

## COMMUNICATIONS



### REPORTS

doi:10.1017/S1478570615000159

THOMAS GRIFFIN writes:

On 25 January 2015 the final concert of the Resonance Early Music Festival was performed before an enthusiastic audience in the Vienna Konzerthaus. As a fitting close to the series Alessandro Quarta conducted the Concerto Romano and five singers representing the four seasons and Jove in a stunning performance of Alessandro Scarlatti's 1716 serenata *La Gloria di Primavera* ('Nato è già l'austriaco sole'). First heard at Naples in celebration of the birth of the Habsburg Archduke Leopold, it was performed on the evening of 19 May 1716, in the palace of Don Nicola Gaetano d'Aragona according to the libretto printed by Michele-Luigi Muzio at Naples in 1716. The *Gazzetta di Napoli*, however, contradicts the libretto, reporting three performances at Naples, on 20, 21 and 23 May, presumably to accommodate the crush of aristocrats determined to witness the serenata:

Naples, 26 May 1716

On Wednesday evening [20 May] His Excellency the Viceroy with Her Excellency the Vicereine went to hear the serenata in praise of the birth of the Most August young Prince which Don Nicola Gaetano d'Aragona, the Duke of Laurenzano, and [his wife] Donna Aurora Sanseverino, of the Princes of Bisignano, had sung in their palace. Because of the rare architecture of the theatre as well as the beauty of the performers' costumes and the excellence of the music, it succeeded most admirably, having been repeated the following day [21 May] as well as on Saturday [23 May], with all the ladies and cavaliers of our city in attendance, to whom were distributed noble refreshments in abundance. (Ausilia Magauida and Danilo Costantini, *Musica e spettacolo nel Regno di Napoli attraverso lo spoglio della 'Gazzetta' (1675–1768)* (Rome: Istituto Nazionale per lo Sviluppo Musicale del Mezzogiorno Onlus, 2009), accompanying CD. My translation.)

Nicolò Giuvo (before 1708–1748), the poet who composed the cantata text, is named on the title page of Muzio's libretto (reproduced in Roberto Pagano, *Alessandro Scarlatti* (Turin: Edizioni Rai Radiotelevisione Italiana, 1972), opposite page 321), where he is identified as a member of the Arcadian Society (*detto trà pastori di Arcadia EUPIDO*). The original singers, composer and designer responsible for this conspicuous *fiesta* are named on page 3 of the libretto:

GIOVE in machina.	Il Sig. D. Antonio Manna, Virtuoso dell' Augustissimo Imperatore Regnante.
PRIMAVERA.	Il Sig. Marchese D. Matteo Sassano.
ESTATE.	La Signora Margherita Durestanti.
AUTUNNO.	Il Sig. Francesco Vitale.
INVERNO.	Il Sig. Gaetano Borghi, Virtuoso dell'Ecellentiss. Signora D. Aurora Sanseverino, Duchessa di Laurenzano.
MUSICA.	Del Sig. Cavaliere Alessandro Scarlatti, Primo Maestro Real Capella. Ingegniere della Scene il Sig. Cristoforo Scor.



These were indeed some of the most distinguished voices at Naples in 1716, followed with consummate skill at Vienna this year by Salvo Vitale (bass, *Giove*), Lucia Napoli (mezzosoprano, *Primavera*), Francesca Aspromonte (soprano, *Estate*), Hillary Summers (alto, *Autunno*) and Luca Cervoni (tenor, *Inverno*).

The Neapolitan libretto included an oversized engraving (also reproduced in Pagano, *Alessandro Scarlatti*) by Giuseppe Maliar of the *scena* designed by Cristoforo Scor for the original performance. Like many serenatas, *La Gloria di Primavera* consists of a dispute concerning precedence among allegorical or mythological characters – in this case, which of the four seasons deserves the most praise or glory for its part in the birth of the much-desired Austrian Archduke. At the end of part one of the serenata the four seasons unite in a chorus invoking the presence of Jove to decide their dispute. After the pause and refreshments, early in part two Jove makes his appearance to render judgment, descending from on high on a cloud or *macchina*, as shown in Maliar's engraving. Thankfully, nothing like this was attempted in the splendid Vienna Konzerthaus, where the serenata was performed in the manner of an oratorio, without scenery or costumes.

In older work lists for Scarlatti a Viennese performance of the serenata is listed for 1716. There is, however, no real evidence for this. Several manuscript scores in the Austrian National Library and in the Bavarian State Library were prepared for the Viennese early-music enthusiast Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, who had the serenata performed at his house concerts on 26 December 1825 and in November 1828. For the 1828 performance it seems Kiesewetter had Scarlatti's orchestration modernized, somewhat in the manner of Mozart's reorchestration of Handel, with the addition of clarinets. Curiously, *La Gloria di Primavera* was given in London in 1721, as proved by a libretto published there by Thomas Wood, and by several published notices recounting a performance in the King's Theatre in the Haymarket. Margherita Durestanti, one of the original singers from Naples, appeared in the London performance, which in all likelihood was organized by Alessandro's brother Francesco as a commercial venture. There is, of course, no evidence that Alessandro ever visited Britain. (All the sources for this serenata are described in Thomas Griffin, 'The Late Baroque Serenata in Rome and Naples: A Documentary Study with Emphasis on Alessandro Scarlatti' (PhD dissertation, University of California Los Angeles, 1983), 691–699 and 802–805.)

As would be expected of an Arcadian poet, Giuvo's text is filled with pastoral imagery (murmuring fountains, whispering breezes, meadows full of flowers). The final ensemble, in fact, is little more than a parody of the final chorus from Act 1 of Torquato Tasso's *Aminta*. But Giuvo's text also contains many striking conceits and surprising metaphors, and offers a convoluted baroque syntax more akin to the Gongorism of an earlier era than to the expected pastoral constraints of the early eighteenth century. Since Giuvo and Scarlatti are remembered primarily for their contributions to the operatic tradition of the era, it comes as no surprise to find a number of commonplace textual images as well as musical topoi characteristic of late baroque opera and oratorio in this serenata. Spring's aria 13 provides a characteristic example: 'Solca il mar scioglie le vele / se mai posa il vento, e l'onda / e la sponda / lascia il provido nocchier.' (Plough through the sea, let billow / the sails. If ever the wind, / waves and tide are against you, / leave it to the cautious helmsman.) Scarlatti responds well to the pastoral imagery as well as to the unapologetic baroque exuberance of this poetry. All twenty of the solo arias, the one duet and two of the seven ensemble pieces (called choruses) of the serenata consist of da capo structures. Often they begin with melodic phrases of odd length that are rarely answered in a symmetrically balanced way. Yet the music achieves coherence thanks to Scarlatti's contrapuntal discipline and keen sense of harmonic progression. Scarlatti invariably derives cogent musical ideas from the poetic texts, sometimes of surprising wit, as in Summer's aria 5, where the Austrian artillery fire upon the Turks in the B section with repeated notes in the lower strings.

As Edward Dent recognized long ago, Scarlatti's handling of instruments is most interesting in his arias. In the set pieces of *La Gloria di Primavera* the composer combines strings, flute, oboes, bassoons and trumpets in an exceptionally diverse array of *concertini* and *concerti grossi*. Some of these combinations resemble the practice of Scarlatti's younger contemporaries, but his essentially conservative stance is more often in evidence in the contrapuntal differentiation that the composer enforces between the singing voice and the accompanying instruments – for example, between the 'concerto grosso d'oboe e fagotti', strings and voices of chorus 11, or the contrast of the 'concerto di due oboe' and Jove's voice in aria 26. The twenty-eight



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

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

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



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

ANTHONY HART writes:

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

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