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## In Memory of Pierluigi Petrobelli

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### **Keywords**

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Roger Parker and Emanuele Senici

Pierluigi Petrobelli died on 1 March 2012 at the age of 79. He was in his beloved city of Venice, having moved there permanently some years before, as always with his companion of many decades, David Urman. Pierluigi was the best-known Italian musicologist of his generation and a major international expert on many aspects of Italian music, Verdi in particular. With his passing we have lost a central figure on the musicological scene, a person of great importance within Italian culture, a beloved university teacher, and, for many, a dear friend.

Pierluigi's intellectual development was characterized, from his earliest days, by an unusual, and unusually joyous, curiosity. His interests were constantly refreshed by an openness to new approaches. In a series of radio broadcasts on Italy's Radiotre, made near the end of his life, he recalled Venetian visits, while still a schoolboy in his native Padua, to attend Venice's Biennale. At the age of 18, in September 1951 he was at the Teatro la Fenice for the world premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. As music history was not offered at that time by the University of Padua, he moved to Rome's La Sapienza University to attend the lectures of Luigi Ronga; he graduated in 1957 with a thesis on Giuseppe Tartini. In 1959 he transferred to the United States to continue his studies, first at Princeton, later at the University of California, Berkeley. This American experience was (as he often recalled) fundamental to his development. It introduced him to a host of new topics, and—just as important—exposed him to new attitudes among his teachers (above all Oliver Strunk): to people who were often impatient with academic orthodoxies and who were open to a free exchange of ideas between professors and graduate students. That philosophy of teaching would become his own.

After returning to Italy, Pierluigi soon began his long association with the Istituto di Studi Verdiani in Parma, first as its librarian. In 1970 he began teaching at the Pesaro Conservatory; three years later he accepted an invitation from Howard Mayer Brown to join the Music Department at King's College London. He recalled this London experience above all for the exciting intellectual exchanges with colleagues such as Reinhard Strohm and Thomas Walker. In 1980 he returned to Italy to become Director of the Istituto, a post he held until his death. In 1981 he became Professor of Music at the University of Perugia; in 1983 he assumed the Professorship at La Sapienza, where he remained until his retirement in 2005. He held visiting professorships at a number of universities, including Berkeley (1988), Harvard (1996), and the *École normale supérieure* (1989, 1997).

The bare bones of this account can give little indication of the remarkable energy and achievement of Pierluigi's career: as a musicologist of international standing; as an administrator, *animateur*, and public figure; as a teacher in the broadest sense. His publications ranged over almost a thousand years of Italian music, including two books on Tartini (1967 and 1992), a book of essays on Verdi and other composers (1994),

several critical editions and around 200 articles. The sheer range of his interests was remarkable, with innovative and often highly original work on early polyphony, seventeenth-century opera, Tartini, Mozart's operas, twentieth-century Italian music (especially Dallapiccola); and above all on Verdi and the musical-cultural milieu of *ottocento* opera. He also presided over, and in most cases personally edited, a thirty-year stream of publications from the Istituto, including the ongoing edition of Verdi's correspondence, more than twenty volumes of the journal *Studi verdiani*, and a host of *Bollettini*, *Atti del convegno*, facsimiles and other items. His activity as Director of the Istituto was quite simply amazing: it would be impossible to list the conferences, exhibitions, and other special occasions that he organized and in which he featured so prominently. In later life he received numerous honors and awards, including Honorary Membership in both the Royal Musical Association and the International Musicological Society, and Corresponding Membership in the American Musicological Society. He was the dedicatee of two Festschrifts (2000, 2002).

Pierluigi's role as a teacher and mentor of others was altogether extraordinary. Generations of students will remember his lectures as true theatrical performances—what lectures should always be but so rarely are—full of enthusiasm and inspiration. Numerous scholars, young and old, were encouraged and advised by him, urged on in their studies by his inimitable mixture of authority and easy-going charm. Many of those who came into his orbit have gone on to international careers, themselves promulgating the variety of approaches that was so important to him. They now teach in the US, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, or elsewhere; all of them will strive, at least from time to time, to emulate their master's manner.

Through both his publications and his untiring advocacy, Pierluigi was, then, a source of inspiration to generations of musicologists studying Italian culture. More basic still, however, was the passionate belief he communicated about the values of humanistic inquiry. His enormous circle of friends, colleagues, and students will certainly mourn his loss; but, more important, they will continue to celebrate and gain inspiration from his life and achievements. His final resting place is in the Petrobelli family tomb in the village of Maserà (near Padua), close to the country house occupied by his family for many decades.