

INTRODUCTION

The *Dialogo: Mergellina e Zefiro*¹ is a serenata for two voices and string ensemble, most likely intended for outdoor performance. It survives in only a single source, a manuscript, now in the Abbey of Montecassino, Italy (cat. no. 5-F-15b, ff. 108-137v), containing the full score. Within that manuscript it is placed between two serenatas by Alessandro Scarlatti: *Venere, Adone e Amore*² (in a version written for a performance in Naples in 1696) and *Il Genio di Partenope, la Gloria del Sebeto, il Piacere di Mergellina* (likewise performed in 1696). Also included in the manuscript is a two-voiced serenata, *Aglaura e Corebo*, by Severo de Luca. The dating of the *Dialogo* to the late seventeenth century, suggested by the dates of the adjacent Scarlatti serenatas, would be in keeping with the style of its music.³

The text locates the performance venue as the Bay of Naples: the main character, Mergellina, personifies a favorite stretch of coastline, traditionally used for serenata performances. The coastal surroundings are a recurrent motif of the text. Although the generic title “serenata” is not found on the manuscript, the work has many characteristics of the outdoor serenata tradition. For example, its setting, with transparent references to the sea as performance location, is common with this genre.

Intricate word play, a regular feature of serenata texts, is seen for example in the aria *Qual magia di voce amena*, which speaks of the Siren, a reference to the Naples symbol of Parthenope. This Siren is compared with the Siren that entranced Ulysses and led to his shipwreck. In this jubilant piece, Zefiro assures the audience that this Siren sings songs of life, not death.

The work begins with a moderately slow introduction, leading to a *balletto* marked *allegro*. This may indicate a dance, such as occurs in several serenatas, particularly those of a pastoral character.⁴

The Petrarchan descriptive formula *Hor che*,⁵ seen frequently at the beginning of solo serenatas, occurs twice in this serenata, but not as the opening. The first duet *Deh brillate onde tranquille* contains the phrase “... hor che sparge il crin di Fille in queste arene” (... now that the locks of Phyllis [the sun] have scattered on these sands). The final duet opens

¹ The full heading on the opening page reads: *Dialogo: Mergellina e Zefiro / Canto, e alto con V.V. [violini]*.

² An edition of this work by Rosalind Halton is forthcoming with A-R Editions, *Recent Researches in the Music of the Baroque Era*.

³ Stylistic indications of a date in the 1690s for this work include the prevalence of arias accompanied by basso continuo only, and the use of strings to punctuate, by means of beginning and ending *ritornelli*. When used during arias, the instrumental parts do not form an integrated contrapuntal texture with the voice, but rhythmically reiterate the harmony.

⁴ For accounts of serenatas incorporating dance found in the *Gazzetta di Napoli*, see February 7 and November 13, 1696 (Griffin 1993: 19, document 85; and 25, document 100), October 26, 1723 (Griffin 1993: 111, document 495). The accounts sometimes point to the performers dancing, or the audience, or a mixture of the two, as the stage boundaries are blurred, or even broken.

⁵ See Griffin 2000, xvii for a discussion of the “hor che” formula in the works of Alessandro Scarlatti and earlier composers.

with “Et hor che Fille in queste rive appare” (And now that Phyllis appears on these banks). The familiar use of this formula, even if in these instances it is a reference to sunrise instead of sunset, is an indication of the recognition by poet and audience of the serenata genre.

A composer is not identified on the manuscript. As it appears between two serenatas by Alessandro Scarlatti, the question arises as to whether it is a work of this composer. In Scarlatti’s known multi-voice serenatas the vocal soloists predominantly sing solo arias, and when a duet occurs, the voices tend to answer each other as if in conversation. In contrast, the *Dialogo* stands out for its numerous duets with their frequently close harmony, which casts doubt on Scarlatti’s authorship.

The *Spassi di Posillipo*, known since the sixteenth century, were seaside festivals occurring during the summer months of July and August. They were multifaceted celebrations of summer, in which music formed an important part.⁶ Scarlatti’s *Venere, Adone e Amore*, the companion piece in this same manuscript, was used as the opening of the Posillipo in 1696, as indicated by the title page. There are accounts of such outdoor music-making early in the seventeenth century.⁷ The tradition continued throughout the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth.⁸ The noble women would use coaches to arrive at the festivities, while the men of the nobility would travel by gondola to the performance venue.⁹ Often a floating stage could be erected, as was the case for *Venere, Adone e Amore*, and the performance was a conglomeration of visual spectacle, often including bullfighting, dance, and fireworks.¹⁰

⁶ For a detailed description of the *Spassi di Posillipo*, see Fabris 2007, 7-9.

⁷ A report from the *Cronicamerone d’Antonio Bulifon* details a wedding celebration in 1617 at the Chiaia (D’Alessandro 1983,159) and the *Diurnali di Scipione Guerra* gives an account of a theatrical festival performed on a stage in the water in 1623. Although not part of a summer festival, Roland Jackson’s 1978 A-R edition of a Neapolitan *Festa a Ballo: Delizie di Posillipo Boscarecce, e Maritime* provides an early example for the music of a typical celebration. It was performed on Carnival Sunday, March 1, 1620, to celebrate “the happiness occasioned by the return to the health of His Catholic Majesty, Philip III of Austria, King of the Spains.” The title of the work, *The Sylvan and Oceanic Delights of Posillipo*, celebrates the natural outdoor surroundings enjoyed at the Bay of Naples, used here as backdrop for a theatrical musical presentation.

⁸ Alessandro Scarlatti’s *Il Dafni* (1700), now counted among one of his operas, was a birthday celebration piece, described as a *favola in musica* by the *Gazzetta*, and performed for the wife of the Viceroy for her birthday on August 5, 1700. As specified in the libretto, it was performed *sullo scoglio di Mergellina*—on the rocks of the Mergellina (Pagano 1972: 157). For accounts referring to seaside performances at the Posillipo from the first quarter of the eighteenth century, see Griffin 1993: 36, document 160; 59-60, document 251; 63, document 270; 63, document 272; 67, document 291; 68, document 294; 68, document 295; and 69, document 297.

⁹ Napoli – 26 Giugno 1685: “dopo pranso si diede principio all’apertura del passeggio di state sù le riviere di Posillipo, ... che v’accorsero per godere della soavità della musica, ch’in più gondole girava per quella Riviera” (Griffin 1993, 2, document 6) [... after lunch, for the opening of the walking-place promenade at the Posillipo...they strolled while enjoying the sweetness of the music, as were many in gondolas, cruising that river.]

¹⁰ Napoli – 21 Agosto 1685: “...Si continuarono dette feste per 3. giorni. Sabato prossimo vi si farà la caccia de’ Torri: Domenico il Carosello, & altri giochi Cavalereschi, & Lunedì si farà un Carro Trionfale portatile per mare, con di sopra molti Cavalieri, e Musicci che dovranno fare balli, e serenata la sera...” (Griffin 1993: 3, document 14).

One less than savoury aspect of such visual entertainment involved the lower classes of Naples. The *cuccagne*, large pyramids of food ready for the sacking, became very popular. More entertainment for the nobility than charity for the poor, they were erected and “offered” to the masses, while the nobility eagerly watched the ravenous crowds fighting for their portion.¹¹

Images of fishing are evoked in the penultimate number of this *Dialogo*, the duet no.13, *All'onde alla pesca*. Perhaps this was a moment for the display of “generosity” to the starving populous: the distribution of fish. Fishing was the subject of another evening’s entertainment, as documented in the *Gazzetta*, on September 26, 1702:

*La sera del medesimo giorno [sabato] il Principe di Santobuono (eletto Ambasciadore a Vinezia) per celebrare secondo il suo nobil genio il Compleannos della Regina N.S. fece rappresentare nel suo palazzo una dilettevol favola piscatoria, con una brieve introduzione in musica...*¹²

[The evening of that same day [Saturday], the Prince of Santobuono (elected Ambassador to Venice), to celebrate the birthday of our Majesty the Queen according to the noble custom, staged a delightful fishing tale in his palace, with a brief musical introduction.]

Another opportunity for a public display of food distribution, particularly of fish, was the religious period of Lent.¹³ Such a gesture is described during a 1686 Lenten festival, where fish were flung down from a triumphal float, accompanied by motets:

...segui un carro Trionfale fabbricato da Marinari a somiglianza del mare su la cima del quale sedeva il Dio Nettuno attorniato da molte Sirene, e Ninfe, e gionto sotto I balconi de S.E. dopo aver cantato alcuni mottetti in lode della medesima, cominciarono a gittar da sopra a basso tanta quantità e diversità di pesci, che molti se ne provvidero per quaresima.¹⁴

[...a triumphal cart followed, made by seamen to resemble the sea from above, where the god Neptune was sitting, surrounded by sirens and nymphs, and having arrived under the balconies of Her Majesty and sung a few motets in praise of the same, they began to fling down from up high a vast and varied quantity of fish, which provided for many during Lent.]

[...The festival will continue for three days. Next Saturday will be the bullfight; on Sunday, the joust and other chivalrous games; and on Monday, a seaworthy triumphal cart, carrying many noblemen and musicians, will host a ball with a serenata in the evening.]

¹¹ For the role that food, famine, and hunger played in such spectacles, see Fabris 2007: 33.

¹² Griffin 1993: 34, document 146.

¹³ See Mancini 1968, 89 and 169, n. 9 and 10.

¹⁴ Domenic’ Antonio Parrino, *Avvisi*, February 26, 1686, no. 41, as quoted in Mancini 1968, 171, n. 28. A similar event from the Lenten period of 1670 is documented by Antonio Bulifon, and reproduced in Mancini 1968: 171, n. 24.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation is not specified with each part in the score, but the indication “V.V.” in the title (see note 1, above) leaves no doubt that the instrumental upper parts were intended for violins, whereas the figured bass part would be performed by a bass string instrument (presumably a cello), along with a harpsichord to realize the harmonies. In view of the acoustical conditions of the outdoor venue, the ensemble may well have consisted of a more substantial group, strengthened by employing multiple violins on the upper parts, reinforcing the bass line with a string bass, and adding more continuo instruments. The work that precedes the *Dialogo* in the manuscript, the serenata *Venere, Adone e Amore*, indicates that the continuo group included *leuti, contrabassi e cimballi* [lutes, string basses and harpsichords], all given in the plural.

The designation of the aria no. 11, *Temprando gl'accenti* as “Aria con violino solo” could simply refer to the fact that in previous sections there were two distinct violin parts, but more likely it prescribed a contrast with the multiple violins employed before. After the violin obbligato solo, all violins return for the duet no. 13, *All'onde alla pesca*. Although here too only one violin part is provided, the prescription *all'unisono* clearly indicates that all violins play this part in unison.

Editorial Procedures

The following edition reflects the manuscript in all particulars. Editorial markings are given in brackets or are addressed in the editorial notes. In the manuscript the part of Zefiro was notated in soprano clef (C1) and that of Mergellina in alto clef (C3), both of which have been converted to treble clef (G2) to conform to modern practice. The archaic Italian spellings of the text have been retained, and made consistent.¹⁵ Modern usage has been followed for accidentals, so that they remain in effect for a measure unless canceled by a natural. Original beaming, and key and time signatures have been retained. The sparse figuring of the basso continuo line is retained.

Editorial Notes and Corrections

The *Dialogo* shares the same, presumably Neapolitan hand as *Venere, Adone e Amore* and *Il genio di Partenope*. The watermarks of this entire manuscript alternate in midwork from a quadruped within a single circle to one of two rods arranged in a cross formation within a single circle¹⁶, the former being an indication of local Neapolitan provenance (Shearon

¹⁵ Zefiro's character is spelled inconsistently, either with a single or double “f.” Likewise, the “h” of “*horche*” is sometimes omitted. It has been standardized to always retain the “h,” in part to remain faithful to its connection to the Petrarch sonnet, mentioned above.

¹⁶ The provenance of this watermark is as yet unknown. However, it occurs in this Neapolitan work, as well as its companion piece, *Venere, Adone e Amore* and Severo de Luca's serenata, *Aglaure e Corebo*, all held in the library of the Abbey of Montecassino, and all with links to the city of Naples.

2000: 111). Within the *Dialogo*, the watermark is almost entirely the latter, changing to the former for the final page.

The following corrections or editorial emendations were introduced:

Introduzione e Balletto, m. 23: there is no closing repeat sign in the ms.

Aurette gioconde, violin 2, m. 96, beat 2: the flat is not given in the ms.

Aurette gioconde, continuo, m. 97, beat 3, second eighth-note: *f* is given in the ms.

Così vaga dall'ima spelonca, voice, m. 141, beat 4: the dotted rhythm is not given in the ms., but is supplied for consistency.

Non ha il mar, non ha il cielo, Zefiro, m. 191, beat 1: the rhythmic sequence is continued in the ms., but is changed in the edition to an eighth note and two sixteenths by analogy with Mergellina.

Zefiro! Mergellina!, continuo, m. 366, beat 4: the last note is figured with a sharp in the ms., which has been omitted in the edition. It is either a mistake, or it refers to the sharpened fourth.

All'onde alla pesca, violin 1, m. 409, beat 3: the dotted eighth-note is *d*" in the ms., but is changed to *e*" for consistency with m. 370.

All'onde alla pesca, violin 1, m. 431, beat 3: the dotted eighth-note is *d*" in the ms., but is changed to *e*" for consistency with m. 380.

Acknowledgments

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