

VIRGILIO MAZZOCCHI SALMI VESPERTINI A 8 VOCI

Ensemble Festina Lente - Michele Gasbarro, Conductor

01. Toccata	00:15	12. Salmo 116 Laudate Dominum	04:28
02. Deus in adiutorium meum intende	00:58	13. Act. 12:1-3	00:35
03. Petrus et Johannes (Canto gregoriano)	00:38	14. Canzona	02:04
04. Salmo 109 Dixit Dominus	04:09	15. Decora lux aeternitatis (Canto gregoriano)	03:18
05. Argentum et aurum (Canto gregoriano)	00:35	16. In omnem terram (Canto gregoriano)	00:13
06. Salmo 110 Confitebor	11:37	17. Ad Jesum autem (Canto gregoriano)	01:02
07. Dixit angelus ad Petrum (Canto gregoriano)	00:33	18. Magnificat	14:01
08. Salmo 111 Beatus vir	07:39	19. Ex proprio sanctorum (Canto gregoriano)	00:52
09. Misit Dominus (Canto gregoriano)	00:41	20. Conclusio	01:35
10. Salmo 112 Laudate pueri	08:39	21. Salve Regina	09:43
11. Tu es Petrus (Canto gregoriano)	00:34		

Total Time: 77:09

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Virgilio Mazzocchi was born in Civita Castellana, a small town in the province of Viterbo, in 1597. He received his first musical education from his older brother Domenico and, in parallel, he attended the local seminary for his studies in humanities. After receiving the tonsure in 1622, he was appointed *maestro di cappella* at Civita Castellana's Cathedral and soon moved to Rome, where in 1623 he became *maestro di cappella*, first at *Chiesa del Gesù*, then at the Roman Seminary and finally, in 1629, at the prestigious *Cappella Giulia* of St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Here he succeeded Paolo Agostini, 'one of the most witty and lively geniuses of the music of our times in every kind of harmonic composition', from whom Virgilio learned the art of composing in the most varied and fashionable genres of the time, and above all in the polychoral style. It was in this genre that Virgilio Mazzocchi distinguished himself among contemporaries, giving to the 'sbattimento dei cori' (the dynamic dialogue of the choirs) a liveliness unknown before, so much so that years later Della Valle expressed his opinion on the Maestro as a '*gran musicone*' (great 'big musician,') due to his compositions with '*twelve or sixteen choirs, with an echo choir in the dome*'. The spectacular dimension of the polychoral compositions, so much appreciated by contemporaries, derived from the ability to perfectly integrate the 'full' style of the choirs with '*very well concerted*' solo sections. This was a very personal style that Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni acknowledged as the work of an '*outstanding composer of ecclesiastical harmonies*' who '*introduced a more vague style into the churches; and rendered the hymns, which had been sung to that time, especially joyous and airy*'. Thus the '*worldly*' music ended up contaminating the sacred music, radically transforming the canons of the '*observed*' counterpoint and generating, in a true Baroque spirit, the aesthetic change that Baini noted many years later as '*the last blow to the 'observed, style in music'*' in favor of a '*more openly rhythmic*' style. *The salmi Vespertini* for 8 voices and organ, printed posthumously in 1648 by his brother Domenico, are the mirror of this reality. The choice of 8 voices is in itself a way to ensure a greater 'variety' to the psalmodic texts, which are strongly evocative and rich in images. *The Dixit Dominus*, the best known among the *Salmi Regali*, while respecting the vigorous character that tradition assigns to it, is conceived by Virgilio in the solidity of the '*cori battenti*', the dynamic dialogue of the choirs. No interference of 'concerted' solos is allowed in the interpretation of the text which, on the contrary, is entirely based on the dialogue of the choirs and on the solidity and richness of the rhythm, even when the musical beat risks losing its pulse in the excitement of some passages (suffice to mention the passages in some parts of the text, such as the *Conquassabit capita, Dispersit superbos, Exaltabit*). The four following psalms and the final *Magnificat* alternate sections that are extremely varied, from the 'full' style to the double choir, to the '*concertato*' style and, as in the case of *Laudate Dominum*, two sopranos who dialogue with a 4-voice choir. It is difficult to establish which sections to prefer, in terms of effectiveness and musicality in the various psalms. Each of them has its own originality and its distinctive element. Only the temporal sequence provides an actual structure and enhances the originality of each part in the 'variety' of the whole. In the overall picture, however, some interesting compositional devices should be noted, like the one built on the text phrase *Sanctum et terribile nomen eius* included in the *Confitebor*: literally an 'earthquake' of sounds that recalls some solutions typical of Monteverdi's style; or the ternary sections that enliven the flow of binary tempos, such as in the *Esurientes of the Magnificat*, where everything is played on the use of syncopated rhythm. In the ordinariness of binary tempos, on the other hand, it is important to highlight the musical passage built on the words *Fecit potentiam in brachio suo. Dispersit superbos*, in which the composer, to express the power of the text, chooses to use the rhetorical device of the mule (a musical formula that recalls the tirelessness of the animal, here rendered vividly by the musical expedient of the two soprano voices singing in wide and martial values, thus 'harnessing', in a figurative sense, the rhythmic and pressing vortices of the other voices). In the execution the sequence of the five psalms and *Magnificat* is presented alternating with antiphons in Gregorian chant belonging to the festivities of Saint Peter and Paul,

and organ pieces taken from an anonymous collection of the Roman school of the early 17th century. The performance closes with a tribute to the purest late-Renaissance counterpoint, an extraordinary page by the great Spanish polyphonist Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611), the *Salve Regina* for 8 voices. It is a music fresco embellished here with the addition of 'filling' instruments. The execution is in line with the Baroque liturgical canons and, above all, the majestic splendor of the seventeenth-century celebrations. The ritual of the music and of the celebration absorbs the profane rhythms of life, where transcendence meets immanence, by maintaining a contact with the human condition of language and thought.

Michele Gasbarro

Ensemble Festina Lente

Founded and directed by Michele Gasbarro, it operates in the field of early Italian Renaissance and Baroque music. The numerous concerts and first modern performances are accompanied by the discographic activity, which includes the publication of a Sieneese Mass with two choirs by F. Bianciardi for the nuova fonit cetra, the Mass Ave Regina with two choirs of T.L. De Victoria (which has received the "Goldberg" from the homonymous international magazine of ancient music, the assignment of the "Choc" and the "Five Diapason" respectively by the prestigious French magazines Le Monde de la Musique and Diapason) and the Messa per la Notte del Ss. Natale by A. Scarlatti for 9 voices, two violins and basso continuo for Stradivarius. Festina Lente has been organizing, since 2004, the roma Festival barocco.

Michele Gasbarro, Conductor

He is professor of choir conducting at the musical conservatory 'L. D'Annunzio' of Pescara and has been involved in ancient music for several years, as a researcher and performer, participating in important festivals, and musical seasons. He founded the Ensemble Festina Lente, of which he is artistic and musical director, and is the creator and artistic director of the Roma Festival Barocco.

Photo Associazione Musicale Festina Lente

