In Memoriam

A tribute to Massimo Nosetti

January 5, 1960–November 12, 2013

By Leonardo Ciampa

Massimo Nosetti was one of the busiest organists in Italy. Born in Alessandria, Italy, on January 5, 1960, he studied organ, composition, and choral conducting at the conservatories of Torino (Turin) and Milan. He was a professor of organ and composition at Cuneo Conservatory from 1981 until his death, and was titular organist of the cathedral in Torino (home of the famous shrulet). At the Basilica di Santa Rita in Torino, where he was the long-time director of music, he was responsible for the installation of a splendid four-manual tracker by Zann, one of the finest organs in the region.

It would be impossible to list all of the cities in which Maestro Nosetti played concerts, gave masterclasses, and recorded CDs. He also found time to teach, compose, and serve as a member of the Diocesan Commission of Sacred Music and as a consultant of the National Commission for Sacred Music. From 1999 to 2004, he was also vice-president of the Italian Association of St. Cecilia; at the time of his death he also served as dean of their organ department.

On November 12, I received an e-mail entitled, “RIP Massimo Nosetti.” I thought it had to be a mistake, some sort of misunderstanding. Could Massimo be gone? He was only 53 years old. I never heard a word about him being sick. A colleague of mine in Torino said, “That’s not possible. I heard about his being sick. A colleague of mine later the previous September, less than two months before his death.

It was hard not to think about Massimo for the rest of that day. Every time I thought of him, the word that came to mind was “impeccable.” He dressed impeccably, spoke impeccably, played the organ impeccably, interpreted music impeccably. And he was an impeccably well-groomed and well-dressed man.

Upon receiving the sad news, many people wrote about the similarities between Massimo the organist and Massimo the person. You couldn’t distinguish between Massimo the organist and Massimo the person. Every time I thought of him, the word that came to mind was “impeccable.”

Impeccable, well-groomed, serious, tasteful, pragmatic, approachable, never cold or snobbish, always striving for authenticity—these, indeed, are traits that could be used to describe his playing. In 2004, he played an unforgettable recital at St. Paul’s Church in Brookline, Massachusetts. Entitled “From the Classical to the Neoclassic,” the concert was a survey of Italian organ music from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. The instrument was a two-manual organ in a room seating only 200 people. From the first notes he played, he grabbed my attention with phrasing and lyricism that made me think the room was five times its size—grand but never drugging, elegant but never cool. Stylistically, every piece was beyond reproach. He elevated the repertoire, the organ, even the acoustics to his own high standards. Yet it never felt like an exercise in self-promotion. Rather, it was like a person communicating music to an audience.

It was music-making of the highest order—all the more impressive because the repertoire contained no “masterpieces.” (This wasn’t Bach’s Pastacaglia or Franck’s A Minor Choral.)

Even the greatest organists sometimes have an off night. Yet you just never heard about Massimo ever playing a recital, or even a piece, that wasn’t up to snuff. And he played everywhere. He played concerts in every part of Italy, in every country in Europe, in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South America, Russia, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. His vast repertoire included the complete works of Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, Bach, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Franck, Hindemith, Alain, and Durufle.

Massimo hosted my very first concert in Italy. I had dear friends who lived in Torino near the Basilica di Santa Rita. From the first time I set foot in the special ambience of the basilica, I dreamed of playing there one day. Massimo allowed this dream to become a reality. It was during his tenure that the basilica purchased a wondrous instrument by Zann, built in 1990—a four-manual tracker, very unusual for Italy! But it was more than just the instrument. It was the magic of the piazza, the magic of the basilica that dominated it, the magic of getting to play my first recital ever in Italy . . . and the magic of Massimo Nosetti, the gentle man who was the reason it all was happening.

Massimino was a faithful, confident man who, at the same time, took nothing for granted and made no assumptions. Every note he played, every lesson he taught, every project he embarked upon—everything counted.

Massimo Nosetti had colleagues and friends throughout the world. This tribute is merely a tiny token of the impression he made in Italy and France. I translated the Italian reminiscences; the French reminiscences were translated in collaboration with my wife, Jeannette McGlamery.

Leonardo Ciampa is artistic director of organ concerts at MTT. He is a highly regarded organist, pianist, and composer.

By Omar Caputi

“Maestro, excuse me . . . but why are we tuning the whole Krummhorn if in the concert you’re using only the central octave?”

“Because every pipe has its dignity!”

Franca and Massimo Nosetti (photo credit: Maxine Thévenot)

Trumpeter Michael Barth, Massimo Nosetti, and conductor Philip Saraboura at St. Paul’s Anglican Church, Toronto, after the opening of the 2012 ORGANIX Festival (courtesy Hannah Besecker)

The impeccable Massimo Nosetti (photo credit: Maxine Thévenot)
The right organ at the right price

We’ll help you choose from the hundreds of vintage organs available through our website. We can deliver it to the organ builder of your choice or refurbish, revoice, and install it ourselves.

“in choosing OCH, i know that the work has been done with the utmost knowledge, enthusiasm, care and integrity.”

David Enlow, Sub-Dean, NYCAGO

Organ Clearing House
www.organclearinghouse.com or call John Bishop at 617-688-9290

The Wamaker Organ
Listen to it worldwide over the Internet!
Hourlong streamcasts are featured at 5pm ET the first Sunday of each month at wrtl.org

In Memoriam

With his over 2,500 concerts, held on various concepts relating to performance repertoire, so as to bring light even to the most unknown compositions, by composers who often were intentionally “forgotten” by many in the 20th century. This love and attention for the disclosure and the rediscovery of the great art of the organ had its apex with the realiza-
tion in Torino of the prestigious Festival Organistico Internazionale di Santa Rita, aonic festival in which the great-
est organists of the world performed. Thanks to them, one was able to listen to so much music.

All this great music was a gift from God, as was the special pipe organ on which it was heard. Indeed, another great work conceived and realized by our Maestro the four-manual tracker by Wély, Yon) Relegated, Jongen, Weitz, Yon, Rota, Ducommun) Italy, 1999)

By Michel Colin

My first contact with Massimo Nosetti was many years ago. I very much liked a piece on one of his recordings, but the season was not as easy to find. He sent me the score in question with a nice note attached.

We met again at a recital that he gave on the organ of the basilica in Saint-Raphaël, on the French Riviera. Thereafter, we continued our relation-

ship through letters and phone calls and we were able to see each other, particularly during a visit to the historic Italian church of Saint-Raphaël in Limone Piemonte. This type of exchange visit was very convivial. Each student, at whatever his or her level, could prepare some pieces, once he or she understood the instrument worked with, its characteristic percussion stops—bars drum, little bells, cymbals—an organ adept at highlighting the “Bel Canto” (i.e., operatic-style) repertoire that was not as yet well known.

We saw each other again in Italy. A particularly wonderful memory was a
By Olivier Vernet

I first met Massimo Nosetti many years ago. We had organized a workshop around a small Italian organ in the town of Contes, near Nice. It was an opportunity for his students from Cuneo and my students from Nice to meet each other.

The day was memorable, with Massimo sharing his kindness and his extensive experience with Italian organs. I also discovered a cultured, sensitive, amicable, and open-minded person.

When I had concerts in Italy, close to Turin, I often saw Massimo in the audience. He always had kind words. I saw him for the last time with his wife in December 2012 at a concert in Pinerolo. He had organized a small trip to Monaco for friends; because I was away at that time, I was unable to show them the new instrument of the cathedral, but I had made arrangements so they could play the Dominique Thomas organ. They were thrilled.

Massimo had agreed to come and give a concert for our Festival International d’Orgue 2014. We were discussing the program he was thinking of playing . . . Unfortunately, life decided otherwise.

Massimo Nosetti was for me a wonderful person to know. I remember our mutual friendship and the moments of sharing. He was a great artist. We still have with us his numerous recordings, but we miss him greatly.

Olivier Vernet is the titular organist of Monaco Cathedral and an award-winning concert artist.

The following is an excerpt from a tribute by Nosetti’s organ class, given at his funeral at the Basilica di Santa Rita in Turin.

Buon giorno, Maestro. Here we are. Your students. Your children.

The last time that we were all together was for your Holy Week concert last April. Such sadness we feel not seeing you seated at the console of the organ, of which you were so proud. So many times you spoke to us about it as one of your most precious creations.

How much music we made together. With your immense knowledge and noble style, you never failed to make us feel honored to serve this noble art. Affectionate father and zealous teacher, we will miss your lessons, in which you always knew how to find the exact term, a phrase in Latin or in Greek, a word in German. Like a great gentleman you never criticized anyone; you were never jealous. You always said to us, “You mustn’t ask anything of anyone; they will come search for you. You must give honor to the organ world.”

We remember how you prepared us for our exams with a rare passion and involvement, how much effort you made to perfect our public performances. They were not mere exams, but moments in which everything was put into play.

Several of us came from faraway cities in order to study, to be able to learn as much as possible. To be your student was like attending the conservatory, doing masterclasses, competitions, and advanced classes all at the same time. You were . . . a sea of knowledge. We thank you for the many organs in Italy that you designed, on which several of us play; you’ve given to us and to posterity the gift of instruments.

It is impossible that everything should finish here. An illness cannot erase all of this. You have hurled a rock in the lake that has created waves, which certainly will never end. We will continue to work as good professionals as you always taught us, making music and continuing to imagine the poetic things you might say to us regarding the interpretation of a work. In this way, your music will not disappear, but will live again in us.

Thank you for everything. This is not a farewell, but a till-we-meet-again. Massimo Nosetti is not dead. Music renders you immortal. You are and will be our teacher. Always.

Michel Colin is titular organist of the Basilica of Notre-Dame de la Victoire in St. Raphael, professor of organ and organology at Toulon Conservatory, and consultant in ancient organs for the French Ministry of Culture.