



REVIEW: EDITION

## Laudate Pueri Dominum

**Niccolò Jommelli (1714–1774), ed. António Jorge Marques**  
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This edition was born within the framework of the Principe Francesco Maria Ruspoli International Competition of Baroque Music and Musicological Studies. Established in 2009 on the initiative of Donna Giada Ruspoli and the Centro Studi Ricerche Santa Giacinta Marescotti, the competition aims to acknowledge the best scholarship through publication in the series *Miscellanea Ruspoli: studi sulla musica dell'età barocca*. In 2014 the competition jury, composed of Dinko Fabris, Manuel Carlos de Brito and Giorgio Monari, awarded António Jorge Marques a special mention for his discovery at the National Library of Portugal of the autograph of Niccolò Jommelli's *Laudate pueri*, as well as for his reconstruction of the music and the resulting critical edition. Giorgio Monari wrote the preface to the edition, recognizing the composition's great artistic value. The volume, which tells the exciting story of this discovery, is the second in the *Saggi Ruspoli* series (the first is Ursula Kirkendale's *Georg Friedrich Händel, Francesco Maria Ruspoli e Roma* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2017)). The editing is based on the autograph, uncovered in 2003, which is the only known source (now available online at <https://imslp.org>). As often happens in such cases, its discovery occurred fortuitously: the scholar was engaged in other research and followed a hunch that led to in-depth analysis and the eventual confirmation of Jommelli's authorship.

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee of 1750 (a special year of reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins in the Catholic Church), Pope Benedict XIV found himself in need of a deputy chapel master for St Peter's Basilica, as the incumbent Pietro Paolo Bencini was no longer able to perform the onerous task alone, owing to his advanced age. The monumental work that Jommelli composed for the occasion was conceived for soloists, four choirs and basso continuo, with two choirs placed in the high dome and two near the altar. It was an ambitious work, even when viewed in relation to the polychoral tradition that had already produced so many masterpieces since the mid-sixteenth century.

As effectively full chapel master, Jommelli had the task of writing the music for the grand feast in honour of the city's two patron saints, the apostles St Peter and St Paul. They were commemorated with imposing festivities of very ancient tradition, celebrated with exceptional pomp on 28 and 29 June, the latter being the day on which their martyrdom is traditionally recalled. The liturgical festivity of the Roman patron saints was expressed in three main moments: at First Vespers, at Mass and at Second Vespers (also known as the *Vesperoni*). The singing was entrusted to the most important choral ensembles in Rome, namely the Papal Chapel, which sang at First Vespers and Mass, and the Cappella Giulia, which sang at Second Vespers. With about thirty singers, the Papal Chapel exalted the *a cappella* polyphonic tradition. The Cappella Giulia, however, gave life to a spectacular liturgy, described and extolled by various sources, which attracted numerous worshippers and for which singers were also hired from other bodies, reaching almost two hundred

voices for the feast of the Roman patrons. The compositions for this feast, which are still preserved today, testify to all the pomp of the occasion: they were usually set for four choirs, sometimes five, positioned in different areas of the church, placed on temporary platforms along the nave and also in the dome. Since the *Laudate pueri* includes two choirs near the altar and two in the high dome, it is a true example of musical ‘gigantism’, in which Jommelli imposes considerable demands on the choirs. Each choir had a positive organ or even two for the basso continuo, doubled by cellos and double basses and supported by an assistant conductor who conveyed with his own movement the cues of the chapel master, himself positioned near the first choir.

Marques reports three key elements that helped him to identify the author of the manuscript: the thematic catalogue of Jommelli’s compositions compiled by Wolfgang Hochstein, some letters from Gerolamo Chiti to Padre Martini and a letter from the Director of the Royal Theatres of Lisbon to Jommelli’s brother, Ignazio. Seeing some photos of the autograph of the antiphon *Haec est domus Domini* – composed in the same year, 1750, and also for St Peter’s Basilica – reproduced in Hochstein’s thematic catalogue triggered the recognition (Wolfgang Hochstein, *Die Kirchenmusik von Niccolò Jommelli* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1984)). The editor, who includes an excerpt from the catalogue in Appendix II, explains that ‘it was the expertise in calligraphic analysis that, ultimately, proved decisive for the crucial breakthrough. On 31 August 2006, while browsing [through] photographs of two Jommelli autographs inserted in Hochstein’s thematic catalogue . . . a light suddenly struck: the anonymous manuscript written for 16 voices and three organs was a Jommelli autograph!’ (7). This was followed by an in-depth comparative calligraphic examination of those elements most peculiar to all the recognized Jommelli autographs that are held in the United Kingdom (in the British Library and the Royal College of Music), which can be consulted in the edition’s Appendix I. In this regard, Marques adds: ‘the elements compared in the tables to be found in Appendix I are not only remarkably similar, but originated from a very similar hand movement, a clear indication that they were drawn by the same hand’ (8).

In Rome, Jommelli was regarded as a foreigner, certainly more famous as an opera composer than for his sacred compositions, and the commission he was given fuelled much jealousy among Roman musicians. Correspondence between the choirmaster of the Lateran Basilica, Girolamo Chiti, and Padre Giovan Battista Martini testifies to this envy, as the latter (with a certain smugness) commented on how Jommelli’s appointment left these ‘maestri’ feeling high and dry (‘cum palmite nasi’; Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna, Epsitolario Martiniano, I.12.110, 18 marzo 1750 – Schnoebelen n. 1 487). Chiti’s letters, which represent the second key element, confirm the magnificence of the event, designed to celebrate, through the expressive power of the ‘colossal Baroque’, the most important date of the liturgical year for St Peter’s Basilica: in 1750 the celebrations for the patron saints Peter and Paul coincided with those for the Great Jubilee. *Laudate pueri* was obviously intended to be performed at the Second Vespers, as Chiti explains that ‘a choir from the dome’ had not been heard since 1725, when a composition for four choirs by chapel master Ottavio Pittoni was used at the Second Vespers for the feast of the patron saints. In his study, António Jorge Marques confirms that the colossal conception of the *Laudate pueri* for four choirs and three organs indicates in itself that the manuscript found in Lisbon belongs to Jommelli’s Roman period. So how did the manuscript arrive in Lisbon? Some letters prove (this is the third key element) that the manuscript was sent along with other compositions to King José I of Portugal by Jommelli’s closest relatives after the maestro’s death, in the hope that an annuity would be granted to them, as the sovereign had long shown a desire to possess all of the composer’s music.

The manuscript (293 x 222 mm) of *Laudate pueri Dominum* lacks the first folios, which would contain the music relating to the first line and part of the second (‘Laudate pueri Dominum: laudate nomen Domini / Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum’). These missing folios led to a complex and laborious process of establishing authorial attribution. The manuscript consists of six bound fascicles, the first five made up of four folios each and the last of five folios.

There are, therefore, twenty-five surviving folios, and eight missing, including the title-page, from the beginning of the manuscript. The original precise and complete numbering of the fascicles (from 2 to 7), is present in pen in the manuscript's upper left-hand corner, and a later hand has numbered in pencil each folio from 1 to 50. The frequent corrections argue in favour of an autograph manuscript, and analysis confirms that the discovered manuscript uses paper with Neapolitan watermarks, thus suggesting that it could have belonged to Jommelli. The excellent quality of the paper has allowed the manuscript to reach us in good condition, despite some stains and later hand-written annotations on the first and last pages. Each folio contains twenty staves, not all used, divided between the first and second choirs (*concertati*) with their basso continuo sharing the same top staff, and the third and fourth choirs with the third organ at the bottom of the page. The manuscript specifies the division 'Org:P<sup>mo</sup>.' and 'Org:2.<sup>do</sup>', or 'Tutti' when the choirs sing at the same time (3). Choirs three and four are never concertante, and sometimes double their voices to become one choir. The arrangement of the choirs is clearly evident in this edition thanks to the inclusion of some facsimile images of the autograph.

This volume by Marquez once again confirms the prestige of the editions of Libreria Musicale Italiana, as it recounts clearly the discovery of the manuscript and the elements that led to it being traced back with certainty to Jommelli. What is more, two appendices allow readers to compare for themselves the autograph's calligraphic elements with those of other works by the composer as well as to consult a catalogue of sacred works that Jommelli composed for St Peter's Basilica. The edition concludes with three indexes listing people, places and works cited for more convenient reference.

This critical edition of *Laudate pueri Dominum* was conceived and published with both performance and study in mind. It is easy to use, owing largely to a clear text, as can be seen from the very first pages of the score. Original clefs are replaced by modern ones, one of very few editorial interventions – alongside the addition of a few articulation marks that clearly correspond to what Jommelli had in mind – helping to avoid a cluttered, cumbersome score. As the editor explains, even the composer's indication of Organ III ('ORG:III') was omitted where it was considered superfluous, given that the staff upon which this instrument was written always appears in the same (last) position. This approach has aided the edition's readability, since the page format used by LMI in this series is rather small. Yet every editorial decision – informed by what Jommelli had notated elsewhere in the score – seems to have been made in the spirit of the autograph. Even the arrangement of the basso continuo has been kept identical to the manuscript, as have the spelling, punctuation and Latin syllables of the text as notated by Jommelli.

Overall, this edition, enriched by remarkable illustrations, recounts the discovery of the source, its successful attribution and the contextualization of the piece in the liturgical practices of the time. When composing *Laudate pueri Dominum*, Jommelli had immersed himself so completely in the serious character of sacred music required for Christendom's most important basilica that he would later recount his struggles to abandon this style as he was preparing to write the opera *Ifigenia in Tauride* for the Teatro Argentina in Rome the following year (51). Marquez's edition offers a wonderful opportunity to revive this work for the Vatican and, through it, to become more familiar with one of Jommelli's most heartfelt artistic moments.

**Claudia Pilla** graduated in piano, harpsichord and musicology from the conservatories of Venice and Pesaro *cum laude*. She has given numerous concerts in Italy, Morocco, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland as a soloist, with orchestra and in chamber-music ensembles, and has made recordings for RAI and other radio and television stations. She has held master-classes on baroque performance practice and the history of ornamentation and old fingerings. In 2012 she published the volume *Le antiche diteggiature negli strumenti a tasto* (Padua: Armelin) and in 2022 the bilingual edition *Guelf. 1055 Helmstedt, Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek: manoscritto in intavolatura d'organo tedesca della prima metà del sec. XVII, completamente diteggiato* (Latina: Il Levante).