

Naples, Capital of Dance

Renowned as a city of entertainment, Naples was unequaled in eighteenth-century Italy for the diversity of its musical life. During the reigns of Carlo di Borbone and his heir Ferdinando IV, the sponsorship of *feste di ballo*, elaborate celebratory balls featuring social dance such as the minuet and contradance, grew increasingly lavish. Organized for *carnevale*, occasions of state, and personal celebrations in the lives of the royal family, the *feste di ballo* fostered both a public agenda and a personal rapport between the monarchs and local aristocracy. As the century progressed, the frequency of and resources accorded to the *feste di ballo* and its showcasing of social dance came to match those of stage drama and instrumental music. Based on extensive archival research, this book reveals the culture of social dance at the Bourbon court and how these spectacular events served to project images of authority, power, and identity.

ANTHONY R. DELDONNA is Thomas E. Caestecker Professor of Music in the Department of Performing Arts at Georgetown University. He is the author of *Instrumental Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples: Politics, Patronage and Artistic Culture* (2021) and *Opera, Theatrical Culture and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples* (2012).

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The ‘feste di ballo’ Tradition in the Long Eighteenth Century

ANTHONY R. DELDONNA
Georgetown University, Washington DC





Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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To my wife, Tina, and daughter, Alessandra

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Acknowledgments

The present monograph stems from long-standing research on the artistic and music cultures of early modern Naples. The *feste di ballo* celebrations endured the entirety of several centuries despite larger and often significant political, social, and artistic upheavals within the Kingdom. Similar to stage drama, the eighteenth-century *feste* represented opportunities for the Bourbon dynasty to project their own authority, power, and sovereignty in diverse manners: sonically, visually, or choreographically. These celebrations differed from theatrical genres, moreover, through the direct participation of the monarchy – Carlo, Maria Amalia, Ferdinando, and above all Maria Carolina – yet they were no longer clothed in the metaphorical allusions of antiquity or the artificial language of the stage. The engagement of the vast artistic apparatus of the Crown, whether the administrative, creative (musicians of the Cappella Reale and royal theater as well as other venues), or production personnel, rendered these celebrations among the most significant of the early modern period, rivaling the stature of stage genres by the end of the eighteenth century. Although the present narrative concludes near the end of the eighteenth century, archival and musical sources exist well into the nineteenth century, encouraging the engagement of scholars in the field.

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