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978-1-108-06427-9 - Musical Biography: Or, Memoirs of the Lives and Writings of the Most Eminent Musical Composers and Writers, Who have Flourished in the Different Countries of Europe During the Last Three Centuries: Volume 2

William Bingley

Excerpt

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Musical Biography.

CHAP. XI.

ITALIAN

MUSICAL COMPOSERS AND WRITERS,

WHO FLOURISHED

From about the Year

1700 to 1725.

TORRI. — HAYM. — ORLANDINI. — BUINI. — G. M.
ALBERTI. — TESSARINI. — GIACOMELLI. — CONTI.
— LOTTI. — GASPARINI. — STEFFANI. — CLARI. —
ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI. — DOMENICO SCARLATTI.
— GIOVANNI. — BONONCINI. — ARIOSTI. — MAR-
CELLO. — ALBINONI.

TEVO. — TOSI.

A GREAT change of character, and numerous improvements of a most important description, took place in the music of Italy during the course of the seventeenth century. For several years of the early part of it, sacred music was almost exclusively cultivated. This was the natural consequence of the composers being retained in the service of, and receiving their chief encouragement

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and emoluments from, the church. The secular music in use consisted principally of madrigals and fantazias; the former vocal, and the latter instrumental.

In the beginning of the century, Carissimi composed, for the use of the church, a species of dramatic dialogue, in imitation probably of the ancient Scriptural Mysteries, which about this period were common in all the countries of Europe. His works were, however, of a description infinitely superior to these, and consisted of recitative, airs, and chorus. To the labours and the talents of this admirable composer the music of Italy was much indebted. His compositions are indeed so truly excellent, that they are heard at the present day with delight; and even Handel did not think himself degraded by condescending to imitate them in several of his productions.

Previously to the time of Carissimi, divers improvements in harmony had taken place. Monteverde, about the beginning of the century, had been so far guilty of innovation upon the former system, as to introduce double discords; and, by quitting the ecclesiastical modulation, he had determined the key of each movement, and had greatly smoothed and phrased the melody. In some of his madrigals it has been remarked, that “every species of discord and modulation is hazarded, for the use of which the boldest composers of modern times have been often thought licentious.”

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Music altogether instrumental appears to have had its rise in Italy about the beginning of this century, first in the fantazias before mentioned (which were adapted only to viols), and, some years afterwards, in a species of sonata, where divers kinds of instruments were used. The invention of what is now denominated overture or symphony has usually been ascribed to Lully, who died in the year 1687. Viols, violins, and other instruments, had, however, been previously used in the choral service in addition to the organ, and several vocal compositions with accompaniments had been published. But the greatest improvements which music, simply instrumental, received at this period, were from Corelli, who indeed effected an important revolution in it; and these improvements were afterwards spread, by means of his numerous pupils, throughout every part of Europe.

The mode of playing on, and the compositions for the organ were likewise gradually advancing towards perfection. Playing in fugue is supposed to have been first introduced by Frescobaldi, who applied himself with peculiar diligence to the study of this noble instrument, and who excelled all his contemporaries both in the knowledge of its powers, and in his abilities to display them to his hearers.

With respect to the opera, it not only had its rise, but was completely established, in the course of the

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seventeenth century. We have already stated that an opera entitled “*L’Orfeo*” was first performed at Venice in the year 1607. After this, similar productions were by degrees encouraged in other parts of Italy. About the middle of the century, theatres were erected in nearly all the principal cities; and before the conclusion of it, this species of entertainment had arrived at such a state of perfection as to be introduced into France, and, not long afterwards, into our own country.

The following is an account of the principal Italian musicians who flourished during the early part of the eighteenth century.



PIETRO TORRI, an Italian by birth, was engaged, in the younger part of his life, as chamber musician to the Margrave of Bareuth, and afterwards as chapel-master of the great church at Brussels. It is generally understood that he was a pupil of Steffani. He died about the year 1722.

One of the most celebrated of his compositions is a duet entitled, “*Heracitus and Democritus* ;” in which the affections of laughing and weeping are contrasted with singular art and ingenuity.

Torri was famed for his musical talents throughout all Flanders; and it is said that in the reign of Queen Anne, when we were at war with the French,

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his house having been in danger, the Duke of Marlborough issued particular orders that it should be protected from violence. In return for this instance of generosity, he presented the Duke with a manuscript, containing some of the most valuable of his compositions. This is yet remaining in the family library at Blenheim.

NICOLA FRANCESCO HAYM was a native of Rome. He came to London about the year 1707, and engaged with Clayton and Dieupart in the attempt to establish an Italian opera there. He adapted the airs in that of *Camilla* to English words, and did the same to *Pyrrhus and Demetrius*, adding also an overture and several songs of his own composition, which rank amongst the best of the time. He continued thus employed for about three years, when Mr. Handel arrived in England, and composed the opera of *Rinaldo*, the superior merit of which over every representation of a similar nature till then exhibited on the stage, had such an effect as to silence all the attempts of Haym and his associates to entertain the town with dramatic music.

The merit of Haym as a musician entitled him, however, to better encouragement than he seems to have received. He was also a man of learning, and published other works besides music.

About the year 1730, he issued proposals for

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printing by subscription “A History of Music,” in two volumes in quarto, which he had written in Italian, and which was to have been translated from his manuscripts into the English language. He describes the nature of his work in these words.

“The author’s design is, 1. To render his subject intelligible and agreeable to all readers, even to those who do not understand music. 2. From ancient writers, antique statues, bass-relievos, and medals, to collect whatever is most material to ancient music: to give an account of its origin, and the esteem in which it was held in the several periods of time; the lives of the musicians, and the use they made of music in their games, sacrifices, &c. with some explications of the ancient fables concerning it. 3. The progress and decay of the said science in the different ages down to the present time. 4. The introduction of operas into several parts of Europe, and particularly into England; with an accurate account of their progress and success. 5. The lives of all the eminent masters and professors of this art in all times, with their effigies.”

The following table of contents was distributed in manuscript amongst the friends of the author.

“Contents of the History of the Music, in two volumes.

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“ Vol. I. book 1. Begins from the earliest antiquity to the restoring of music in the Temple after the captivity of the Jews ; to which is annexed an account of twenty gods of the gentiles, who were all musicians, and the most remarkable medals concerning them.

“ Book 2. The introducing of music into Greece in the time of Cadmus, down to the siege of Troy ; wherein mention is also made of forty-four persons who exercised music and poetry in those ages ; together with all the monuments relating to them that are now extant.

“ Book 3. From the siege of Troy to the first Olympiad, with an account of forty persons who flourished during that period, and the effigies of such of them as have been transmitted to posterity. In these three books several ancient fables neces-

“ Book 4. From the first Olympiad to Alexander the Great, containing the history of eighty-four musicians, with several other particulars relating to the science they professed ; as also their effigies and other antique monuments as above. N. B. To this period the reader will have a complete history of poetry as well as music, it being proved that hitherto all poets were musicians also.

“ Book 5. From Alexander the Great to the Emperor Alexander Severus, when the music of

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the gentiles ends ; containing the fall of ancient music, and an account of forty other musicians, as before : to which is annexed fifty apophthegms of ancient musicians.

“ Book 6. Treats of all those solemnities, &c. in which music was employed by the ancients, as sacrifices, wars, triumphs, nuptials, banquets, tragedies, comedies, pantomimic entertainments, dancings, funerals, festivals, and games, all proved and illustrated by medals, gems, bas-reliefs, and other antique monuments.

“ Book 7. Treats of the several instruments used by the ancients, in a manner altogether new, and much clearer than has been done hitherto ; with such of their instruments as could be delineated from antiquities now existing, engraved on copper. The whole making the most complete collection of that kind yet published.

“ Book 8 Includes a curious inquiry into ancient music in the several periods of time, with its excellency ; wherein the ancient musicians excelled the moderns ; and also those particulars in which the latter surpassed them ; and concludes with adjudging the palm to the ancient music.

“ Vol. II. book 1. Begins from Christ, with the institution of music in the Christian churches ; and comprehends also the invention of the notes now used, and harmony ; their introduction into all parts of Europe ; with the institution of Doctors of Music in England ; and several other curious

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matters that occurred during the space of one thousand five hundred years.

“ **Book 2.** An account of the greatest masters in all parts of Europe during the fifty years following, with several other particulars.

“ **Book 3.** Beginning with the seventeenth century, gives an accurate account of the invention of operas in imitation of the Greeks, with several important particulars, and a series of masters to anno 1650.

“ **Book 4.** Another series of masters for the succeeding twenty-five years; the introduction of operas and other kinds of music into different parts of Europe.

“ **Book 5.** The continuation, as before, of the next twenty-five years.

“ **Book 6.** Beginning at 1700, with an account of the introduction of Italian operas into England, and the progress they have since made; the founding of the Royal Academy, and several other curious matters.

“ **Book 7.** Some account of the principal masters now living, and the present state of music in all parts of Europe.

“ **Book 8.** A curious dissertation or inquiry in what manner music may be carried to a greater perfection than it hath hitherto attained.”

It appears from a list of the subscribers in his own hand-writing, scarcely amounting to forty in number, that Haym met with but with small en-

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couragement in this undertaking. He therefore abandoned his design and the profession of music altogether, and from that time employed himself in collecting pictures for sale and on commission. In the latter capacity he was engaged by Sir Robert Walpole, Dr. Mead, and several other persons.

Haym had some taste for poetry. In a collection of Mr. Galliard's compositions there are two Italian *cantatas*, the words of which were written by him. He was also the author of *Etearco*, an opera represented at the Haymarket in the year 1711.

GIUS. MAR. ORLANDINI was an able and favourite Bolognese master, who furnished the theatre at Venice with many *operas*. His compositions seem more dramatic and elegant than those of any composer of the Italian school anterior to Hasse and Vinci. He is said to have been particularly happy in the composition of *intermezzi*, a gay kind of music, which was little understood by any other master till the time of Pergolesi.

His *hymns* in three parts are sufficiently natural and easy for psalm-singers, and other persons not very deeply skilled in the knowledge of music. He wrote also *cantici* or catches, and continued to flourish from 1710 to 1745.