



recitatives of the serenata are generally more florid and shapely than those found in a typical opera of the era. Six particularly affecting recitatives are set accompanied by strings.

Alessandro Quarta produced his own edition of the serenata for the Viennese performance. A modern edition of the serenata, along with an English translation of the text, by this writer can be found at <[www.ascarlatti2010.net/main\\_page/primavera](http://www.ascarlatti2010.net/main_page/primavera)>. It is based on the three earliest manuscript scores from Scarlatti's era in the Naples Conservatory Library. At the Viennese performance conducted by Quarta, timpani, not found in the early sources, were employed to spectacular effect at suitably glorious moments. The earliest scores of the serenata call for a *flauto*, usually thought to mean a recorder. At the recent Viennese performance a baroque transverse flute was heard instead, to stunning effect. Quarta deserves particular praise for his judicious tempos, suitably allegro to maintain the happy spirit of this festive serenata, but not so rushed as many young conductors today seem to think necessary.

Sadly it must be reported that the Archduke Leopold, celebrated at his birth by *La Gloria di Primavera*, lived only a few months. Had he lived, Europe might have been spared several wars the Habsburgs were required to fight in order to secure the imperial succession for his sister Maria Theresa. While Leopold is barely a footnote to history, and the Habsburg Empire is long gone, the enthusiasm of the Viennese audience for Scarlatti's music confirms the original order of the old adage *vita brevis ars lunga*.



doi:[10.1017/S1478570615000160](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1478570615000160)

ANTHONY HART writes:

Early-music performances were a rarity in Malta until a few years ago. Slowly, over the years, harpsichords started to appear in concerts and a retired doctor began to build clavichords. During a series of fundraising concerts for the restoration of one of Valletta's oldest churches, a male-voice choir was formed to sing renaissance polyphony. This fervent activity led a local artist, Kenneth Zammit Tabona, to dream of a baroque music festival in the island's capital, Valletta. January 2013 saw the first Valletta International Baroque Festival, with concerts held in several of Valletta's baroque edifices, including the magnificent Manoel Theatre (built in 1731 and one of the oldest working theatres in Europe) and the awe-inspiring St John's Co-Cathedral, the church of the Knights of Malta. The first year was a resounding success and augured well for the future, as was confirmed in the second year of the festival.

Many of the concerts during the third festival, held in January 2015, were fully booked well before the first note was sounded. The festival kicked off with a concert by the Nederlands Kammerkoor featuring Robert White's Lamentations. Zammit Tabona, artistic director of the festival, dedicated this concert to the victims of recent acts of terrorism, a fitting tribute. The tercentenary of the birth of Maltese composer Girolamo Abos (1715–1760) was celebrated with three concerts of his works, by the Passacaglia Ensemble, Die Kölner Akademie and the Valletta International Baroque Ensemble. Abos was born in Malta and went to Naples in 1725 to study at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù with Francesco Durante, Gaetano Greco and Gerolamo Ferrara. He started his career in Naples in 1742 with an opera buffa for the Teatro Nuovo, and from 1754 was a teacher at the Conservatorio Santa Maria della Pietà dei Turchini, where Paisiello was one of his students. He was well known in Europe, where he travelled frequently. In 1755 Abos joined the 'Congregazione dei musici di Napoli', and at that time also served as maestro di cappella at several of the city's churches, composing seven masses, several litanies and other sacred vocal works. He also wrote fourteen operas for Naples, Rome and London, of which *Tito Manlio* (Naples, 1751) was the most successful. During his stay in London in 1756–1758 he occupied the post of music director of the Italian Theatre, after which he returned to Naples. Abos never returned to his place of birth. Thanks to the efforts of local musicologists Frederick Aquilina, Joseph Vella Bondin and Joseph Vella, together with the Australian musicologist and conductor Richard Divall, much of Abos's music has been researched and edited.



The Valletta International Baroque Ensemble, consisting of Maltese musicians augmented by international performers who provide instruments and expertise not available on the islands, provides a platform for education and training of local performers. Their performance this year gave us the opportunity to hear three talented soloists in an outstanding performance of Abos's *Stabat mater*: the British soprano Mhairi Lawson, Maltese soprano Gillian Zammit and Maltese mezzo-soprano Claire Ghigo. The *Stabat mater* is one of Abos's longest sacred works, scored for three voices, strings and basso continuo. The music is remarkable for its melodic elegance, the equal prominence of the voices (often supported by two violins and cello) and a final 'Amen' fugue demonstrating Abos's talent as a contrapuntist. Die Kölner Akademie, in consultation with Aquilina, gave an outstanding performance of Abos's Magnificat edited from a manuscript preserved in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek of Vienna (Mus. Hs. 19084). This was followed by the *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel* (Commissione Arcivescovile di Santa Cecilia, Naples (catalogue number 17, supplement 1)) and finally a superb *Messa a due cori* (Conservatorio San Pietro a Majella, Naples (catalogue number 37.7.50)).

The festival also gave audiences an opportunity to hear instruments not played in Malta since the eighteenth century, namely the theorbo, sackbut and cornet. Continuing this introduction to early instruments, Sigiswald Kuijken performed the six Bach cello suites on the violoncello da spalla. On the other hand, the young and talented Maltese pianist Joanne Camilleri provided a refreshing new perspective on Bach's Goldberg Variations, which was exquisitely played. The keynote concert was a wonderful performance of Bach's *St John Passion* by the Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment with the Joyful Company of Singers in the magnificent setting of St John's Co-Cathedral. As with previous festivals, special programmes were devised to familiarize young people with the music and instruments of the period. Inspiring baroque music in equally inspiring baroque settings has now become the hallmark of a festival that is truly international, as witnessed both by the performers and the many tourist groups present at the venues.



doi:10.1017/S1478570615000172

## CONFERENCES

COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL ET INTERDISCIPLINAIRE: RAMEAU, ENTRE ART ET SCIENCE  
 INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE SUR LE PATRIMOINE MUSICAL EN FRANCE, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE  
 FRANCE, FONDATION ROYAUMONT AND OPÉRA-COMIQUE, PARIS, 20–22 MARCH 2014

People heard the surname Rameau with some frequency in 2014, which marked the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the death of the composer and theorist Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764). In classrooms and on radio broadcasts, a circumscribed set of associations comes to mind with each utterance of the name. Musicologists think of Rameau's discourses on triadic harmony and his theory of the fundamental bass (*basse fondamentale*). Keyboardists think of music composed by a literate organist and violinist from Dijon. Singers and dancers might also think of the many forays into choral music, ballet and opera that cemented Rameau's rise to artistic prominence during the French Enlightenment.

Yet Rameau – were he alive to say so – would surely remind us that the cement of his popular favour took a long time to dry. Its wetness haunted him into the middle decades of the eighteenth century, when Parisian commentators cobbled together chronicles of baroque music that stressed Rameau's complicated harmonies and his even more complex personal – and musical – politics. We write similar accounts even now. Ours concern fights among French moral philosophers, histories of Italian impresarios and new tales of opera gone wrong, all somewhere along the peripheries of Aristotelian *ratio* and Enlightenment reason. Today,