



Concerto', *Music & Letters* 77/3 (1996), 404–424); and Sergei Grochotow's article 'Mozart und Hummel' (*Acta Mozartiana* 40/3–4 (1993), 94–103) could have been mentioned in Chapter 2. Typographical errors in the text and in the musical illustrations occur fairly frequently, and uneven print quality makes the odd word difficult to read.

Certain reservations notwithstanding, there is much to commend about Kroll's scholarship. The book is certainly welcome, and it has been researched and written on a scale commensurate with Hummel's stature and importance as a pivotal musical figure in European musical life of the early nineteenth century. Kroll's ambitious work will hopefully stimulate a new wave of interest in this unjustly neglected and often misunderstood figure; it will certainly serve as the indispensable source of information about Hummel that we have lacked for so long.

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KURT SVEN MARKSTROM

THE OPERAS OF LEONARDO VINCI, NAPOLETANO

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Despite the expectation of historical oblivion, Leonardo Vinci (c1696–1730) was not the usual victim of the type of quixotic transition that we might associate with early eighteenth-century opera, when a demand for novelty in music and drama upended the careers of many composers. Vinci's reputation during the eighteenth century was well established, and he was also celebrated posthumously. His name remained familiar among critics, and among impresarios of the period, who chose to restage his operas often well after these works' initial success. Yet Vinci's relative obscurity in modern opera scholarship stems from a familiar phenomenon whereby membership of the pantheon of composers is restricted to those whose lives are treated in traditional historical narratives, at the expense of any acknowledgment of the compositional impacts of historiographically marginalized composers who in their time were not necessarily less important. For Kurt Sven Markstrom, Leonardo Vinci is one of these casualties, a composer of note who has been often passed over in virtual silence by modern historical surveys and style histories that focus on Johann Sebastian Bach, Antonio Vivaldi and George Frideric Handel. Sometimes composers like Vinci have been melded indistinguishably into the musicological background as part of the generation of composers that belonged to the Neapolitan School. In *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 'Napoletano' Markstrom makes a convincing case for re-erecting Vinci as one of the most important agents in the development of the early classical style, as well as a key contributor to early eighteenth-century Italian opera and musical culture.

Markstrom's research on Vinci has gathered momentum over many years. As noted in the Preface, Vinci is no longer such 'an arcane academic subject' as he was when Markstrom first proposed the composer as a topic for his dissertation (xiii). Since then Markstrom has played a key role in transforming our understanding of Leonardo Vinci into a distinct compositional figure of seminal stylistic influence. He has helped to inaugurate a new collected edition of Vinci's works (the 'Progetto Leonardo Vinci') and has prepared several editions for modern performance premieres. The publication of *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci* has thus been anticipated for some time. It is not merely a reworking of the author's dissertation, but a study that now incorporates Markstrom's editorial work as well as his more recent research projects (one on Nicola Porpora, another on Pietro Metastasio).



Markstrom's book is neither a comprehensive biography nor a compendium of all Vinci's musical styles; rather, it functions as a chronological survey of the composer's operatic output, since writing music for the theatre was Vinci's main occupation. In the disciplinary terrain of more recent musicology, some may regard the biography or stylistic survey of a single composer as an increasingly outmoded endeavour, but here Markstrom argues for the need to appreciate Vinci's operas as single musical-dramatic entities rather than as material to be mined for generalized stylistic observations. He divides his book into ten chapters, which proceed biographically, selectively studying several of the key comic operas and the majority of the composer's heroic operas.

Apart from Chapter 1's focus on the historical background to the earliest phase of development in Vinci's career, the remaining chapters fall into a basic pattern. They are grouped by historical chronology and comprise both the study and critique of one or more operas. For each work discussed, Markstrom begins by sketching out the historical events that surrounded each chosen opera's commission, production and composition. From there he often provides a synopsis and narrative description of the work, followed by more detailed focus on chosen acts or musical features. While the majority of these case studies are treated descriptively, they occasionally include critical observations. Familiar aspects of Vinci's compositional style and certain characteristic elements of his operas – such as his dramatic use of accompanied recitative or the 'gestic' qualities of his aria writing – are highlighted in these discussions. What is both novel and useful here, however, is the way in which Markstrom views these stylistic elements and strategies progressively: that is, how they are uniquely honed in individual operas, and how they evolve as part of this composer's biography. There is much information to be gained from the finer details of Markstrom's work-by-work approach, an approach that adds dimension and nuance to better-known compositional generalities attributed to Vinci, and to Neapolitan operas of the early eighteenth century.

One example among several illuminating analyses is found in Chapter 4, 'Stampiglia's Heroic Comedies', where Markstrom focuses on the opera *La Rosmira fedele*, Vinci's second Venetian opera, composed for the Carnival season of 1725. Important elements of trans-regional stylistic convergence (Neapolitan and Venetian influences) as well as Vinci's compositional distinctiveness emerge from Markstrom's discussion. For one thing, this was an opera that Vinci treated largely as a pasticcio, drawing heavily from a score by Domenico Sarro (although this score was of an opera with a different title, *Partenope*, a work that had been revised for Sarro by Stampiglia for performance in Naples in 1722). At the same time, Vinci was driven to rework and recompose many of the arias in this work to satisfy the needs of Faustina Bordoni, who most likely demanded the change of title in order to focus attention on her role. Markstrom's insights reveal the growing influence of singers on the process of composition and their role in transforming the status of the opera as a musical work, which ultimately created the 'hegemony of the aria in eighteenth-century Italian opera' (108). His analysis of *La Rosmira fedele* demonstrates how several arias reveal Vinci's ability to appropriate Venetian taste and to model his writing quite closely on the style of Antonio Vivaldi. Elements such as unusual scoring (for example, oboe, strings and timpani), more liberal use of sequences than are normally evident in Vinci's writing, tremolo string accompaniments and concerto-like themes all point to a Vivaldian influence. Yet in certain arias Markstrom reveals that important departures were made by Vinci, through his slowing-down of the harmonic rhythm in the bass line, and his use of syncopation and chromaticism in key spots to create a sentimental effect. The latter, he notes, was copied by subsequent composers and points towards the *empfindsamer* style (110–111).

Markstrom's comprehensive approach to Vinci's operas also provides the author with vantage points for scholarly revisionism. He reminds us, for instance, of the importance of Vinci's *Alessandro nell'Indie*, despite Edward J. Dent's dismissal of this work on the grounds that it was commonplace, mediocre and derivative of Alessandro Scarlatti (301). Markstrom places *Alessandro nell'Indie* on a par with *Semiramide* (which was praised in a singular fashion by Dent), noting that both works belonged to a later generation of operas (their genesis took place at a point that was considerably later than the time when Scarlatti's influence was relevant in Vinci's writing). He observes, furthermore, that each opera was important and attractive even though both contained, in his words, 'their share of commonplace and mediocre material' (301) in addition to more



effective writing. In an earlier chapter of the book, Markstrom identifies key compositional conventions evident in *Semiramide*, such as the final sequence of Act 2, in which the musical climax is reached in a dramatic dialogue between the pair of lovers, leading to a solo aria for the heroine, followed by an accompanied recitative and a final aria by the hero. This sequence was an effective formula that Vinci used in other operas. Nevertheless, Markstrom argues that *Alessandro nell'Indie* was one of the most attractive of Vinci's operas and surpassed *Semiramide* largely because of the composer's success in matching melodic quality with the noble heroism of the opera's characters, a feature that is not always evident in Vinci's other operas.

Beyond the descriptive scrutiny of works, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci* vividly weaves anecdotes, historical data and interesting facets of eighteenth-century operatic life into the biographical narrative. We are given important contextual background to the reading of librettos so that contemporary political forces become motivations for dramatic writing. Markstrom does not neglect to detail the circuit of opera between important urban centres such as Naples, Venice and Rome, in which composers, dramatists and performers all vied for commissions and notoriety. Colourful vignettes of composers' rivalries emerge (especially between Vinci and Porpora), along with tales of singers and their sway over audiences; but, most importantly, evidence of the influence of singers on the compositional choices made by Vinci becomes apparent through the assignation of character roles, aria writing and the pacing or shaping of scenes throughout acts. We also learn a fair amount about the relationship between Vinci and Metastasio, a collaboration that Markstrom claims to have been successful because of Vinci's willingness to accommodate the librettist's texts so faithfully, and his seemingly endless talent to provide novel and enticing scores to works that had been previously set and performed by his contemporaries.

One major outcome of Markstrom's attempt to produce a thorough biographical framework for this study is the occasional detour into non-operatic works and related historical events. Although his impulse to provide as much contextual detail as possible is commendable, I found that such discussion is apt to distract the reader from the main trajectory of the narrative and the primary focus of the book (one case in point is his treatment of 'The Rosary Oratorio' (*Le glorie del Santissimo Rosario*) in Chapter 3). In fact, the tendency towards comprehensiveness, which in this book involves a very close reading of the chronology and a work-by-work approach, may lead to another problem. What this book lacks at critical junctures is the ability to pull away from events on the ground, to leave for a moment the singular analysis of operas and to point to the broader influences that directed Vinci's career and governed his choices as composer and entrepreneur. We want to understand how Vinci is responsible for the 'monumental stylistic change' emerging through his operas and throughout his work in the 1720s (xvii); yet Markstrom often avoids presenting a larger perspective on socio-cultural factors and aesthetic debates that helped to shape this movement, aside from his discussion of contemporary compositional influences and other biographical events. Admittedly, he tries to arrive at this area in the last section of the book, 'Vinci in Memoria', but even here the historical analysis feels thin and as if it is something of an afterthought. If his intention was to offer credit to Vinci for his contribution to the creation of a new sensibility, then much more detailed historical and cultural discussion should have been provided, with references to other recent scholars who have addressed this important cultural shift that took place through opera.

It is unfortunate that several printed music examples in the book are blurred and difficult to read, and that typographical errors are evident throughout the book, but the overall value of Markstrom's study is hardly marred by these cosmetic mishaps. This book offers much to the eighteenth-century opera scholar and enthusiast, who will benefit greatly from this survey. *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci* provides a useful stylistic framework for understanding the early classical style as it emerged through opera, and for observing the compositional model that Vinci provided for the next creative wave of eighteenth-century Italian opera.

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