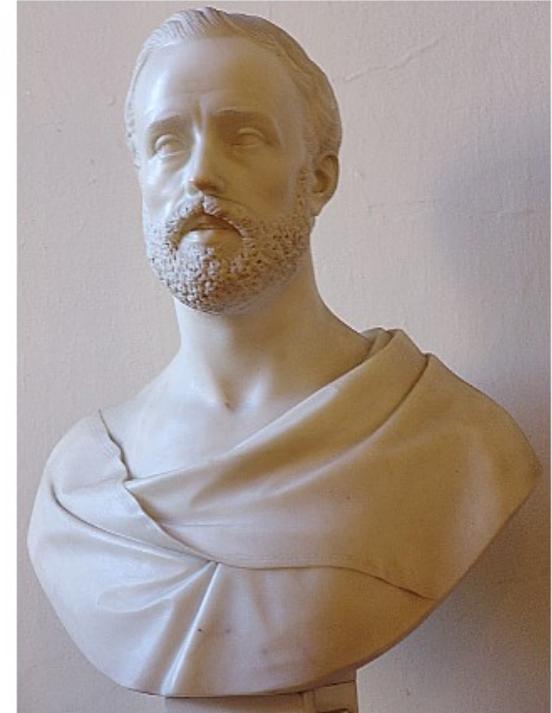


Giovanni Maria Benzoni

1809 - 1873



*During the bicentenary from the Birth of this Illustrious
Artist, a due tribute
to whom which got the local Art
to be considered reason of International Praise.*

*“Giovanni Maria Benzoni, child of a rough land,
born during the artistic renaissance,
whose future would have been magnificent,
turned his attention and his steps following the marks of
the great masters and moulding his works
with Canova and Bernini’s examples”.*

G.Rota, Bergamo 1938



iovanni Maria Benzoni was born in Songavazzo the 28 August 1809, from Giuseppe and Margherita Covelli, as appears from the registry of the parish archive.

When he was 11, his father died overwhelmed by the water of the Borlezza river while he was trying to cross it to reach Clusone, the 8 May 1820. Since then, Giovanni Maria Benzoni had been putting up with the hardships due to the poverty. When he was still very young, he moved to Riva di Solto (Brescia province), by his uncle Francesco, a carpenter, and he stayed there for 5 years. During these years he started discovering his bright inborn ingenious: he drew and carved wooden figures in full and bas-relief, attracting the attention of many art connoisseurs. Among them there was a certain Engineer Camplani of Riva di Solto that soon after noticing the works of the neo-sculptor and finding them very interesting, he thought well of introducing Benzoni to Mr. Fontana, a close friend of Luigi Tadini, Count of Crema and patron of the arts, which was regular frequenter of Sebino and founder of an Academy of fine arts in Lovere with a museum and an art gallery there annexed. Benzoni was not 17 yet, when he started carving a wooden bas-relief figure, representing St Francesco in prayer, and that sculpture shined at so well, that it became the begin and the basis of his fortune.

Mr. Fontana asked Benzoni to make a copy of St. Francesco work, so as to show it to Count Tadini. He did the copy in few days and that sculpture was so personal and full of passion, that gripped the cultured patrician (nowadays this work is an exhibit at the Tadini's Gallery, hall XXI). In order to test further Benzoni's skill, later on Count Luigi asked him to make a copy of the high-relief done by Antonio Canova for the grave of Tadini's child, Faustino, located in the Chapel of his Palace in Lovere.



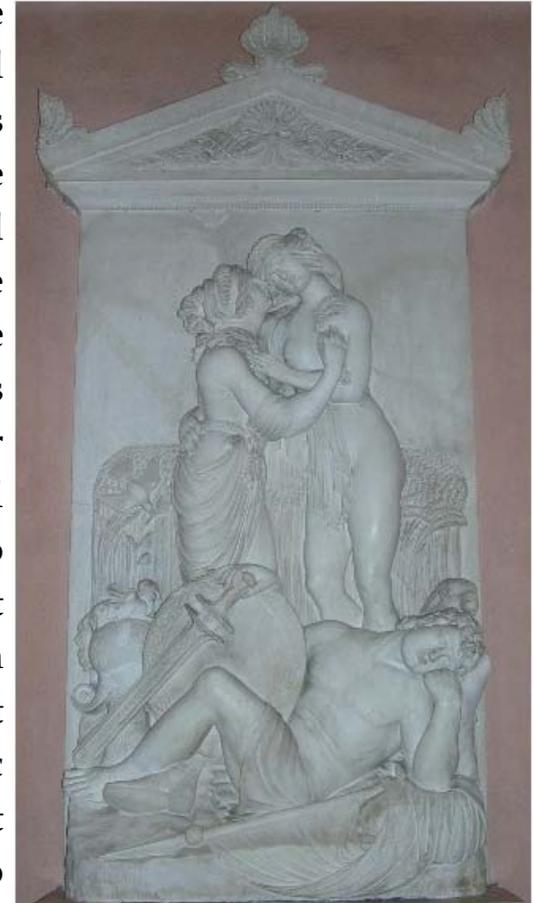
Having seen that magnificent replication, so similar and suitable to the art of that great master of the neoclassical sculpture, Tadini understood having discovered a promising talent for the art and, following his inclination to the patronage, he started lavishing for Benzoni's education. Thus he



welcomed him to his Academy where Benzoni did his first studies of drawing and grammar.

During the year he worked in Lovere, he did modest works without a particular artistic consciousness: they are two wooden

sculptures, the Spring and the Winter, whose original destination was the Concerts Hall (nowadays they are located near the entrance hall of the Gallery), and a marble stone representing Mars while sleeping done for the armors hall. The noble art lover understood how skilled Benzoni was, but he was also conscious that it was not enough to make Benzoni a famous artist: his natural talent had to be driven by an artistic education. To do so Count Tadini tried to get Benzoni to be admitted in one fine art



institute as the Carrara Academy in Bergamo and the Brera Academy in Milan, but both of them refused the artist.

It was like this Luigi Tadini decided to pay expenses for Benzoni to go to Rome so as to improve the studies of drawing and sculpture.

The artist arrived to the eternal city during December 1828 and there he became apprentice of the sculptor Giuseppe Fabbris, which belonged to the circle of Canova's followers. He started attending the courses of drawing, sculpture, anatomy and history at the St. Luca Academy, in which he had been admitted thanks to an exam, in which he showed the model of the "Mars while sleeping", the last sculpture made in Lovere.

The studies advanced with so success that he won, still novice, several awards at the academic contests.

Giovanni Maria Benzoni was not more an ingenuous self-taught, but an artist which convinced with the spontaneity of lines and profiles, and a very delicate touch.

While Benzoni was enjoying his first conquests at the drawing contests, he got the bad break of the death of Count Tadini, passed away May 1829.

All his hopes seemed to be broken, but by his last wills the Count had already disposed a three years long pension for his protégé. He therefore managed to finish his training at the St. Luca Academy and establish himself in the artistic and lively panorama of Rome.

After only four years of stay in the roman environment, the sculptor opened a workshop in 1832, doing works of whatever genre for his purchasers: sacral, profane and funereal.

Due to the increase of the errands he moved his workshop close to Del Popolo Square and the new workshop had a laboratory annexed, in which lot of drafters were working. Here his works were collected and disposed by date of finishing: from the first draft to the final work.



The group of his sculptures ended to become a sort of museum, which was assiduously visited by pilgrims and travelers so much that the reporters asserted that all Rome went to his workshop to visit that plentiful production of statues.

This workshop had been visited by Popes, as Gregorio XIV and Pio IX, chiefs of State, as the emperor of Russia, the Sultan of Turkey and the Royals of Italy and Holland.

Among his buyers there were the most important figures of his age, by which he was recognized as the follower of Canova, and he had to make lot of copies of his masterpieces to fulfill all the errands.

In those years the feverish activity of Benzoni started: many of his works had been made for the foreign countries so much that nowadays they can be found spread in many European museums (and some of them are maybe deprived from their right paternity). As his personal registries show, among the more requested subjects there were.



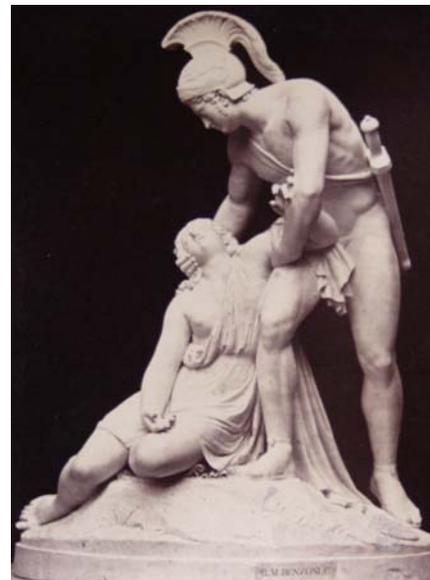
Amore e Psiche



Ettore e Andromaca



Baccante



Achille e Pantisilea

He never forgot his first patron, to whose munificence his success had to be grateful.

As a matter of fact and although all the orders he had to hack it, in 1839 he agreed to do a memorial work for Count Luigi Tadini, rejecting any remuneration and feeling really honored, because he could express his gratitude towards who which got him to start making this job.

It was born like this the monument of Count Luigi Tadini, to complete which he dedicated lot of years, since it was completed only May 1858.

From September of the same year till now that masterpiece is located on a marble basement at the Tadini's Gallery in Lovere.

In this sculptural group the artist portrays himself as a young boy, hand in hand with his generous patron, which is dressed with an unusual night robe, while raises him with a motion of an extraordinary paternal love.

A representation of the most significant event of the life of our artist: the meeting with who which heightened him from his poor origins to the Art Olympus.



Benzoni always kept in contact with Bergamo, so as to maintain the relations with the local nobility, from which he received lot of errands for busts or memorial sculptures. This was the main why he visited lot of times the city, and each time before leaving again to Rome, he liked go to Songavazzo to meet his relatives and his friends.

His presence in Bergamo is documented during the summer of 1844, in occasion of the consignment of a work which was ordered by the Municipal Congregation to commemorate the Vienna Peace signed by Francesco I of Austria in 1815.

The monument represents the allegory of the Peace in a typical neoclassical tradition: a matronly figure crowned with olive leafs and supplied with a scepter with which she squeezes a viper (a metaphor for the defeated discord) has next to her a young figure, the Genius of sciences and arts (an auspice of prosperity and cultural renaissance).

The Peace was originally located in the Reason Palace of Bergamo Alta, but nowadays it is stored in the Carrara Academy.



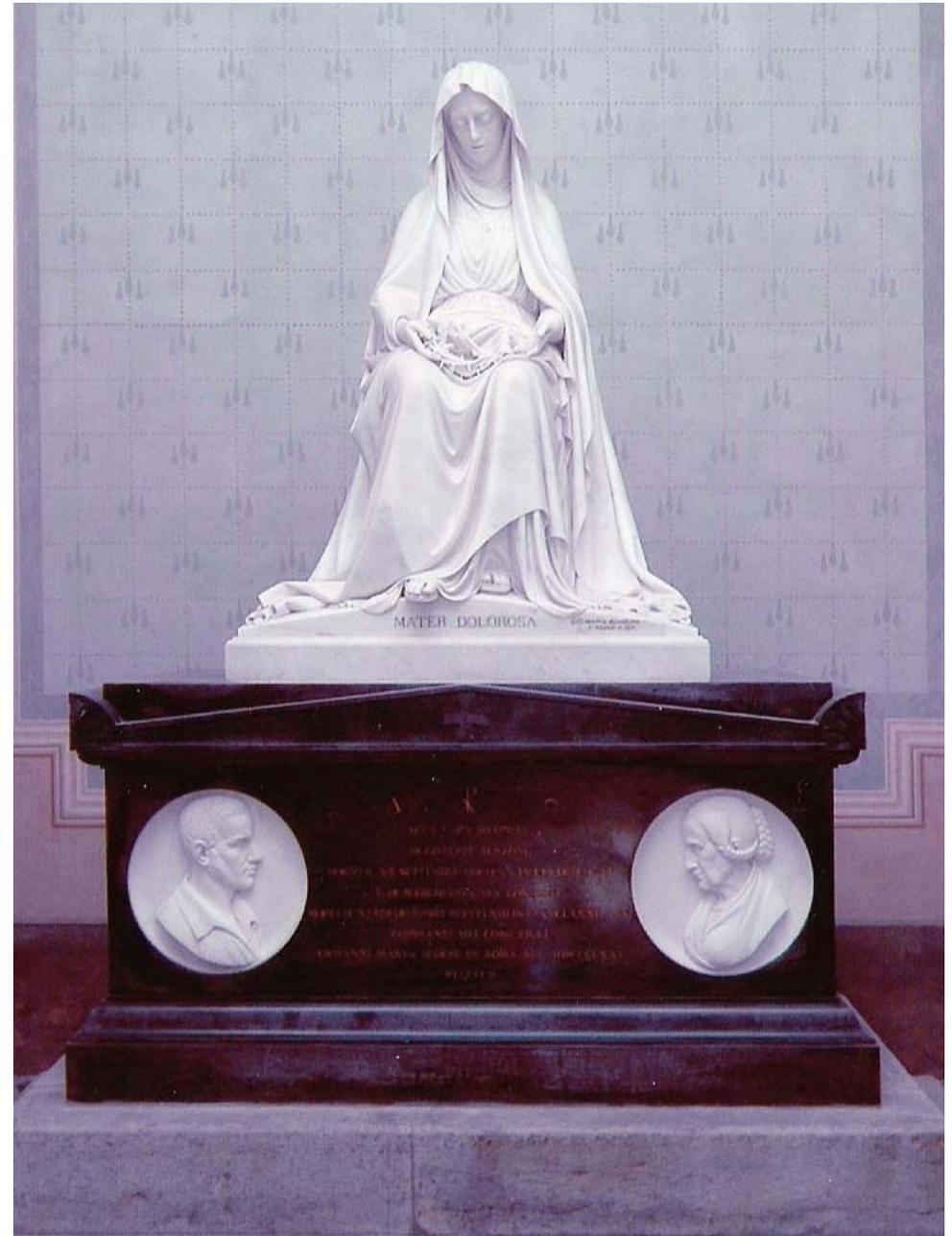
The artistic production of G.M. Benzoni never neglected his native place.

It is not a case that just in Songavazzo one of the best sacral subject done in his full artistic consciousness can be admired: the statue of “The grieve Madonna”.

It is a sort of grieve Mercy, which is connoted by a touching expressivity, which strikes the spirit and arouses the emotion of anybody stares at.

The intensively face as the posing of the figure express a dramatic feeling, a touchable sorrow of a soul which is distressed by a grave loss.

As a matter of fact, this work was conceived as a completion of the sepulchral monument which was erected in 1871 in memory of Benzoni’s parents Giuseppe and Margherita Covelli, on whose basement there’re two rounds with the respective portraits.



During his life Benzoni took part in lot of exhibitions and he was conferred with lot of decorations.

In 1861 he was charged by the Papal Government to exhibit in the International Exhibition of Fine Arts in Anversa. That exhibition was organized by the Royal Society to encourage the fine arts, and all the nations with their greatest masters and masterpieces were invited.

G.M. Benzoni, which was invited as representative of the Italian art, was able to be on top of the charge given by Pope Pio IX, of which he gained his regard and praise, maybe also because of the varied works Benzoni did for him, among them it is noteworthy the portrait of the Pope dated 1860.

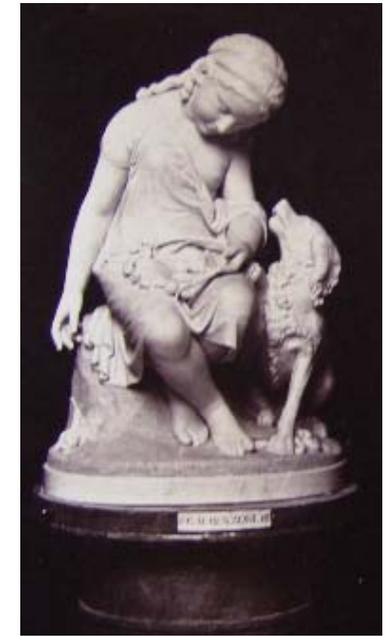


The participation to that event ratified further his international fame. The sculptor from Bergamo had reached such a technical level, that he could bewitch visitors coming from all the European countries. In the "Salon d'Anvers" catalogue of the 1861 all the sculptures made by Benzoni and exhibited in that event are listed among the masterpieces of the most important masters of the nineteenth century art.

Among those which aroused so interest that they have been replicated lot of times so as to satisfy the international demand, there were:



The Gratitude



*The Innocence
guarded by the Faithfulness*

A collection of articles published in 1853, deals with the visit of two pilgrims of Milan to the workshop of Benzoni, which so described one of those sculptures which lot of praise would have aroused eight years later in Anversa:

"Benzoni started showing the sculptures which some students were finishing, then let us gain access to one room where there were the completed works which needed the last hand, the perfection touch of their master, his life-giving spur.

Among them there was a full-size babe, between the puberty and the adolescence, which was taking off a thorn from the leg of her beloved dog, while it was lapping up her hand as a state of gratitude. <I wanted>, Benzoni said, <to link goodness and gratitude with such a simple action; I wanted to show the eternal shame that animals feel better than humans such a fair sentiment>.

His works seemed liven up under our eyes while he was talking, his voice aroused a soul which got that cold stones to quiver."

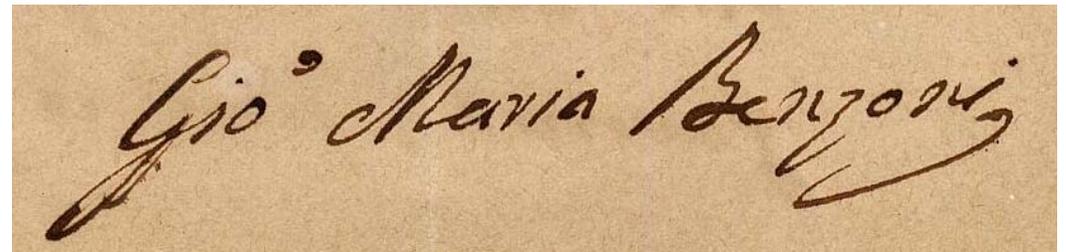
Simplicity and charm: the union which has been the secret of the success of his main masterpieces among the European public.

Giovanni Maria Benzoni had a huge artistic production, considering that in forty years of activity he did as many as 518 works, 212 of them as original productions.

He worked till the end when April 26th 1873 he suffered from a sudden and terrible disease which got him to die the following day. He was buried in the San Lorenzo al Verano cemetery, in a sepulchral monument he personally did for him and his family, while all the citizens were deeply moved.

Although Benzoni is reminded by the most influential historic and artistic dictionaries, his fame has vanished during the centuries, closeting him to the local memory.

We have to admit that he was exceptionally gifted of a great talent and he could support the neoclassical taste of the papal and bourgeois Rome of the nineteenth century. We can consider this artist as one of the last great leaders of the neoclassical tradition.



Gio' Maria Benzoni

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Done by

Roberta Bertazzoni

for

Songavazzo's Library



*for the Celebration of the Bicentenary from the Birth
of Giovanni Maria Benzoni*