

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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ELLEN T. HARRIS

HANDEL AS ORPHEUS: VOICE AND DESIRE IN THE CHAMBER CANTATAS

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pp. xi + 430, ISBN 0 674 00617 8

Contrary to rumours that circulated in advance of this book's publication, *Handel as Orpheus* is not a monograph 'about' Handel's sexuality. Nor is it an analytical study of a genre, although this was apparently Harris's original intention. Instead, it addresses the social, political, literary and musical environment in which Handel, his collaborators and his patrons lived and worked. This book is partly about layers of responses – the response of the cantatas' creators to their milieu, the particular response of Handel to the texts and the potential responses of certain members of the audience to the works themselves. Harris uses her considerable knowledge of source studies to advantage here (see especially Appendix One, which analyses source-based evidence to establish a chronology of the cantatas). She also builds on her previous work on the pastoral (*Handel and the Pastoral Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1980)). Once again, she shows her aptitude for engaging with both issues and sources using her informed and imaginative interpretative skills.

Harris acknowledges the 'hazards' of writing a contextual history, stating firmly that her readings do not reveal Handel's intentions. She feels that 'interpretations still exist within a range of validity and need to be grounded in the work of art itself' (21). This work needs to be read in the context of its author's stated aim, which was not to

'out' Handel but rather to broaden the interpretation of the cantata texts and music by placing them in the social context of the period . . . The absence of a definitive statement concerning Handel's life is deliberate . . . Nevertheless, the evidence presented by the cantatas does indicate an important role for same-sex love both in Handel's social context and in his music. [22]

She chooses her words with precision, adopting the modern term 'homosexual' only after taking care to modify our perception of it, since this concept did not exist in the eighteenth century.

Harris's approach to creating history is revealed in part by the themes she pursues. 'Code Names and Assumed Identities' (Chapter One) considers the role of these phenomena among the group of Italian noblemen and cardinals for whom Handel worked in the early part of his career (1706–1710). For such an educated society literary codes were particularly meaningful, though a single name could convey multiple associations. Handel's appellation of 'Orpheus' connected him with a character depicted both as an acclaimed musician and as a 'homosexual' in the literary sources. Harris argues that Cardinal Pamphili's Orphic cantata *Handel non può mia musa* (Rome, ?1707) was strongly reminiscent of Orpheus's sexual preferences in the sense that there is a significant amount of specifically homoerotic innuendo in the text.



(A secondary source on metaphor in fifteenth- to seventeenth-century Italian texts supports this interpretation.) She detects a possible musical response to this innuendo in a progression from syncopation to a smoother rhythmic movement in Handel's score.

Chapter Two considers the different musical responses to women's and men's characters in the cantatas. The texts for women either are highly emotive or present women as a danger to men, while the male characters speak of love in a more measured, or even veiled, manner. The music for the males is consequently more structured, while the females present harmonically colourful and rhythmically unstable fare. Indeed, Harris argues that Handel formulated his expressive voice as a composer through these musical portrayals of abandoned women. The issue of 'voice' is clouded by the significant percentage of cantatas where neither the singer nor the beloved object is identified by gender, and by a performance practice that saw men and women singing roles in the same vocal registers.

Chapter Three considers cantatas from the pastoral literary tradition, where same-sex attractions played a fairly prominent role. Handel responds to the controlled artifice of these texts with 'greater surface control and formal regularity' (108). Harris plausibly argues that the artificial tone and deliberate blurring of gender identities in the pastoral literary tradition rendered it highly suitable for expressions of same-sex love, which, in the context of social mores of the time, had to remain concealed. In spite of this need for discretion, many of Handel's patrons from his Italian years were associated with same-sex relationships. His self-borrowings suggest the gendered flexibility of much of this pastoral music. Handel is careful, however, to re-assign the more erratic expostulations of his abandoned women to female characters in similar dramatic contexts. 'Cantata Couples and Love Triangles' (Chapter Four) returns to this concept of deliberately unstable music; Harris concludes that Polyphemus (*Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, Naples, 1708), by losing control of his music, subsequently loses his voice and consequently does not win the love of the nymph Galatea.

'Silence and Secrecy' (Chapter Five) considers the cantatas of Handel's early London years (1710–1722). Harris supports her claim that this was a period when silence was explored in literature with examples from Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1749) as well as excerpts from reports in the press on trials of sodomites. Silence and discretion were important in the fraught political environment surrounding the Hanoverian succession. In this context, Harris's assertion that the sexually rapacious tyrant in Handel's *Silla* (1713) was an allegorical representation of George I is difficult to accept – surely a 'savvy political opportunist' such as Handel (188) would not have associated himself with a deliberately insulting portrait of the monarch? *Silla* has no redeeming features, either as a person or as a ruler. Although Robert Hume has argued that intentional authorial allegory was generally impolitic and therefore unlikely, it is entirely possible that the audience may have chosen to apply meanings relating to their immediate context. (See Hume's article 'The Politics of Opera in Late Seventeenth-Century London', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10/1 (1998), 15–43.) But Harris's observations concerning musical silence are also compelling: she detects a notably increased use of 'disruptive' silence in Handel's London cantatas, a development later echoed in the acting style of David Garrick, who was renowned for expressive pauses that distorted the grammatical sense of the text. A generous provision of music examples clearly illustrates the different functions of musical silence, distinguishing its structural and expressive uses: musical fragmentation depicts extreme emotion.

Chapter Six considers the 'Culmination of the Private', namely Handel's later vocal works written for private patrons. *Esther* and *Acis and Galatea* were written for the Duke of Chandos in 1718. Harris reveals links between these works and specific writings by Alexander Pope, while also demonstrating the plausible involvement of John Hughes in the writing of *Acis*. An interpretation of *Esther* as representing the Jacobite cause is suggested by the known political convictions of three of Handel's collaborators (John Gay, John Arbuthnot and Pope) and the suspected allegiance of Handel's patrons at this time. Harris's attempt to establish *Esther* as a homosexual allegory is less compelling. Notwithstanding contemporaneous considerations such as the 'likely homoeroticism of the artistic circle and the strong prohibitions that existed against urging tolerance for same-sex acts' (231), the introduction of Marcel Proust's interpretation of this story in support adds an anachronistic element. While considering the multiple interpretations that could be applied to *Acis and Galatea*, the reader is expected to consider Polyphemus as: a homosexual, a vengeful woman in



drag and a satirical metaphor for Ambrose Philips, a contemporaneous writer who eschewed the classical tradition of the pastoral. Although intriguing arguments are offered in support of each of these interpretations, the reader is required to cover a lot of conceptual ground.

The Epilogue considers 'True Representations' of Handel in the 1740s. Joseph Goupy's well known caricature of Handel and its later variants are analysed in an emblematic fashion after Harris demonstrates that Handel's contemporaries would have approached these images in this manner. A combination of emblems suggesting traits associated with same-sex desires (Harris's research here has encompassed eighteenth-century and modern sources) suggests that Goupy (who knew Handel well) was attempting to project an image that could prove damaging to his former friend. The frequent metaphorical references to Handel as Orpheus *after* he has rejected women, as well as to his female 'opponents' as Thracian women in the period between 1739 and 1745, suggest that Handel's personal reputation was tainted in some quarters.

It is impossible to do justice to a rich contextual history in such a short review – Harris's engaging discussion of Handel's music is under-represented here. Moreover, the intricate research required to establish each interpretative point can be presented in a review only in highly condensed form; this necessary process can sometimes obscure the force of an argument. This observation is not a general criticism of the way in which this book is written, for it is carefully shaped, well researched, highly stimulating and utterly original. The transparency of Harris's reasoning may permit the reader to disagree with her on occasion, but her approach and style are just as likely to inspire further scholarly activity along similar lines.

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SIMON P. KEEFE, ED.

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO MOZART

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In 1956 Donald Mitchell and H. C. Robbins Landon edited a volume of bicentennial essays on Mozart (*The Mozart Companion*) that was to serve Mozart scholarship well for over a generation. With unashamedly formalist bias it argued the case for Mozart's pre-eminence from within the scores themselves, interpreting the composer's music in relation to what were then current agendas. Such agendas change with time, and whereas virtually the entire *Mozart Companion* was devoted to the music, categorized by genre, the latest of the Cambridge Companions devotes much of its space to contextual placement of Mozart's output. It aims to paint 'a rounded yet focused picture of one of the most revered artists of all time . . . [bridging] the gap between scholarly and popular images of the composer'. This it certainly does, and the editor, Simon P. Keefe, is to be congratulated for bringing together a team of scholars whose efforts constitute the most comprehensive recent account of the composer. Keefe has divided the Cambridge volume into four sections addressing, respectively, 'Mozart in Context', 'The Works', 'Reception' and 'Performance'. Many readers who bring little prior knowledge to the subject, but who wish to enhance their appreciation of Mozart's work, will find the chapters on the works themselves (Part Two of the volume) rewarding and absorbing. Recent research on the concertos (including work by Keefe himself) and the operas is summarized effectively here and is expressed in a tone that draws the reader into the process of discovery step by step. By the end of the journey through the keyboard music, concertos, orchestral works, chamber music, and vocal and operatic output, the non-specialist reader will feel a part of that process of discovery and will know Mozart afresh. Devotees of the composer will perhaps already know much of the background



literature that is detailed in the footnotes and bibliographies, but will find much by way of refreshing interpretive comment to retain their interest.

Keeping abreast of the burgeoning Mozart literature is an impossible task at the best of times, and this volume serves both as a timely reminder of the problem and as a reliable and up-to-date guide that navigates debates old and new with clarity and authority. Time and again, I was impressed by the sensitive ‘bridging of the gap between scholarly and popular images’ highlighted on the dust jacket. For instance, the opening of Cliff Eisen’s chapter on the chamber music quotes at length the comment by ‘Salieri’ on the slow movement of the B flat Partita, K361, in Act 1 Scene 5 of Peter Schaffer’s play *Amadeus* (1980), memorably describing the chugging accompanimental figures as ‘like a rusty squeezebox’ (105). Deftly, Eisen uses the reference to open up an interesting discussion of the meaning of ‘chamber music’ prior to the nineteenth century. Further paths through the labyrinth of Mozartean criticism (stretching from Jahn to Keller) are offered later in the chapter. These include a fascinating glance at a *topos* that excuses Mozart’s later chamber works – the Prussian quartets and the quintets, primarily – on the grounds of his supposed illness. While the sophistication of Eisen’s deployment of the literature is not paralleled in all chapters of the *Companion*, the quality is uniformly high and the summary picture gained from reading this central section of the book well repays the effort.

Parts One, Three and Four provide a context for understanding the scores themselves. Eisen contributes the opening chapter on Mozart in Salzburg, which offers a brilliantly drawn sketch of the complex network of musical life in the city of Mozart’s birth, displaying an enviable command of the wide range of archival material deployed to good effect and pointing up some revealing insights. For instance, it appears that symphonic music and serenades by Mozart were regularly performed at the University of Salzburg, a fact that Eisen suggests was intended as a deliberate provocation to Mozart’s ‘official’ employers, the prince-archbishops. Indeed, Colloredo’s unbendingly critical attitude towards the young composer may have been formed in the face of this provocation: the fact that most of Mozart’s chamber works from the Salzburg years were not premiered at court, but in the university, could have been interpreted as a snub.

Dorothea Link continues the story of Mozart’s career with a vivid chapter on Mozart in Vienna, covering his freelance existence in the capital and the colourful characters involved directly or indirectly with his rise and fall. Despite such setbacks as a lawsuit lost against Prince Lichnowsky in 1791, Link regards Mozart’s freelance years as, broadly speaking, a success. Her chapter is a little more predictably organized than Eisen’s, falling into neat categories, possibly in order to emphasize the sheer variety of milieus in which the composer lived and worked. Recent work by Morrow and Halliwell is put to good use here. Among the minutiae that are laid out for consideration is a step-by-step pursuit of the declining price of the set of three ‘subscription concertos’, K413, 414 and 415 (1782–1783). Link concludes that the original offer price was too high. Fair enough; yet I wished for more from this line of enquiry. What does the original asking price tell us of the composer’s own estimation of these pieces? And what of the tension between that apparent artistic self-esteem and the crude commercial reality that forced Mozart to part with the concertos at approximately a seventy per cent discount? Maybe this is the subject of a penetrating article in the scholarly literature, rather than a subject for investigation in this particular volume, but nevertheless it is a question that I wish had not been dodged.

Ian Woodfield ventures into the fascinating but dangerous territory of Mozart’s compositional methods, in particular the lessons to be learned from studying the autograph material of the operas. Anyone who has studied the autographs at first hand will appreciate the temptations to draw snap conclusions from these amazing documents. (I know I do, and perhaps I have succumbed to some of them.) Woodfield will live to regret his judgments far less than most of us who have tried to recover the archaeology of these scores. His measured treatment identifies in turn several types of enquiry that may be applied for the purpose of distinguishing particellas (which Mozart would have reused as fleshed-out skeletons) from fair copies of finished arias. En route Woodfield includes some illuminating insights into the detailed process of consultation between the composer and the particular singers for whom he was writing, including painstaking and utterly convincing forensic musical commentary on revisions to climactic points in solo arias (see Plate 2,



page 43). In relation to Examples 3.1 and 3.2 (40–41), I am a little less convinced by Woodfield's approach. The methodology requires him to impute deficiencies retrospectively to what Mozart originally wrote, seeking a reason for its alteration in terms of *improvement* of the (perfectly acceptable) original. Different does not necessarily have to be better. Still, this is a chapter that shines a searchlight into areas of Mozart's compositional process not hitherto revealed, and for that (as well as for its quality) scholars owe Woodfield a debt of gratitude. This is a chapter to be savoured.

David Schroeder's chapter on Mozart and late eighteenth-century aesthetics highlights the need for a reassessment of Mozart as a composer interested in aesthetic debate. Nevertheless, it is curious that there is no reference here to Nicholas Till's 1992 book on *Mozart and the Enlightenment*, especially the critical role of Leopold Mozart in fashioning his son's intellectual curiosity. Schroeder is right to be suspicious of the reliability of Mozart's letters as a source of his views. The problem is that Schroeder then goes on to use the letters exactly for the purpose of portraying Mozart as a dissimulator of the first order. If you cannot trust the documents, why rely on them? If they are so duplicitous, you can read into them anything you like, thus undermining everything – including the view that Mozart was passionate about contemporary aesthetics. Schroeder does provide a good factual account, however, of the *personalia* who affected (or who were at least in a position to affect) Mozart's aesthetic development. There are a few inconsistencies in the chapter. Voltaire is variously vilified by Leopold (51) and held up to Wolfgang as a model to imitate (54). You cannot have it both ways. Towards the close there is a good point on the refocusing of the older view that music's function was moral persuasion (57). It might have been worth going further to pursue this point specifically in relation to Mozart's music, rather than leaving a potentially fruitful observation in the abstract.

The third section of Keefe's book turns to reception. John Daverio's chapter on Mozart in the nineteenth century, Jan Smaczny's on Mozart in the twentieth and William Stafford's on the evolution of Mozartean biography all display in their different ways a combination of scholarship firmly grounded in contemporary sources and imagination in its application. Daverio's is a masterly account offering an enviable blend of fascinating detail and command of the broader spectrum, displaying insight into shifting portrayals of the composer and acute sensitivity to detail: for instance, the likely role of Albert von Mölk in creating the much-reproduced myth of Mozart the eternal child and the fact that Mozart's most famous Italian operas were often presented for nineteenth-century audiences in German translations and typically in altered versions. One important observation is that Rochlitz's revision of *Don Giovanni* (as *Don Juan* in 1801) effectively turns it into a tragedy rather than a comic opera, a surprisingly early watershed in the business of 'Mozart appropriation' that has characterized the reception of his works since his death. Daverio's account of the shifting aesthetic filters through which Mozart and his music were successively rendered is basically a Hegelian voyage away from the 'characteristic' or 'sublime' of Schlegel (c1800) towards the 'timeless' and 'universal' (c1850), in which, according to Franz Brendel's *Geschichte der Musik in Italien* (1852), Mozart's universal genius was in his unique ability to draw diverse expressive threads together in an organic whole. The chapter's final section includes several anecdotal reflections on Mozart by later nineteenth-century composers (in particular Brahms and Wagner) in which Mozart tantalizingly assumes a historiographical position akin to that most often associated with Beethoven in relation to the stylistic and ideological development of nineteenth-century music (181–182). Daverio points to several instances in which Brahms was influenced by Mozartean innovations in sonata-rondo form, while Wagner may have been influenced in his leitmotiv technique by Mozart's planning of operatic ensembles. That Mozart could plausibly be cited as an alternative to Beethoven as a progenitor for the nineteenth century is another instance of 'Mozart appropriation' (Mozart as organicist metaphor on this occasion). Daverio's chapter, ostensibly on Mozart reception, ends up by touching on new perspectives for the reception of Schumann, Berlioz, Brahms, Wagner, Tchaikovsky, Strauss and Schoenberg. This immensely rewarding account is one of the highlights of the volume and repays rereading.

Jan Smaczny marshals a wide range of evidence on the course of Mozart reception during the last century, beginning with a review of observations on Mozart's character drawn from novels, biography and criticism that seek to portray the composer as the eternal child. He even manages to include in his engaging account



Sacheverell Sitwell's preposterous, utterly speculative and baseless biographical observations on Mozart's character extrapolated from an interpretation of the Lange portrait. Smaczny explores at some length the tendency to 'psychologize' the composer in the twentieth century as a mirror of our own contemporary concerns and preferences. In writing Mozart for the twentieth century, we are writing ourselves. Interestingly, Smaczny's chapter points to a division between the stable account of popular myth and the Mozart of musicology, who vacillates between a classical antidote to Wagnerian progress (or excess) and various other guises emerging from the Köchel catalogue, the letters, periodical literature such as the *Mozart Jahrbuch*, *Acta Mozartiana*, the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe* and institutions such as the Stiftung Mozarteum, Salzburg. (Others might have been invoked: for instance, the Mozart of analytical methodology and the Mozart of Till's *Mozart and the Enlightenment*.) What is intriguing is the occasional merging of the alternative Mozarts portrayed in popular myth and scholarship. In one fascinating glimpse we are treated to a rare moment when even Hans Keller blinks (186), quitting the organicist persona for a rare foray into the realm of metaphor. Smaczny's section on Mozart and musicology in the twentieth century is a handy summary of key events in Mozart scholarship in the last hundred years, as indeed is the following section on Mozart and the performer, in detailing recent trends in approaching Mozart's scores 'authentically'. Smaczny's is a virtuoso performance, displaying a breadth of knowledge extending at times beyond the strictly documentary, as in his exemplary discourse upon *echte* Mozartkugeln '[erupting] onto the shelves of delicatessens and duty-free shops the world over, reminding those with a sweet tooth that the Salzburg genius could provide physical as well as spiritual nourishment' (197).

William Stafford is well known for his measured account *Mozart's Death* (1991). In this chapter he examines Mozartean biography, interlocking historical chronicles and interpretive patterns. Among several recent accounts of Mozart's life and work to which Stafford refers, it is good to see Konrad Küster's writings attracting the critical comment they richly deserve. Stafford is keen to point out that the task of biography in any period is 'a construction of Mozart and his life in accordance with preconceived ideas' (208). This is true of any new biography, which, Stafford suggests, will have to be 'reflexive . . . to recognize in self-conscious fashion the biographical tradition and its legacy of narrative frameworks that have shaped the way we view the composer' (210–211). It may well be that such a biography will leave behind a deconstructive trace, although it is unlikely to be a biography that simply deconstructs the notion that there is a type of writing that separates 'echt' biographical scholarship from popular myth. Rather, it will also deconstruct the notion of an author, and of a reader as well. I would confidently predict that Mozart will survive the experience.

And so, finally, to performance, the topic of Part Four. This comprises two chapters, by Katalin Komlós on Mozart the performer and Robert Levin on performance practice in Mozart's music. Komlós starts by stressing the eighteenth-century understanding of a performer as someone of exceptional musical abilities, fitting into this context Mozart the *Wunderkind*, fortepianist, harpsichordist, organist, violinist, singer, sight-reader and improviser who displays astonishing aural and memory skills. This picture is developed through a copious assemblage of documentary references drawing on Mozart's letters and on contemporary accounts in diaries and memoirs. Her closing comments (226) are highly significant, namely that Mozart valued taste and feeling in performance. She cites in support the letter Mozart wrote to his father on 6 December 1777 describing his pride in successfully coaxing little Rosa Cannabich to play the Andante of his C major Piano Sonata K309 'with the utmost expression'.

Whereas Komlós's chapter explores what external documents tell us, Robert Levin's chapter on performance practice rests on a close examination of the scores themselves. There is much practical guidance on the idiosyncrasies of Mozart's notation of dynamics, staccatos, slurs and ornaments, and an occasional foray into aspects of his compositional process that give rise to them. Time and again the lesson of this chapter is that Mozart's autographs, rather than edited scores (even those of the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*), provide the key to interpreting his intentions. Levin is doubtless correct to remind us that Mozart's expressive narrative is often a fractured one and that we falsify it – especially as pianists – by applying to it a smooth surface veneer deriving from the era of Chopin (an interpretive aesthetic intended for a different repertory and for different instruments). What he does not address is the nature of Mozart's intentions themselves. Does Mozart's



notation encode one thing and one thing alone? Levin does not claim that it does; indeed, he reminds us that Mozart was the greatest improviser of his time, hinting that the nature of the work is not something to which permanence is necessarily attached. By notating a musical idea we transform it from something born in the dimension of time into something recorded in the dimension of space. Admittedly, Mozart was sometimes careless in his notation, but there is an element of risk involved in trying to standardize it, to make it fit our interpretive agendas, tying it down within generic boundaries. Mozart's works go beyond the confines of their texts, and this is all part of their eternal charm: not 'is', but 'might be'.

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MARA PARKER

THE STRING QUARTET, 1750–1797: FOUR TYPES OF MUSICAL CONVERSATION

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'One consequence of the traditional emphasis on the [string quartets] . . . of Haydn and Mozart', writes Mara Parker in her new book, 'is that we have lost sight of the many other eighteenth-century composers whose string quartets are worthy of attention' (279–280). It is difficult to disagree with this assessment of the current state of affairs. Quartet composers such as Luigi Boccherini, Giuseppe Cambini, Florian Leopold Gassmann, Adalbert Gyrowetz, Franz Anton Hoffmeister and Ignace Pleyel, much admired in the late eighteenth century, are rarely performed today, and usually given short shrift in the secondary literature. Parker's principal aim is a conventional musicological one, namely to give a voice to a large body of works that have been marginalized by the achievements of universally venerated composers (Haydn and Mozart) and thus to place centre stage a musical corpus that is currently residing in the wings.

The first three chapters set the musical, contextual and social scenes for Parker's subsequent analytical discussion. Chapter One, 'The String Quartet as Chamber Music', focuses on understanding the string quartet in a historically informed fashion, whereby its unique textural qualities take precedence over harmonic and formal features that dominated twentieth-century critical discourse. Chapter Two, 'Social Aspects: From Private to Public', offers a broad-ranging exposé of the social context of the string quartet (especially in London, Paris and Vienna), addressing issues such as private performances, the emergence of concert performances of string quartets in the final decade of the eighteenth century and the make-up of various professional quartet groups. And Chapter Three, 'String Quartet Types: Towards a Reconsideration', turns to the different manifestations of the genre (*Hausmusik*, *quatuor concertant*, *quatuor brillant* and Viennese 'classical') and to the different ways of appreciating interaction across the entire spectrum of mid- and late eighteenth-century works. By putting interaction at the heart of an appreciation of this repertory, Parker explains, we privilege a fundamental feature of chamber music, rather than an idealized notion of the string quartet as a metaphorical embodiment of the virtues of musical classicism.

Each of Chapters Four to Seven takes one of the four categories of discourse identified by Parker as characteristic of string quartets of the period and fleshes out its musical qualities with numerous examples and illustrations. In general terms the *lecture* 'consists of a melody plus accompaniment', with the listener having 'no doubt about the role of each instrument' (75), the *polite conversation* of 'long, uninterrupted melodies, part or voice exchange, and a strong contrast – both visually and aurally – between melody and accompaniment' (133), the *debate* of 'independence achieved and maintained within set roles and functions' (233) and the *conversation* of 'equality of voices', where 'roles and functions are minimized' (235). The final



chapter, 'The String Quartet during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century', reiterates arguments threading through the volume as a whole: the string quartet in the second half of the century is often misrepresented as 'a unified medium which undergoes a logical sequence of developmental steps' (279); instrumental relations should assume hermeneutic significance in examining this repertory; and the writing for all four string parts becomes increasingly demanding as the period progresses.

Parker's scholarly enthusiasm for the task at hand is not in doubt. Her quartet sample – over 650 works by sixty-two composers – is impressive, since the majority of the works under scrutiny are not available in reliable modern editions. She is also to be commended for including many lengthy music examples; on several occasions entire quartet movements are reproduced.

But methodological and stylistic problems loom large. Parker's analyses, for example, while covering a broad spectrum of works, lack sophistication. Textural intricacies and subtleties are seldom discussed, and observations are more or less restricted to straightforward textural description. Her unnecessarily dogmatic stance on the misleading nature of structural, harmonic and motivic discussion of the late eighteenth-century string quartet, which 'leaves little room for a consideration of the most unique and important aspect . . . – the relationship between the four voices' (23), also limits her options. Even if discussion of texture is Parker's priority (and justifiably so), it is surely the case that a more thorough assessment of other technical features of the music, alongside an examination of texture, would have enhanced our appreciation of this repertory. The breadth of works under consideration appropriately reveals as a historical misrepresentation the standard textural narrative of a progression towards participatory equality during the second half of the century. But the lack of insight into textural refinements leaves a lingering doubt about whether large chunks of the repertory in question are worthy of protracted analytical study in the first place. Haydn and Mozart, moreover, are handled untidily. Secondary sources incorporating important discussions of conversation in Haydn's string quartets are bizarrely omitted (even from the bibliography): Hans Keller's *The Great Haydn Quartets: Their Interpretation* (London: Dent, 1986), W. Dean Sutcliffe's *Haydn: String Quartets, Op. 50* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Gretchen Wheelock's *Haydn's Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor* (New York: Schirmer, 1992) and William Drabkin's *A Reader's Guide to Haydn's Early String Quartets* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000). Further, one of the most famous of all eighteenth-century instrumental works, Mozart's 'Dissonance' Quartet, K465, is repeatedly assigned the wrong Köchel number, K485 (185, 205, 313). Remarks on Haydn's and Mozart's works are also prosaic: we learn nothing about the textural prowess of these composers from Parker's commonplace observations about, for example, the development section of Mozart's K458/iv – 'the ensemble must have four strong players. Successful execution requires that all members possess similar technical and musical abilities. It is not enough to read one's own line' (220) – or the development of Haydn's Op. 33 No. 2/i – 'Small ideas are shared among all four voices; a fragment may as easily appear in the cello as the first violin' (191). Explaining that a debate movement includes a melodically dominant first violin as well as 'independent and interesting' second violin, viola and cello parts, Parker states that 'a number of works by Haydn and Mozart . . . can be used to illustrate this feature, but to do this would be to state the obvious' (205), effectively admitting that her analytical approach leaves her ill-equipped to shed significant light on their works.

Parker's explanation of her four categories of string quartet discourse is also problematic. Given her historical orientation, it is surprising that she relies on definitions of lecture, conversation, debate and politeness from a recent edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, rather than on understandings gleaned from eighteenth-century sources. Musical and non-musical dictionaries and treatises, not least the numerous eighteenth-century writings on conversational etiquette and decorum, would have provided ample material for detailed and historically sensitive descriptions of these categories of discourse. Her references to a generic 'listener' are also devoid of historical context. Thus it is unclear whether she means an eighteenth- or a twenty-first-century listener, or indeed a *Kenner* or *Liebhaber*, when referring to the listener's unawareness of textural manipulations in Nicolas-Joseph Chartrain's Op. 4 No. 5/i (217) and to the necessity of 'constantly [shifting] his or her focus from one part to another' (243) in Carlo d'Ordonez's Op. 1 No. 1/i.



Several aspects of Parker's written style also give pause for thought. She repeats herself quite frequently in the early chapters, explaining, for example, that 'More and more the dilettante had to be content with the passive role of listener' (27) and 'Amateurs had to content themselves with listening to [string quartets], rather than playing them' (30), and affirming in quick succession that 'It was not until the 1790s that the string quartet became a regular part of the concert repertoire' (38) and 'It was not until the 1790s that the string quartet entered the public concert repertoire with any frequency' (39). On occasion, too, statements are misleading or unspecific: 'Once one leaves the sphere of Viennese composers, one finds a wide variety of quartets' (23) implies (presumably inadvertently) that there is little diversity among Viennese works; her assertion that 'This is not to suggest that [in revising the traditional approach to studying eighteenth-century quartets] we throw the baby out with the bath water, but rather that we use "a different soap"' (56) is difficult to fathom; and 'a polite conversation with "a little something extra"' (172) is unnecessarily colloquial. Her blunt reference to the listener to *Hausmusik* quartets by Pleyel as 'most aware of the acrobatics performed by the first violin and only minimally conscious of what the other voices are doing' does not inspire confidence in the music, and rests uneasily with her immediately ensuing statement that '*Hausmusik* pieces could and should be evaluated on their own merits, rather than as "poor" relations to the Haydn (Viennese) quartet' (48).

Ultimately, Mara Parker's book represents something of a missed opportunity. Her diligence in procuring and transcribing large quantities of hitherto obscure eighteenth-century quartets is laudable, and could have precipitated a thorough stylistic recharting of highly important chamber-music territory. It will be left to others, however, to offer more persuasive interpretations of the musical significance of the larger, unjustly neglected, portion of this late eighteenth-century repertory.

SIMON P. KEEFE



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DEBORAH ROHR

THE CAREERS OF BRITISH MUSICIANS, 1750–1850: A PROFESSION OF ARTISANS

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

pp. xii + 233, ISBN 0 521 58095 1

The oxymoron in the title of Deborah Rohr's book reveals in a nutshell the problematic nature of her subject. Reversing her original 1983 dissertation title (*A Profession of Artisans: The Careers and Social Status of British Musicians, 1750–1850*), it neatly encapsulates the essential conflict unique to the British musician: were they indeed professionals, or mere artisans? How did they see themselves, and how did others consider them? Rohr's chosen period, straddling the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, covers a fascinating time in British history, though for musicians it must have seemed frustratingly static in terms of their own status and social mobility.

This subject has engaged the attention of scholars for some time, notably Cyril Ehrlich, whose *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) still remains a seminal work in the field, and one with which Rohr's work will inevitably be compared. Ehrlich has also covered some of the same territory in his history of the Royal Philharmonic Society in *First Philharmonic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). The Philharmonic Society archives are but one of the many sources used by Rohr, whose biographies of some 6,600 musicians were culled from the archives of the Royal Society of Musicians and Westminster Abbey, among others. Directories (Doane, 1794, and the *Musical Directory*, 1855), contemporary journals and dictionaries (Sainsbury, Grove, Brown and Stratton) provided additional fodder. The result is a collective biography, a technique borrowed from the history of science, and more



recently used and discussed by historians such as Lawrence Stone. Rohr's compendium, or 'the catalogue', underlies this book much as DOS lurks behind Windows, embodying a huge amount of quantitative research that generates the themes for this study. Rohr's windows are in fact the occupations of these musicians, from church musicians and downtrodden orchestral opera pit players to exalted opera stars. If 'the catalogue' exists on a database, it would be useful if it could be made accessible to the wider academic community in the way that information on concert life has been made available.

The 368 musicians featured in the decade from 1750 had swelled to 3,117 a century later, but the increase in number had not been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in status. Readers looking for eighteenth-century coverage should note that sources on musicians are strongest between 1790 and 1830 and during the 1850s. Rohr indicates her 'gently Marxist assumption' that musicians' careers were linked to social context. She could go even further and describe it as a dialectic: the study in fact is an examination of the relationship between the two. Her approach also owes something to *Annales* and recent trends in social history. Indeed, Rohr is both a historian and a musician; she holds doctorates in both disciplines, and this book began life as a history dissertation, not a musicological one.

Unlike Ehrlich's chronological study, Rohr's is grouped around professions (educational, church and secular), though she rounds these out with separate summaries of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century contexts. The eighteenth century saw the gradual decline of music from its earlier 'elite' status to one that combined academic and practical aspects. Music's high status (with Medicine, Divinity and Law) was historically derived from its theoretical basis and its connections with both church and university. Although these connections remained (and many musicians continued to be employed by the Church), the eighteenth century saw the growth of secular music-making, particularly as the middle classes or 'ranks' became more prominent. Here was a market for stage singers and orchestral players, who, while catering to the newly found leisure time of 'the middling sorts', were relegated to the artisanal class. Music's affiliation with the liberal arts became eroded as musicians slid into the financially less attractive realm of the mere practitioner. Indeed, this same duality – between practitioners and theorists – remains in the institutions of university and conservatory, though North American universities long ago combined the two under one roof, not always happily. Rohr points to similar changes, growth and divisions in other professions, such as civil engineers, architects and surveyors; physicians fought a defensive action against surgeons, who even today are styled 'Mr' and not 'Dr'.

The depths to which musicians had sunk by the end of the eighteenth century are starkly represented in Patrick Colquhoun's tables of national income distribution for 1806, helpfully given in edited form in an appendix. Here musicians are ranked at the bottom of professions associated with the 'middle ranks', with annual income hovering around £200, below that of architects and surgeons (£260) but higher than that of soldiers (£139–£149).

The changing nature of the profession in the eighteenth century saw the establishment of organizations such as the Royal Society of Musicians, although its function remained mainly charitable; despite the granting of a royal charter in 1790, it did not take on licensing powers as other professional organizations did. Rohr does not speculate on the reasons for this, and it was not until 1822 that the Royal Academy of Music was founded in order to train musicians in the profession. Even this had its drawbacks and featured separate curricula for girls and boys.

Xenophobia and misogyny, which Rohr sees as the main culprits in this account, were not helpful for the development of the profession. Throughout the period under scrutiny, music-making was perceived as inherently feminine, and therefore not suitable for 'real men'. Indeed, the role of women is a focus in this book, and the author challenges the received wisdom of 'separate spheres'. The reality was in fact more complex, and English singers, for example, were able to infiltrate the marketplace as viable and welcome competition to what Defoe called the 'heaps of Foreign Musicians' who had invaded London.

Rohr sketches the gendered history of music in Britain, drawing on research by both historians and musicologists such as Linda Austern, Linda Colley and Thomas McGeary. Amidst all this was the amateur musician, the bastion of British musical life. Although the received wisdom is that amateur music-making



lay firmly in the female realm, the satirical drawings of James Gillray show avid male performers on the violin, cello and flute (all banned for feminine use) in the ubiquitous accompanied sonatas of the late eighteenth century. Even though her concern is professional music-making, it would have been interesting if Rohr had fleshed out this aspect of British musical life, much as Richard Leppert has done, using the iconography of the period. Like men and women, professional and amateur music-making did not flourish in totally separate spheres.

Rohr's chapter on the 'social profile' of musicians during the entire period of her study presents an impressive array of tables outlining family professional networks, other occupations and geographical origins. The table dealing with locations of musicians' careers indicates opportunities existing outside London, and migrations to Europe and the colonies: fifty-six per cent of the musicians studied were based in London. In spite of the less than ideal conditions of the music profession, most elected to stay, with only four per cent leaving for Europe or the colonies. Conversely, some twenty per cent of the musicians surveyed were from outside Britain.

This quantitative approach pervades the book. Although based on the idea of 'collective biography' mentioned above, there is usually not more than fleeting reference to the lives of particular musicians: one must turn instead to studies such as Philip Olleson's on Wesley, or Fiona Palmer's on Dragonetti. In this study the rank and file are privileged over the principals; this is disappointing, as the period is shot through with colourful, gifted figures such as Puzzi and Harper. Individual biographies are no doubt sacrificed for an evenness of approach and an emphasis on typicality, but it is disappointing not to see significant entrepreneurial musicians such as Clementi highlighted. Indeed, Clementi and J. B. Cramer fit well within Colquhoun's merchant class, not to be ignored in 'a nation of shopkeepers'. Colourful careers such as Mrs Billington's are touched on but abandoned at the mere hint of tabloid-style scurrility. Such coverage is a potent reminder to today's readers that there is indeed nothing new under the *Sun*. While gender is an important part of this study, musicians such as Jane Mary Guest are omitted, though she makes a brief appearance under her married name, Mrs Miles. Miss Guest, a pupil of Rauzzini, was a well known musician in her home city of Bath, and, like the more famous Gertrud Mara, organized a concert series in the late eighteenth century. She also enjoyed royal patronage and published several compositions.

The tables are revealing in themselves, and even more than intended can be extrapolated from them. For example, the table giving wages for 'orchestral musicians at the Covent Garden Theatre' is in fact less interesting in terms of wages than it is for the versatility expected of the players. In an era of changing instrument technology, Thomas Wallis was expected to perform on a keyed bugle in addition to his duties on trumpet and bugle-horn; another player performed on 'clarinet and violin', and one Thomas Chipp played on the kettledrums and harp, in addition to being on call to tune the theatre's pianos. The loose organization of orchestras in their early period is well illustrated by the anonymous period drawing on the jacket of this book, which depicts a motley array of players warming up at rehearsal; there is no semblance of order or discipline.

This book carries with it the earnestness of its dissertation origins. Although some of the colour of the period is sacrificed for a balanced overview, which makes for somewhat laborious reading, scholars will welcome its thoroughness, reliability and accessibility. Quantitative research can too easily become its own end, but in this case it has been thickened with enough observation to round out the picture. We have much to be grateful for in such exhaustive excavations. Just as the previous incarnation of this book influenced a recent generation of scholars, so it is hoped that the seeds Dr Rohr has sown will continue to bear fruit.

DOROTHY DEVAL





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DOWNING A. THOMAS

AESTHETICS OF OPERA IN THE ANCIEN RÉGIME: 1647–1785

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pp. viii + 411, ISBN 0 521 80188 5

Although explicitly billed in the introduction as ‘a cultural history of French opera to the Revolution’ (4), readers anticipating critical renegotiations of familiar musico-philosophical *traités* will be somewhat disappointed. Yet the attraction and usefulness of this work is that Thomas specifically avoids falling back on hackneyed texts and does not slavishly retrace others’ steps through reams of over-analysed material. The work’s title proves to be a little misleading too: the first part of the book is less a discussion of musico-dramatic aesthetics than it is a casting of light on the politics and poetics of the propaganda machine that powered opera production under Louis XIV; and the dates (1647–1785) are simply boundary markers which have no overarching historiographical significance in themselves. (The year 1647 refers to the premiere of Luigi Rossi’s *Orfeo* at the Palais Royal in front of the eight-year-old Louis and 1785 marks the publication of Lacépède’s *Poétique de l’Opéra*.) This book is, then, neither a conventional cultural history of the evolution of French opera during the ‘long’ eighteenth century, nor a straightforward study of what might be regarded as the primary business of musico-aesthetic discourse. Paradoxically, this is what, in many respects, gives the book its strength and value.

The book’s nine chapters are arranged into two discrete, thematically oriented, parts. The first, ‘French Opera in the Shadow of Tragedy’, explores the foundation of *tragédie en musique* under the Académie Royale de Musique and its struggle to establish itself as a dramatically viable, and morally respectable, alternative to neoclassical spoken tragedy. The focus is on song, the voice and the troubled relationship between opera and its tragic counterpart. The second part examines opera as ‘Barometer of Enlightenment’ (10) and centres on aspects of the culture surrounding French opera and its preoccupation with the ‘burning question of the existence of a common moral fabric of humanity’ (10). The unstoppable rise of *opéra comique* and the concomitant demise of *tragédie lyrique* are traced, as is the shift away from the use of mythological subject matter towards the domestic ‘bourgeois’ drama favoured in the closing decades of the eighteenth century. These shifts, of course, mirror changes in the philosophical landscape from Cartesian materialism to man-centred naturalism, though little attention is paid to these aspects and how they might have determined aesthetic issues.

Chapter One, ‘Song as Performance and the Emergence of French Opera’, opens with an overview of operatic developments in France and focuses upon Rossi’s *Orfeo* (1647). *Orfeo*, of course, epitomizes the fundamental problem of opera – the necessity of diegetic song – and is adroitly chosen as a starting-point here. If *Orfeo* is already singing, how then are the composer and the librettist to make him sing powerfully and persuasively enough to bring Euridice back from the dead? And what impact will this have upon verisimilitude on the one hand and the coherence of the poetic, musical and dramaturgical structure on the other? For Thomas, these questions have everything to do with the ‘performativity of song’; *Orfeo* will *perform* successfully for his audience, but in return Aristeo’s performance must necessarily be ‘unconvincing and . . . unsuccessful’ (26). Song is framed ‘as an extraordinary and expressive moment, as a moment of transcendence in which the acts of singing and listening stand out’ (26). But it is also a moment in which music must be rendered with dramatic purpose; music must sacrifice itself in order to serve the greater needs of the plot. The spectator (both on stage and in the audience) is implicated, and song therefore elicits a specific form of attention and reaction. Thomas argues that the issue of ‘song as performance’ exercised a succession of theorists, with respect not only to immediate aesthetic considerations, but to the moral foundations of the genre itself. The reader is reminded that for decades many commentators degraded the operatic spectacle to the low status of mere sensual pleasure, that opera was seen as a form that stretched the limits of an aesthetics founded upon mimesis, and that *tragédie en musique* was for many an oxymoron (31).



But the perceived weaknesses of *tragédie en musique* turn out to be the very facets that provided The Sun King's ministers with an unparalleled political opportunity.

Chapter Two, 'The Opera King', is the highlight of this book and an extremely important contribution to existing knowledge. Thomas focuses on the political function of the prologue as a vehicle for representing (and eulogizing) the king through allegory. Fascinating parallels are drawn between Lully and Charpentier's prologues and depictions of Louis in contemporaneous 'historical' paintings and tapestries that adorned the walls and ceilings of the court. Such artistic productions are seen as performing a vital political function, providing the court, the nation and visiting dignitaries with a 'portrait' of the king. Opera is the ideal vehicle for a regime wishing to present the king to his subjects as master of men and equal of gods. As Thomas argues, 'the prologues . . . "produced" the King in the genre's own image: spectacular, at once original and primordial, *ne plus ultra, sans pareil*' (89). Moreover, opera's perceived connection with Greek tragedy lends the form – and a king depicted in its prologue – a certain prestige and mythology.

Chapters Three, Four and Five present complementary readings of three pivotal works – Lully's *Armide* (1686), Charpentier's *Médée* (1693) and Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie* (1733). Chapter Three concentrates on the attempt to define *tragédie en musique* as a credible alternative to spoken tragedy. Using the example of *Médée*, Thomas argues convincingly in Chapter Four that Charpentier's musical vocabulary is consciously and conspicuously excessive (Medea's material is 'alien to the French vocal tradition' (9)), and that his deployment of dissonances and his conflation of French and Italian styles destabilizes the balance between music and text in the work. *Médée* itself represents opera allegorically, 'through the figure of the exiled woman, as "victimised" genre, one whose ostentatious spectacle and music were criticised because they threatened the aesthetic of interiorisation and sublimation' that underpin spoken tragedy (131). Rameau's first *tragédie lyrique* is seen, in Chapter Five, as a reinvention of tragedy, a new form elaborating upon the ruins of both the Lullian tradition and classical tragedy, whose purpose it was to alter the experience of tragedy in the opera house. Rameau's 'Trio des Parques' from Act 2 – though never performed during the eighteenth century – is used to explore the new heights of musical articulacy achieved by the composer.

The second part of the book, 'Opera and Enlightenment: From Private Sensation to Public Feeling', beats an unpredictable but intriguing pathway through a disparate range of material that considers the aesthetics of opera in the broadest possible sense. Chapter Six, 'Heart Strings', explores the relationship between musical affect, musical magic, therapy and medical models of sensibility. Thomas skilfully traces the shifting conception of music from the Renaissance view of an occult phenomenon which had the 'ability to affect the body and the soul' to an eighteenth-century view of a form of therapy and a catalyst for sympathy – a trigger for intersubjectivity (179). It is argued that magic and sympathy could be considered as elements coexisting within (and across) a 'vast discursive continuum' and given shape according to specific cultural and historical circumstances.

Elements of these themes – most important amongst them sympathy – permeate Chapter Seven, which considers the rise of *opéra comique*. Central to the popularity and inordinate success of many *opéras comiques*, Thomas argues, is the fact that the genre made sympathy an integral part of its identity and signifying strategy. Works can be seen to operate *on* the spectator by eliciting sympathetic reactions to dramatic situations and thereby allowing the spectator to identify directly with the plight of the characters. Two *opéras comiques* serve to illustrate the crux of the argument, Rousseau's *Le devin du village* (1752) and Méhul's *Stratonice* (1792). Both works, it is claimed, exhibit key thematic and structural properties: each centres on 'passion, sacrifice and reconciliation . . . each makes sympathy the key to the resolution of the problem and thereby invites the interest and sympathy of the spectator' (213–214).

Chapter Eight is concerned with architectural designs of the lyric theatre, with the ways in which such designs reconstructed and conceptualized spectatorship and projected notions of public values, and with the inexorable shift towards bourgeois drama. Thomas reviews several (unrealized) proposals for the renovation and reconstruction of the Académie Royale commissioned after the 1673 fire, proposals which 'encouraged forms of spectatorship that developed along with the new culture of sympathy' (265). It is argued, for example, that the move to rid the opera of the *deus ex machina* – and of the machinery that made it possible



– as well as the new conception of the theatrical experience implicit in this move required a new kind of ‘self-reflexive public space’ (267).

The concluding chapter continues to probe conceptions of sympathy, feeling and spectatorship that underpin the three previous chapters. It centres on Lacépède’s seven-hundred-page *Poétique de la musique* (1785), in which questions of ‘a common humanity’ and the ‘culture of feeling’ are considered. Thomas provides an invaluable reading of this largely unknown text and no doubt will be responsible for renewed scholarly interest in this contemporary of d’Alembert, Gluck and Gossec.

STEPHEN BAYSTED



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PETER WILLIAMS

BACH: THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS

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In his short guide to Bach’s Goldberg Variations, Peter Williams manages to pack in an extraordinary amount of information about the work’s background, compositional techniques and structures, and reception history. His consideration of the work’s relationships to a large amount of other music is particularly remarkable. The writing style is fresh and engaging and the material presented clearly and concisely. We can safely say that Williams’s book will be the fundamental work on its subject for years to come.

The book opens with an account of the revered status of the Goldbergs. Williams suggests that this status derives from the work’s unparalleled originality (even in Bach’s repertory) when set against more standard musical vocabulary and harmony. This down-to-earth view informs much of the book. Williams’s ability to get to the heart of Bach’s abstract and practical achievements is a particular strength: his explanations of how Variation 12 combines *canon inversus* and a stylish polonaise, and how the motivic treatment in Variation 19 involves ‘a note-pattern for every bar of the piece, subtly changed in profile and at no point pedantic or tedious’ (75) are especially lucid. In the Introduction Williams proposes that Bach’s son Wilhelm Friedemann was the virtuoso Bach originally had in mind when composing the Goldbergs rather than the pre-pubescent Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, house-musician to Count Keyserling. Wilhelm Friedemann’s presence is felt in several places in this book, most notably in the discussion of *Clavierübung III*, which Williams suggests would have contained pieces suitable for Friedemann to play at church services.

Williams’s Introduction considers other issues: the type of harpsichord required by the Goldbergs and instruments available at that time, modern editions, and the work’s title *Clavierübung IV*, when no such appellation is found on the original title page or in the composer’s obituary but was adopted by the editors of the Bach Society in the nineteenth century. Although Williams outlines the problems and inconsistencies in applying the name *Clavierübung IV* to the Variations for Harpsichord, BWV988, he opts to take the four volumes of the *Clavierübung* series as given in works such as the *New Bach Edition* because they allow the following chapter of this handbook to consider each as ‘a highly organized and explicit collection of musical techniques, theoretical allusion and practical usefulness . . . [S]ome idea can be glimpsed of the composer’s original conception and its part in the compendium of musical techniques he seems to have spent so much of his life assembling’ (8).

Chapter One, ‘Background and Genesis’, focuses on the *Clavierübung* series, providing a wealth of fact and speculation. There is a virtuosic interweaving of musical associations between this series and works by other composers. In the discussion of the six partitas of *Clavierübung I* on page 18, for example, there are references to compositions by Handel, Couperin, Rameau, Graun, Reinken and Mattheson, as well as to



Bach's French Suites. The discussion of *Clavierübung III* is particularly absorbing; Williams proposes that various agendas are at work and result in a doctrinaire component that is at odds with features of modernity evident in some of its constituent parts. The sharp change in personality between *Clavierübung III* and the Goldbergs, which came out only two years later, stimulates Williams to explore the compositional history of the Goldbergs and the phenomenon in Bach's late works of the 'unrepeatable or "one-off variation cycle"', complex variations of an unusual kind, clearly models in some sense and yet hardly imitable' (30). This chapter ends with a short section on the Fourteen Canons, BWV1087, where Williams mentions possible allusions to number symbolism and considers the technical aspects of canonic composition, concluding that the results are 'only *just* plausible' as musical sounds (34, author's emphasis).

Chapter Two, 'Overall Shape', explains how the bass theme, which has a pedigree stretching back to the sixteenth century, is expanded by Bach to thirty-two notes, resulting in full and separate movements without cantus firmus or ostinato treatment. The perceptual and conceptual structures of the work are succinctly outlined, and again there is a wealth of reference to compositions by Bach and others.

Chapter Three, 'The Movements', is particularly impressive, as Williams says something meaningful, detailed and informative about every movement of the Goldbergs, with only a page on average devoted to each one. He keeps the overall sequence and coherence of the movements in mind – for example, the increasing level of virtuosity among the two-manual variations – while also pointing out the successful combination of compositional skill and musicality in specific places, such as the 'beautiful effects' (78) that result from canonic imitation at the seventh above at the beginning of the second half of Variation 21. Occasionally, however, the great master receives a rap on the knuckles from Professor Williams: the canon at the unison in Variation 3 has 'note-spinning' while the bass 'goes on rumbling about to no great purpose' (58); and the canon at the tenth from the *Art of Fugue* 'wander[s] about aimlessly', unlike the canon at the third above in Goldberg Variation 9, which has a 'driving bass-line and a logical binary form' (64). 'Questions of Reception', the topic of Chapter Four, gives a brief overview of the publication and possible performance history of the work, detailing in addition its likely impact on Beethoven's Diabelli Variations. Williams suggests that 'the uncanny mixture between patterns that are startlingly original and those that are quite ordinary or elemental' (97) is common to both monumental works. His treatment of articles by Alan Street and Ursula Kirkendale, however, linking the Goldbergs to cosmology and rhetoric respectively, would lead a reader unfamiliar with these authors to conclude that their work is fanciful nonsense. An area not considered in this book is the discography of the Goldbergs, which is unfortunate since Williams's great insights into the work would no doubt also have led to informative reactions to available recordings.

Occasionally issues are only touched upon, perhaps on account of the book's brevity, leaving the reader rather in limbo: why is the New Bach Edition of this work 'begging some questions' (8), and how does the 'beauty and dark passion' (83) of Variation 25 raise questions of an aesthetic nature about the ability of music to express or arouse emotions? Some typographical errors and oddities can also be listed: the repetition of the word 'against' (55); an awkward sentence containing 'was the or an original idea' (59); the F# in row two, column two of the lattice-like table on page 78 should, I suspect, be in bold type; and the term 'feminine cadence' (55) is surely now an anachronism. These are minor infelicities, however, and do not detract from Peter Williams's excellent contribution to our knowledge and appreciation of Bach's Goldberg Variations.

DENIS COLLINS





EDITIONS

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GIROLAMO ABOS, *STABAT MATER*

ED. JOSEPH VELLA BONDIN

Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 68

Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2003

pp. xxiv + 75, ISBN 0 89579 531 0

So little music by Maltese composers of bygone centuries is available for performance that one is grateful for the publication of this once celebrated work. In style, of course, there is nothing specifically Maltese about it. Rather, it is representative of the Neapolitan – rapidly becoming international – style of the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed, Abos (1715–1760), having first been a student of the Neapolitan conservatory of Sant'Onofrio (Naples and, earlier, Palermo were the favoured training grounds of Maltese musicians), remained on its books as a teacher until his final days. So here is another setting of Jacopone da Todi's famous sequence to add to those by the two Scarlattis, Durante, Pergolesi and Astorga, with which it may be most relevantly compared.

Scored for two sopranos, alto, two violins and continuo, Abos's *Stabat Mater* is well worth studying and performing. Admittedly it is no masterpiece. One could describe it merely as an 'off-the-peg' Neapolitan product or, more dismissively, as 'Pergolesi without the brilliant bits'. One soon tires of the over-frequent diminished sevenths, the excessively stereotyped rhythms and the unrelieved parataxis, one short, self-contained phrase repeatedly coming up after another. Abos also handles transitions between short and long note values, and between quick and slow harmonic rhythm, rather clumsily. Pergolesi is evidently the model, but on every count Abos fails by a small but nevertheless significant margin to match him for variety, originality and sureness of touch. Here and there, nice moments occur – particularly at junctures where all three voices are in play. The editor, Joseph Vella Bondin, is right to point to the 'third' voice as a positive attribute, since Abos seems happier as a contrapuntist than as a melodist, a point well brought out in the final 'Amen' fugue.

Much of Vella Bondin's introduction deals with Abos's life and career in general and, independently of the edition proper, makes a valuable contribution to music history. He has worked diligently on local and foreign sources, both primary and secondary, so that a clear and carefully drawn picture of the master emerges. I am disappointed, however, that in his citation of eminent Maltese composers he makes no mention of Abos's very capable pupil Benigno Zerafa (1726–1804), for whom, in 1744, Abos signed a document certifying the completion of the latter's studies at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo, but who, unlike his teacher, returned to Malta in order to take up the post of choirmaster at Medina Cathedral. Laudable, too, is Vella Bondin's success at tracking down the origin and transmission history of the surviving manuscripts of the *Stabat Mater*.

He makes, however, one serious misinterpretation, which seems to have had consequences for his editorial decisions. The score of the work copied by Giuseppe Sigismondi, today in the library of the Conservatorio di Musica 'S. Pietro a Majella', Naples, is prefaced by a title that includes the phrase 'a 3. voci C. e A. con V[ioli]ni, e Viola Orig[ina]le'. Vella Bondin's first mistake is to interpret 'Viola' as the (modern) viola, when it clearly refers to the bass violin or cello, as was common in Italian terminology of the time; second, he interprets 'Originale' as 'original', whereas it is synonymous with 'score' and refers to the manuscript as a whole, not to the presumed viola part. But it so happens that Sigismondi began to copy out a separate part for 'violetta', presumably of his own invention. Vella Bondin puts two and two together, makes five, and proceeds to include Sigismondi's reasonably skilful addition in his score, continuing with a much less convincing viola part of his own invention from the point where the original abruptly stops. In



fairness to the editor, he clearly voices doubts in his introduction about the authenticity of the viola part, but the damage is already done. Most performers will elect to include the part, acting on the rational assumption that it would not be present had it not been thought desirable. (One is not arguing, of course, that the viola is an inadmissible instrument per se. It would be perfectly authentic, in performance practice terms, to let it play *col basso* at the same pitch or an octave higher, as appropriate.)

It also has to be said that the editorial realization of the figured bass is a disappointment, containing many solecisms. It is puzzling that A-R Editions customarily pay such careful attention to the content, style and presentation of introductions and critical notes, but – as I have noted before in reviews of editions in the same series – have such a *laissez-faire* attitude to realizations. I am not one of those who decry their very existence. Even if most professional continuo players specializing in early music will ignore written-out realizations in favour of their own versions, better tailored to the instrument, the room acoustic, the tempo and all the other relevant factors, most amateur performers will not – and their needs, too, have to be met. The great shame is the general decline over the decades in the standard of editorial realizations, which has gone hand in hand with that of the study of harmony and counterpoint. If one looks at the editorial realizations produced a century ago by scholars such as Hugo Riemann and Max Seiffert, one may indeed smile sometimes at their attempts to gild the lily – to smuggle in canons, countermelodies and so on, in the spirit of the famous description of J. S. Bach's doubtless atypical improvisations. But there is rarely any doubt about the technical solidity of these realizations. Nowadays, unfortunately, a grammatically correct written-out realization is almost an exception.

Another grouse: like the great majority of modern editions of eighteenth-century music, this one has no coherent and unambiguous method of showing which chromatic inflections were prescribed in the source, via the notational conventions of the time, and which have resulted from editorial intervention. To do this properly, inflections (sounds) have to be distinguished from accidentals (symbols), and one has to be certain – usually from observation rather than from information gleaned from contemporary theorists – what the differences between the old and the new notational codes are. The goal is to arrive at a situation where the information provided in the edited score and in the critical apparatus enables the user to make a perfect mental reconstruction of the notation of the source. But how rarely this happens.

To end on a positive note: this edition makes available an interesting and representative work from a repertory (sacred music of the Neapolitan school) that even today is seriously under-represented in performance and on the printed page. It provides a good introduction to the life and music of its composer and makes a useful contribution, if not exactly to the story of music in Malta, then at least to that of the Maltese-Italian musical connection during its greatest period.

MICHAEL TALBOT



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ARTARIA 195: BEETHOVEN'S SKETCHBOOK FOR THE MISSA SOLEMNIS AND THE PIANO SONATA IN E MAJOR, OPUS 109

TRANSCRIBED, EDITED AND WITH A COMMENTARY BY WILLIAM KINDERMAN

Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002

3 volumes, pp. 384, ISBN 0 252 02749 3

Editions of Beethoven sketchbooks, like the objects themselves, come in an array of formats. The earliest was a simple facsimile reproduction, without transcription or commentary, of a sketchbook torso for the Diabelli Variations and the Ninth Symphony, published in 1913. Attempts at straight transcription, without facsimile, began in the Beethoven centenary, 1927. The next anniversary year, 1970, marked another



turning-point, with the British Museum issuing a Beethoven manuscript (a large miscellany of sketch leaves from the early period) in two volumes: a facsimile and a complete transcription with commentary. Around the same time the Beethovenhaus in Bonn, which had for some twenty years been publishing transcriptions only, began issuing sketchbooks in dual format.

The sketchbook under review here, from the Artaria collection in the State Library in Berlin, covers most of the year 1820, when Beethoven was attempting to complete two major projects simultaneously: a setting of the mass in honour of his patron Rudolph and a set of three piano sonatas for the publishing houses of Maurice and Adolph Martin Schlesinger. It is the first Beethoven sketchbook to be issued in three parts, with separate bound volumes for facsimile reproduction, transcription and commentary. It also inaugurates a new series from the University of Illinois Press, which recently took over the publication of *Beethoven Forum*, thus establishing itself as a major purveyor of Beethoven studies. Each volume is handsomely cloth-bound; \$125 for the set, which weighs nearly seven pounds and runs to over three hundred pages, also represents fair value for money.

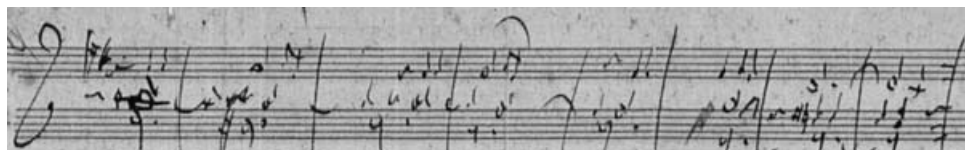
The importance of a good facsimile reproduction, particularly for the late sketches, cannot adequately be stressed. Without such a document, one must take the editor's work on faith, which is tantamount to saying that one must trust the editor's judgment as one would trust one's own. With such a document, intelligent musicians who understand Beethoven's notational and bibliographical idiosyncrasies can make their own transcriptions and therefore project themselves into Beethoven's creative world. The quality of photographic reproductions and paper is very good here: the different shades of ink can be clearly discerned from each other, and from the pencil notations which take up a quarter of the book's contents. The facsimile benefits further from the inclusion of leaves that now belong to other manuscript complexes but were probably at one time part of Artaria 195, including a leaf in private ownership that was unknown to scholars until a decade ago.

The careful examination of these additional leaves, together with the resurfacing of a new leaf, has resulted in a slight redrawing of the 'structural chart' for Artaria 195 in *The Beethoven Sketchbooks* (1985), the pioneering work by Douglas Johnson, Alan Tyson and Robert Winter on which all modern research on sketchbook chronology and reconstruction is based. It is most probable that Artaria 195 originally comprised sixty-four leaves, of which fifty survive and five of the remaining fourteen can be traced with reasonable confidence to other extant sources. For the most part Kinderman's research confirms the findings of Johnson–Tyson–Winter, and the new leaf (called somewhat grandly 'the Malerich manuscript', after its owners) helps to confirm the regular gathering structure of the manuscript.

The transcriptions are generally reliable, at times inspired, and Kinderman is to be congratulated for making sense of the different layers of heavily corrected sketches, which account for about ten per cent of the page content of Artaria 195. Oddly, he makes heavy work of some of Beethoven's more innocent-looking notations, such as the jotting in piano score at the top of the Malerich leaf (see Example 1a). If the comparison in Examples 1b and 1c illustrates the fragility of transcription, it also confirms the central role of the facsimile reproduction, which is in effect the critical report of a sketchbook edition, the 'notes' to which one turns when seeking confirmation of the editor's readings.

The commentary is the longest for any Beethoven sketchbook and is testimony both to Kinderman's lifelong fascination with the sketches for the *Missa solennis* and the late piano sonatas, and to his critical engagement with the literature on these works. The topics covered here range widely, from chronology and content to music analysis and biography. Of particular value to an appreciation of Beethoven's activities in 1820–1821 is a detailed chart of the content of Artaria 195 in relation to other sources, such as pocket sketchbooks, the autographs for the Mass and the Sonata Op. 109 and the desk sketchbook Beethoven used immediately afterwards (Artaria 197).

But taken in its totality, subdivided into eighteen chapters, the commentary goes considerably beyond an interpretation of a single manuscript, amounting to all intents and purposes to a conspectus of the entire four-year period covering the Mass and last piano sonatas. While some topics – provenance, chronology, content, relationship to other manuscripts – are entirely proper to an edition of this sort, much of his other



a Beethoven's manuscript



b Kinderman's transcription



c My reading

Example 1

research might have been more appropriately presented in other forms (journal articles and conference papers, for example), with findings summarized here. The focus on Artaria 195 is sometimes lost, as in the chapter 'On Transcribing Beethoven's Sketches', which takes as its principal example a leaf from Artaria 197 simply because it is easier to show there that pitch and duration cannot always be determined by a straightforward reading of Beethoven's music penmanship. And in another of his short essays, on the 'Origins of the Final Sonata Trilogy', Kinderman invokes jottings for a 'Sonate in E moll' from yet another manuscript, in a dubious bid to advance the composition history of the last sonata (Op. 111) by eighteen months.

It is appropriate, of course, for the commentary to dwell on the sketches for the Sonata Op. 109, which take up half the sketchbook, and especially on the variation set, which is the most extensively documented movement in Artaria 195. Kinderman charts their progress in the middle pages of the sketchbook and notes that a rudimentary form of Variation 1 appears early on (54–55), well before a second draft that resembles the final version far more closely (75). From the position of these sketches, one can say that a crucial feature of the variation movement was determined at a late stage in its genesis – the inclusion of a second 'theme' before the start of the actual process of thematic diminution. The first draft, conceived as a double variation, gives prominence to the third of the tonic chord, G#, exactly as Beethoven does in the theme. (I believe that Kinderman is mistaken in reading into this sketch an initial emphasis on E.) It is only in the later draft that we get a recognizable version of Variation 1 – that is, a sketch that is not only more compact but that also explores a different register of the piano and 'composes out' the new pitch, B.

Why is this important? For me, the separation of the two drafts for Variation 1 by more than twenty pages points to Beethoven's radical rethinking of the variation set, and the possibility of beginning with two distinct themes, one conceived in the manner of a chorale, the other more in the manner of an aria for solo voice. (The famous tempo marking *Gesangvoll* applies to each theme in its own way.) We find this technique elsewhere in Beethoven's late variations, for example in the slow movement of his last string quartet.

On each front cover, the University of Illinois Press describes its publication as a sketchbook 'Transcribed, Edited, and with a Commentary'. The actual ordering is reversed, with the Commentary



appearing as volume 1. This reinforces my impression that the publishers have elevated the musicologist above the composer (a ranking that is also suggested by the typeface on the spines of the volumes) and are asking us to read the commentary first, as though the facsimile were too specialized a document to be tackled on its own and the transcriptions too fragile to be interpreted without the benefit of Kinderman's contextualization. In other words, we are offered not so much a *Skizzenausgabe* as a *Skizzen-Erläuterungsausgabe*, an edition purposely designed as much to shed light on the sketches as to bring them to light. Kinderman's *Artaria 195* is a job well done; it is also a job overdone.

WILLIAM DRABKIN



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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, STRING QUARTET IN C SHARP MINOR, OP. 131

ED. EMIL PLATEN

Munich: Henle, 2002

ISMN M 2018 0742 3

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN, STRING QUARTET IN A MINOR, OP. 132

ED. EMIL PLATEN

Munich: Henle, 2002

ISMN M 2018 0743 0

These two sets of parts, without score, are based on the New Beethoven Complete Edition (Section VI/5, not yet published), and are the result of years of scholarly work on these two quartets. As long ago as 1983 the editor, Emil Platen, published an article drawing attention to an early manuscript version of the first movement of Op. 131 ('Eine Frühfassung zum ersten Satz des Streichquartetts Op. 131 von Beethoven', *Beethoven-Jahrbuch* 10 (1978–1981), 277–304), but the present editions of the two quartets were not completed until summer 2002 and spring 2002 respectively. They will certainly be greatly welcomed by performers, who until now have had to use old and not wholly reliable editions that lacked any critical commentary.

As well as a beautifully presented musical text, the first violin parts include a Preface in German, English and French, plus a Commentary in German and English only. The Preface provides a very brief outline of the genesis and composition of each work, and of the editorial principles adopted, but this should be sufficient for most performers. The Commentary is rather more detailed, discussing each of the main variants and problematic readings in the sources. Matters of purely academic interest, however, such as minor variation between the sources and descriptions of watermarks, are wisely omitted here, and interested readers are referred to the critical report in the New Complete Edition, which will discuss such matters in exhaustive detail.

The result, then, is a performing edition that in most ways will be a great service to quartet players. For the first time, they will be able to see at a glance where in the source material the main problems lie, and they will have a reliable guide to the basis for editorial decisions. For example, in bar 5 of Op. 131/iii the second violin has a minim rest in both the first edition and the manuscript copy (*Stichvorlage*) used for its preparation, although one would expect a B crotchet plus crotchet rest. Later editions (and recordings) therefore vary as to whether this B is included. Platen explains that Beethoven appears to have written a minim rest by mistake in the autograph but corrected it in pencil later (though without deleting the minim rest). This change must have been made only after the *Stichvorlage* had been copied, and it is even just possible that it was made by someone other than Beethoven. An earlier draft of the autograph, however, includes the B, which was evidently Beethoven's intention, and the note is therefore included here as well; and a footnote on the music



page draws attention to the Commentary, thus enabling performers to reach their own conclusions. This is the kind of detail that makes this edition so superior to previous ones.

On several counts, however, it would be possible to envisage an even better edition of these quartets. First, there are a few places where editorial judgment might be called into question: for example, Op. 131/i, bar 24. Here, as Platen explains, the autograph and the early manuscript version have D# for the cello but the *Stichvorlage* and first edition have D♭. He opts for D# in the edition, though without a footnote in the cello part to draw attention to the problem. But the situation is not simply one of different accidentals in different sources. According to Platen's edition, the autograph and early manuscript have no accidental (the sharp comes from the key signature), whereas the *Stichvorlage* has a prominent natural. Those who have worked extensively with manuscript sources will know that copyists and composers – including Beethoven – often omit, but very rarely add, accidentals inadvertently. In the present case, then, Beethoven may have omitted the natural by mistake in the earlier two sources, before having it added in the *Stichvorlage*; or he may have decided on the natural only at a late stage. But it seems most unlikely that the copyist carelessly or surreptitiously added an unauthorized natural, as one would have to assume if Platen's text is correct. Thus it must be hoped that performers will work this out from the evidence presented here and use a natural, rather than blindly following the given text.

The treatment of Op. 132/iii, bars 169–206, is more puzzling. Platen cites a Beethoven letter discussing the problem of slurs in this passage and claims that the letter indicates the slurs should cover all three notes in three-note groups. Yet in this edition they consistently cover only the first two notes. This is in line with other scholars' transcriptions of the letter in question, and it would appear that the Commentary is incorrect here.

A second issue is the use of sketch material. Although Platen uses the early version of Op. 131/i, and an early draft of Op. 131/iii and iv that happens to be preserved in the main autograph, he makes no mention of the hundreds of other pages of sketches and rejected autograph leaves – such as those in Berlin MS Artaria 210 – which might throw light on problematic passages. They are unlikely to provide definitive solutions, but it seems inconsistent to disregard them. One passage they might illuminate is the ghastly parallel fifths in Op. 131/i, bar 20, where the first note in violin 1 should perhaps be a crotchet, not a minim. This would avoid these fifths, which are entirely out of keeping with Beethoven's normal style, and especially the strict polyphonic style of this movement. If Beethoven could write a rest when he intended a B (see above), he could easily write a minim instead of a crotchet, and it would be interesting to know if any sketches show a different version of this bar.

Another problem arises from editorial double bars, which are sprinkled liberally without any indication that they are not in the sources. In Op. 131 the *Stichvorlage* shows only the fourth and seventh movements ending with a proper double bar. The fifth ends with a thin double bar and 'attacca' (since the sixth had already been begun on a fresh page and the 'attacca' was to cover the blank staves between them). Three other movements proceed straight into what follows with just a single bar line and (where necessary) a change of key signature or time signature. And the first movement concludes without even a bar line, since the first note of the second movement is deemed to be part of the same bar as the end of the first. It is surely unacceptable silently to insert double bars in these places, in a so-called 'Urtext' edition, merely to suit the publishers' house style. Even worse is the spurious double bar added two bars before the end of the fifth movement. These double bars will signal to performers a much stronger barrier between sections than Beethoven wanted. Conversely, at the end of the fourth movement, the publishers, though correctly using a thick double bar, have followed this with a change of key and time signature, as if the next movement were a continuation. In other words, they signal a weaker barrier than Beethoven indicated. Although double bars are not performed audibly, they create a psychological effect that easily carries through to performance, and they should therefore match what is in the sources.

This brings us to the other main issue with this edition. It is clearly intended for performers, and the Preface asserts that performers 'want an edition that offers all the information they need to present the composition in performance, and that does so authentically' (iii). Yet information about authentic performance practice is almost completely absent. Some guidance on such general matters as pitch, tempo,



vibrato and types of instrument and bow intended or expected by Beethoven would surely be beneficial. There are also specific notational matters that invite comment. Should trills begin on the written note or the note above, and should they have a termination if one is not marked? Do the long slurs indicate merely a legato style (as with some composers of the period) or actual bowing (as with others)? If the latter, this has significant implications for the tempos of the slow movements, where too slow a speed would make the indicated bowing impossible. Of course one cannot expect firm answers for every issue, nor a comprehensive account. But some discussion, which will at least raise performers' awareness of the problems and the relevant evidence, and indicate the range of what is legitimate in these particular quartets, seems essential for a satisfactory performing edition of any Beethoven work. To this extent the present edition, for all of its undoubted merits, must be considered less than adequate.

BARRY COOPER



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ANTONIO SALIERI, MASS IN D MINOR

ED. JANE SCHATKIN HETRICK

Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era 65

Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2002

pp. xxii + 162, ISBN 0 89579 1V

Those encountering his sacred music might be surprised to learn that Salieri, in charge of the Habsburg court chapel for thirty-six years (1788–1824), composed only six masses (one a cappella (1767), four orchestral (1788, 1799, 1805, 1809), one requiem (1804)) compared to about thirty masses each by his predecessor, Giuseppe Bonno, and his successor, Joseph Eybler. Salieri's Mass in D minor of 1805 is the third of his four orchestral masses and the third to appear in a modern critical edition by Dr Hettrick. Only the Mass in C major (1799, for double chorus) awaits editorial treatment. The edition provides a general introduction to the composer and his music, a performance history of the work and a descriptive analysis of each movement, with insightful references to Franz Xaver Glöggel's *Kirchenmusik-Ordnung* of 1828. It also discusses confusion in the numbering of Salieri's masses and includes an informative section on performance practice, focusing on the organ and the size of the performing forces (four choruses, one solo for each vocal register – typical of many masses of the time but rarely observed in 'authentic' performance practice). The critical report describes the primary sources (lacking only the minutiae of measurements and paper types) and defines the editorial method, with special attention again to the organ and to issues of articulation and dynamics, here adding information and suggestions useful for understanding notational practices.

Hettrick posits that each of Salieri's masses is associated with a specific function or occasion, either in the life of the composer or in the imperial court. While a precise association for the Mass in D minor is not known, its key and date of composition – 1805, the year of Napoleon's first occupation of Vienna – suggest to Hettrick a work *in tempore belli*. If this is so, it echoes comparable contributions by Haydn to this subcategory, namely the overtly titled *Missa in tempore belli* (1796) and the D minor *Missa in angustiis* or 'Nelson' Mass (1798). And in such comparisons lies the distinctive quality and significance of this newly revealed contribution by Salieri.

Our image of the Viennese mass in the early years of the nineteenth century has been dominated by compositions associated with the chapel of Prince Nikolaus II Esterházy; the last six settings by Haydn, Beethoven's Mass in C and all five of Johann Nepomuk Hummel's masses represent a flourish of activity in a genre that was artistically in stasis following the church reforms of Emperor Joseph II in the 1780s. It is



Salieri who counterbalances this dominant view of the symphonic mass and thus provides another somewhat different answer to the question of what constitutes ‘true’ or ‘proper’ church music. While the issue itself is old (extending from Augustine through the Council of Trent), it had been raised again by the 1749 encyclical *Annus qui* of Benedict XIV and was taken up by Enlightenment reformers in both a social context (Joseph II) and a musical one (primarily in theoretical speculations in the musical press).

Salieri himself voiced his opinion on the propriety of contemporary styles of liturgical music when discussing a *De profundis* by Gluck (as quoted by Hettrick): ‘[It] is written in a true *Christian* style and therefore . . . is worth far more for its purpose than so many other [pieces], written in a [so-called] masterful, but not a Christian style. These seem to me unsuited for or even detrimental to religious use.’ Salieri’s distinction between ‘masterful’ and ‘Christian’ indicates not only his critical outlook on his contemporaries but also the essence of his own style, one that avoids the perceived excesses of artistry per se.

The distinctive elements of Salieri’s sacred music were set forth in Friedrich Rochlitz’s 1825 obituary of the composer (as given by Hettrick):

In spirit and style of writing, they compare most closely with the early works of Joseph Haydn, except that, since the premises of this chapel [the Hofkapelle, Vienna] are small, and the performing forces can only be sparse, they are less richly scored; they are also less artfully composed in general with regard to fugue and counterpoint; but instead they have an even more beautiful melodic quality whose expressiveness is a distinctive aspect of the entire work.

Rochlitz’s observation – expressive melody in preference to artful fugue – is closer to the mark than his comparison of Salieri to early Haydn, at least as far as the masses are concerned. Rochlitz continues by describing Salieri’s sacred music as ‘simple, noble, pious, and gentle but nevertheless inspired’. The descriptive language recalls Salieri’s indebtedness to his patron, Gluck, and Gluck’s manner of natural expression without exaggeration (either contrapuntal or melodic). Salieri’s Mass in D minor balances the contrapuntal and the melodic without leaning too much towards the purely learned or the overtly decorative. The majority of the vocal writing is chordal or loosely chordal, a hallmark of the Hofkapelle style that continues with Salieri’s successor, Eybler. The solo vocal writing stays within the rhythmic pace of the instruments, thus avoiding a sense of separation or exaggerated flourish. The melodies are tuneful (as in the Credo) and expressive (as in the D minor Kyrie), demonstrating emotion but not the high drama of Haydn’s *Missa in angustiis* Kyrie. The learned writing highlights climactic goals (the close of the Gloria, Credo and *Dona nobis pacem*) and is more artful and varied than Rochlitz indicates. Most curious is the fact that Salieri composed three Credos for this mass. Evidence of the first exists only in the organ part, but the second (Hettrick’s ‘Credo B’) exists complete in both score and parts and therefore was presumably performed, but was later cancelled and replaced by an inserted ‘Credo nuovo’ (Salieri’s title). The revision takes away the contrapuntal artifice, as both the ‘Credo’ and ‘Et resurrexit’ sections of Credo B are in canon (reminiscent of the beginning of the Credo in Haydn’s *Missa in angustiis*). It is only regrettable that this edition does not include Credo B as an appendix.

Salieri’s significance, as exemplified by his Mass in D minor, lies in his shaping of a distinctive and modern religious language (his ‘Christian’ style) that avoids the perceived excesses and improprieties of his age and yet, in doing so, steers clear of the neo-Palestrina solution of the Cæcilians and the alternative neo-historicism of Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis*, trends that come to prominence in the following decades. The debate about what constitutes ‘true’ sacred music is complex in the early decades of the nineteenth century, as all composers, Haydn included, seem to be searching for a new relationship between religious expression, music and liturgy. In Austria the camps divide in terms of philosophy and style (using Salieri’s terms ‘Christian’/‘masterful’) and geographical association (Vienna/Eisenstadt). In the 1820s the Viennese publisher Haslinger initiated a series of prints under the title *Musica sacra* that responded to both sides. The series included six masses by Eybler (Salieri’s successor as Hofkapellmeister), which represent a continuation of the Hofkapelle style, and three masses by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (the last significant composer of the Esterházy Kapelle). The divisions were heightened in subsequent decades as the performance venue of the



mass changed from the church to the concert hall. Ultimately the genre survives in the twenty-first century primarily in our university choruses and local choral societies. Although deserving, Salieri may never replace Haydn and Beethoven in these programmes, for the very reason that his less 'artful' style will not feed the entertainment goals of these groups. But in the context of a liturgical service the true intent, propriety and value of Salieri's 'Christian' style is fully revealed and his ultimate success as a composer of sacred music confirmed.

My thanks go to Jane Hettrick for providing a taped performance of the work.

JEREMIAH W. MCGRANN



RECORDINGS

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MICHEL-RICHARD DE LALANDE (1657–1726)

MUSIC FOR THE SUN KING

Te Deum laudamus (s32); 'Panis angelicus', from *Sacris solemniis* (s74); *La grande pièce royale* (s161); *Venite, exultemus* (s58)

Carolyn Sampson (*dessus* 1), Natalie Clifton-Griffith (*dessus* 2), James Gilchrist (*haute-contre*), Paul Agnew (*taille*), Jonathan Gunthorpe (*basse-taille* 1), James Mustard (*basse-taille* 2) / Ex Cathedra Chamber Choir / Ex Cathedra Baroque Orchestra / Jeffrey Skidmore
Hyperion CDA67325, 2002; one disc, 1'11"

Born in Paris in 1657, Michel-Richard de Lalande received his earliest musical education as a boy chorister in the culturally rich environment of the royal church of St Germain-l'Auxerrois in Paris. During the late 1670s, while working as an organist at various important Parisian churches, Lalande would undoubtedly have become familiar with the emerging genre of the mature Versailles-style *grand motet* – the genre of which he would later become the leading exponent. Composers such as Robert, Lully, Du Mont and Charpentier clearly influenced Lalande's own stylistic development. With his appointment by Louis XIV in 1683 as one of the four *sous-maîtres* at the royal chapel, Lalande began a long-lasting relationship with the royal family that was maintained on both a personal and a professional level until the end of his life. Over the course of the next decade he added various prestigious positions to that of *sous-maître de la Chapelle*, including *surintendant de la musique de la chambre* (in 1689), perhaps the most prestigious court musical position of the day. By 1715 he was in sole command of the music of the royal chapel at Versailles, making him the most influential composer of French sacred music in the early eighteenth century. Not only was his music being performed at the royal chapel and at court, however; it was also featured regularly throughout the first half of the eighteenth century at the Concert Spirituel, the highly acclaimed and popular Parisian concert series first established in 1725. There is evidence (through publications, manuscript copies and writings) that Lalande's music retained its popularity long after the composer's death in 1726. As late as 1792 his music was being performed regularly at the royal chapel, as well as elsewhere in France.

Although probably best known today for his sacred works, Lalande was also a successful composer of secular stage and concert works, including ballets, *pastorales*, *intermèdes*, *divertissements*, instrumental suites and symphonies. Ex Cathedra's recording of 'Music for the Sun King' features music composed by Lalande for use at Versailles. With the exception of *La grande pièce royale*, all the music recorded for this CD was intended originally for use in the royal chapel. *La grande pièce royale*, later known as the *Deuxième Fantaisie ou Caprice que le Roi demandait souvent*, was copied by Philidor in 1695. While the original purpose of this



piece is not confirmed on the score, Lalande composed other works that were intended for performance during the king's supper by the elite ensemble of instrumentalists known as the *petits violons*. This piece may have served a similar court function.

Although written as one continuous piece, *La grande pièce royale* falls into six contrasting sections, distinguished on the score by changes of tempo and metre. From the outset, the instrumentalists of Ex Cathedra capture the contrasting characteristics of the six sections. At the opening the sense of regal dignity is established through the slow repeated descending bass line and coloured by the use of an obbligato bassoon part. In the fast fugal second section – similar in style to the second part of a French overture – the instrumentalists' bright, crisp, rhythmic playing provides a contrast to the surrounding material. It is, however, the two central sections that are perhaps the most remarkable passages in the piece, particularly in the writing for the solo bassoon. Although the bassoon was being used in both sacred and secular music during the 1690s, the extent to which it is given an independent role in this piece is striking. In the first of these two sections, marked *doucement*, the bassoon is given an evocatively haunting duet with the violin, performed here with great subtlety and sensitivity. Lalande's use of orchestral colour and some beautifully rich harmonic writing, reminiscent at times of his contemporary Marc-Antoine Charpentier, create a sense of warmth and intensity. In the following section the instrumentalists imbue the melodic lines with a feeling of elegance and poise, suggested not only by the marking *gracieusement* but also by the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic shape. Here (and in other sections of this piece) the influence of Lully is clearly felt, particularly in the dance-like quality of the writing. In this section, and in the final section of the piece, the instrumentalists capture the wonderful sense of rhythmic interplay (such as in the hemiolas towards the end of the piece) that gives the music its momentum. The piece concludes with an almost nonchalant gesture, the music seemingly tossed away by the musicians.

For the remainder of the CD, Ex Cathedra focuses on some outstanding examples of Lalande's sacred choral works (a setting of the *Te Deum*; a *grand motet*, *Venite, exultemus*; and the solo 'Panis angelicus', taken from another *grand motet*, *Sacris solemniis*). Throughout Lalande's illustrious royal career, he provided music for celebrations of the king's mass in the chapel at Versailles. Louis XIV's preference for low mass meant that few seventeenth-century French composers (with the exception of Marc-Antoine Charpentier) composed polyphonic settings of the mass. Instead, while the priest intoned the words of the mass, the royal musicians performed *grands* and *petits motets*, which to visiting dignitaries must have sounded more like a concert of sacred music than a liturgical celebration of the mass.

Many of Lalande's works are extant in various versions: he was a constant reviser of his own music. Comparisons of such works make for an interesting study in stylistic development. While clearly rooted in the earlier 'Versailles' motet style of composers such as Formé, Veillot and Lully, Lalande was not averse to Italian influences. Although perhaps not as immersed in the style as Charpentier, his harmonic treatment reflects an interest in it, particularly in the expressive use of sevenths and ninths. Although Lalande does not appear to have travelled to Italy, he was part of a vibrant musical circle, led by the Abbé Matthieu, whose passion was for Italian music. Lalande's motets offer the listener varied musical structures with contrasting sections for soloists and chorus, accompanied by obbligato instruments, orchestra and continuo. Although sectional in nature, the *grands motets* do not consist of fully independent movements. Ex Cathedra's performances effectively reflect Lalande's sense of a continuous musical structure.

Writing in 1704, Le Cerf commented that a composer should mirror in his sacred music the general sentiments expressed in the psalm, while acknowledging that certain words demanded special treatment by the composer and that changes in mood or the form of narration should be reflected by appropriate changes in musical style (*Comparaison de la musique italienne et de la musique françoise* (Brussels, 1704–1706; reprinted Geneva: Minkoff, 1972), 164). A similar reference to text setting had been made in 1636 by the influential French theorist Mersenne, when he wrote that 'one must consider the text in its entirety, and the design or intention of what it contains . . . so that being sung it has at least as much power over its listeners, as if it were recited by an excellent orator' (*Harmonie universelle* (Paris, 1636; reprinted Paris: Éditions du Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975), 361). Lalande clearly shared the same concerns for



careful, powerful and rhetorical text setting in his sacred music. As can be heard in the works chosen for this recording, his close attention both to the general sentiments of the text and to the details of word-painting contributes to their effectiveness. In Ex Cathedra's performances both the general and the more specific sentiments of the text are superbly conveyed to the listener. For example, in the 'Tu ad liberandum' section of the *Te Deum* (surely inspired by Charpentier) Lalande uses expressive harmonies, silence, affective melodic lines and word repetition to convey the text; this is enhanced at the end by Ex Cathedra's use of dynamics. In contrast, the following 'Tu devicto mortis aculeo' section has a strident bass line, Lullian upbeat flourishes and powerful harmonies employed to portray the 'sting of death' – writing that could have been envisaged for an opera, almost Handelian in its dramatic appeal. At the words 'et in psalmis jubilemus ei' in the *grand motet Venite, exultemus*, the singers and instrumentalists give an exhilarating performance of the composer's fast, melismatic setting. At 'venite, adoremus' Lalande shrouds 'adoremus' in a halo of sound: melismas, heart-rending dissonant harmonies, falling bass lines and pedal points are exquisitely rendered by the performers. In the triple-metre setting of 'Nos autem populus ejus' the references to 'pasture' and 'sheep' prompt a lilting, *pastorale*-style setting, with solo oboe and strings accompanying the *haute-contre*, answered by a bright-sounding chorus. In the 'Panis angelicus' the soloists evoke an ethereal and expressive quality appropriate to the text. In this piece a subtle but strong bass line supports the dialogue between the soprano and solo flute. The balance between the parts is superb, allowing the listener to hear clearly the various strands of the texture. The lines are beautifully ornamented, giving shape and momentum to the phrasing. Throughout this recording Ex Cathedra's sensitive approach to the text (in terms of both syntax and meaning) certainly gives the music as much power as that of 'an excellent orator'.

For this recording Jeffrey Skidmore has recreated performances of Lalande's music that pay close attention to performance-practice issues specific to French baroque music, such as pronunciation, tempo choices, rhythmic alteration and ornamentation. The importance of careful pronunciation cannot be overstated, yet in many performances it is completely overlooked or ignored. It is not a question primarily of historical reproduction, but rather an issue that affects many aspects of the music, particularly articulation. Jeffrey Skidmore has retained the pronunciation of Latin as though it were French – a practice that was maintained in France until the early years of the twentieth century. This is a feature of the recording that gives the music that quintessential French flavour, in spite of the Latin text. Rhythmic and melodic inflections and stresses make so much more sense when the appropriate pronunciation is used.

In French baroque music, the issue of rhythmic alteration (the application of *notes inégales*) has often been contentious. While the practice itself is unquestioned, its exact nature remains elusive: performers must decide where (if at all) and to what degree rhythmic alteration is practised. The relationship between the choice of tempo and the application of *notes inégales* is of fundamental importance. Although a particular metre and rhythmic pattern might suggest rhythmic alteration, an incorrect choice of tempo will make the use of inequality unnatural and inappropriate. For a surprisingly large amount of music from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, there are verbal indications of tempo, and these include precise durations. Indeed, Lalande's *Te Deum* includes such indications written in the hand of the composer. (See Lionel Sawkins, 'L'interprétation des *grands motets* de Michel-Richard de Lalande d'après le minutage de l'époque', in *Le grand motet français (1663–1792): actes du colloque internationale de musicologie*, ed. Yves Ferraton and Jean Mongrédien (Paris: Université de Paris-Sorbonne, BN, 1987).) For the most part, Skidmore appears to have followed the markings of the autograph score and used them as a guide for his interpretation of this work, creating a satisfying approach not only to inequality but also to rhythmic aspects such as hemiolas.

Inequality is applied in a number of sections in the *Te Deum* (as elsewhere on the recording). In the 'Tu rex gloriae' section, for example, in which *notes inégales* enhance the lilting quality of the music, there is a beautiful balance between the solo soprano and the solo violin – the performers match each other's subtle use of inequality and ornamentation, as in their execution of some exquisite *ports de voix* and *coulés*. Similarly appropriate is the use of the over-dotted rhythms at the opening of the *Te Deum* – a rhythmic alteration suggested by the tempo and metre and aptly chosen to suit the grand ceremonial style associated with the text.



One further aspect of performance practice should be mentioned: the choice of voices, particularly the upper voices. Although women (including Lalande's own daughters) did occasionally sing in the royal chapel at Versailles, it would have been most common to have boys, castratos or falsettos singing the upper parts. Women would have sung at the Concert Spirituel, whereas boys were not usually used as soloists at these concerts. The *haute-contre* line was sung by high tenors, rather than female altos or countertenors. On this recording Jeffrey Skidmore uses a mixture of voice types to simulate the sound of the singers of Lalande's day. Without the sound of the castratos, it is impossible to recreate precisely the vocal sound of Lalande's music, but Skidmore's compromise solution, with both men and women singing the *haute-contre* lines, creates a satisfying result.

In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) Lydia Goehr has raised important questions regarding just what it is that we understand by a musical work of art, and the extent to which we rely on the written score as being representative of that work. This recording by Ex Cathedra demonstrates the importance and value of looking beyond the notes on the page in recreating the music of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France: elements such as ornamentation, rhythmic alteration, dynamics and continuo realization all play a significant role in bringing life to this music of the past. Ex Cathedra has melded together sensitive musicality, a passion for baroque music and concern for musicological issues to produce a fine recording. This is an ensemble full of creative flair, whose stylish and spirited performances effuse vitality and drama.

C. JANE GOSINE



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JEAN-JOSEPH CASSANÉA DE MONDONVILLE (1711–1772)

SIX SONATES EN SYMPHONIE, OP. 3

Les Musiciens du Louvre / Marc Minkowski

Archiv 474 550-2, 2003; one disc, 0'58"

Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville is regarded today as an outstanding figure in eighteenth-century French music, but his music has only recently begun to attract attention from modern performers and conductors. Marc Minkowski, founder and conductor of Les Musiciens du Louvre, led the revival of Mondonville's music with a recording of excerpts from the *pastorale-héroïque Titon et l'Aurore* (Erato 2292 45715 2, 1992) and has now issued this fine new recording of the composer's orchestral transcriptions of his sonatas for harpsichord and violin (Op. 3). After hearing these energetic performances conducted by Minkowski, one might be prepared to argue that the composer's genius shines not only in his stage works and in the *grand motet*, as scholars have previously argued, but that he also excelled in the genre of chamber music. In this collection his writing is full of variety and innovative in both formal design and use of instrumental colour.

Throughout Mondonville's chamber music the violin plays a central role. As a brilliant performer on the instrument himself, Mondonville also introduced some innovations to its technique, such as the first use of harmonics in solo violin music (in *Les sons harmoniques*, Op. 4). Born in 1711 in Narbonne, Mondonville probably received his early musical training from his father, who was organist at the Narbonne cathedral. Nothing is known of his early musical training on the violin, but at the age of twenty-two he was in Paris, where he performed a concerto at the Concert Spirituel 'd'une manière très brillante', according to the *Mercur de France*. In the same year he published a collection of violin sonatas (Op. 1), and a year later a set of trio sonatas (Op. 2).



After his trip to Paris Mondonville spent some time in Lille as violinist and one of the directors of the Concert de Lille. There he also published his next two collections, the *Pièces de clavecin en sonates* (Op. 3, no date) and *Les sons harmoniques* (Op. 4, no date). The former collection, as its title indicates, unites the harpsichord solo *pièce* with the *sonate* for violin, which was much in vogue at the time. These were the first keyboard sonatas published in France, and their novelty also extends to the way in which the two instruments are treated as equals, without one part doubling the other.

Mondonville was back in Paris in 1738 and 1739, once again demonstrating his interest in innovative musical combinations. At the beginning of September 1738 he directed a concerto for three choirs at the Concert Spirituel, and in 1739 performed a concerto of his own composition; both have been lost. From that year he held successive appointments as *violon de la chambre de la chapelle du Roi*, then *sous-maître* and eventually *intendant* of the royal chapel in 1744. His *grands motets* were regarded as the equal of Lalande's when they were performed at the Concert Spirituel in the 1740s, and several of them remained in the repertory well into the 1760s. The first sonata from Op. 3, adapted as a 'grand concerto', was performed with great success at the Concert Spirituel on 2 April 1749 and repeated the following day. Several of the sonatas continued to be performed *en symphonie* at the Concert Spirituel between 1749 and 1757. In all, at least thirty-nine of Mondonville's works were performed in that series, and repetitions of those works totalled a staggering 513 performances over a period of twenty-seven years.

The sonatas of Op. 3 for harpsichord and violin appear to have become well known outside France as well. Editions were published in England by Walsh as *Six sonates or Lessons for the Harpsichord Which May be Accompanied with a Violin or German Flute* and in Italy as *Sei sonate di cembalo accompagnate dal violino composta dal Sigr Mondonville, maestro di Capella di Versagles, del Re di Francia* (no place, no date). The sixth sonata was transcribed for organ and survives only in manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Rés. F. 1657). Some fifteen years after the printed edition of Op. 3 first appeared, at a time when the orchestral *symphonie* was enjoying popularity, Mondonville prepared the transcriptions of the sonatas for instrumental ensemble. The sole surviving manuscript of the transcriptions (which is probably not a holograph) belonged to the Marquis de La Salle and is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Conservatoire collection, D. 11027). The set is entitled *Sei sonate a quattro 1^o et 2^o violin, fagotto e basso*. They form the basis for the present recording and for a modern edition published by the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles. The reference in the title to *sonate a quattro* may indicate the minimum number of instruments needed to perform the works (a trio plus keyboard continuo), but there are indications for larger forces too: oboes are indicated in Sonatas 1 and 6, and the bassoon often has an obbligato role separate from the continuo. In some sonatas the texture is varied by woodwind doublings of strings with flute or oboe, alternating with solo passages for different groups.

In his transcriptions, with the exception of some octave displacements of upper parts originally written as hand crossings in the harpsichord, Mondonville rarely departs from the original melodic and harmonic material for violin and harpsichord. He often retains the importance of the original crossed-hand passages by assigning them to the bassoon, an instrument that was rarely given prominence in orchestral writing at this time. The sonatas are cast in three movements (fast–slow–fast), with frequent use of French dance rhythms and forms. Most of the first movements incorporate sonata allegro form, but the opening movement of Sonata No. 1 is a French *ouverture*, and the first movement of Sonata No. 6, which is labelled 'concerto', uses tutti-solo contrast. In the French *ouverture* the slow opening section gives way to imitative passages in the allegro in which a leaping melody in quavers played by strings is answered by a scalic countermelody in semiquavers from the bassoon. Other reminiscences of the French suite include the *gigas* that conclude most of the sonatas and the finale in Sonata No. 5, which resembles a *rigaudon*.

All but one of the middle movements are entitled 'aria' and use the French *rondeau* form. They are metrically quite varied, relatively thin in texture, and usually feature a simple, tuneful melody. The aria of Sonata No. 4, which Edith Borroff has described as 'one of the most personal of Mondonville's works' (in 'The Instrumental Style of Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville', *Recherches sur la musique classique française* 7 (1967), 179), is a sentimental *rondeau* in C minor. The melody is accompanied by a gentle string



pizzicato doubled by bassoon. Rameau is said to have taken inspiration from Mondonville for his *Pièces de clavecin en concerts* (1741), as did Louis-Gabriel Guillemain and Armand-Louis Couperin after him, and it is tempting to suggest that this aria inspired Rameau's 'La livri' from that collection, which is also in C minor.

In the outer movements of the sonatas *Les Musiciens du Louvre* achieve an appropriately symphonic sound with an ensemble of twenty-five musicians (six first violins, six second violins, two violas, four cellos, two basses, two oboes, two bassoons and harpsichord or organ). The orchestra at the Concert Spirituel may have been slightly larger – we know that it had thirty-seven players in 1751 – with even more doubling of upper strings and woodwind, but the excellent balance and energy that *Les Musiciens du Louvre* provide seems to give the music all of the contrast and depth that it requires. Minkowski makes the effective decision to use soloists in Sonata No. 3 and in a few movements from other sonatas, and they give competent and stylish performances throughout. The accomplished playing of violinist Anton Steck and bassoonists Jean-Louis Fiat and Catherine Pepin deserves special mention.

Boroff accords Mondonville considerable praise for his innovative writing for violin and harpsichord in Op. 3. 'As a whole', she writes, 'these works represent an extraordinary achievement for a young man who knew no model from which to draw knowledge of this new medium' ('The Instrumental Style', 181). The orchestral transcriptions offer an attractive alternative to hearing the works in their original scoring, and the performances by *Les Musiciens du Louvre* bring to life Mondonville's impressive accomplishments. The recording has been issued under Archiv's blue (budget) series and also in the Deutsche Grammophon series (457 600 2). The performances are identical, but the latter includes an informative essay on Mondonville and the sonatas by Edmond Lemaitre.

MARY CYR



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ANTONIO VIVALDI (1678–1741)

LA VERITÀ IN CIMENTO

Nathalie Stutzmann (Damira), Gemma Bertagnolli (Rosane), Guillemette Laurens (Rustena), Anthony Rolfe Johnson (Mamud), Sara Mingardo (Melindo), Philippe Jaroussky (Zelim) / Ensemble Matheus / Jean-Christophe Spinosi
Opus 111 OP30365, 2003; three discs, 2'38"

The tercentenary of Vivaldi's birth in 1978 saw the first sustained interest in his operas, which had languished largely unperformed ever since their scores were identified in Turin's Biblioteca Nazionale in the 1930s. Many of these performances left much to be desired, but now, twenty-five years on, there has been another burst of activity, with several new recordings of a much higher standard.

This set of three CDs in Opus 111's Vivaldi series is the first recording of *La verità in cimento*, a work written at a crucial time in Vivaldi's career. Vivaldi was thirty-five when he made his operatic debut in Vicenza with *Ottone in villa* in 1713, followed rapidly by several works for the Venetian stage. *La verità in cimento* dates from the autumn of 1720, following a period at Mantua in the employ of the Landgrave of Hesse-Darmstadt and on the threshold of the decade in which Vivaldi's works were staged in Rome, Florence and Prague as his reputation spread across Italy and beyond. *La verità in cimento* marked Vivaldi's brief return to Venice after his three-year Mantuan sojourn; the production was at his old haunt of the Teatro Sant'Angelo rather than at one of the larger, more prestigious theatres. However, he clearly had less impresarial control over the following Carnival season than previously, since he contributed only one act of *Filippo Re di Macedonia* to that season's repertory. (The first two acts were supplied by his compatriot Giuseppe Boniventi.)



The libretto for *La verità in cimento*, by the young Venetian Giovanni Palazzi, displays the vogue for the exotic with its Turkish setting, although Vivaldi makes no attempt at an ethnic musical palette in the manner of later composers such as Gluck or Mozart. The plot is unusually straightforward, but centred around the customary conceit of mistaken identities. Mamud, Sultan of Cambaja, wants to end the political rivalry of the Turkish states of Joghe and Cambaja by marrying his son Melindo to Rosane, Princess of Joghe. However, Mamud fathered two sons, one legitimate (Zelim, born to his wife Rustena) and one illegitimate (Melindo, born to his favourite, Damira), and then switched the two babies at birth. The opera opens with Mamud's decision to reveal the deception to the people, and the ensuing action explores the impact of this decision on the various characters. The scheming Damira objects to her son losing the throne to his rival Zelim and plots to prevent it. The Sultana Rustena is manipulated by Damira and believes that she has been betrayed by Mamud. The honest Zelim wants to get on with his half-brother, but Melindo will have none of it and rejects him scornfully. Predictably, both young men are in love with Rosane, who is happy to flirt with both and to marry whoever will give her power and a throne. Mamud spends much of the opera in a haze of indecision, and the obligatory happy ending is achieved only by Zelim's willingness to relinquish both Rosane and the kingdom of Joghe, retaining only the crown of Cambaja for himself.

Thus the opera contains little real action, focusing instead on personal relationships and the characters themselves, a fact that may well have been exploited by Vivaldi's strong original cast of singers. The six singers included only one castrato, the little known Girolamo Albertini, and one tenor, Antonio Barbieri, who was making his Venetian debut in the role of Mamud. Barbieri was one of three singers whom Vivaldi had brought with him from Mantua, the others being Antonia Laurenti (also known as 'La Coralli'), who sang Melindo, and Antonia Margherita Merighi (Damira), who appeared regularly in Venice from 1717 to 1732 and was one of Handel's leading ladies in London from 1729. Another, even more famous, soprano whom Handel recruited in Italy at the same time, Anna Maria Strada del Pò, was also beginning her career in Venice with *La verità in cimento*. She created the role of Rosane, and the clear articulation that was to make her shake so renowned in London in the 1730s would have been well exploited by the sighing musical figures of Rosane's closing aria in Act 1, the C minor Andante 'Amato ben'; this aria gives its name to the concerto in which the same theme appears.

Antonia Laurenti and Anna Strada have another claim to fame, too, for while *La verità in cimento* was being performed, Benedetto Marcello published his infamous satire *Il teatro alla moda* attacking contemporary practices in Venetian opera. The frontispiece, with its well known anagrams, refers to the two singers, along with a third (Chiara Orlandi, who sang the part of Rustena), the librettist Palazzi and Vivaldi himself, the latter also being identified by the figure of an angel (the Sant'Angelo) wearing a priest's hat and playing the violin.

La verità in cimento survives in a single autograph score, although the popularity of its music is revealed by the many individual arias now to be found in libraries across Italy, Germany and France. The work appears to have undergone various revisions, possibly as the result, at least in part, of a delay in its premiere, and many scenes have one and sometimes two alternative arias. The final chorus is also missing, although the music can be recovered from the Roman opera *Giustino* of 1724, whose closing chorus, over a chaconne bass, reuses the same text. Musical director Jean-Christophe Spinosi, ably advised by the Vivaldi scholar Frédéric Delaméa, has sensibly opted for the initial version of the score. However, for one scene in Act 1 (Melindo's aria in Scene 11, not Scene 8, as stated in the liner notes) an alternative aria, one of two settings of the text 'Mi vuoi tradi lo so', is chosen on grounds of musical quality – an understandable choice, particularly when this powerful dramatic aria, full of long runs for the voice, is as well sung as it is here by Sara Mingardo. Mingardo also makes the most of her opportunities in Melindo's earlier aria, 'La del Nilo', whose coloratura depicts the wicked serpent lurking on the banks of the Nile (Palazzi was clearly not bothered by the niceties of geography).

The standard of much of the singing on this set matches that of Mingardo. Melindo's rival Zelim, the original castrato role, is sung appropriately by Philippe Jaroussky, whose flexible male soprano negotiates coloratura passages with ease yet provides an appropriate air of gentle innocence for his G minor siciliano



'Tu m'offendi' in Act 1. Gemma Bertagnolli's pure soprano gives Rosane's music an air of youth and flirtatiousness as she plays off one suitor against the other, as in 'Amato ben'. The part of Damira receives some of the most dramatic music; Nathalie Stutzmann's powerful alto is well suited to the challenge, and she negotiates well the taxing wide leaps, more reminiscent of Vivaldi's later vocal style, in 'Se l'acquisto di quel sogno'. Occasionally, however, she comes close to caricature with a couple of very low notes at the end of cadenzas and some slightly hammy asides in the recitative. Mamud is an unsympathetic character, but his music, though technically demanding, has an appealing lyrical aspect that is brought out to the full by Anthony Rolfe Johnson.

Lyricism is not something that is immediately striking about the approach of Ensemble Matheus under Spinosi, however. The overture sets the tone for much of the playing: a very aggressive style with exaggerated dynamics, off-the-string playing and heavily attacked staccatos. This can undoubtedly be exciting, and is entirely appropriate in certain contexts, but at times it seems at odds with the music and indeed Vivaldi's own directions. It certainly sits uncomfortably alongside Rolfe Johnson's gentler approach in a couple of arias, and the sudden dynamic surges in the overture's second movement contradict Vivaldi's *sempre piano* marking. This mannered approach is taken to its extreme in Melindo's Act 2 aria 'Occhio non gira', where syncopations are accentuated so much that the melodic line and indeed, in the middle section, all musical sense is completely lost.

Vivaldi's orchestration in *La verità in cimento*, as in a number of the earlier operas, shows an ear for colour that one would expect from Vivaldi the concerto composer. Tenor recorders double the violins for Rustena's gentle 'Fragil fior' in Act 1, an aria in which Guillemette Laurens, as in one of her subsequent arias, appears to favour a slower tempo than Spinosi, whose speeds, unlike other aspects of this interpretation, are generally well judged. There are obbligatos for sopranino recorder (*flautino*), in an aria borrowed from the Mantuan opera *Tito Manlio*, and for cello, as well as a lively accompaniment for pairs of oboes and trumpets in Melindo's 'Crudele se brami' in Act 3, another piece that Vivaldi brought with him from Mantua, this time from *Teuzzone*. Spinosi adds further colour to the score by varying the continuo section. Although there is no evidence that Vivaldi ever used plucked continuo instruments in his operas, the presence here of theorbo and sometimes guitar adds some interesting colours, even if the frequent changes in some sections of recitatives can sound fussy. Spinosi is very fond of pizzicato double bass; used sparingly this can add welcome lightness to delicate arias, but it is overused here, and it seems perverse to add it to an aria like Rustena's 'Cara sorte', whose bass line is specifically marked 'Viol[oncello] solo sempre'.

The high standard of the singers is generally matched by the high standard of their ornamentation, which, apart from an occasional extreme of register at the end of a cadenza, fits both the musical and the dramatic situations. Although Palazzi's text is not inspirational, Vivaldi produced some fine music, not least in the bucolic trio in Act 1, with its echo effects, and the dramatic quintet at the end of Act 2, whose sudden changes of tempo neatly capture the contrasting feelings of the different characters. Undoubtedly, this first recording of the opera was worth waiting for, although it is a pity that the opportunity was missed to include at least some of the alternative arias as an appendix – there is certainly space on two of the CDs. Nevertheless, the recording is most welcome, and further issues in Opus 111's Vivaldi series are eagerly anticipated.

ERIC CROSS



