



COMMUNICATION: CONFERENCE REPORT

Women and Music in the Early Modern Age

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Women's history and gender studies have become increasingly prominent in the international academic arena during the past fifty years, giving rise to multiple theoretical approaches and debates. A feminist approach has also gained ground, mainly since the 1980s, in the field of musicology. However, its impact on different countries and academic traditions is still very variable and often insufficient. Most musicological approaches continue to favour research on men, leading to a distorted and partial view of music history. In Portugal, research on women in music history still has a short trajectory, mostly focused on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with only occasional studies of the early-modern era. Considering these contexts, the choice of the theme 'Women and Music in the Early Modern Age' for the ninth conference organized by the Centro de Estudos Musicais Setecentistas de Portugal (CEMSP) was especially welcome and pertinent, not only for its international scope, but also as an incentive for further research in this field to be undertaken within Portugal itself.

As with previous conferences, the meeting took place at the National Palace of Queluz, a summer residence of the Portuguese monarchy near Lisbon and a privileged space for court music during the second half of the eighteenth century. This palace is also the headquarters of CEMSP, a hub for research and performance created in 2013 on the initiative of the baroque orchestra *Divino Sospiro*.

The Covid-19 outbreak has seen many academic events cancelled, postponed or moved entirely online, but the CEMSP managed to keep their conferences in a face-to-face format during the pandemic, with only some talks delivered remotely. At this event, twenty-one presentations were given in person and only the keynote address and eight papers were presented online. During two and a half days of intense knowledge exchange, scholars from eleven countries presented papers in five different languages (English, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and French), with Italian and English predominating. As most of the attendees spoke at least two or three of these languages, the linguistic variety did not pose a problem in general, although the degree of audience participation in the discussions after each paper was quite variable.

In the opening session, the welcome by António Nunes Pereira (director of the National Palace of Queluz) was followed by the keynote address from Lidia Bramani (independent scholar, Milan), dedicated to Nannerl Mozart and other women of the Viennese Enlightenment. The author of several books, Bramani sought to deconstruct the common view of Nannerl as an example of historic gender discrimination. She asserted that Nannerl received an education similar to that of her brother; she was never marginalized or influenced by family or social constraints in her life choices or in her studies and career, as several historical sources and correspondence show. Adopting an approach to presentation that would be broadly accessible to listeners from many backgrounds, Bramani gave also examples of female figures close to Mozart who managed to insert themselves into a social environment that was able to recognize their personal and artistic qualities.

A substantial number of the papers focused on women as singers in contexts that ranged from professional theatres and courts to amateur musical practice. Taking the career of *Violante Vestri*

(c1725–1791) as an example, and illustrating with the famous engraving dedicated to her in 1750 by Marc'Antonio Dal Re, Alessandra Mignati (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan; Università di Napoli Federico II) proposed some thoughts on the history of female performers, the audience's expectations, the importance of seduction in theatre and the significance of the support from prestigious personalities. Vestri's case is peculiar because she did not perform prima donna roles; nevertheless, she acquired an excellent reputation, reinforced by the abovementioned engraving, which Mignati carefully analysed, showing how it also constitutes a fascinating window onto the opera house of the time. Marcia Kayser (Universidade Estadual do Paraná) synthesized some well-known features of the artistic profile of Anna Renzi (c1620–after 1661), the first diva in the history of opera, and Lorena Vallieri (Università di Firenze) demonstrated how the Teatro Malvezzi of Bologna (1694–1745) functioned as a kind of springboard for female singers, actress and dancers to launch their European careers, using information from the correspondence of Count Sicinio Pepoli to support her argument. Epistolary sources – namely the letters of the Modenese diplomat Antonio Grossatesta (died 1762) to the secretary of the Este court, Giuseppe Riva (1728–1732) – also allowed Gianluca Stefani (Università di Firenze) to shed new light on such prominent female singers as Faustina Bordoni (1697–1781), Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778) and Vittoria Tesi (1701–1775).

Artistic rivalry was approached by Benoît Dratwicky (Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles) in a paper dedicated to the quarrels of singers at the Académie royale de musique in the eighteenth century, which examined the public and private issues involved and their media misappropriation. Barbara Nestola (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique; Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance; Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles) focused her talk on the circulation of female singers and their importance in the transfer of Italian repertoires and performance practices to Parisian theatres at the end of the reign of Louis XIV. For instance, singers including Élisabeth Daneret, Mlle Dun and Louis Muraire inserted Italian arias into performances of French opera. The relationship between repertoires and women's performance was considered from a different perspective in another paper. Silvia Mancianti (Université de Poitiers; Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles) reflected on the perception of the figure of the singer as *faemina scaenica* – that is, the relationship between 'personne et personnage', the woman who performs and the role itself – in the context of production and reception. For this purpose, she focused on the repertory of the last phase of the Comédie-Italienne of Paris, in which the 'cantatrice' as character appears. In one such example, the play *La Cantatrice* (1762) by dramatist Antonio Collalto (1713–1778), it could be seen that women were initially appreciated for the vocal and artistic talents that they displayed in performance. However, in other plays of the following years, the profession of singing was depicted as immoral when exercised by women.

Another interesting area, as revealed by Antonio Soriano Santacruz (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), concerned female theatrical managers in Madrid during the eighteenth century. The usual woman-actress-singer profile allowed these managers access to positions of authority inside the theatrical milieu that society often denied them on the outside. They were key figures in the development of musical-theatre repertoires, as was the case with María Hidalgo, who directed her theatre company for eighteen years and positioned herself at the centre of a complex socio-cultural network. Santacruz's paper was part of a coherent session that also included presentations by Aurèlia Pessarrodona (Conservatori Superior de Música del Liceu, Barcelona; Universidad Alfonso X el Sabio, Madrid; Universidad Internacional de Valencia) and Lucía Magán Abollo (Universidad de Salamanca). Pessarrodona discussed the many facets of the construction of femininity in small-scale genres of music theatre, particularly the tonadilla, and how these are reflected in the complementary performative dimensions (acting, singing, dancing, castanet playing), while Magán Abollo focused on the specific case of Rosa María Rodríguez, 'la Gallega', a paradigmatic comic actress-singer in eighteenth-century Spain.

Alongside the professionally performed plays, the aristocracy also rose to the challenge of performing theatrical works privately themselves. An example of this practice was given by Elena

Zilotti (Università di Verona), who discussed the role of noblewomen as actresses in amateur theatre in Verona during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Beyond the world of the theatre, some women were professionally active as singers in princely courts and aristocratic palaces. On this topic, Antonella d'Ovidio (Università di Firenze) centred her presentation on the careers of 'virtuose di musica' in the service of aristocratic families in seventeenth-century Florence, examining in particular the harpsichordist and singer Lucia Coppa Rivani (1625–1699), 'virtuosa' of the Marquis Filippo Niccolini (1586–1666). In turn, Samantha Owens (Victoria University of Wellington/Te Herenga Waka) explored the role of professional female vocalists based in Stuttgart between c1700 and 1730 and their social networks. A number of these women came from families of professional musicians, while others were seasoned prima donnas; a small handful were local adolescents selected to receive musical training.

The role of women as professional instrumentalists was a theme that had only a small presence in the programme, but the single case presented by Clare Beesley (Universiteit Utrecht) was a fascinating one. This study concerned the British Catholic musician Marianne Davies (1743/1744–1819), who, after being a child-prodigy flautist, became a pioneering adult virtuosa of the glass harmonica. Letters of recommendation written for her by eminent personalities were crucial for Davies's international career. One of the main issues surveyed in this paper was whether and how the language used in these letters carried gendered associations.

Dance was also the subject of a single paper: 'From Feuilleton to Gender Studies: Marie Sallé under the Eyes of Critics', by Silvia Garzarella (independent scholar, Milan). The scarcity of sources, limited almost entirely to press reports, meant only a partial restitution of the importance played by Marie Sallé (c1707–1756) in the history of dance and female professionalism. Garzarella offered a critical survey of research devoted to her with the intent of highlighting the importance that gender studies have had for a full recognition of her talent not only as performer, but also as choreographer, author and teacher.

A set of papers focused on the topic of women as composers. Among the women considered were well-known figures such as Barbara Strozzi and Isabella Leonarda – the subjects of papers by Nicola Badolato (Università di Bologna) and Enrico Gramigna (Università di Bari Aldo Moro) respectively – as well as other personalities whose lives and works have been revealed by more recent research, and whose music needs further dissemination. David Gasche (International Center for Wind Music Research, Kunstuniversität Graz) spoke about a relatively rare activity among women composers: writing music for military band. Examples by composers such as Princess Anna Amalia of Prussia (1723–1787), who wrote at least seven marches for military wind band, indicated that these women crossed the frontiers of this traditionally male domain. A paper by Judith Ortega (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) brought to light an important work by the Italian composer Maria Rosa Coccia (1759–1833), unknown until now: *Ifigenia*, a cantata for five voices and orchestra composed in 1779 and dedicated to Maria Luisa of Parma (1751–1819), Princess of Asturias and spouse of King Charles IV of Spain. One of Coccia's main strategies in developing a professional career was to look for support from women belonging to European aristocratic elites, partly by dedicating her works to them. An emblematic example that matches this profile of patroness was Maria Luisa of Bourbon (1782–1824) – Infanta of Spain, Queen of Etruria and Duchess of Lucca – as demonstrated by Ana Lombardía (Universidad de Salamanca) in her paper. Maria Luisa founded two schools for women, supported female painters, writers and composers, and was herself a collector, performer and composer. Among the nearly two thousand scores in her music library it is possible to find instrumental works by female composers including Nunziata Mazzini, Nunziata Roberti, Anna Marchi and Maria Luisa herself – who, incidentally, was the first Spanish woman to compose symphonies.

Female music patronage was also a core subject of other presentations, as seen in the paper of Marko Deisinger (Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien), regarding Eleonora Gonzaga (1630–1686, the third wife of Emperor Ferdinand III (1608–1657)) and her influence on Viennese cultural life in the period 1651–1686, and that of Laurent Guillo (Centre de Musique

Baroque de Versailles), who presented a musical and theatrical portrait of Jeanne-Louise Constance d'Aumont, Duchess of Villeroy (1731–1816), and analysed the history and constitution of the imposing music library gathered by this outstanding music patroness in Paris.

The role of women in introducing new artistic and stylistic tendencies could also emerge from royal marriages: Nicola Usula (Université de Fribourg) explained how the arrival of the new Empress Margarita Teresa (1651–1673) in Vienna in 1666, to join her husband Leopold I (1640–1705), was decisive for the incorporation of Spanish features into local spectacles. A recently discovered libretto ('Festejo Musico') provides additional information on the 'Spanisches Drama' performed in 1667, of which only the music of five dances by Johann Heinrich Schmelzer (c1620–1680) is preserved.

The role of music in women's education was explored by Laura Ventura Nieto (Royal Holloway University of London) through the example of Lavinia Guasca (1574–1632) and Margherita Langosca (1607–1632), mother and daughter, who were ladies-in-waiting at the Savoy court. By exploring ideas such as self-fashioning and gender construction, she looked into early-modern education and musical skills as means of shaping aristocratic and courtly women's identities. Speaking about another context and time, Janka Petőczová (Ústav hudobnej vedy Slovenskej akadémie vied (Institute of Musicology, Slovak Academy of Sciences), Bratislava) presented recently discovered manuscript sources of keyboard music belonging to Eva Sofia Günther (dated 1773) and Anna Günther (1783) that document women's education for domestic music-playing in a bourgeois-aristocratic Lutheran family in the city of Levoča.

Convents and monasteries were another privileged area for female musical practice. Ascensión Mazuela-Anguita (Universidad de Granada) examined personal handwritten plainchant notebooks for singing in cloister processions that were traditionally handed down from aunt to niece in early-modern Barcelona, and Ilaria Grippaudo (Liceo Musicale Regina Margherita, Palermo) discussed the role of convent music in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Palermo as a further way of asserting female identity, as well as consolidating the institutional and social image of public communities and families to which nuns belonged.

On the last day, Inês Thomas Almeida (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) addressed the compelling topic of women as critics in a paper dedicated to the Prussian Jewish writer Esther Bernard (1767–after 1833), whose profile corresponds to that of what we would today call a feminist activist. Bernard's 1801 stay in Portugal resulted in critical travel reports (published in 1802 and 1803) that point out the lack of visibility of Portuguese women in public life and include interesting insights into opera performances in Lisbon's public theatres. At the same session, Marta Brites Rosa (Universidade de Lisboa) added some thoughts about women as spectators in eighteenth-century Lisbon and the several restrictions that were intended to keep them invisible to the public eye.

The launch of a new book – *'Padron mio colendissimo . . .': Letters about Music and the Stage in the 18th Century*, ed. Iskrena Yordanova and Cristina Fernandes (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2021) – and a concert by the Ensemble Gli Accenti and soprano Teresa Duarte featuring music by Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Isabella Leonarda and Barbara Strozzi, completed the programme. On the whole, it was a rewarding meeting that demonstrated the vitality of this field of studies and opened up multiple pathways for further research.

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