

Andrea Gabrieli for Igor Stravinsky (Venice, 15 April 1971): The Choice of Sandro Dalla Libera

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Igor Stravinsky died in New York on 6 April 1971. The news of his death, including the plan for him to be buried in Venice, quickly spread around the world. According to Robert Craft (1923–2015), a friend and close collaborator of the famous Russian composer, the location for his burial was not explicitly dictated in the will of the composer. Instead, Craft himself, along with Stravinsky's wife Vera sought to identify a particularly symbolic place for his remains.¹ For various reasons Venice prevailed over New York and any other American city, Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois in France (where his first wife and daughter Mika were buried), and Leningrad (the ancient and modern St. Petersburg), a city to which the composer had strong sentimental ties.

Stravinsky's relationship with Venice was marked by a continued series of successes beginning in the 1930s and culminating in the 1950s (FIGURE 1). In 1951, the Teatro La Fenice hosted the premiere of this opera *The Rake's Progress* conducted by the author himself. In 1955, he composed the *Canticum sacrum ad honorem Sancti Marci nominis*, an eloquent tribute to the Venetian musical tradition, which was performed in St. Mark's Basilica during the 1956 Biennale. He also composed for the Biennale *Threni: id est Lamentationes Jeremiae Prophetiae*,

his first and largest completely dodecaphonic work. It was performed for the first time in 1958 in the hall of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco. Venice was emblematic in the life of the composer also for another personal reason. Sergei Diaghilev (1872–1929), Stravinsky's main promoter during his time in Belle Époque Paris had spent the last years of his life there. Therefore, it was ideal that Stravinsky could be united with his former friend, in the orthodox section of the monumental Venice cemetery.

Although the organization of the funeral ceremony began immediately, there were many bureaucratic and logistical problems, that were further complicated by the upcoming Easter festivities. Accompanied by the composer's closest family and friends, Stravinsky's coffin left New York by plane on 12 April, Easter Monday,

FIGURE 1. Igor Stravinsky in Venice, 1925. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Alfredo Casella.



and arrived in Venice the following day after a short stopover in Rome. It was then placed in a funeral chamber set up in the *cappella del Rosario* in the church of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo, the ‘pantheon of the doges’ and the church of many great celebrations throughout Venetian history. Since the funeral ceremony was to be celebrated according to the Orthodox rite, the Greek Orthodox community of Venice was contacted and the presence of the archimandrite Cheruvim Malissianos was assured. Indicative of his intent to transform the religious celebration into an international media event, on the day of Stravinsky’s death, Craft had already contacted the management of the RAI (Italian national television) by way of the Russian painter Eugène Berman (1899–1972), who lived in Rome. The RAI quickly agreed to include the event in its programming, with the aim of transmitting it worldwide.²

Both Craft and Stravinsky’s widow intended that the musical programme for the ceremony include Stravinsky’s *Requiem Canticles*, composed in 1966, considered to be a natural accompaniment for the composer’s burial service, as the only addition to the songs prescribed in the Orthodox liturgy. The orchestra of the Teatro La Fenice made itself available for the occasion despite having previously scheduled commitments. However, the collaboration with the RAI brought an additional work to the programme performed by the RAI choir of Rome. This might have complicated the musical contribution. Instead an additional sound element was inserted. On the eve of Easter Sunday the telephone rang at the home of Sandro Dalla Libera (1912–1974): he was called to accompany the religious ceremony on the organ.³ A vivid memory of this communication remains in the family, along with that of the subsequent discussion that ensued to define Sandro Dalla Libera’s musical contribution to Igor Stravinsky’s funeral.⁴

Dalla Libera was involved for several reasons. An internationally renowned organist and teacher at the Venice and Padua conservatoires, he was also a well-known and esteemed figure in Venetian circles by virtue of his commitment to the rediscovery of the city’s musical history (FIGURE 2). Since 1957, he had been collaborating with the Fondazione Giorgio Cini for the promotion and study of organ music in Venice and the Venetian territories. In the mid-1960s, he initiated a substantial reorganization of the historical archive of the Teatro La Fenice. It was probably this ongoing collaboration that facilitated his involvement in the musical programme for Stravinsky’s funeral. The reasons, however, for adding organ music to the funeral programme are neither obvious nor to be taken for granted. The Greek Orthodox rite would not have required any such instrumental intervention. Adding organ music was perhaps intended to guarantee a greater sonic element, given the presence of other works, which were considered inappropriate for aesthetic reasons to accompany the ceremony, in particular the baroque *Missa*

FIGURE 2. Sandro Dalla Libera at the organ, May 1974. Private collection.



defunctorum by Alessandro Scarlatti which, despite Craft's objections, had been performed by the RAI choir.⁵

When he was first contacted, Dalla Libera was told that the composer's widow wished to have unpublished organ music by Stravinsky performed.⁶ The reference is not clear as to which music and it remains unknown to this day; however, it is unlikely that they were original works for organ. The pieces may have been transcriptions for or adaptable to the organ, such as piano compositions that Stravinsky loved to play at home: an example is the Prelude in E-flat minor from the first book of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier* (BWV 853), which remained open on Stravinsky's piano – as Craft recalls in his *Chronicle* – it was one of the last pieces he played before losing consciousness.⁷ Unintimidated by the request, Dalla Libera proposed to perform organ music linked to the noblest Venetian tradition, some pages by Andrea Gabrieli (1532/3–1585) (FIGURE 3).

Upon arriving in Venice with Stravinsky's coffin, Craft immediately set to work with the orchestra of La Fenice. Rehearsals were held in the theatre foyer, since the stage was occupied by a production of Bizet's *Carmen*.⁸ To agree on the

programme Dalla Libera probably met with Craft at the theatre, or together with the archimandrite Malissianos during rehearsals at the church of Ss. Giovanni and Paolo. In fact, he was to have a leading role in the celebration: the organ pieces would be the only instrumental music admitted during the religious rite.

On television, the funeral celebration began at 11.30 a.m. on 15 April 1971, with Alessandro Scarlatti's *Missa defunctorum* performed by the RAI choir of Rome. Then, in Venice, the orchestra of La Fenice performed Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles*, under the baton of Craft. After a short pause, the liturgical celebration began, accompanied by the notes of Andrea Gabrieli's *Praeambulum quarti toni*.⁹ To avoid misunderstandings during the ceremony, the organ intercalations were guided 'on sight' by the archimandrite with a gesture of the head.¹⁰ In the second edition of his *Chronicle*, Craft reports on the performance of three organ pieces agreed upon in advance: the aforementioned *Praeambulum quarti toni*, the *Toccata del decimo tono* and the *Pass'e mezzo antico* by Andrea Gabrieli.¹¹ But, as it happened, four organ pieces were performed. Shortly before the beginning of the celebration, Dalla Libera was asked to add another, and he decided on the *Praeambulum tertii*

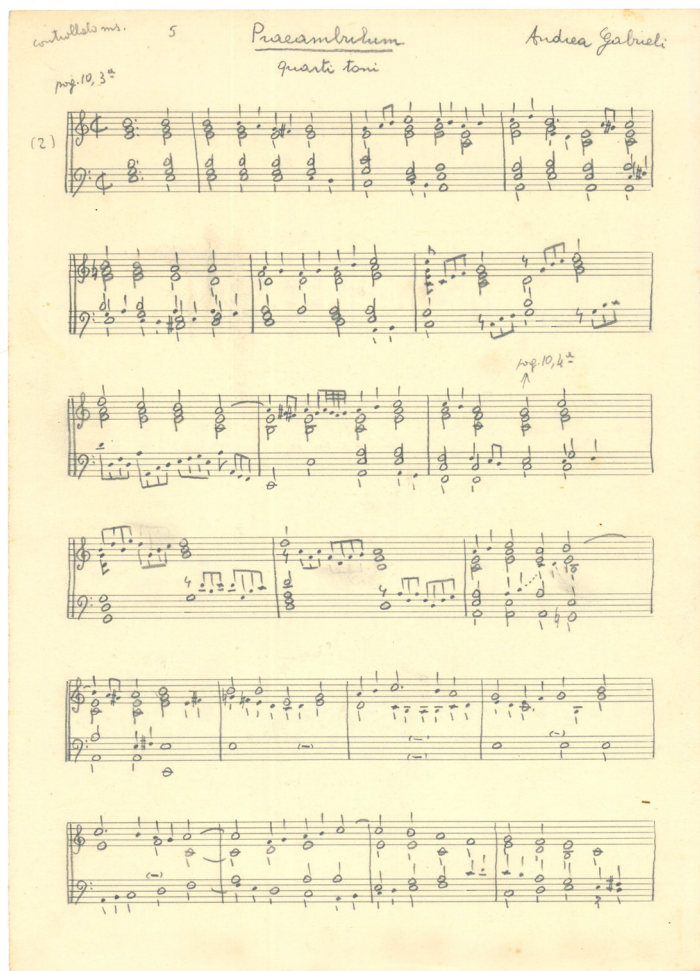
FIGURE 3. Epigraph for Igor Stravinsky: Venice, 15 April 1971. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Sandro Dalla Libera.



toni.¹² This piece was performed during the first pause foreseen by the liturgy. The *Toccata del decimo tono* was played during the second pause. The blessing of the coffin at the end of the celebration was accompanied by the *Capriccio sopra il Pass'è mezzo antico*, which was played twice to allow the crowds of people present at the ceremony to leave the church in an orderly fashion.

The programme that Dalla Libera conceived for the occasion was closely linked to his activities as performer and researcher at this time. A few years before he had identified the two *praeambula* in the organ tablature with German notation preserved in the National Library of Turin, a precious collection of organ music written in the first half of the seventeenth century (FIGURE 4).¹³ Beginning in the

FIGURE 4. Autograph by Sandro Dalla Libera of Andrea Gabrieli's *Praeambulum quarti toni*, ca. 1960. Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venezia), Fondo Sandro Dalla Libera.



summer of 1957, at the suggestion of his friend Renato Lunelli (1895–1967), Dalla Libera devoted himself to an analysis of this source, which allowed him to identify several unknown compositions by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli, Claudio Merulo, Girolamo Frescobaldi and others. These discoveries provided materials for a series of musical editions that he prepared starting in 1958.¹⁴ In the summer of 1961, the two *praeambula* were published in a critical edition by Ricordi of Milan.¹⁵ The same volume also contained a modern edition of the *Toccata del decimo tono*, first published in Girolamo Diruta's *Transilvano* (1593).¹⁶ In book 3 of a series of six volumes dedicated to the organ music of Andrea Gabrieli, the *Capriccio sopra il Pass'e mezzo antico* was first published in 1596 by the Venetian music publisher Angelo Gardano.¹⁷ Together with the other pieces he performed during Stravinsky's funeral Dalla Libera had previously recorded this work, and other organ music by Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli, as part of a project realized in 1967 for the Milanese label Vedette Records.¹⁸ In the recording, he played the organ of the church of the Ospedaletto, built by Pietro Nacchini in 1751, which had been only recently restored. The organ of the church of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo that Dalla Libera played at Stravinsky's funeral belonged to the same tradition of eighteenth-century organ-building in Venice: the instrument was built in 1790 by Gaetano Callido, and then enlarged and partly modified between 1912 and 1913 by Beniamino Zanin (FIGURE 5).¹⁹

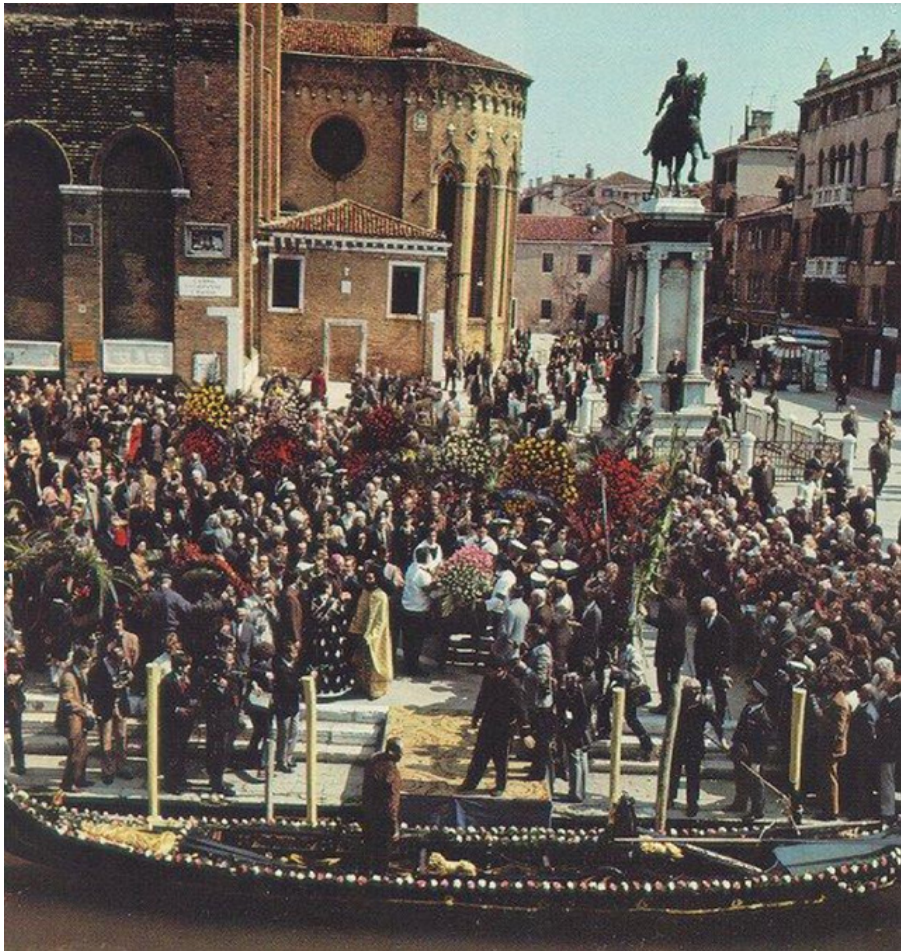
FIGURE 5. The organ of the church of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice. Photogram from the RAI footage of funerals of Igor Stravinsky, 15 April 1971 (Archives RAI, with permission).



Igor Stravinsky's funeral was broadcast worldwide by the RAI.²⁰ The live transmission made it possible to watch the funeral of one of the greatest composers of the twentieth century on television. At the same time, it offered an opportunity to listen to organ music by an important Venetian composer of four centuries prior, that of Andrea Gabrieli. Thus, against the backdrop of one of the most beautiful and iconic churches in Venice, the results of avant-garde musicological research were transmitted to an international audience for whom this repertoire was essentially unknown.

The funeral ceremony concluded with the notes of a dance: Andrea Gabrieli's *Capriccio sopra il Pass'e mezzo antico*. The choice may seem extravagant, yet,

FIGURE 6. Igor Stravinsky's coffin comes out of the church of Ss. Giovanni e Paolo in Venice after the funeral ceremony (Creative Common Pictures).



with its noble and by no means obvious appeal, the work somehow illustrates the figure of an artist who, almost four centuries after, united dance and music, sound and rhythm, expectation and surprise to extreme consequences. Thus, Igor Stravinsky's remains embarked on their last journey to the cemetery on the island of San Michele to music by Andrea Gabrieli performed with cultural awareness by Sandro Dalla Libera, a choice which withstood the test of Robert Craft's severe judgement, and brought the sixteenth-century Venetian composer to worldwide attention for the first time amid the silence of a liturgical ceremony (FIGURE 6).

Notes

- 1 See Robert Craft, *Stravinsky. Chronicle of a Friendship*, revised and expanded edition, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1994, p. 550: 'April 12–13 [...] he [Stravinsky] never expressed any desire to be buried here [in Venice]; the responsibility for that decision is V.'s [Vera] and mine [Craft]'. This assertion is not included in the first edition of the *Chronicle*, published in 1972 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).
- 2 See Craft, *Stravinsky*, p. 547: 'April 6 [...] Telephone from Berman, in Rome, asking about our travel plans and other information, with RAI hooked in, recording everything we say'. This assertion is not included in the first edition of Craft's *Chronicle*.
- 3 For a biographical profile of Sandro Dalla Libera (Zovencedo, Vicenza, 28 March 1912 – Lido di Venezia, 6 October 1974) see the commemorative booklet *Sandro Dalla Libera organista*, edited by his son Francesco Dalla Libera (Padova: Amici della Musica di Padova, 2012, pp. 4–7).
- 4 I would like to express my personal thanks to Francesco Dalla Libera for sharing many personal memories related to that event.
- 5 See Craft, *Stravinsky*, p. 551: 'April 15 [...] The obsequies begin with Alessandro Scarlatti's *Requiem Missa Defunctorum*, added for bad measure to show off the chorus, but the music is featureless and in no way relates to I.S. [Igor Stravinsky] (or, being Neapolitan, even to Venice)'.
6 I also owe this information to a kind communication from Francesco Dalla Libera.
- 7 See Craft, *Stravinsky*, p. 548: 'April 7 [...] the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I, is still open on the Prelude in E-flat minor, which he [Stravinsky] had been playing on Saturday'.
- 8 See Craft, *Stravinsky*, p. 550: 'April 13. [...] I am obliged to rehearse in the foyer of La Fenice; a rehearsal of *Carmen* is on stage: Bizet's passions mingle profanely with our *Requiem*'.
- 9 A detailed description of the ceremony is provided in Craft, *Stravinsky*, pp. 551–554. See also Stephen Walsh, *Stravinsky. The Second Exile: France and America, 1934–1971*, London: Jonathan Cape, 2006, pp. 562–563.
- 10 I also owe this note to Francesco Dalla Libera, who, together with other family members, followed the celebration next to his father from the organ gallery. At that time, it was covered by a tent which limited the view towards the nave of the church.
- 11 See Craft, *Stravinsky*, pp. 551–552: 'The three organ pieces that follow (Andrea Gabrieli's *Praeambulum quarti toni*, *Toccata del decimo tono*, *Passé mezzo antico*), played by Sandro Dalla Libero [*sic*], would have pleased him'. This assertion is not included in the first edition of Craft's *Chronicle*.

- 12 I thank Francesco Dalla Libera for providing me with this detail.
- 13 The *Praeambulum quarti toni* and the *Praeambulum tertii toni* are transmitted in the organ collection in German notation preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Turin: Fondo Giordano, II, respectively ff. 9v–11r and 11r; see Oscar Mischiati, 'L'intavolatura d'organo tedesca della Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino', *L'Organo*, 4, 1963, pp. 1–150: II (Giordano 2), respectively no. 7 and 9.
- 14 On this subject see Luigi Collarile, *Musica antica per organo nell'Italia del dopoguerra. Scoperte e progetti editoriali nel carteggio tra Sandro Dalla Libera e Renato Lunelli (1949–1966)*, in: *La Polifonica Ambrosiana (1947–1980). Musica antica nell'Italia del secondo dopoguerra*, a cura di Livio Aragona e Claudio Toscani, Lucca: LIM, 2017, pp. 171–218.
- 15 Andrea Gabrieli, *Toccate per organo*, Milano: Ricordi, 1961 (A.R. 2659). Sandro Dalla Libera had concluded the brief introduction of this volume, recalling the context in which the edition was conceived: 'This publication, in addition to the three volumes of organ composition by Giovanni Gabrieli, the three volumes of Claudio Merulo's *Toccate* and the volume with the three organ masses by Andrea Gabrieli, already published by Casa Ricordi, aims to offer to organists and scholars a valid contribution to the knowledge of Italian organ literature in general, and Venetian in particular [Con questa pubblicazione, che si aggiunge ai tre volumi di *Composizioni* per organo di Giovanni Gabrieli, ai tre di *Toccate* per organo di Claudio Merulo e al volume *Tre messe* per organo di Andrea Gabrieli già editi da Casa Ricordi, si vuole offrire agli organisti e agli studiosi un valido contributo alla conoscenza della letteratura organistica italiana in generale e veneziana in particolare]'. For a new critical edition of Andrea Gabrieli's organ production see Andrea Gabrieli, *Composizioni per strumento da tastò*, a cura di Luigi Collarile, Milano: Ricordi (Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Andrea Gabrieli, 16), in preparation.
- 16 Girolamo Diruta, *Il Transilvano. Dialogo sopra il vero modo di sonar organi, et istromenti da penna*, Venezia: Giacomo Vincenti, 1593, ff. 32v–33v. As Dalla Libera pointed out in the introduction of the critical edition, this toccata is also transmitted in the collection written in German tablature, preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Turin: Fondo Giordano, I, ff. 56r–57r; see Mischiati, *L'intavolatura d'organo tedesca*, I (Giordano 1), no. 45.
- 17 Andrea Gabrieli, *Il terzo libro de ricercari... insieme uno motetti, dui madrigaletti, & uno capriccio sopra il Passè mezo antico, in cinque modi variati, & tabulati per ogni sorte di stromenti da tasti*, Venezia: Angelo Gardano, 1596, ff. 38v–42v. Dalla Libera knew the copy of the *Passè mezo antico* transmitted in the German tablature preserved at the Biblioteca Nazionale of Turin: Fondo Foà, vol. 7, ff. 12v–15r; see Mischiati, *L'intavolatura d'organo tedesca*, XV (Foà 7), no. 3.
- 18 The stereo vinyl is identified by the serial number VST 6008. The recording was made on 17 and 18 December 1966. In 1974, the Vedette Records granted the German label Christophorus-Verlag of Freiburg im Breisgau the rights to reprint the vinyl. The documentation relating to the recording project is kept in the Fondo Sandro Dalla Libera, now available for consultation at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice.
- 19 For a description of the organ of the church of Ss. Giovanni and Paolo see Sandro Dalla Libera, *L'arte degli organi a Venezia*, Roma: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale Venezia–Roma (Civiltà Veneziana, Studi, 13), 1962, pp. 109–112. For a description of the Nacchini organ see Dalla Libera, *L'arte degli organi a Venezia*, pp. 115–116.
- 20 The recording of the television footage of the event is kept in the RAI archives.

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