

Chiesa Santa Maria del Divino Amore



Chiesa del Divino Amore is the 18th century church of the Confraternity of the Madonna of Divine Love. It used to be called Santi Cecilia e Biagio, the name that is still to be found in many sources. The church is in rione Campo Marzio. [\(1\)](#)

History

The first church here was built c. 1131 and was dedicated to St Cecilia. According to tradition, her father's house stood at this site. The church was later also dedicated to St Blaise. [\(1\)](#)

In 1525, Pope Clement VII granted the church to the *Confraternita dei Materassai*, the Guild of Mattress-makers. It was the Guild that added the dedication to St Blaise, who was their patron. So the church became known as Santi Cecilia e Biagio or San Biagio dei Materazzari. The street that the church is on was then called the Vicolo dei Materazzari. [\(1\)](#)

Pope Benedict XIII and the Guild had it rebuilt from the foundations in 1729. The architect was **Filippo Raguzzini**, who left the adjacent 12th century campanile intact. The church was re-consecrated in 1731. [\(1\)](#) [\(4\)](#)

The mattress-makers had their confraternity suppressed during Napoleonic period. The church was then given to the Confraternity del Divino Amore (Confraternity of the Madonna of Divine Love) in 1801 or 1802 by Pope Pius VII. The confraternity had been founded in 1744 at the Santuario della Madonna del Divino Amore, in the countryside down the Via Ardeatina, and existed to foster

devotion to Our Lady at what was to become Rome's principal Marian shrine. The church was restored, the interior decorated with frescoes and the name changed. (1)

There was another restoration in 1972. During the work an ancient memorial inscription was found under the altar, which says that the faithful gathered here to pray for the intercession of St Cecilia. The inscription read: (1)

Hec est domus in qua orabat Sancta Cecilia MCXXXI consecravit

The campanile was restored in 1995, when rendering was removed to reveal the structural brickwork. (1)

Exterior

The façade is simple to the point of starkness. There are two storeys, the first one storey being approximately twice the height as the second. There are four pilasters flanking a single large central doorway with an unmolded doorcase and an undecorated floating cornice. These pilasters do not have proper capitals, but triglyphs instead. They support an entablature with a simple dedicatory inscription on the frieze: *Deiparae Virgini divini amoris dicatum*. This entablature has posts above the pilaster "capitals". (1)

The low second storey has four blind pilasters melting into a simple architrave below the cornice of a triangular pediment with an oculus in its tympanum. This pediment does not reach across the entire width of the façade, as there are no pilasters at the corners. In the center of this storey is a rectangular window with a slightly bowed top. (1)

The mid-12th century bell-tower was preserved when the church was rebuilt. There used to be several storeys with arcades, but only the top two survive intact. The main part of the tower, up to the nave roofline, is now a simple brick affair with two large windows but you can see the brick archivolt where arcades were filled in. The alteration is thought to have taken place during the 18th century rebuilding of the church. (1)

The top two storeys both have an arcade of three arched soundholes on each face, with the arches separated by little marble columns with cushion impost. The cornices of both storeys are embellished with marble modillions '(corbels), and above the arcades are colored pottery dishes set in brick tondi. There is a tiled pyramidal cap. (1)

There is now a little convent adjacent, of the Figile della Madonna del Divino Amore which is a religious sisterhood founded at the main shrine. (1)

Interior

The interior is on a simple rectangular plan, with a blind arcade of three arches on each side wall springing from very wide Doric pilasters. The arcades are separate from the cornice from which the ceiling vault springs, and hence a single expanse of wall on each side allows for fresco work. (1)

The barrel-vaulted ceiling has cross-ribs meeting at two hexagonal central panels which are frescoed, and has three lunettes on each side. The left hand lunettes have windows, but the right hand ones do not, blank panels are inserted for the sake of symmetry. (1)

The last bay of the church is the sanctuary. It has recently (after 2010) been enclosed by a tall gilded railing rather like a modern iconostasis without icons. This is an impressive innovation. (1)

In a gilded Glory over the high altar is a painting of the *Virgin and Child* attributed to **Vincenzo Camuccini**. (1)

The side walls and ceiling vault panels are decorated with 19th century frescoes in a neo-Classical style by **Filippo Prosperi**. They are rather good. The two ceiling panels show *SS Blaise and Cecilia venerating the Madonna and Child*. The side wall frescoes have four personified virtues, accompanied by putti (*Justice, Temperance, Fortitude and Prudence*), and obviously give a nod to Micheangelo. (1)

There are two side altars. The left hand altarpiece shows *SS Cecilia and Valerian Crowned by an Angel* and is by **Placido Costanzi**. There is a statue of *St Joseph* on the altar itself. (1)

The right hand altarpiece shows *St Blaise Removing a Fish Bone from a Child's Throat*, and replaces a Crucifixion by Fabrizio Chiari. The statue on the altar is of the *Sacred Heart*. The two altars have matching revetted frontals of green-veined marble. (1)

The organ is in a gallery over the entrance. (1)

The sacristy is decorated with a fresco of *SS Cecilia and Valerian Crowned by an Angel*, painted in the middle of the 15th century and inspiring the chapel altarpiece mentioned. Here also is the 12th century epigraph mentioning the house of St Cecilia. (1)

Note:

Feasts that are celebration with great solemnity in the church are the Presentation of Our Lord on 2 February, St Blaise on 3 February, Sts Valerian and Tiburtius (Cecilia's husband and brother-in-law) on 14 April and St Cecilia on 22 November.

Artists and Architects:

Filippo Prosperi (19th cent), Italian painter
 Filippo [Raguzzini](#) (1690-1771), Italian architect
 Placido [Costanzi](#) (1702-1759), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period.
 Vincenzo [Camuccini](#) (1771-1844), Italian Neoclassic painter

Location:

Address: 12 Vicolo del Divino Amore, 00186 Roma

Coordinates: [41° 54' 11.4"N 12° 28' 34.7"E](#)

Links:

1. http://romanchurches.wikia.com/wiki/Chiesa_del_Divino_Amore
 2. http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=it&u=http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chiesa_dei_Santi_Cecilia_e_Biagio
 3. http://www.vicariatusurbis.org/?page_id=188&ID=743
 4. http://www.info.roma.it/monumenti_dettaglio.asp?ID_schede=835
 5. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dealvariis/sets/72157632567527416/>
("De Alvariis" gallery on Flickr)
- a. Priester. Ann; "Bell Towers and Building Workshops in Medieval Rome"; *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 1993), pp.199-220