

ITALY

Halloween concert to honour Satan staged in Italian church

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The Holy Curé d'Ars often said: 'Take Masses away from churches and devils will dance on altars'. Taking into account what is about to happen on 31 October in Vigevano, an Italian town in the northern Italy, the phrase couldn't be more true. In fact, since 2009,

the Lombard church of San Dionigi has been on loan by the diocese to a banking foundation that makes use of it for cultural purposes. Therefore, since that date, the church has no longer been used for religious purposes. This does not mean, however, the building has ceased to be a church, and despite the common use of terms such as 'former church' or 'auditorium'.

And since Holy Masses have been removed, the devils have punctually entered and brought witches and ghosts with them to celebrate, confirming Saint Jean-Marie Vianney's prophecy.

This is the significance of an event that **local newspapers have begun to publicise** and which seems to be the town's main cultural activity on 31 October, a day that by now, with an increasingly consumerist mentality, is dedicated to celebrating Halloween.

'A concert of classical music and opera arias dedicated to demons, ghosts and witches as narrated by the great 19th-century romantic music repertoire'. A decidedly devilish programme, without doubt. In the past, it was hidden below the sweetened veneer of children and trick-or-treating... today we have calmly progressed to concerts in honour of Beelzebub. What else do we need to know?

Maybe this: the concert will be held, says the article, 'in the evocative setting of the Auditorium San Dionigi in Piazza Martiri della Liberazione', but don't be misled by the word. It says auditorium, in reality it is an actual church and a particularly beautiful one at that. It is a church that the diocese loaned 15 years ago to the **Piacenza and Vigevano Foundation**, 'a private non-profit organisation of banking origin, whose mission is to promote the social and economic wellbeing of the territory'. So this is the social wellbeing that the organisation will promote on 31 October: a devils and witches-themed concert, complete with a dress code: 'We welcome the presence of the public dressed up in theme: witches, demons, vampires and ghosts are welcome'.

The programme is based on what the musical production - also of great quality - has to offer on the theme of the macabre and the horrific: from the '*Scene of the Wolf's Glen*' from the German opera '**Der Freischütz**' (1821) by Carl Maria von Weber where in a 'wood inhabited by spirits, under a moon dripping with blood, a wicked pact is made between a desperate man and the Devil: the seven magic bullets to carry out the curse are forged'.

It continues with a great 'classic of the "demonic" repertoire: "Night on Bald Mountain" by Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky (1867), performed live in the

piano version for four hands by Federica Casella and Antonio Bologna and accompanied by the images of the mythical final chapter of the animated masterpiece "*Fantasia*" by Walt Disney in which we see a powerful demon summoning spirits and demons to himself by appearing on the summit of Bald Mountain'.

Once more: 'The Devil is again the protagonist of the great aria "*Sono lo spirito che nega*" from Arrigo Boito's "*Mefistofele*" (1868) and then 'Giuseppe Verdi' who 'gives us a truly evocative number, performed by the Bottega dei Suoni choir together with the Maestri Cantori Chorale, with the witches' song '*Double, double toil and trouble*' from "*Macbeth*" (1847).

And then the legendary '*Trillo del Diavolo*' (Devil's Trill) by Giuseppe Tartini (1713), which 'legend has it, was performed by the Devil himself'. And again: the aria '*Quell'uom dal fiero aspetto*' from the opera '*Fra Diavolo*' (1829) by Daniel Auber where 'a much-feared bandit is called Fra Diavolo because of the pride of his appearance and the fear he inspires when he appears'. The well-known '*Danza macabre*' (1874) by Camille Saint-Saëns, performed on the piano by Antonio Bologna, could not be missing.

In short, works of undoubted artistic value, without doubt, when taken individually in their context. But when deliberately projected within the framework of the demonic give the effect of what the organisers, to whom the Foundation gave free rein, wanted to call a concert 'in honour of the devil'.

Evidently something must have escaped their notice, and it cannot be ruled out that the sloppiness with which dioceses grant churches by removing them from worship has created a comfortable slumber. The slippery slope begins with a harmless concert of sacred music but ultimately finishes up indulging in whatever goes at any given time and as beggars can't be choosers, also permits Halloween parties, especially these days.

Moreover, that the building is still a church is written by the foundation itself in defining the place as 'Auditorium of the Foundations of Piacenza e Vigevano - Church San Dionigi'. So, church it was and church it remains, because a church ceases to be a church only after an appropriate bishop's decree has been issued to alter its canonical and architectural characteristics. Looking even at the photo published on the Foundation's website, complete with paintings, balustrade, altar and tabernacle, in no way can it be said, that we are dealing with a former church.

And the fact that this has escaped the notice of those who should be supervising, the Foundation and the curia, is also demonstrated by the violation of

Article 4 of the regulations governing the use of the auditorium-church: 'The Auditorium is intended for the holding of conferences, conventions, theatrical and musical performances, events of collective interest, aimed at fostering cultural growth and the exchange of opinions and ideas, provided that the uses are compatible with the structure itself.'

That a concert in honour of the devil favours the cultural growth of the Vigevano population is more than debatable, but certainly the use that will be made of it on 31 October cannot be said to be compatible with a structure, which, we repeat, remains a church to all intents and purposes.

What does the curia think of this? 'This is the first I've heard of it,' the episcopal vicar, Monsignor Angelo Croera, told the *Daily Compass* on the phone, 'but I am new here. But I will inquire and try to understand what this is about. Try to call me on Thursday'.

That's exactly what the *Daily Compass* will do, but in the meantime it would be advisable to check and make one decision: to stop everything. Who knows, maybe the bishop will decide to chase away the devils and witches who are now ready to enter the house of God with all their paraphernalia?