

**Bononcini - San Nicola di Bari (2011)**



1.Part I: Sinfonia 2:30 2.Part I: Recitative: Figlio, la via del Cielo (Giovanna) 1:28 3.Part I: Aria: Augellino, che levassi a volo (Giovanna) 2:40 4.Part I: Recitative: Mia Genitrice (San Nicola) 0:47 5.Part I: Aria: E fiorito il sentier (San Nicola) 2:56 6.Part I: Recitative: Nicola? A' cenni tuoi (Epifanio, San Nicola) 0:50 7.Part I: Aria: Per godere un diletto (Epifanio) 2:36 8.Part I: Recitative: Padre? Che chiedi? (San Nicola, Epifanio) 0:50 9.Part I: Aria: All'Uomo fan guerra (San Nicola) 0:52 10.Part I: Recitative: Di sì degna vittoria (Epifanio) 0:24 11.Part I: Aria: Se cinto di costanza (Epifanio) 1:52 12.Part I: Recitative: Giovanna? Mio consorte? (Epifanio, Giovanna, San Nicola) 0:55 13.Part I: Aria: M'incateni, e si mi sciogli (San Nicola) 3:44 14.Part I: Recitative: Sempre Madre amorosa (Giovanna) 0:58 15.Part I: Aria: A girar (Giovanna) 1:49 16.Part I: Recitative: Scolpisce il tuo desio (San Nicola, Giovanna) 1:00 17.Part I: Aria: Un dolce affetto (Giovanna) 3:44 18.Part I: Recitative: Stelle, deh non ardete (Giovanna) 0:52 19.Part I: Aria: Tutto fiamme (Clizio) 2:09 20.Part I: Recitative: Ma qui giunge Nicola (Clizio, San Nicola) 0:56 21.Part I: Aria: Il diletto e una Sirena (San Nicola) 2:18 22.Part I: Recitative: Entro a dotto Liceo (San Nicola, Clizio) 1:02 23.Part I: Aria: Anche il Cielo (Clizio) 1:56 24.Part I: Recitative: Al misero Vivente (San Nicola, Clizio) 0:57 25.Part I: Aria: Io non vuo (San Nicola) 2:31 26.Part II: Recitative: Il diletto? (Clizio, San Nicola) 2:07 27.Part II: Aria: D'un bel ciglio (San Nicola) 4:22 28.Part II: Recitative: Più d'ogni vizzo (Clizio, San Nicola) 1:23 29.Part II: Aria: Anima infida (Clizio) 2:43 30.Part II: Recitative: Son gl'interni disastri (Clizio, San Nicola, Giovanna) 2:09 31.Part II: Aria: Di tue flebili pupille (Giovanna) 3:45 32.Part II: Recitative: Clizio, non far (Epifanio, Clizio) 1:10 33.Part II: Aria: Fan temer l'Onde (Epifanio) 2:27 34.Part II: Recitative: Sento dentro al mio petto (Clizio) 1:03 35.Part II: Aria: Raggio eterno (Clizio) 3:17 36.Part II: Recitative: O come la tua fronte (San Nicola) 0:40 37.Part II: Aria: Gli Astri, che in Ciel scintillano (San Nicola) 2:20 38.Part II: Recitative: Se in età così acerba (Clizio, Giovanna) 0:57 39.Part II: Aria: So, che sdegna (Giovanna) 3:03 40.Part II: Recitative: Sempre del mio desio (San Nicola, Epifanio) 0:44 41.Part II: Aria: Ancor nel primo albore (Epifanio) 1:21 42.Part II: Recitative: Madre? Mio Genitor? (San Nicola, Giovanna, Epifanio) 0:40 43.Part II: Aria: Al pensiero lusinghiero (San Nicola) 2:08 44.Part II: Recitative: Figlio, se in tanta pugna (Giovanna) 1:02 45.Part II: Duet: Quando il Cielo (Giovanna, San Nicola) 1:19 Lavinia Bertotti, Elena Cecchi Fedi (sopranos) Gabriella Martellacci (alto) Furio Zanasi (bass) Les Muffatti (ensemble) Peter van Heyghen (conductor)

Giovanni Battista Bononcini (1670-1747) was an Italian composer who for period of his working life lived in London, where for a time his popularity rivaled Handel's. His output includes operas, anthems and masses. His oratorio 'San Niocola di Bari' dates from around 1693 and uses the large forces of soloists, choir and orchestra. Another welcome discovery from Ramee. ---prestoclassical.co.uk

Saint Nicholas is one of the best-known saints, but his reputation today as a friend of children hardly reflects his role in the history of the church. In pieces of music in which he plays a role it is mostly his many miracles which is given attention to. The oratorio which is presented here is different in that it concentrates on the youth of Saint Nicholas who is modelled as an exemplary son to his parents. The story is simple: Nicholas prepares for a journey to study in Egypt and Palestine. It is shown how harmonious the relationship with his parents is, and how hard his mother takes it to let him go. Nicholas also has chosen the path of virtue and is determined to resist all worldly temptations. As a kind of opposite number the librettist is introducing Clizio, a fellow student who enjoys worldly pleasures. During the oratorio Nicholas is able to make him see the errors of his ways and Clizio shows repentance.

The oratorio was first performed in 1693 in Rome. The libretto was written by Silvio Stampiglia, who Bononcini met in the circle of the Colonna family. Filippo II Colonna was Great Constable of the Vice-Kingdom of Naples which was ruled by Spain. In Rome several churches were devoted to Spanish saints, and in one of these, San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, the first performance took place. The addition 'di Bari' in the title of the oratorio can be explained by the fact that the bones of Saint Nicholas were brought to the Italian town of Bari at Sicily in 1087. Soon the town and later the whole island accepted Saint Nicholas as their patron saint. At the time the oratorio was performed Bari was under Spanish rule.

The oratorio was one of Giovanni Bononcini's most successful work which resulted from the collaboration with Stampiglia. It was performed several times during Bononcini's lifetime. The character of the work and its spiritual message were in line with what was the goal of the oratorio in those days: to convince the audience to follow the path of virtue. In the booklet Peter Van Heyghen explains that the message isn't even exclusively Christian, as it also appears in the writings of philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza and Kircher: "the main point is always the dualism between body and soul in general, and the exploration of the human emotions in particular. The ideal state of mind that humans need to seek out is virtue, which can only be attained when the spirit remains in control of the body, when free will, an attribute of the spirit, is not troubled by emotions, attributes of the body; on when the foundation of human behavior is

ultimately reason, which is inspired by God, and not affect (emotions), which is only worldly." This seems to me an important key to understand the way oratorios like this are written. It also explains the presence of Clizio, who - unlike Saint Nicholas - has no historical foundation. Clizio is the character who is led by emotions, and whom is brought to reason by Nicholas.

In the extensive and splendid programme notes Peter Van Heyghen goes into many details in regard to the background of both libretto and music. He also gives a number of examples of the way Bononcini has set the text to music. Everybody who is going to listen to this work is well advised to read these notes carefully, as they are a great help to understand the content of this work.

Bononcini had a reputation for text expression through musical means, and that was well-deserved as this oratorio impressively demonstrates. There are many things which strike the ear, like the role of the instruments in depicting the images in the text, for instance the movements of the bee or the fluttering of the bird, or a thunderstorm. Musical figures are used to express emotions in the text, and the same is true for dance rhythms, including sarabanda - here used because of its "origin in hell" as Cervantes put it - and the tarantella. The arias are various in form; some use the dacapo form, but most are without reprise and some are strophic. In many arias the voice is only supported by the basso continuo, whereas the strings play the ritornelli. The arias are not very long - none lasts more than 4 minutes - and the recitatives are also pretty concise. This gives the oratorio considerable pace, although the story in itself is not very dramatic.

Hopefully this description gives some idea about the quality of this oratorio. Fortunately none of the many virtues of this work is passing by unnoticed in this performance. At first I was a little sceptical about the interpretations of the two sopranos but it didn't take long before I started to enjoy the way they portrayed their respective characters. The many beautiful arias they have to sing come off splendidly, and their voices are just different enough to tell them apart. The emotions of Giovanna when her son is about to leave are impressively expressed by Elena Cecchi Fedi. Lavinia Bertotti does very well in Nicholas' dialogue with Clizio. Gabriella Martellacci has a dark voice, and is perhaps more suitable to the repenting Clizio than to the Clizio who sings the praise of worldly pleasures. She could probably have been a bit more joyful in that episode. Furio Zanasi gives a very good account of the role of Nicholas' father Epifanio, showing the right kind of authority but at the same time the sensitivity his role requires.

The orchestra is excellent throughout; every effect Bononcini has included in his score is fully explored. The basso continuo section deserves much praise for the very dynamic, imaginative and differentiated realisation of their part. And, as I already mentioned, the programme notes

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are exemplary: they are very informative and well-written, and also well translated into English.

In short, this is a production of the highest order, and definitely going to be one of my discs of the year. ---Johan van Veen, musica-dei-donum.org

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