

THE ANCIENT ANTEGNATI ORGAN IN THE COLLEGIATA CHURCH OF BELLINZONA (1588)

In the 16th-century Collegiate Church (which it owns) - dedicated to Saints Peter and Stephen -, the City of Bellinzona is fortunate enough to house one of the few Antegnati organs built by Graziadio Antegnati - in 1588 - that have survived to this day still (almost) intact.

Its builder, **Graziadio Antegnati** (Brescia, 1523/'25-1590/'91) was the most important representative of the Antegnati family of Brescian organ builders.

La Corsa più Medievale della Terra!



The ancient Antegnati Organ (1588) in the Collegiata Church of Bellinzona

Also owned by the City of Bellinzona and of inestimable value, the prestigious Antegnati Organ in the Collegiata Church is the second oldest organ in Switzerland after the one - dated 1430 and therefore the oldest organ in the world - in the Basilica of Valère in the city of Sion.

Since 2006, the ancient Antegnati Organ - a precious testimony to an art and musical aesthetics that developed over more than two centuries - has been the centrepiece of the [Festival Antegnati Bellinzona](#), organised by the Associazione Amici dell'organo Antegnati (Friends of the Antegnati Organ Association), which - through concerts, master classes, study conferences, recordings and other events - promotes the knowledge and appreciation of this important instrument.

TO UNDERSTAND WHO BUILT THE ANTEGNATI ORGAN IN BELLINZONA

The Antegnati family was a family of organ builders active between the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 18th century in Brescia, whose work was practised both on organs and other instruments such as harpsichords and spinets.

The first mention of an organ builder by the name of Antegnati appeared in 1481, on the occasion of the tender called for the rebuilding of the organ in the church of Santa Maria de Dom (cathedral) in Brescia. In it, one could read the name of Bartolomeo Antegnati (or Bartholomeus de Lomexanis de Bressia), son of Giovanni, a jurist of noble origins from Antegnate (Bergamo), who had obtained Brescian citizenship in 1436.

In the Antegnati family, there were as many as 19 figures dedicated to this occupation and who contributed to the professional ennoblement of the *artifex instrumentorum musicorum* (musical instrument craftsman), a profession considered in the Middle Ages to be more of a “mechanical” than a “liberal” art, and sometimes practised by people who were “very low and almost beggars” (quotation taken from Costanzo Antegnati’s *L’arte organica*, a treatise written to resolve his son’s doubts about what his father proudly called the “arte antegnata”).

Graziadio Antegnati, grandson of Bartolomeo on the latter’s second son’s side (Giovanbattista), represented the third generation of organ builders in the family. He represents a figure to be studied much more deeply and carefully with reference to his exact historical-artistic implications.

Of Graziadio Antegnati, the great 19th-century Bergamasque organ builder Giuseppe Serassi said:

“(...) he was the most exact and perfect in this art among the many of this illustrious family (...) the solidity, the sweetness of the reeds and the mastery of them were inimitable”.

However, in view of the fame he enjoys, very little biographical data is known about Graziadio. The period between his appearance at the age of 15 in a Brescian workshop of “*flaschis scloporum*” and the construction of his first organ, the one for the Brescian community of Coccaglio in 1562, but above all the one commissioned by Guglielmo Gonzaga in 1565 - when he was therefore about 40 years old - for the Palatine Basilica of Santa Barbara in Mantua, is still very mysterious.

It is not known whether it was the two aforementioned occasions that prompted him to definitively take over the workshop he had inherited from his father, previously perhaps little frequented due to tribulated family vicissitudes.

To our knowledge, Graziadio Antegnati built less than about ten instruments in a quarter of a century, including, in 1578, a new organ for the Carmine Church in Brescia.

His quest for perfectionism was, however, favoured by a prosperous economic situation derived from his father’s inheritance and two other subsequent inheritances.

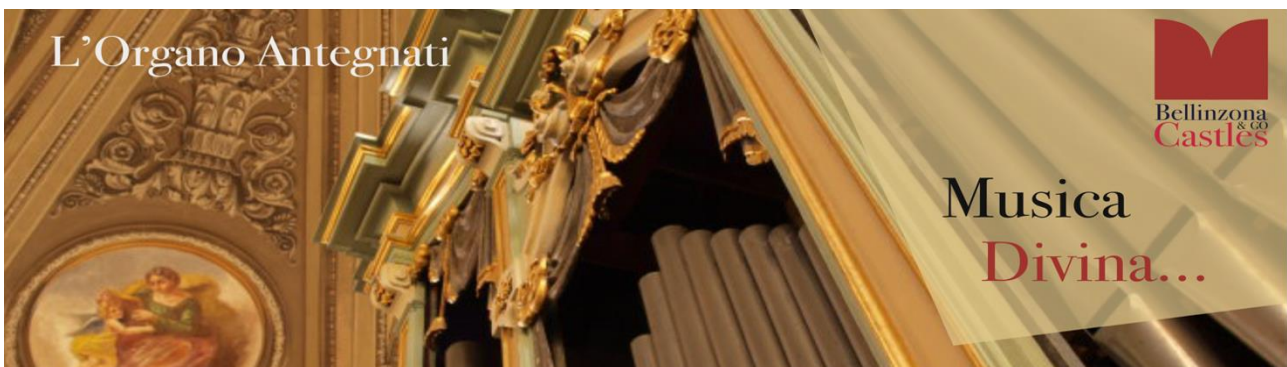
Built by Graziadio Antegnati remain:

- the largest and most famous Antegnati Organ in the world, the 16-foot one made in collaboration with his son Costanzo in 1581 for the friars of the church of San Giuseppe in Brescia
- the already mentioned organ of the Palatine Basilica in Mantua, a very precious instrument, designed in a very short time in collaboration with the virtuoso very short time in collaboration with the virtuoso Girolamo Cavazzoni and which has 7 enharmonic keys and which was used by some great figures of the time such as Giaches de Wert, Claudio Monteverdi, Luca Marenzio, Giovanni Giacomo Castoldi, Amante Franzoni and Francesco Rovigo
- the organ of Bellinzona's Collegiate Church; a twelve-footer consisting of 11 registers and signed by Graziadio Antegnati inside the main pipe and in which eighty per cent of the original pipes still exist.

Of the other instruments built by Graziadio Antegnati, also together with his son, almost nothing remains, except for a few dozen pipes in more contemporary organs.

(source: [Wikipedia: Antegnati](#))

In the context of the first edition of BELLINZONA CASTLES & GO (Sunday, 29th May 2022), a cultural banner dedicated to the Antegnati Organ of the Collegiata Church was placed on the staircase of the same church at approx. KM 11 of the RUNNING RACE route - also part of the WALKING/NORDIC WALKING RACE route. Purpose: to inform and make race participants aware of the presence in the city of an ancient instrument, of inestimable value, built at the end of the 16th century by the most important representative of the famous Brescian organ-building family of Antegnati (Graziadio Antegnati) and still today the centre of a renowned organ festival.



Cultural banner dedicated to the Antegnati Organ of the Collegiate Church placed on the staircase of the same church («*The Antegnati organ. Music Divine...*»)

INSIGHTS:

- Tarcisio Ferrari - *The Graziadio Antegnati organ in the Collegiata Church of Bellinzona, Birth and evolution history 1588-1999* - Casagrande Editions 2002, Bellinzona (**highly recommended publication**)
- [Website dedicated to the Antegnati Organo in Bellinzona](#)
- [Database of the Organological Documentation Centre of the Lucerne High School - Music \(fact Sheet on the Antegnati Organo in Bellinzona\)](#)
- Discovering the Antegnati Organ in Bellinzona ([part 1](#) e [part 2](#))
- [The genealogy of the Antegnati organ builders by Ugo Ravasio](#)
- [Graziadio Antegnati in the Treccani Encyclopaedia](#)