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Italian Opera and European Theatre, 1680-1720: Plots,
Performers, Dramaturgies (review)

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Italian Opera and European Theatre, 1680–1720: Plots, Performers, Dramaturgies. By Melania Bucciarelli. pp. xxiv + 227. *Speculum musicae*, 7. (Brepols, Turnhout, 2000, €90. ISBN 2-503-51021-3.)

This collection of essays probes a number of the murkier shadows of Italian theatre in the Baroque era. The shadows obscure our view of theatrical events as experienced, as elements in grander debates about aesthetics, as expressions of cultural identity, and as evidence of the achievements of individual performers and creators. These topics are viewed from a number of perspectives, several of which are rooted in non-Italian cultures. Of these, Melania Bucciarelli's firm grounding in French drama is the most apparent, but the bases of Spanish comedy and of acting techniques are also touched upon.

The subjects of the five chapters are (1) the poetic and rhetorical backgrounds of the *dramma per musica*, (2) the relationship between the commedia dell'arte and the *dramma per musica*, (3) the scenario and the *dramma per musica*, (4) Italian tragedy and the *dramma per musica*, and (5) French tragedy recast in the Italian manner; the last two essays concern specific works, Antonio Salvi's *Astianatte* and François de Scudéry's *Radamiste* respectively.

The study is mainly literary, but unlike many studies of opera glued to printed librettos, it brings the penetrating focus of a laser beam to the questions themselves. Examples have obviously been selected with great care, with an overall gravitation towards works that are accessible in modern editions and, within the limits of a little-known repertory, those that can be considered to have some continuing (or potential) appeal. Much of the logic is inductive. A single example, discussed at length, often serves to support a broad line of reasoning summarized in a sentence or two. It is sometimes the case that only one example is available.

This is so, for example, with the three-way comparison of representations of a work which crossed over from commedia to opera—*I tre principi di Salerno* (the scenario) and *Engelberta* (the opera). In this discussion the emphasis is very much on dramaturgical development. Bucciarelli shows how Apostolo Zeno, whose own scenarios for *Engelberta* survive, has adhered to structures evident in sixteenth-century comedy. She draws attention to the polarities in *Engelberta* that resemble the oppositions constructed between the *innamorati* of the commedia and to how Zeno retreads them to convey his moral messages. Zeno's text, like most others dis-

cussed in detail, was set several times over a short time-span—by Fiorè (Milan, 1709), Albiononi and Gasparini (Venice, 1709), and Orefice and Mancini (Naples, 1709). While keeping one eye on the recent past, Bucciarelli seems to keep the other on the more distant past, that is, on the legacies of antiquity as they were distilled by medieval learning. In this discussion, she cites the debts of eighteenth-century drama to ancient rhetoric and medieval lexicography.

A large number of references dispersed throughout the text pay homage to many of the standard works of seventeenth-century French drama and to writings on Italian aesthetics c.1700, particularly those with some relationship to the ideals of Arcadianism. Many of the signal works of the Italian comic repertory are noted in the discussion relating to Italian tragedy vis-à-vis the *dramma per musica*. The discussion of rhyme versus free verse brings in, as do several other topics, a continuing concern for the living work, the work as it was conveyed by actual performance. Gravino's claim that verse was more audible than prose is a case in point. Several passages compare the means by which characters conveyed their public and private personae in the same roles of the same works.

The discussion of French–Italian relations c.1700 has the same general strengths as the other treatments: in place of what might be a black-and-white portrait in other studies, we find here a narrative on the subtle changes, from year to year, that marked the love-hate relationship of Arcadian dramatists around 1700 with the imposing corpus of French drama of the preceding half-century. The case discussed at length is that of Pierre Corneille's *Rodogune* (1651) as it evolved on the Italian opera stage in such works as Morselli's *L'incoronazione di Serse* (1691). A four-page appendix (no. 3) is devoted to listing the French dramatic antecedents of Italian operas in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Bucciarelli seeks in this discussion to show that the *dramma per musica* was a mediating force between the French and Italian theatres.

The discussion of *Astianatte* ('Rhetorical Strategies and Tears . . .') makes the claim that Salvi (1701) was precocious in his revision of Racine's *Andromaque* (1667). In the process of reducing the number of characters, shortening the recitatives, and generally simplifying the text, he left some of the work's important lines unspoken. It remained for Gasparini to express these musically, and music examples are provided to show how he did so.

The discussion of *Radamisto* as crafted by

Domenico Lalli in *L'amor tirannico*, his first work for the Venetian theatre after he had arrived from Naples in 1710, is rotated in the author's kaleidoscope to view its life less in the hands of its Italian composers (Gasparini, Feo, Orlandini, Chelleri, and Porta) than in those of Handel, who set it for London's Haymarket Theatre in 1720. A particularly long footnote (p. 146) discusses the possible librettos to which Haym may have had access. In her discussion of the text, Bucciarelli shows Lalli's overall fidelity to Scudéry's model (*L'Amour tyrannique*, 1638). She also notes that elements of the original drama ill suit the needs of opera and shows how Handel addressed them in the successive versions of *Radamisto*.

The second and third essays, on the commedia and the scenario, will be the most valuable to many readers because they treat the subjects least often discussed in studies of opera-as-theatre and least well survived by the artefacts that could facilitate further study. One would hardly expect there to be a topic of substance in the comparison of the commedia *La morte di Leonello e Brisseida* and Zeno's *Teuzzone* (Milan, 1708), but Bucciarelli has no problem in delineating it.

This book has many general strengths. Like its predecessors in the *Speculum musicae* series, it is elegantly produced and beautifully printed. It is generously illustrated and carefully indexed. It includes many citations to recent articles in out-of-the-way places. Bucciarelli shows a fine command of the many byways of theatre studies.

What is particularly refreshing about Melania Bucciarelli's work is her ability to retrieve, from the finest details of works that lie entirely beyond the mainstream of the modern theatre, the precise details from which a much larger picture of past relationships—between genres and between literary traditions—can be constructed. One might occasionally wish for more extended summaries. Yet the delicacy of her arguments seems to require the immersion in detail that her commentaries provide. Once their exposition is complete, the conclusions are assumed to be self-evident.

ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD

The String Quartet, 1750–1797: Four Types of Musical Conversation. By Mara Parker. pp. xiii + 315. (Ashgate, Aldershot and Burlington, Vt., 2002, £42.50. ISBN 1-84014-682-6.)

As well as being a musicologist, Mara Parker is a performer, a cellist whose curiosity about the

string quartet in the second half of the eighteenth century has led her to explore over 650 works by contemporaries of Haydn and Mozart. Bibliographical control of the sources, especially the authenticity and chronology of the music, and broad issues of cyclic and movement structure are not her concerns. Instead her performing instincts have encouraged her to evaluate how prolific composers of quartets such as Beecke, Boccherini, Brunetti, Cambini, Dittersdorf, Gyrowetz, Krommer, Pleyel, and Vanhal treated the texture of the medium. Certainly, texture and sonority are only occasional concerns of modern commentators on music of this period, and one welcomes an approach that privileges such elements. However, the book does not fulfil this initial promise.

In an effort to control the impressive, not to say daunting, number of quartets that she has examined, Parker divides the music into four types, labelled 'the lecture', 'the polite conversation', 'the debate', and 'the conversation'. The preface stresses that 'these categories are in no way derived from contemporary eighteenth-century sources' (p. xi), oddly ignoring an opportunity to relate the approach to a fundamental aesthetic concern of the period—music as speech.

But there are more basic problems with Parker's categories, ones that mar the book as a whole. First, the differences between the last three of her categories are attenuated and difficult to maintain. Second, while she talks in the preface about 'works' being in each of these categories, the chapters devoted to each one of these types list, in the main, individual movements from works; further, as the author herself repeatedly admits, many of these movements, whether by Haydn or by a secondary composer such as Krommer (see pp. 178–9), move between these a priori categories. As a theory, 'four types of musical conversation' very soon lacks conviction.

Large tracts of the book consist of descriptions of quartet textures presented in adjacent music examples, often of generous length, with little or no attempt to relate them to other analytical concerns, whether local or large-scale. The broad-brush opening chapters on the historical background present information on the origins of the genre, the differing traditions of performance in Europe, and other aspects of the development of the genre in the eighteenth century but, again, none of this is systematically related to texture. Thus a book that avowedly focuses on texture summarizes but never scrutinizes terms such as *quatuor dialogué*, *quatuor concertant*, and *quatuor brillant*.