

COMMUNICATION



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LA NINFA DEL TAGO (1721): ALESSANDRO SCARLATTI RECYCLES IN ROME A NEAPOLITAN SERENATA FOR THE KING OF PORTUGAL

On 1 December 2018, in the Museu Nacional de Arte Antica, Lisbon, maestro Enrico Onofri conducted a concert in which an otherwise unknown vocal work by Alessandro Scarlatti was heard for the first time since 1721. The first half of the concert, brilliantly performed by the Orquestra Metropolitana de Lisboa, consisted of instrumental works by Locatelli, Telemann and Manfredini. The second half was a performance of Scarlatti's two-part serenata for three voices *La Ninfa del Tago*, beautifully sung by Marianna Castello-Branco, Ana Sofia Ventura and Cátia Moresco. One would search in vain for this serenata in most modern worklists of the composer, and it deserves further contextual explanation.

On the feast of Saint Barbara, 4 December 1715, the Habsburg Viceroy of Naples, Count Wirich Philipp von Daun, mounted a conspicuous celebration for his wife's name day, the serenata *Filli, Clori e Tirsi*. Serenatas of this type were customary during the last phase of Alessandro Scarlatti's tenure at Naples as maestro di cappella (1708–1725), and it comes as no surprise to learn from the *Gazzetta di Napoli* that Scarlatti was the composer of the music performed for the entertainment of the ladies of Naples that evening in the Royal Palace. Edward Dent (*Alessandro Scarlatti* (London, Arnold, 1960), 169; original publication in 1905 with preface and notes by Frank Walker) noticed some belligerent references in the text of *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* to war with the Turks, which led him to assign the serenata to 1718, the year of the Peace of Passarowitz, with which the conflict between the Empire and the Turks was concluded. *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* dates from several years earlier, however. (Evidence for the year 1715 is presented on my website at: http://www.ascarlatti2010.net/main_page/lisbon/)

No printed libretto for *La Ninfa del Tago* corresponding to the Neapolitan performance of *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* is known, but in 1721 a lightly revised version of this serenata's text appeared in a Roman print with the following title:

LA NINFA
DEL TAGO
COMPONIMENTO MUSICALE
FATTO CANTATE
Dall'Em.mentiss., e Reverendiss. Principe
NUNO DA CUNHA
Cardinale di S.Chiesa, e Generale Inquisitore
in tutti I Domini Portughsi
Per il Giorno del Felice Nome della S.R.M.



DI
GIOVANNI V.
RE' DI PORTUGALLO.

There is no surviving score that has a title corresponding exactly to this text. Yet as the title-page indicates, the 'musical entertainment' was given in Rome by the Portuguese Cardinal and much-feared Inquisitor Nuno da Cunha e Ataíde in celebration of the name day of his king, João V. Evidently the king did not celebrate his name day on 24 June, the feast of Saint John the Baptist, but during the octave of 27 December (27 December–3 January), the period dedicated to the feast of St John, Apostle and Evangelist. The Roman *Diario Ordinario* of 3 January 1722 preserves a report which surely refers to the performance of *La Ninfa del Tago*.

An even more revealing account of the 1721 performance is preserved in the *Diario Ordinario* of 10 January 1722:

Avendo l'Eminentissimo Signor Cardinal Nugno da Cunha la sera delli 29. passato fatto ornare nobilmente suo Palazzo, e precisamente il nobil Salone, ove anticamente facevasi la famosa Accademia degl Umoristi, nel mezzo del quell'vedevasi eretto un gran Padiglione guarnito d'oro, e di'intorno un ornamento di superbissimi specchi tramezzati da ben lavorati lampadari di lucenti cristalli, e sotto di esso 18. Eminentissimi Signori Cardinali, con gli Eccellentissimi Signori Ambasciatori di Portogallo, e di Venezia, con un gran numero di Principesse, e gran Nobiltà, che godevano la nobil Cantata da scelti Musici, oltre un bel concerto di Strumenti; Et avendo inteso l'Eminenza Sua di essere stata tutta la Nobiltà sodisfattissima, e della Musica, e delli Cantori, & ancora di tutti gli Artefici, che avevano operato, volle versi di loro usare la sua solita natia generosità, con far dare al Signor Pasqualino Betti di regalo particolare una cedola di scudi 60., alli Suonatori un'altra di scudi 253. alli Musici di scudi 120., al Signor Cavalier Scarlatti Compositore della Musica di scudi 200., al Poeta di scudi 60., all'Architetto, che aveva sì industriosamente il tutto distribuito di scudi 50. e per tutte le altre spese del solo parato di scudi 300., e tal munificenza stata universalmente lodata.

The Most Eminent Lord Cardinal Nugno [*sic*] da Cunha, having had his palace nobly decorated on the evening of the 29th of last month, and specifically the *salone nobile*, where in the past the famous academy of the Umoristi took place, one saw erected in the middle of it a great pavilion adorned with gold and in its midst a most superb ornament of mirrors encased by well-shaped large glittering crystal chandeliers, and below which there were eighteen Most Eminent Lord Cardinals, with the Most Excellent Lord Ambassadors of Portugal and of Venice, with a great number of Princesses and high nobility, who enjoyed the noble cantata by select singers as well as a fine consort of instruments; and His Eminence having understood that the nobles were entirely satisfied with the music, and with the singers, and even with all the artisans who devised the work, he wished to demonstrate toward them his customary inborn generosity by making a special gift of 60 scudi to Signor Pasqualino Betti, to the instrumentalists one of 253 scudi, to the singers of 120 scudi, to the composer of the music, Cavalier Scarlatti, one of 200 scudi, to the poet of 60 scudi, to the architect, who so industriously arranged it all, 50 scudi, and for all the other remaining expenses 300 scudi; and such munificence was universally praised. (My translation)

When an aristocratic patron of this era such as Nuno da Cunha commissioned a musical work, he would have expected to receive a newly composed piece. Yet that was unlikely to have been the case with *La Ninfa del Tago*. With only a few minor alterations to the text, and one newly composed recitative and aria, *La Ninfa del Tago* was almost certainly the same as the Neapolitan work of 1715. This was not the first Neapolitan serenata that Scarlatti reused in Rome. *Venere, Adone et Amore*, heard at Naples in 1696, reappeared years later with a few alterations in a score dated Rome, 1706. Indeed, the reuse of occasional music, especially if the second



patron was unlikely to know about its earlier performance, was a common phenomenon of the era and can be documented in the literature on Handel, Caldara, Bononcini and others. Scarlatti must have been well pleased with the two hundred scudi he received for a composition that may have already earned the composer forty-five scudi a few years earlier in Naples.

As mentioned above, the text of *La Ninfa del Tago* corresponds closely to that of *Filli, Clori e Tirsi*, except that the specific references in the latter have been altered to conform to a new occasion. *Filli, Clori e Tirsi*, for example, begins:

Dalle fiorite arene
Dal mio patrio Volturno, a voi ne vengo
Di Partenope belle ò piagge amene.

From the florid banks
of my home [the River] Volturno, I come to you,
oh beautiful, delightful shores of Partenope [that is, Naples]

For the Roman performance of *La Ninfa del Tago*, Filli's text was altered to:

Dalle dorate arene
Del mio paterno Tago, a voi ne vengo,
Del Tevere felice, ò piagge amene.

From the golden banks
of my home [the River] Tagus, I come to you,
oh delightful shores of the happy Tiber.

It is fortunate for the modern-day scholar that the *Diario Ordinario* names one of the three singers of the serenata at Rome (Pasqualino Betti); however, the name of the serenata's poet is not given anywhere. While the texts of *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* and *La Ninfa del Tago* remain anonymous, they clearly find their inspiration in Francesco de Lemene's *La Ninfa Apollo*, a three-act opera which begins with the character Lilla singing the words:

Da la fiorita arene
Del mio patrio Cefiso a voi ne vegno,
Ciel felice, aura dolce, ed ombra amena
De la Tessala Tempe ...
From the florid bank
of my home [the River] Cephisus, I come to you,
happy sky, sweet breeze, and pleasant shade
of the Thessalian temple ...

The text of this opera first appeared in print in 1692 in the collected edition of the poet's work (*Poesie diverse del Signor Francesco de Lemene ... parte prima* (Milan: Carlo Giuseppe Quinto, 1692), 22–33), where *La Ninfa Apollo* is described as 'performed in Rome' (*rappresentata in Roma*). The circumstances of this first performance remain obscure, but the numerous reprintings of the libretto at subsequent performances testify to its popularity in the early years of the eighteenth century. Allacci (*Drammaturgia ... accresciuta e continuata fino all'anno MDCCLV* (Venice: G. Pasquali, 1755), columns 561–562), for example, lists a total of six printings, one as late as 1764. In 1744 the literary critic Francesco Savero Quadrio (*Della storia e della ragione*



d'ogni poesia, five volumes (Milan: Francesco Angeli, 1744), volume 3 part 2, 434) included de Lemene among the reformers who had made Italian opera 'if not perfect, at least in some measure bearable' ('se non perfetta, almen sofferibile alquanto'). The two serenata texts, *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* and *La Ninfa del Tago*, are considerably shorter than a three-act opera and represent a much-abbreviated version of de Lemene's work, though with some material not found in *La Ninfa Apollo*.

At a pre-concert lecture in December 2018, Luca Della Libera noted the essentially banal quality of this serenata's text. Only after the happy resolution to a generic tale of nymphs and shepherds does the serenata text turn to the specific occasion being celebrated: 'del gran nome sublime della Ninfa sovrana di Wirrigo Consorte' at Naples in 1715, or to the 'giorno fausto e beato; e tal'esser dovea, ch'oggi é quel giorno del gran Nome possente dell'invitto GIOVANI, pregio ed Onor del Tago' at Rome in 1721.

For this two-part Arcadian frolic Scarlatti provided an opening sinfonia in three parts (Presto – Adagio – Allegro), eleven arias, two duets and one trio, with all these movements joined by recitatives (two of them accompagnato). A modern score and libretto for *Filli, Clori e Tirsi* and images of the 1721 libretto for *La Ninfa del Tago* can be consulted on my website at http://www.ascarlattiz2010.net/main_page/filli_clori_e_tirsi. One hopes that maestro Onofri will soon make available a recording of this rare work.

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