

AMADEUS - June 2006  
A TASTE FOR INNOVATION  
*by Massimo Rolando Zegna*

Curiosity, pointing new goals time after time, pleasure and capability to change himself and start over new: these are some of the most evident characteristics in Filippo Maria Bressan's artistic print. Founder in 1993 of Athestis Chorus and Academia de li Musici, conductor of Santa Cecilia National Academy Choir from 2000 to 2002, today Bressan is a guest conductor, besides his collaboration with the groups created by himself. A commitment connected with the proposal of a new, ambitious project about the repertoire of '600 and '700 in Verona.

*Your musical education was marked by personalities such as Jurg Jürgens and John Eliot Gardiner.*

I met Jürgens in Urbino, during a training course. At that time I was studying orchestra conducting in Wien and at the same time I was growing my passion for singing and choir. He chose me as an assistant and I followed his career for many years in Italy and Hamburg. He was more than a teacher for me, actually a life coach, so important to develop my personality, not only as a musician but of a conductor. With him I deepened the repertoire of '600 and '700 that I already felt particularly close to my sensitiveness and that I wanted to face with more philological criteria. An ideal I refined in Stuttgart with Gardiner. I took inspiration from his groups to found Athestis Chorus and Academia de li Musici, an organic formed by a choir and an orchestra adopting ancient instruments.

*Together with Athestis Chorus you had the chance to work with prestigious interpreters such as Carlo Maria Giulini, Claudio Abbado, Eliahu Inbal, Jeffrey Tate.*

They were looking for a quick, agile and well prepared choir, I was finding back out my studies in Wien and the role of conductor that I had put apart.

*How do you remember your collaboration with Santa Cecilia?*

As a beautiful and important experience for my artistic maturation. However, it ended because it did not deal much with my interests and my ideals, more European rather than Italian. In our country, a professional choir works almost only within the opera houses, in a system which is not the best respect to my education. I'm not used to repeating what is generally performed, I am curious and I like looking forward. I discussed a long with Luciano Berio the possibility to build up new projects, but in Italy everything is very slow and some changes can even be disturbing.

*What is your most pleasant memory about Berio?*

Through him I moved close again to contemporary music. He had an attitude for irony and jokes, but also a taste for his time culture, able to open up and use any current element, from the Beatles to Frank Zappa, to get his musical goal, his compositions.

*The period you spent with Santa Cecilia, slowed the activity with your group.*

Now I started again at full capacity: I believe in this project a lot and I am totally devoted to it. I am from Veneto, so I worked a lot in the rediscovery of Venetian repertoire of '600 and '700 with Athestis and Academia de li Musici. Cavalli, for instance, is a marvellous poet of music, whereas Benedetto Marcello is for proportional rules: Bach stands for Händel as Marcello stands for Vivaldi. If the "Red Priest" has the the easy writing, the communicativeness and the sumptuousness of the "Saxon's" sound, Marcello shows an introspective soul, apparently less desirable, but gifted of an extraordinary ability in composition.

*Bach and Händel: two authors you have not mentioned by chance.*

I conducted a lot of Bach. For what deals with Händel I'm going to execute all his oratorios at Noto Festival. We shall be starting with Theodora.

*At the same time you are also a guest conductor.*

I think important, as far as it is possible, not to close yourself in the niche of Baroque, but to be able to get in and out different repertoires.

*And that is why you started devoting yourself to opera theatre with a certain frequency.*

However, in this case, I begin from '700 and I stop at Rossini and 1850.

*An interest that had some consequences on the birth of another project.*

Everything was born from a Don Giovanni, conducted in a semi-scenic form, with original instruments, which moved the interest of Verona and secondly its collaboration in creating a training centre for the production and the improvement of the music from '600 and '700 tradition, faced with executive praxis from that time and particular attention to opera repertoire. It is named "Bottega del Barocco e del '700", it has been already founded, it is active and can also count on the support of the Arena di Verona Foundation, Evaristo Felice Dall'Abaco Conservatory and Tempio Armonico: a baroque group that depends on Alberto Rasi.

*How is Bottega's activity going to develop?*

Every year we are going to organize some auditions across Europe and to select a double company of singers who will be given the possibility to follow a training course in interpretation of Baroque music. This course should improve acting abilities as well, because melodramas of that time are full of recitatives that ask the singers a great stage presence. Then we are going to present at the Philharmonic Theatre an unknown (or not much performed) title. This year we are starting with Arianna by Benedetto Marcello. The circulation of the production in Italy and abroad is foreseen too, as well as a collaboration with different directors: from the most traditional and historically faithful to the most innovative ones.

*And concerning the non theatrical repertoire?*

A concert season is going to employ Athestis Choir & Academia de li Musici and Tempio Armonico. Moreover, every year we are going to host important interpreters and orchestras, such as William Christie, John Eliot Gardiner, Ton Koopman, Philippe Herreweghe.

*What about the program?*

There will be two moments: the first around april/may, the second in october. One will be dedicated to theatre, the other to concerts: we will see how. For the moment we are starting in autumn 2006 with a concert season besides several conferences and videoconferences through very futuristic techniques: a way to put together our contemporary society with an ancient repertoire that we are going to perform. I like this admixture very much. Berio used to say that the ones who have a project in their mind often forget that they live in a society. So, why don't we use technologies which allow to go deeper and almost touch a repertoire apparently so distant? We want to try this way!