

Francis Biggi

I work in early music, especially in the music of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance since the second half of the Seventies.

I belong to the generation of Italian musicians who decided, determinedly and at a very young age, to embark on a course of musical, cultural and personal education outside national boundaries.

In the world of early music we work on the original sources, on historical documents.

But to my mind, a specialised, theoretical training was not enough; I needed to have some involvement with the music within the society that had created it. I needed to experience the elements of it in order to understand the influence that thinking had on music and the relationship that music had with society, with culture, with philosophy and with politics. I felt I needed an interdisciplinary education that comprised not just specialist musical studies but also history, ethnology and anthropology.

I have focussed my research on the relationship between text and music in the repertoires of the late Middle Age and the early decades of the Renaissance, on the treacherous terrain between writing and oral transmission. Working in collaboration with other specialists I have been able to construct a hermeneutic model to sing the narrative poetry. Once I had understood what distinguishes narrative singing from other forms of singing, I turned to the polyphonic repertoire of the early Renaissance, in which compositions that use the same meter as narrative poetry are often found. It was necessary to analyse hundreds of compositions in search of characteristics corresponding to the model I had developed, thus creating a library of essential melodic formulas, with which I started experimenting.

I worked with young performers, some of them students at the HEM and some selected through audition, who were involved in a three-year project as part of a collaboration involving HEM in Geneva, the Fondation Royaumont, the Concertgebouw in Bruges and the Fondation les Chemins du Baroque in Sarrebourg, dedicated to reconstructing, musically and theatrically, the *Fabula di Orpheo* by Angelo Poliziano. The text of the work, which was written around 1480, uses primarily the most common meter for narrative poetry. The work was sung in whole or in part, but there is no music attached to it. A documentary on how the project was carried out is available on the website of the Haute École de Musique de Genève.

This research methodology, essential to the way I work with music, takes into account a large number of extra-documentary and extra-musical items and has radically changed my approach to interpretation. It has been applied to several other art projects, all aimed at exploring unconventional perspectives: from the minor and marginal repertoires of the early Renaissance to traces of Italian music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the musical tradition of contemporary Mexico.

As well as a tool for reflection and artistic creation, this methodology has become a very useful pedagogical tool, due to the direct involvement of students in the process of research and analysis of sources and in processing the musical result.

1) An artistic research project currently in progress that is generating artistically relevant insights for the researcher, with thoughts as to how these might have a longer-term impact on his or her musical practice.

A comparative study of the Japanese Gunki Monogatari with the Italian tradition of singing epic poetry, from its origins in the 13th century until our era. The project is co-sponsored by the Geneva Conservatory and the Research Center for Japanese Traditional Music of the University of Kyoto. Its goal is to deepen the understanding of the creative processes and communicative techniques found in sung narration from across the cultural spectrum. The study, which combines observation and analysis with practical experimentation, is designed to develop a set of interpretive models that retrace the artistic and conceptual path that led to the birth of the 'stile recitativo.'

2) Outputs from a completed or well-advanced artistic research project that can be shown to be having a lasting impact on the researcher's own musical practice

'Una Musa Plebea,' an artistic research project dedicated to the minor repertoires of the Italian Renaissance, was the first fundamental attempt to analyze an early music repertoire and its survival in the popular tradition today by using an interdisciplinary methodology that united musicology, ethnomusicology and the analysis of secondary sources. The program, published in 2011 by the Raumklang label, was recorded over several years, following a process that began with the creation/formation of a work method, then its verification, followed by its application to music of often vastly different origins.

Outputs from a completed or well-advanced artistic research project that can be shown to be having an impact on the musical practice of people other than the researcher(s)

The project, dedicated to Angelo Poliziano's "La Fabula di Orpheo," was the result of collaboration between the Geneva Conservatory, the Royaumont Foundation, the Bruges Concertgebouw and the Chemins du Baroque Foundation of Sarrebourg. Its preparation involved a group of young performers: students of the Geneva Conservatory together with young professionals from across Europe. The long period of preparation (three years) created a unique work environment for the young musicians who participated. They were confronted with an approach that they had never experienced before to singing techniques, improvisation, ornamentation, and the relationship between text and music. The possibilities opened up by the workshop, and the work-methods used there, would have a major influence on the young musicians involved, changing their way of looking at early music and its methods of interpretation.

The music of the production was recorded by K617 in 2006 and received excellent reviews from the international press, including a 'Diapason d'Or.' In addition, there is a video produced by the Geneva Conservatory that illustrates the conception and realization of the project.