

Terza Messa

Composer: Michele Cantatore



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Michele Cantatore is one of the most illustrious personalities that Ruvo has ever produced throughout its cultural history. A fine example of how culture can triumph over poverty, how light can dispel the dark, and how spirituality can overcome harsh situations.

A rare model of how art and beauty can become vehicles for social advancement and freedom from the suffering and intractability of destiny.

The composer's connection with his local area is also important. The creation of a genuine tradition linked to the Christian community to which he belonged means that the music he composed is not the subjective expression of the writer, but a common heritage of faith and art.

The 50 years of service to music that maestro Michele Cantatore accomplished is an example and encouragement for us all to live with consciousness and passion, to experience religious musical works with humility and austerity, without self-aggrandizement, without deceptive ambition, moved only by faith and the love of beauty, and with the ultimate goal of praising the Lord.

Maestro Cantatore's great concert came to an end in 2005, leaving the people of Ruvo greatly in his debt; this book represents a first small expression of our gratitude to him.

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Michele Cantatore



Michele Cantatore was the maestro di cappella — orchestra leader — at the Ruvo di Puglia cathedral for over 50 years, and also played the organ in several churches in that town, maintaining close contacts with the SS Redentore — the Church of the Redeemer in Venice — where he was a member of a singing group for many years. His desire was to educate, through music, to the quest for and the manifestation of one's faith through music, embodying not just the role of a distinguished Maestro of music, but above all a Maestro of life.

He was born in Trani on 9th April 1919 to a peasant family from Ruvo, and experienced the privations of postwar Italy throughout his childhood and adolescence, exacerbated by an unsuccessful operation for a congenital cataract condition when he was one year old, which left him almost totally blind. Following the death of his mother, he was sent to live with an aunt in Ruvo, where he had the opportunity to explore his natural aptitude for performing liturgical music in the town's churches, demonstrating an exceptional talent for musical memory and intonation, and a remarkable inclination for learning. The pastor Don Gioacchino De Palo was struck by the boy's abilities and enrolled him at the Vittorio Emanuele II boarding school in Florence to attend vocational classes that would be useful to him in the world of employment for the blind (such as basket weaving and other manual activities). However, his aptitude for study was so apparent that Michele instead attended classes in general culture and music, and was taught by teachers who took his situation to heart.

His three years' stay in Florence was the making of him; it instilled in him a particular partiality for art and culture. On his return to Ruvo, he began working as a liturgical organist and surrounded himself with singers that he chose among ordinary local people: peasant farmers and craftsmen with whom he held music and choral singing classes, ensuring everyone had a copy of the score and was able to follow the notes of the melody. Making copies for every singer was not an easy task in the 1960s: they all had to be copied out by hand. He achieved this by dictating the original copy to his

wife and daughters, who reproduced the required number of copies of each arrangement.

He moved to Padua in the 1960s to pursue his studies and improve himself, and studied the organ under Amadeo Boccardo. He later studied polyphonic music at the G. Cini Foundation, a branch of the Benedetto Marcello Conservatory of Venice on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore, under the distinguished guidance of Pellegrino Ernetti, a Benedictine monk who was the first chair of Polyphonic Music. He was awarded a diploma in Polyphonic Music, and attended other advanced classes in Gregorian chant whilst he remained in Venice.

With the benefit of these studies and being a devout Christian, he returned to his home town and devoted himself to teaching music at the diocesan seminary of Bitonto and other courses in music established by the regional authorities; he inspired generations of young people with a taste for music and singing, many of whom later became well-known professional singers: Angelo Anselmi, Nicola Bucci, Rino Campanale, Giovanni Mazzone, Gino Sparapano and others. Together with the priest Don Mario Jurilli and Professor Raffaele Camerino, he founded the Santa Cecilia Schola Cantorum in Ruvo, where his esteemed instruction in choral training was aimed at students of all ages, who were often invited to participate in liturgical and lay recitations.

His profound faith inspired by the sincere values of the Gospel led maestro Cantatore to compose a number of musical works for worship or inspired by holy themes. He wrote his music initially in Braille, and although he used only a rudimentary machine, "his blind eyes seemed to see a light that turned into the Gregorian-style evocative harmonies that were his prayer and the prayer of everyone, for everyone". He then dictated his compositions to family members who wrote them down, and later employed a succession of professional music writers, such as Maestro Basilio Giandonato, director of the music school and leader of the town's band.

In addition to three masses dedicated to the Holy Family, the third of which he wrote in Italian, Michele Cantatore also composed several oratorios, including *La Resurrezione di Lazzaro* (the Resurrection of Lazarus,) songs dedicated to the Virgin Mary, a *Salve Regina* for voice and organ, motets and hymns for various religious festivals (including the Hymn to San Biagio, protector of the town of Ruvo di Puglia, which is performed at official celebrations,) *Inno alla Pietà* (Hymn for Mercy) for choir and organ,

and Aprite le porte a Cristo (Open your Doors to Christ) dedicated to Pope John Paul II.

His masses for choir and organ include the pastoral mass, In nativitate Domini, and he also composed the theatrical work 8 Gennaio (8th of January,) the story of the popular uprising that led to Ruvo Town Hall being burnt down on 8 January 1894.

Michele Cantatore died peacefully on 5 October 2005, comforted by his faith, which provided guidance and inspiration throughout his life.