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Giacomo Puccini

„Dal Romanticismo al Verismo“

Die Kammermusik von Giacomo Puccini

Videoeinführung von Valerio Fasoli

Crisantemi per Quartetto d'Archi

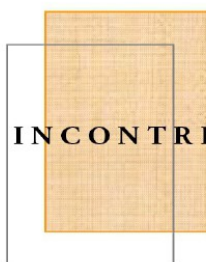
Tre Minuetti per Quartetto d'Archi

Quartetto in Re Maggiore

EnsembleSolisten Quartett

Künstlerische Leitung: Valerio Fasoli

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Giacomo Puccini

Dal Romanticismo al Verismo

The chamber Music by Giacomo Puccini

String Quartets

PART I

List of chamber music works ()*

Adagio in La Maggiore, per quartetto d'archi, 1882

Scherzo in La minore per archi, 1882

Quartetto d'archi in Re Maggiore, 1882-1883

Fuga Reale per quartetto d'archi, 1883

Tre Minuetti per quartetto d'archi, before 1884

Crisantemi per Quartetto d'archi, 1890, („Alla memoria di Amedeo Savoia Duca d'Aosta“)

Giacomo Puccini, one of the most important composers of his time, was born into a family of musicians. Although we remember and celebrate him today almost exclusively for his operatic output, we cannot forget that, born into a family of generations of musicians, he devoted himself almost exclusively to instrumental music until completing his studies in Milan.

His early musical education was in Lucca, where his father and four generations of ancestors had been choirmasters of the Palatine Chapel of the Republic. Therefore, having "music in his blood", his early musical education came from his family. During this time, he took organ lessons at the Cathedral Seminary and began playing in church at a very young age. At the same time, he studied choral singing, thus gaining his first experiences with the vocal repertoire. The first compositions date back to this period, in which Puccini wrote Cantatas and a „Messa di Gloria“.

However, it must also be recognized, following the sources of the time, that Puccini had an uneven performance with regards to his academic path. From what we know today, particularly according to Dieter Schickling's studies, no major production remains from his student days. It seems that Puccini only produced the bare minimum necessary to continue his studies with sufficient success.

What is certain is that, attending a performance of Giuseppe Verdi's Aida in Pisa in 1876, aroused in him great enthusiasm, which, however, did not immediately translate into artistic production. He probably developed concepts and ideas in his head which he then elaborated in the following years.

It was during this period, with the help of his mother, that he managed to find the financial means necessary to enroll at the Milan Conservatory, where he continued his studies first with Antonio Bazzini and then with Amilcare Ponchielli, which perhaps determined the completion of his revolution towards opera. His chamber music was mostly composed during this period, between 1882 and 1884.

In some cases, it appears, even according to his own statements, to be preparation material for lessons, that is, composition exercises. But is this really the case? Where does the exercise end and the research begin?

Many critics, both of his own time and later, maintain that Puccini exhibits little research and musical culture. On the contrary, they maintain that Puccini was very skilled at creating styles and themes that engaged audiences and that his style was ultimately not very revolutionary.

What's certain is that his works are absolutely captivating and the theatricality of his work is undeniable.

We titled this project „From Romanticism to Verism“ to see how Puccini was a keystone of a time of great transformation, in which the collapse of some royal houses and the birth of the first modern republican forms had a strong impact on the collective consciousness and gave rise to very different phenomena.

Puccini was born in a culturally dynamic period of great social transformation. In other words, if Romantic composers had led less adventurous lives, and lived just a few years longer, he would likely have experienced the apotheosis of a time of immense emotional tension. Instead, perhaps by its very nature, Romanticism was relatively short-lived, so Puccini was too young to experience its peak.

Furthermore, Romanticism was experienced in Italy in a very particular way. Aside from Paganini, this progressive and unprejudiced movement did not find a large following in Italy, perhaps also because opera and vocal performances tended to express themselves through a dramatic quality of content rather than style, rather than technique. Perhaps the political instability and social tensions of the time led culture to focus more on content and Giuseppe Verdi's work is the best proof of this.

For some reason, instrumental music, which became the emblem of Romanticism in Central Europe, was completely neglected in Italy. On the contrary, this dramaturgy and this outpouring of emotion was perfectly expressed in opera. Even today, it is a common belief among composers that the principal and most complete form of composition is opera.

And in this sentiment, Puccini was born. Everyone recognized and recognizes Puccini's unique dramaturgy and direction, his unique sense of stagecraft and theatricality. Fascinated by the romances of the time and the most exotic atmospheres that reached Europe, Puccini was a masterful interpreter of dazzling passions and profound sentiments. In this sense, he was perhaps the most skilled at reviving the Romantic spirit, albeit with an even deeper and more passionate accent. It's legitimate to think that if composers like Chopin and Schumann had lived longer, they would have been dazzled by Puccini's operas.

If it's true that at one point Puccini's work has been described as a „verismo“ opera, would it be illegitimate to suggest that Puccini was a „romantic verismo opera composer“? That his orchestration of Roman verismo works was such as to revive them in a passionate romanticism? Can we forget the ending of *Madame Butterfly* or *La Bohème*, or the death of Cavaradossi in *Tosca*? How deep and devastating are these moments?

But what of all this can be found in his early instrumental music? At a certain point in his life, after the enormous success, Puccini recognized that it would have been nice to linger

more on the instrumental parts to give more continuity to his compositions and not be made a slave to the narrative:

«Music? A useless thing. Without a libretto, how can I write music? I have that great defect of writing it only when my puppet executioners move on the stage. If I could be a pure symphonic composer (?). I would deceive my time and my audience. But me? I was born many years ago, many, too many, almost a century... and the holy God touched me with his little finger and said to me: "Write for the theatre: mind you – only for the theatre" and I followed the supreme advice.»

This project aims to investigate these aspects in early instrumental production and see what seeds lie within them.

(*) *Le composizioni per quartetto d'archi di Giacomo Puccini* by DIETER SCHICKLING

Quartetto in Re Maggiore

An analysis of the Quartet in D Major reveals much about the composer's style. While there is no absolute certainty that what has been discovered so far are actually the movements of a single quartet, we can say that with good probability these different themes are indeed its constituent parts.

Let's take W. Ludwig's reconstruction as valid and consider the separated movements as part of a single quartet. Let's start with the initial Allegro. Here, the influence of Schubert's classical romanticism is very significant. Both in the harmonic construction and in the contrapuntal structure, it is very linear and disciplined, yet at the same time has significant dynamic and dramatic thrusts. It is inevitable to perceive underscored references and allusions to operas and to some dramatic moments in later operas, particularly *La Bohème* and *Madam Butterfly*. Stylistically, the work evolves from a purely chamber-like, almost Mozartian atmosphere to moments of great lyricism and emotion, with very sudden dynamic and expressive shifts. The instrumental lyricism is typical of the vocals, and some sections seem to introduce aspects of early and twentieth-century Italian song.

The adagio is a beautiful picture, with calm and tranquil atmospheres, with sudden shifts between major and minor modes, small flashes and mood swings. Puccini often emphasizes the clear timbre of the strings, especially the violins, but the viola and cello also tend toward the high notes. The timbre is subtle and evanescent.

The Scherzo, very Viennese and Brahmsian in style, recalls some of the atmospheres of Mendelssohn's Italian Opera or some of the images of Dvorak's New World Symphony. Here too, there are significant emotional leaps. The theater and theatricality in the music are in Puccini's blood. Temperament, passions, the fulfillment of Romanticism. Technically refined, Puccini never indulges in self-celebration or stylistic display. Compositional technique is not an end in itself, but rather a service to emotion. The emotional plot comes before all else. While other composers could construct hours-long movements with a theme and a little counterpoint, Puccini prefers the volatility of sentiment. Themes are hinted at, developed, but quickly abandoned for new themes and new emotions. This is probably a characteristic of Italian opera in general, from the earliest times. Italian operas present many different themes, but they are not lingered over. What is missing is what philosophers might call "rumination" of concepts, that exhaustive analysis of a possibility until no substance remains and the emotional drive is completely exhausted. Puccini, and Italian culture in general, prefers to live in the moment, caressing sensations but always seeking new ones.

The Trio resembles a painting from *La Bohème*, with the same lightheartedness and carefreeness. Very short, Puccini seems to be trying to convey that happiness is fleeting, fleeting glimpses of tenderness and fulfillment embedded in human experiences.