

FESTIVAL CONTEMPORANEAMENTE BAROCCO SIENA 2010

Michele Benuzzi: *Bach – diary of an impossible journey*

Review of the recital of 23rd October 2010

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On Saturday 23rd October, on the stage of the Rozzi Theatre in Siena, the harpsichordist Michele Benuzzi was the protagonist in the third solo recital of the 2010 Festival Contemporaneamente Barocco. After the opening recital by the pianist Stefano Bollani at the Rinnovati Theatre and that of the violinist Stefano Montanari at the Civic Museum in San Gimignano, Benuzzi performed on a magnificent instrument, a copy of an eighteenth-century model whose provenance is German, offering a programme totally dedicated to the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. From the multiplicity of genres and strata to be found in the boundless Bach output for keyboard instruments, Benuzzi followed a thread of obvious interest for the listener, all the more so for being heard comparatively infrequently in recitals. The chosen course was not the contrapuntal didacticism of the German composer, the strand of compositions conceived for the purpose of teaching, nor that of the later works, which one might define as scientific; Benuzzi investigated a selection of compositions that were more in touch with contemporary musical reality. A vast network of ideas originating from the new musical experiences of the early eighteenth century does indeed pervade the pieces performed in the recital, which offered clear and exciting evidence of the journey across remote lands which was accomplished in the musical mind of a composer who lived within a restricted geographical area.

The musical journey is full of suggestions, thoughts, and impressions. Bach meditates at the keyboard on the very diverse styles, exploring their roots and questioning their expressive significance. The compositions chosen by Benuzzi echo their models in the instrumental music of France and of the Italian *concertante* style in its Venetian version, referred to explicitly in the subjects taken from the works of Albinoni for the fugues BWV 950 and 951. And if French music provides particular sources of expressive inspiration with its collection of dance forms which present the characteristic profile of a society and of a well-defined culture, Italian music is the key to the poetry of the affections, an aspect to which the encyclopaedic compositions of Bach could not have failed to relate.

Benuzzi faces his demanding programme authoritatively. He does not lose his listener in the complex contrapuntal textures of the compositions, with their often monumental structure. Above all, drawing on his stock of evidently authentic work on the definition of each element of expression, Benuzzi always succeeds in bringing out the heterogeneous ideas which the counterpoint integrates or from the which it originates. This allows his interpretation of the impossible journey, to which the title of the recital refers, to live again.