

Francisco António d'Almeida and the Serenata Genre in Early and Mid Eighteenth-Century Portugal.

The music manuscript CIC 12 from the National Library of Portugal contains thirteen arias by Francisco António d'Almeida (1702-1755?), one of the most important Portuguese composers of the first half of the 18th century. Five of them have been identified as being part of the serenata *Gl'Incanti d'Alcina* of 1730. There are also eight arias from another serenata, *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio*, staged a year later, in 1731. To study the libretti which were the sources of the identification of these arias and then the music present in the CIC 12 manuscript is of fundamental importance in understanding the serenata genre during the reign of King D. João V of Portugal.

Consequently, this paper intends to enlarge our knowledge of the formal and stylistic structure of d'Almeida's serenata and also to give an overview of the performing practices and the courtly and aristocratic significance associated with this genre. Particularly in the field of the study of Portuguese dramatic music of this period, the understanding of the serenata is of primary importance, since it was the principal musical event performed on courtly occasions. Its study gives us today a rich picture of the characteristics of musical life in the court of D. João V, and helps us simultaneously to understand the differences, in this period, between the genre of the serenata and major genres such as opera and cantata.

The term serenata, as applied to 17th and 18th century Italy,

means a cantata-like work performed in courtly or aristocratic surroundings to celebrate dynastic occasions or political events, or, as in Portugal, anniversaries and name-days of the Royal Family. It originally signified a musical greeting, usually performed outdoors in the evening, to a beloved or a person of rank. By the middle of the 18th century this term is generally applied to a vocal-instrumental dramatic genre. Shorter than the opera, but longer than the solo cantata, the serenata has two parts with recitative/aria vocal numbers. It had several singers, six on average, and, like the oratorio, had no stage action or change of scenario. In Portugal it was generally performed indoors and had an allegorical libretto based on ancient Greek mythology, with characters of pastoral and mythological nature. The instrumental part was always performed by an orchestra.

Rui Vieira Nery has suggested that in Portugal the assimilation of Italian models was a slow and gradual process, beginning in the first half of the 17th century as an undercurrent which only began to surface in the music of the first years of the 18th century, emerging more strongly in the second decade of D. João V's reign, and only becoming dominant from around 1750. We know that from 1716 onwards, to commemorate the birthdays of King D. João V, the Queen and the "Infantas" and even foreign noblemen, it was usual to represent Italian serenata on those occasions, substituting the older "comédias" and "zarzuelas" in the Spanish language. As evidence of the performance of those serenata, we only have some newspaper reports in the "Gazeta de Lisboa", the Nunciature reports and, in most cases, the respective

libretto. Most of those written sources do not even mention the composers in question. Nevertheless, we know that some of them were important composers of serenades, namely, Domenico Scarlatti, the Baron of Astorga and Francisco António d'Almeida. An item from issue n° 31 of the "Gazeta de Lisboa Ocidental" of the 1st August 1720 reads as follows: *"On the day of "Santa Anna" the King, our Lord, celebrated this day with an excellent "Serenade", which was performed in his private room..."* A transcript of a Nunciature Record of 6th August of the same year tells us, in Italian, about the same performance: *"La notte de' 26 del passato la Maestà sua ordinò si cantasse nel suo Appartamento una bella Cantata in honore della gloriosa S. Anna, dalla quale la Maestà della Regina porta il nome. Si fece la d.^a Funzione nel quarto interiore del Rè, e la Compositione era del Sig. Domenico Scarlatti, tanto le parole, che la musica, essendo stata cantata da trè soprani, et un Tenore tutti Italiani, e dei migliori della Chiesa Patriarcale [...].* From October 1731 onwards we find successive references to the performance of serenades in the context of the musical "saraus" in private households, like the one of Canon Lázaro Leitão, where professional and amateur performances took place. It is worth noting, that some of the inscriptions written in the libretti indicate "da cantarsi", which suggests a performance without the scenic component.

Since Domenico Scarlatti's arrival at Portugal, we know that the performance of serenades was intensified. Many of them were performed in the private chamber of Queen Mariana of Austria. As a matter of fact, this entertainment genre was strictly private, the nobility being only admitted to those performances in a very

reduced number.

Given the musical preferences of King D. João V, particularly regarding sacred genres, all of the dramatic music forms suffered a significant restriction in terms of performance. In the 1730's we cannot find any record of a public performance of opera in Lisbon. Those were being substituted by serenade in performances without sets. In October 1731, there were serenata performances twice a week in the household of a certain Jorge and D. Maurício.

During the reign of King D. João V, one of the leading composers of serenade was Francisco António d'Almeida, who was born in Lisbon in 1702 and died there in 1755. He was the author of the first opera written by a Portuguese, *La pazienza di Socrate* of 1733. Francisco António d'Almeida was one of the composers sent to Rome to study music, at the expense of King D. João V. There, in 1722, he presented his oratorio *Il pentimento di Davidde* at the "Chiesa di S. Girolamo della Carità" and, four years later, his most famous work in the same genre, *La Giuditta*, which is one of the great landmarks of 18th century Portuguese music. We know that, in Rome, he was well-known, since the caricaturist Leone Ghezzi, the same man that drew Vivaldi, left us a register of d'Almeida's figure with a praiseworthy inscription written about his musical talent. In 1728, he is back in Lisbon where his serenata *Il trionfo della virtù* is staged in the Palace of Cardinal da Mota. Organist at the Patriarchal Church, it is possible that he died as a result of the Lisbon earthquake of 1755.

The music of Francisco António d'Almeida is characteristic of the absorption of the Roman ecclesiastical and concertante style

and the Neapolitan opera buffa conventions. Besides the already mentioned *La pazienza di socrate*, he wrote *La finta pazza* (1735) and *La Spinalba* (1739) staged at the “Paço da Ribeira” with the singers from the Royal Chapel. In the field of sacred music, he composed one Mass, several motets, a *Te Deum* for soloists, orchestra and chorus and music for the staging of the popular Lisbon “presépios”. His last work was the serenata *L'Ippolito*, staged at the “Paço da Ribeira” in 1752.

The manuscript CIC 12, from the National Library of Portugal, includes 13 hitherto unknown arias by Francisco António d'Almeida. Numbers 1 to 4 and 6 are from the serenata *Gli incanti d'Alcina* of 1730.

Numbers 7 to 14 are from the serenata *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio* of 1731. There exists another aria that completes the content of the manuscript: it is the aria n° 5, *Confusa smarrita* in f minor, which belongs to the Third Act, Second Scene, of the opera *Catone in Utica* by Leonardo Vinci, whose date is 1728.

In our study of the formal characteristics of the serenata and bearing in mind that the two works in our manuscript are from 1730 and 1731 respectively, we decided to search for all the performances of serenata in a consistent period of time to seek out the structure of this genre. We have chosen a period of approximately a decade, from December 1729 until October 1738, since such a period of time seems convincing to try to elaborate a standartized structure of the serenata and his apparented genres in the 1730's. Therefore, we have chosen three other works, besides those present in CIC 12. The first is *Il trionfo d'Amore*, a “scherzo

pastorale” with music by Francisco António d’Almeida, performed in the “Paço da Ribeira” in 1729. After the “dramma per musica” *Gl’incanti d’Alcina* from 1730 and the serenata *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio* a year later, both by the same composer, comes *Il Sogno d’Endimione*, another “scherzo pastorale”, performed in the “Marquês de Fontes” Palace in 1732, the composer of this last work being unknown. Finally, we took the serenata *Le virtù trionfanti*, with music also by Francisco António d’Almeida, performed at the Cardinal D. Tomás de Almeida’s Palace in 1738.

On those five works there is always the same major division in two parts, in the case of *Gl’incanti*... not two parts but two acts. In terms of formal dimension, the serenata is thus a shorter genre than the Italian opera seria of this period. We can also affirm that the serenata had generally six characters. Each of the parts in the serenate of this period had an average of 17 numbers. In those numbers there was a solo aria for each of the characters and, sometimes, towards the end a duet or a trio, depending on the dramatic action. Almost always was also a final chorus in each of those parts. Obviously, each of the arias or ensemble numbers was preceded by a recitative. Depending on the complexity of the content of the libretto, these were of a significantly varied dimension.

In the five works we analyzed, we found very interesting facts about the titles of the genres. If the difference between “scherzo pastorale”, in the cases of *Il trionfo d’amore* and *Il sogno d’Endimione*, and serenata, *Il vaticinio di Pallade*... and *Le virtù*

trionfanti, seems not to be significant as regards the structural architecture of the form, by contrast, the term “dramma per musica”, as in the case of *Gl’Incanti...*, reflects differences that are important to bear in mind. In fact, *Gl’Incanti d’Alcina* is the only work which has “acts” divided into “scenes”, with two acts, divided into 13 and 11 scenes, respectively. But, perhaps even more important, is the fact that *Gl’Incanti...* has didascalical notes in the libretto giving clear instructions both to scenery and to stage action. For example, in the opening first scene of the first act, the written inscription goes as follows: “*La scena rappresenta un viale d’alberi, che a suo tempo spariti lasciano in vista rupi coperte di dumi, e frasca: in lontananza il prospetto del Palazzo d’Alcina.*” In the same first Act, in the 11th scene, there is an instruction to one of the characters, “*Ruggiero*”: “*All’entrar Bradamante in questo discorso, Ruggiero s’assiede vicino a un albero del viale, e con un selce, che raccoglie mostra di scrivere sul tronco*”. It is worth noting that these instructions are not the exception, but the rule, since a significant number of scenes of the libretto have similar indications. Knowing that the usual genre description of most libretti of opera seria in the 18th century is “dramma per musica”, the same term applied to *Gl’Incanti...*, we could be speaking in this case, of a serenata type that is very closely related to the structure and performing principles of opera seria. The *Gazeta de Lisboa Ocidental*, an important source for the written registers of performances in that period, says that during the evening of the 27th December 1730 there was a serenata performance in the Queen’s room. This register refers specifically to *Gl’Incanti...*. Bearing in mind that, as

Manuel Carlos de Brito wrote, in its broadest sense the word serenata, and I quote, "...use to mean any kind of musical entertainment during the first half of the century...". This opinion reinforces the idea, in the case of the *dramma per musica Gl'Incanti...* of a small opera seria, performed without scenery and stage action as the *Gazeta de Lisboa* tells us. Moreover, as regards the given performing practice during D. João V's reign, we know that the inscription "Da cantarsi...", such as occurs on the frontispiece page of the libretto of *Gl'Incanti...*, would imply a performance without scenery. We must remember that in other registers of the same periodical which refer to serenata, also called "opera" or "comédia em música", there are written testimonies of performances staged with sets. Bearing in mind this fact and also the nature of *Gl'Incanti's...* libretto, we could speak of an opera seria of small dimension. The main difference is that, instead of having 25 arias or more in a three act structure, *Gl'Incanti...* has two acts with 11 arias, that is to say, more or less, half the number of arias, by comparison with opera seria.

As regards the formal principles of the arias present in the two Francisco António d'Almeida's works in this manuscript, we are faced with a clear aria da capo structure. As a matter of fact, all the arias contain the usual "ritornelli" and also the "bravura" sections. As to the instrumental colour, we rely on uniform principles and a minimal number and type of instruments. With exception of the arias *Impelidisce, e tremate* and *Di lor virtù de l'altero grido*, both from *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio*, which include a pair of horns ("corni de caccia"), all the remaining arias are scored

for two violin parts, viola and basso. The scoring of the strings is also quite uniform. The first violins take on the melody line; the seconds double a third or sixth below. As for the violas, during the majority of the music, they double the Bass part an octave higher, the scribe having only written “col basso” in the respective stave. The Bass is the usual continuo part, with no “obbligato” sections, apart from some cello continuo solos.

As concerns the rhythmic structure of those arias, the only metric variety we observe results from the insertion of a section in a different time-signature than the main one, usually a 4/4 which contrasts with the different main time-signatures of the arias. Such are the cases of *Ne prieghi rimproveri* and *Mio bel tesoro* from *Gl'incanti d'Alcina* and *Impelidisce, e tremo, Se vincitor tu sei, T'accheta t'accheta e non voler* and *Frà tant'alme* from *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio*.

As regards the tonal structure of the arias, the choices of key are, as was the general rule, related to the type of the affections expressed by the texts. For example, the typical expression of rage and also sadness connected with D minor can be found in *Se già m'ingannasti* from *Gl'incanti...* in which the character *Argante* expresses his profound sadness due to *Lidia's* infidelity.

The choice of both E major and E minor for depicting tenderness and other pathetic moods is also a main expressive characteristic of these arias. It is worth noting, for example, how in the first aria of the manuscript, *Rasserena quel dolore* from *Gl'incanti...* E major reflects the calming down of *Lidia's* love pain. In this same “dramma per musica” the aria *Mio bel tesoro* in E

minor is a strong expressive illustration of the anxiety of *Bradamante* who misses her lover and cannot find him.

Knowing that in the field of opera seria the arias sung by the various characters usually followed a tonal key relationship and also that in the same act the arias of one character were of a contrasting expression, we can find much the same characteristics in the works of this manuscript. In fact, this reveals the principle of presenting contrasting affections in successive arias, following the structural principle codified by Metastasio. Nevertheless, we must bear in mind that there is a major distinction between opera seria and the serenata and “dramme per musica” we are referring to. This difference results from the existence of fewer arias in a serenata, when compared to an opera seria. Since usually each part of a serenata had one aria per character, there was no place left for contrasting expression of the same character in the context of a single part. This contrast occurred only between the usual two arias of a character in the context of the entire serenata. Major evidence of this fact is found, for example, in the two arias of *Pallade* in the serenata *Il vaticinio di Pallade e di Mercurio*. One in each part, they have a significant contrasting expression. The aria belonging to the first part, *Sò ben ch'è penoso*, in G minor, expresses the suffering of *Pallade* who must separate herself from her lover. The key of G minor corresponds to this pathetic mood. By contrast, the other aria, in the second part, which is also the last aria of the serenata, *Di lor virtù de l'altero grido*, in F major, is the expression of glory and honour, closing the work in a positive mood, as was usual in opera seria. For the character *Pallade* this last aria

demonstrates a great contrast of mood when compared with the one in the first part. We can observe other key relationships in this same serenata, for example in the character *Calipso*. There are three arias of *Calipso*, two in the first part, one in the second, and also a final duet with *Ulisse*. If we take the first part, we can observe that the two *Calipso* arias are in contrasting keys, respectively, G major and its relative minor. But also in rhythmic terms there are differences. One aria has a C time-signature, the other is in 3/8 and 2/4 time. We can also notice that the movement of *Ogni fronda ch'è mossa dal vento* is an "andante" which translates the motion of the wind into music (*ch'è mossa dal vento*). The other aria, *Se vincitor tu sei*, "a tempo giusto", evokes the desire of victory in a more declamatory style.

As concerns the formal characteristics of the arie da capo of both *Il vaticinio...* and *Gl'incanti...*, we should emphasize that the A section is usually twice the size or more of the B section, qualities which match a specific formal type of aria da capo. With always two stanzas, the number of lines in each is greatly variable. For example, we can have an eight line stanza in the A section and a seven line stanza in the B section, as happens in *Alma guerriera* from *Il vaticinio...* But, in the same serenata, we have also short stanza arias, with only three lines, for example, *Cessi l'odio* in the beginning of the second part. There are also arias with a bigger second stanza, such as the case of *Non seppe finora* from the fourth scene of the first act of *Gl'incanti...* This aria has four lines in the first stanza and five in the second.

As for the ABA structural principle, we have here the

developed Metastasian two part A section scheme AA´B AA´, with the interspersed “ritornelli” in this same A section. As for the harmonic movement, they are typical Metastasian arias with the usual tonal relationships between related keys: thus, if an aria begins with a major key, the B section is in the related minor, or vice-versa.

To conclude, we can say that in Portugal during the 1730´s we observe an increasing process of assimilation of the Italian opera seria models, due to the success obtained by serenata and other related genres. The formal structure seems to be a two part work with an average number of six characters singing pure Metastasio “da capo” arias. Only the “dramma per musica” *Gl´incanti d´Alcina*, due to its formal structure which includes acts divided into scenes with staging and scenery indications, could be assumed to be initially thought of as a small opera seria. However, the given performance register in the *Gazeta de Lisboa*, telling us that it was performed without scenery and stage action, made the work almost undifferentiated from a serenata. As for the composer Francisco Ant3nio d´Almeida, his unquestionable artistic talent makes him one of the strongest representatives of operatic activity during the reign of D. Jo3o V. The musicological study of his music and the consequent performance are, at the present time, two major tasks for portuguese musical culture.

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