



# STABAT MATER

in five movements for quintet

GIANMARIO LIUNI

If faith gives your life meaning and music is your vocation, sooner or later your heart will encourage you to express both of these indispensable elements of your daily life through your music.

Just as it comes naturally to each musician to dedicate a piece to his wife or children because there is nothing more marvelous in life, which is something I've done as well, I spontaneously decided, albeit with trepidation and reverence, to honor the Virgin Mary, our Mother, with my music.

But how does one honor the Virgin Mary? What does it truly mean to pay homage to her?

My first sincere intent is to give her "something beautiful", just as one offers a lit candle or a flower. But there is more. The Mother of God is the Co-Redemptrix who renews our faith through Christ and indicates the path to reach him.

Therefore, paying homage to the Virgin Mary through music means speaking of her so that she speaks to us about her son Jesus. It means writing music that uplifts us, revealing the unique mystery of the Son and Mother's holiness that allows us to comprehend in the gazes of the Mother and Son the "sanctity of suffering seen in the mirror and recognized as the same" (J.M. Ibañes Langlois).

This was not the first time that I had worked on a sacred piece. I previously placed my music at the service of a book called "Il Libro della Passione"

## **Sequentia (in Festo Septem Dolorum B.M.V.)**

**Text:  
Attributed  
to Jacopone da Todi**

by José Miguel Ibañes Langlois (Edizioni Ares). The result was a CD called "Quadri della Passione" that accompanied the book. This musical commentary for a reading of excerpts from the long poem started with a few themes and harmonies that, through jazz improvisation, provided the moods for creating a direct, sincere and immediate musical background for the recited text.

This "Stabat Mater" and the other pieces presented are totally different because they are complete, entirely written scores. Nevertheless, and this is the reason for my reference to my previous experience, all the pieces within this composition (including the "Salve Regina") directly derive from a few of these harmonic/melodic moods that I mentioned.

Here I tried to unite in a single narrative the Passion of Christ marvelously described and expressed through Langlois's poem and the Passion of Maria as narrated in the incomparable text by Jacopone. I believe, in fact – and this is nothing new (when you consider Bach, for example) – that each good musical idea must be repeated through variations that explore in depth a range of possibilities. Anticipating any initial reluctance towards this composition, I wish to point out that my work comes from an absolutely intimate and private devotional desire that is totally extraneous to

any purely technical desire of mine to experiment with the sacred music genre. If you want to place yourself in the right frame of mind for listening to my composition which is a bit different from what I have composed in the past, without preconceptions, think of a child, just a few years old, who offers his father a drawing. The father is pleased: he takes the drawing to work and cherishes it as a memento for years. Well, I'm that very young child and this is the only real and main intention of my compositions.

**“Well, I'm that very young child and this is the only real and main intention of my compositions.”**

Composing relevant music for an existing text is always a very complicated problem that ultimately concerns the composer's profound study of the words and his very personal interpretation of them. Jacopone's text, which is based here on the critical edition of Gianfranco Contini (see Gianfranco Contini "Letteratura italiana delle origini", pages 230-233, Ed. Sansoni, 1989), is both a contemplation of the Passion of Christ from the Virgin Mary's perspective and a subsequent personal prayer to be able to relive that scene to attain salvation and the glory of God. My intent was to compose music for the text with a contemplative dimension from which a personal prayer naturally flows. But what does contemplating the Virgin

Mary's anguish mean? Mary's anguish is not like ours, the faithful mortals who struggle to believe. It is not "only" the anguish of a mother faced with the death of a son. Mary is Co-Redemptrix because she knows the sense of her Son's Passion and accepts it. Even more, she accepts it and desires it, and she participates in the Passion of her Son due to her love of humankind. Rather than being consoled, the Virgin Mary consoles us (*Consolatrix afflictorum*). She is the strong one who remains at the foot of the Cross. Therefore, the Virgin Mary's sorrow is a mystery because it transcends us just as the perfection of sanctity transcends our misery. Her anguish is contemplated as we contemplate the mysteries, in peace, with astonished, attentive and concentrated participation. Thus, this music effectively reflects my way of living, feeling and experiencing this mystery.

**"Mary's sorrow  
is a mystery.  
Her anguish  
is contemplated with  
astonished, attentive,  
and concentrated  
participation."**

Although I prefer letting the experts identify the musical references in my works, I'd like to mention a few ideas that accompanied me while I was composing these pieces. It was certainly impossible for me not to think of the Gregorian chant with its gravity and solemn stillness. Its modality (Gregorian modes) has always suited me and is constantly reinterpreted in a wide

variety of stylistic and compositional genres. Of course, I not only used medieval modes (or scales on which the entire composition is based), but also those more related to the harmonic-melodic harshness of the 20th century. I don't know how much of my jazz experience emerges in these pieces; certainly, the ostinato lines of the contrabass, the foundations on which everything is built, are typical of a certain "modal jazz" created by giants like John Coltrane or Miles Davis.

Lastly, I would point out that the vocals have no melismas or embellishments but, as in all my compositions, are based on a syllabic vocal line in which each syllable is sung on one note. I believe this style makes the text more direct and intelligible and is more suited to the solemnity of the pieces.

The phrases or words are never repeated save for where – and this is the exception that confirms the rule – I intentionally wanted to underline them because I consider them particularly important for contemplative purposes.

The ensemble is a small orchestra with all its sections: the flute (Giulio Visibelli) representing the woods; the French horn for the brass (Sandro Ceccarelli); and the contrabass played with the bow for the strings (Stefano Dall'Ora).



**M° Giulio Visibelli**



**M° Sandro Ceccarelli**



M° Stefano Dall'Ora

The core of the ensemble is the voice (Eleonora D'Ettola) accompanied by piano around which the instruments move in counterpoint, taking turns playing solo phrases. The contrabass literally digs deep within the soul with its profound sound. The flute vibrates as penetrating as a sword and the French horn is the perfect mystical element of the composition. But it is the voice, sustained by the chords played on the piano, which expresses the purity of a crystalline soul rising up against the abyss of anguish.



M° Eleonora D'Ettola

This CD is completed by two pieces, the "Salve Regina" and the *addendum* "Dolce Signora". While different for its gentler and more open manner, the "Salve Regina", with its Latin text, is an extension of the prayer in the "Stabat Mater", constantly underlining the Virgin Mary's gentleness and mercy. Even more universally loved and recited than the "Stabat Mater", it is one of the prayers that I am most fond of due to its distinct contrast between Mary's gentleness and the fiercely realistic "gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle". "Dolce Signora", on the other hand, is a piece I wrote for my CD "Mottetti", where it was performed by a jazz quartet. While its style is completely different from the other pieces, I wanted to insert

this addendum in this CD, classically arranged for this ensemble. The lyrics I wrote delineate my very personal relationship with the Virgin Mary and therefore ideally complete my tribute. After many words, I only ask the listener to follow me without preconceived ideas and misleading preconceptions, to believe in the sincerity of my intentions and to grant me the trust that allows my compositions to be the handmaidens of the heart that prays to God.

**Gianmario Liuni**



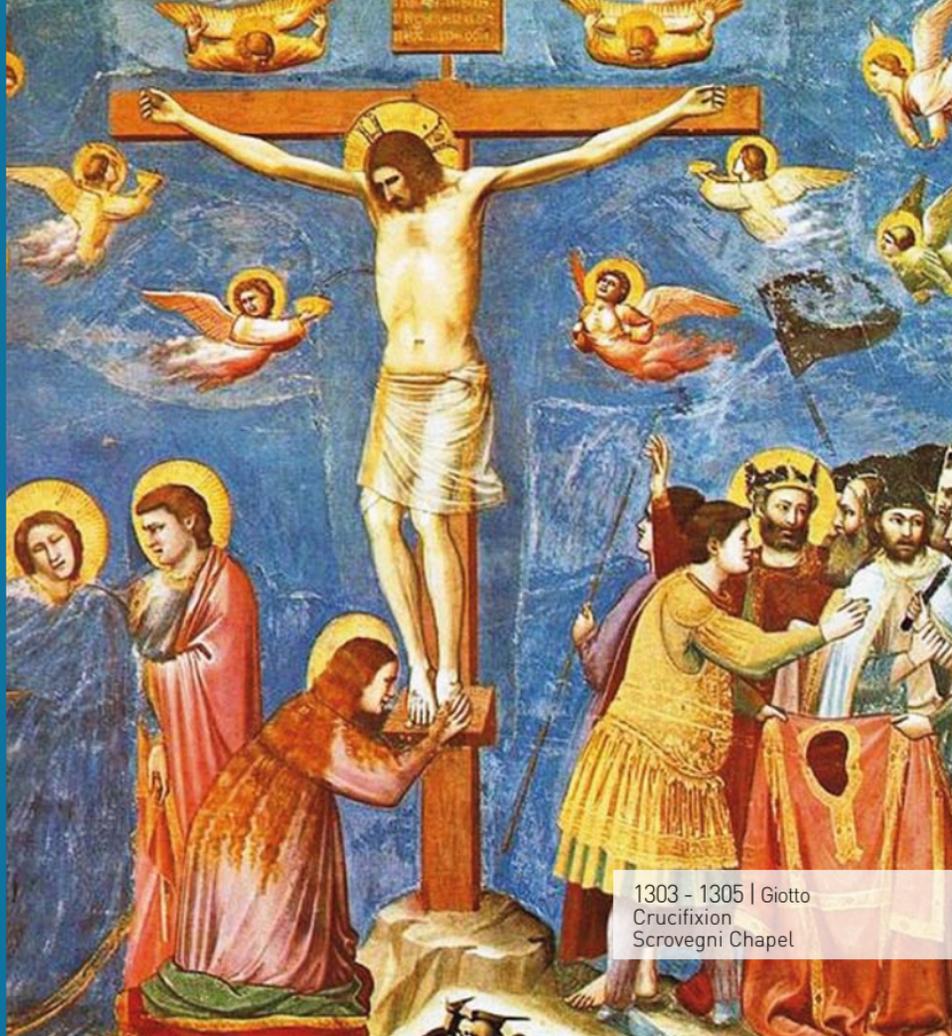
M° Sandro Ceccarelli, M° Giulio Visibelli, M° Stefano Dall'Ora, M° Eleonora D'Ettola, M° Gianmario Liuni



STABAT  
MATER

Notes

Don Adriano Bregolin



1303 - 1305 | Giotto  
Crucifixion  
Scrovegni Chapel

**Notes on the text,  
its author  
and composer**

**Don Adriano Bregolin  
Pastor at San Michele  
Archangelo Cavaglià (BI)**



The **"Stabat Mater" sequence** is the contemplation of the Virgin Mary's sorrow before the mortal remains of her Son.

It is also a long dialogue with the Virgin Mary herself, a long prayer asking that the wounds of the Lord penetrate our flesh, like the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi. As St. Paul said in his Letter to the Galatians: "I bear the marks of Jesus on my body." Attracted by the love of Christ, Jacopone asks the Virgin Mary to give him the same wounds as the Lord. The Virgin Mary encourages redemption and Jacopone wants to be associated with this work for the kingdom.

The author of the text is **Jacopone da Todi**: an extraordinary Franciscan monk who converted to Catholicism after he discovered the hair shirt worn by his wife, who had unexpectedly died. They were an affluent, well-educated bourgeois couple that was socially active in the cities of Umbria. Their serenity was shattered by her sudden death. Discovering the spiritual life of his wife, Jacopone strongly desired to follow her example and to completely devote himself to Saint Francis' life of chastity, poverty and obedience. Jacopone da Todi spent the transitional period of the Franciscan order divided between the convent and spiritual life.

In addition, enthusiastic about the election of Pope Celestine V, he never accepted the Pope's "great resignation" and strongly contested Pope Boniface VIII, who imprisoned him. Jacopone demanded his freedom, which only arrived with the successor of Pope Boniface, who died shortly after the Humiliation of Anagni.

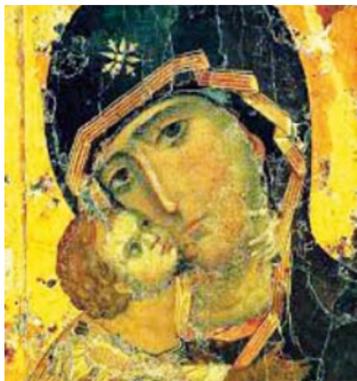
It seems that the hymn to the Sorrowful Virgin was the mystical part of his spiritual quest and allowed him to transform the terrible physical and spiritual sufferings of his captivity into an offering to Christ on the Cross.

Jacopone had a remarkable ability to write in the nascent Italian vernacular with a skill that only a philologist can appreciate. He used the Tuscan, Umbrian, and Roman dialects to give his words more power, truth and expressiveness. Several compositions that delve into the theology of the time are remarkable.

With the elegance of a poet, he opposes Abelard's theology with his logical sophisms. He discusses goodness and intelligence, demonstrating that love deepens the intelligence and leads to Christ while avoiding the path of pride.

1130

Theotokos - Vladimir



**The Stabat Mater** appears to be his final composition. It is in beautiful, elegant Latin with a clear, serene prosody. His invectives or sarcasm no longer appear. Everything is summarized in the contemplation of Christ, his only love.

**The Virgin Mary** is the most worthy being to contemplate her Son and the only teacher for deeply understanding the mystery of the Cross. Only by embracing this sorrow and feeling the pains of crucifixion can one embrace Christ and attain salvation. In this mystical ecstasy the senses are pacified, animosities disappear, and the turbulent life of the Church is summed up in the motherhood of the Virgin Mary, which helps to look beyond contingent events.

Clearly, Jacopone's maestro is Saint Francis of Assisi. But the great Father represents something more for the history of Italian and European faith and prayer.

Each person stands before the image of the San Damiano Cross. Its voice allows Francis to discover his calling. An extreme upheaval takes place within the 'Pauper Saint of Assisi' and is conveyed to us as a way to embrace Christ. The Christ of the Icon of the Cross fully responds to the rules of spirituality and theology of the East.

1050  
San Damiano Cross



Moreover, it is the Christ of St. John who, while on the Cross, already portrays the Resurrection of Easter: his eyes are open and his hands are as welcoming as he appeared on the eighth day during the Cenacle. The Cross is transforming in the victory of life over death.

Standing before the cross, Saint Francis asks what price must be paid through love to achieve the triumph of Easter.

His entire life will be a crucifixion while continuously and joyfully singing the Beatitudes: "Herein is perfect joy" Saint Francis says to Brother Leo, describing the harsh reception that he will find in the convent where they are directed. He reminds the men and women of the Renaissance in Italy and Europe, drawn to a world of fame and wealth, that the path to salvation is marked by the folly of the cross.

With spontaneity and simplicity, Francis carries this message within the reality of life and sentiments. He abandons cultured preaching and does things so that people welcome the message of the Gospel: there is the Greccio creche, but we must also consider his life of poverty and penance and the experience of the stigmata.

The Kingdom of God is not of this world and yet by living as Christ did, one can bring a little bit of the joy of Heaven here on earth. Thus, through the spirituality of St. Francis, we come to understand that Jacopone's hymn to the Sorrowful Virgin is a vibrant example offered to Christians for new evangelism.



Gianmario Liuni has developed an original musical language drawing from his training and deep knowledge of music. He moves freely and with distinction. Listening to his many compositions, one notices the influence of Keith Jarrett, Paul Bley, Miles Davis and John Coltrane. He pays great attention to ethnic sounds and colors. In his beautiful songs, especially, you hear a French mood, a Latin tango vibe, experiments with modal harmonies, and a focus on African songs and refined pianists such as Abdullah Ibrahim and Richard Beirach.

In these songs, one characteristic element immediately emerges (as always in Liuni's music): striking singable melodies that are immediately remembered. This work is in the sonata style. A verse of the sequence opens the meditation. The following verses accentuate the meditation and each piece closes with the initial exposition.

Making a comparison with the original Gregorian chant (dating back to 1,000 AD) there are often convergences related to the common modal style of the melody.

Jacopone's song immediately opens with a theme of great sorrow that participates in the tears of the Virgin Mary. Liuni's musical poetry expresses it through a melodic scale based on a chord that symbolizes the artist's soul.

Liuni has a "blues" vibe that would seem ideal for describing a sense of pain and sorrow. In his most contemplative compositions, like this work, he often accompanies the musical phases with a bass ostinato. At the same time, the songs alluding to the mystery of Christ and echoing the prayer have an unusual freedom.

This Stabat Mater is pensive and sorrowful, with a female vocal line that is similar to a folk tune. Therefore, it gradually achieves what is sung in the sequence: "Ut tecum lugeam".

After the "Stabat Mater",  
Gianmario Liuni has  
included a  
"Salve Regina" in the CD.

Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiae;  
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.  
Ad te clamamus, exsules filii Evae:  
ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes  
in hac lacrimarum valle.  
Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos  
misericordes oculos ad nos converte.  
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,  
nobis, post hoc exilium, ostende.  
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

### Translation

*Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,  
Our life, our sweetness and our hope.  
To you do we cry,  
Poor banished children of Eve;  
To you do we send up our sighs,  
Mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn then, most gracious advocate,  
Your eyes of mercy toward us;  
And after this our exile,  
Show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving,  
O sweet Virgin Mary.*

The origin of the prayer dates back to the eleventh century, but its composition is uncertain. The most widespread tradition attributes the words of this prayer to Brother Herman of Reichenau. St. Bernard is only responsible for the last verse: "o clemens, o pia, o dulcis virgo Maria."

Herman was born with a severe physical handicap (he could not stand up or walk). Sent to the school of the Benedictine monastery in Reichenau on Lake Costanza, he lived there for the rest of his life and became a monk. He was extremely cultured in the arts and well-versed in works from the Arab world. This esteemed Benedictine monk left us this prayer that became a hymn of the monks sung at the end of their day.

I enjoyed writing music for these words. It is sweet, classical in style, full of color and love.

Regarding the addendum, I consider it a beautiful prayer to the Virgin Mary expressing a childhood sentiment of spirituality and devotion to the Virgin.

**The song penetrates  
the heart through  
a modern voice that is, at  
the same time,  
full of spirituality.**

Sweet Lady of my soul  
Pray for me  
I am here  
hiding my sorrow within you

Hold me  
The way you hold a child  
Who is all trusting

I know  
I often flee from You  
But now  
Stay with me and do not abandon me  
Tonight

Queen of Heaven  
True Mother

I know that  
You never abandon me  
Your Son  
Who you always see in me

And follow  
In every place where He is alone

And you give Him  
Your love and motherly gaze  
That never betrays

**Lyrics by G. Liuni**

Here is the text of the Stabat Mater divided according to the five movements of the composition (Critical edition of the text and translation by Edward Caswall, *Lyra Catholica*, 1849):

**1** | Stabat mater dolorosa  
iuxta crucem lacrimosa,  
dum pendebat filius;  
cuius animam gementem,  
consternatam et dolentem  
pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta  
fuit illa benedicta  
mater Unigeniti!  
Quae moerebat - et dolebat,  
et tremebat - dum videbat  
nati poenas incliti.

**2** | Quis est homo, qui non fleret,  
Matrem Christi si videret  
in tanto supplicio?  
Quis non posset contristari,  
Christi Matrem contemplari  
dolentem cum filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis  
vidit Jesum in tormentis  
et flagelli subditum;  
vidit suum dulcem natum  
morientem, desolatum,  
dum emisit spiritum.

**1** | At the Cross her station keeping,  
stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
close to her Son to the last.  
Through her heart, His sorrow sharing,  
all His bitter anguish bearing,  
now at length the sword has passed.

O how sad and sore distressed  
was that Mother, highly blest,  
of the sole-begotten One.  
Christ above in torment hangs,  
she beneath beholds the pangs  
of her dying glorious Son.

**2** | Is there one who would not weep,  
whelmed in miseries so deep,  
Christ's dear Mother to behold?  
Can the human heart refrain  
from partaking in her pain,  
in that Mother's pain untold?

For the sins of His own nation,  
She saw Jesus wracked with torment,  
All with scourges rent:  
She beheld her tender Child,  
Saw Him hang in desolation,  
Till His spirit forth He sent.

- 3** | Eia, mater, fons amoris,  
me sentire vim doloris  
fac, ut tecum lugeam;  
fac ut ardeat cor meum  
in amando Christum Deum,  
ut sibi compleaceam.

Sancta Mater, istud agas:  
Crucifixi fige plagas  
cordi meo valide.  
Tui nati - vulnerati,  
iam dignati - pro me pati,  
poenas mecum divide.

- 4** | Fac me tecum semper flere,  
Crucifixo condolere  
donec ego vixero.  
luxta crucem tecum stare,  
te libenter sociare  
in planctu desidero.

Virgo virginum praeclara,  
mihi iam non sis avara:  
fac me tecum plangere.  
Fac ut portem - Christi mortem,  
passionis eius sortem,  
has plagas recolare.

- 3** | O thou Mother! Fount of love!  
Touch my spirit from above,  
make my heart with thine accord:  
Make me feel as thou hast felt;  
make my soul to glow and melt  
with the love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother! pierce me through,  
in my heart each wound renew  
of my Savior crucified:  
Let me share with thee His pain,  
who for all my sins was slain,  
who for me in torments died.

- 4** | Let me mingle tears with thee,  
mourning Him who mourned for me,  
all the days that I may live:  
By the Cross with thee to stay,  
there with thee to weep and pray,  
is all I ask of thee to give.

Virgin of all virgins blest!  
Listen to my fond request:  
let me share thy grief divine;  
Let me, to my latest breath,  
in my body bear the death  
of that dying Son of thine.

5 | Fac me plagis vulnerari,  
cruce hac inebriari  
in amore filii.  
Inflammatum et accensum  
per te, virgo, sum defensus  
in die iudicii.

Fac me cruce custodiri  
morte Christi praemuniri,  
conferri gratia  
Quando corpus morietur,  
fac ut animae donetur  
paradisi gloria.

5 | Wounded with His every wound,  
steep my soul till it hath swooned,  
in His very Blood away;  
Be to me, O Virgin, nigh,  
lest in flames I burn and die,  
in His awful Judgment Day.

Christ, when Thou shalt call me hence,  
be Thy Mother my defense,  
be Thy Cross my victory;  
While my body here decays,  
may my soul Thy goodness praise,  
Safe in Paradise with Thee.

1564  
Michelangelo Buonarroti  
Pietà Rondanini





# STABAT MATER

in five movements for quintet

GIANMARIO LIUNI

- 1 | STABAT MATER
- 2 | QUIS EST HOMO QUI NON FLERET
- 3 | EJA MATER FONS AMORIS
- 4 | FAC ME TECUM SEMPER FLERE
- 5 | FAC ME PLAGIS VULNERARI
- 6 | SALVE REGINA

*ADDENDUM*

- 7 | **DOLCE SIGNORA (TESTO G.LIUNI)**