



ORGAN & MUSIC FESTIVAL RHODES

800 years from the Pilgrimage of St. Francis in the Middle East

ST. FRANCIS IN MUSIC & IMAGES

Organ Improvisations on episodes from St. Francis' life
*Clips from the silent movie **BROTHER SUN** (1918)*

Rounding out the evening will be the **St. Cecilia Singers Choir** of Rhodes conducted by **Christos Paraskevopoulos** with **Natasa Bolaki** on the organ.

An Event organized by

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH OF RHODES
in the frame of the Custody of The Holy Land's
TERRA SANCTA ORGAN FESTIVAL

RHODES| Church of St. Francis
4 October 2019

EUGENIO MARIA FAGIANI (ITALY)



As an affirmed international concert organist, Eugenio Maria Fagiani performs across Europe, the Middle East, Russia, United Kingdom, Canada and the U.S. He conducts masterclasses (both in Interpretation and Improvisation) and lectures for top-rated music institutions around Europe and North America and often serves as a juror in international competitions. Fagiani is the Organist of the Franciscan Shrine of La Verna, Arezzo, and serves as the organist of the "LaVerdi" Symphony Orchestra in Milan. His works as a composer and a series of organ transcriptions are now part of the repertoire of some of the most prestigious artists of our time such as Stephen Tharp and David Briggs. Fagiani is the Artistic Director of La Verna Organ Festival and Artistic Advisor of the Terra Sancta Organ Festival, organized by the Custody of the Holy Land. He records with VDE-Gallo, Spektral Records, Fugatto and Decca.

In collaboration with the ITALIAN INSTITUTE OF CULTURE IN ATHENS



Presentation

This concert is part of a special event: the 800th anniversary of the Pilgrimage of Peace of St. Francis to the Middle East, which took place in 1219. For this reason, our concert will also be a little special: an Italian silent film from 1918 illustrating the life of St. Francis will be screened while the music will provide a live commentary to the various episode, as it was done at the time of the silent films.

The film, which will be screened in a reduced version, is titled “Brother Sun”, written by Mario Corsi, directed by Ugo Folea and produced in 1918 by the company Tespi.

Without being able to use the word (except in the written captions) and with a film art still in its infancy, the 1918 film struggles to describe Francis’ spirituality, but it illustrates very well the episodes of the life that generated it. Corsi e Falena’s film is probably the only one, of the many films made on the life of Francis, which explicitly shows the most mysterious episodes: the crucifix of the church of San Damiano which speaks to him and the seraph angel who imprints on him the signs of the passion of Christ. The scene of the approval of the rule by Pope Innocent III is a faithful iconographic reproduction of Giotto’s fresco in the Basilica of Assisi. The authors demonstrate a surprising knowledge of Franciscan sources. Great importance is given to the role of Claire: it is she who pushes Francis towards the leper, using the same words that Francis wrote in his Testament when retelling the beginning of his vocation. Sometimes the director lingers on secondary aspects (many have been cut by us to contain the duration of the concert) or the landscapes (excellent are the shots of the outdoor locations) and assumes a basic knowledge of the biography of Francis on the part of the spectators. The historical setting is not always congruent (for example there was no La Verna convent at the time that Francesco received the stigmata) but the film is however of excellent workmanship and obtained a great success: the Italian press, which at the time was not involved in cinema, dedicated entire columns to “Brother Sun” written by the most important theater and musical critics. Yes, even music. For the first time in Italy, a film also included a soundtrack, which was performed with an orchestra and live choir. The novelty lay in the fact that it was a piece of music written expressly for a silent film and integrated into its production, composed by Luigi Mancinelli specifically for the film and not added later (and for this the name of the composer is mentioned in the initial titles together to the authors). It was an evolution of the cinematographic musical poem: a new genre.

Plot

Assisi (Italy), early 13th century. Francis, son of a wealthy merchant, returns home after participating in the war between Assisi and Perugia, during which he was captured and imprisoned. In his father’s store, he recounts his adventures. The story is interrupted by a beggar who is shoved away by Francis in a rude manner. Present in the store is the

noble Claire, who reproaches Francis because the beggar had asked for charity in the name of Jesus Christ. Full of remorse, Francis goes after the poor man and gives him charity. Francis returns to his normal life and has fun with friends and courtesans, while Claire and her sister Agnese pray for him. Francis feels that his life is at a turning point, but his inspirations are still not clear to him so he enlists for another war with the aim of becoming a knight. In Spoleto, after a couple of days of travel, Francis is seized by a great fever, which he interprets as a divine sign: he leaves the army and returns to Assisi. Thus, a conversion that is still erratic and confused in its progression, begins: Francis gives charity to the poor, he is disturbed by the strange prophecy of a madman who spreads his cloak on the road for him, he avoids the wanton company of his friends, but then he rejoins them. One of these loose parties tragically ends with a duel: Francis, astonished, is a witness to the violent scene. Claire urges him to overcome his repulsion towards a leper and Francis discovers that what was before disgraceful is now for him a source of joy and inner sweetness. While Claire refuses wedding proposals, Francis begins to live in poverty and withdraws in prayer. One day the crucifix of an abandoned church, San Damiano, reaches out to him. Confirmed in his vocation by this sign, Francis resists his father's attempts to bring him home. The father then appeals to the authority of the bishop, but Francis publicly gives up all the family goods, returning to his father also his clothes, and declaring that from that moment on that he will serve the "Father who is in heaven". The bishop accepts the religious profession of Francis. A few young people from Assisi join Francis in his spiritual quest of wanting to live the gospel as it is written. On Palm Sunday also Claire is touched by the divine grace and decides to consecrate herself to God by following the path of poverty chosen by Francis. At night she escapes from home and reaches Francis and the other friars in the church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, called the Portiuncula. After the ceremony of consecration, Francis entrusts Claire to the Benedictines waiting for a more suitable arrangement for the new vocation (Claire later will establish the order of the Poor Sisters following the spirituality of Francis). Francis and some friars go to Rome to get the approval of the rule of the new order from Pope Innocent III: the rule consists in observing the gospel of Jesus Christ, living in obedience to the Catholic Church, in chastity and without possessions. The Pope approves the rule. Returning to Assisi, the Friars find their accommodation occupied and then settle definitively at the Portiuncula. Because of his humble and peaceful attitude, Francis constitutes a threat neither for animals nor for men: in Gubbio, a wolf becomes tame before him and the Sultan of Egypt receives and respects him. Francis returns to Assisi and then retires to prayer on Lake Trasimeno, where he speaks to the birds. On the La Verna Mountain Francis receives the stigmata, the signs of the passion of Christ, which a crucified seraph angel imprints on his body: now Francis is fully conformed to Jesus Christ. Thus wounded, Francis leaves La Verna, but near Assisi he loses his sight almost completely. Despite this situation of illness and discomfort, Francis dictates the "Canticle of the Sun"

in which he praises God with all his creatures. In Assisi, Francis undergoes surgery on his eyes with a red-hot iron: feeling the hour of death closing by, he is taken to the Portiuncula, where he dies on October 4, 1226. Chiara leaves the monastery to pay Francis the last farewell. In 1228, Pope Gregory IX declares Francis a saint. Two years later, in 1230, the body of the saint is laid to rest in the basilica erected in his honor in Assisi.

The film and the spirituality of St. Francis

In the initial titles, the film is defined as “Franciscan restitution”, a sign of careful historical research by the authors. Restitution is not a term that defines a literary genre for the cinema, such as comedy, action film, western, etc. Restitution is a term that belongs to St. Francis and that explains his spirituality, in other words, his way of thinking and living. Restitution entails not to take possession of the gifts—meaning love—that the Lord makes us, but to always put them back into circulation. This is a mechanism that lovers know well: those who feel loved are driven to love in turn, to give back love. Everything has been given to us, beginning with life itself, without any merit on our part, so we cannot interrupt this circulation of love by appropriating it. The restitution restarts the mechanism of divine love that man interrupts by appropriating it, making his own what has been destined for everyone, such as land, water, nature and even overruling other men for his own interests and his own ideas. If we begin to think, out of conviction or by a method, that what we have is not ours, we would be more tolerant of others. If nothing belongs to us, we have nothing to defend, nothing for which to wage war, nor things, nor ideas. If nature is not ours, we have no right to destroy it. Francis is not famous for his miracles, but for having managed to live without posing a threat to others, men, animals, nature. For this reason, neither animals nor men feared him: the birds and even the wolves approached him. He was open to dialogue, with an attitude of respect that he gave and received, as in the encounter with the Muslim Sultan of Egypt. If we have only one God, the Father who gives us all good, then we are all brothers: this is why Francis called all the creatures “brother” and “sister”, like in the famous Canticle of Brother Sun, which gives the title to this and other films about Francis and his life (for example the celebrated version directed of Franco Zeffirelli).

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Locations & organists

8 May 2019 | **Larnaca** | St. Mary of
Graces Catholic Church
Ferruccio Bartoletti (Italy), organ

10 May 2019 | **Nicosia** | Holy
Cross Catholic Church
Ferruccio Bartoletti (Italy), organ

11 May 2019 | **Limassol** | Saint
Catherine's Catholic Church
Ferruccio Bartoletti (Italy), organ

12 May 2019 | **Pafos** | Agia Kyriaki
Chrisopolitissa
Ferruccio Bartoletti (Italy), organ

26 September 2019 | **Amman** |
Terra Santa Cultural Center
Mario Mariani (Italy), organ

4 October 2019 | **Rhodes** | St.
Francis' Church
Eugenio Maria Fagiani (Italy),
organ

25 October 2019 | **Bethlehem** |
Church of St. Catherine
Eugenio Maria Fagiani (Italy),
organ

28 October 2019 | **Tel Aviv-Yafo** |
St. Peter's Church - Jaffa
Eugenio Maria Fagiani (Italy),
organ

29 October 2019 | **Haifa** | St.
Joseph Latin Church
Eugenio Maria Fagiani (Italy),
organ

12 November 2019 | **Damascus** |
Church of St. Anthony
Robert Kovács (Hungary), organ

16 November 2019 | **Aleppo** | St.
Francis' Church
Robert Kovács (Hungary), organ

18 November 2019 | **Latakia** |
Church of the Sacred Heart
Robert Kovács (Hungary), organ

25 January 2020 | **Beirut** | St.
Louis Latin Cathedral
Fausto Caporali (Italy), org

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