

Francesco Borromini (1599-1667)

Autor(en): **J.E.**

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FRANCESCO BORROMINI (1599—1667)

On Saturday, 7th October, preceded by a suitable commemorative ceremony in the lecture theatre of the new Centro di Studi di Trevano, there opened at the Villa Ciani at Lugano, under the patronage of the Government of the Canton Ticino and the City of Lugano, supervised by prof. Paolo Portoghesi, lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture of Rome University, a comprehensive exhibition of original reliefs, drawings and models by the celebrated baroque architect *Francesco Borromini* to mark the third centenary of his death, by his own hand, on 2nd August 1667.

Amongst all the builders, sculptors and artists from the Sotto-Ceneri region of the Canton Ticino who rose to fame during the Renaissance period in Italy, Borromini is the one who acquired world renown as the founder, with his contemporary Lorenzo Bernini of Naples (1598-1680) of the "Baroque" movement. By this term we denote the tendency in art in the early XVII century, particularly in architecture, sculpture and painting towards the grandiose and picturesque, sometimes descending to the grotesque and absurd.

Born at Bissone, the lakeside village at the Eastern end of the Melide causeway, it was clear that architecture was to be his destiny as his father, Domenico Castelli, was an architect of note and his mother a Garovi, also came from a family of architects. His real surname was, therefore, Castelli, but the reason for the change is unknown, except perhaps that in Italy a name ending in "ini" generally indicates a native of Tuscany. In his early years he came under the influence of his uncle Carlo Maderno, from Capolago, who was already active in Rome as assistant papal architect.

We first meet Borromini the apprentice in 1621 assisting his relative in the construction of the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle in Rome, designing details for the cupola and sculpturing original supports for the lantern. When in 1624 Carlo Maderno was put in charge of St. Peter's (although his own design had not been accepted by the Pope), Borromini was given a number of minor tasks to perform which gained him useful experience. When Maderno died, Bernini succeeded him as chief architect of St. Peter's. Borromini stayed on under him for five years, decorating, cutting statues, ornamenting chapels and so on under his direction. The first opportunity of showing his mettle came to Borromini when he built the small convent of the "Trinitari" fathers in 1634. He was then 35 years of age. After this his works follow in an uninterrupted *crescendo*: the Palazzo Spada, with an original perspective portico, the alterations to the Palazzo Falconieri; the construction of the Oratory of the "Filippini" fathers, to which he gave an unorthodox curved-in façade. He transformed and decorated the interior of the Cathedral St. John Lateran; he built the Church of St. Ivo, with the bizarre corkscrew cupola (the Italian commemorative postage stamp shows a lovely view of this construction seen through the 'Borromini Gate'). He also began the construction of the Church of the "Sette Dolori" which was left unfinished, and he rebuilt the Palazzo Carpegna, which now houses the S. Luca Academy and in which he devised the world-famous ramp. Many and many more are his works: in Piazza Navona, the Church of St. Agnes and the adjacent Palace housing the papal organisation for the Propagation of the Faith are but a few jewels he gave the world before a tragic end attended him. Yielding to a fit of depression he committed suicide, at the age of 68 years when still at the height of his fame.

His works found many admirers and also bitter critics. He wrote that he would never have lived to be merely an imitator. His numerous followers brought "borrominian" teachings all over Europe. Amongst these worthy of note is the ticinese Carlo Fontana of Rancate, who built several notable churches and buildings in Rome.

It is only fitting that we conclude by giving voice to at least one of the critics, Prof. Willian Spalding of Edinburgh University in a work published in 1941. "... on Borromini's head rests the guilt of having modernised the nave of St. John Lateran, walling up the old columns in huge piers, piercing the piers with strange niches for statues, and transforming the whole interior into its present shapeless ugliness. Among his original designs in Rome, the Church of St. Agnes in the Piazza Navona, though extravagant and faulty, has redeeming features, and is not his worst. That unenviable distinction belongs to the little Church of San Carlino at the Four Fountains, a building whose whole cubic contents are said not to equal one of the piers of St. Peter's. On its puny front the outlines undulate like waves, and columns large and small, pedestals, entablatures and balustrades, doors, windows, niches, pannels and sculptures jostle each other as if fighting for room".

No lover of the Baroque is Prof. Spalding! I wonder if he would have approved of the present day matchbox style architecture?

J.E.

SWISSAIR WINTER TIMETABLE

Under its preliminary winter schedules, effective from 1st November, Swissair is maintaining the daily London-Geneva morning flight introduced last April. From the end of December, new and larger DC-9 series 30 jets offering first and economy class will take over this service from Caravelles.

In the winter season all of Swissair's London flights will operate from Heathrow Airport. Daily London-Zurich services continue with a morning and an early evening departure. The latter flight and the daily afternoon service to Geneva will be operated five times weekly by Coronado and twice weekly by DC-8 jets.

DC-9s will again fly the five times weekly afternoon service London-Basle-Zurich, and from mid-December the night tourist services London to Zurich and Geneva and Manchester-Zurich. From the same date, there will also be London-Basle night flights. Some London-Zurich night flights will be operated by leased BAC One-Eleven jet. Night tourist fares remain unchanged, ranging from £21 19s. 0d. return London-Basle or Geneva.

The joint Swissair/BEA all cargo services continue to operate six times weekly London-Zurich-Basle and three times weekly Manchester-Zurich.

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