



**09 September 2022**  
**1 conference and 4 Concerts**

*Eloisa Vacchini – Vocalia quartet*

**Romanesque churches in Ticino:  
Between God and sound, the meaning of singing in the  
XI-XIII centuries**

## Description and Program

On this one-day excursion we will visit the most beautiful witnesses of Romanesque architecture in Ticino, focusing our attention on an aspect that has been somewhat forgotten in modern architecture: the interplay between architecture and music. We'll discover the interplay of church buildings, art and music in the Middle Ages. Architect Eloisa Vacchini ([www.studiovacchini.ch](http://www.studiovacchini.ch)) will talk to us about the relationships between numerology, history, spirituality, architectural space in the Middle Ages and singing.

Four professional singers, Oskar Boldre, with his quartet VOCALIA will accompany us. ([www.oskarboldre.com](http://www.oskarboldre.com))

While listening and moving, we will get to know the great knowledge about the sound vibrations of that time. We will notice that the stones of the buildings with their life and vibrations turn into their own musical instrument.

### Program

- 9.00 Departure with the bus from Ascona (Autosilo)
- 10.00 San Nicola, Giornico. Concert and conference.
- 12.00 Grotto Canvett, Semione
- 13.45 San Remigio, Corzoneso. Concert
- 14.15 San Carlo di Negrentino, Leontica. Concert and storytelling.
- 16.00 SS Pietro e Paolo, Biasca. Concert.
- 18.00 Ascona autosilo.

We will start with the church that is the most famous: San Nicolao in Giornico. It is located on the Way of St. James and has many surprising beauties. The church of St. Nicholas is intact and presents itself to us almost exactly as it was a thousand years ago. It is the perfect place to illustrate architect Vacchini's research with respect to this particular theme, the relationship between song and space. Topics include some basic principles that governed the lives of builders and monks of the time and what their personal beliefs were about the meaning of the golden section and the creation of the universe.

Time for lunch in a "grotto" with polenta, cheese, brasato and some time for relax and conversation.

After lunch we will drive in the valley of Blenio, the "Valley of the Sun", as it is also called. The first visit to the Sun Valley will be to Corzoneso, a village divided between its part on the plain and its higher part. Here, near the river, there is a small oratory called "San Remigio," where the quartet's singing will fill the space in a very different way. We will then see the rehashes of history how they have changed the acoustics.

We will continue up the mountain to the village of Leontica and walk to the small church of Negrentino; a fascinating church, a masterpiece of architecture and painting. Here there will be a second part of storytelling with the observation of the paintings, some wondering of their significations. And some more music.

Filled with history, voice and culture, we will return to Biasca for the last music moment. The church of SS Peter and Paul in Biasca is one of the most beautiful and well-known in Ticino. Restored almost completely to its former Romanesque splendor by Alberto Camenzind in the 1960s, it brings back many qualities of that time, among them especially the quality of its acoustics.

## **S. Nicolao Giornico**

The most important Romanesque building in Ticino. The date 1168 is found on a stone and the church is mentioned in 1210 and 1298.

*"Located near the parish church of San Michele (of which the stone baptismal font at the entrance is preserved), the church takes us on a journey through history; according to very reliable studies, San Nicola (or San Nicolao) seems to have been built in the 12th century by the Benedictine monks of the Piedmontese abbey of San Benigno di Fruttaria, who wanted to spread the Benedictine monastery in northeastern Europe. If nothing remains of the monastery, the church is a small jewel full of frescoes, friezes and stone sculptures. The exterior has the shape and distinctive structure of Romanesque churches with the imposing bell tower and two beautiful portals. The interior, with a single nave, has a very particular structure, with the raised presbytery and the crypt below clearly visible. The main frescoes in the apse, from the 15th century, are by Nicola da Seregno, while on the left wall there are older frescoes (12th century). The crypt is valuable and is enriched by 8 columns with sculptural capitals with the typical medieval symbolic representations. The baptismal font at the entrance is very interesting and ancient (XII): hexagonal, made of a single block of stone and completely shaped."*

*(www.lagomaggiore-e-dintorni.it)*

*"Although natural light is a basic element in modeling architectural space, architectural theory rarely expresses itself on the effects of daylight, which over the hours and seasons shapes the character of interior and exterior spaces of the built environment. The "direction of light" inside a structure is determined by its location and orientation, the shape and distribution of the openings in the space, the materials of their closures (transparent, opaque, colored glass, etc.), and the color and texture of the interior surfaces on which the light falls and from which it is reflected.*

*The deliberate guidance of natural light inside a medieval sacred space was certainly not as elaborately planned as it was in buildings of late antiquity. Nevertheless, a certain intention to direct natural light is also recognizable in Romanesque architecture. It enters the building only in a very reduced form. It is filtered and directed in such a way that only a punctual illumination takes place, creating strong contrasts between light and shadow.*

*The monastery church of San Nicolao in Giornico (TI) was built at the beginning of the 12th century in the Val Leventina and is a significant example of this characteristically sparing use of daylight. On a sunny spring morning, natural light is concentrated in the choir and crypt, whose walls are decorated with light-colored plaster and, in places, late medieval frescoes; the altars of the choir and crypt are the brightest points in the church interior. Today, the increasing musealization of historical buildings leads to the fact that the lighting installations are increasingly expanded. This often results in lighting situations that are completely foreign to the original character of the buildings." (National Information Center on CULTURAL HERITAGE)*

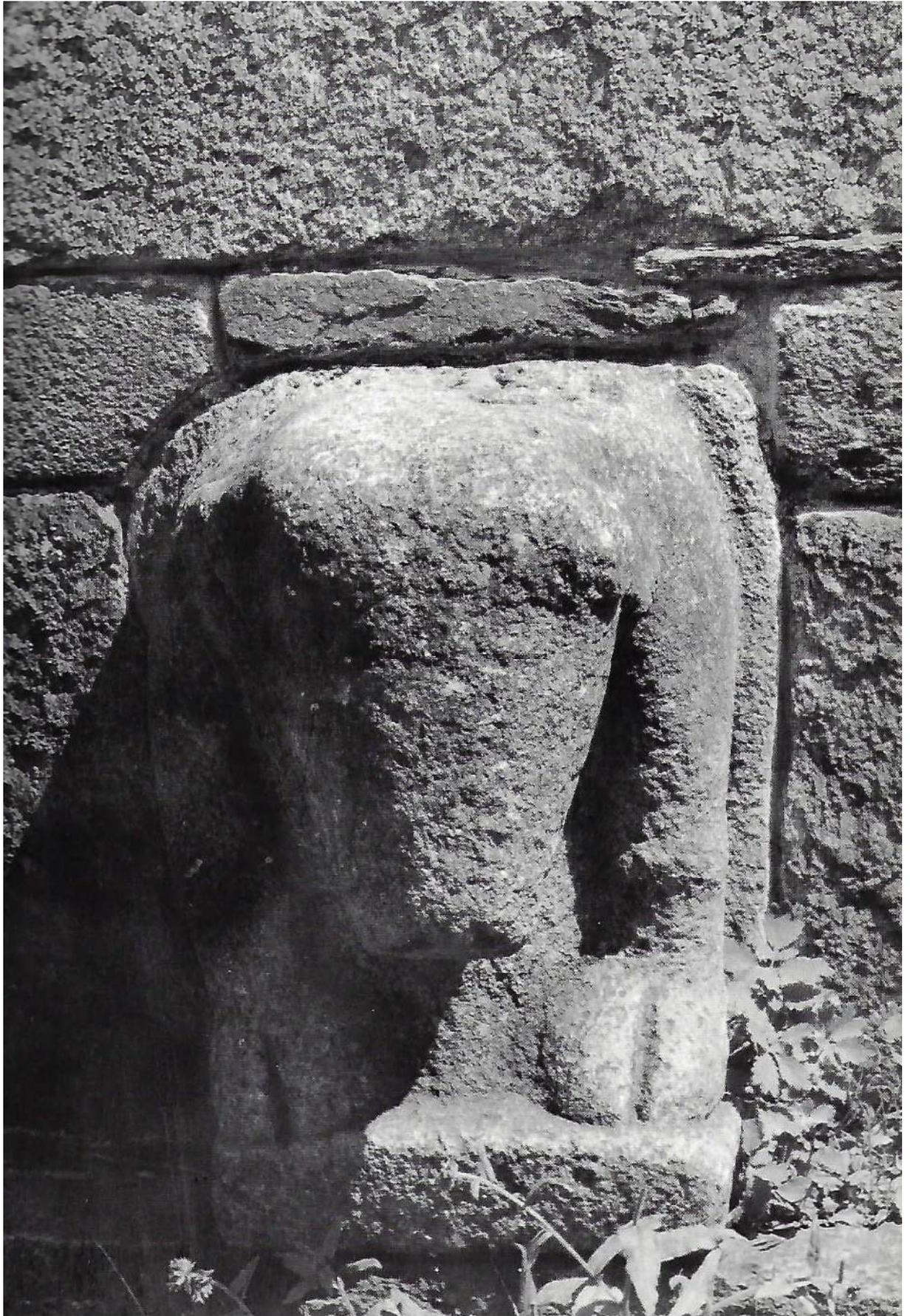
*"The interior of the church has a single nave leading to the presbytery located in a somewhat elevated position, which is accessed by means of two flights of steps. The presbytery hall is square in shape and ends with a semicircular apse that takes light from two single-lancet windows.*

*Below the presbytery the elegant crypt is immediately visible (given a rather unusual architectural solution in Romanesque churches); it is accessed by descending a few steps. It is divided into three small naves by eight columns with richly carved capitals, all different*

*from each other, which re-propose, in the variety of plant, geometric and zoomorphic motifs, the suggestion of medieval symbolism." (Wikipedia)*







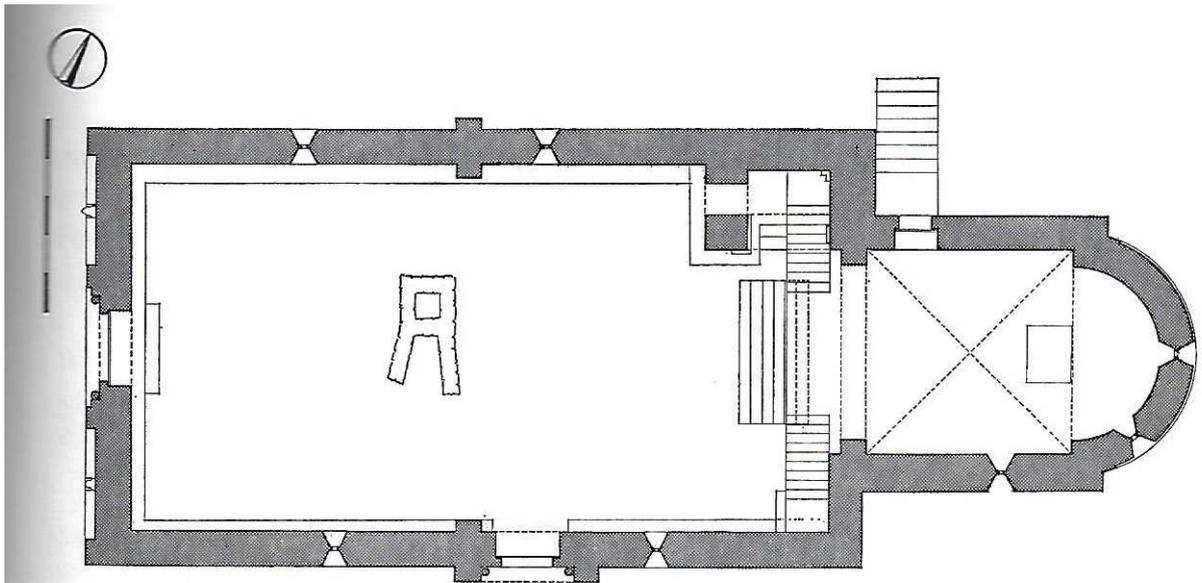


Fig. 17  
Giornico, *San Nicola*. Al centro i resti sotterranei della presunta «memoria».



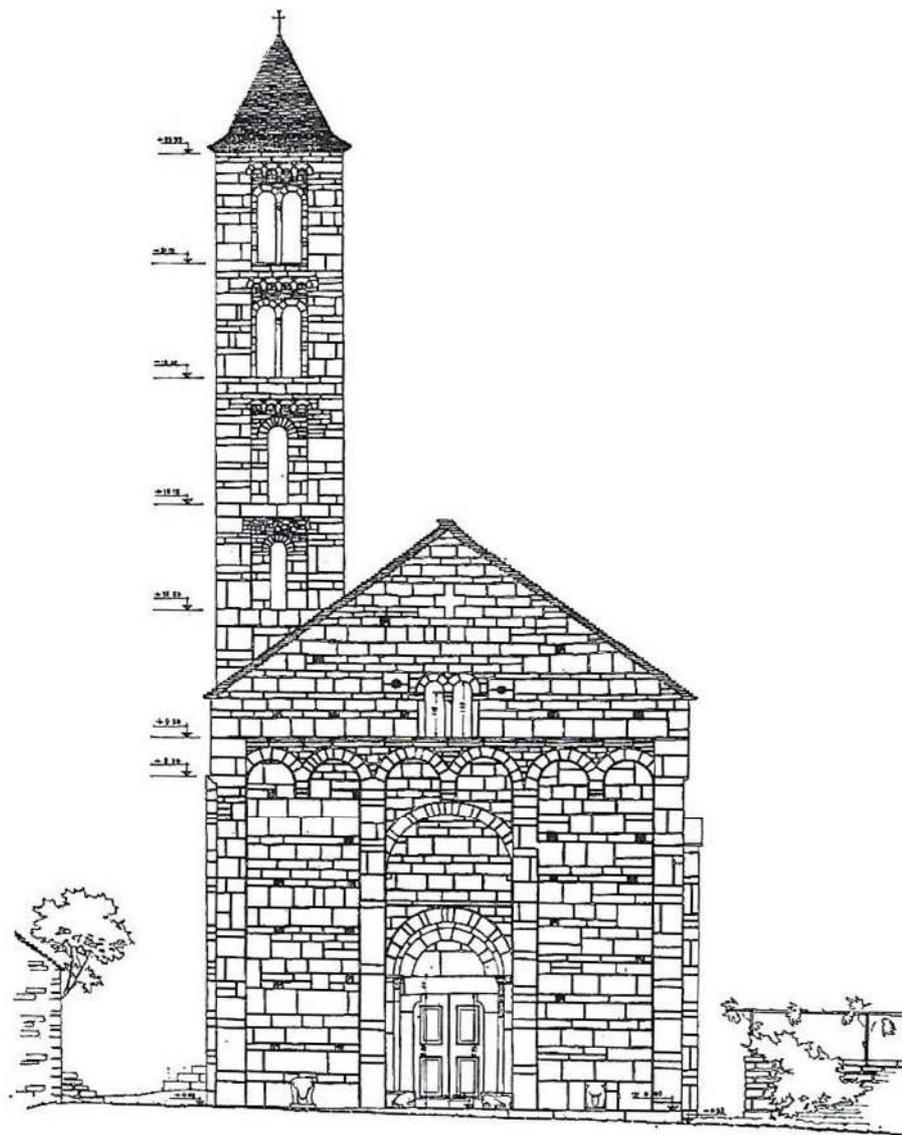


Fig. 20  
Giornico. *San Nicola*. Fronte occidentale.

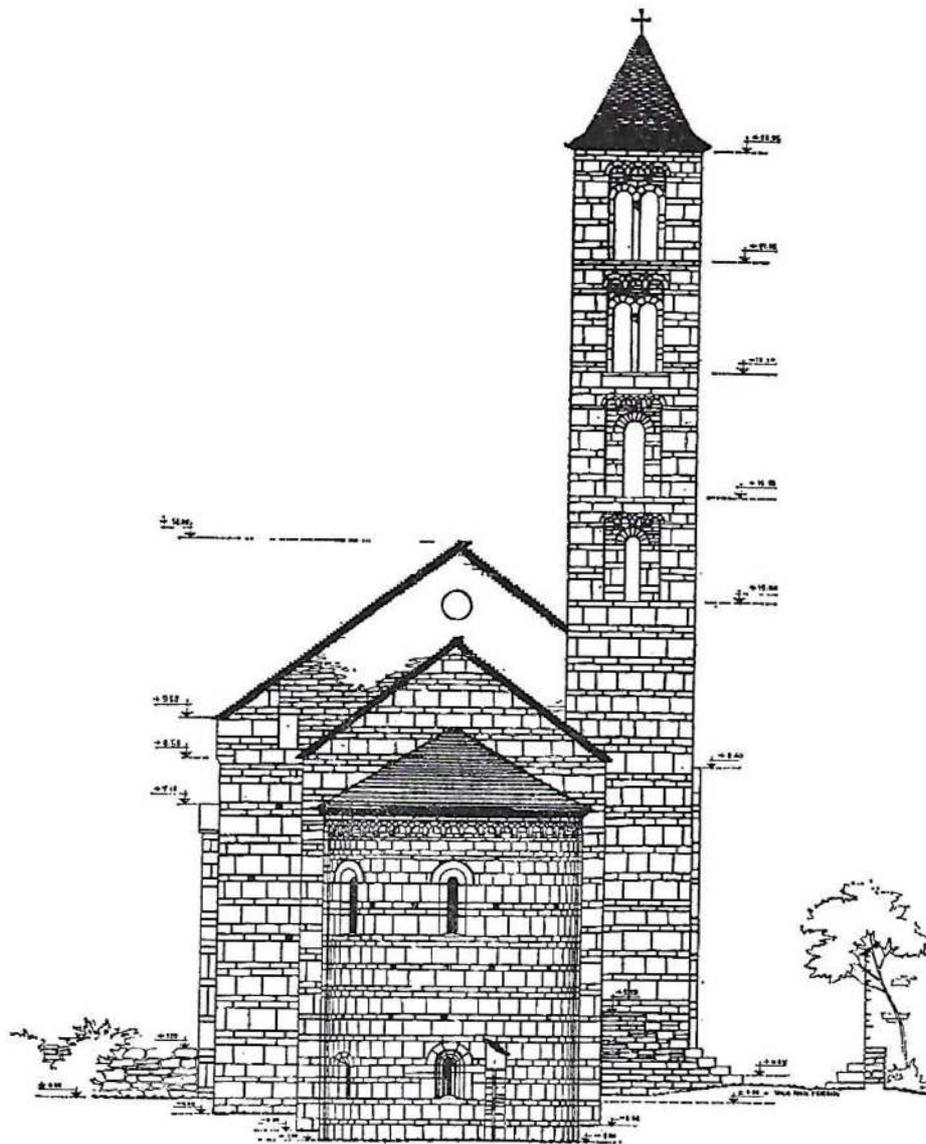


Fig. 22  
Giornico. *San Nicola*. Fronte orientale.

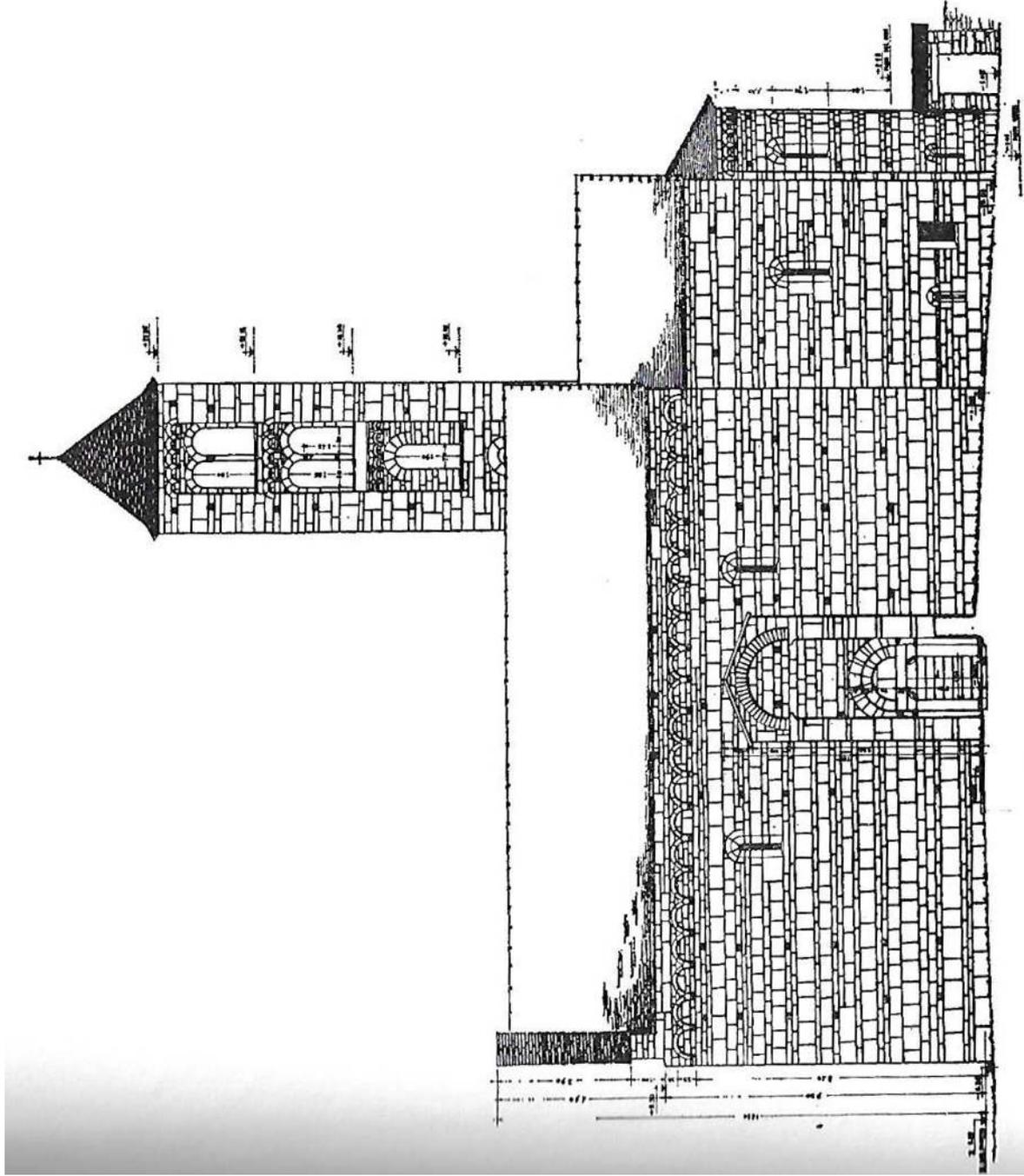


Fig. 23  
Giormico. *San Nicola*. Fianco meridionale.



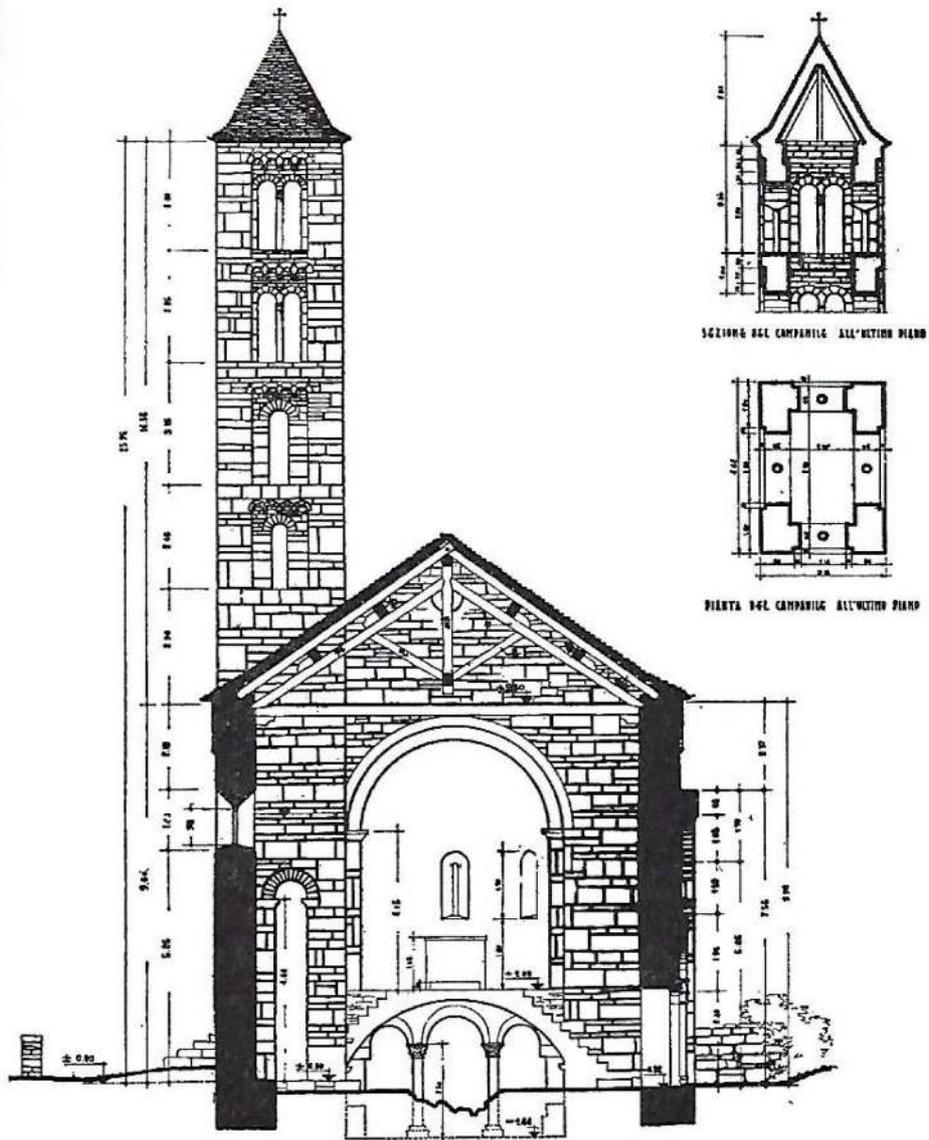


Fig. 21  
Giornico. *San Nicola*. Spaccato e sezione del campanile.

## **SS Pietro e Paolo**

### **Biasca**

*"Aviasca" clergy are mentioned in a codex of Pfäfers Abbey around 830. The existence of a chapter and a provost is documented in the 12th century. The present church dates back to 1171 and was internally rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries, which led to changes in the floor level, columns, windows and roofs. The architect Alberto Camenzind restored the building in Romanesque style between 1955 and 1967, eliminating the ossuary and the sacristy in the north.*

*Perhaps born as a baptistery since the 9th century, it was rebuilt between the 12th and 13th centuries as a church with three naves. It was rebuilt towards the middle of the 17th century, when the floor was raised in stone slabs, the access steps and the construction of the vault in the nave. A later modification led to the construction of the porch on the facade. However, the various changes (also thanks to the above-mentioned restorations) have not affected the stylistic uniformity.*

*The hall with three naves, of which the central one is slightly higher (pseudo-basilica), ends with a semicircular apse. The highly elevated choir rests directly on the rock below, while the western part is built on a prepared base. The front part of the building is characterized by the wall, aligned in irregular ashlar that stand out from those of the apse and were cut with great care in the initial phase of construction. The architectural evaluation of the external walls is also not uniform; in the apse and on the south side: pilasters and frieze of hanging arches; on the facade and on the north side: large blind arches with archaic taste; in the tympanum of the facade, as well as a two-light window, five blind arches and a cruciform opening. Only some single lancet windows on the north side are original, while the others are the result of reconstruction instead of Baroque windows.*

*In the southeast corner stands the imposing four-story bell tower, punctuated by pilasters and arches, with mullioned and triple-light windows on the top floor and a high pavilion roof accessed by a 12th-century unbridled arched staircase. The façade is preceded by a two-tiered staircase built in 1685; the prothyrum dates from 1732. Externally, the church, with its stone wall, shows a sober elegance and testifies to a rather refined building technique (the use of stone ashlar in the realization of the decorative parts is particularly clever). The gigantic San Cristoforo on the façade, now almost illegible, can be dated to the 13th century.*

*The internal decoration*

*Inside the church, the slope of the stone pavement is noticeable, since the base that supports the building does not fully compensate for the natural difference in height of the granite slope on which it was built. The three naves with six bays are characterized by pairs of columns; the fourth pair, suppressed in the 17th century, was rebuilt during the restoration. With a few steps you can overcome the unevenness of the granite slab floor that rises on several levels. In the presbytery and on the two side walls in the sixth span: ribbed cross vaults on consoles. The apse has a domed vault. The wooden coffered ceiling of the three naves is modern and was designed during the restoration by the painter Pietro Salati (1920-1975). For typology and colors it is inspired by the original from 1380-1420, of which some fragments were found during the demolition of the lateral barrel vaults and the crosses of the central nave of the Baroque.*

*In the church we find fresco cycles of considerable historical and artistic interest. The oldest ones, placed in the sails of the cross vaults facing the transept, date back to the 13th century: Their overall view with the decorations is particularly suggestive. The meaning proposed for the frescoes would be the allegorical representation of the various moments in the life of man.*

*These grisaille figures on the vaults above the presbytery and the north side compartment have late Romanesque features on checkerboard, lozenge or striped background. Primitive representations, possibly derived from early Christian models (miniatures), are distinguished: the horse and the wolf as symbols of victory and temptations of earthly life; the blacksmith and the rooster as allegories of the otherworldly; finally, to signify immortality, the lion fights the snake and the peacock. Another interpretative hypothesis associates them with the ancient symbols of civil and criminal justice of the city of Milan. The Last Supper, San Cristoforo and San Pietro date from the Gothic period of the late 14th century. Most of the frescoes were painted in the decades around 1500: Cristoforo da Seregno's school of painting can be recognized by the characteristic fretwork; The two crucifixions and the different figures of the saints denote a more popular style. The frescoes in the apse and in the presbytery are the work of the school of Antonio da Tradate (who held a workshop in Locarno), especially the Christ in Majesty and the two scenes from the Acts of the Apostles, which are iconographically very good. The paintings on the triumphal arch and on the two lateral arches show the style of Giovanni Battista Tarilli (1549 - after 1614) of Cureglia or his workshop from the end of the 16th century, as well as the figures of the Apostles on both columns in front of the presbytery. The stories from the life of San Carlo Borromeo, painted by Alessandro Gorla (1560-1630) around 1620, deserve special attention: The representation of the closing ceremony of the Council of Trent in the presence of the saint is surrounded by panels of different sizes, further commented by inscriptions and with scenes from the youth, work and death of the Milanese cardinal. In the church there are Romanesque sculptural fragments, possibly belonging to an earlier worship building: a male frontal figure, two fantastic animals and a column crowned by a pine cone, possibly a fragment of a chair or pluteus; A capital with two angular heads, perhaps from the 11th century, restored as a holy water group next to the south portal. Above the west portal is the Baroque choir loft with rustic paintings from 1726, reduced during the restoration only to the central part. The other holy water group is dated 1526. In the wall of the right aisle opens the polygonal Pellanda Chapel, whose inaugural stone dates back to 1600, at the request of the knight Giovanni Battista Pellanda di Biasca. Above the entrance: family coat of arms and two allegorical stucco statues; on the vault and walls: Late Renaissance stucco with painted angels and Marian symbols; large oil paintings on canvas by Camillo Procaccini depicting San Domenico di Guzmán in the presence of the Madonna, the Madonna of the Rosary and the Mass of San Carlo Borromeo from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 17th century."*

*([www.parrocchiabiasca.jimdofree.com/chiese/ss-pietro-e-paolo/](http://www.parrocchiabiasca.jimdofree.com/chiese/ss-pietro-e-paolo/))*

Le voyageur qui descend en train ou en voiture du St-Gothard vers le Sud à travers la Vallée de la Léventine, voit en cours de route, à partir des beaux clochers de Quinto et de Prato, toute une série de monuments romans. Après avoir salué en passant les sanctuaires de Giornico, S. Nicolao et S. Maria del Castello, il se trouve à Biasca en face de la première église de grande envergure: l'ancienne Collégiale des SS. Pierre et Paul. Blottie contre les flancs de la montagne et construite dans ses parties orientales directement sur le rocher, elle occupe une place dominante au-dessus du bourg. Comme beaucoup d'églises tessinoises du Moyen Age, elle a été découverte du point de vue scientifique par le professeur J.R. Rahn, qui en a donné en 1885 une description succincte; depuis lors, l'histoire de l'art s'en est occupée à plusieurs reprises, sans pourtant avoir résolu jusqu'à présent tous les problèmes qui s'y posent. L'église de Biasca, une pseudo-basilique à trois nefs sans transept, compte parmi les monuments d'architecture religieuse du Moyen Age les plus importants non seulement du Tessin, mais de notre pays tout entier.

Depuis quelque temps cependant, on jugeait la vénérable église trop éloignée du bourg. On construisit donc une église paroissiale nouvelle, plus rapprochée des paroissiens. Le vieil édifice se trouvait désormais à l'écart de la vie. De plus en plus abandonné, il tombait en désuétude, les services religieux se limitant à bien peu de choses. Pendant les travaux de restauration qui durèrent presque vingt ans, on a été obligé au surplus de le tenir fermé pour la plupart du temps. Inévitablement, il allait ainsi être oublié même des amateurs d'art et des spécialistes. Ceux qui l'ont connu encore dans son état un peu poussiéreux d'avant la restauration se souviendront sans doute de la discordance marquée entre l'extérieur et l'intérieur; celui-ci ne répondant pas à ce que celui-là avait promis, la plupart des visiteurs ressentaient en y entrant une légère déception.

En effet, l'histoire avait joué un mauvais tour à ce monument, notamment du fait des transformations radicales que le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle y avait réalisées. C'est alors qu'on avait supprimé la première des quatre paires de piliers, en partant de l'Est. Le plafond de bois du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle fut remplacé à la même occasion par une voûte en staff, et un décor classique en stuc masquait parois et piliers. Des peintures au goût de l'époque décoraient partiellement les surfaces. Autels, chaire, fonts baptismaux et tribune complétaient l'allure baroque de cet aménagement qui ne permettait plus guère de soupçonner, voire de reconnaître le caractère primitif de l'église.

12

Notre dessein était de rendre à celle-ci le plus possible sa dignité d'autrefois. Des sondages commencés en 1946 déjà sous la direction de l'architecte A. Camenzind ont prouvé l'existence d'importants restes de peintures murales du Moyen Age sous le badigeon baroque. On pouvait espérer les récupérer par une opération délicate de dégagement et de restauration. L'intention d'entreprendre une restauration totale du monument nous engagea cependant à une décision des plus importantes: après tout, étions-nous autorisés à sacrifier l'aspect baroque de l'intérieur? N'étions-nous pas moralement tenus de respecter la décoration baroque, vieille elle aussi de plus de deux siècles, puisque l'œuvre nous était parvenue ainsi?

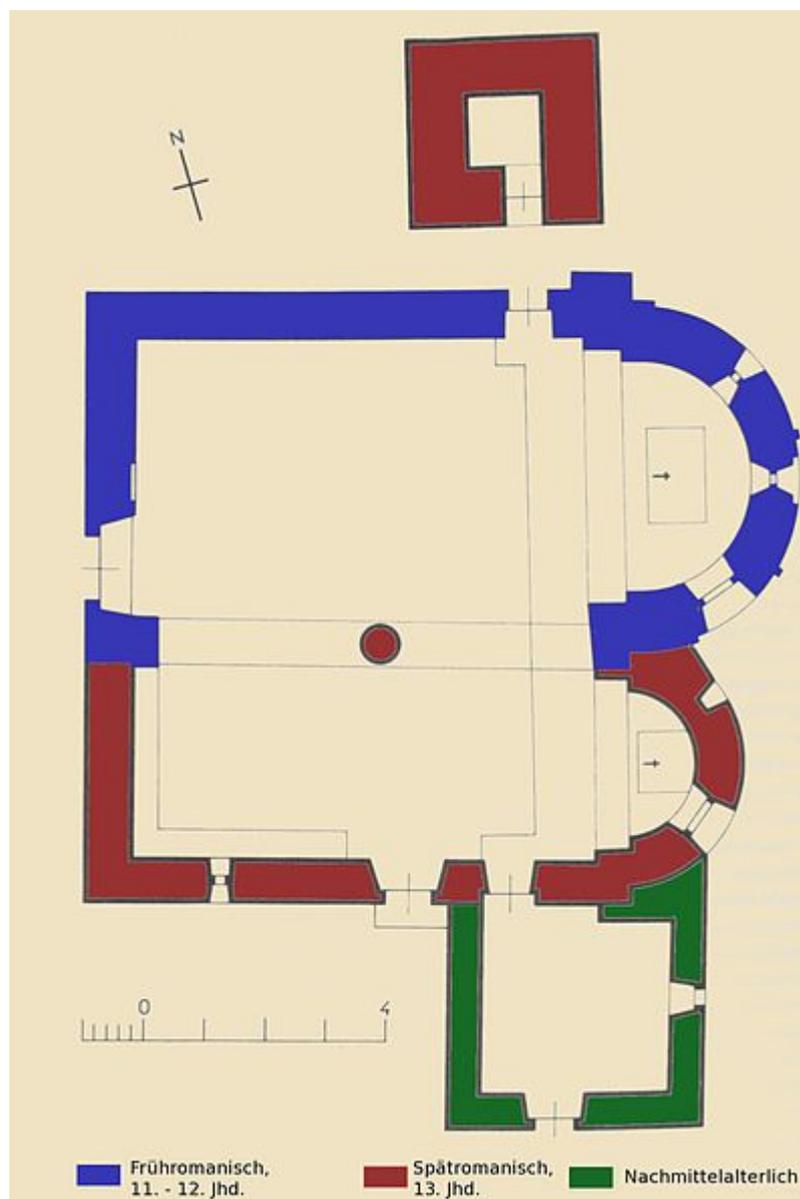
*(San Pietro di Biasca, verschiedene Autoren, Comitato restauri San Pietro di Biasca, Istituto grafico Casagrande, Bellinzona, 1967, Seiten 12 und 13)*



## San Carlo di Negrentino Leontica

Until 1610, the year of the canonization of Charles Borromeo, the church was dedicated to Ambrose of Milan. Until the beginning of the 18th century it was the parish church of Prugiasco.

The two-nave church with a double apse is first mentioned in writing in 1214, but it dates back to an earlier period. It was built in two stages. The original Romanesque apsidal hall from the 11th century was probably extended in the 13th century to the south by a similar but narrower room with a smaller apse. The earlier entrances in the north and west walls were replaced by a west and south portal in the new south section. At the same time, perhaps a little earlier, the campanile on the north side was built.





Oskar Boldre (1968) starts his music career very young as an autodidact. From 1985 he plays music as a guitarist and singer in progressive rock bands in the "cellars" of Milano (I). Later he plays Free Folk and Afro Jazz as singer-percussionist, bassist and composer. After a five-year stay in a mountain farm in Tuscany, where he discovers the power of the voice as an instrument and the polyrhythmn of the body, he devotes himself to the study and deepening of overtone singing with Bernard Jaeger (CH/D). In 1997, the Scuola di Musica Popolare in Forlimpopoli (I) commissions her to rearrange traditional Bulgarian songs for mixed voice octet. In addition to arrangements and transcriptions, Oskar Boldre sings tenor in the octet.

Also in 1997 he founded the polyphonic choir Goccia di Voci (with world music repertoire), which he has been directing ever since, as well as the vocal ensemble Ancore d'Aria (with a unique and novel offer in the European a capella scene). He has taught voice at the Scuola di Musica Popolare in Locarno and since 2000 he has taught vocal improvisation in Locarno, Lugano and since Solothurn.

As a vocal coach, actor and composer he has collaborated with various theaters. Since 2004, Oskar Boldre has been artistic director of the international festival Voci Audaci (CH). He is a member of the society OSA!

As a vocalist/voice artist he is involved in numerous collaborative projects: with Ivo Antognini's Jazz Band (CH), in Francesco Forges' voice project One More Language (I), and as a duo with vocalist Albert Hera (I), leader, arranger and singer in the voice-only project Nel Cuore delle Voce with Anna Oxa (I).

Since 2004 other solo productions, deepening the techniques of the voice as an instrument, as well as overtone singing, vocal percussion, inspired by the limitless offer of traditional musical cultures of the world: Voci come Occhi, a concert directed by Davide Fossati, is a vocal-theatrical experiment, performed in the framework of the festival "arcaico, semplicemente organico" (archaic, simply organic) in Cinisello Balsamo (I). A Swiss-Italian co-production: Teatro dei Fauni/Cooperativa Mosaico. Voce Danzante con Respiro, concerto for solo voice and live electronics, composed from improvisations and unique compositions following songs by C. Debussy, M. Ravel, B. Marcello.

"Vocalia" is one of its latest collaborations. The three singers he's singing with and who will transport us on this journey have been collaborating with him for many years. the repertoire offered will range from ancient compositions by Hildegard von Bingen to contemporary compositions of both sacred and pop music. Boldre himself will finally transport us to the world of diphonic singing, where the armonics of the human voice and golden section seam recognize themselves as part of the same family.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iypt8pGYvEI>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05My01xZHic>  
<http://www.oskarboldre.com/DEUTSCH/index.html>