

# Marcello's Orientalism

Eleanor Selfridge-Field

The 50 Psalms of David published by Benedetto Marcello between 1724 and 1726 constitute the bulwark of the composer's fame, not only within his lifetime but also for a century-and-a-half or more after he died (1739). Marcello was truly famous. **His Psalms were cited as often as Handel's *Messiah*, particularly in the nineteenth century.** Some of the impetus came from the proliferation of choral societies and the ever larger performing resources that were considered appropriate. Yet Marcello's Psalms are vastly different from other psalm repertoires and may never have been known to Handel, whose *Messiah* was first performed in 1742, three years after Marcello's death. Marcello's Psalms served musical and academic purposes, but they were not intended for liturgical use. In particular they were intended to illustrate how music based on Old Testament texts might adopt the musical values of antiquity, while accommodating consonant aspects of current musical practice. How exactly he perceived and implemented these values form the first two parts of this study. How the psalms themselves were received over time and place constitutes the third.

## 1. The *Salmi di Davide* and their Texts

Born to a noble Venetian family in 1686, Marcello inherited a rich intellectual legacy. His mother, Paolina Capello, was an occasional poet. He and his brothers Alessandro and Gerolamo each practiced several pursuits including the writing of poetry and prose. Alessandro (the eldest and most versatile) developed a wide array of skills including „desegno“ (drawing), invention, and music. He played the violin. He also composed Arcadian cantatas and a handful of violin sonatas and concertos. He contributed (though sparingly) to the Republic of Letters, where he was drawn more to applied science than to the arts. Gerolamo was, like Benedetto, less extroverted but is survived by essays and poems. For a few years (c. 1718 – 20) he was heavily involved with Venetian affairs in Lombardy.

All three brothers were obligated to serve in minor posts within the Venetian government. Their assignments were rotated often, since most minor offices changed hands every 12 – 16 months. The family palazzo was a relatively plain one in the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena.<sup>1</sup> Records in the state archives, on the other hand, show Alessandro to have held several offices that dealt with various matters in the Venetian Ghetto. Although Ales-

---

<sup>1</sup> It is separated by a small garden from the now better known Palazzo Vendramin-Calergi, where Richard Wagner died. Details of the lives of the Marcellos can be found in Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *The Music of Benedetto and Alessandro Marcello, A Thematic Catalogue with Commentary on the Composers, Works, and Sources*, Oxford 1990. Alessandro Marcello is said to have painted frescoes on the walls and ceiling of the church. All trace of the frescoes is gone, and the church has been inoperative for a number of years.

sandro and Benedetto were not always on the best of terms, Benedetto's awareness of life in the Ghetto would no doubt have increased after Alessandro was appointed to the office of Auditor Vecchio (22 March 1722). This three-man board was roughly the equivalent of a US circuit court, for it made judgments on matters of dispute. Alessandro's commute was a short one, for the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena was hardly more than a city block from the entrance to the Ghetto. On summer nights, music made in the Ghetto would easily have been faintly audible from the family palazzo. Venice was a notably quiet place where sounds carried easily across rooftops, around corners, and over the water.

With respect to the Psalms and Marcello's high degree of familiarity with music in the Ghetto, however, a more direct means of knowledge acquisition has to have been in play. We have no way of knowing what that was. The Ghetto was not a single place so much as it was string of microcultures, the earliest of which had been established on the Giudecca in the thirteenth century. At the peak of its power in the sixteenth century, Venice encouraged the establishment of these micro-communities, because the promotion of mercantile affairs benefitted from the established connections of Jewish traders with the Levant. Hence, as many as five flavors of the Ghetto experience exist. Marcello was conversant with the musical practices of the three largest – the Sephardic (Spanish), the Askenazic (German), and the Levantine (broadly speaking, Middle Eastern, but predominantly eastern Adriatic). Marcello's knowledge of Jewish practice was anything but casual.

As a young man, Marcello had immersed himself in the Arcadian movement. At least ninety percent of his nearly 400 cantatas for solo voice treat pastoral subjects.<sup>2</sup> Arcadian imagery emphasized bucolic settings but did so with a high degree of sensitivity to classical mythology. It pursued the conveyance of a sense of innocence. In Marcello's *œuvre*, these related values evolved along separate paths. Gentle natural phenomena (breezes, trickling brooks) were rife in his lyrical works, but by the 1720s he had moved on to dramatic cantatas based on epic poetry. Here he sought to convey as directly as possible the torments of conflict and anxiety, albeit as experience by figures (especially tragic heroines) from antiquity. Emotion supplanted innocence. A new sensitivity to themes of injustice seemed particularly to inform his carefully selected forays into this realm.

When he first became involved in setting the first 50 psalms of David (by 1723, if not earlier), he synthesized the previous paths he had pursued into a sumptuous set of composition that collectively required a cast including God (epic narrative), All the People (lyrical choruses), and the psalmist, King David (laments). Thus it was Biblical poetry that wedded the musical settings to the elusive intellectual ideals of Marcello's academic environment. (In Jewish services, poetry could be a substitute for exegesis and homily, which were prohibited.)

The texts were in the vernacular paraphrases of Girolamo Ascanio Giustiniani (1675–?), like Marcello an academically-oriented, musically interested nobleman. The musical settings were presented in an eight-volume series printed by Domenico Lovisa in folio with broad

---

2 On Marcello's cantatas, see Selfridge-Field, *The Music* (as n. 1). Many updates and findings on the cantata texts appear in Marco Bizzarini's book: *Benedetto Marcello, Le cantate profane – I festi poetici*, Venice 2003. His madrigals were also Arcadian in their themes.

margins.<sup>3</sup> The physical parameters and the typographical complexities of the content suggest remarkably generous funding, since the volumes had no dedicatees. Giustiniani's family had a long-standing relationship with Venice's Teatro San Moisè, Marcello's with the Teatro Sant'Angelo. There is no indication, however, that common theatrical interests led to the collaboration that produced the Psalms of David.<sup>4</sup>

Psalms paraphrases in vernacular languages began to appear soon after the start of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>5</sup> Those who were inspired by psalms set to vernacular verse had included Claude Goudimel (c. 1520 – 1572) and Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562? – 1621), who both were inspired what came to be known as the *Geneva* (or Huguenot) *Psalter*. What was distinctive about Giustiniani's paraphrases was that they highlighted the „Arcadian“ imagery embedded in many texts. The works were explicitly academic and clearly non-liturgical.<sup>6</sup>

Giustiniani's paraphrases were recognized for their conscientious re-rendering of the original Hebrew texts. What were perceived as the clutter and artifice of recent versions were stripped away. Ancient Hebrew culture was recognized among academics for its asceticism, in contrast to the hedonism of ancient Greek culture. Giustiniani and Marcello seem to have been kindred spirits in their zeal for disapproval of pleasure and fancy. These values were typical of the Venetian aristocracy, contrary to the impression conveyed by a host of recent writings that confuse the liberties taken by visitors to Venice with the behavior of Venetians themselves.

Marcello introduced into several of his works paradigmatic quotations of Hebrew chant, for which he gave both text and music. (These insertions were constructed to retain all the general features of the sources – square „chant“ notation, running right to left; and Hebrew labels and text underlay.) He indicated whether quotations from Hebrew came from the Sephardic, Ashkenazic, or Levantine traditions. He also introduced two quotations from ancient Greek odes, and in one instance provided an ecclesiastical incipit from Roman Ca-

3 Although Venice had been one of the principal centers of music printing between 1500 and 1700, it had now been eclipsed by presses in the Low Countries (especially Amsterdam), Paris, London, and Vienna. Yet Lovisa's imprimatur indicates that the art of music-typesetting remained strong.

4 There is a remote possibility that Giustiniani and Marcello were related: Giustiniani's mother was the daughter of Giovanni Capello. It is also possible that their paths crossed often through their posts. Poet and composer both occupied series of offices responsible for stringent enforcement of policies governing public behavior and financial rectitude.

5 Notable examples in English include the works of Sir Philip Sidney (1554 – 1586) and his sister, Lady Pembroke; Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549) and John Hopkins (1603, 1604); Henry Ainsworth (1612); and John Milton (published 1673, following *Comus*; written from 1653 onward). Among them, the Ainsworth edition is notable for comparing Hebrew, Greek, and Chaldaic sources. Examples in French start with the 1537 rhymes of Clément Marot (d. 1544) that populate the core of the Huguenot Psalter. Dick Wursten (*Clément Marot and Religion. A Re-assessment in the Light of his Psalm Paraphrases*, Leiden 2010) notes that Marot's aim was to produce a „consistent“, historically correct version. He explores the question of whether Marot reworked earlier material by Marguerite de Navarre.

6 Italian oratorios were sometimes based on vernacular texts, but in the Venetian Ospedali, oratorios were in Latin. Latin remained the language of the church. See E. Selfridge-Field, „Towards a Cultural History of the Venetian Oratorio, 1675 – 1725“, in: *Florilegium musicae: studi in onore di Carolyn Gianturco*, ed. Patrizia Radicchi and Michael Burden, 2 vols., Pisa 2004, vol. II, pp. 911 – 925.

tholic liturgy. The resulting requirements for interleaved typesetting won recognition in the *Giornale dei letterati d'Italia*. It reported on his achievement in several installments, covering two volumes in each review. The final report, which appeared in 1727, read as follows:

The seventh volume came out in 1726, in 168 pages, with eight Psalms (36–43). The eighth contained another seven, in 181 pages, bringing the total to 50, and appeared in the current year, 1727.<sup>7</sup> Both contain specific introductions for the reader, letters from individual maestri of music to Sig. Marcello commending his musical compositions, and the poetic paraphrases of the Psalms of that volume by Sig. Giustiniani. This [impressive] work, with such perfection of characters<sup>8</sup> and such a majestic presentation, has been prepared in the workshop of [Domenico] Lovisa, whose music printing has certainly not been surpassed in beauty or presentation.<sup>9</sup>



In addition to the intermediation of Giustiniani's poetic paraphrases and Lovisa's printing, each volume of the *Salmi* contained as a frontispiece an engraving by either Giuseppe Camerata or Sebastiano Ricci. The engravings, which sought to convey the major Psalm typologies, were organized into a cycle of four themes, the whole conveyed twice. The themes were:

- Songs of praise (Vols. 1 and 5)
- Songs of war (Vols. 2 and 6)
- Songs of divine punishment (Vols. 3 and 7)
- Sacrificial invocations (Vols. 4 and 8)

Camerata was responsible for the first two themes, Ricci for the latter two. The most powerful images are Camerata's, of an elevated King David playing his harp, and Ricci's, of David's plea for mercy, his harp (greatly shrunken) at his feet. Ricci was well suited to creating scenes of awe, and this skill accorded well with Marcello's objectives.

Individual psalms follow their Biblical models, inflecting verse after verse in ways that convey each turn of the text. The conventional literary typologies of the psalm texts spanned eight categories with a ragged distribution. Among the first fifty psalms, fully half fall into a single category – the lament. Some of Marcello's most notable psalm settings are associated with the categories of wisdom, kingship, and trust. The most sparsely populated categories are royal psalms, liturgical psalms, and psalms of sacrifice.<sup>10</sup> Overarching architectural plans attempt to convey, concurrently with the verse-by-verse settings, the general thrust of the complete text.

7 The publication date given on the title page of Vol. 8 is 1726, but the bi-monthly *Giornale* permitted the final word on this. Some of the testimonial letters were composers, the most prominent having been Giovanni Bononcini, Francesco Gasparini, Geminiano Giacomelli, Johann Mattheson, and Georg Philip Telemann.

8 „Perfezione“, in Italian, referred to the taking of a skill (here printing) to the highest level possible.

9 *Giornale dei letterati d'Italia*, 37, 1727, 537f.

10 On the typology, see annotations for individual psalms in the *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (RSV), ed. Herbert G May and Bruce G. Metzger, Oxford 1962.

Illustration 1: Giuseppe Camerata's depiction of songs of praise provided by King David (Books 1 and 5 of the Salmi di Davide).



Illustration 2: Sebastiano Ricci's depiction of divine mercy and punishment, in which David sits on the throne, his harp at his feet (Books 3 and 7 of the Salmi da Davide).

## 2. Musical Sources and Content

Although Marcello's appropriation of remnants of ancient civilizations does not exactly correspond to Peter Gay's notion of „pagan Christianity“ as a hallmark of the Enlightenment,<sup>11</sup> the general contours of his interests conforms quite well. Marcello's usage fails only insofar as it was motivated by academicism. In his time, the Bible was a widely used source on Roman history, but Marcello looked in far more esoteric places. The two quotations from early Greek sources would have come to attention within the whirlwind of new editions and translations of ancient texts.<sup>12</sup> The „musical“ notation given in the Lovisa print looks like an optometrist's chart, with Roman characters turned sidewise to represent some of the musical content; the Greek text underlay is reproduced in pointed Greek script. The Hellenistic pedigree of what is identified as „Homer's Hymn to Ceres“ does not bare close scrutiny, but we only appreciate this from the scholarship of later generations. Of Dionysius's Hymn to the Sun, quoted in Psalm 16 („Tu che sai quanto sia giusta“ for two tenors and basso continuo) Marcello explained that he had „adapted“ the work from an „ancient Greek cantilation on a hymn in the Lydian mode,“ but that he had „transposed [it] to a better mode.“<sup>13</sup> He marveled at the fact that the Greeks could transcribe all their music using the tetrachord system. He considered the tuning system for *cembali* of his own time to be insufficient to support the „natural melodies and...perfection of the voice“ that the Greek system had sustained. Allusions to Greek music in the Italian academies normally concentrated on the tetrachord system as well algorithms for tuning the lyre, and comments on modern modal interpretation – in the absence of actual music. Marcello's provision of the original music and new compositions based on it was an extraordinary departure, for to the extent that there was any access to ancient music, its musical substance and poetic substrates had been entirely ignored. No one had seriously tried to compose new music according to either its principles or its models.

Marcello went further than simply incorporating ancient fragments of Jewish music in new works. Guided by a deep knowledge of the poetic texts and by apparently vivid current knowledge of religious practices in the Venetian Ghetto, he set out to compose music that reflected behavioral characteristics practices associated with the respective Jewish liturgical traditions. These included the separation of men and women (the women usually being

---

11 In Gay's model, the Pagan Christian would have been a person whose intellectual undertakings are dominated by a world of letters, a person who was highly conversant with antiquity but who put his knowledge to diverse uses, and a person who took pride in human (and humanistic) achievement. However, in Gay's model the Pagan Christian also ignored local history. (In this respect, Marcello could not have been more deviant.) See Peter Gay, *The Rise of Modern Paganism (The Enlightenment, I)*, New York 1995, Book One, Ch. 1, „The Useful and Beloved Past“ (pp. 31 – 71); Ch. 5, „The Era of Pagan Christianity,“ pp. 257 – 322.

12 The first French translation of Homer had been published only in 1723, and the literary circles in which Marcello moved would undoubtedly have noted the event.

13 Eric Werner (The Music of Post-Biblical Judaism, in: *The New Oxford History of Music*, I, ed. Egon Wellesz [Oxford 1957], pp. 332f.) observed a link between expressive modes and musical modes, which, he said, were „hermeneutic devices to attune the human soul to the various emotions expressed in the Scriptural and post-Biblical poetry of Judaism.“ (The doctrine of *ethos* prevailed across the Middle East.)

sequestered in balconies), an emphasis on „purity“ of many kinds, and an articulation of several musical styles observant of specific Psalm-function categories. The sources on which he drew were absorbed from traditions that reflected various dates of arrival. The Levantine synagogue had been established in 1541, the Sephardic in 1580, and the Ashkenazic in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> The adherents came respectively from The Balkans and Eastern Mediterranean; from the Iberian diaspora (then evident in Italy, Austria, Turkey, and parts of South America); and from Central and Eastern Europe.

Marcello's auditory capture of chant melodies continues to serve scholarship well. Seroussi has recently shown (as Israel Adler suggested decades ago)<sup>15</sup> that by transcribing the melodies Marcello made a valuable contribution to ethnomusicological and diaspora studies.<sup>16</sup> In particular he has detailed the continued circulation of certain melodies in diverse Sephardic congregations and communities throughout Europe, the Middle East, and South America.<sup>17</sup>

Not least of the values of Marcello's transcriptions is his careful attention to rhythmic detail. Marcello is at pains to introduce triplets in duple contexts and dotted figures in long passages of uniform-duration notes. He seems to be attempting to transcribe faithfully what he heard. There was no other model available, and he asserts that he had no access to written exemplars of Hebrew chant. The circumstances under which he did transcribe the music are by no means clear. He could perhaps have gleaned musical residues from an academy convened during the Venetian tenure of Leon of Modena (1579 – 1648).<sup>18</sup> Apart from his many other distinctions, Modena was known for his commanding knowledge of cantillation

---

14 The earliest Jewish populations in Venice can be traced to the thirteenth century, when there were two synagogues on the long island known as the Giudecca (but previously as Spinalunga). In 1541 the Senate permitted Jewish merchants to build storehouses in the Ghetto. Mercantilism was strongly encouraged in Venice because the government welcomed the additional custom duties it generated. On the other hand, Jews were not allowed to own property. Inquisition regulations prohibiting the presence of the Talmud and the printing of books in Hebrew in Venice would have privileged oral tradition. Most Jews resided in the Ghetto but they were not required to do so. Jews were subject to a curfew, but so too were most other sectors of the population. Debtors were only allowed outside their homes for a half-hour a day.

15

16 Edwin Seroussi, „In Search of Jewish Musical Antiquity in the 18th-Century Venetian Ghetto: Reconsidering the Hebrew Melodies in Benedetto Marcello's *Estro Poetico-Armonico*“, in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, new ser. 93, No. 1/2 (Jul. – Oct. 2002), pp. 149 – 199.

17 Don Harrán has written numerous articles touching on Marcello, Jewish music in Venice, emblems of Jewishness in Italian music of the time, and the diffusion of Sephardic songs. Of particular relevance here are „In Search of the Italian Sephardic Tradition“, *Musica judaica*, 17 (2003), p. 165; and: „Hebrew Exemplum as a Force of Renewal in 18th-century Musical Thought: The Case of Benedetto Marcello and his Collection of Psalms“, in: *Music in the Mirror: Reflections on the History of Music Theory and Literature for the 21st Century*, ed. Andreas Geiger and Thomas J. Mathiesen, Lincoln, NE, 2002.

18 Eric Werner (The Music of Post-Biblical Judaism [see n. 13], citing on p. 328 his own „Manuscripts of the Birnbaum Collection“, *Hebrew Union College Annual*, xvii [1944], 414 – 16), claims that Modena's academy explored music from the near environs, such as polychoral motets by Giovanni Gabrieli and his contemporaries at San Marco, Venice.

processes, for his efforts to edit the music of Salamone Rossi, and for his manual on Jewish rites for non-Jewish readers.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the faint possibility that older forms of Judaic liturgy filtered into Venice through its occupation (until 1687) of the Peloponnese, whose Jewish community was considered to be particularly thorough in its preservation of Hebrew script, Marcello's insistence that he had no access to any written source for the music leaves only one other possibility. It was the most straightforward: Marcello could have attended services in the synagogues near his family's palazzo on the Grand Canal. The ghetto lay immediately to the north of the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena. It stretched eastward towards the Cannaregio Canal and north towards the Fondamenta Nuove. The Ashkenazic synagogue was the biggest and the closest to Marcello's home.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Marcello's Aims and Interpretations

The reproduction of themes from then surviving chants and odes of antiquity is largely concentrated in the third and fourth of the eight volumes. Marcello's psalm settings were substantial works, comparable with Bach cantatas in their segmentation into a series of substantial sections. Each Biblical verse received its own movement. (Individual movements were later carved off, particularly in the Protestant world, as „anthems“.) One verse might recur as a refrain. Alternatively, a musical realization might recur with a subsequent verse. Individual psalms could have an overarching musical stance taken from an initial meter or texture. In Marcello's mind the music (its content as well as its manner of performance) was subservient to the text.

Although Marcello gave the marriage of poetry to „harmony“ as the main goal of his undertaking, he acknowledged that his aim was not so much a literal realization as an analogical one. The question then became how to situate the values of the remote past within the musical resources and practices of the present. According to his reading of Hebrew cultural practice (as reiterated in the carefully footnoted introduction to his first volume of Psalms), Moses sang canticles celebrating the flight from Egypt with „the sons of Israel.“ His sister Miriam „intoned“ with her cymbal the same canticle. It was David who introduced the use of multiple choirs in the tabernacle, for which he also composed songs and hymns. As many as 24 choirs had been used. They were supplemented by independent groups of instruments of diverse timbres. Prominent among them were the psaltery and the bell.

---

19 On all these subjects, see Don Harrán, „*Dum Recordaremur Sion: Music in the Life and Thought of the Venetian Rabbi Leon Modena (1571 – 1648)*“, in: *AJS Review* 23/1, 1998, 17 – 61, passim. Modena's skills as an orator were also legendary. Some Venetian noblemen are reputed to have attended his exhortations whenever possible.

20 The Marcellos owned property near the mouth of the Ghetto. Alessandro Marcello, the most senior brother, served briefly (1722 – 23) in the office of Auditor Vecchio, a government judgeship which resolved disputes between Christians and Jews *The Music of Alessandro and Benedetto Marcello*, 1990, pp. 436f.



In the current singing of Hebrew communities in Venice Marcello found that „evidences of ancient practice“ were easily identified. He noted that no written examples were available, although for Greek music, he found it „necessary“ to turn to manuscripts. Marcello took special interest in the severity of holy judgment and sought musical means of signifying it. For example, to signify the awe-inspiring impetus of Divine Justice, he said, one could employ unusual modes. „Diatonic-chromatic“ modulations known from madrigals could be utilized by substituting enharmonically notated passages that would be rendered „imperfectly“ on „artificial“ instruments, especially the [enharmonic] harpsichord. Barbieri notes that the physicist Giordano Riccati, in an unpublished study of recent uses of unequal tunings, cited Marcello's psalms No 2, 3, 9, and 11, as well as two of Marcello's cantatas, cantatas by other composers of the time, and a Hasse *Miserere*.<sup>21</sup>

Above all, it was important to perform the Psalms without „arbitrary“ ornaments, especially in passages addressing God<sup>22</sup> or speaking of matters divine, because the petitioner had to be respectful and humble. It went without saying that the singers had to be consistent in timing, clear in pronunciation, and in tune with one another. The accompanying *ripieno* instruments, although variable in number, should be appropriately proportioned, such that the basses would be emphasized in order to simulate the style of antiquity.

In a note to the readers in Book Two, Marcello dealt mainly with his reading of ancient Hebrew worship. He reported that among the Hebrews only hymns, canticles, and psalms were still sung, because they were the only music handed down by oral tradition. He noted that Moses ordained that there should be three uses of the trumpet: (1) [to announce] solemn sacrifices and religious feasts, (2) to announce the beginning of Jubilee and sabbatical years, and (3) to encourage soldiers on to battle. It fell to David to introduce these practices in the Tabernacle. It was he who wrote canticles and psalms and he who ordered the making of various instruments. After the Temple was built, music of a high and decorous order was made. This continued until the Hebrews were routed by the Romans.

He turned to the Greeks in his introduction to Book III. He now concentrated on secular (and rational) issues – first, the rending of Greek texts; then, issues of tuning and temperament, modes, and material specific to individual works, for this was a volume in which a large number of quotations of „ancient“ sources was present. He explained his choices of ancient models for individual works and verses. He allowed various accommodations to performers, according to the constitution of their ensembles. The subtleties of his intentions for interpretation are more difficult to ferret out here than in most of his earlier books.

In its musical content, on the other hand, Book III contains some of the most ambitious settings of the entire collection. In Psalm 18 alternating passages of narrative and reflection are contrasted musically by eighth- or sixteenth-note figures highlight images suggested al-



21 Patrizio Barbieri, „L'espressione degli ‚affetti‘ mediante l'inequale accordatura degli strumenti da tasto nel settecento veneto“, in: *Convegno di studi Organaria veneta* (Patrimonio e salvaguardia – Con il contributo della regione veneto, 1987): 42 – 67. The Marcello cantatas were „Lungi, lungi speranze“ (A182) and „Il so begli occhi amati (A145).“ The other composers whose works were cited were Maria Teresa Agnesi and Agostino Steffani.

22 Whose name (or names) could not be spoken, according to Jewish doctrine. God's presence is manifest through such phenomena as the power of the Sun (Psalm 16) and the power of a storm (Psalm 29).

legorically in the text, while brutally long strings of whole notes convey the insistent voice of God in this and several other cases. Also in the verse „Allor tu gradei, Signor,“ derived musically from Homer’s [incompletely preserved] „Hymn to Ceres“ in Psalm 18 (Example 1), the articulation marks in the bass part show a frequent method of articulation used by Marcello, who was a cellist. The composer noted that the Greek model was a „diatonic genus of the Hypolydian mode.“

Example 1: Greek model for the verse „Allor tu gradirei, Signor“ in Psalm 18.

In the introduction to Book IV Marcello makes special note of Psalm 21. As a „prophesy,“ it calls for solo voice as well as musical acknowledgment of what he terms „the Redeemer of the World expiring on the Cross.“ The „great mystery“ of the Passion suggests to him accompaniment by violas. These instruments, in the hands of experts, can „actively inspire emotional engagement and sorrow.“ His setting of Psalm 21, for alto and two violas, is one of the most evocative of sorrow among the fifty works. Some passages call for violoncello solo as the only bass support. An example in which the melody is, additionally, derived from a German Jewish „intonation on an oration“ is provided by the verse „Signor, non tardi dunque il tuo soccorso.“ The incipits of model and realization are shown in Example 2 (Marcello was never other than literal in his use of quotations.)

The Jewish liturgical year separates (in the same manner as the Christian) the High Holidays, Sabbaths, and festivals from ordinary days. The components considered appropriate for musical setting within individual services were (1) psalms, (2) penitential prayers, (3) strophic liturgical hymns, (4) doxologies, (5) priestly blessings, and (6) Biblical verses. A curiosity of Marcello’s acquisitions from Hebrew sources is that their content does not usually correspond exactly to the new location or liturgical function. Although he initially confines his sources to psalms, he borrows from Psalm 113 (in the Ashkenazic rite) in his setting Psalm 10. Psalm 15 quotes a popular hymn („Maos tsur“) from the Ashkenazic tradition. The source for a quotation in Psalm 19 comes from mystical poetry. After quoting from what he termed an Askenazic prayer in Psalm 22, Marcello abandoned further exploration of



Example 2: Incipits for the verse „Signor, non tardi dunque il tuo soccorso“ in Marcello’s setting of Psalm 21. Note that with respect to the conventional notation underneath, the pitch contour of the model must be from right to left.



„ancient“ and „oriental“ material. Details of these relationship between borrowed and new materials are summarized in Table 1.

Psalm No. (RC numbering)	Vol. No.	Rite or Tradition	Source quoted	Notes
9	II	Sephardic	Psalm 143	
10	II	Ashkenazic	Psalm 113	
14	II	Sephardic	Psalm 117	
15	III	Ashkenazic	Hymn „Maos tsur“	
16	III	Greek	„Dyonisius“ Hymn to the Sun	Now attributed to Mesomedes Lyricus.
17	III	Sephardic		
17	III	Ashkenazic		
18	III	Sephardic	Intonation of unknown origin	
18	III	Greek	Homer’s Hymn to Ceres (incomplete)	
19	IV	Ashkenazic	Mystical poetry	
21	IV	Ashkenazic	„Oration“	Could be a Ladino text inaccurately transcribed. Quoted in Mayr’s <i>Samuele</i> and Rossini’s <i>La Siège de Corinthe</i>
22	IV	Ashkenazic		Aramaic

Table 1. Occurrence of musical quotations from „ancient“ material in Marcello’s *Salmi di Davide*.

Among the values he continued to pursue were the proper use of cantillation (for scriptural recitation), voicing patterns that preferred lower voices, and accompaniment that was limited to strings (and usually harpsichord). In Jewish practice, the ritual chanting of Biblical readings (cantillation) employed two styles – a more poetic one for the Psalms, Proverbs, and book of Job as well as a simpler prose style for everything else. Cantillation practices varied from sect to sect of Judaism (for example, there were no special Psalm cantillations among the Ashkenazim). In other sects, the grammatical constructs understood to inhere in the tex-

tual material were extensive and complex.<sup>23</sup> The one place where these various prescriptions converge is in Psalm 42, „Dal tribunal augusto,“ scored for bass and basso continuo. It is one of most widely performed of the *Salmi di Davide*, not because of its adherence to prescriptions for monophonic music and male voices but because of its suitability to virtuoso display and its minimal requirement for performers. Despite all Marcello’s caveats concerning self-important performance, the melodic leaps required of the voice in this psalm are merciless. It was obviously impractical in Marcello’s time, and in the academic milieu, to exclude female voices altogether, but across the whole collection sopranos are largely excluded and the average tessitura of the vocal parts lies in the tenor range.

Musical figures in individual works largely responded to the text at hand. Marcello heavily employed madrigalian word-painting. Homophonic writing anticipated the participation of „all the people“; their role was to simulate the throng petitioning or responding to God. Contrapuntal writing was supposed to exhibit (as much as express) the strictness of God. The more elaborate it was, the more was demanded of „the people“. Monophonic writing typically represented David.

It is more difficult to determine Marcello’s thoughts on when, and to what extent, voices and instruments should be doubled. A fair summation of his introductions and the tidbits that can be gleaned from the testimonials appearing in them is that his priorities were to cater first for performers of professional merit and then for greater and lesser numbers of them per part according to the availability and physical circumstances. *Solo* and *tutti* markings are numerous, though *moreso* in the instrumental parts than in the vocal ones.<sup>24</sup>

With respect to the use of instruments, Marcello clearly departed entirely from strict sects of Judaism, among whom the exclusion of instruments recognized their abandonment after the Expulsion from the Temple.<sup>25</sup> Marcello was articulate in his instructions for when, where, and how stringed instruments should participate. He consistently emphasized his own instrument, the violoncello, ostensibly because it suited the overall range of the voices for which he scored. He scored for violas in laments. Individual passages might be marked for *bassetto*. They could indicate *marcato* or *pizzicato* playing. Although textual and musical errors occasionally occur in the typography, cues that recognize the coming and going on individual instruments are generally more consistent than in other music of the time.

---

23 An instructive aphorism was offered by Eliyahu Schleifer in 1992: „Simple tunes may be ancient, or they may be later simplifications of more complicated chants.“ This is a crux of an issue that chant studies share with folksong studies. Formalization can lead to endless elaboration, but the need to share repertoires among large populations can quickly undermine refinements. See Schleifer’s account in „Jewish Liturgical Music from the Bible to Hassidism“ in *Sacred Sound and Social Change: Liturgical Music in Jewish and Christian Experience*, ed. L. A. Hoffman and J. R. Walter (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 13–59. For contextual placement, see also Don Harrán, „The Hebrew Exemplum“ (as n. 17), pp. 143–194.

24 Johann Matteson’s instructive testimonial letter in Vol. VI related that he had performed (selected) works in Hamburg with 30 professional singers.

25 Some Biblical sources stipulated that Psalms 4 and 6 were „for strings“ (accompaniment on the psaltery), while Psalm 5 was „for flutes“. Nowhere did Marcello call for flutes, which were banned from church use by the Papacy during the Counter-Reformation.



When it came to expressing the theme of Old-Testament justice, God's rule assumed the guise of strict counterpoint. Marcello claimed Palestrina as his model,<sup>26</sup> but his contrapuntal practice is varied. He uses homophony and polyphony in alternation. He employs a wide range of points of imitation. He reserves the *stile da cappella*, which is used sparingly, for the cherished „redress of vice“. Pedal points underscore references to eternity, as for example in Psalm 28 („O prole nobile di magni principii“), and hope, as in the conclusion of Psalm 32 („Alme giuste, alme innocenti“; shown in Example 3).

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in a single system. The lyrics are: "za nostra speran", "nos tra spe - ran", "spe ran", and "za." The music features complex counterpoint with staggered entries and endings within pairs of voices. The notation includes various note values, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 3: Concluding phrase of Psalm 36, on the text „nostra speranza.“

This example shows in a very limited space much of Marcello's contrapuntal arsenal, especially the staggered entries and endings within pairs of voices (alto/tenor and bass/basso continuo), but at the same time (and again through contrasted voice pairs) the variability of hope (alto/tenor) and its steadfastness (bass/basso continuo). In combination, the *stile da cappella* and such specific devices as these illuminate „the holy way to redress vice with rules and precepts.“ Other psalms that vigorously exhibit the same qualities are Nos. 36 and 50.<sup>27</sup> (The perpetual canon „In omnem terram,“ printed after No. 50, actually forms the conclusion of Psalm 18.) One peculiarity of Marcello's text underlay in contrapuntally set psalms is that words divided into two syllables (e.g. *me-a*) in one voice may be elided into one (e.g. *mea*) to facilitate reaching a common cadence. Marcello's lyrics are more generally inclined to be inconsistent from page to page.

Apart from contrapuntal contexts, Marcello adds striking rhythmic figurations to his arsenal of weapons against complacent listeners. In the lengthy Psalm 17 (alto, tenor, bass)

<sup>26</sup> In youth, Marcello had laboriously copied treatises and models of composition by hand. His hand copy of the 1622 *Regole* of Camillo Angleria in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana was for a time thought to be his own work.

<sup>27</sup> Full scores for five Psalms – Nos. 14, 18, 22, 36, and 50 – will be posted online in 2011, provisionally at <http://www.ccarh.org>.

rhythmic inventiveness sustains interest, especially in setting the verse „Il Signor solo sarà l'oggetto,“ where a five-bar ostinato bass is heard against a conventional text in conventional meter. „Implacable wrath“ is reified by rumbling cellos and violins. In the final section, introduced by an ecclesiastical intonation of Mode 5, the note denominations of the lower voices become elongated as the „centuries“ of the text gradually stretch out.

A fundamental question that arises from Marcello's careful musical glosses is how to synthesize all the resulting instantiations of one or another impression of „classical purity“ in a single work. Over and over, Marcello contrasts highly active with ominously static voices. In Psalm 22, „Se il Signore mio Pastore“ („The Lord is my shepherd“), a lilting 3/8 meter conveys the pastoral nature of Divine care. Initially it is the voices that move briskly over a static accompaniment, but these relationships are eventually reserved and the final passage instills tranquility. These three qualities – dynamic vs static voicing, the use of 3/8 meter, and an unrush fluidity suggestive of a moderate tempo – are in fact characteristic of Marcello's pastoral psalms in general, but especially those demonstrably inspired by antiquity.

Such qualities, in fact, spread across much of the rest of Marcello's music. Just as the Psalms gave scope for Marcello to recycle techniques he had employed in his earlier cantatas and madrigals, so they also served as an incubator for those few works that were to follow. The fundamental idea of his anomalous oratorio *Il pianto e riso della quattro stagioni* (1731)<sup>28</sup> may in fact come from a text within Psalm 29, „Se la sera si piange, il sol non sorge che il *pianto amaro* in *dolce riso* è volto.“ Only in music can one express the simultaneities of opposing emotions and their rapid convergence, as here when the „bitter tears“ of evening turn into a „sweet smile“ under the morning sun.

Marcello's heavy use of madrigalisms is acknowledged in the preface to Volume IV. He expresses the view that teachers and singers can learn as much from his settings as their predecessors had from madrigals. To this end, his setting of Psalm 21 („Voglio mio dio“ in Giustiniani's paraphrase but usually cited by its Latin analog, „Deus, deus meus“) was intended to illustrate the musical evocation of sorrow and emotional response. To this end, it was accompanied by *violette*, for Marcello (like Brahms) seems to have considered the alto range to have been particularly well suited to expressions of sorrow. The „vanity“ and „brevity“ of life are set, in Psalm 38 (for soprano solo) with rising arpeggios followed by descent on flatted tones.

No overall view of the Psalms would be complete without some mention of the architectural devices Marcello uses to unify certain works. Psalm 40, for example, is essentially a dialogue between two musical ideas associated with the texts „I miei nemici“ and „Per darmi morte.“ In this instance the concluding evocation of eternity is conveyed through a fugue. (Eternal damnation, in contrast, is portrayed in Psalm 48 by the introduction of a descending G-Minor scale in a section otherwise in G Major.) The „wide river of mercy“ is suggested in Psalm 50 by a single pitch – B flat. White snow in Psalm 50 hovers on E flat.

---

28 Recently edited by Michael Burden: *Il pianto e il riso delle quattro stagioni* (= Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era 118), Middletown, WI, 2002.

#### 4. Performance, Reception, Reputation

Performance practices associated with Marcello's psalms varied over time and space. Within Venice, the two venues with which they have been loosely linked are the Palazzo Giustinian near Ca' Foscari and the Sala di Musica in the Ospedaletto. As the home of the nobleman-poet who wrote the psalm paraphrases, Ca' Giustinian was a natural venue. Its *salone* would have accommodated the three or four voices to a part that Marcello's prefaces suggest would have been appropriate, plus a small group of strings and a harpsichord. The Ospedaletto's Sala di Musica is a slightly more enigmatic choice. Its superb acoustics would have suited a small ensemble performing for a small private audience, but Marcello's own call for predominantly male singers would not have suited the human resources of this all-female institution, nor would his thoughts on the reinforcement of voices and instruments been easily accommodated in its confined space (Illustration 3).

Once born beyond the confines of Venice, the Psalms took on a life of their own. On July 8, 1739, two weeks before Marcello's death, the general director of the Arcadian Academy at Rome launched the first of twelve weekly concerts in which all of the *Salmi di Davide* were performed in order. The series was originally intended as a memorial to the newly deceased cardinal Carlo Colonna but it came to serve as a memorial to the composer of the



Illustration 3: The Sala di Musica, Ospedaletto (Eleanor Selfridge-Field, 2009).

psalms. The print on which this Roman cycle was based (Rome: Antonio de' Rossi, 1739) corresponds closely to the manuscript copy of the Psalms owned by Joseph Smith, the British resident in Venice, and now held by the Royal College of Music, London (MS 2123). Second-hand reports of the Roman performances mention large choirs and string ensembles. Similarly, a performance at the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome, under the auspices of Pietro Cardinal Ottoboni, is mentioned retrospectively in the London 1757 edition of the Psalms edited by Charles Avison and John Garth.

Johann Mattheson first mentioned the performances organized by him at Hamburg Cathedral in his *Critica Musica* (1725). His attraction to the Psalms is documented in his testimonial „letter“ reproduced in Volume 6 of the Lovisa print. It is by far the most ample and the most specific testimonial (6 October 1725) provided by any musician, for Mattheson found much to praise. He admired Marcello's effort to reconcile ancient and modern music. He found substance in the melodies, and he praised the fact that they were based on penetrating readings of the lyrics. He recommended the works not for „private concerts“ but for „a people rich in virtuosi and full of faith.“ Mattheson was very proud of the fact that the works had been performed in Hamburg Cathedral, where he was then the music director, and at other nearby churches. Under his direction, the concerts had involved about 30 performers, each of them „highly able.“ The singers „sang with the unanimity of the ancient Levites and with all the beauty of modern *manieri*.“ The listeners, he tells us, were filled with joy.<sup>29</sup> Marcello had replaced Palestrina, he said, as the paragon of contrapuntal practice.

As if to prove the point, Marcello opened Volume 7 with his lengthy setting of Psalm 36 and discussed it at length in his preface. It is here that he tells us that he employed the *stile ecclesiastico da cappella* because it provided „the holy way to redress vice...“ He used the second mode because it implied the „rigor derived from ancient Greek legislators.“ Thus it was through the use of ecclesiastical modes that he wedded contrapuntal textures of the Renaissance to symbols of the „sound“ of (what was then considered to be) antiquity. Particular attention is given to the setting of such words as „punite“ and „giusti“ (the punished and the righteous).<sup>30</sup>

Marcello indicates that although only the four vocal parts are supplied, harpsichords and double basses should be used „for reinforcement,“ thus indicating that the written score does not fully describe the extent of the performing resources he intended.<sup>31</sup> Further, he adds, the basses can be divided (*spezzati*). The continuo shown is the most active „voice“ of the work. His settings of Psalms 43 and 50 follow roughly similar lines. Psalm 48 (alto, tenor, bass) indicates „cembali e contrabassi colla parte [bassa].“

29 Marco Bizarrini („Le esecuzioni dei *Salmi* di Benedetto Marcello nell'Europa del Settecento“, in: *Rassegna veneta di studi musicali*, 7 – 8 [1991], pp. 167 – 186) notes that Antonio Conti referred to Psalm performances for Charles VI at the court in Vienna.

30 Psalm 37 makes its own riposte to this by setting the text „giustizia eterna“ with two homophonic voices.

31 The written score merely contains the indication „Violoncelli e Contrabassi col Basso“ at the start of the work.



## Legacies

The Roman imprint may have been pivotal in projecting the Psalms into European public consciousness, for it was only the second printing. Nineteen other printed editions occurred subsequently. They came from Paris, London, Florence, Milan, Udine and Venice. In the Napoleonic-era edition of Sebastiano Valle (Venice, 1803 – 05), the Giustiniani text was „modernized“. A great popularizer of the Psalms was Franciszek Mirecki,<sup>32</sup> a Pole who studied with Cherubini in Paris. Cherubini was the alleged editor of the Parisian edition (c. 1819) with Mirecki's piano accompaniment. Mirecki is said to have produced an orchestrated version of the „Cherubini“ edition (Paris, 1830), but no exemplars are known.<sup>33</sup> The Merlo edition (1835), dedicated to Gioacchino Rossini, was almost as regal as the original Lovisa set of volumes. It too provided a piano accompaniment, by Pietro Tonassi, who offers numerous octave doublings in the left hand and completely recasts Marcello's aims. The Ricordi edition of c. 1870 may have been based on the Roman print of 1739, as the works were arranged in the same number of physical volumes and similar physical layouts.

Printed sources contain only a small portion of the circulated psalms. The theme quoted from Psalm 21 in Example 2 was used to further goals quite different from Marcello's by Johann Simone Mayr, in his oratorio *Samuele* (1821). Soon after (1826), Rossini quoted it in *La Siège de Corinthe*. Re-assignments of social function and religious persuasion continued to follow Marcello's Psalms wherever they went. The survival of lyrics translated into Swedish and English document the extensive use of the repertory in Protestant worship. The survival of Latinized texts in monastic holdings in Italy suggest their use in Catholic liturgy. Translations into the French vernacular may have retained the academic intentions of the originals. The intended uses of translations into German may have varied with the location of the adaptation. The vernacular suggests academic usage, through in specific cases they seem to have been linked with conservatory pedagogy and with the choral societies that flourished in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>34</sup>

The carving up of the Psalms into versets and anthems paved the way for conversions of what had been accompanied vocal works to instrumental (especially keyboard) ones. Later, some instrumental works were then provided with new texts (suited to diverse purposes including liturgical and pedagogical use) in practical editions of the twentieth century. Fragments of Marcello's psalms (under many other names and genres) were ultimately diffused through the European and American musical landscape so stealthily that it would be impossible to eradicate all trace of the ill-conceived progeny.

In hindsight, it is evident that a few psalms may be recalled today mainly because of incidental textual associations with well known works by other composers. Marcello's Psalm

32 **First Name** Mirecki (1791 – 1862) was the first person to publish a treatise in Italian on orchestration (Milan, 1825). The treatise (*Trattato instrumentazione*) remains unpublished, although a modern edition is planned by Michał Bristiger.

33 Copies do exist of the 1841 reissue of Mirecki's edition with piano accompaniment. An undated edition from Udine provided „correction“ of the Mirecki-Cherubini effort by Francesco Anichini, a music theorist at the Florence Conservatory.

34 On specific sources, see Selfridge-Field, *The Music* (as n. 1).

18 („I Cieli immensi narrano“), for example, is a textual cousin of the chorus „The Heavens are Telling“ in Haydn’s *Creation* (1798), a work inspired more by Handel’s oratorios than Marcello’s Psalms (though Handel’s oratorios were widely circulated in the London that Haydn visited in the 1790s).

Others who were inspired by psalms set to verse in vernacular languages had included Claude Goudimel (c. 1520 – 1572) and Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562? – 1621). Both were inspired by the *Geneva* (or Huguenot) *Psalter*.

Marcello’s espoused aim of recapturing the purity of ancient music led him to carefully curate residues of earlier times and then frame them in the operational practices of the present. Critics constantly shifted their ground on the question of what constituted the nucleus of the Psalms’ importance. The works were variously valued for their harmony (England), their melody (Germany), and their counterpoint (France).<sup>35</sup> Ironically, this breadth of understandings eventually rendered the repertory invisible, impenetrable and inscrutable. Each view partly eclipsed another.

Settings of texts widely associated with religious practice are difficult to understand as secular music in a world of constantly diminishing regard for sacred music. That the spread of the Psalms made them one of the most widely distributed repertoires of the eighteenth century is something of a curiosity. The Psalms themselves, like Marcello’s satirical treatise on the culture of opera, *Il teatro alla moda*, were scarcely ever out-of-print from his time until about 1775 – 250 years after their creation. They can never be fully resituated in their original niche – as works to please academicians – because none of the cultural apparatus that made them such objects of respect survives. Yet they can still be appreciated as musical works that constitute a genre of its own kind, and they can still reveal new meanings, and cunning aesthetic models, to those with the patience to seek them.

---

35 See Eleanor Selfridge-Field, „Marcello’s Music: Repertory vs. Reputation“, in: *Benedetto Marcello: La sua opera e il suo tempo*, ed. Claudio Madricardo e Franco Rossi, Florence 1988, pp. 205 – 222.