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Ann Lingas

Celebrating Corelli

Arcangelo Corelli fra mito e realtà storica. Nuove prospettive d'indagine musicologica e interdisciplinare nel 350° anniversario della nascita. Atti del congresso internazionale di studi (Fusignano, 11–14 settembre 2003), ed. Gregory Barnett, Antonella d'Ovidio and Stefano La Via, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2007), €73

The violinist Arcangelo Corelli's dramatic effect on witnesses—especially when leading large groups in his own compositions—was widely reported by his contemporaries, and inspired fellow musicians from

Francesco Geminiani to Georg Muffat. Corelli capitalized on his celebrity in part by cooperating directly with the Amsterdam publisher Roger, as Rudolf Rasch's discovery of contracts between the parties has shown. This arrangement ensured that his six printed collections circulated throughout Europe among a diaspora of Italian musicians who presented and taught his music to instrumentalists, including a growing number of amateur players. Later, as Corelli the violinist-leader faded from memory, his legacy as a composer became more prominent. The 18th-century music historians Charles Burney and John Hawkins called attention to his music, and its importance was consolidated through Joseph Joachim and Friedrich Chrysander's 1888–91 edition of his collected works. Corelli subsequently came to occupy a peculiar historiographical position, characterized as a crucial link in the development of 'absolute' music who gathered together and refined the instrumental practices of his age.

This last view of Corelli was reflected in the conference proceedings of the first International Corelli Congress held in 1968, which mainly included studies evaluating surviving musical sources or offering thoughts on the origins and influences of the composer's style. By the third Congress of 1980, published papers echoed wider musicological trends, exhibiting a strong interest in the 'thick context' of Corelli's Rome. In particular, authors examined the place of music within the Arcadian Academy, which sponsored literary gatherings of Rome's foremost patrons and intellectual figures. The fifth Congress of 1994 witnessed strong challenges to long-standing narratives as some contributors questioned existing descriptions of Corellian style and the sense in which his compositions served as models or could be considered 'classic'. Conceptions of Corelli have continued to shift, and papers from the sixth Congress of 2003 under review here reflect productive scholarly tensions as well as an impressive familiarity with a wide variety of sources evoking musical Rome. The editors have divided 25 papers—13 in Italian, eleven in English, one in Spanish—into five sections whose titles are translated below.

In one of four essays examining 'Classicism and originality: between myth and historical reality', Peter Allsop chips away at a long-standing Corelli cliché, that of his unoriginality ('"Nor great fancy or rich invention": on Corelli's originality'). Drawing widely on sources of instrumental music by the composer and his Italian peers, Allsop demonstrates with finality that Corelli by no means codified or distilled the wide variety of music that surrounded him. Stefano La Via adopts a contrasting interdisciplinary perspective in his offering 'From the "poetic reason" of Gianvincenzo Gravina to the "lovely ideas" in music of Arcangelo Corelli: theories and practices of Roman "classicism" beyond Arcadia', as he searches for ideals of musical composition espoused by the courtly circles that employed Corelli. In line with earlier scholars, La Via acknowledges that few sources directly address the poetics of music. He also confronts a problem central to Corelli's purely instrumental legacy: the inferior, even irrelevant place of wordless music in writings of the Roman elite who overwhelmingly describe music as an enhancement to sung poetry.

Working within this artistic hierarchy, La Via interrogates Corelli's op.4 *Sonate a tre*, dedicated to Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni—the foremost Roman patron of the arts and a leading Arcadian—and written for intellectual gatherings at his palace. Element by element, La Via interprets the lavishly emblematic frontispiece that accompanies the Roman (Komarek) edition of 1694 to reveal ideals appropriate to instrumental music, in an extensive series of classical allusions to the power of harmony. He links this privileging of harmony with recurring praise by contemporaries for Corelli's ability to *regolare l'armonia* ('control harmony'). Although La Via chooses to explore this concept of control mainly through harmonic analysis, he acknowledges that contemporary commentators used the term 'harmony' much more broadly, not least in reference to Corelli's dramatic coordination of large performing forces. He aligns the poet Gravina's musically suggestive literary model of creating 'order out of disorder' with the practice of balancing contrasting musical units or materials, and identifies the op.4 no.3 sonata as best suited to this ideal. La Via locates order in generic concerns of form and tonal plan, but a promising link between poetic theory and instrumental music is treated too narrowly to be convincing in an otherwise compelling paper.

Four articles in the second thread, 'Music and the arts in Corelli's Rome', reflect the intensification of interdisciplinary research in Corelli studies by elaborating on the unusually close proximity of theorists and practitioners of the arts in Rome's close-knit courtly circles. Carla De Bellis considers Arcadian-circle texts and examines the roles voices and instruments have in the practice of poetry. Tommaso Manfredi documents an unrealized proposal made by Ottoboni for a 'universal' academy of the arts that would have brought many of his princely interests to one location, and Karin Wolfe revisits the posthumous inventory of Corelli's substantial art collection, focusing on items by Francesco Trevisani.

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More obviously impinging on Roman musical practice, Gloria Staffieri's paper (trans.) 'Pietro Ottoboni, patron-librettist: commissioning strategies and compositional choices' searches for traces of Ottoboni's taste in musical settings of his own librettos. She considers two *drammi per musica* (three-act librettos meant to be sung rather than spoken) presented in 1690—*La Statira* with music by Alessandro Scarlatti, and Bernardo Pasquini's setting of *Il Colombo*—and finds enough musical similarities between them to apply tentatively the label 'Ottobonian'. Staffieri suggests that the seriousness or *malinconico* (melancholy) described by observers of both dramas correlated both with Ottoboni's wish for more edifying librettos and with an unusual quantity of closed numbers in minor keys. Further, the highlighting of elite instrumentalists—for example in concerto grosso scoring (to which Staffieri might add arias with obbligato string instruments prevalent in the 1690s)—suited the few virtuoso players with secure court posts. Staffieri contrasts features of a few non-Ottobonian settings in support of her claim, but these encompass a bewildering number of variables such as different librettists, composers, performance contexts and even cities for periods when *drammi per musica* were restricted in Rome. Comparisons based on a more consistent set of works would greatly strengthen Staffieri's conclusion—for instance among settings of all surviving Ottoboni librettos, as Lowell Lindgren suggests in the ensuing discussion (p.166), or between Roman oratorios with their greater continuity of production.

Contributors addressing the Congress's third theme, 'Opus 5: problems of textual criticism, exegesis and performance practice', are frequently concerned with the existence of alternative versions for twelve movements—mostly adagios—in the first six sonatas of the collection. The original 1700 Roman publication of *Sonate a violino e violone o cembalo* was followed in 1710 by a third Roger edition advertised in an Amsterdam newspaper as: 'Corelli's *Opus 5* with ornaments to show how an adagio should be played that have recently been composed by Corelli for the purpose of publication'. Michael Talbot furnishes this translation in the introduction to his '"Full of graces": Anna Maria receives ornaments from the hands of Antonio Vivaldi', and provides a coherent description of Corelli's 1710 'gracings' as an improvisational performance practice mediated by notation. Talbot also lends support to Rasch's argument that the embellished movements were indeed furnished by Corelli. Thomas Gartmann ('Research report of a non-edition: difficulties in editing Corelli's op.5') provides an updated list of 32 additional embellished 18th-century sources for op.5 reported since the 1970s, and explains the resulting difficulties for the scholars who in 2003 were still working to complete a critical edition (subsequently published in 2006).

Peter Walls ('Constructing the Archangel: Corelli in 18th-century editions of opus 5') is more ambivalent about the 1710 edition's claims as he grapples with the adagios. His starting point is two contrasting tropes applied to Corelli and described by Neal Zaslaw in *Early Music*, xxiv (1996), pp.95–118: Corelli as the measured and classic 'archangel', contrasted with a 'wild-man' Corelli suggested in other sources. Walls wonders whether the latter image—which he sees as ascendant in the preponderance of modern recordings including graced adagios—is given undue emphasis, and urges modern players not to feel unduly bound by this conception. At least for 18th-century England, Walls seeks to realign Corelli with the archangel topos—'the dignified classicist who understands form, harmony, counterpoint, and beauty' (p.234)—which he associates with the ungraced 'Urtext' of 1700 lurking in the background (this problematic term appears twice, at pp.233 and 244). The continuous publication of unembellished editions, the English commentators who disapproved of too much ornamentation, and the gentlemanly Corelli portraits created and used by northern Europeans lead Walls to a somewhat extreme conclusion: '[I]t is clear that a fair proportion of 18th-century musicians concluded that [to play the adagios unadorned] was exactly the right thing to do' (p.248).

The general evidence presented by Walls in fact furnishes little reason to believe that ornamentation was often entirely left aside, and many factors suggest just the opposite in the particular case of Corelli's adagios. English violinists who sought out and performed these works had every opportunity to consult the 1710 edition or the many Italians teaching and playing in Corelli's name, and Zaslaw's article above suggests that surviving ornamented versions of op.5 actually became more densely embellished as the century passed. Nor of course do 'plain' editions necessarily represent what was played. Without a 1710-style graced edition, less able violinists could have learned or produced simpler embellishments while more ambitious performers could have prepared and exhibited their own flights of fancy as do many players today. Even less convincing is the anachronistic idea that ornamented adagios by definition indicate 'wild-man' Corelli, and its inversion that an unembellished rendition suits the 'archangel'. Early portrayals of Corelli as 'possessed' do not

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refer to this repertory as Walls notes, and in any case were offered by observers of violinists in the act of performing rather than by teachers or players making performance decisions. For 18th-century players, gracing was more commonly understood to arise out of inspiration in combination with learnedness (specifically study in musical composition), resulting in embellishments of ingenuity and good taste. In balance, it is hard to imagine these adagios—with their longstanding pedagogic function of imparting taste in ornamentation and documented performance tradition since reimagined in the present—regularly left without graces.

In section 4, 'Trio sonatas and the Roman tradition', Sandra Mangsen's article '(Re)playing Corelli's trios' critiques modern conceptions of the genre with an imaginative twist. She summarizes and agrees with scholarly opinion in recognizing a varied and changeable relationship between Corelli's treble parts, with the second violin treated overall as a 'junior partner' (p.328). Mangsen tests this relatively uncontroversial conclusion further by turning to recordings made between 1957 and 1995. She chooses three different trio sonata movements to represent the following treble relationships: the first violin predominates, the two violins have more-or-less equal parts, or there are opportunities for both players to take the lead at different junctures. Mangsen describes how and when each violinist draws attention—through effects of volume, timbre and ornamentation—and finds a large variance in interpretations. She acknowledges that the recording process itself may account for some of these features, but nevertheless persuasively overturns the assumption that a listener will necessarily perceive the music in the same way as someone reading the printed score. Parts that seem collegial in notation are not always performed so—the first violinist may not yield, the second may not come forward when the opportunity arises. To explain her results, Mangsen suggests that performers have differing views of categories such as 'Corelli', 'trio sonata' or 'second violin', and that the dynamic between particular pairs of violinists results from many factors including individual temperament and each player's expectations about their fellow treble. Her strength is in locating Corelli's music emphatically in performance, combating the distorting effect of treating a score as a complete representation of a work, or even imagining performances based on notation without testing such assumptions against the actual choices of players.

Encounters with Corelli's widely travelled music can hardly help but be a rich theme, as shown by the final section of eight articles, 'Production, diffusion and reception of the Corellian model'. Miguel Ángel Marín, Joyce Lindorff and Leonardo J. Waisman follow Corelli's music to Madrid, China and South America respectively, and Lowell Lindgren describes in careful detail Italian instrumentalists making their way in London ('The great influx of Italians and their instrumental music into London'). He finds frequent mention of Corelli's music, and presents evidence suggesting that footnotes in the well-known English translation of François Raguenet's *A comparison between the French and Italian musick and operas* (London, 1709) originate with the cellist Nicola Haym (p.482). Lindgren's paper is documented by an extensive and well-presented set of contemporary references to Italian musicians, arranged chronologically.

Gregory Barnett's 'Church music, musical *topoi* and the ethos of the sonata da chiesa' argues that the range of sonatas appropriate for use in church was greater for listeners in Corelli's time than current trio sonata categorizations allow, a point raised in his 2000 review of Allsop's influential 1999 monograph *Arcangelo Corelli: 'New Orpheus of our times'* (see *Journal of Seventeenth-Century Music*, vi). Allsop's reply in 2002 (*JSCM*, viii) vigorously defended the position that Corelli did not append *da chiesa* ('church') to his sonata titles for a reason and reiterated the modern use of the term 'free' sonata for cases where a church or chamber setting is not specified. Barnett provides a brief summary of the terminological debate, listing sonata titles in a chart with accompanying description, but is not satisfied that 17th-century usage is consistent enough to settle the question. He therefore widens his scope beyond the sonata genre to consider musical characteristics within a wider variety of compositions intended for church use. For example, Barnett searches out trio sonata passages that resemble church organ preludes, and others that exhibit contrapuntal *stile antico* writing associated with the prized sacred music of Palestrina. Barnett also disputes the commonplace that movements evoking dance automatically mark sonatas as 'light' or secular and thus unsuited for performance in church. With reference to similarly dance-like sacred vocal examples such as alleluias, he challenges the idea that Corelli's contemporaries would have held this view.

The many musical editions, performances, recordings and discussions featuring Corelli show that his coattails have proved useful and stimulating to generations of musicians and commentators. These latest conference proceedings suggest that scholars have successfully confronted many orthodoxies of Corelli studies, and that new approaches are inspiring scholars as they continue to negotiate his place in music history and historiography. In

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these two volumes it is possible to glimpse new versions of the celebrated Corelli—as a violinist constantly engaged in providing accompaniments for singers within Rome's strongly vocal musical life; as a highly regarded composer-violinist who served as an ideal for aesthetically challenged instrumental music; and as a practitioner whose music-making encompassed more than his scores can possibly indicate.

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