

MARCO ANTONIO CENTORIO VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Cappella Musicale della Cattedrale di Vercelli Denis Silano conductor

Marco Antonio Centorio c.1600 - 1638 Vocal and Instrumental Music

1.	La Centoria "Canzone per sonare con Doi Organi"	4'13	7.	La Coccha "Canzoni francese, da suonare, a' 3. Doi Cornetti, t Transh ang []"	2251
2.	Vigilate Pastores			et Trombone []"	3'51
	"Concerto in Dialogo, a 8 voci		8.	Jubilat Ecclesia	
	[] con doi flauti"	10'06		"Concerto a' 3 voci et	
				3 istromenti"	4'13
3.	La Leggiadra				
	"Canzoni francese, da suonare,		9.	La Vezzosa	
	a' 3. Doi Cornetti,			"Canzoni francese, da suonare,	
	et Trombone []"	4'48		a' 3. Doi Cornetti,	
				et Trombone []"	4'14
4.	Laudate pueri				
	"senza intonatione, a' 5, Alto,		10.	O dulcis et bone Jesu	
	et Tenore, con 2 Violini			[anonimo, attr. a Centorio;	
	et Violone"	3'55		soprano e basso, 2 flauti,	
				violone e organo]	4'20
5.	La Gratiosa				
	"Canzoni francese, da suonare,		11.	Spargite flores	
	a' 3. Doi Cornetti,			"Canto solo, con doi Violini, et	
	et Trombone []"	4'47		Violone"	5'20
6.	Hodie cantant angeli "Concerto con sinfonia a' 6, doi Soprani, et Basso, doi Violini,			Laudate pueri	
				"a' 4, a' 5 et a 7 se piace, fatto s la Cecona [di T. Merula]"	opra 5'41
	et Trombone"	5'06			

Cappella Musicale della Cattedrale di Vercelli mons. Denis Silano *conductor* Marco Antonio Centorio was born around 1600 in the Piedmontese town of Vercelli, in northern Italy. Once part of the local aristocracy, his family had gradually declined to gentry status. In his book *Serie degli uomini e delle donne illustri della città di Vercelli*, the historian Carlo Amedeo Bellini (1625-1672) declared that Centorio began his studies of music and the humanities at the Collegio degli Innocenti, an institution founded in the late 15th century to supply Vercelli Cathedral with singers for religious services. Centorio, who had a fine treble voice, was one of the six *pueri cantus* taken in and educated at the Collegio. When his voice broke he moved to Milan, where he studied organ and counterpoint, possibly at the behest of Giacomo Goria, the reformist bishop who took up his post in Vercelli in 1611. By 1618 Centorio was already organist at Vercelli Cathedral, working alongside his older colleague Giovanni Rovasio as music master at the seminary from 1624. In 1628 he was appointed chapel master in the Cathedral, a position he held until his early death in 1638.

Centorio's style reveals not only the solid training in counterpoint that was typical of northern Italy, but also the composer's skill in handling motets, the Milanese *canzone* of the late 1500s and the new style of the early 1600s exemplified by Monteverdi, Donati, and later Grancini and others. His early compositions reflect the musical practice of the last quarter of the 1500s, a period that witnessed the contribution of great masters, including Simon Boyleau, Orfeo Vecchi (the "Milanese Palestrina", who had also been a *puer cantus* at the Cathedral in Vercelli) and the Franciscans Orazio Colombano, Giacomo Antonio Picciolo and the famous scholar and author Valerio Bona, who had all studied under the Cremonese composer and teacher Costanzo Porta.

As far as we know, none of Centorio's compositions appeared in printed editions, so for this recording we decided to focus on the manuscript scores of his complete works for voice and instruments and solo instruments kept in the Vercelli Chapter Archive. Of his other compositions, unfortunately only fragmentary parts for voice or instruments have come down to us. The manuscript scores are all signed, with the exception of *O dulcis et bone Jesu*, which can nevertheless be attributed to him with relative certainty. Apart from the dialogue *Vigilate pastores*, the CD provides listeners with the world premiere recording of hitherto unpublished works performed on the basis of the modern critical edition curated by the author of these notes.

The recording opens with the elegant chant *La Centoria*, *«per sonare a doi organi»*, a singularly fine piece in the style of the late sixteenth century Milanese canzone that was already in decline. It is interesting to note that the instruments the composer specifically envisaged were two organs, in this case with the possibility of adding two cornets and two trombones, or indeed two violins and two violones. For the recording we have used one violin and one violone.

Special mention should be made of the pastoral dialogue *Vigilate pastores*, which belongs to a genre of non-liturgical compositions on Latin texts for different vocal and instrumental ensembles, conceived for the enjoyment of the aristocracy and high-ranking clergy: for instance, a Christmas offering for the bishop (who is mentioned in the notes of the local archive) or the sojourn of the Dukes of Savoy between 1635 and 1637. The composition calls for a particularly interesting ensemble: eight voices (including four *cantus* parts that would have been sung by the *pueri* of the Collegio degli Innocenti), two soloists (tenor and bass), two recorders (the consummate pastoral instrument) and organ. Of great dramatic impact, this little cantata reveals Centorio's skill in counterpoint and melody: the solo parts are remarkably melodious, the *sinfonia* for two recorders highly elegant and the choral sections in antiphonal dialogue, with a delightful alternation of binary and ternary rhythms, hugely impressive in their solemnity.

The four songs (*La Leggiadra, La Gratiosa, La Coccha* and *La Vezzosa*) in the collection of *Canzoni francese, da suonare, a' 3. Doi Cornetti, et Trombone,* constitute a good example of a genre that was widespread at the time (to mention just a few of the composers who come to mind: Giovanni Gabrieli, Pietro Lappi and Cesare Borgo). Centorio largely adheres to the established model, which he probably came across during his studies in Milan, providing us with delightfully fresh compositions in which the thematic elements are developed and varied without losing sight of his original musical intent. Shared rhythm among the voices alternates with counterpoint, encouraging the musicians to accentuate differences of dynamics and timbre within varied units that comprise dactyl, trochaic and tribrach meters.

While Cantorio's motets certainly reflect coeval vocal music, the examples that have come down to us also reveal the composer's interest in works for voice and instruments, especially what is known as the mottetto con sinfonia. This was a wellestablished genre that ranges from the Cento concerti ecclesiastici by Ludovico da Viadana of 1602 through to the works of Giovanni Antonio Cangiasi, Alessandro Grandi and Tarquinio Merula, among others. The instrumental ensemble increasingly tended to envisage two violins and violone, though occasional variations are also to be found. Moreover, the theorbo was commonly added to double the basso continuo, as we know from Centorio's own production. In some pieces included in this recording (for instance, the O dulcis et bone Jesu), we chose to replace the violins with two recorders, which were frequently used in 16th century music, and also in the following period. In other works Centorio suggests they were interchangeable, just as the violone and trombone were. The motet Spargite flores for solo voice, violins and violone is sung here by a boy soprano, which we felt was better suited to the sound sphere of a period in which only male voices (children and adults) took part in church choirs. In the luminous motets Hodie cantant angeli and Jubilat Ecclesia, dedicated to Saint Eusebius, the patron saint of Vercelli, the sections of the concerto tradition alternate and intersect, with the two high voices (sopranos and violins) and the one lower voice (bass and violone or trombone) sharing the same chromatic range. In the elegant, kaleidoscopic Laudate pueri a' 5, on the other hand, the tessitura ranges from the violins to the violone and embraces the alto and tenor voices.

The last piece in the recording embodies a story of its own. The Laudate pueri, [...]

fatto sopra la Cecona actually derives from a Confitebor, a' 5. Doi Canti, et Basso, con doi Violini, sopra la Chiacona by Tarquinio Merula (1595-1665), included in the volume Pegaso [...], Salmi, Motetti, Suonate, et Letaniae della B. V. a due tre quattro e cinque voci (Venice, 1640), which was the second edition of a tome published between 1633 and 1637 with which Centorio was certainly familiar, since he copied some of it by hand. The same composition also features as the Ciaccona a 2 violini, ed a 3 con violone in the volume of Canzoni overo sonate concertate per chiesa e camera a due e a tre published in 1637, which includes the same chaconne bass already used by Merula in 1633 in Su la cetra amorosa, aria a' voce sola in cecona for soprano, in the work Madrigali et altre musiche concertate of 1633. Since Centorio died in 1638, we can consider his version of the music, with its exuberant melody and stirring rhythm, as fully baroque in intent, despite the evident reflections of the Renaissance palette. As such it embodies a sort of musical testament of a great master, who may have lived his brief existence in a provincial town, but was nevertheless completely au fait with what was going on in music further afield. Posterity is enormously enriched by his considerable legacy of compositions and printed scores by other composers, so it is entirely fitting that his oeuvre should at last come to the fore, where it deserves to be. © Mons. Denis Silano

Translated by Kate Singleton



Cappella Musicale of Vercelli Cathedral mainly aims at reviving the Vercelli Cathedral manuscript and printed music heritage dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries. Led by Maestro Monsignor Denis Silano, the ensemble consists of musicians specialized in performing early music and a select group of amateur singers. They perform at liturgical services in Vercelli Cathedral.



Choir and soloists: Laura Albergoni, Nadia Bava Moiso, Barbara Chwalibog, Elisa Maglio, Giulia Musuruane [6, 8, 12], Teresa Nesci [6, 8, 10, 12], Serena Romano, Lourdes Talaouc, Costanza Tornari; Luca Dellacasa [12], Marina Furlan, Gianluigi Ghiringhelli [4, 12], Walter Mazzoni, Alessandro Pisa, M. Cristina Tomasoni; Pierpaolo De Leonibus, Gianluca Ferrarini [2, 4], Lorenzo Papangelo, Sergio Parini, Caio Poy, Michele Pretti, Luca Ronzitti, Diego Tricerri; Davide Benetti [2, 6, 8, 10, 12], Andrea Bestazzi, Marco Grattarola, Raffaele Moretto, Nicholas Terlato.

Children's choir "Collegio degli Innocenti": Chiara Esposito, Alessio Follis, Angelica Mazzoni, Gianluca Pisa [11], Natalia Santangelo. Roberto Berzero *vocal trainer* Organ: Carlo Montalenti [1-12], Luca Dellacasa [1]; Violin: Alessandro Conrado [4, 6, 8, 10, 11], Paola Nervi [1, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11]; Cello: Gualtiero Marangoni [1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10-12]; Flute: Gianfranco Saponaro, Luca Ventimiglia [2, 10, 12];



Cornetti: Benedetta Ceron, Pietro Modesti [3, 5, 7, 9]; Trombone: Cristian Margaria [2, 3, 5, 7, 9]; Theorbo: Francesco Motta [2, 4, 6, 8, 10-12].





Vercelli born priest **Mons. Denis Silano** studied organ, choir conducting, composition, Gregorian chant and musicology. He was the curator of the modern edition of *Harmonia super vespertinos psalmos sex vocibus* by O. Colombano (Venice, 1579) and of its world-premiere recording under Brilliant Classics in 2018. His works have been published by Vox Antiqua (CH), Rugginenti (Milan) and Edizioni Paoline (Rome). He is Maestro di Cappella at Vercelli Cathedral.



Recording: 8-12 January 2020, Chapel of the Archiepiscopal Seminary of Vercelli, Italy Sound engineer: Fabio Framba
Recording and post-production: Fabio Framba
Many thanks to photographer Andrea Cherchi
Cover: Nativity (1608-13), by Guglielmo Caccia (known as Il Moncalvo), Church of San Michele, Casale Monferrato (AL), Italy
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