

Milan whose involvement in the life of his society reached out across a very wide spectrum of activities.

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L'Oratorio di Santa Maria della Vita, ed. Marco Poli. Bologna: Costa Editore, 1997. 127 pp., ill.

One suspects that the modern reader will never quite know or appreciate the impression made by the arrival of the *penitenti* in the towns and cities of medieval Italy. There is no way for us to feel the emotional or spiritual response to the human columns wending their way through the narrow streets, entranced in song and self-flagellation. Yet the impact was clearly enormous and immediate. On 10 October 1260 the first of these processions passed through Bologna then, a mere nine days later, the Bolognesi emulated them and embarked on a similar trek to Modena. The proliferation of societies of *disciplinati*, *flagellanti*, or *battuti*, and the establishment of their many churches, oratories and social institutions began shortly thereafter. The passage of time and the evolution of the goals and activities of these lay brotherhoods have succeeded in erasing all but a few traces of the humble yet fervent, almost fanatical devotion which spawned the confraternity.

The Oratory of Santa Maria della Vita may provide a small window into the early origins of the movement in Bologna. Its location on Via Pescherie ("Fishmongers Street") dates at least as far back as 1502 and speaks to the less than noble standing of early confraternity members. (The Confraternity of Santa Maria della Vita itself can be traced back to 1261.) The massive renovations undertaken in the seventeenth century reflect the evolution in confraternity focus from penitence and self-flagellation in darkened rooms to civic consciousness and collegiality in brilliantly decorated oratories. The recently completed renovations, and the much lauded installation of an elevator, have transformed the oratory into a museum piece.

Nonetheless, even if the spiritual or emotional experience of the confraternity are no longer accessible to us, Marco Poli's superb edition chronicling the renovations carried out in the oratory provides a more than adequate scholarly view of the movement and its evolution. It recounts the early activities of the confraternity, its places of worship and the steps in its formalisation. As a record of the restorations of the oratory, it is invaluable. The book contains many full colour illustrations of the paintings, the sculpture, the flooring and the architecture of the oratory. Photographs of the restoration work in progress give a good indication of the state of disrepair into which the Oratory had fallen, as well as the extent and the difficulty of the restorations.

Starting with Mario Fanti's introductory essay describing the origins of the Confraternity and its historical context, the book is organized into a series of essays devoted to a variety of related topics. Silvia D'Altri's piece on the daily life of the *oratoriani*, and in particular on their musical and theatrical activities,

includes an appendix that will be of interest to scholars of Medieval and Renaissance drama. Francesco Giordano's essay on the architectural and decorative aspects of the Oratory traces the origins of the present building. The architectural and technical sketches included in Giordano's survey will enable the reader to visualize better the lay-out of the Oratory and appreciate its artistic treasures, in particular, Lombardi's spectacular sculpture group, *Il Transito della Vergine* (later in the volume there is a more comprehensive treatment of the work by Maria Delbianco). The wealth of paintings housed in the Oratory is set out, in brilliant colour, in Giovanni Sassu's fascinating essay that speaks not only to the artistic merit of the various pieces but to the religious and social implications they represent. The painstaking nature of the restorations is highlighted in Daniele Meneghini's article on the flooring and decorative tiling of the Oratory. The final essay by Emma Biavati outlines the technical details of the project and emphasizes its sweeping nature. While each of these specialized essays will appeal to a particular field of scholars, taken together they comprise a comprehensive and dizzying view of the enormity of the renovations and the spectacular results they achieved. As such the volume is a valuable addition to confraternity studies.

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Riepe, Juliane. *Die Arciconfraternita di S. Maria della Morte in Bologna. Beiträge zur Geschichte des italienischen Oratoriums im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kirchenmusik*, 5. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1998. 604 pp. ISBN 3-506-70625-X

This well-documented and thorough study by Juliane Riepe is a valuable and important contribution to research on confraternal life and the Italian oratorio in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Her starting point is the role of Italian confraternities, specifically the Arciconfraternita di S. Maria della Morte, in commissioning and organizing oratorio performances beginning around 1650. In this book she seeks to trace the origin of, and reasons behind oratorio performance traditions, what these traditions were, and how they developed over a period of more than 100 years.

Riepe originally planned to focus on the oratorios of the Bolognese composer Giacomo Antonio Perti (1661–1756). In the course of her research, however, she discovered strong connections between the composer and the Arciconfraternita di S. Maria della Morte; the title pages of his oratorio libretti often referred to the confraternity and all of his known Passion oratorios were performed several times and almost exclusively by the confraternity. As she pursued these links, the focus of her study shifted away from the oratorios of Perti and towards the Arciconfraternita di S. Maria della Morte.

The choice of this particular confraternity was fortunate: this was one of the oldest, wealthiest, respected and influential of the Bolognese fraternities; its