




COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Musicking: Culturally Informed Performance Practices

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The annual ‘Musicking’ conference brought together culturally informed musical performances and masterclasses with academic research in a series of events centred on the study of early music within its broader cultural context. In 2022, its seventh year, the conference celebrated and honoured Musicking’s artistic director Marc Vanscheeuwijck on his retirement from the University of Oregon. As a tribute to his scholarly contributions, the event focused primarily (but not exclusively) on genres, composers, instruments and music in and around Bologna and Naples. The conference consisted of five ‘Intermezzo’ lecture-concerts, three panels, a special lecture, a keynote address, masterclasses and two concerts. As was the case in 2021, participants had the option of attending in person or virtually, the latter allowing for presenters and attendees to engage with conference events on a national and international scale.

The conference opened on Tuesday 19 April with the Intermezzo lecture-concert ‘Eighteenth-Century Spanish Violin Repertory through its Own Lens’ by Guillermo Salas Suárez (Case Western Reserve University). Taking Spanish treatises as a starting-point, Salas focused on issues of bowings and articulation, ornamentation and accompaniment techniques. He illustrated the topics of his talk with excerpts from Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1757), Francisco Manalt (c1710–1759), José Herrando (c1720–1763) and Gaetano Brunetti (1744–1798).

Issues concerning vocal performance took centre stage on the Wednesday. The term ‘falsetto’, *L’homme armé* masses, the cantatas of Leonardo Vinci (1690–1730) and prosulas for mass propers from Benevento occupied the attendees on one of the busiest days of the conference. The panel ‘Soldiers and Castrati’ brought together Cameron Steuart (University of Georgia) and John Ahern (Princeton University) in a fascinating session that dealt with terminology and authorship. Steuart analysed the use of the term ‘falsetto’ in eighteenth-century opera, debunking some of the negative connotations commonly attached to it in its modern use. According to Steuart, falsetto was understood in the eighteenth century as an integral component of most voices and a unique approach used in order to attain extreme ranges, something that could appear in parodic contexts but could also be associated with the illusory and unbelievable. Ahern’s presentation, ‘Attribution, Style, and Idiom in the Naples *L’homme armé* Masses’, looked back into the fifteenth century with a captivating discussion about authorship. Recent discoveries related to the Naples *L’homme armé* manuscript in the Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III, Naples (I-Nn, shelfmark VI E 40) and its sister manuscript in the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique – Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België (B-Br, shelfmark MS 5557) enabled Ahern to reopen the debate about the authorship of this unique cycle of six anonymous masses, traditionally attributed to Fremin le Caron (*fl.* c1460–1475) or Antoine Busnoys (c1430–1492). Based on codicological and historiographical evidence, Ahern proposed Robert Morton as a third possible author for this cycle of masses and highlighted the difficult balance composers had to strike between personal style, tradition and ceremonial requirements at this time.

Later that day, Valeria La Grotta presented the Intermezzo lecture-concert ‘The Operatic Microcosm of Leonardo Vinci’s Cantatas’, in which she examined Vinci’s use of theatrical elements and techniques in his small corpus of such works. La Grotta illustrated this approach to the output with a moving performance presented in collaboration with the Ensemble Sonar d’Affetto. After a short break, Luisa Nardini (University of Texas at Austin) delivered her special lecture ‘Re-Texting the Liturgy in Southern Italy: Prosulas for the Proper of the Mass’, bringing medieval improvisation into the conversation. Nardini’s discussion of prosulas highlighted research from her recent book *Chants, Hypertext, and Prosulas: Re-texting the Proper of the Mass in Beneventan Manuscripts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), and coincidentally provided valuable context for ensuing presentations concerning ornamentation and improvisation processes in later periods (recurring topics at this year’s conference). The day ended with a masterclass by Guido Olivieri and Marc Vanscheeuwijck, featuring early-music students from the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance. The students performed three songs by Barbara Strozzi and two violin sonatas by Giovanni Antonio Piani recently discovered by Olivieri.

On Thursday 21 April the first panel, ‘Obbligato e Improvvisato’, featured presentations by independent scholars Catherine Bahn and Matthew Mazanek. They both tackled the difficult task of reconstructing lost improvisatory traditions and discussed the significance of these for historical performers today. In her presentation ‘The Obbligato Cello: Recreating the Improvised Practice of Aria Accompaniments in Northern Italy’ Bahn guided attendees through her process for reconstructing improvised violoncello obbligato parts from around the turn of the eighteenth century. The result was an exciting mixture of contrapuntal, harmonic and melodic realizations of the thoroughbass that goes far beyond the simple doubling of the bass line. In ‘Implicit Curriculum: Improvisation Pedagogy in the Guitar Methods, 1760–1860’ Mazanek focused on nineteenth-century teaching methods aimed at amateur guitarists. He highlighted several issues concerning gender and amateur performance, as well as the concept of *Werktreue* and the decline of improvisation in the nineteenth century.

The Thursday Intermezzo lecture-concert, ‘The Neapolitan School for Improvising on the Cello: Francone’s *Passagagli*, 1699’, was given by Giovanna Barbati (Conservatorio Alfredo Casella, L’Aquila). Barbati analysed the *Passacagli* of Gaetano Francone (*fl.* 1688–1717), which are fundamentally improvisatory pieces included (along with other early works for the violoncello) in a manuscript of 1699 preserved at the Montecasino Abbey. She touched upon organological aspects of the instrument’s earlier stages, performance techniques and even terminology, before examining Francone’s variation patterns and the role of improvisation during this period. After her presentation, Barbati performed *Bizarre sulla Ciaccona* by Nicola Matteis (died after 1713), a *Tarantella* by Giulio di Ruvo (*fl.* 1703–1716) and her own variations on a ground by the same composer. Guido Olivieri, a specialist in Neapolitan instrumental repertory, concluded the day with his keynote address ‘Instrumental Music in Eighteenth-Century Naples: Repertory, Culture and Institutions’. Here he shared the results of many years of study of Neapolitan music and archival sources, including his analysis of a great deal of information about music written for private patrons that had not previously been studied. He brought to light the central role played by Neapolitan instrumental music and teaching methodologies in the creation of a strong pedagogical system, and the spread of this technique throughout many parts of Europe owing to the migration of musicians trained in Neapolitan conservatories.

The final panel, on 22 April, had the title ‘Contrapuntal Instruction and Performance Practices’ and included presentations by Peter van Tour (Örebro universitet) and Federico Lanzellotti (Università di Bologna and Universidad Complutense de Madrid). In his presentation ‘Giambattista Martini’s *Libro per Accompagnare*: Thoroughbass and Counterpoint in Eighteenth-Century Bologna’ van Tour analysed Martini’s thoroughbass exercises and emphasized the importance of counterpoint in eighteenth-century Bolognese (and, therefore, Italian) composition, arguing for it to be considered alongside recent rediscoveries of partimento traditions.

Lanzellotti's 'A New Approach to Carlo Ambrogio Lonati's Violin Music: From (Puzzling) Sources to (Gripping) Performance' examined stylistic features of the work of Lonati (c1645–c1710/1715) through the lens of performance practices, including the use of a five-string instrument, scordatura, chordal and polyphonic passages in double or triple stops, arpeggios and bow vibrato.

On the same day, Fabrizio Longo (Pontificio Istituto Ambrosiano di Musica Sacra, Milan) addressed the topic of five-string instruments of the violin family in his lecture-concert 'With Five Strings: New Studies about a Violin from the Seventeenth Century'. Longo argued that considerations of timbre, rather than an undeveloped technique, could lie behind the inclusion of writing for this instrument in the Bolognese seventeenth-century manuscript collection AA.360 in the Museo Internazionale e Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna (I-Bc), as well as in Lonati's music. In the final lecture-concert of the conference, on Saturday 23 April, Christopher McGinley (University of Wisconsin Eau Claire) brought together modern choral pedagogy and eighteenth-century performance-practice traditions using the motet 'O vos omnes' by Nicolò Jommelli (1714–1774). McGinley proposed methods through which today's choral directors can assist student and amateur choirs in better understanding performance matters concerning the tactus, text underlay, pronunciation and musical emphases, and by helping performers free themselves from what he termed 'the tyranny of the bar line'.

This year's Musicking Conference featured two evening concerts. The first, on 22 April, was performed by the University of Oregon Oratorio Ensemble and featured Giovanni Paolo Colonna's oratorio *La Profezia d'Eliseo dall'assedio di Samaria* (Modena, 1686). The libretto, by Giovanni Battista Neri (1660–1726), narrates the siege of Samaria by the Syrians and the city's ensuing famine (as told in 2 Kings). The quality of the performance – the first since its premiere in Modena in 1686 – and the recent news of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the siege of Mariupol made this an especially emotional moment. The final event of the conference was the concert 'Sacred Music in Baroque Naples', given by guest artist Kraig Scott, Marc Vanscheewijck, and staff and students of the University Oregon's early-music programme. The concert featured works for organ by Giovanni Maria Trabaci (c1575–1647), Giovanni de Macque (1548/1550–1614) and Bernaro Storace (*fl.* mid-seventeenth century), the *Stabat mater* and a *Salve regina* by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–1736) and a concerto for violoncello by Leonardo Leo (1694–1744).

Whether discussing ornamentation, organological issues, choral conducting or theatrical approaches to chamber music, all the academic presentations kept historical performance practices at the centre of this seventh edition of the Musicking conference. Masterclasses and concerts respectively offered the opportunity to look at the practical application of academic research to historical repertory and to listen to seldom-programmed music. This year more than ever, the conference bridged the gap between musicological research, music education and historical performance practices, facilitating the ongoing discussion among all its participants.

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