae* plainchant melody. The same idea, curiously, had occurred also to Dietrich Buxtehude, in the three-part settings of the central section (“*Salve caput cruentatum*”) of the last cantata of the cycle *Membra Jesu nostri*.

As always when approaching a work written hundreds of years ago, there are

always performance choices to be made and there may be some who may take issue with our choices. The main task that we set before us when making this recording was to give back to the world this wonderful piece of music. The edition of the score is available for free (just request it on the Astrarium Consort website). It is our sincere hope that after listening to our performance other choirs and ensembles would be inspired to perform it themselves, applying their own points of view. In which case, this magnificent score will continue in repertoire and our goal shall have been achieved

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Translations: Carlo Centemeri and Joshua Cheek



Astrarium Consort is a project born in 2014 as a collaboration between several musicians and scholars, to document on records rare and unpublished baroque repertoire. The members of the consort come from Europe, Asia and America and they perform regularly on the international scene. The group, based in Milan, has a variable structure, according to the scoring. The group was released in 2015 for Brilliant Classics the first complete recording of the solo cantatas by Giovanni Paolo Colonna. Since its foundation, the group is led by Carlo Centemeri. Among the musicians that have performed with Astrarium Consort, we can find Francesca Cassinari, Elena Carzaniga, Salvo Vitale, Grasiela Setra Dantas, Andrea Vassalle, Mauro Massa, Luca Alfonso Rizzello, Carlo Sgarro, Aki Takahashi, Paolo Borgonovo, Marlise Goidanich, Flora Papadopoulos and many others.

On our website you can be informed on Astrarium forthcoming projects and also learn how to contribute to them.

This recording is respectfully dedicated to

*Stefano Bianchi,
Vico Chamla,
Angelo Marzatico,
Loredana Pecorini,
Gabriele Pedron,
Marco Rossi,
Gian Nicola Vessia*

et lux perpetua luceat eis

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Silvia Canavero, Irene Santini, Cristina Fera, Paolo Borgonovo,
Eleonora Bettinelli and Ilaria Zibetti*

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Recording supervisor: Eleonora Regorda

Editing: Eleonora Regorda, Carlo Centemeri & Edoardo Lambertenghi

Photo: Alberto Panzani

Chamber organ by Carlo Mascheroni (2016), Diapason: a=415Hz, Temperament: Tartini Vallotti

Astrarium Consort logo: Irene Santini

Sources: New Critical Edition by Carlo Centemeri, available on request from astrarium consort's website

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