

The places and the music of Benedetto Marcello: A short sentimental journey

It is difficult not to fall into rhetoric, easy sentimentalism or commonplace expressions when evoking the image of Venice, but, undoubtedly, a short stroll in this unique town can offer a stimulus for reflection and a reason for fascination, even if one is travelling for work, or, as in our case, for research. To a musicologist, who gets off the train at Santa Lucia Station and makes for the centre of the Serenissima to reach its libraries, the Fenice Theatre, the Conservatory or the island of San Giorgio, there's no alternative shortest way, apart from taking the water bus, but crossing the steep Scalzi Bridge towards San Marco, and passing by the Confraternity of St. John and St. Roch. Places characterized by a high density of musical memories, to begin with Monteverdi laid to rest in the church of the Frari. Nevertheless, the popular refrain says that in the Lagoon the straight path is not always the shortest, or the easiest, and that sometimes it is necessary to get lost to find one self in Venice. From Lista di Spagna, towards Labia Palace, one reaches the Bridge of Spires, hence, turning into Rio Terà San Leonardo, to get lost is almost a duty, to find oneself hemmed in between high houses and the Grand Canal, in the same places that, since the end of the Seventeenth century, have seen Benedetto Marcello's human and aesthetic accomplishments and achievements. The contemporaries would have said Marcello della Maddalena, to distinguish the branch of the family from other, more powerful ones. The church of Maddalena, with its severe architecture, is the one in which Benedetto was baptized in 1686, a few steps away from the sober family palace, which still nowadays faces the Grand Canal with its sober façade, contrasting with the richer adjacent Vendramin palace, which, a few century later, would have been the scene of Wagner's death. In this area of Cannaregio, still inhabited by true Venetians, Marcello spent his whole life, committing himself to social duties and "mad and desperate" studies, almost in a voluntary segregation, in which love for music, for theological studies and culture would have prevailed over his destiny as a public servant and chief officer, a political appointment that derived from the rank of his ancient, noble and honorable family, yet not in wealthy conditions. We like to imagine the path that the young Magistrate must have followed hundreds of times to reach the Doges Palace, seat of the power of the Venetian Republic. A path that destiny (or perhaps our imagination of posterity) dotted with emblematic places: following the Strada Nuova (which did not exist at the times of Marcello) one passes by Santa Sofia, where the Venetians gathered to commemorate Marcello at the news of his death, which took place in Brescia, where the young nobleman served the town government. Few steps ahead, in a picturesque little square, there's the ancient Basilica of the Holy Apostles, where the composer used to attend to the Mass. There he is also said to have fallen into a grave that suddenly opened before his feet; the incident would have

determined a deep spiritual crisis and, according to many, the severe and austere character of the Master and of his music, as well as his fight against corruption and immorality carried on in his "Fashionable Theatre" – even if its satirical libretto was written years before –, should be read in the light of this episode indeed. The following step of our short sentimental journey in search for Marcello's music is San Giovanni Grisostomo, where there was the most magnificent theatre of the Venetian Republic, the symbol of a social life made of parties and masks to which Marcello opposed the ascetic spirituality of his Psalms, admired by the posterity and still nowadays one of his most frequently performed works. Near San Marco, where a great part of Marcello's political career took place, two very important manuscripts of his music are still preserved in the severe rooms of Marciana Library. Our journey is over, but, by means of these old documents which have been forgotten for too long, the adventure of rediscovery begins, in a charming itinerary that, restoring a legacy of astonishing beauty, offers to us, unaltered through three centuries, the atmosphere of another Venice, severe and ascetic, seen through the eyes of a Composer who could look beyond the appearances, providing his music the strength of a moving spirituality, that overshadows also his immense technical skill and formal knowledge.

Mario Marcarini

A new gem enriches the treasure of Andrea Bacchetti's discography. The Genoese pianist draws from the repertoire of music from Veneto one more fragment to the great mosaic of his performances, establishing himself as a refined interpreter of Eighteenth-century musical culture. Continuing in the effort of valorisation of the musical production of that century, Andrea Bacchetti has chosen, for this new recording, Benedetto Marcello's keyboard sonatas. A pleasant journey through an imaginary landscape crossed by a gleam of melancholy. Banca Carige is proud to present to its clients a new interpretation of a moment of our country's rich musical history and wishes good listening.

Giovanni Berneschi

Presidente of Banca Carige SpA