

## Tommaso Giordani: Sonatas Op. 30

### Antonin Kammell: Sonata in D Major, Op. 1, No. 1

#### Luchkow-Stadlen-Jarvis Trio

**Tommaso Giordani**, born in Naples in 1738, was a member of a large singing musical family, (Tommaso and his dancer brother Francesco were the only non-singers; the composer Giuseppe Giordani seems to be unrelated). After travelling Europe (via performances in Ancona, Pesaro, Graz, Frankfurt, Salzburg, Amsterdam, and Paris), they were invited to London to perform at Covent Garden. The family stayed in London from 1753-1756, performing operas and burlettas, including one of Giordani's early stage works, "*La Comediante fatta Cantatrice*" (1756).

The family settled in Dublin from 1764, performing at Dublin's Smock Alley Theatre, where Tommaso acted as Musical Director from 1764-1767, becoming one of the leading musicians in the Irish capital. During his tenure at Smock Alley, he co-produced the first *opera seria* to be performed in Ireland, "*L'eroe Cinese*" by Giuseppe Bonno (1711-1788), as well as launching his own career as an opera composer. He returned to London in the late 1760s and by 1770 was composing and directing productions for the Italian Opera at the King's Theatre. He returned to Dublin in 1783, where he spent the remainder of his life, establishing the short-lived "English Opera House" before becoming Music Director of the Theatre Royal, Crow Street in 1788.

Giordani composed many works for the stage, both operas and insertion arias for other composers' productions, songs for the pleasure gardens, solo songs, concertos, sonatas, trios, quartets, keyboard pieces, teaching pieces, an oratorio "Isaac" (1767), and a Te Deum (1789) upon George III's recovery from illness. Giordani's final opera, "The Cottage Festival", was produced at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, in 1796. Most of his operas and songs exist now only in keyboard scores, his orchestrations unfortunately having been lost, as is his oratorio and the Te Deum setting. He counted a number of the aristocracy among his many students; his most famous pupil being the pianist and composer John Field who made his professional debut in 1792 at one of Giordani's public "Rotunda" concerts. Respected in both London and Dublin as a talented composer and inventive orchestrator, Giordani's best works are the ones that perhaps have a hint of the operatic footlights in their melodies. He died in Dublin in 1806, and perhaps his influence lived on through his pupil John Field and the composers Field later influenced: Chopin, Schumann, and Brahms. Although occasionally attributed to other composers, Tommaso Giordani's most famous composition is undoubtedly "*Caro Mio Ben*", composed in 1783 for one of his favourite singers, the Neapolitan castrato Giusto Tenducci (ca.1735-1790). Interestingly, Tenducci moved to Ireland to sing opera at Smock Alley under Giordani's direction, and later composed and sang operas at the Theatre Royal, again with Giordani.

At first sight, Tommaso Giordani's 'Three Sonatas for the Piano-Forte or Harpsichord with Obligato Accompaniments for the Flute or Violin, and Viola da Gamba or Tenor', Opus 30, present something of a mystery. The title page lists the gamba ahead of the tenor (a common term for viola in late 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England), suggesting that the viol was the composer's preferred choice of instrument. However, they were published around 1782, a period in which the gamba had all but fallen from mainstream interest. These are the only works in Giordani's output written specifically for the viola da gamba and this choice of instrumentation cannot have benefitted sales of the publication (though it must be noted that Giordani published the sonatas in such a way as to permit their performance as unaccompanied keyboard pieces).

Indeed, period newspaper advertisements for these sonatas omit all mention of the viola da gamba. Given the scarcity of popular interest in the gamba, why then did Giordani publish these sonatas as principally for that instrument? An answer can be found in the dedication that appears on the title page which reads 'Composed and most humbly dedicated to the Right Honorable Lady Viscountess Althorp'. Peter Holman (*Life After Death: The Viola da Gamba in Britain*, 2010) identifies this as Lady Lavinia Spencer, (née Bingham; 1762–1831); a well-educated noblewoman who married into the powerful Spencer family on 6th March 1782, and a direct ancestor of the current Earl Spencer and his sister Princess Diana (and consequently Princes William and Prince Harry). Since Giordani's sonatas were published that same year and declare her full title, rather than her name in the dedication, it is tempting to speculate that they were published (if not as a simple attempt to win the approval of one of the most powerful families in England) in celebration of this marriage or even commissioned as a wedding gift.

It is interesting to observe that the melody of the "Caledonian" middle movement of Sonata II bears a passing resemblance to the tune "The Lass of Peaty's Mill". New words to this old melody had been written by the poet Allan Ramsay [1686-1758] and published in William Thomson's "*Orpheus Caledonius*" in 1725/33. If Giordani did in fact use a form of this well-known tune as his inspiration for this movement, Ramsay's words would have fit very well as an appropriate wedding tribute, especially as George, 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl Spencer apparently fell "out of his senses" with the intelligent, talented, and attractive Lavinia. "*The Lass of Peaty's Mill, So bonny, blyth and gay, In spite of all my skill, Hath stole my heart away...*" and, perhaps more tellingly, "*Without the help of Art, Like Flowers which grace the Wild, She did her Sweets impart, When e'er she spoke or smil'd. Her Looks they were so mild, Free from affected Pride, She me to love beguil'd, I wished her for my Bride.*"

Certainly, Giordani appears to have had some musical or social connection with Lavinia's family, the Bingham, possibly through her father, Charles Bingham, 1st Earl of Lucan. Bingham lived in Ireland for much of his life and it may have been there that Giordani first met or became aware of him. Indeed, in 1774, he published 'Six Easy Solos for the German Flute... humbly Dedicated to S'r Charles Bingham'. Bingham's interest in music is confirmed in the biography of controversial Eighteenth-Century socialite Anne Ford, who was herself well-known as a gamba player. Ford performed in a series of private and semi-public concerts between 1758 and 1760 and lists 'Sir Charles Bingham (flute)' among the 'AMATEURS' alongside one 'Lord Bateman (viol di gamba)' and Ford herself. They appear to have played on occasion with the 'professors' 'Stephen Paxton (violoncello)' and 'Thomas Arne (harpsichord)' and so would have been exposed to high-level music-making.

While little is known about Lavinia's musical education, we do know that she played the gamba and like all young noblewomen was likely exposed to music making from a young age. Charles Bingham's musical social life make it likely that he would have encouraged Lavinia to pursue music as a pastime. On her marriage into the Spencer family, the viola da gamba would certainly not have been an unfamiliar instrument to her new in-laws. Lavinia's mother-in-law Margaret Georgiana, Countess Spencer, was a keen gamba player and Holman points out that the Althorp estate records show receipts to the Countess Spencer's household from one George Gardom for 'Putting a Viol da Gamba in Order' (12th March, 1772), for a set of strings (15th July 1772), and for a 'Bow for the Viola da Gamba (14th January 1775). If the Opus 30 Sonatas were written for Lavinia, she must have been a highly accomplished young player.

It is clear that in composing these sonatas Giordani has attempted to appeal to both players of the gamba and the viola. The result is a part that lies quite comfortably 'under the hand' on the viola but, in places, is fiendishly difficult on the gamba. Almost every sonata requires that the gamba player is comfortable playing in very high positions. The first movement of Sonata I reaches F#5 —the top line of the treble

stave and far beyond the frets on the gamba—while the first movement of Sonata II sees the gamba and violin playing a two-bar passage in octaves (one of Giordani's favoured musical figures) at this same *tessitura*. These sonatas stand out from Giordani's other instrumental works due to their high level of sophistication in the development of melody and the interplay of the instruments. Far from being an accompaniment to the piano, the gamba part (along with the violin) is a virtuosic solo voice within a texture in which the distinction between soloist and accompaniment is much less clearly delineated. The violin and the gamba parts play in duet or in unison at the octave more often than they form melody and accompaniment. Indeed, the gamba introduces themes within the texture as often as the violin, usually in conversation with the fortepiano. The fortepiano is given both continuo and solo roles, the latter often introducing new melodic material and featuring significant passages of virtuosic, piano concerto-like figuration.

Giordani excels in his slow movements, all of which are more like miniature tone poems. One can easily see where John Field might have received inspiration for his Nocturnes. The slow movements of the first and second sonatas are introduced by the gamba while the faster outer movements often feature a countermelody in the gamba part which is quickly handed between instruments, spotlighting each in turn, more in the manner of a symphony *concertante* than a "trio". The result is a constant flux in dominance between the three instruments, each providing commentary on the other. The equality of the instruments is reflected in both the general *tessitura* of the gamba part and the level of virtuosity it requires. There is precedent for this level of virtuosity in viol writing at the end of the Eighteenth Century in the music of Carl Friedrich Abel. It is very possible that Giordani knew Abel and became involved in his concert series with JC Bach (the 'Bach-Abel' concerts in London). Certainly Giordani's music was played in these concerts, as this fact was used by his publishers to advertise their editions. Giordani must have been acquainted also with Abel's gamba sonatas, which occasionally require the gambist to play so high that the player's fingers must be placed beyond the end of the fingerboard.

With the viola da gamba forming a central musical interest in Margaret Georgiana's household at Althorp, it is not surprising that one of the few remaining copies of Giordani's Opus 30 sonatas (in this case only the keyboard part) survives in the collection of her daughter, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, now stored at Castle Howard in Yorkshire. This may have been passed down directly from Countess Spencer's library at Althorp, begging the question: what else might Lavinia and Countess Spencer have played on the viol? Given the general dearth of material being published for gamba at this time, Peter Holman suggests that they may have adapted music for violin, viola, or 'cello for performance on the gamba.

One candidate for this use are the trios of the Bohemian composer, **Antonín Kammell** (1730-c. 1785). Born in Běleč, a village outside Prague, he arrived in London in 1765 and was part of JC Bach and Abel's social circle. On 6th May 1768, not long after his arrival, his music was featured in one of the Bach-Abel concerts at Almack's Assembly Rooms. He seems to have been close to Bach (the two apparently performed frequently together), and possibly even studied with him. Thereafter, his name featured heavily in the Bach-Abel programmes and his quartets were published along with those of Bach and Abel. Kammell must have been well acquainted with the range and technique of the viol and Holman points out that, in a letter to his patron, Count Weldstein on 20th October 1766, he mentions six solos (now lost) 'for the Viola da gamba, which start in a very decorative way'. Since Abel himself often played viola parts, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the Spencers may have done so as well with Kammell's trios. The Althorp records show that the Spencers owned some Trios by Kammell as well as his op. 6 Nottornos. Kammell also dedicated his second set of six string quartets, Op. 7 [1770/71 or 1775] to Georgiana, Countess Spencer.

Interestingly, Kammell's early works, including his Notturnos and Trios for two violins and continuo, feature a very low 2nd violin part. Low enough, in fact, to allow them to be performed on the viol. The Trio featured here, Op. 1 No. 1, is typical of Kammell's writing. It is quintessentially *galant* and demonstrates the composer's talent for melody. While occasionally high, its range suits the gamba well and the few chordal passages are easily accomplished. For viol players such as Lavinia and her mother-in-law Margaret Giorgiana Countess Spencer who may have been accustomed to performing viola and even violin parts on the gamba, playing in high positions may not have been particularly daunting. Surrounded by the latest, fashionable music and with access to the teaching of the best musicians in the country, Lavinia and her mother-in-law may well have been highly accomplished amateur players, keeping the viola da gamba alive and active perhaps into the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century.

Sam Stadlen & Michael Jarvis