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BRILLIANT
CLASSICS



PELAZZA
ORGAN MUSIC

Fabio Macera *organ*

Giovanni Maria Pelazza 1847-1936
Organ Music

“Dodici Suonate su varii tuoni”		19. Dopo l’Epistola	2’33
1. Allegro Sinfonico	6’19	20. Suonata per l’Offertorio	3’44
2. Suonata Caratteristica in D	4’19	21. Pel Postcommunio	6’49
3. Suonata in C	3’56		
4. Suonata in E flat	3’29	da “Dieci Suonate per la benedizione del	
5. Adagio in A	3’19	SS. Sacramento, fasc. 1”	
6. Marcia Finale in F	3’15	22. Suonata No.2	1’52
7. Adagio per l’Elevazione	3’00	23. Suonata No.9	2’02
8. Marcia Finale in G	3’35		
9. Suonata in F	4’34	da “Dieci Suonate per la benedizione del	
10. Polka Finale in F	1’52	SS. Sacramento, fasc. 2”	
11. Adagio in G	3’02	24. Suonata No.2	1’38
12. Suonata in C	3’06		
		dalla “Messa in D”	
dalla “Messa in C”		25. Per dopo l’Epistola	2’34
Sei Versetti strumentati pel Gloria		26. Per l’Elevazione	2’25
13. I.	0’51	27. Per dopo la Messa	1’53
14. II.	1’23		
15. III.	1’30		
16. IV.	1’18		
17. V.	1’59		
18. VI.	1’29		

Fabio Macera *organ*
organ of the Sanctuary of the SS. Crucifix at Borzonasca, Italy

Very little is known about the life and works of the Piedmontese musician **Giovanni Maria Pelazza**, although the recent publication of *Giovanni Maria Pelazza da Carmagnola* edited by Anna Fietta and Guido Corraisi¹ has helped rescue him from the mists of oblivion.

He was born in Carmagnola in 1847, and trained as a musician within the sphere of the Salesian brotherhood in Turin², in particular with Giovanni Cagliari (1838-1926)³, a priest and musician who was made a Cardinal by Benedict XV in 1915.

In 1871 Pelazza won the selection for the job of organist at the parish church of Romano Canavese⁴, where found himself playing the grand organ built in 1862 by Camillo Guglielmo Bianchi⁵. With its two manuals, 2350 pipes and 59 registers⁶, the instrument certainly played a role in shaping Pelazza’s creativity during those years, although we do not know for sure in what order his surviving works were composed. With the exception of the nine compositions that make up the anthology *Vademecum per gli organisti* published by Cantone in Turin, they were printed by the Salesian press in the *L’Organista provveduto* series. Although they are undated, it is reasonable to suppose that they were written between around 1865 and 1885.

The Bianchi organ at Romano is stylistically true to the Serassi model, the many registers and solo features making it well suited to reproducing the motifs typical of Italian opera. This emphasis on accompanied solo melody is evident not only in the *Mass in C* and the *Mass in D*, but also in the *Suonate per la Benedizione*, all of which were written during the years Pelazza was organist at Romano.

Yet in certain respects Pelazza’s musical language was more original than that of most of his fellow composers during the same period in Piedmont (Quirici, Bodro, Ferrua, to mention just those whose works were also published in the *L’Organista provveduto* series). This is particularly so in the case of the *Dodici Suonate su varii tuoni*, which speak for the composer’s familiarity with all aspects of Italian instrumental music in Piedmont and Lombardy, where the influence of Rossini was beginning to fade. Indeed, the organs built during these years, especially those by Lingiardi⁷ and Bernasconi⁸,

speak eloquently for the new developments, including the evolution of the symphonic organ. This «expression of increasingly widespread attention to orchestral imitation»⁹ featured the addition of viola-like registers, soft, melodious reed effects, emphatic reed sounds and improvement of the dynamic impact of the swell box.

Pelazza was familiar with the symphonic organ built by Lingiardi in 1879 for the church of S. Maria Ausiliatrice at the behest of Don Bosco. We do not know whether he became the chief organist there, but it is certain that he had the chance to play the instrument¹⁰, and was indeed inspired by it when working on the *Dodici Suonate su varii tuoni*: the use of the sound box, the bells (Tam-tam introduced by Luigi Lingiardi), and particular registrations suggested by the composer in the score are all explicit references to this type of instrument.

In my opinion the *Dodici Suonate* are not just the high point of Pelazza's creative flair in composing for the organ. They also reveal how his style evolved, how «without renouncing melody [...], he tended to reduce the embellishments derived from the *belcanto* tradition»¹¹. Moreover, they embody important references to the Lingiardi symphonic organ. It is reasonable to suggest that Carlo Bodro (1840-1900 ca.) is the only other composer to have written so evidently with the Lingiardi symphonic organ in mind.

In 1887 Pelazza moved to Marseilles¹², and the following year unsuccessfully took part in selections for the position as organist at the church of Sainte Augustine in Nice. During this period he not only composed and played the organ, but also worked as a conductor in various cities in Provence¹³. In 1898¹⁴ he transferred definitively to Buenos Aires, where he was probably organist and chapel master at the Salesian church of St. John the Evangelist in the Boca district, which at the time was full of immigrants from Liguria¹⁵.

In the book by Georges Gustave Serié, *Don Bosco nel ricordo degli ex allievi*, reference is made to Pelazza as a choir conductor, which gives us an idea of the reality of sacred music in the early 1800s in an Italian community in Argentina. It is also the

only extant description of Pelazza's physical aspect, as well as certain of his character traits. He comes across as distinctly fiery, which tallies with some of his compositions, especially the polkas and marches. It is also interesting to read about the failure of the reform of sacred vocal music within so specific a musical context:

“Buenos Aires, 1900. Major festivities in La Boca district [...] A few quick brushstrokes to conjure up the situation of sacred music [...] The score allowed the singers to show off their vocal qualities [...] plump, chubby tenors, thin, steely basses, all of them with mops of hair duly combed down and pomaded, fashionable ties and studded pins, gold chains with precious medallions visible above the waistcoats. The soloist, brilliant favourite of the company, in the centre of the chorus, his legs wide apart, like a torero, his thumbs tucked into the little pockets of his waistcoat and his jewelled fingers hanging down, waiting for his moment, without deigning to sing with the choir: he was getting ready for the high notes. [...] Pelazza was conducting with even greater verve than usual, shaking his leonine head with its long mane of silvery hair, aware that down below there were highly competent judges. From his eyes flew flames towards the musicians as he rose up in the supreme act of supporting, or so it seemed, the entire weight of those rushing harmonies in his tense, agile hands [...]. We should also report that Dogliani was there as well, and that Pelazza had studied with him in Turin. One might object: but if this is the outcome [...]. Instead, let us console ourselves with the conviction that such are the smoky remains of a fire that is almost extinguished. We are well aware of the wretched state of sacred vocal music in Italian churches, and how even Rossini and Verdi wrote religious music to help overcome this embarrassing state of affairs¹⁶.”

We also know that Pelazza took part in the inauguration of the new organ built by Carlo Vegezzi-Bossi at the church of St. John the Evangelist in the Boca district¹⁷, and composed an oratorio entitled *Cristoforo Colombo*¹⁸. And this is the sum total of available information regarding the life and works of Pelazza, who died in Tigre (Buenos Aires) in 1936.

Despite various contacts in Argentina, where Pelazza lived and worked, no more has come to light, though perhaps further research might uncover other interesting details. It is highly likely that his style as a composer also changed in keeping with the dictates of the Cecilian Reform. An analysis of any works dating from the 1900-1936 period might also enrich our understanding of the creative output of a musician of remarkable originality.

The decision to use for this recording a single-manual Serassi organ is due to the fact that the instrument represents the type of organ that was most widespread in Italy during the 1800s. The compositions containing evident references to larger organs, which are actually quite rare, and in particular symphonic organs (the Lingiardis only built ten of them), suggest that they were adapted to suit smaller instruments, which explains the approach adopted by Fabio Macera for this CD.

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Translation by Kate Singleton

1. Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, *Giovanni Maria Pelazza da Carmagnola*, Romano C.se., Maximo di Martinetto M., 2017.
2. *Bollettino Salesiano*, IX/7(1885), p.96 n. 1.
3. See the dedication to Mons. G. Cagliero of the *20 numeri di Litanie della Beata vergine*, Turin, Calcografia Salesiana, n.d.
4. Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, op cit. p.18.
5. Camillo Guglielmo Bianchi (Lodi, 10 October 1821 – Novi Ligure, 7 December 1890) was a mid 19th century Italian organ builder. He had studied under the Serassis, and his main professional focus became the construction of church organs in southern Piedmont and in Liguria, where he largely adopting the sound system used by the Serassi firm, which was fairly typical for Italian organs of the 1800s. See Giancarlo Bertagna, *Gli antichi organi di novi Ligure e l'attività di Camillo Guglielmo Bianchi*, Alessandria, Edizioni dell'Orso, 1986.
6. Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, op. cit. pp 37-41.
7. A family of organ builders active in Pavia from 1807 to 1920. With the construction of the

organ at the church of S. Maria del Carmine in Pavia (op. 40, 1836), inaugurated by the famous Father Davide da Bergamo, the Fratelli Lingiardi company made great steps forward in terms of improvements and innovations. Luigi was certainly the most interesting member of the family, as the *Memoirs* (1878) he dedicated to his sons and other writings clearly reveal. It was he who developed the orchestra organ, which brought together the Italian organ tradition and elements deriving from northern Europe. This involved maintaining the character of the Ripieno, but at the same time reinforcing the timbre of the reed registers by adopting different degrees of pressure on a single wind chest with two sections fitted with a double transmission mechanism connected to two series of stops, one relating to the grand organ, and the other to the second organ, or echo organ, which corresponded to the reed registers. See the various studies in *L'arte organaria dei Lingiardi fra tradizione e sperimentazione*, edited by Laura Mauri Vigevani and Marco Ruggeri, Viterbo, BetaGamma Editrice, 2014.

8. Dynasty of Italian organ builders with roots in the Varese area, largely active in Lombardy. In particular Giuseppe Bernasconi, during the 1850s and 60s, renewed the classic model of Italian organs of the 19th century by adding numerous viola-like registers and redesigning the sound system of the Echo Organ with a view to expanding its expressive range. This was a significant departure from the Serassi model, where the console of the Echo Organ was similar to that of the Grand Organ, in keeping with the earlier baroque tradition of alternation between Tutti and Solo passages.
9. Marco Ruggeri, *L'organo orchestra in Lombardia nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento in Contributi per la storia dell'arte organistica e organaria in Italia*, Venice, Edizioni Fondazione Levi, 2012, p. 101.
10. See Bruno Bergamini, *Giovanni Battista Maria Pelazza, carriera musicale*, in Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, op cit. p.28.
11. *Idem*, p. 33.
12. Dionisio Petriella - Sara Sosa Miatello, *Dizionario Biografico Italo-Argentino*, Buenos Aires, Asociación Dante Alighieri, 1976, p.521.
13. Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, *op cit.*, p. 23.
14. Dionisio Petriella - Sara Sosa Miatello, *op. cit.*, p.521.
15. G.G. Serietà, *San Giovanni Bosco nei ricordi e nella vita degli ex allievi*, Torino, Ed. SEI, 1953.
16. G.G. Serietà, *op. cit.*, pp. 185 ff. The reference to Giuseppe Dogliani (1849-1934), chapel master at the church of Maria Ausiliatrice is deliberate, since he was an active supporter of the Cecilian movement for church music reform.
17. See the «Bollettino salesiano», XXVIII/5 (1904), p. 156.
18. Anna Fietta - Guido Corraï, *op. cit.*, p.26.

BORZONASCA (GE)

Parish Church of S. Bartolomeo Apostolo – Santuario del SS. Crocifisso

The organ in the Sanctuary of the Holy Crucifix at Borzonasca is a fine example of Lombard organs of the 19th century.

Positioned in the choir above the main entrance, it was built by the Serassi brothers of Bergamo in 1821, opus No.389.

It features a chromatic keyboard of 54 notes (C₁-F₅) with separation of basses and sopranos between B₂ and C₃, and a sloping with 19 pedals (17+2: C₁-E₂, + two pedals for Bass drum and Third hand) constantly connected to the keyboard.

The registers are activated by levers, arranged in two columns to the right of the keyboard:

Voce Umana	Principale I 8 Bassi
Ottavino [2 S]	Principale I 8 Soprani
Fagotto [8 B]	Principale II 8 Bassi
Tromba [8 S]	Principale II 8 Soprani
Clarone [4 B]	Ottava Bassi
Corno inglese [16 S]	Ottava Soprani
Viola Bassi 4	Duodecima
Flauto Traverso S.	Decimaquinta
Corni da caccia [16 S]	Decimanona e Vigesimaseconda
Flauto in ottava	Quattro di ripieno
Cornetto S. [quattro file]	Sesquialtera Bassi
Flagioletto Bassi	Contrabbassi e rinforzi
	Tromboni

Knob to the right of the music stand for Campanelli.

Knob to the left of the music stand for Uccelliera.

Small pedals to the right of the pedal board for: Lombard free combination and Tiratutti del Ripieno.

When the instrument was restored in 1995-96 by Bottega Organara Dell'Orto & Lanzini of Dormelletto (NO), the pipes, wind chest and bellows were all carefully inspected. This allowed for recovery of the original unequal temperament 1/6-comma.





Fabio Macera studied under Emilio Traverso and obtained his Diploma in Organ and Organ Composition at the G. Cantelli Conservatoire in Novara.

He then furthered his understanding of interpretation and performance technique by attending courses held by eminent teachers such as H. Vogel, Chr. Stembridge, D. Hunter, M. Radulescu and G. Bovet. He also specialized in French early and symphonic music under J. P. Lecaudey at the École de musique at Saint-Remy-de-Provence.

He has performed in concerts in Italy and abroad, taking part in various organ festivals as a soloist

and an accompanist for singers, choirs and instrumentalists.

In December 2015 he took part in “Auditions d’orgue” at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and in 2017 in “Les Dimanches Musicaux de La Madeleine”.

In 2016 the magazine *Musica* awarded him the full 5 star rating for his CD “Armonie d’Organo tra Ottocento e Novecento”, released by the French label Fugatto.

He has been part of the Diocesan Commission for the organs of the Chiavari diocese, helping catalogue the organs for *Gli Organi della Diocesi di Chiavari* that was published for the Jubilee Year of 2000.

He is artistic director of the organ festival *Armonie Sacre percorrendo le Terre di Liguria* and a founding member of the Jean Sibelius Orchestra of Rapallo.

He is principal organist of the Serassi organ at the Sanctuary of the Holy Crucifix in Borzonasca (GE), and at the Basilica Arcipresbiterale dei SS. Gervasio e Protasio in Rapallo.

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