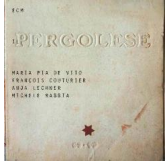


Maria Pia De Vito, François Couturier, Anja Lechner, Michele Rabbia – Il Pergolese (2013)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
Wednesday, 31 March 2021 13:59 -

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1. *Ogne pena cchiu spietata (Pergolesi)* - 5:58 2. *Amen (Couturier)/Fac Ut Portem (Pergolesi)* - 11:20 3. *Sinfonia for violoncello (Pergolesi)* - 10:03 4. *Chi disse ca la femmena (Pergolesi)* - 4:43 5. *Tre giorni son che Nina (Pergolesi)* - 8:43 6. *Fremente (De Vito-Couturier-Lechner-Rabbia)* - 3:14 7. *In compagnia d'amore I (De Vito-Rabbia)* - 4:11 8. *In compagnia d'amore II (Couturier-Lechner-Rabbia)* - 3:47 9. *Dolente (Couturier)* - 7:18
Percussion, Electronics – Michele Rabbia Piano – François Couturier Violoncello – Anja Lechner Voice – Maria Pia De Vito

Il Pergolese marks the ECM debut of Neapolitan vocalist, composer, and arranger Maria Pia De Vito. Other members of this collective ensemble -- cellist Anja Lechner, pianist Francois Couturier, and percussionist Michele Rabbia -- are well known to fans of the label's offerings. De Vito has been recording since the mid-'80s. She's fronted killer ensembles led by Bruno Tomasso, Tino Tracanna, and Colin Towns, been in a trio with Ralph Towner and John Taylor, and issued several acclaimed dates as a leader, including 2011's stellar *Mind the Gap*. Though she has primarily established herself in jazz, international, and improvised music, she was trained classically in opera. Il Pergolese was commissioned by Festival Pergolesi Spontini di Jesi in 2011. It is a revisioning of the composer's work in fragmentary aspects, and an exploration of her themes and frames through modern composition, improvisation, and sonic invention. Couturier's "Amen" commences with his piano and subtle electronics by Rabbia; it was inspired by the *Stabat Mater*, and indeed, its haunted lyric line, articulated by Lechner's brooding, lonesome cello, leads directly into Pergolesi's *Fac Ut Portem* from that work. De Vito uses restraint to command the dynamic and timbre, allowing the words -- which she translated into Neapolitan in honor of the composer's love of Naples' art song and popular musics -- to flow deliberately but freely, making room for the composer's source melody alongside jazz and 18th century folk song. In the three group improvisations, "Fremente" and "In Compagnia D'amore I & II," the quartet reference Pergolesi's *Nun si Chella Ch'io Lassaje* and *Tu di Saper Procura*, respectively.

In these works one can hear the composer's actual persona emerge from the improvisatory fragments due to the intuitive, disciplined interplay of the participants and De Vito's massive gift as a vocalist. "Chi Disse ca la Femmena" showcases the manner in which this group can take liberties -- in this case with one of the composer's Neapolitan songs -- weaving together the influence of jazz, Brazilian rhythms, and free improvisation without ever losing his thread. The set closes with Couturier's "Dolente," also inspired by the Stabat Mater. The pianist's use of the source harmonic fragment is stretched, taken apart, and re-formed in real time. De Vito is a wonder in soprano voice; first she provides an unfettered yet disciplined utterance of seemingly random syllables, followed by wordless improvised lines, and finally, Pergolesi's translated lyrics as Lechner and Couturier weave a near mystical, elliptical frame around her use of the original melodic conception. *Il Pergolese* is musically brave and sophisticated, and as deeply moving as it is provocative. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

The life of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736), cut tragically short at age 26 by tuberculosis, nevertheless made an immeasurable impact on the world of Baroque music and, as evidenced here, beyond. Already a successful opera composer by his mid-20s, Pergolesi would leave behind his final work, the *Stabat Mater* of 1736, on his deathbed. As *Il Pergolese*, singer Maria Pia De Vito, pianist François Couturier, cellist Anja Lechner, and percussionist Michele Rabbia have responded to the Italian composer by modernizing him at a crossroads of jazz, folk, and improvisation, De Vito going so far as to translate texts from the *Stabat Mater* into Neapolitan. The latter move yields pieces by Couturier inspired by that same masterpiece. His "Amen," like the album as a whole, treats the development process as a precious use of time: only after Rabbia's airbrushed percussion and additional electronics take hold do the darkly rolling piano and forlorn nightingale of cello share a canvas. The affirmation itself fluoresces under De Vito's care before carrying over into Couturier's jazzily inflected chords, by which he sets up Pergolesi's processional "Fac Ut Portem." De Vito rides the ocean waves of its drama, craving sunlight but drinking only storm. She then dips back into the Marian text with "Dolente." Resonant percussion and birdlike vocals give Couturier the space to lull us into the song proper for a lachrymose yet, by virtue of the Neapolitan language's delectable syllabic flavor, somehow blissful repose.

From Pergolesi's first comic opera *Lo frate 'nnamorato* (The Brother in Love) come two arias. The achingly lyrical "Ogne pena cchiù spietata" rests on a bed of piano and cello. Into this gorgeous scene steps De Vito like another Maria—Farantouri, that is—but with a little more maple mixed into her oak. Even after she fades, traces linger on as Lechner and Couturier are joined by Rabbia's tapped hand drums. "Chi disse ca la femmena," on the other hand, is a more straightforward melody that turns into folkdance and best explores the band's rhythmic possibilities. A similar carpet of development unrolls itself down the corridor the "Sinfonia for

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violoncello,” which holds its own in a landscape of shifting tectonics. With archaeological care and glass tools, Rabbia chips away at Lechner’s caged pizzicati as if they were relics in need of recognition. That they most certainly get in the return of Couturier, who with an empathic analysis tells the backstory of their unearthing. And as Lechner’s bow sings its arco song, it resuscitates a Baroque heart to a calm yet glorious rhythm. “Tre giorni son che Nina,” a wildly popular song of the Italian Baroque attributed to Pergolesi, is another thing of beauty. It opens in raindrops before Lechner puts bow to string and follows a river breached from a dam of mortality.

Some freely improvised tracks round out the program. “Fremente” winds itself around De Vito, whose bubbling lines run wild in the realm of possibility, while “In compagnia d’amore I” and its sequel evoke Luciano Berio’s Visage and a voiceless chasm, respectively. Whatever their guise, the musicians of Il Pergolese pose their emotional statuary in accordance with the moment at hand, turning everything they touch into intimate theater, with De Vito as the heart, and the trio as the soul. ---Tyran Grillo, ecmreviews.com

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