

GIOVANNI BATTISTA FASOLO
Annuale Opera Ottava, Venezia 1645
(Tactus, TC590701, 2016)

- Musica, 292, dicembre 2017-gennaio 2018

La nostra gratitudine va tutta alla casa discografica felsinea Tactus per continuare a proporre all'ascolto, e dunque rendere fruibili a tutti, i capisaldi della letteratura e della trattatistica organistica apparsi in Italia tra i sec. XVI- XVII, prevalentemente a uso liturgico.

Dopo le monografie dedicate a Girolamo Cavazzoni, Girolamo Frescobaldi, Claudio Merulo, Adriano Banchieri, Girolamo Diruta e Costanzo Antegnati; ora sotto la lente d'ingrandimento è il più citato dispensario relativo all'alternatim organistico durante la liturgia: L'Annuale che contiene tutto quello, che deve far un Organista, per risponder al Choro tutto l'Anno (1645) di Giovanni Battista Fasolo. Con la bolla «Cum novissime» di Clemente VIII, il 14 luglio del 1600 venne ufficialmente promulgato il Caeremoniale Episcoporum. Esso rientra nel numero dei libri liturgici che il Concilio di Trento volle fossero preparati o revisionati e si compone di tre libri: Libro I. Principi generali riguardanti tutte le funzioni; Libro II. Funzioni particolari: Messa e Vespro; Libro III. Norme sulle precedenza e sul modo di accogliere Vescovi, Legati e Governatori ecclesiastici. Lo svolgimento musicale della Messa e dell'Ufficio (Liturgia delle Ore), particolarmente per il Vespro, è disciplinato dal Caeremoniale Episcoporum. Le Tabelle ordinate a uso degli organisti di Adriano Banchieri e Girolamo Diruta, nonché gli apparati repertoriali di vari autori – uno per tutti il citato Annuale di Giovanni Battista Fasolo (1598 ca.-1664 ca.) – dipesero proprio dalle prescrizioni del Caeremoniale. In particolare dal capitolo ventotto del Libro I – De organo, organista et musicis – di cui si riportano alcuni stralci relativi alla Messa: «[...] 3. Conviene suonare l'organo tutte le volte che il vescovo entra in chiesa per celebrare solennemente – o per assistere alla Messa celebrata da un altro nelle feste “solenniori” – oppure quando esce a cerimonia conclusa. [...] 6. Per regola ai Vespri, e al Mattutino e alla Messa, il primo verso dei Cantici e degli Inni [...] va eseguito dal coro in tono intellegibile, non dall'organo; così il versetto Gloria Patri etc., anche nel caso che il versetto precedente sia stato cantato ugualmente dal coro. Stessa regola si osserva negli ultimi versetti degli Inni. [...] 9. Nella Messa solenne si suona l'organo “alternatim”, quando si dice Kyrie eleison e Gloria in excelsis; si suona finita l'Epistola, all'Offertorio, al Sanctus “alternatim”; così all'elevazione del SS. Sacramento con suono alquanto grave e dolce; così all'Agnus Dei “alternatim”, quindi sino al Postcommunio, e al termine della Messa. 10. Quando però nella Messa si dice il Credo (Symbolum) non si deve interporre il suono dell'organo; il Credo va eseguito dal coro con canto intelligibile. [...] 13. Nelle Messe e negli Uffici dei defunti non si usa né organo né musica, cosiddetta figurata, ma solo canto fermo; il quale conviene usare nei tempi di Avvento, di Quaresima e nei giorni feriali». L'organista Luca Scandali ha scelto di registrare – al prezioso organo Luca di Bernardino da Cortona (1547) della chiesa di S. Domenico in Cortona – la seconda parte dell'Annuale; quella appunto dedicata alla Messa.

Per far ciò si è avvalso dell'Ensemble Bella gerit (voci virili) per le parti in cantus planus. Le messe gregoriane interessate all'alternatim organistico – per un processo di cristallizzazione dell'ampio repertorio – si ridussero a tre soltanto. Vale a dire, le seguenti Missae del Kyriale Romanum: la Messa IV – Cunctipotens – detta «degli Apostoli» (Apostolorum); la Messa IX – Cum júbilo – detta «della Madonna» (B. Mariae Virginis); la Messa XI – Orbis Factor – detta «della Domenica» (in dominicis diebus). Anche per Fasolo la seconda parte del suo Annuale consiste, appunto, in tre messe organistiche da eseguirsi in alternatim con le tre messe gregoriane dell'Ordinario testé citate. Nei celeberrimi Fiori Musicali (1635), Frescobaldi utilizzò in senso stretto la prassi dell'alternatim nei

soli versetti del Kyrie, consacrò, invece, il suo massimo impegno alla composizione di brani liberi da eseguirsi durante particolari momenti della Messa: l'Ingresso, il Graduale, l'Offertorio e la Comunione (Proprio della Messa). Per non tacere dei brani destinanti a commentare il momento culminante del mistero eucaristico: le Toccate per l'Elevazione. Alle Toccate avanti la Messa spetta, invece, il compito di annunciare e aprire il servizio divino e, al tempo stesso, di preparare il Kyrie. Ecco, per Fasolo avviene quasi tutto il contrario; a cominciare dalle Toccate avanti la Messa, del tutto assenti, e dall'alternatim completo non solo per Kyrie, ma anche per Gloria, Sanctus et Benedictus, Agnus Dei. Graduale e Offertorio vengono sostituiti da brevi brani nello stile della Canzona alla francese e del Ricercare; immancabili le Toccata per l'Elevazione e i Postcommunio, dopo la Comunione. Dunque con Fasolo si tocca con mano il mestiere dell'organista di chiesa – un po' come con l'Organo suonarino (1605-1638) di Banchieri – quindi meno «speculazione» e più pratica quotidiana. Musica d'uso e consumo, modello cui ispirarsi per “improvvisare” durante le sacre funzioni, senza per questo cadere nella banalità o nella sciatteria. Anzi, il pregio della brevitatis, intesa come «sintesi» efficace, è per Fasolo un attributo che ben gli si attaglia.

Mirabili, come sempre, la perizia stilistica e la sopraffina musicalità con cui Luca Scandali dà vita a uno spaccato seicentesco di ciò che si poteva udire durante la Messa, laddove vi fossero ferrati musicisti e cantori al servizio di chiese urbane.

Michele Bosio

- Fanfare Magazine 41:1 (September/October 2017)

Few people have probably ever heard of Giovanni Battista Fasolo (c. 1598–c. 1664), for even though this compendium, his eighth published opus, came from Venice, the center of music publishing of that time, he himself was a Franciscan monk who apparently never went there or was part of its vibrant musical establishment. Indeed, due to his ecclesiastic calling Fasolo's life is sparsely documented. For example, he probably came from Asti, or some place close by, but spent much of his early years either in Rome or Naples, where he apparently composed a number of secular works. Until recently, these were apparently attributed to better-known men, such as Francesco Manelli, but research into the designation “Il Fasolo” for many of these has allowed for the correct authorship to be determined. There is no doubt, however, that he was a relatively prolific composer of sacred music, much of it intended for ordinary parishes and churches. For example, his op. 6 collection of simple motets appeared as early as 1635 in Naples, and various collections included sacred songs. Rather late in life he became maestro di cappella to the Duke of Monteleone in Sicily, where he disappears from history around 1664, presumably having died.

His works, destined for normal and not highly skilled musicians, were popular enough during his time, but by the end of the century had largely fallen out of favor, due to their conservative style. This would explain the dearth of recordings, but such repertoire is something that Tactus specializes in rediscovering. The *Annuale* consists of three Masses. The first, in *Dominicis diebus*, is a traditional one, with inserted organ modulations that were intended to fill gaps in the service, including a postlude; the second, in *duplicibus diebus*, is another that can be seen as an alternative to the first; and the third, a Mass dedicated to the Virgin Mary, is replete with organ interludes. It should be noted that this recording, which alternates the choral chant and organ portions, is only one of four sections in this sprawling publication. The others, organ versicles to be played interspersed between the hymns, settings of the Magnificat and antiphon *Salve regina*, and a collection of almost two dozen independent works for organ, are not included.

The booklet notes seem to relate Fasolo's music to the 1635 *Fiori musicale* by his more famous contemporary, Girolamo Frescobaldi, and there is one documented indication that it was intended to be published originally that same year following the appearance of Fasolo's motets. Why this had to wait a decade is not entirely clear (the notes don't really offer a thoroughly convincing timeline), but it did create a model that was both practical and imitable. This, however, should contain a caution. The chant is fairly straightforward, but the organ interludes tend to be full-voiced, with a powerful registration. The counterpoint is largely suspensive, but the harmonies are fluid and the sound mighty.

Unfortunately, the interludes also tend to be very short, so that the fugal portions are barely begun before a cadence occurs. These are more like operatic ritornellos of the time, and they don't really give a fullscale idea of how Fasolo might have been as an improviser. They are, however, very functional in terms of an integrated set. The *in duplicius diebus*, on the other hand, begins with a bass voice cantus firmus that has a bit of the *L'homme armé* lurking in the background. In the Gloria it floats above the organ, though the lower range can be a bit awkward; one is glad when the chant recurs. The best parts of the organ playing, however, occur in the two modulations of the Virgin Mary Mass, where Fasolo expands his counterpoint to some excellent lengths.

About the performance itself little needs to be said. Apart from the registration that tends to be rather brilliant, using the higher stops, the organ playing is easy and quite appropriate for the genre. The chant portions can sound a bit muted and the bass solo cantus firmus of Mauro Presazzi is a bit grating, but that has nothing to do with voice quality but rather the tessitura and function. I would like to say that these no doubt important works by Fasolo could mark a revival, but they must remain in the realm of the practical rather than the artistic. As mundane, functional pieces, they work well, but their simplicity and often brevity might relegate them to an archival disc.

Bertil van Boer

- Choir & Organ, September 2017

'Never mind the quality, feel the width' might describe the Tactus phenomenon: the Italian label busily releasing that nation's myriad early music treasures at an extraordinary rate. Their featured instrumentalists range from good to exceptionally fine but their choirs can be disappointingly dismal. Here are three of their latest world premiere recordings...

Franciscan monk and composer Sisto Reina's **Armonia Ecclesiastica**, published in 1653, features lovely music one longs to hear in more polished performances, though the soloists are accomplished and the student choir's enthusiasm never in doubt. Secular music in the Spanish style **Andrea Falconiere and Filippo Coppola** includes instrumental tracks of irrepressible charm. Indifferent vocal soloists and a wince-inducing contribution from Bologna's Coro Polifonico 'Santo Spirito' let the side down. Over to Venice and three Organ Masses by **Giovanni Battista Fasolo**: early Italian organ fans will relish the bright tones of the 16th-century instrument in Chiesa di San Domenico, Cortona, played with a magisterial brilliance by Luca Scandali – a virtuosity unmatched by male vocal soloists and choir singing chant with wayward pitch.

- American Record Guide, July/August 2017

Composed by the Franciscan friar Giovanni Battista Fasolo (c 1598-c 1664), this 1645 volume's full title explains exactly its use as "the yearbook [annuale] that contains all an organist must do to respond to the choir through the Year". Alternatim masses have a mix of music for alternating choir and organ (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, and Deo Gratias here) and pieces for solo organ (Modulatio after the Epistle; Modulatio for the Offertory; Elevation; Modulatio after the Agnus Dei).

Listening to this music today gives us the opportunity to appreciate the mass texts in a thoughtful and decelerated way. I find the musical interpolations far from mere interruptions, because they expand the reach of familiar texts that are often recited quickly, mumbled and by rote. Musical variety also keeps us engaged in the meaning of the words, as the settings are by turns sinuous and chromatic (typically at the Elevation, the moment where the congregation's eyes are on the consecrated sacraments), imitative and dance-like (after the reading of the Epistle), solemn, stately, and grand.

Organist Luca Scandali and the Bella Gerit choir complement each other very well and effectively use changes in registration, volume, and color to animate the music. The organ in the San Domenico church in Cortona, Tuscany was built in 1547 by Luca di Bernardino (Cortona), the Voce Umana stop was added in 1760, and the organ was restored in 2007 by Marco Fratti (Modena). Its pitch is A=432 and the temperament is meantone.

I recently reviewed two other fine recordings of organ alternatim masses by Claudio Merulo (Brilliant 95145, N/D 2016) and Giovanni Salvatore (Brilliant 96146, J/F 2017).

Notes, bios, stoplist in English; no texts.

C. Moore

- Early Music Review, March 14, 2017

Fasolo's *Annuale Opera Ottava* is essentially a handbook for organists offering music appropriate for services throughout the year. The present CD offers liturgical reconstructions, ordinary and propers, for three types of mass: the *Missa in Dominicis diebus*, the *Missa in duplicibus diebus* and the *Missa Beatae Mariae Virginis*. Fasolo's music, played by Luca Scandali on a characterful 1547 organ by Luca di Bernardino in the Chiesa di San Domenico in Cortona, alternates with appropriate chant sung by the Ensemble Bella Gerit. The main star of the CD is the venerable 16th-century organ, which offers an intriguing range of stops. It is imaginatively presented by Luca Scandali, who manages to entice the most gentle and almost strident sounds from the instrument. The chant is beautifully unanimous, and has the pleasant detachment of working clergy perhaps almost over-familiar with its phrases. The only slight fly in the ointment is the audible difference in background sound as we switch from organ solo to the voices and back again – clearly the two were recorded separately and edited together. Fasolo's publication appeared in the wake of Frescobaldi's much more famous *Fiori Musicali* of 1635, but in its subtle differences from it suggests that local liturgical traditions and musical practices were still very much respected. Rather than pick a publication like Frescobaldi's off the shelves, at least some local organists decided to compile rival publications in imitation but reflecting their own specific talents and the traditions within which they operated.

D. James Roos