# CONFERENCES

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## OLTRE LE NOTE: L'IMPROVVISAZIONE NELLA MUSICA OCCIDENTALE DAL SETTECENTO ALL'OTTOCENTO

LA SPEZIA, 15–17 JULY 2010

As the train approaches La Spezia, the traveller has short glimpses of the celebrated beauty of Cinque Terre – the 'five lands'. This secluded place lies at one side of a triangle between Genoa, Livorno and Parma, the region where Niccolò Paganini spent most of his youth mesmerizing his audiences and outpacing his instructors. One of the most famous aspects of Paganini's playing was his ability as an improviser – extemporizing compositions on the spot, quickly solving musical challenges and making the best out of unexpected situations. It was only logical that Paganini and his intriguing technique would be highlighted at a conference about improvisation held at the centre of this very region, the coastal town of La Spezia. But the conference Beyond Notes: Improvisation in Western Music in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries was more wide-ranging than that. Twenty-nine specialists in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music with an interest on improvisation were brought together to discuss aspects related to this elusive practice, 'one of the subjects least amenable to historical research', as the *New Grove* entry on improvisation puts it (Bruno Nettl and others, 'Improvisation', in *Grove Music Online* <www.grovemusic.com> (5 March 2011)), but which is highlighted in many musical treatises and accounts of performance up to the mid-nineteenth century.

The keynote speakers approached the subject from very different vantage points. Rudolf Rasch (Universiteit Utrecht) is well known for his publications in music history, theory and cognition and his many editions from renaissance to classical music. His address was mostly concerned with the points of contact between improvisation and composition as illustrated by the history of music editions. If there seems to be no controversy in stating that improvisation is a volatile art form, Rasch demonstrated that the same could be said of Western musical composition for the greater part of its notated history. Throughout the last few centuries works by Corelli and Boccherini have been subjected to different approaches to the question of how much information, if any, should be supplied by the editor. Rasch argued that Corelli's Sonatas Op. 5 always needed or were subjected to some sort of adaptation. From the sketchy first editions to nineteenth-century arrangements with performance markings and written-out piano accompaniments to the most recent historically informed publications, performers and editors were called upon to supply the missing information, thus making it meaningful to their own time. With his forthcoming edition for the Boccherini *Opera Omnia* Rasch faced a different problem. Since there is no autograph or reliable copy of the Six Trios Op. 1, any edition would have to deal with the issue of multiple copies and profuse variants – sometimes major reworkings. Even though a reconstruction might get closer to Boccherini's text, it cannot claim to represent his exact conception. Paradoxically, a single notated version does not seem to be enough to represent the composer's intention.

A conference on improvisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries would inevitably touch on the controversial question of whether improvisation has ever existed in Western 'art' music. Of course, that would depend on how we define improvisation, and this was the core issue of the second keynote speech, delivered by Vincenzo Caporaletti (Università degli Studi di Macerata). A composer and jazz specialist, Caporaletti is also known for his 2005 book *I processi improvvisativi nella musica: un approccio globale* (Lucca: Libreria musicale italiana). For Caporaletti, Nettl's descriptions of improvisation as 'rapid . . . composition' or 'creation of a musical work as it is performed' (Bruno Nettl, 'Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach', *The Musical Quarterly* 60/1 (1974), 6, and 'Improvisation', *Grove Music Online*) are examples of circular thinking. Since one object simply replaces another, an improvisation would not be phenomenologically distinct from a composition or a musical work, the difference being only contextual. Although the keynote speech sounded somewhat nihilist at certain points, it did call for a more thoughtful way of using

these terms. A true understanding of improvisatory processes should then come from the cognitive sciences, using a model of musical knowledge based not on the framework of a written score, but on the psychomotoric system of a performer. Caporaletti sees improvisation and extemporization, or *ex tempore* realization, as different things, since the former supposedly creates new material. The discussion that followed focused on the feasibility of true improvisation in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western music, since a certain framework or conditioning seems always to be present. On a lighter note, a final question, whether the conference title should be changed instead to 'extemporization in Western music', was left unanswered.

Despite that controversy, the participants explored a variety of topics ranging from treatises' detailed guidelines for melodic ornamentation and diminution to the actual record of manuscripts used by individual performers. Other papers dealt with regional practices and styles of extemporizing ornaments and variations, forms and genres associated with these practices, and the use of improvisatory gestures and clichés as a compositional topic. Some papers were especially welcome as they brought a much-needed view on improvisation in nineteenth-century urban popular music.

Maria Teresa Dellaborra (Istituto Superiore di Studi Musicali Franco Vittadini, Pavia) presented an extensive compilation of references to improvisation in eighteenth-century Italian treatises from Geminiani (1751) to Tomeoni (1798). These included the 'dos and don'ts' of ornamentation and suggestions for better renditions of *affetti*, ornamenting cadences, extemporizing preludes before a performance, and even for using improvisation as a stratagem to circumvent difficult passages. Delegates congratulated her on the amount of information she had been able to collect from a large number of sources, though some felt that the information should be more contextualized, as musicians in different places had different views on where to draw the line between good taste and excess. Moreover, while musical treatises and manuals reveal the authoritative view of a pedagogue, it is the record provided by performing sources that tells us the extent to which musicians followed or ignored those instructions and how they kept their repertory functional as fashions changed. Laura Möckli (Universität Bern) has explored that issue in her study of the manuscript 'Raccolta di abbellimenti o fioriture di cavatine arie e duetti' (I-Tn Foà-Giordano 631) from about 1840, which contains ornamented versions of over forty arias, drawing on operas from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* to Verdi's *Macbeth*. One of her most interesting examples was an 1830s ornamentation of the aria 'Voi che sapete', which prompted an interesting discussion on authenticity and functionality in music. Some of these reworkings of opera arias were probably intended to fit the needs of a recital format, and that aspect was also covered in Damién Colas's (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris) paper, read by Luca Sala. Colas's paper was mostly concerned with annotated singing scores from the Théâtre-Italien and the Académie Royale de Musique in Paris, particularly those with modifications to and sketches of ornamentation, testimonies to a singer's interpretation on stage.

Still on the subject of nineteenth-century opera, Naomi Matsumoto (Goldsmiths College, University of London) took a more case-study approach by investigating the origins and cultural implications of Lucia's cadenza at the end of the mad scene in Donizetti's opera. Matsumoto traced lines of transmission based on comparisons of early twentieth-century recordings and what is known of the styles and practices of major European singing schools. She also argued that the celebrated duet cadenza – a later addition for voice and flute that replaced the original solo cadenza – marks a breaking-point between a solo display of extemporized virtuosity and a careful, thought-out composition. A duet cadenza has to be carefully learned and well rehearsed. The cadenza thus changes function, becoming less a depiction of freedom and more a rite of passage, and indeed an indication of pedigree, by showing which vocal school the singer is affiliated with. Matsumoto concluded by arguing that, contrary to some feminist readings, the cadenza does not depict freedom in its improvisatory madness, but only the restraints of a repressive late nineteenth-century society.

By virtue of their open structure and speech-like quality, recitatives have often been compared with improvisations. Simone Ciolfi (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata) investigated the use of improvisatory elements in recitatives from solo cantatas by Alessandro Scarlatti, arguing that his highly personalized and expressive discourse was conveyed by means of a minimalist technique, in which each small variation was capable of deceiving the listener's expectations, bringing about the new and the unfamiliar. Since this style is


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also guided by poetry, Ciolfi theorizes that poetic structure could even dictate an improvised recitative, illustrating it with Crescimbeni's 1711 description of a musical gathering in which Scarlatti and the poet Gian Felice Zappi were said to have simultaneously created music and text in an extemporized performance. John Lutterman (Whitman College and University of California, Davis) also focused on improvised recitative accompaniment, but from the point of view of cello and thoroughbass treatises. He demonstrated how performers were expected to provide chordal thoroughbass realizations as they migrated from the viol to the cello in the late seventeenth century, adding that the guidelines in treatises served as a foundation for both written composition and improvised solo performance, or partimento. Lutterman closed his argument by presenting traces of the practice of continuo realization in a few examples of cello passages in Bach and Corelli that feature arpeggio schemes, cadential gestures and sequential motivic treatment.

Improvisatory elements in solo instrumental music also emerged in a series of papers that concentrated on score analyses, dealing with violin, flute, piano and guitar literature. My paper (Rogério Budasz, University of California, Riverside) considered Portuguese practices of paraphrasing songs and composing variations on harmonic schemes as recorded in tablature manuscripts for the five-course guitar. Fabrizio Ammetto (Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico) focused on Vivaldi's concertos for two violins, underlining the role of function and space in both the conception and the performance of these works. Gregorio Carraro (Università degli Studi di Padova) evaluated Tartini's instructions for ornamentation in light of the composer's own controversial theories on natural and artificial harmony. Renato Ricco (Università degli Studi di Salerno) investigated the connection between virtuosity and improvisation in Bériot's violin method and in his posthumous work *Prélude ou Improvisation*. And Walter Kreyszig (University of Saskatchewan and Centre for Canadian Studies, University of Vienna) compared the plain autograph version of the Adagio of Quantz's C major flute sonata with the highly ornamented version printed in the *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversière zu spielen*. Kreyszig delighted the audience with a very generous handout and argued that Quantz's manual may serve as the basis for the interpretation of almost all of his instrumental works.

Focusing on Hummel's Sonata in F sharp minor, Rohan Stewart-MacDonald (Cambridge) approached improvisation as a musical topic, somewhat similar to the fantasia topic. Hummel's sonata simulates an act of improvisation, with all its unnecessary repetitions, dead-ends and tempo fluctuations, and is infused with chaotic passages depicting the anxiety caused by the possibility of loss of control and direction. Stewart-MacDonald's arguments and his performance of short excerpts were well received by the audience. Some similarities with the recitative topic were also proposed in the discussion that followed. Still on the same subject of analysing improvisation as a musical topic, Klimis Voskidis (Goldsmiths College, University of London) traced its uses in Liszt's early piano transcriptions, arguing that their gestures and figurations were drawn from different sources, most notably from the bel canto tradition, and could have been used likewise in his famous concert improvisations.

Although not completely abandoning the score-based analytical approach, another group of papers was more concerned with sociohistorical and aesthetic reflections. A scholar and performer specializing in Paganini, Philippe Borer (Société Suisse de Pédagogie Musicale), explained how the *Caprices* reveal the influence of both the *commedia dell'arte* and the art of nineteenth-century improviser-poets. Borer added that by giving the impression of music being created at that very moment, Paganini's performances fulfilled the romantic ideal of combining the creative impulse with coherent discourse, while his wanderings as a travelling virtuoso and his apparent creative freedom also reflected the ideal of *liberté* that was so pervasive in the literature of the time. The literary connection was also explored by Carmela Bongiovanni (Biblioteca del Conservatorio Niccolò Paganini, Genoa), who found parallels with the culture of poetic improvisation in Italian society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and by Mariana Esposito (Università degli Studi di Lecce), who explored the opposing views of Wackenroder and E. T. A. Hoffmann on the originality, creativity and immediateness of artistic inspiration that were so central to the German romantic ideal. Considering improvisation in the context of rhetorical categories, Martin Kaltenecker (Centre de Recherche sur les Arts et le Langage – EHESS, Paris) pointed out that the image of enthusiasm and inspiration provided by improvisatory-style performances had the twofold function of revealing the essence of creation and at the


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same time communicating through music. This idea became devalued as the century progressed, being associated with superficial and mystified audiences at a time when organicism, precise notation and careful listening by learned audiences were gaining importance.

Concentrating on writings by Czerny and Liszt, Martin Edin (Örebro universitet) exposed the sometimes contradictory views of theorists and performers when facing the question of when to embellish a fermata. The idea of maintaining the purity of a number of 'classical' works was increasingly fashionable, and Edin showed that while Czerny advocated that pieces of 'profound content and serious character' were not the place for improvisation, there were exceptions to that rule, as illustrated by his book on extemporizing fantasias (*Systematische Anleitung zum Fantasieren auf dem Pianoforte* (Vienna: Diabelli, 1829)), and by Liszt's practices and publications suggesting that a performer should learn how to create and play his or her own cadenzas in some contexts. Clara Wieck Schumann, who was known to excel in that field, also used to compose preludes and concert transitions, as explained by Valerie Goertzen (Loyola University New Orleans). Her intriguing study concentrated on Clara's grouping of pieces in concerts from 1835 to 1837, creating mosaics of different and not always complete works by Bach and Beethoven with preludes to connect them, some of which she documented in 1895.

The organ, an instrument that managed to preserve in both pedagogy and performance the improvisatory aspects that once were so common in Western 'art' music, featured in the paper by Steven Young (Bridgewater State College) on Louis Vierne, organist at Notre Dame de Paris from 1900 to 1937. The presentation was particularly noteworthy as it was the only one based on actual recorded improvisations. Released by the Odeon label, these recordings do not display the glaring virtuosity usually associated with the term 'improvisation'. But they do show how organ improvisations would have been performed at the most important Parisian church by the early twentieth century, how they related to contemporary instruction manuals and how they were conditioned by liturgical function, including the needs of worshippers.

Approaching eighteenth- and nineteenth-century popular music is even more challenging than studying improvisation in art music during the same period. Not only more scarce, most of the time the written record is non-existent. Even so, Csilla Pethö-Vernet and Raffaele di Mauro were able to draw a convincing picture of the uses and misrepresentations of improvisation in urban popular music in Vienna and Naples during the first half of the nineteenth century. Pethö-Vernet (Université de Paris IV – Sorbonne) showed how the earliest transcriptions of Roma musicians performing *verbunkos* are probably harmonizations. Published in Austrian newspapers, these written records contrast in many respects with reports of Roma improvisatory practices, notably through the absence of augmented seconds. According to Pethö-Vernet, transcribers probably regarded such features as elements of performance rather than structure, which suggests that other idiomatic features might have been suppressed as well. This means that the transcriptions cannot convey the richness described in literary sources. Moving from Vienna to Naples, Raffaele Di Mauro (Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata) surveyed two traditions of popular improvisation in the early nineteenth century, one related to rural songs and feasts, and the other related to an urban middle class. He focused on this second group, which nurtured a culture of poetic improvisation, printed pamphlets and musical scores, and whose venues were salons and popular theatres. As a case study Di Mauro selected the famous song 'Io te voglio bene assaje', wrongly considered to be the first Neapolitan song with ascertained authorship, which reached a stable form only after several versions – some of them published, most of them not – had been created in that context of improvisation and reworking.

Maria Christina Cleary (Universiteit Leiden and Orpheus Institute, Ghent) delivered the conference's last paper. It was a lecture-recital and dealt with the single-action pedal harp and the survival of practices of figured-bass accompaniment on that instrument well into the mid-nineteenth century. As demonstrated in instruction manuals, harpists learned to extemporize ornaments and variations on famous themes, as well as to compose preludes and interludes to connect the works on a recital. That would explain, among other things, the apparent simplicity of most musical scores for the harp up to about 1830, as performers would probably have regarded them as sketches to be elaborated upon. Cleary also considered some sociocultural ramifications as European society increasingly confined the harp to the domestic and feminine realms

during that period. She then illustrated some of the abilities expected from a nineteenth-century harpist by improvising variations on an aria from Monsigny's *Le roi et le fermier* and playing the highly improvisatory Fantasia in C minor by Spohr. The conference could not have ended on a more appropriate note.

Held within the context of the Ninth Paganinian Festival of Carro, which features concerts every year through the months of July and August, the conference was organized by the Centro di Studio Opera Omnia Luigi Boccherini. Since 2005 this group of scholars has been busy with a variety of high-profile musicological projects, including conferences on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music, editing the complete works of Boccherini, Locatelli and Geminiani, and publishing the journal *Ad Parnassum*, to name just a few. The Centro will release the proceedings of this conference in a volume edited by Rudolf Rasch.

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## G. B. PERGOLESI, THE TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION OF NEAPOLITAN MUSIC IN SAXONY AND BOHEMIA

DRESDEN, 12–14 NOVEMBER 2010

This conference, taking place in the lecture room of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek in Dresden, was the fourth of the series dedicated to Giovanni Battista Pergolesi in the third centenary of his birth, after the conferences held in Naples in January (see the report by Angela Fiore in this journal (7/2, 338–341)), Milan in May and Rome in September. It was hosted by the Chair of Musicology of the Technische Universität Dresden and co-organized by the Domaine de Musicologie of the Université de Fribourg, the Centro Studi Pergolesi in Milan and the Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini in Jesi. Unfortunately, the host himself, Hans-Günter Ottenberg, was unable for health reasons to attend the conference, and was represented by Wolfgang Mende, who delivered his paper by proxy and watched over every organizational detail.

Before the opening session brief greeting speeches were addressed to the audience by Thomas Bürger (Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden), Matthias Klinghardt (Technische Universität, Dresden) and Claudio Toscani (Centro Studi Pergolesi, Milan). Vincenzo De Vivo (Fondazione Pergolesi Spontini, Jesi) recalled the efforts of the Pergolesi Foundation in the past and especially in the celebration year 2010.

After the greetings, the first session, chaired by Claudio Toscani (Università degli Studi di Milano), focused on the transmission of Neapolitan sacred music in central Europe. Janice B. Stockigt (University of Melbourne) reviewed Italian compositions in the collection of the Dresden Catholic church (now in the Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek of Dresden) from the viewpoint of a privileged source: the catalogue compiled under the supervision of Johann Georg Schürer in 1765. Lists of Pergolesi sources (with their present call numbers) and of all Italian composers mentioned in the catalogue provided stimulating material for discussion and further research. In my contribution (Claudio Bacciagaluppi, Université de Fribourg), I examined central European sources as evidence against the authenticity of the 'third version' of Pergolesi's Mass in D, and of the *missa postuma* in F. In early reception, before the 1752 *querelle des bouffons*, copying shops in Naples produced spurious pasticcio-parodies drawing on authentic works, while Pergolesi himself appears to have applied parody techniques only to single movements, mainly in newly composed works. The extensive research of Jóhannes Ágústsson (Reykjavík) in the Dresden State Archive has added considerably to our knowledge of Giovanni Alberto Ristori's time at the court of Naples (1738–1740). His role was that of an unofficial diplomat, taking advantage of his position as Queen Maria Amalia's music teacher.