

REVIEWS



BOOKS

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MARGARET R. BUTLER

MUSICAL THEATER IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PARMA: ENTERTAINMENT, SOVEREIGNTY, REFORM

Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2019

pp. xvi + 179, ISBN 978 1 580 46901 2

Margaret Butler opens *Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century Parma* with an incisive assessment of the modern (musicologically convenient) category of ‘reform’ opera, a move not only in keeping with the revisionist questioning of the ‘reform’ credentials of operatic aspiration in this period, voiced by Marita P. McClymonds and others, but also in tune with the probing of generic labels found in such studies as Stefano Castelvocchi’s *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Butler’s aim is therefore to develop a ‘flexible . . . rich and nuanced view’ of operatic reform (1–2), through focusing on the city of Parma in a crucial period (the late 1750s to 1762) and in particular on the work of Tommaso Traetta, who arrived there in 1758 and then between 1759 and 1761 produced the four pieces examined by Butler. As she observes, others have also done much to deepen our understanding of reformist tendencies and practices in this period – including McClymonds, Bruce Alan Brown, Bruno Forment and Paul Cornelison – and Parma and Traetta have also already been studied (following Henri Bédarida’s *Parme et la France* (Paris: Champion, 1928), by Daniel Hertz, Paolo Russo, Marco Russo and Fabrizio Cassoni, among others). But Butler makes a good case for a reappraisal of Traetta’s work in Parma, despite apparent non-‘reform’ elements (such as giving priority to the singer), extensive reliance on French works (including borrowing from Rameau and other French composers) and what was assumed to be the limited influence of whatever reform was envisaged because of the short-lived nature of the venture. As she explains, Traetta’s operas have been studied as independent musical works (and therefore, it seems, found somewhat lacking), but they ‘have never been adequately examined within the context from which they emerged’ (6), and as such, she contends, their import and value have been misunderstood. She proposes to right that in this book.

The context Butler aims to explore is one emerging from extensive archival research (as is the hallmark of her work generally): while some material has previously come to light, much of what Butler examines has not, and her appraisal derives as much from a deftly woven synthesis of known but underappreciated source material as from the revealing of new documents. As so often, in fields from the medieval to the modern, it is the lack of musicological interest in the ostensibly non-musical (or not sufficiently musically original/interesting) that has led to misunderstanding – in this case, of the import of this period in Parma and the impact of Traetta’s works. The context Butler explores includes the impact of French art and artists (including dancers) on Parma’s cultural life, the nature of the imported French works, accompanying administrative and infrastructural practices that bolstered French influence, and the rationale for the decision to embrace French style and practices, placing Parma’s opera at this time ‘on a continuum’ of Franco-Italian fusion (7). Thus Butler’s reappraisal is not primarily concerned with Traetta’s works as music, although she deals with music (particularly that of the French precursors to Traetta) competently enough. Her approach instead opens the door to examination of the influence of and insight offered by those kinds of figures often treated as peripheral in musicological and historical studies. These include political and artistic reformers like Guillaume du Tillot; influential women such as Marie Louise Élisabeth de Bourbon, wife of Parma’s ruler Philippe de Bourbon and daughter of Louis XV; ‘the barber and chronicler’ Antonio Sgavetti (12); artistic



arrangers such as Jacques-Simon Mangot, whose work runs as a thread through the book, and who succeeded Traetta as maestro di cappella in Parma (22); and the singers and especially dancers who evidently delighted the Parmesan audience, and who form another (usually unappreciated) layer of connection between different kinds of artistic work.

With a reappraisal of the significance of Traetta's work for Parma being the basis for the book's musicological appeal, it is appropriate that the structure drives towards examination of his works in the final two chapters, with those preceding providing context. In the first chapter Butler sets the scene for Parma's artistic connection to France (and particularly Lyon), explaining political motivations and alliances, as well as the transformation of the city under French cultural influence. The performance schedule she outlines for the French troupe engaged by du Tillot from 1755 demonstrates an overlapping of personnel, genre and repertory between French and Italian works. Even though there was some tension around the introduction of 'a foreign taste' (as one librettist put it) to Parma, Butler suggests it eventually established an expectation that French-inspired works such as Traetta's *Ippolito ed Aricia* would contain some French music and performers. Particularly important to shaping this expectation was Jacques-Simon Mangot: Butler demonstrates that Mangot's experience as an opera singer and director in Lyon, along with his musical connections, must have influenced the ambitious nature of Parma's operas after his arrival in 1756. Mangot's anthology of 'nothing but the best operas known today' (34), compiled for Padre Martini, illustrates his preference for French serious opera.

The account books and other production documents that Butler examines in the second chapter confirm the emphasis placed on French entertainment in Parma, to the extent that they were partly subsidized by Italian operas (under which heading Traetta's hybrid works were included). These documents further demonstrate the care taken over the administration of Parma's theatrical enterprise, and an ensuing continuity of administrative structures and chance for betterment that theatre administration offered for some personnel. Butler observes the degree to which the theatre was interwoven with court life, with political officials serving as 'active participants in the entertainments' production' (52).

In the third chapter Butler examines in detail four French adaptations for Parma; this allows her to frame Traetta's works as an 'Italian variety' of the Parmesan practice of Franco-Italian fusion and thus to reconsider Traetta's role as a 'reform' composer. Butler establishes the willingness (indeed, enthusiasm) in Parma for mixing French and Italian style and reference in culturally and politically advantageous manner. By examining these works as a group, looking for the first time at their librettos and considering music that may be related (particularly via the manuscript volume prepared for Padre Martini by Mangot), Butler is able to tease out the strength and significance of Parma's French connection. These works indicate that Parma's varied entertainment needs were thoughtfully catered for – effectively, serious works catered for a musically knowledgeable and Francophile audience, and lighter works for those simply wanting to be entertained. Beyond an entertainment function, adaptations made to each of these works also show Parma's negotiation of its cultural and political status. The case Butler makes for Mangot's use of Rameau's music in *Anacreonte* – a carefully argued speculation – demonstrates the political value of layered national (almost canonical) musical reference in opera at this time, and it sets the scene for discussion of Traetta's contribution to Parma's hybridized opera.

Traetta's first two 'reform' operas for Parma, *Ippolito ed Aricia* and *I tindaridi*, are seen in chapter 4 as logical continuations of the practice developed around the French troupe and French works. The French troupe's departure heralded Traetta's arrival, and the adaptive practices they had developed seem to have influenced Traetta, as well as colouring the choice of the two Rameau works – one (*Ippolito*) previously unknown to Parma's citizens, presented in abridged form, and the other well known and offering a 'nostalgic view of the recent past' (86). Butler argues convincingly (based on contemporaneous sources) that Traetta's version of *Ippolito ed Aricia* was an advertisement for the city and its familiarity with Parisian fashion: 'if you want to hear what is most appreciated in Paris, come to Parma' (90). *I tindaridi*, on the other hand, is seen as capitalizing on the success of Rameau's *Castor et Pollux*, and previously unexplored printed income statements suggest how this work might have figured in Parma's broader aesthetic and political enterprise. A more disparate approach in chapter 5 marks 'The End of the End of Reform', as connections with Vienna



(thanks to the wedding of Isabella, daughter of Louise Élisabeth and Philippe de Bourbon), Venice and Turin (thanks to the new director, Jacopo Antonio Sanvitale) are reviewed. Detailed discussion of Caterina Gabrielli's signature aria, 'Respiri ormai contento', which migrated from Traetta's *Armida* for Vienna (1761) to his *Enea e Lavinia* in Parma (1761), takes the study in a different direction again, but Butler aims to unite these elements by suggesting they all point to 'future directions' for Parma and its 'broadening of the possibilities of French model adaptation' (126).

In *Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century Parma* Butler has capitalized on the breadth of understanding developed in her previous work on Turin. Attendant on her trademark focus on theatre archives is an understanding that the history of opera encompasses relationships amongst theatres, cities and performers as much as it does those between composers and works. It is the combination of close attention to archival resources, care in piecing together different elements of the documentary trail to reveal previously unnoticed connections, and imaginative willingness to speculate about what these connections might mean for the larger musical and cultural picture that together will render this work valuable to other scholars of opera, enriching our understanding, in particular, of the vexed issue of 'reform' in this period.

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REBECCA CYPRESS AND NANCY SINKOFF, EDS

SARA LEVY'S WORLD: GENDER, JUDAISM AND THE BACH TRADITION IN ENLIGHTENMENT BERLIN

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As a rare early collector, performer and connoisseur of music of the Bach family, Sara Levy is unquestionably a most worthy subject. Her artistic predilections, once unusual, are now foundational. What is more, she lived in interesting times: Enlightenment-era Berlin was the site of great social, intellectual and cultural exchange. The present book, developed following a 2014 conference on the subject at Rutgers University, aims to expand our current view of Levy and the complexity of her historical moment by way of an interdisciplinary approach. The result is, as the title promises, a study primarily focused on matters relating to Jewish identity, gender roles and Berlin's Bach tradition, arguably in that order. Whether this volume as a whole contributes productively or even entirely responsibly to these important narratives is at times equivocal.

Co-editor Nancy Sinkoff's Introduction provides useful orientation to the terms *Haskalah* (Hebrew for Jewish Enlightenment) and *maskilim* (enlightened Jews), both of which describe fundamental cultural influences on Sara Levy's world that are usually discussed only in specialized music-historical literature. Sinkoff also promises that the book's readers will be rewarded with new insights into Levy's historical, musical and philosophical moment (8) – a vital antecedent to the nineteenth-century 'Bach revival' so frequently credited to her great-nephew Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (who, however, was not baptized at birth along with his siblings, contrary to what is stated on page 5). Chapters contributed by specialists in German and Jewish studies, religious studies, women's studies, aesthetics and musicology form the book's three main sections: 'Portrait of a Jewish Female Artist: Music, Identity, Image'; 'Music, Aesthetics, and Philosophy: Jews and Christians in Sara Levy's World'; and 'Studies in Sara Levy's Collection'. An Appendix containing four previously unavailable letters written by Sara Levy with commentary by Barbara Hahn rounds out the collection, and a companion recording (*In Sara Levy's Salon*, The Raritan Players and Rebecca Cypess, Acis Productions Bo6ZYP8SRN) features two of the volume's authors, Steven Zohn and co-editor Rebecca Cypess. The