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Giuseppe Sigismondo
**Apotheosis of Music in the
Kingdom of Naples**

edited by **Claudio Bacciagaluppi**,
Giulia Giovani and **Raffaele Mellace**
Introduction by **Rosa Cafiero**
English translation by Beatrice Scaldini



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Index

- VII** *Giuseppe Sigismondo and his magnum opus*
Claudio Bacciagaluppi, Giulia Giovani and Raffaele Mellace
- XIV **Codicological description**
- XVIII **Editorial criteria**
- XXIII** Rosa Cafiero
“Please return to me the biography from the Calata del Gigante, which I previously had, so that I may check some things about Jommelli and Piccinni”: the Apoteosi della musica in the scriptorium of Giuseppe Sigismondo
- 1** Tome I
Introduction
- 63** Tome II
1) *In which I recount how a public musical archive was established for the first time in Naples with the collection of musical scores and books of the archivist don Giuseppe Sigismondo*
2) *On the establishment of the four conservatori, and the music present in Naples in the 16th and 17th century*
- 88 **On the Conservatorio de’ Poveri di Gesù Cristo**
- 90 **On the Conservatorio di Sant’Onofrio a Capuana**
- 98 **On the Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto**
- 107 **On the Conservatorio di Santa Maria della Pietà de’ Torchini**
- 114 **The Musicale Liceo of 1807**
- 134 **On the formation of the only Conservatorio musicale, built in Naples under the auspicious reign of Ferdinand I**
- 137** Tome III
137 *On the initial foundations of dramatic musical theatre in Italy*

- 156 *Eulogy of Orazio Vecchi*
160 *Eulogy of Tommaso Carapella*
163 *Eulogy of Egidio Duni*
169 *Eulogy of Leonardo Vinci*
173 *Eulogy of Giambattista Pergolesi*
185 *Eulogy of Nicola Porpora*
203 *Eulogy of Domenico Cimarosa*

223 Tome IV

- 223 *Eulogy of Francesco Mancini*
226 *Eulogy of Pasquale Cafaro*
237 *Eulogy of Antonio Sacchini*
245 *Eulogy of Leonardo Leo*
254 *Eulogy of Francesco Durante*
261 *Eulogy of Tommaso Traetta*
267 *Eulogy of Nicola Sala*
273 *Eulogy of Nicola Piccinni*

293 Appendix I

Giovanni De Silva, *Eulogy of the Neapolitan maestro di cappella Pasquale Cafaro, 1788*

301 Appendix II

Jean-Claude Richard de Saint-Non, *On the Most Famous Neapolitan Masters, 1781*

297 *Bibliography*

329 *Index of Names*

345 *Index of Music Places in Naples*

Giuseppe Sigismondo and his *magnum opus*

Claudio Bacciagaluppi, Giulia Giovani and Raffaele Mellace

The “famous amateur” Giuseppe Sigismondo was born on 13th September 1739, son of Rocco Sigismondo and Orsola Pagano, and was educated at the Jesuit Collegio massimo and at the Real Liceo. After obtaining his degree in 1759, he began to practise as a lawyer. His interest in music arose from the habit of listening to performances in the churches of the Tribunali district, where he lived with his family. When Giuseppe was not yet twenty years old, Rocco Sigismondo, aware of his son’s passion, arranged for him to take lessons with Giuseppe Geremia, a pupil of Francesco Durante at the Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto,¹ as well as with Gennarino Capone, a pupil of Carlo Cotumacci. The young Sigismondo also received dance lessons from the master Michele Di Francia;² between 1761 and 1768 he also had the privilege of studying singing with Nicola Porpora.³

Giuseppe Sigismondo’s musical training, which was focused around the study of singing and the harpsichord, benefited from his attending lively environments such as Neapolitan palaces where private concerts were often held. For example, in the Donnarumma household he had the opportunity of singing numerous works by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, of whom the amateur Nicola Donnarumma “possessed the entire collection of theatrical works.”⁴ Similarly, twice a year in the home of Francesco Porcelli and Anna Fischetti he was able to attend performances of cantatas for three voices on the subject of the Passion of Christ and of St. Anne, upon a text by Nicolò Recco with music by Giovanni Fischietti, Nicola Logroscino, Antonio

1] The term *conservatorio* has been left in Italian throughout this volume in order to preserve the original meaning of ‘orphanage,’ which is lost in the English ‘conservatoire.’ Also the later name of *collegio* has been left in Italian [translator’s note].

2] The biographical information on Sigismondo is taken from his *Apoteosi della musica*. Cf. p. 7.

3] *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

4] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Tome I

[i] <Apotheosis of Music in the Kingdom of Naples during the last three centuries.⊃>1

1. On the founding of *conservatori* for music
2. On composition for Holy Services
3. On the introduction of dramatic theatre
4. On the causes of partial decadence.

Tome I.

A

Particular circumstances of the author Giuseppe Sigismondo, archivist in the *conservatorio* in Naples.

Composed in the year 1820.>²

[1] Introduction³

The work which I am here offering to the public has no other object than that of resurrecting the most beautiful, the most pleasing, the most delightful

1] The word *transundati*, lacking a true meaning, results from the alteration of “trasandati,” used by Sigismondo himself (“tutto mi verterò sulla storia musica de’ tre trasandati secoli,” p. 4), which at the time signified ‘to pass’ as well as ‘to neglect.’ Cf. s.v. “trasandare,” *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca*, 4th edition, vol. 5 (Florence: Manni, 1729-1738), 133 (online edition accessed 16th November 2014, <http://www.lessicografia.it/>).

2] The owners of the manuscript, Franz Sales Kandler (1792-1831), and later Aloys Fuchs (1799-1853), are responsible for various additions and corrections. Cf. Cafiero, “Tracing a History of the Neapolitan School. Giuseppe Sigismondo’s ‘Apoteosi della musica’ from Naples to Berlin,” *Musicologica Austriaca* 30 (2011), 69, fn. 45. The authorship of the interventions is specified in a footnote wherever it is possible to attest it with certainty. For further details see the introduction to the present volume.

3] An annotation by Kandler in red pencil is still visible in the margin despite being rubbed out. Only two dates are still legible: “Letto li 15 [...] XXI” and further down, “1 Maj XXVI.”

of the four liberal arts (by which I mean music) from that state of debasement into which, if it has not entirely fallen, it seems at least on the cusp of doing so. I am well aware that some may declare me to have lost my wits, or at least to have plunged into hypochondriac afflictions, and might say to me with frowning appearance: “And how is this possible? At a time when there are many theatres open in Naples, where such worthy professionals⁴ excel in song, dance and playing? Where there is an orchestra of many loud woodwind and string instruments; snare drums, flutes, bass drums, timpani, bassoons, great [2] serpents, etc. which have increased a hundred-fold to enhance its harmony? After delighting in such numerous pleasing spectacles both heroic, tragic, fantastical, romantic, oriental, occidental and right from the *ultima Thule*?⁵ After hearing in a single month eight or ten scores by composers from northern Italy, from France translated into our own idiom, by Germans and other composers from across the Alps and having delighted in the diversity of ideas, the variety of styles, grandiose scenery, flights, machines and other grandeurs, so that I know not if it is the eye or the ear that is more fulfilled? And you insist with such frankness on upholding such a ridiculous absurdity?”⁶ And now to the evidence. In this opus I shall venture to unearth the early period [3] of dramatic theatre in Italy, its apogee, and shall then progressively demonstrate with highly evident proof that we have entered into the century of its decline, and that having just emerged from barbarism, we have ended in anarchy.

Now, I am speaking here of nothing but musical theatre, and it is music, rested upon poetry, which forges the greatest value and magnificence within it. Thus it is necessary for me to draw water from the earliest spring and begin by examining those places where one learns the very first eruditions of this art, both in the vocal and instrumental [fields]. Other literary learnings are necessary, namely Latin above all, poetry, [4] specifically of the dramatic kind, and finally the styles of the sacred and secular traditions, in order to emerge as capable and excellent composers in this art form which may well be conceived as limited; in fact I shall demonstrate through evidence that it nearly possesses something of the divine.

Therefore, it is not to be disputed that the primary object of music ingrained in our hearts should be that of praising the creator of the whole [world], par-

4] Throughout this work the title *professore* has been translated as ‘professional,’ denoting a professional musician as opposed to an amateur [translator’s note].

5] *Thule*, or *Tule*, is a mythical island at the extreme North of the Earth. Kandler has broken the sentence by inserting a question mark in red pencil.

6] *Assurdo* (lit. ‘absurd’), as found in the manuscript; possibly a copyist’s misreading of *assunto* (‘concept’).

ticularly in those holy temples consecrated to him, as well as of what manner and what kind it should be in exalting his glory, weaving his praises, beseeching his grace and offering the most deep and tender thanks for it. We shall demonstrate what decadent state we are in in this very genre of music.

[5] The final aim of this work of mine will be that of giving an accurate account of the early founding of dramatic theatre in Italy, later branching all over cultivated Europe, dividing this latter part into four periods: the first from the beginning of the 17th century until the middle, and from here to its end, and likewise [dividing] the 18th century into two further portions. In each of these epochs I shall mention the lives and works of the most eminent and accomplished composers and music masters⁷ of our nation, retrieved from their own works and amended from many errors acquired through false reports received from biographers from the last century, both French and Italian. This through my being a pupil [6] of some such masters and an intimate friend of others, and finally through hearing old and impartial contemporaries speaking of them and retrieving the most genuine and authentic reports from them. I pray God that this far from easy labour of mine will result in bringing profit and benefit to an art which in the past has been so renowned⁸ all over Europe as well as to the masters of that same art who have always competed with those of the most cultivated nations.⁹

But who am I, and what are my relations with an art form of which I have not learned to become a professional, to invest myself with the authority of disseminating precepts? Thus I declare to be a simple amateur, because an invincible, almost innate passion, [7] cultivated since my most tender years, has always urged me, even to my own detriment, to search for its beauties and greatest perfections through the comparison of works by many truly accomplished masters, in part through my own personal dealings with them, and in part through the most accurate research on their output. This always in order to discern the best amongst them, as all may observe in the unfolding of this opus, in which I shall hardly touch upon the precepts of the art, neither on the laws of harmony, nor fugues, nor canons, nor double counterpoint or

7] The title *maestro* has been generally translated as ‘master,’ signifying an accomplished man in his field, but occasionally as ‘teacher, preceptor,’ to highlight this more specific role. When used as a direct appellation, it has been left untranslated [translator’s note].

8] The word *rinomata* (‘renowned’) has been added as a correction; however, the underlying text remains illegible.

9] In fact, Sigismondo’s history of dramatic theatre shall only comprise the birth of the genre around 1600 (pp. 137-156). Conversely, a great deal of information on theatrical music and sacred music may be found in the eulogies of individual composers located in tomes III and IV.

the *cantus firmus*, etc., but I shall dedicate myself entirely to the history of music of the past three centuries [8] as taught in *conservatori*, as performed in churches, and as it was introduced and has evolved within our theatres.

Meanwhile, as I myself have demonstrated an inclination, or to better say an enthusiasm for such a beautiful art form from the very first instance of the development of my reasoning, and having encouraged it until this final decadent age of mine, may one grant me consent to briefly revisit the vicissitudes and relationships encountered along the course of my life through this harmonious passion, leading me to acquire, against all my expectations, the reputation of a famous amateur.

I was born on 13th September 1739, son of Rocco Sigismondo, one of the clerks appointed to the late Sacro Regio Consiglio,¹⁰ [9] and *donna* Orsola Pagano, who was niece of Duke *don* Nicola de Simone on his sister's side. My home was in the city quarter near the Regi Tribunali¹¹ and aptly adjacent to the women's convent named Sant'Antonio alla Vicaria, where I presently lodge, having changed many dwellings, thus fulfilling the adage: "e ritornò dove la notte giacque."¹²

Following the first rudiments of grammar, I moved to the Collegio Massimo run by the Jesuit fathers until [the study of] rhetoric, where I was taught the treatises of Italian and Latin poetry, the Greek language and the first rudiments of sacred and secular history. Meanwhile, [10] I read as many of the Latin and Italian poets as I could lay my hands on by myself; above all the tragics and the comedians. Thus, having comprehended them to the extent that there was no longer anything to be learned in lowly Jesuit schools, I set out to further myself in the art of rhetoric in our own Real Liceo in Naples, which at the time was blossoming more than ever before with the most singular personages in every field. Here I also learnt philosophy, mathematics, civil and canonic law, so that on 22nd September 1759 I was awarded a doctoral degree, and embarked upon the convoluted avenue of the law courts, under the direction of Giuseppe Cirillo¹³ for civil law and Pietro Torte for criminal law.

[11] At this point let us pause a little during the first act of my play, and let us begin the gallant intermezzo of my own musical farce by returning to the beginning.

Being born in the district of the law courts, I was thus close to the churches of Arcivescovato, Tesoro di San Gennaro, of the Oratorian fathers, of San Lo-

10] The highest civil court of appeal in Naples during the *ancien régime*; cf. *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, ed. by Tommaso Astarita (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 491.

11] The 'Royal Courts' [translator's note].

12] 'And he returned where he lay at night'; (Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, canto X, octave 26).

13] Giuseppe Cirillo (1709-1776), jurist and poet.