

Reviews

Boccherini Studies. Volume 1, edited by Christian Speck, Bologna, Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2007 (BS, 1), pp. xii+ 332, ISBN 978-88-8109-461-5, € 80,00.

To celebrate a great composer's anniversary is a familiar ritual of music scholarship, always welcome as a stimulus for research and amplified appreciation through festivals, conferences, or special publications. A dubious side effect is the tendency for such celebrations to help perpetuate an already deeply entrenched, narrowly circumscribed canon of preeminent masters and their cherished compositions, and thereby to assure that those deemed to be lesser masters will remain consigned to supporting roles, of interest mainly for their contribution as part of the historical backdrop for their more illustrious contemporaries.

At least until recently, this would appear to have been Luigi Boccherini's fate – respected as an influential contemporary of Mozart and Haydn, yet doomed to obscurity among the rosters of history's also-rans. The distance between Boccherini and the most venerated figures of the age was not always so great, however, at least within the realm of chamber music. Commentators of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries showered his music with superlatives, and some placed his contribution on a par with the best. Charles Burney declared that there was «perhaps no instrumental music more ingenious, elegant, and pleasing, than his quintets» (*A General*

History of Music, 1789; quoted in HEARTZ, Daniel. *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720-1780*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2003, p. 997), and Saverio Mattei, in his 1785 *Memorie*, had no hesitation in predicting that «the admirable trios, quartets, quintets, and sextets of Boccherini will always be the most perfect models of instrumental music» (HEARTZ, Daniel. *Op. cit.*, pp. 992-993).

The later decline of Boccherini's reputation is not hard to understand, given the fragile foundation on which it had rested. The persisting appeal of his chamber music – the core of his musical legacy – depended of necessity on the enthusiasm of small circles of connoisseurs. Moreover, having spent most of his career in Spain, on the periphery of European cultural life and artistic developments, he was destined never to be identified with any musical institution that might have sustained the memory of his contribution.

Does this mean that there is no hope for Boccherini? In recent times it has become fashionable to question historians' habits, assumptions, and values, to embrace decentered views of historical processes, and to focus intently on issues of diversity, otherness, and marginalization. Such trends would appear to offer brightened prospects for a renewal of interest in the composer's cultural environment and musical legacy. Indeed, some of the very factors that had helped ensure his long neglect may now be viewed more invitingly as sources of scholarly

inquiry in their own right, perhaps capable of helping him to emerge from the shadows in which he has languished for so long.

Was it mere happenstance that Boccherini's fortune began to change most dramatically as the two-hundredth anniversary of his death (2005) drew near? Daniel Hertz's monumental *Music in European Capitals* (2003) bestowed unaccustomed stature on Boccherini by identifying him, along with Paisiello and J. C. Bach, as part of a triumverate of leading galant-style apostles. Also in 2003, Elizabeth Le Guin was awarded the prestigious Einstein Award of the American Musicological Society for a pathbreaking essay on Boccherini in the society's journal; and in the anniversary year itself came the publication of Le Guin's instantly famous and controversial *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology*, by anyone's measure one of the most original pieces of musicological research in recent times.

No less well timed was the ambitious 2005 launching of a project that truly represents a quantum leap in Boccherini research: the Italian National Edition of Luigi Boccherini's *Opera Omnia*, under the auspices of Ut Orpheus Edizioni (Bologna) and the Centro Studi Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini-Onlus (Lucca) – an immense endeavor that will finally make this largely unknown repertory universally available for study and performance. The edition is projected to encompass forty-five volumes (nine for vocal music, three for stage works, twenty for instrumental music, and thirteen additional volumes for works of doubtful authenticity, documents, letters, and a thematic catalogue). And in a manner similar to such exemplary precedents as the Mozart and Haydn *Jahrbuch* publications, an ongoing series of Boccherini studies will be issued in tandem with the edition as a forum for research related to the composer's life, music, and artistic milieu.

The present volume represents the first in this series, comprising a foreword by Christian Speck and essays by a host of

enterprising scholars, including Germán Labrador, Mara Parker, Rudolf Rasch, Cesare Fertonani, Elisa Grossato, Elisabeth Le Guin, Christian Orth, W. Dean Sutcliffe, and Miguel Ángel Marín. No less varied in substance and methodology than in language and country of origin, the essays represent a cross-section of current Boccherini research (Italian, German, Spanish, and English languages are represented; the absence of any contribution from France is curious, given the vital role once played by French biographers, performers, and connoisseurs in the reception of the composer's music). In an effort to impose a semblance of order on the volume's conspicuous diversity of topic and method, the editor has grouped the contents according to four general areas of research: biography, chronology and transmission, criticism, and reception. But the apparent neatness of this division proves deceptive. For just as Boccherini was an artist whose training, life experience, and artistic personality straddled cultural, stylistic, and national borders, the authors of these essays have tended to approach their subject through open-ended, exploratory perspectives that defy easy categorization as they overstep customary scholarly boundaries.

Where to begin? Although it comes last in the volume, the Spanish scholar Miguel Ángel Marín's wide-ranging survey of the history of Boccherini biography – enriched by a wealth of quotations from earlier generations of critics and lexicographers – is perhaps where many readers might wish to start. The author's trenchant observations on the circumstances under which Boccherini's chamber works were once cherished but ultimately neglected are provocative and illuminating, and they point up promising directions for future scholarship. As Marín himself declares, the insights he presents will help to liberate us «from inherited myths and to explore new interpretations of a composer that still deserves his own place in music history» (p. 323).

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Of particular interest are Marin's comments on the composer's relative seclusion at the court of Spain and the apparent consequences of that condition for the nature of his work and its reception. And yet Boccherini was not always so isolated. A travelling virtuoso in the early years of his career, he was fondly received in the salons of Paris during his sojourn there in 1767-1768. It was there that he discovered a robust market for his trios, quartets, and quintets, and succeeded in establishing relationships with publishers that would stand him in good stead for much of his subsequent career. Rudolf Rasch explores this market and the broader context of Boccherini's engagement with music publishers in Paris, Amsterdam, London, Vienna, and Venice at various junctures in his career. In the process, he offers a revealing portrayal of Boccherini's ever-sharpening self-awareness as an artist, craftsman, and businessman, keenly attuned to the tastes of his targeted audiences, and willing to accommodate the exigencies of the publishing industry by bundling works in carefully assembled opus groups, distinguishing between sets of small, relatively easy pieces and those consisting of larger, more challenging works, and generally striking a balance between novelty and familiarity. A useful appendix, crammed with factual information, encompasses an array of tables that identify individual works as well as opus groups with their publishers and dates of publication.

Given the Parisians' fondness for Boccherini, and given the ease with which he seems to have accustomed himself to that city's cultural milieu, his readiness to abandon this cosmopolitan environment for a relatively sedentary, reclusive life in Spain is an enduring mystery. What was there about that distant land, steeped in its own insular traditions, for which he felt a special affinity? Examining this principal phase of the composer's career, Germán Labrador's essay does not attempt to shed new light on the

enigmas of Boccherini's temperament and his career choices, but rather to offer a detailed, factual account of his material circumstances from 1770 to the end of his life. Along the way, we learn much about conditions that informed his professional activities: the dominant role of Italian musicians and eager cultivation of Italian music; the relationship between Boccherini and his violinist colleague Gaetano Brunetti, an older contemporary who first joined service in the Spanish court in 1767; and the vicissitudes of Boccherini's interaction with his Spanish employers. With the aid of some well-presented graphs and statistics, Labrador traces Boccherini's salary year by year, adduces evidence for the favor, respect, and substantial compensation he enjoyed, and illuminates the conditions under which his chamber music was admired and performed.

Although Labrador's information on Boccherini's Spanish income is admirably clear and precise, it represents only a partial account of the composer's financial situation. For in what was surely one of the more unusual employment arrangements to be enjoyed by an eighteenth-century musician, Boccherini received financial support not merely from one royal establishment but simultaneously from two. The Prussian crown prince Wilhelm, himself a cello player, had written admiringly to Boccherini as early as 1783; and after the death of Boccherini's Spanish patron, the infante Don Luis, in 1785, the composer was in a position to accept an offer from the soon-to-be monarch of Prussia as a court composer – but only in absentia, for Boccherini chose to remain in Spain, where he drew a pension and enjoyed additional patronage. From 1786 until the king's death in 1797, Boccherini responded to his distant patron's musical appetite by sending him a steady stream of chamber works from Spain. Mara Parker's essay surveys the documentary traces of the relationship between composer and music-loving king, offers a catalogue of Boccherini's works preserved in the Berlin

Staatsbibliothek, and reports on the many comments and performance markings in the parts, which collectively provide evidence of how the music was «studied, played, and appreciated» (p. 57). Endeavoring to describe the music itself with help of several music examples, Parker dwells on the manifestly idiomatic writing for the instruments, the composer's gift for novel sonorities, and the trademark Boccherini textures that allow the cello parts either to blend seamlessly with the other voices or to shine as distinctive solo personalities.

Boccherini's approach to the chamber medium with which he is most famously associated – the string quintet with two cellos – is further explored by the Italian scholar Elisa Grossato. She turns our attention to his mastery of timbre, especially as embodied in his agile, inventive cello parts, which typically traverse a wide registral swath within the ensemble's sound-space, seemingly ready at any moment to escape pedestrian bass-line duty in favor of higher register acrobatics and a repertory of sonorous effects. She emphasizes Boccherini's gift as a colorist, bent on cultivating a language of allusive images in sound that direct our thoughts and feelings toward objects and sensations outside the music itself. In the process, she calls attention to certain aspects of Boccherini's artistic personality and eclectic compositional style: his indebtedness to his predecessors, the influences he appears to have absorbed from the Spanish milieu in which he lived, the sometimes folklore-tinged backdrop for his musical experience as a performer and composer, the sheer novelty of his invention, and his idiosyncratic mixtures of conventional and exotic, old and new.

Boccherini's veneration of music from the past is examined in closer detail by Cesare Fertonani, who identifies the composer as one of the last exponents of a proud Italian string-instrument tradition embracing the musical legacy of Corelli, Pasquini, and Vivaldi. Inspecting a particular artifact from

the past in Boccherini's chamber music – the example of a *folia* embedded within the dance movement of his quintet Op. 40 No. 1, G 340 (1788) – he ponders the significance of this moment as an instance of musical nostalgia, the affirmation of a potentially still vital tradition, and also – given what the author sees as a significant resemblance to the *fandango* – the token of a convergence of Italian and Spanish elements.

Boccherini's archaic leanings come into focus also in W. Dean Sutcliffe's essay, which concentrates on the Op. 32 string quartets – a set of works that seems haunted by «ghosts from the past» (p. 276), owing to a wealth of figures, gestures, allusions, and compositional techniques that look back to the musical customs of an earlier generation. The musical processes and materials in question – including an accent on surface continuity, fast harmonic rhythm, formulaic suspension patterns, Phrygian cadences, and chromatic tetrachords – are painstakingly enumerated. They show the composer's engagement in «defining the modern manner by playing it off against older, more venerable types of music» (p. 249).

Just how such stylistic idiosyncrasies as those identified by Grossato, Fertonani, and Sutcliffe might fit into an overall profile of Boccherini's oeuvre will doubtless become clear as the complete edition makes previously inaccessible works available in textually reliable scores. Yet the very notion of textual reliability points to certain performance- and notation-related issues that must be confronted by editors, performers, historians, and analysts of style. At issue are not only such discrete matters as clefs, improvised ornamentation, and notational shorthand devices for solo figuration, but the larger phenomenon of a once vital dialogue between composer and performer whose nuances are not easily captured by the editorial compromises implicit in the very idea of an authoritative complete edition. Christian Orth's essay gives us an inkling of

the problem by presenting a case study in the kinds of vital performance instruction that might be gleaned from Boccherini's idiosyncratic notational practices. In question here is the multiplicity of clef changes with which certain of his soloistic cello parts are peppered. Orth explains their rationale by showing how the clef changes are keyed to particular thumb positions high on the neck of the instrument, around which passages of figural display are typically organized.

The multiple clef changes, perhaps mystifying and potentially confusing if incorporated in a modern scholarly edition, are nevertheless rich in meaning for any performer who strives to capture some of the idiomatic nuances that the original notation can convey – and especially for the enterprising performers intent on coming to grips with places where Boccherini not only taxes the cellist's ability to project as a solo voice, but where he actually seems bent on showcasing difficulty, physicality, and the spontaneous emotional energy on which the meaning of Boccherini's music may often be seen to rest.

This general line of inquiry has been explored at length by Elisabeth Le Guin, a cellist and scholar who has long felt a certain personal connection to Boccherini and his music. Proposing to conjure an image of the composer standing before us as a performer, she urges us to experience the music subjectively – from the inside, in all its visceral, immediate, sensual presence – so that we can luxuriate in the vagaries of the musical surface and drink in the elusive sensations that it may evoke. In so doing, she largely rejects basic assumptions about music analysis as a means of demonstrating structural unity and coherence through objectification, normalization, or reduction. The piece showcased in her essay is indeed one that would strain customary analysis to the breaking point: an unpublished sonata for cello and bass (G 569) whose radically unconventional design includes manifold,

overlapping recurrences of material from one movement to the next. She offers a visually exhausting, multi-page table that records surface events in great detail; but even on close inspection, the table's profusion of thematic and topical labels, keys, left-hand positions, and measure numbers does not explain very much – nor, one suspects, is it meant to be helpful in any normal way, but is rather intended to underscore the music's resistance to explanation in terms of closed, hierarchic structures or long-range narratives.

Readers of this difficult yet nonetheless engaging essay may sense that the author herself is deliberately reaching beyond the constraints of the scholarly-essay genre, mirroring the allusiveness of the music she discusses through her method of engaging multiple, often unanticipated vantage points, attitudes, and strands of inquiry. However unusual and challenging, her essay may be seen in this sense to mirror the larger enterprise represented by the volume in its entirety. That Boccherini's art does not always conform to norms and expectations, that his music is often most interesting when it defies explanation according to customary analytical yardsticks, are lessons reinforced repeatedly throughout this collection of essays, most of whose authors would doubtless agree that new methods must be developed in order for us to reconnect with Boccherini's musical legacy, the cultural, commercial, and artistic environments from which it sprang, and the enthusiasm by which his music was received by contemporaries.

Other than a pervasive spirit of discovery, born of an urge to revive interest in a major yet undervalued historical figure, there is no unifying theme, nor should any such cohesion be expected of the *Boccherini Studies*, whose presumed purpose is simply to provide a central locus for all Boccherini-related research. (The initial volume's nearly exclusive focus on chamber music constitutes a unifying thread of sorts, and this is understandable given the fact that the composer's fame has

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always rested principally on his many publications of trios, quartets, and quintets. Other facets of his oeuvre, including orchestral compositions, theatrical works, and sacred music, will have to await future exploration.) As future issues of the *Boccherini Studies* are planned, certain modifications of the serial's format might be considered. First, given the international scope of the endeavor, readers may find that they need all the help they can get in order to work their way around its polyglot contents. A subject index would be welcome, as would the inclusion of an abstract for each essay. Second, the addition of biographical information on contributors would doubtless prove useful, especially to aspiring Boccherini scholars who might wish to make contact with their colleagues across national borders. The number of such scholars is likely to grow as Boccherini continues to gain prominence and respect among devotees of eighteenth-century music; and as a consequence, it may be assumed that the *Boccherini Studies* will receive intensive use. It is thus a pleasure to report that the inaugural issue is physically sturdy and certainly designed to last. Added to this practical virtue is the visual impression of its dignified, quietly authoritative gold-on-black binding. Boccherini is now someone to reckon with, this volume seems to say, a major figure of his age, eminently worthy of an anniversary celebration of his own.

Floyd Grave
New Brunswick (NJ)

★★★

Domenico Scarlatti Adventures: Essays to Commemorate the 250th Anniversary of His Death, a cura di Massimiliano Sala e W. Dean Sutcliffe, Bologna, Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2008 (Ad Parnassum Studies, 3), pp. xiv+458, ISBN 978-88-8109-462-2, € 120,00.

La ancor giovane collana degli *Ad Parnassum Studies* si è arricchita quest'anno

di un terzo elegante volume dedicato a Domenico Scarlatti in occasione del duecento cinquantesimo anniversario della morte, altrimenti passato sotto silenzio nel panorama dell'editoria musicologica internazionale. Si tratta di una raccolta di dodici saggi in italiano e inglese, curati egregiamente da Massimiliano Sala e W. Dean Sutcliffe. Il titolo del volume richiama l'adeguata disposizione d'animo di chi si avvicina alla figura del musicista. Non importa se si lavori alla scrivania o allo strumento, se si voglia comprendere lo 'spirito' della sua musica o restituirne la 'lettera', in ogni caso ci si deve preparare a un'avventura, affascinante ed emozionante quanto incerta e pericolosa. Quasi tutto ciò che ha a che fare con Domenico Scarlatti ha dell'avventuroso: la filologia, l'ermeneutica, la biografia, l'interpretazione storica e musicale, finanche la cronologia. Diversi saggi raccolti nel volume in esame ci fanno comprendere che questa particolarità scarlattiana non è dovuta solamente a una precaria situazione delle fonti documentarie e musicali, ma origina nella produzione stessa di un compositore che dimostra una capacità straordinaria, tanto più in un'epoca musicale dominata dal gusto italiano, di aprirsi alle culture altre, di contaminarne le espressioni e di pervenire così a esiti che infrangono gli orizzonti di attesa.

I curatori del volume hanno rinunciato a rendere manifesta un'articolazione tematica, offrendo al lettore una serie di saggi d'argomento e taglio diversi. Certamente, alcuni criteri traspaiono dall'ordine dei contributi. I primi tre saggi si rivolgono alla musica vocale, vale a dire a quella parte della produzione di Domenico Scarlatti che, seppur cospicua nelle dimensioni, resta all'ombra delle sonate. Colin Timms ripropone la presentazione di una cantata da camera su testo di Antonio Ottoboni, risalente, come la maggior parte delle cantate scarlattiane, agli anni romani. Nel saggio di D'Alvarenga l'indagine si sposta al periodo portoghese (1719-1729), di cui l'autore si sforza di chiarire