

INTRODUCTION

The Composer and the Music

The son of Giovanni Maria Bononcini was born in Modena on July 18, 1670. His relatively long life straddled two centuries. Orphaned when he was eight, he received his musical training at San Petronio in Bologna and began to publish his compositions when he was only 15. A prolific composer, he was also a string player and singer. In 1688 he was *maestro di capella* at S. Giovanni in Monte for which he composed masses. He went to Rome in 1691 where he produced serenatas, oratorios, and operas, the most famous being *Il Trionfo di Camilla* which was premiered in Naples in 1696. After the death of his Roman patron he went to Vienna in 1697 and served in the court of Leopold I. By the turn of the century his reputation was widespread over Europe; he worked for a lengthy time in London and then Paris. He returned to Vienna in 1736 and remained there until his death on July 9, 1747.¹

Bononcini has been praised for his melodic invention and word setting but considered somewhat inferior to Handel in ability to sustain long passages.² Although his music was criticised by Burney, Hawkins thought it to be “tender, elegant, and pathetic”. The pieces presented here in the Anthology are from collections predating his Roman sojourn. Opus 4, from 1686 is dedicated to the composer and wealthy patron Pirro Albergati, while the first edition of Opus 6 appeared the following year and is dedicated to Alessio Orsi. Subsequently there was a span of 60 years between the first appearance of Opus 6 and Bononcini’s next collection of chamber sonatas, the “XII Sonatas for the Chamber,” published in London in 1732.

Although published only a year apart, Opera 4 and 6 exhibit notable differences in terms of basic musical structure. The latter collection adheres almost entirely to what might be called the “Corellian” textbook sequence of Slow-Fast-Slow-Fast, while the former presents a much wider range of tempo alternation. Sinfonias 5 and 12 of Opus 4 contain extensive solo sections for each violin and the cello, while Sinfonia 11 consists almost entirely of slow sections, relieved only at the end by a lively *vivace*. Perhaps the most unusual work in Opus 6 is the final one, Sinfonia 12, which is almost a solo showpiece for the violin, from the wild dissonant jumps and progressions in the opening section to the *moto perpetuo* from measure 121 to the end.

¹ An overview of Bononcini’s life and works may be found in Lowell Lindgren, in *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “Bononcini, Giovanni,” published 2001.

² For a discussion of Bononcini’s London years see Winton Dean, *Handel’s Operas, 1704-1726* (Oxford, 1987), 306ff.