

1629: A Year in the Musical Life of Venice

*Once again I cast my anchor in Venice, where in the days of my youth I studied under the great Gabrieli ... Staying in Venice with old friends, I found the manner of musical composition somewhat changed. They have partially abandoned the old church modes while seeking to charm modern ears with new titillations.*¹

Heinrich Schütz, from the preface to *Symphoniae Sacrae* (Venice, 1629)

By the time of his second visit to Venice in 1628-29, Heinrich Schütz was well-established as *Hofkapellmeister* of the Saxon court in Dresden – one of the most prestigious musical establishments north of the Alps. Having studied in Venice some two decades earlier (1609-1612), the lavish polychoral style he had learned from Giovanni Gabrieli was rapidly becoming outmoded among progressive Italian composers, and he was keen to study the latest musical developments at first hand.

The most famous musician in Venice at this time was of course Claudio Monteverdi, *maestro di cappella* at St Mark's basilica since 1613. But he was not the only attraction; as Jerome Roche has pointed out, Schütz's intention was 'to observe a musical world', one which was 'peopled by many lesser though by no means insignificant lights.'² And so, in essence, the aim of our project is to explore this musical world, to rediscover the music of some of its lesser-known inhabitants, and to understand the music of its more familiar composers within a richer and broader context. To that end, we have made new editions of several pieces which are performed here for the first time in nearly four centuries. All the music was published (or submitted for publication) in Venice in 1629. Some of the composers lived and worked in Venice; others worked in provincial cities within its musical orbit.

Among the composers represented on this recording, it was perhaps the music of Alessandro Grandi, Monteverdi's erstwhile deputy at St Mark's, that was to have the greatest resonance for Schütz. Grandi was a specialist in the small scale, writing solo-voice motets with *ritornelli* for two violins, creating a fusion of vocal monody and instrumental trio sonata textures that was to define the new Venetian style. Grandi had left Venice for Bergamo in 1627, but maintained ties with the city, publishing his third and final book of *concertato* motets there in 1629. ***Regina caeli*** (track 6) is typical of the pieces in this collection, with its close imitation between instruments and voice, and increasingly elaborate ornamentation.

Fortuitously, 1629 also saw the publication of two landmark collections of small-scale instrumental music: Dario Castello's second volume of *Sonate concertate in stil moderno*, and Biagio Marini's seminal Op.8 collection of *curiose & moderne inventioni*. What little we know of Castello's biography is gleaned through the title pages of his publications, where he claims to be a musician at St Mark's and head of a company of wind players.³ His skill as an instrumentalist is borne out in the virtuosic demands of his writing, which exceed those of most other composers of his generation. In the preface to his first book of sonatas (1621) he advises his readers 'not to lose heart in playing [these pieces] more than once, because they will then be practised and in time will be easy', and, moreover, 'I could not have made them easier while still observing the *stile moderno*.'⁴ In other

¹ Cited in Hans Joachim Moser, trans. Carl F. Pfatteicher, *Heinrich Schütz: His Life and Work* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1959), 54 and 128.

² Jerome Roche, 'What Schütz learnt from Grandi in 1629', *The Musical Times* 113 (1972), 1074-75.

³ Eleanor Selfridge-Field, 'Dario Castello: A Non-Existent Biography', *Music & Letters* 53 (1972), 179-190.

⁴ Translated in Rebecca Cypess, *Curious & Modern Inventions: Instrumental Music as Discovery in Galileo's Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 23.

words, it seems that for Castello such virtuosity was the very essence of the modern style. Most of his pieces are written for flexible instrumentation; *Sonata terza* (track 1) simply specifies two *soprani* (violins, cornetts and recorders would fit into this category). *Sonata decima settima* (track 17), on the other hand, is scored explicitly for pairs of cornetts and violins *in ecco* (perhaps recalling similar echo effects in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and *Vespers*), and demonstrates an idiomatic understanding of each instrument's character and technical capabilities in its soloistic writing.

Details of Marini's life are rather more richly documented. He was a virtuoso violinist who worked at St Mark's in the early years of Monteverdi's tenure, and at the time of preparation of Op.8 was in the employ of the Count Palatine of Neuburg. Already well-known as a composer of instrumental and secular vocal music, his Op.8 represents the culmination of a decade of experimentation with emerging instrumental genres. His *Canzon prima* (track 3) for four violins or cornetts suggests a familiarity with Gabrieli's sonata for three violins 'or other similar instruments' (1615), while his *Sonata per l'organo* (track 5) is most unusual for its time in being a fully-realised duo for organ and obligato instrument; the latter also clearly demonstrates, through its Phrygian-inflected opening, that the old church modes were not yet entirely abandoned. If the aforementioned pieces look to the musical past for inspiration, perhaps it is the *Sonata senza cadenza* (track 15) that most embodies the spirit of 'curious and modern invention' through novel compositional procedures that wittily prepare and then evade every opportunity to make a perfect cadence.

The early seventeenth century witnessed something of a struggle for supremacy between the cornett and violin, which were often seen as interchangeable in the instrumental repertoire (as evidenced by the familiar rubric *violino, ò cornetto*). Until the 1620s the cornettists, lauded for their ability to imitate the human voice, perhaps held the upper hand; but Marini's Op.8 contains several highly innovative features for violin which the wind players simply couldn't follow. These include *scordatura* tuning, multiple-stopping, and an extended range which begins to take the violinist beyond the comfort zone of first position. The notation of double- and triple-stopping required the development of special techniques for music printing, which may perhaps explain the delay of three years between the date printed on its dedication page (1626) and that of its eventual publication in 1629. The *Capriccio* (track 9) for 'two violins in four parts' is an example of such innovation in violin technique.

Claudio Monteverdi is one of a number of 'diverse and most excellent' composers represented in Lorenzo Calvi's 1629 anthology, *Quarta raccolta de sacri canti*, the unique source for *Exulta, filia Sion* (track 2), a solo-voice motet which draws on some of the most progressive compositional devices of the day. Dance-influenced triple-time *ariosi* and organ *ritornelli* provide a structural framework, punctuated by short sections of declamatory recitative which give way to extended virtuosic passagework such that each line of text is treated in a contrasting manner. Other pieces in this collection include Grandi's *Salva me, salutaris Hostia* (track 12), and Benedetto Rè's *Lilla convallium* (track 13), both of which are written for two soprano voices with violins, in which the cornett substitutes for the second voice in our arrangement. One of the lesser-known composers on this recording, Rè was *maestro di cappella* of Pavia Cathedral, where Calvi himself was a bass singer.⁵ Another important but lesser-known composer represented in the anthology is Ignazio Donati, who moved from Novara to Lodi cathedral in 1629 (he would eventually become *maestro di cappella* of Milan cathedral in 1631). He had previously published several volumes of sacred music in Venice, including *Salmi boscarecci* (1623) which are characterised by a high degree of flexibility in performance practice: they can be performed by one or multiple choirs, with or without

⁵ Jerome Roche, 'Calvi, Lorenzo', *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>, accessed 19 April 2018.

instruments. On a smaller scale, his instructions for the performance of *Maria Virgo* (track 11) demonstrate similar flexibility: it can be sung by two, three or four voices, which may also be substituted by instruments *ad libitum*. We perform this piece with a single voice and three cornetts, including a tenor cornett on the lowest part.

Another little-known composer is Giovanni Carrone, whose only extant compositions are contained in his *Primo libro delli motetti*. *Congratulamini mihi* (track 10) is a duet for two sopranos to be sung in honour of a female saint, whose name is left blank in the printed source, to be supplied according to the occasion of performance. We have chosen St Marina, who was especially venerated in Venice (where her relics were housed in a church bearing her name until it was destroyed during the Napoleonic era). The second soprano part is played here on the mute cornett.

Orazio Tarditi was a monk in the Camaldolese order and in 1629 he became organist at the church of San Michele in Isola, on what is now the cemetery island of Venice (then a monastic settlement belonging to the neighbouring island of Murano). Tarditi was a prolific composer: his *Celesti fiori musicali* is designated as Op.8 on its title page – an impressive achievement at the young age of 27. *Plaudite, cantate* (track 8) is the first composition in this collection of sacred concertos for solo voice, with a choice of plucked *basso continuo* (chitarrone, harp, lute, spinet and other instruments) given as alternatives to the organ – hence our pairing of voice with harpsichord in this instance.

Schütz's ability to assimilate the panoply of influences to which he had been exposed and bring his collection of *Symphoniae Sacrae* to publication within just nine months of his arrival in Venice was quite extraordinary. In later life, he modestly recounted how 'in the year 1629, when I had arrived in Italy for the second time, I composed ... a little Latin work of one, two, or three vocal parts, together with two violins, or similar instruments.'⁶ Of the new style of composition they embody, he wrote, 'according to the keen-minded Herr Cl. Monteverdi ... music has now reached its final perfection.'⁷ The first two pieces in this collection, *Paratum cor meum* (track 4) and *Exultavit cor meum* (track 16) are written explicitly for soprano voice with two violins and organ, which Denis Arnold describes as the 'very basis of the Venetian 1620s style'.⁸ Nevertheless, following Schütz's suggestion of 'violins, or similar instruments', and inspired by the text *exaltatum est cornu meum* (lit. 'my horn is exalted'), we take the opportunity to perform *Exultavit cor meum* with two cornetts – and moreover precede it with a short organ intonation (on the eleventh mode) by Giovanni Gabrieli.

Schütz's interests were by no means confined to sacred music. Within days of his arrival in Venice in November 1628, he wrote to his patron, 'I already perceive that since the time when I first visited these parts this whole art has changed much ... that music which is useful to royal banquets, comedies, ballets, and similar presentations has now become markedly better and more plentiful.'⁹ Perhaps he had in mind the dance music of Martino Pesenti, a blind musician (and former pupil of Giovanni Battista Grillo) who made his living playing chamber music for the Venetian nobility.¹⁰ Pesenti's second book of *Correnti* for harpsichord includes descriptive titles for each of its pieces, including some that seem to be named after musicians of St Mark's. We include *La Grandia* (track 7) (Grandi) and *La Priula* (track 14) (Giovanni Priuli, a contemporary of Schütz during his student years

⁶ In the preface to *Symphoniae Sacrae II* (Dresden, 1647); cited in Moser, trans. Pfatteicher, *Heinrich Schütz*, 129.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Denis Arnold, 'The Second Venetian Visit of Heinrich Schütz', *The Musical Quarterly* 71 (1985), 359-374, at 370.

⁹ Cited in Moser, trans. Pfatteicher, *Heinrich Schütz*, 128.

¹⁰ Eleanor Selfridge-Field, 'Pesenti, Martino', *Grove Music Online* <www.oxfordmusiconline.com>, accessed 19 April 2018.

under Gabrieli). Both pieces are in binary form with *spezzata* (lit. 'broken') variations on the repeat of each section.

Our programme thus offers a series of snapshots from an extraordinary year in the life of this most musical of cities. This is a celebration of the high-water mark of Venetian music, prior to the plague which reached Venice in 1630, with devastating consequences. By some estimates, Venice lost nearly one third of its population between 1630 and 1631.¹¹ The Venetian publishing trade was decimated: whereas for 1629 we have the luxury of some 50 extant collections of printed music, this drops to around 30 in 1630 (as the plague hits), and then we have nothing at all from the Venetian presses in 1631.¹² There were of course many musicians among the casualties, including Alessandro Grandi in Bergamo, and perhaps most of the cornett *virtuosi* of Venice, since the payment records at St Mark's contain no further reference to the cornett until 1640 (when two new players are listed – one a former violinist, the other a singer – both seemingly having retrained to fill the vacancies).¹³

Schütz left Venice just in time. In addition to the fruits of his studies – his own collection of *Symphoniae Sacrae* – he took with him one of the most celebrated violinists of Venice, Francesco Castelli, several volumes of printed music, and some musical instruments for the Dresden court. The latter included new violins acquired during a visit to Lombardy (and we can only speculate that he might have had dealings with the Amati family in Cremona), together with three *cornetti* and four *cornettini* from Venice, the receipt for which still survives in the city archives in Dresden.¹⁴

Instruments used on this recording

Organ

Whereas many recordings of early music make use of small, portable continuo organs with stopped, wooden pipes, such an instrument would have been quite unfamiliar to musicians in early seventeenth-century Italy. The primary continuo instrument intended for sacred repertoire was the church organ, which in Italy was characterised by its fundamental rank of open, metal pipes, known as the *principale*. The sound quality of the Italian organ is unmistakable: rich and full bodied in the bass, yet transparent in texture and with a clarity of articulation that perfectly complements other contemporary instruments, especially cornetts and violins in the treble register. Moreover, it was a common practice for small groups of instrumentalists and/or singers to perform in the *cantoria* (organ loft), creating a particularly close spatial and sonic relationship between the organ and the other ensemble members.

The Italian church organ is of course the very opposite of portable and so until recently the only way to capture this remarkable sound on record was to work on location with a suitably restored instrument. For this project, however, we have adopted a twenty-first-century solution: an electronic instrument playing high-quality samples of an original Venetian organ. The instrument sampled for this purpose is in the church of St Maria d'Alieto, in Izola, on the Adriatic coast of

¹¹ J.N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-Clio, 2005), 103.

¹² Figures derived from the RISM (*Répertoire International des Sources Musicales*) database <<https://opac.rism.info/>>, accessed 11 April 2018, supplemented by *Recueils Imprimés XVI^e-XVII^e Siècles*, RISM B/i (Munich: Henle Verlag, 1960), 500-503.

¹³ Payment records transcribed in Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *Venetian Instrumental Music from Gabrieli to Vivaldi*, 3rd edition (New York: Dover, 1994), 330-348.

¹⁴ Roland Wilson, 'Die Entwicklung des Zinken zwischen 1500 und 1700: neue Erkenntnisse', in Christian Philippsen and Monika Lustig (eds.), *Der Zink: Geschichte, Instrumente und Bauweise*, *Michaelsteiner Konferenzberichte* 79 (Augsburg: Wißner Verlag, 2015), 33-40, at 39.

Slovenia. It was made by the Venetian organ builder, Pietro Nachini (1694-1769) and is very much in the tradition of Venetian organ building stretching back to Vincenzo Colombi in the sixteenth century.

Its specifications can be found on the website of *Sonus Paradisi* (www.sonusparadisi.cz), who made the samples and kindly granted us permission to use them on this recording. Each individual pipe of the Izola organ was sampled in three-channel audio (rather than the usual stereo), such that we were able to recreate an 'aural image' of the original spatial disposition of the organ pipes via the virtual pipe organ software *Hauptwerk*, routed through three carefully positioned Genelec speakers (kindly loaned to us by Royal Birmingham Conservatoire). The wooden midi keyboard for our electronic organ was made by Luca Panetti, and the organ case by Jeffrey Newton. Although unconventional, we hope by these means to have taken one step closer to the sound-world of seventeenth-century Venice.

Harpsichord

Steven Devine plays a harpsichord by Colin Booth, based on an original instrument by the Venetian maker Domenico da Pesaro (now in the musical instrument museum of Leipzig, dated 1533). Pesaro was one of the leading harpsichord makers of the sixteenth century; Zarlino is known to have played on one of his instruments.

Cornetts

Jamie Savan plays a treble cornett by John McCann, mute cornett by Serge Delmas (track 10), and tenor cornett by Christopher Monk (track 11).

Helen Roberts plays a treble cornett by Paolo Fanciullacci.

Theresa Caudle plays a treble cornett by Roland Wilson (track 11).

Drawing on the latest research into original Venetian/Bassano cornetts in the collection of the Accademia Filarmonica, Verona,¹⁵ we have tuned our instruments to accord as closely as possible with historical fingering patterns; the result is a more flexible and variegated sound which helps us get a little closer to the 'vocal' quality to which we aspire.

Violins

Oliver Webber plays a violin by George Stoppani, a copy of the 1629 instrument by Girolamo Amati in the Rutson Collection of the Royal Academy of Music, kindly loaned for this recording by the maker. We were thrilled to have the opportunity to work with this beautiful instrument, of the type that Schütz himself might have sought out for the Dresden court.

Theresa Caudle plays a violin by Paul Denley, after an original attributed to Giovanni Paolo Maggini – the leading exponent of the Brescian school of violin making in the early seventeenth century. Both Maggini and Girolamo Amati were among those who perished during the plague of 1630-31.

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¹⁵ Jamie Savan, 'Unlocking the Mysteries of the Venetian Cornett: *ad imitar piu la voce humana*', *Historic Brass Society Journal* 28 (2016), 31-55.