

FESTIVAL CONTEMPORANEAMENTE BAROCCO SIENA

Review of the concert on 22nd October 2010

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Totally dedicated to the poetry of Torquato Tasso, and to *intonazioni* between the end of the sixteenth century and the start of the seventeenth, this was the only event dedicated to vocal music at the Contemporary Baroque Festival 2010. The concert was held in Siena on Friday 22nd October in a packed Church of Santa Maria Angeli. The Arcomelo ensemble, with the soprano Elena Bertuzzi and the tenors Paolo Borgonovo and Matteo Zenatti, under the direction from the harpsichord of Michele Benuzzi, gave a performance of music by Giaches de Wert, Sigismondo D'India, Domenico Mazzocchi, and Claudio Monteverdi, based on some passages from *Gerusalemme Liberata*. Two instrumental pieces (a Sinfonia by Giovanni Battista Buonamente and a Ciaccona by Tarquinio Merula) completed the programme. Readings of lines from the poem alternated with the singing: the performance practice was in line with various formulae for musical *intonazione* advanced in the early seventeenth century.

In the first four episodes (or images) which comprised the narrative line of the programme, readings of *intonazione* introduced the musical settings of the composers cited. In the first episode, an evocation of day-break in the crusader camp at the gate of Jerusalem led to the lament of the Christian soldiers: a performance - bristling with dissonance - of the setting for solo voice by Mazzocchi, 'Dunque ove tu, Signor'.

The second episode began with the night-time escape of Erminia from the camp of the Crusaders, and ended with an expression of torment through unrequited love from Tancredi, set to music by Sigismondo D'India ('Sovente allor'), from the *Music for Solo Voice* of 1609.

In the third, we witnessed the discomfited reaction and the mounting anger in Armida because of the flight of the beloved Rinaldo from her enchanted palace, again in a setting by Sigismondo ('Forsennata gridava') from the same collection as the preceding piece.

The fourth episode, devoted to the appearance of the heavenly spectre of Clorinda to Tancredi in a dream, as realised in the madrigal 'Giunto alla tomba' by Wert, foreshadowed the scene to which it is the essential antecedent in the drama of *Jerusalem*. The killing in a duel of the brave warrior formed a climax to the concert programme: the extraordinary *Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* of Monteverdi. In the narrative line of the madrigal by Monteverdi, one found the ideal end-point of the musical thread which had been unravelled at length by the programme.

Such 'affective' music makes vital contact with the poetry of Tasso and impresses a highly theatrical image on the mind with increasing power. From the polyphonic writing of the Flemish de Wert one is taken on to the compositions for solo voice of D'India, with their vital theatricality; then on to complete the drama through the characteristic style of Monteverdi.

The singers and the instrumental ensemble travelled with ease along an exciting route, with a careful balance of sonorities in the combination of voices and instruments. This was a truly felt and convincing interpretation of 'affective' musical rhetoric. We surrendered to the dramatic tension which captured us: the audience was moved unhesitatingly.