

25. Cantate Domino (Motetto a 4 voci miste)

Giuseppe Pitoni
(1657-1743)
arr. William Melton

Pitoni, Giuseppe Ottavio

(born 18 March 1657 in Rieti; died 1 February 1743 in Rome)

Brought to Rome as an infant, Pitoni began musical studies with Pompeo Natali at the age of five and became a boy chorister three years later. Francesco Foggia gave him instruction in counterpoint, and beginning at the tender age of sixteen Pitoni was engaged as maestro di cappella at a series of churches in Monterotondo, Assisi, and his birthplace of Rieti. In 1677 he was back in Rome, where he became maestro di cappella of San Marco. He remained in this post for over sixty years, though he served simultaneously as the director of additional major Roman cathedrals and churches, including Santa Cecilia and San Pietro (St. Peter's). He was an exceptional teacher, authoring books on harmony, counterpoint and music history and producing such pupils as Francesco Durante, Leonardo Leo, Girolamo Chiti and Francesco Feo. At Pitoni's death at the advanced age of eighty-five, he was buried in the Pitoni family vault at San Marco.

The number of Pitoni's compositions, wrote his pupil and biographer Chiti, was 'infinite' (a modern scholar amended this assessment to 'impossible to determine', because of the number of works that may have been lost). In any case, Pitoni was an extremely productive composer of sacred music, creating about two hundred Magnificats and nearly the same number of motets, many hymns and pieces in smaller forms, an impressive two hundred and seventy masses and an astonishing seven hundred psalms. Many of his masses were written for three or even four antiphonal choirs, and late in life he began a mass for no less than twelve choirs. Pitoni, who had laboriously copied out Palestrina's scores to study their style, acquired such a command of technique that he could dispense with the step of composing a score, simply writing out parts independently. 'Cantate Domino' (*Motetto a 4 voci miste*) is a setting of Psalm 149: 1-2 ('Sing to the Lord a New Song').

The composer's love of polychoral settings is reflected even in this modest four part work, which was probably performed with two separate choruses during his lifetime. A similar effect can be suggested in the transcription by stressing distinct gradations in dynamics and, as written by scholar Helmut Hucke about Pitoni's style, a 'more incisive bringing out of the soli/ripieno contrasts'.

Text by William Melton