

GIOVANNI BATTISTA SAMMARTINI'S LATE SYMPHONIES: A RECORDING PROJECT

The Milanese composer G. B. Sammartini (1701 - 1775), is considered by modern musicology to be the key figure in the development of the so-called Classical style.

Famous during his lifetime, performed throughout Europe, Gluck's teacher from 1737 to 1741, he frequented the leading musicians of his time (including Mozart) and was the hub of Milan's musical life.

Known in textbooks on music history as the "father of the symphony", Sammartini was in fact the first composer to try and develop the symphony starting from the "concerto" and "sonata for three instruments" (i.e. the chamber music forms of baroque music) rather than the "Ouverture d'Opera"; indeed he is the composer of the first symphonies whose composition date is known (precisely 1732). In his early experiments, Sammartini was able to establish an ensemble of instruments for the symphony which remained the standard combination for the classical period.

The importance of G. B. Sammartini's symphonic works is fully recognized today, thanks also to the work of two American researchers, N. Jenkins and B. Churgin.

We have a complete picture of Sammartini's symphonic output thanks to the work by Bathia Churgin and Newell Jenkins, who published in 1976 the thematic catalogue of the composer's works. As well as 74 symphonies whose authorship is uncertain or even dubious, 68 symphonies were catalogued whose authorship is quite certain. These works have been divided by Bathia Churgin into three stylistic periods: the early period (up to 1739), the middle period (from 1740 to 1758) and the late period (from 1759 to 1775).

The style of the works dating from the late period can already be defined as classical and in some cases is reminiscent of the style of Mozart or Boccherini.

The orchestration becomes more complex and sophisticated: wind instruments (horns and oboes) are added, basses and cellos have independent parts and in some symphonies violas play *divisi*.

Despite his fame during his lifetime, Sammartini's music met with a curious fate due to the historical events that wracked Milan at the end of the century: not one known signature by Sammartini is conserved in the Milan archives, since all the documents ended up in Vienna or Paris during the upheavals of the first French occupation. Thus, for a century and a half the problem of cataloguing Sammartini's works, in particular the symphonies, was an extremely complex problem for musicology, due to the manuscripts and publications of Sammartini's music being dispersed throughout Europe - a problem that was not to be solved until 1968 with the publication of the key study by B. Churgin, *The Symphonies of G.B. Sammartini*. The result is that today anyone wishing to perform a symphony by Sammartini would have to limit the choice to the first 20 published in 1968 by B. Churgin, to the subsequent 10 symphonies published - again by Churgin - in the '70s or to the 2 published in 1973 by N. Zimpel; if, instead, (s)he wished to study those written in his prime, i.e. after 1760, (s)he would have to undertake an exhausting hunt through Europe's libraries.

The symphonies in this project are unpublished: belonging to the group composed in the late period and thus extremely important from a stylistic point of view, the manuscripts are to be found in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Fonds du Conservatoire in Paris.

On completion of the entire cycle of late symphonies, this first CDs has been rounded off with recording of a quintet for three violins, viola, cello and basso continuo (from the collection of 6 quintets of 1776), also unpublished and from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris.

The second CD will include symphonies JC 17, 11, 49, 40, 26.

In both cases the pieces are previously unpublished, both on paper and in the form of recordings. The symphonies' scoring consists of a full string orchestra with the addition of a couple of oboes and a couple of horns.