

Introduction

The Composer and the Music

Giovanni Maria Bononcini was born in Montecorone, near Modena, and was baptised on September 23, 1642.¹ He studied in Modena with Marco Uccellini, and became proficient on the violin and *violoncello da spalla*. His earliest published works date from 1666 but it was only in 1675, two years after he became *maestro di cappella* of the Modena cathedral that his vocal music began to appear. His untimely death occurred on November 18, 1678. Of his eight children only two, Giovanni and Antonio, survived to adulthood. Both became notable composers.

Along with the sonatas of Maurizio Cazzati, Bononcini's *sonate da chiesa* mark a transition from the canzona to the multimovement sonata.² There is less exploitation of instrumental virtuosity than in, say, the sonatas of Marco Uccellini, and more emphasis on compositional technique - a "predeliction for counterpoint" as one writer put it. Playfulness is also apparent, as in the abrupt endings of some of the sonatas.

The first edition of Bononcini's Opus 6 was printed in Venice in 1672 and was dedicated to ("Abbot and Count") Giulio Camillo Campori. The "Al Lettore" section that follows the dedication is an important document in its own right for the history of performance practise in the seventeenth century. Here performers are admonished not to make extensive elaborations in the music or, even worse, rewrite entire passages. The addition of tasteful ornaments is acceptable, however.³

This letter to performers is missing in the second edition which was printed by Giacomo Monti in Bologna in 1677, the year before the composer's death, and dedicated to Antonio Maria Padovani. The letter of dedication was signed by the bookseller Marino Silvani, Monti's later successor. The edition appears to have been printed from a different set of plates.⁴ There are numerous discrepancies with the first edition and, on the whole, the 1677 print seems to have

¹ Principal sources in English for Bononcini's life and works include William Klenz, *Giovanni Maria Bononcini of Modena: a Chapter in the Baroque Instrumental Music* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1962) (reprint Greenwood, 1987), Lawrence E. Bennett, and Gregory Barnett, "Bononcini, Giovanni Maria", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., and Gregory Barnett, *Bolognese Instrumental Music, 1660-1710. Spiritual Comfort, Courtly Delight, and Commercial Triumph* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

² The sonatas are discussed by Marcello Eynard in "Il Ruolo di Giovanni Maria Bononcini nella produzione di sonate da chiesa a due violini e basso continuo in ambito modenese," *Marco Uccellini* (L.I.M., 1999), 99-139. Klenz' discussion of the *sonate da chiesa* is on pp. 147-65 of his book cited in note 1 (his observations are summarized by Eynard on p. 104 of his article). John Suess surveys Bononcini's sonatas in his dissertation, "Giovanni Battista Vitali and the Sonata da Chiesa", (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1962), I, pp. 180-94.

³ A partial translation and discussion of the letter may be found in Klenz, 75-6.

⁴ Klenz, however, writes that the "contents are unchanged" perhaps meaning that the pieces are the same (Klenz, 56).

been less carefully prepared. Klenz conjectures that there also may have been another edition, printed in England.⁵

Bononcini's *Trattenimenti musicali*, (Musical Entertainments), Opus 9 was printed in Bologna in 1675 and dedicated to Luigi d'Este.⁶ The collection opens with five *sonate da chiesa* followed by four *allemanda-corrente* pairs in the Italian style and six dances in the French style. The letter of dedication expresses the hope that Luigi will appreciate "the sweet sounds of melodious instruments"⁷ after having experienced only military music and the sounds of battle as a youngster.

⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶ Cousin of the reigning Duke of Modena and Reggio, Francesco II d'Este.

⁷ "...di diletto il dolce suono de' canori Stromenti."