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A detail from Raphael's fresco 'The School of Athens' showing the Sibyl seated on a stone ledge. She is wearing a white and purple robe and is holding an open book. A cherub is lighting a torch above her head. The background shows other figures in the fresco.

EL CANT DE LA SIBIL·LA

Sacred music from medieval Catalunya

ENSEMBLE SAN FELICE
FEDERICO BARDAZZI

Sung texts available at www.brilliantclassics.com

El Cant de la Sibil·la	
Sacred music from medieval Catalunya	
Music from the <i>Llibre Vermell de Montserrat</i>	
1	Polorum Regina 5'10 <i>Soloist: Eloisa Iori</i>
2	Los set goyts 2'33
3	Maria Matrem Virginem 6'41
4	Stella splendens 2'58 <i>Soloists: Emma Giannini, Eloisa Iori</i>
5	Imperayritz de la ciudad joyosa 6'31 <i>Soloist: Maria Chiara Di Benedetto</i>
Traditional Catalan ballad	
6	El comte Arnau 4'11 <i>Soloists: Rachele Zamperini, Simone Emili</i>
Music from the <i>Llibre Vermell de Montserrat</i>	
7	Ad mortem festinamus 2'29
8	Laudemus Virginem – Splendens ceptigera 1'47
Music from the Barcelona Lectionary (14th century)	
9	Antiphona: Christus natus est nobis – Psalmus 94/95 (Invitatory): Venite exultemus Domino 2'29 <i>Soloist: Simone Emili</i>
10	Benedictio – Lectio – De homilia Sancti Augustini 1'41
11	Responsorium: Verbum caro factum est 2'32
12	Benedictio – Lectio – Sermo Sancti Augustini in die Natalis Domini 1'25
13	El cant de la Sibil·la 7'02 <i>Soloist: Chiara Galieto</i>

Music from the <i>Llibre Vermell de Montserrat</i>	
14	O Virgo splendens 1'39
15	Cuncti simus concanentes 3'00 <i>Soloists: Eloisa Iori, Rachele Zamperini, Simone Emili</i>
Traditional medieval song	
16	Ave maris stella 1'57 <i>Soloist: Simone Emili</i>
Ensemble San Felice	
Federico Bardazzi <i>conductor</i>	
Instrumental accompaniment	
Federico Bardazzi <i>vielle</i>	
Michele Bertucci <i>recorders, tambourine, symphonia (hurdy-gurdy)</i>	
Dimitri Betti <i>portative organ</i>	
Xiao Ran Bu <i>erhu (Chinese violin)</i>	
Marco Di Manno <i>recorders</i>	
Dario Landi <i>lute</i>	
Veronica Nosei <i>shawms, recorders</i>	
Donato Sansone <i>recorders, percussion, symphonia, bagpipe</i>	
Tommaso Scopsi <i>percussion</i>	
Vocalists	
Federico Bardazzi, Dimitri Betti, Shuyun Huang, Dario Landi, Marco Di Manno, Xhianzhuo Mi, Tommaso Scopsi, Mengyao Sun, Xiao Jing Xu, Zhiqiang Zhang	
Pueri Cantores della Cattedrale di Sarzana	
Alessandra Montali <i>chorus master</i>	

Voci bianche (child sopranos)

Elsa Canepa, Maria Chiara Di Benedetto, Eleonora Cantale, Maria Sofia Cantale, Asia Del Prato, Gaia Forcelli, Emma Giannini, Eloisa Iori, Michelle La Galante, Mickaela La Galante, Martino Mei Moretti, Elsa Poletto, Corinne Fanny Rosignoli, Michele Virgilio, Rachele Zamperini

Tenors

Pietro Bernardini, Simone Emili

Basses

Gaetano Canepa, Zeno Canepa, Emmanuele Casula, Emanuele Menconi



Recording: 9 & 10 April 2016, Pieve di Sant'Andrea in Sarzana, La Spezia, Italy

Artistic production: Federico Bardazzi & Nicola Cavina

Recording, editing & mastering: Nicola Cavina

Cover image: *Sibilla Eritrea*; detail from the Sistine Chapel, Rome, by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)

Recording in the Pieve di Saint'Andrea took place thanks to Father Piero Barbieri

Liner notes & biography translations: Ian Mansbridge

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El Cant de la Sibil·la: About the project

The realisation of *El Cant de la Sibil·la* came out of the Medieval Music Workshop held by Federico Bardazzi, Alessandra Montali, Donato Sansone and Marco Di Manno at the ‘Giacomo Puccini’ Conservatoire in La Spezia, thanks to an artistic collaboration between Opera Network Florence, Pueri Cantores of the Cathedral of Sarzana and Ensemble San Felice. Working together, these four creative forces have produced something of great artistic and educational value. The launch of the Early Music Workshop brought many young students from the conservatoire into contact with very old and little-known repertoire. With expert professional guidance, they were taught early vocal and instrumental techniques, for an authentic reconstruction of the performance style from the era in which the works were composed. The young singers from the Pueri Cantores della Cattedrale di Sarzana choir (some of whom are very young indeed) gave the performance extra depth with a vocal technique that intentionally recalls the sound of the texts from the *Llibre Vermell*, a work that pilgrims to Montserrat would have heard on arrival at their destination, performed by the Escolania choir of *niños cantores*. Finally, the use of copies of period instruments, mixed with the purity of the vocal timbre, produced an absolutely captivating blend of sounds.

El Cant de la Sibil·la opened the first InCanto Armonico festival, a new event dedicated to early music that aims to mix instrumental and vocal music, to encourage young music students and professionals to perform together, to share projects with associations and artistic bodies from different regions, and to host Italian and foreign choral and instrumental groups and collaborate with them. In spite of their differences, these groups aspire to build mutual understanding and fruitful relationships steeped in empathy, leading to truly enchanting results, as seen in this recording.

© Alessandra Montali

St Augustine: ‘De Civitate Dei’, chapter XXIII, 23: The Sybil’s Prophecies

‘Some people refer to a prophecy made by the Erythraean Sibyl. The Erythraean Sibyl certainly made some prophecies explicitly concerning Christ, which we first read in bad, stilted Latin, due to the lack of skill of an unknown translator. In a certain section the first letter of each line spelled out the phrase “Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Saviour”.

There are 27 lines in total, or three cubed; three times three is nine, and three times nine, as if

making a flat figure three-dimensional, is 27. Then, if you join the first letters of the five Greek words meaning “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour”¹ you get a word meaning “fish”, a word that expresses Christ in a spiritual sense, as only He can remain alive, i.e. without sin, in the abyss of mortality, like in deep water.

The Erythraean Sibyl or, as some call her, the Cumaean Sibyl, throughout the poem of which this is a short extract, does not present anything that recalls the worship of false or invented gods; on the contrary, she speaks against them and their followers, and so it appears she may be one of the citizens of the city of God.

These are the Sibyl's words. Without adding anything, we have set them down one after the other, taking care to highlight the first letter of each line, which transcribers may wish to preserve for the future. However, some people have written that the Erythraean Sibyl was not around at the time of Romulus, but instead lived during the Trojan War.’

The Song of the Sibyl

In the Middle Ages singing was an integral part of worship, combining intimate prayers, dance rhythms and courtly arias originating from the regions crossed by the great pilgrimage routes: from Italy to Catalonia via Provence; from Thuringia to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris via Normandy; and from southern Italy to the court of Castile, where St Dominic, the guardian of pilgrims, was worshipped. These traditions became amalgamated during pilgrimages, eventually forming their own unique language.

Montserrat Monastery, set on the jagged Catalan mountains above Barcelona, is the most legendary of all the pilgrimage sites. Its ardent resistance to the Visigoth hordes has seen it renowned as a bastion of Christianity since medieval times. This programme attempts to depict an imaginary coming together of pilgrims from various places, who meet en route and head to Montserrat to attend midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. Musically speaking, we started out on this abstract journey with the *Llibre Vermell*, a work created to ensure that the believers who climbed up to Montserrat had a suitable musical repertoire to sing. The pilgrims had tended to alternate religious songs with secular hunting songs and dances, often accompanied by minstrels and storytellers.

The statue of the Madonna in the central chapel of the monastery is black, representing the end of time and the approaching apocalypse. In this chapel the monks would sing the opening lines of

sacred hymns performed by the Escolania, the renowned Montserrat boys’ choir.

During the third nocturn of the Christmas Day matins service, a boy from the Escolania was dressed up as the Sibyl and, blindfolded, sang the famous verses from pagan times predicting the coming of Christ and the end of the world. This tradition also spread to Italy, Provence and Castile and continued for several centuries, until it was outlawed by the Council of Trent. For this performance we chose the version found in the archives of Barcelona Cathedral, in Codex 184, which is the same age as the *Llibre Vermell* and, most importantly, contains the full pseudo-Augustinian *Lectio* on the Sibyl's prophecy. Romance languages were starting to be used in religious settings in this period, and so we chose the Catalan version from Codex 184 (the manuscript also contains a Latin version), just as the two languages alternate in the *Llibre Vermell*.

The Gregorian chant section has the job of placing the Sibyl's prophecy in its original context, i.e. the liturgy of the *Matutinum*, which was the precursor to medieval liturgical drama, seemingly fed by an irrepressible need to depict something intangible. The *Matutinum* was divided into three nocturns, sung at different times during the night (with the third sung at dawn). Each comprised three psalms and three readings with corresponding responsories; it was introduced by the Invitatory Psalm 94 (or 95 in the Hebrew numbering), and the Te Deum hymn was sung at the end. Following the Second Vatican Council, Matins became the ‘Office of Readings’, comprising a total of three psalms and two readings with corresponding responsories, still introduced by Psalm 94 and rounded off, on feast days, by the Te Deum.

It is worth underlining that the earliest liturgical dramas originated in the final part of the third nocturn of Matins at Easter and Christmas, first modifying and then taking the place of the final Responsory; it is almost as if sacred theatre formed of its own accord from the words of the early church fathers. Liturgical drama would subsequently move into several tropes in the Introit of Mass. However, this service remained more resistant to this form of spiritual expression, as, unlike the Office of Readings, it already provided an excellent representation of the sacred, and thus was also more rigidly formalised. For the Invitatory psalm and the *Lectio* of Saint Augustine with the corresponding Responsory we used several sources, including the 12th-century Florence Antiphony from the archiepiscopal archive and a thorough comparison with the oldest source of the Gregorian Office, the 9th-century Hartker Antiphony. For the Latin pronunciation we chose the form closest to medieval Catalan. Indeed, there is evidence that, although Catholicism was centred in Rome, in the late Middle Ages there were differing views on ecclesiastical Latin in

different parts of Europe.

The instruments used are copies of original period instruments, based on drawings and extremely detailed research. When arranging the pieces we always sought to leave room for the simplicity and expressiveness of the pieces in the *Llibre Vermell* created by heterophony and improvisation.

In *El Cant de la Sibila* in particular we developed the ornamentation in the solo vocal line and structured the lyrics of the choral parts using a technique still used today in Arabic *nawba* in the countries of northern Africa; it is well known that there were very close ties between Arabic, Jewish and Christian culture on the Iberian Peninsula in the medieval period, especially when it came to music.

This procedure is based on an expansion of the original text, where the final syllables of phrases are repeated ('destruhira...ra...ra') and phrasal tropes taken from the text itself are added ('al jorn del judici'). Popular Arabic choruses are also revived, such as '*ta na ni, dir na*', similar to our '*tra la la*' and particularly suited for providing a commentary somewhere between irony and cynicism that dispels the apocalypse prophesied by the Sibyl. The choir therefore has a dual role in this piece, acting as a drone – a background to the dialogue between the solo voice and the instrumental improvisations – and enhancing various aspects of the text's dramatic nature through the procedures indicated above.

A single piece with a secular text was included in the programme, telling the legend of Comte Arnau and his little widow: this text, set to music as early as the Middle Ages, was passed down orally for several centuries and today forms part of the vast repertoire of traditional Catalan music. Its inclusion in this programme aims to represent a time during the night when the pilgrims, awaiting the opening of the monastery and the start of the Matins liturgy and following numerous hymns to the Virgin Mary, gave the floor to the storytellers.

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¹The text reads as follows: Haec de Christi nativitate, passione et resurrectione, atque ejus secundo adventu ita dicta sunt, ut si quis in graeco capita horum versuum discernere voluerit, inveniatur JESUS CHRISTOS THEU YIOS SOTHER: id est, Jesus Christus Dei Filius Salvator, quod in latinum translatis eisdem versibus apparet, praeterquam quod graecarum litterarum proprietates non adeo potuit observari (*Lectio Sancti Augustini Episcopi in die Natalis Domini*)



Federico Bardazzi, a specialist in Early and Baroque music, is best known as a conductor of opera, ranging from the genre's origins through to Handel, Gluck, Mozart, Rossini and Puccini.

After studying cello under André Navarra in Siena and Paris, Bardazzi studied chamber music with Piero Farulli and the Borodin Quartet, composition with Carlo Prospero and Roberto Becheri, Gregorian chant with Nino Albarosa and Johannes Berchmans Göschl, choral conducting with Roberto Gabbiani and Peter Phillips and orchestral conducting at the Chigiana Academy with Myung-Whun Chung.

He conducts the Ensemble San Felice, a globally acclaimed vocal and instrumental group with a repertoire encompassing everything from Medieval to contemporary music.

He has devoted much of his time to the music of Bach over many years, and under his baton the ensemble has performed all the composer's major church music and instrumental concertos. He has conducted Handel's *Messiah* in numerous concerts, both in Italy and across Europe.

In addition to a new version of Mozart's unfinished *Requiem*, he frequently performs rare works and renowned masterpieces by 17th-century composers, including Girolamo Frescobaldi, Francesco Maria Stiava, Dietrich Buxtehude, Jerónimo de Carrión, François Couperin, Michel-Richard de Lalande and John Dowland. His 2005 rendition of three of Giacomo Carissimi's oratorios at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London was particularly noteworthy, and in May 2008, again in London, he put on the first staged production in modern times of Handel's *Rodrigo*, directed by Luciano Alberti, for the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music, founded by Ivor Bolton and Tess Knighton. This production was also performed in 2009 at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence, where in 2011 he conducted Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers* for the Amici della Musica di Firenze. A CD of the performance was recorded for Brilliant Classics.

His programmes focused on research into medieval music have achieved great success throughout Europe: 'Nigra sum sed Formosa', based on the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*; 'La Sibila del reno'

(‘The Sibyl of the Rhine’), which concentrates on the work of Hildegard of Bingen; the medieval liturgical drama taken from Florentine codices *Quem queritis*; and ‘Laudi e Contrafacta nella Firenze del Trecento’ (‘Laude and Contrafacta in 14th-century Florence’) and ‘Musica per San Zanobi nella Firenze del Trecento’ (‘Music for St Zenobius in 14th-century Florence’), exploring the work of Francesco Landini. He is currently working on ‘La musica della *Commedia*’ (‘The Music of the *Divine Comedy*’), a major study of the music in Dante’s masterpiece presented in the form of concerts, conferences and multimedia productions.

Federico Bardazzi was course director at Maggio Fiorentino Formazione from 2008 to 2014, where he organised projects and higher and further education courses, supported by the European Social Fund, for the full range of artistic and technical professions linked to opera. This work was carried out in partnership with Tuscany’s leading opera organisations, including Teatro Verdi in Pisa, the Torre del Lago Puccini Festival and Teatro Metastasio in Prato, with which he continues to work. This experience led to Opera Network, an idea originally conceived by Carla Zanin, which works to develop collaborative projects between various types of organisation to put on opera productions, aiming to help young artists take their first steps in their professional careers. These include (all conducted by Bardazzi): Purcell’s *The Fairy Queen* (Teatro Goldoni, Florence 2013), *Il Flaminio* by Pergolesi (Teatro Verdi, Pisa 2014) and *Il Trionfo dell’Onore* by Alessandro Scarlatti and Gazzaniga’s *Don Giovanni* (Teatro Verdi, Pisa 2015). The 2016/2017 season will present a work by Galuppi in partnership with the Landestheater in Salzburg, directed by Carl Philip von Maldeghem. Bardazzi is currently director of the Torre del Lago Puccini Festival Foundation Training Centre.

He is artistic director of ‘In-canto gregoriano – incontri internazionali di Firenze’, a Gregorian chant festival in Florence, and was a member of the national (2003–06) and international (2009–15) board of directors of the International Association for Studies of Gregorian Chant (AISCGre).

He is president and artistic director of the Florence International Choir Festival, which every year brings hundreds of choral singers from all over the world to Florence for an event of great musical and cultural importance.

Aware of the great potential offered by the Far East for artistic and musical higher education in Italy, he devised and launched a cultural, linguistic and musical training course for Chinese students in collaboration with the University for Foreigners Perugia.

He has run courses on Gregorian chant and mediaeval monody for the University of Florence,

and is invited to give masterclasses all over the world: two particularly noteworthy examples were his 2014 masterclass in Seoul for the World Symposium of Choral Music and a masterclass given in Jerusalem for the Israel Choir Conductor Association. With the Ensemble San Felice he coordinates two European-funded projects in collaboration with some of the most prestigious academies and universities in Europe: VetMusicPro and Cantus Posterior.

He has amassed an extremely wide-ranging discography at the helm of the Ensemble San Felice, taking in everything from medieval repertoire to opera, and has credits not only as a conductor but also as a Baroque cellist, gambist and viellist for labels including Brilliant, Tactus and Bongiovanni.

His concerts have been broadcast by the Italian national broadcaster Rai, on Swiss, German and Polish radio and television, and on the BBC, which produced a special programme dedicated to his work.

Federico Bardazzi lectured in ensemble music and Baroque music at the Bellini Conservatoire in Palermo and the Marenzio Conservatoire in Darfo Boario Terme (Brescia), and has taught at the Puccini Conservatoire in La Spezia since 2012.

The **Ensemble San Felice** is a vocal and instrumental group founded in 1993 by Federico Bardazzi as part of his work at the San Felice Academy in Florence (where he was president from 1991 to 1999 and artistic director until 2009). The group became an independent association in 2009, allowing it to develop projects that were more specific and focused yet wide in scope, including collaborations with prestigious Italian and foreign organisations. Federico Bardazzi is president, the flautist Marco Di Manno is artistic director and Carla Zanin is general manager of the association and, in particular, the Florence International Choir Festival, which brings hundreds of musicians from five different continents to Florence every year.

The repertoire the ensemble performs is predominantly sacred and ranges from medieval to contemporary music, focused in particular on the work of J.S. Bach: over the years it has performed numerous works by him, including the Mass in B minor, the six German Motets, the St John Passion, the Brandenburg Concertos and a complete liturgical reconstruction of the Lutheran Mass set in Bach’s years in Leipzig, not to mention numerous cantatas.

Under Bardazzi’s guidance the group also specialises in 17th-century repertoire and has performed rarely heard works by Marco da Gagliano, Frescobaldi, Carissimi, Buxtehude, Jerónimo de Carrión and François Couperin in numerous festivals both in Italy and abroad.

The first performance in modern times of the *Vespers of St Cecilia* by Francesco Maria Stiava, mounted by the ensemble in partnership with the musicologist Giuseppe Collisani, generated significant public interest. For years the ensemble has also had a close relationship with the work of Giacomo Carissimi, performing, in addition to the famous *Jephthe*, many oratorios which are less well-known but nevertheless of indisputably high quality. It performed these works at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London in 2005. In 2008, again in London, the public was treated to the modern fully-staged premiere of Handel's opera *Rodrigo*, as part of the Lufthansa Festival of Baroque Music. In the field of Baroque opera the ensemble's stand-out productions with Opera Network include Purcell's *The Fairy Queen*, in collaboration with Maggio Fiorentino Formazione (2013), Pergolesi's *Il Flaminio* (2013–14) and *Il Trionfo dell'Onore* by Alessandro Scarlatti (2015), a co-production with the Teatro Verdi in Pisa. 2017 will see the first modern performance of *Montezuma* by Baldassare Galuppi, a co-production with the Landestheater in Salzburg, the Puccini Festival and Opera Network, directed by Carl Philip von Maldeghem and conducted by Federico Bardazzi.

Other productions have received significant public and critical acclaim on numerous European tours, in particular a new version of Mozart's *Requiem, El Cant de la Sibila*, which was first presented at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, *Nigra sum sed formosa* (Cantigas de Santa Maria) and the medieval liturgical drama drawn from Florentine manuscripts entitled *Quem Queritis?* The ensemble has also repeatedly returned to the music of Arvo Pärt, including its *Magnificat* programme created with the support of the European Union and based around the *Sieben Magnificat-Antiphonen* and the *Berliner Messe*, with the addition of texts from the proper in Gregorian chant.

The group has dedicated a lot of energy to the Gregorian repertoire in recent years, focusing on philological and semiological aspects of performance. This gave rise to 'In-canto gregoriano – incontri internazionali di Firenze', a prestigious annual festival held in Florence in partnership with Viri Galilaei and the Metropolitan Chapter of Florence. It regularly features the most renowned figures in the field, including Franz Prassl, Nino Albarosa, Johannes Berchmans Göschl and Daniel Saulnier.

In recent years two European projects, VetMusicPro and Cantus Posterior, stand out amongst the ensemble's work; it coordinated both, in partnership with universities and conservatoires from more than ten European countries.

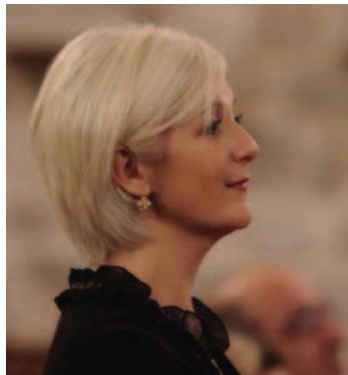
The project entitled *La Musica della Commedia* ('The Music of the *Divine Comedy*') –

incorporating music, video art and spoken word – developed by Julia Bolton Holloway, Federico Bardazzi and Marco Di Manno with artistic support from Carla Zanin, was especially well-received. It was performed in Spain, Portugal, Germany and Austria, and in Italy at the Ravenna Festival and in Florence Cathedral in a co-production with the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore and Teatro della Pergola. A CD of the performance was released by *Classic Voice – Classic Antiqua* magazine, with 16,000 copies produced, and a DVD was released along with Marco Romanelli's book *Cantando come donna innamorata. Dante e la musica* ('Singing like a Woman in Love: Dante and Music') published by the Rome-based Società Editrice Dante Alighieri.

The ensemble's latest project is 'InCanto Armonico', with artistic direction from Alessandra Montali and Federico Bardazzi and in collaboration with Opera Network and the Pueri Cantores della Cattedrale di Sarzana choir. The festival, founded in 2016, incorporates several captivating venues in northern Tuscany and Liguria, with a programme predominantly focused on Early and Baroque music, brought to life by up-and-coming talented performers, some of whom are extremely young.

Ensemble San Felice's wide-ranging discography under Federico Bardazzi's baton comprises 20 CDs and DVDs recorded over 15 years, including Monteverdi's *Vespers* (Brilliant), the first ever recording of *Messa sopra l'aria di Fiorenza* by Girolamo Frescobaldi (Bongiovanni), a CD of Alfonso X's Cantigas de Santa Maria entitled *Nigra sum sed formosa*, and Francesco Landini: *Cantasi Come: Laudi e contrafacta nella Firenze del Trecento* ('Cantasi Come: Laude and Contrafacta in 14th-century Florence') (Bongiovanni).

The ensemble's concerts and recordings have been broadcast by the Italian national broadcaster Rai, Swiss, German and Polish radio and television and the BBC, which dedicated a special hour-long radio programme to the group.



Alessandra Montali

After graduating with outstanding grades from the 'L. Boccherini' Conservatoire in piano, Alessandra Montali continued her studies at the University of Bologna, where she achieved a degree with honours in Arts, Music and Entertainment, and later a PhD in Musicology. She won scholarships that allowed her to develop her musicological training both in Italy and abroad (University of Paris X-Nanterre). She participated as a speaker at conferences both nationally and internationally (Rome, Milan, Bologna, Paris and Kraków), and has published articles for major specialist journals (*Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*, *Rivista di Analisi e Teoria Musicale*) that have been translated abroad (University of Pittsburgh Press, Cracow Press). Her most important book is *Ascoltare il Tempo. Le*

relazioni temporali nella musica: dalla linearità alla stasi (Aracne, 2008), which examines the cognitive emotional and cultural processes involved in music listening. She has taught History of Music at the Conservatoires of Pesaro, Bari, Bergamo, Potenza and currently teaches at the Conservatoire in Vibo Valentia.

Alongside her musicological work, Montali is active as a choral conductor. She specialised in working with youth choirs, and studied vocal pedagogy with Italian and foreign experts (among them M. G. Abba, M. Mora and G. Morgan), and has held choral singing and training courses. She is director of the Pueri Cantores della Cattedrale di Sarzana, a group of 'voci bianche', or young soprano voices. The ensemble is dedicated to the study of both early and modern music, sacred and secular, and collaborates with various instrumental ensembles. The choir's repertoire encompasses everything from Gregorian chant to Renaissance and Baroque music, as well as modern music and contemporary songs. Pueri Cantores have performed in numerous concerts, including the medieval music programme 'Stella Splendens' in collaboration with the Diocesan Museum of Villafranca, Aulla, Massa and Pontremoli, which was filmed and broadcast by Italy's Rai Tre channel. In 2010,

the choir concluded the VII International Festival of History, organised by the University of Bologna, with a performance of Gregorian and medieval songs. Montali also directed a drama for voices, choir and instruments in the ancient Basilica di Santo Stefano in Bologna entitled 'Diario del Santo Viaggio. Donne, penitenti, mistiche, sante e beate, pellegrine medievali in faticoso e periglioso cammino verso Gerusalemme' ('Diary of a holy journey. Women, penitents, mystics, blessed ladies and medieval pilgrims make the tiring and dangerous journey to Jerusalem').

Together with the Baschenis Ensemble, a group of musicians who specialise in Renaissance and Baroque music, Montali directed a programme of Renaissance music entitled 'I bei legami' for the Early Music Festival in Val di Vara. With the same group she instigated a revival of Renaissance and rock pieces with early instruments in the programme 'BaRock Music: tra filologia e contaminazioni', which was performed in 2012 for the ARSA Festival in Sarzana. In Torre del Lago Puccini, she conducted a concert of music by Bruno Coulais for the Puccini Festival. For the theatre, Montali has been active as a choral director, including for the opera *Noye's Fludde* by Britten, performed in 2011 in collaboration with the orchestra of the Conservatory 'G. Puccini' of La Spezia; in 2013, she did the same for the Telemann cantata *Der Schulmeister* in collaboration with the Orchestra da Camera 'A. Mussinelli' of La Spezia, and in 2014, she was choral director for a musical version of Italo Calvino's fairy tale *Giricoccola*, with music by A. Galliano, performed for the Festival of Music and Fairy Tales in Sarzana.

In 2014, thanks to the realisation of a CD produced by the Rotary Club of Genoa, Pueri Cantores was identified as one of the best youth choral groups in Italy. The following year, Montali was chorus master for a concert entitled 'Reconstruction of the Protestant liturgy of Christmas' with Ensemble San Felice, directed by Federico Bardazzi. Alongside the ensemble and Bardazzi, she staged 'Music in Comedy' for two prestigious events: the Ravenna Festival and the Festival of Sacred Music 'O flos colende', staged in the Duomo of Florence. The programme was released on a CD published in *Classic Voice: Antiqua* in November 2015.

In 2016, Montali collaborated with Bardazzi in the artistic direction of the InCanto Armonico Festival, in partnership with the Opera Network association and Ensemble San Felice in Florence, where they premiered *El Cant de la Sibilla*. In April 2016, she conducted a series of concerts with the Pueri Cantores alongside the Baschenis Ensemble in Southwell Minster, Newark and Newstead Abbey, Nottinghamshire, in the UK.