



Lorenzo Rossato

interviewed by Brittany Pacini

Lorenzo Rossato is a musician who has arranged a hymn for the Italian hymnal. Translated from the Italian by Ashley and Brittany Pacini.

Could you tell us about your background and how your upbringing has influenced your work?

My family was non-musical, but after I came along, that changed. I was born in a small province in Venice in northern Italy. My father owned a business that did well enough for us to be comfortable, but after five years it failed and our family was left with very little money. As a result, my younger brother and I (I'm the oldest of five brothers) had to attend a religious school run by Catholic priests. When I was nine, the priests noticed my musical abilities and my clear voice in the choir, and if it hadn't been for them, I wouldn't have discovered my musical talent.

How did you find out about the LDS Church?

A member gave a Book of Mormon to my friend, a nonmember, and if it weren't for that friend, I would never have converted. Even though I wanted to read the book and learn about it, however, my friend never gave it to me. But just seeing

that copy sparked an interest in me and it didn't let me stop searching for the Church. I didn't know where to find it. I didn't even know the name of the Church. But finally, after three years of searching, I found it. The Spirit led me to it. As soon as I entered the building, I saw a table full of copies of the Book of Mormon, and I immediately asked for my own copy. Two weeks later, I was baptized.

What was your conversion experience like?

It wasn't the work of any one missionary. I can see now that there was a spirit of searching in me that led me to the Church—a spirit that had been within me for years. Heavenly Father taught me, preparing me to recognize the Church and to already believe in those principles I'd known for only a brief period of time.

Tell us a little bit about your family and their involvement with your music.

In the beginning, I had to overcome a lot of difficulties and opposition from my parents in order to pursue music after I finished high school. At that time it was unthinkable to follow that path, and the crisis my family was experiencing made it even



worse. I had to make many sacrifices with my studies and my work. At night I worked in a factory, so I studied the piano during the day in my garage so I wouldn't bother the neighbors. I had to support my family because we were poor and because my father suffered from depression and anorexia after his business failed.

I was the first pioneer in my family to enter the musical profession. Many of my cousins encouraged me to continue, and later on, one of my cousins' sons later became a well-known violinist. I also obviously had a great desire to pass my passion for music on to my daughters. Now both of them are involved in music—my oldest daughter, Zuleika, received a degree from the Santa Cecilia Conservatory in Rome as a pianist, and my younger daughter, Nauvoo, received a degree this year in lyric opera as a soprano. Also, my sister is a choirgirl in Milan and participates in choirs that specialize in classical music.

How did you first get started in music?

More than anything, I think I was always involved without ever really knowing that I was. All thanks, however, goes to the Holy Musical Choir at the Catholic Church. They let me attend their school and practice the piano and the organ because it was important for the Catholic ceremonies.

When you write a piece, do the words come first or does the music?

For many musicians, the words come first and the music follows, or vice versa. In my case, though, the words come along with the music, and they are both directly connected to each other, as if they're fused.

Tell us about the song “Mandate voci di gioia all’Eterno,” which you arranged for the Italian hymnal.

It came about during my translation of the English hymnal into Italian. While I was translating the hymnal, I was asked to insert a piece written by Brother Tommaso Castro [who wrote the original text and music for the hymn]. The melody that I found was very beautiful, but the harmonizing needed to be sorted out. I made several different versions of it for Brother Castro, but unfortunately, none of them was ever used. The published version in the hymnal isn't

the correct version, neither the text nor the music. Maybe it was a result of an error during printing, or maybe it was just modified by someone else. At this time, though, we're actually trying to insert the original version and correct the hymnal.

Besides this hymn, what other works have you completed?

For the past twenty years I've become more dedicated to a certain type of music, similar to classical music but not quite as similar to the much lighter or modern music. For example, I set to music some four or five of the Psalms, both for a soloist voice and for choir and orchestra. I also put to music the parable of the ten virgins. I base my works on texts and scriptures of the restored gospel. One example is a piece based on Alma 29, called “O That I Were an Angel.”

For many years now I've been completely dedicated to the elaboration of a certain number of church hymns into polyphonies for choirs to use. I'm very inspired by the Protestant choral music of Bach, which I think would be great to do in church—even if we give it a more European style. The Spirit has really pushed me to do this kind of work, and I feel an urgency, as though it were really a necessity. Because of this, I dedicate a lot of my time to such projects.

What are some of the projects you'd like to work on?

After I finish my work on these hymns, I want to write music for the Church. I'm always receiving inspiration from the gospel. In the past number of years, I've dedicated my time to elaborating musical themes, but I feel that to really help defend the gospel, I should write music for the Church. I see this music as much more original and spontaneous.

Where do you get your inspiration for your music?

From the gospel. For example, when I wrote “The Ten Virgins,” I was dedicated to this project for an entire year. Over that time, the inspiration came to me in random moments. This work has been a process led by continual revelation. I feel that the need to feel the Spirit in our daily lives is often a necessity to work in such a way.



What are the challenges you've run into as you've pursued a career in music?

I've written both sacred music and instrumental classical music for many years, both of which unfortunately are genres that don't interest the larger public. Because of that, it's hard to make this type of music known and appreciated—even though every time I write, I always feel pleased and appreciated. There isn't a huge general interest because it's not commercial and striking—it's much more intimate music.

What are your favorite and least favorite aspects about being a musician? Why?

The most beautiful part of being a musician is that you write music from what's felt within your heart. You constantly enjoy this experience with inspiration and with being creative, and that always brings you closer to the Lord. Every time I write, it hits me that the Lord is guiding me in what I write. In my case, though, the difficulty is that I can't ever live off of just writing music. But being guided by promptings from the Lord makes me feel that this is a way for me to develop this talent—a talent from Him. It's worth a lot to me.

Who is your audience?

Not just members of the Church—I've actually gotten more appreciation from my nonmember students who've felt something from my music. For my performances, I often use singers who aren't members, and they're always very enthusiastic about

those roles. It's a way for me to do missionary work. I also hold annual concerts at the church for my students, and this way I'm able to make the Church environment an influence in their lives.

How does the gospel influence you, both as an individual and as an artist?

We have very little time in our lives, and the gospel has helped me understand that the most important thing we can do in the time we do have is to use the talents that we've been given to glorify the Lord and strengthen our testimonies.

Two prophecies have pushed me to create a new style of music within the Church, or at least to find a way to value what we already have. The first is a prophecy from 1888 that says one day the music of the Church will be studied and appreciated throughout all the world—as we now do with classical music.

The second prophecy was an article by an orchestra director who was baptized in France many years ago. In the article, he asked several times where the restoration of music was. We know that with the Reformation of the Protestants, classical music was elevated to a much higher level. We as a church must arrive at this type of music—a type that can be appreciated the same way classical music has been.

This can happen because we enjoy the privilege of searching for more revelation. We have access to the real priesthood, and we have the Spirit at our disposal. I've begun to do something along these lines with the hope and knowledge that others have done likewise in the past.

The thing I think is missing is a type of music that's definitely Mormon. It's just not there. There's Anglican music, Catholic music, Protestant music, etc., that anyone can recognize. But where's the Mormon music?

How do you see your work building the kingdom?

I see it as a type of mission instead of as a profession. Whatever I teach, I do it with the love of the gospel. That's part of everything we do in our lives. I often see people who listen to my music being touched by the Spirit—I see that they notice something. I always hope that the principles being taught through my music are continually illuminating truth. ■

