

LIR CLASSICS

LIR007 - PROGRAMME NOTES

Le Madonne Lagrimanti

Towards the end of the sixteenth century in Florence, the distinguished group of dilettantes and intellectuals who made up the Camerata of Count Giovanni Bardi had one important aim: to reform the musical language prevalent at that time. They wished to initiate a new means of expression to replace the iniquities (as they saw it) of counterpoint, remaining faithful to Plato's dictum that music's purpose was to uplift the listener. 'Uplift' was not to be synonymous with pleasure! Galilei, in his *Dialogo...della musica e della moderna* (Venice, 1581), insisted that 'any pleasure to the inner self has a moral or emotional influence'. Thus counterpoint could offer only sensuous pleasure. The Florentine Group strove to imitate and recreate the Greek ideals of rhetorical speech in music, without purely musical procedures. For them, solo melody was the only way to declaim the text in a natural way. The Camerata stated that Greek melody had tamed wild beasts and produced all kinds of other marvellous effects which contrapuntal music was quite incapable of achieving. Therefore, in order to make the text audible to the listener, counterpoint must be eliminated. In the Greek humanistic sense poetry and the text were always in the fore, thus making melody, tone and counterpoint servants to the word and its rhythms. In Caccini's songs, and those of his contemporaries, the recitativo style of monody disrupted the continuity of the beat and became a *tempo rubato*, where the rhetorical and emotional intent of the text dictated the tempo. Caccini called this *sprezzatura* – a certain 'nonchalance' or 'negligence'. Inevitably, from the beginning, composers, including Caccini, sought to add sonorous melody to the text. Recitative became interspersed with melodic intrusions and the *arioso* style, and these interjections became more prevalent in the years immediately following the Camerata. However, it is impossible to underestimate the influence Count Bardi and his Florentine Camerata had on the emerging style and forms of the baroque era.

Laments, especially those composed about the Virgin Mary, bereft lovers, or even Mary, Queen of Scots, were perfect subjects for the expressive and dramatic new monodic style. The *Lamento d'Arianna* (1608) was Claudio Monteverdi's earliest monodic lament following the monodic portions seen in his *Orfeo* (1607). The popularity of this lament and its subsequent parody, *Pianto della Madonna* (1640, but probably written soon after *Lamento d'Arianna*), had a tremendous influence upon Biblical laments composed by other composers for generations to come.

No discussion of the monodic style is complete without mentioning the *basso continuo*, or thorough-bass. The polarity of the bass and melody opened up new possibilities for novel harmonies and new ways of accompanying, which seemed

chaotic to conservative musicians at the end of the 16th and early 17th centuries. A figured bass outlined a chordal accompaniment, realised by improvisation. At least two players were required to accompany the voice, a string bass or low wind instrument to sustain the bass note, and a chordal instrument (harpsichord, organ, theorbo, harp, lute, chitarrone, guitar, or lirone) to fill in the harmonies. Frequently, more than two instruments were involved, as on this recording. A brilliantly improvised realisation of a figured bass can give a deeper and more colourful meaning to the text.

Nancy Long, May 2004

Sigismondo d'India (ca.1582-1629), a Sicilian of noble birth, worked in Turin for many years. He came under the influence of Caccini while in Florence in 1608, and continued the basic tenets of the Florentine Camerata in his compositions. He was a singer and composer who balanced dramatic instinct with professional discipline. In the preface to his first book of monodies (*Musiche da cantar solo*, Milan, 1609) he criticises most composers of monodies for their monotonous harmony and dull declamation and declares that his own unusual and novel chord progressions and intervals offer his songs a greater affectation and force to 'move the affects of the soul'. He declared that one could pass with 'utmost novelty' from one chord to another according to the sentiment of the text.

Marco da Gagliano's (1575-1642) collection of monodies was published in 1616, nine years after his opera *La Dafne*. Like his contemporary Saracini, he was fond of dissonances and simultaneous cross-relations. Nevertheless, he retains a more melodic gracefulness in his songs, while being against pointless addition of 'gruppi, trilli, passaggi, ed esclamazioni' by the singers. 'I do not wish to deprive myself of these adornments, but I wish them to be used in the proper time and place' (preface to *La Dafne*, 1607). He claims it is better to leave out ornaments if the storyline (i.e., the quasi-recitative text) does not require it, and concentrate on the clear pronunciation of syllables instead. *Il morte, il tuo Signore* and *Tu languisci e tu mori* are both written in the style of the monodic laments of the Madonna, and *Gioite* is a strophic song written in dance style with an instrumental interlude.

A marvellous marriage of dramatic recitative and religious fervour has been achieved by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) in his sacred parody of the *Lamento d'Arianna* in the *Pianto della Madonna*, 'a voce sola sopra il *Lamento d'Arianna*'. It was probably composed shortly after the performance of the opera *Arianna* in 1608 and was published in his *Selva morale e spirituale* (1641). It was to become the model for innumerable plaints of the Blessed Virgin. This work was appreciated throughout Italy and Germany as a masterpiece of sacred monody. In his introduction to *Lamento della Ninfa* (1638), Monteverdi stated that it was to be performed 'not in strict time, but according to the affection'; i.e., following the sentiment of the text. This statement absolutely applies to the performance of the *Pianto della Madonna*.

Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643) was born in Ferrara. He was a brilliant organist who studied with Luzzaschi and became the organist at St. Peter's in Rome in 1608, remaining there more or less until his death in 1643. His *Primo and Secundo Libro d'arie musicali* (Florence, 1630) were composed during the period in which Frescobaldi had a break from Rome to be organist at the Tuscan court of the Grand Duke in Florence. The *Aria di Passacaglia* is one of the pieces from Frescobaldi's

collection of monodies called *Arie*, published in 1630, not in Florence, but in more conservative Rome. With its alternation of recitative and arioso sections, the *Aria di Passacaglia* shows the emerging cantata in its incipient form, and is quite different from most of the other pieces in the collection, which are in the recitativo style.

Claudio Saracini (b.1586) was a member of a noble Sienese family who held no official post as a musician and may have spent much of his time travelling through Europe. He was one of the most daring composers of monodies and, although influenced by Monteverdi (he dedicated one of his madrigals to Monteverdi), he surpassed his contemporary in his unconventional use of dissonances. Only a dilettante could show so little regard for the standard practices of harmonic progressions, as one can hear in the two songs included here. It is clear that d'India displays greater discipline and musical unity than Saracini in his monodies. Nevertheless, his six published books of *Musiche* remain among the most important body of monodic song of the early Baroque period.

In the introduction to his famous collection of songs called *Nuove Musiche* (1602), Giulio Caccini (1550-1618) claims to have been the first composer of monodies, which he had composed in the 1580s during his association with Count Bardi and the Florentine Camerata. That group had ended by 1592, but Caccini remained an exponent of this 'new' style, and had attracted several other composers by this time as well. The first volume of *Nuove Musiche* consists of a most informative and enlightening preface, combining Caccini's philosophy on solo song and solo singing. He discusses composition and singing style, compares it with the old style of *passaggi* or diminutions, and then gives several examples of embellishments and methods of 'affective' singing and accompanying. In fact, although Caccini claims to have invented these ornaments he describes in *Nuove Musiche*, he merely borrowed from renaissance treatises on diminution and changed their manner of execution. In these songs Caccini's primary aim, indeed, of the Baroque era itself, is to 'move the affects of the soul', not just to 'tickle the ear', as in the old practice. Therefore, in *Nuove Musiche*, and no doubt in his own teaching and singing, Caccini wished to bring some moderation to the singers' love of virtuoso and flamboyant singing. Some of the ornaments described in the *Nuove Musiche* and used throughout this recording are:

- 1) Gruppo or groppo – the equivalent of our modern trill.
- 2) Trillo – a rapid repetition of the same note, usually beginning slowly, becoming more rapid.
- 3) Ribattuta di gola (the 're-striking of the throat'), later known as the Lombard rhythm – in monody it imitates a sob.
- 4) Esclamazione – basically a *sforzando* attack with an instant *decrescendo*, followed by a *crescendo*, usually descending to next note.
- 5) Passaggi and cascata – scale passages widely used in the Renaissance, but performed in monody with much more *rubato* to correspond to the emotional intent of the text.
- 6) Clamazione – beginning the written melody note from a third below.
- 7) Dynamics (*messa di voce*, *scemar di voce*, *esclamazione*, *crescendo*, etc.) – actually used as ornamentation and probably performed much more dramatically than we do today.

Giacomo Carissimi (1605-1674) carried the monodic style into the middle Baroque period and continued the development of the recitativo-arioso style into the

cantata and oratorio. For the greater part of his life he was active in the direction of church and chamber music in Rome. Carissimi was more adventurous and inventive in his cantatas than in his oratorios, employing more affective intervals within the harmony, such as the Neapolitan sixth chord. He was one of the first to use the brief da capo aria, in which the return is written out because the sections are not yet independent movements. *Mary, Queen of Scots*, is a chamber cantata based on her dramatic and tragic death. It is narrated in an alternation of recitative and arioso, with a brief da capo aria in the middle.