

Five



Questions for Francesca Torelli

Interviewed by Anna F. Porcaro

To read the interview in Italian, see the *Digital Supplement* No 21.

Francesca Torelli is considered among the best Italian lutenists in today's early music scene. After earning a degree in lute with the highest marks at the Conservatory of Verona Francesca studied with Nigel North at the Guildhall School in London.

She has collaborated with the orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and with other groups: Vivaldi of Solisti Veneti, Il Ruggiero, Accademia degli Astrusi, Cappella Artemisia, Sans souci, Cappella Palatina, Accademia Farnese and Offerta Musicale.

Francesca recorded two solo CDs (on the Tactus and Brilliant labels) with music by Pietro Paolo Melli and Alessandro Piccinini and the albums John Dowland: Lute Songs, Lute Music; Musique pour le Roy-Soleil: Robert de Visée Works for Theorbo, Italian Baroque Music for Archlute, and Le Dialogue: Charles Mouton Lute Suites for Magnatune. Her solo CD Renaissance Fantasias, (Da Vinci, 2022) was awarded five stars by Musica and Amadeus magazines.

She is founder and director of the Scintille di musica ensemble, and with them recorded six CDs for EMI and Lugomare. These recordings focus on sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian music. Since 2001 she has taught lute at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory in Milan.

What led you to the lute?

I started studying classical guitar when I was twelve years old. My teacher was self-taught and had no guidelines for teaching, so he gave me an incredible number of scores and let me choose the pieces to study. I already had specific preferences and, without knowing it, I always chose music that had been composed for the lute. When I realized this I wanted to know what the lute was like. A family friend knew the only lute teacher in an Italian conservatory [in 1977], Orlando Cristoforetti, and went with me to listen to one of Cristoforetti's house concerts. When I heard him play I was enraptured. I left the guitar and studied with him until I graduated.

At the beginning of my studies, another source of inspiration was Julian Bream's record *Lute Music from the Royal Courts of Europe* (Sony Classical, 1967). At that time there were

other recordings of lute music by other lutenists or guitarists, but I felt that Bream's recordings had more lively and spontaneous expressiveness than the other recordings. Aside from my teacher, Bream's recordings were the only other thing that strongly influenced me.

What do you feel proudest about?

Even though I am eternally dissatisfied with things, I am also proud of many small milestones that I've reached at different stages of my life. When I graduated, I was happy to have been, at that time, the youngest lutenist, as well as the first woman lutenist in Italy. I was one of the first people in Italy, or perhaps even one of the first people in Europe, to sing while accompanying herself on the lute in concerts and recordings. I also tried to bring the world of early music a little closer to that of folk and pop music. I did this by directing a large ensemble of ancient instruments, Scintille di Musica, and combining it with a famous Italian folk/pop singer-songwriter, Angelo Branduardi. Together we made six CDs and performed not only in concert halls, but also in city squares, with the hope that we would broadcast this music to a different and wider audience. The renaissance music programs I created were really crossovers between early music and the folk side of pop. For me it is very important for those studying the lute to have had a strong, clear historical background, but it is just as important to know how to break away from pre-established patterns to approach other ways of making music. For me this means also that the way you approach music must change depending on the degree

