

The Great Venetian Music
Basilica di S. Ambrogio

Sunday, May 24, 2009
Starting time: 21:00

Antonio Vivaldi

Magnificat, RV610a

Gloria, RV589

Al Santo Sepolcro, RV169

Concert for Strings in A major, RV158

Benedetto Marcello

Concerto in c minor for oboe and strings

Singers and Choir of the Accademia Internazionale della Musica di Milano
Director of choir: Maestro Mario Valsecchi

Chamber Orchestra Milano Classica
Director: Maestro Massimiliano Caldi

The Venue

The church is one of the most symbolic sites of the city, a testimony of Milan's ecclesiastical independence and ancient Christian traditions. The first church, consecrated by the bishop Ambrogio in the year 379, was built on the burial spot of two martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius. It was rebuilt in the 11th century, in the Romanesque style, and this is the church that now survives.

The shorter bell tower is called Torre dei Monaci (Monks' Tower) and dates back to the 9th century, the second tower, known as Torre dei Canonici (Canons' Tower) was built between 1128 and 1144.

A vast arcaded atrium gives entrance to the Basilica. There are composite columns with decorated capitals, engraved with figures representing monsters and vegetables. On the left portal there is a pre-Romanesque relief depicting St. Ambrose; the central portal has lintels, door posts, and lunette formed by intaglio fragments dating from 8th - 10th century.

Inside, the basilica contains several samples of roman and early medieval art. Among them:

Near the entrance on the right side of the nave is a short Roman column with "Moses's snake".

The ambo, a type of large marble pulpit that was used mainly for Gospel readings, was built on top of the Sarcophagus of Stilicone, which stands exactly in the same place it has been since it was carved in 385 AD. The tomb was probably commissioned by and for a high military official, who appears with his wife on the north side of the sarcophagus and again in a roundel on the lid. According to a tradition it was made for Stilicone, a general who died in 408 in the service of Emperor Honorius.

The Altar in gold leaf at the front of the nave was made in 835. It depicts the Life of Christ on the front and the Life of St Ambrose in gilded silver on the back. The altar is sheltered by a canopy made of four ancient columns and decorated with 10th-century stucco reliefs. The one facing the nave depicts Christ giving the Book of the Law to St. Paul (left) and the Keys of the Kingdom to St. Peter.

The central scene of the apse mosaic has a late Byzantine layout and probably dates from the early 1200s. The side scenes are probably even earlier - dating from early 9th century in the

Carolingian era. These connect St. Ambrose and the city of Milan (*Mediolanum*) with St. Martin and the city of Tours (*Turonica*). Both bishops were staunch opponents of the Arian heresy.

360° view of the atrium: http://milan.arounder.com/sant_ambrogio/IT000005326.html

360° view of the church: http://milan.arounder.com/sant_ambrogio/IT000005325.html