

Evidence for an unknown Passion Oratorio by Antonio Lotti

Ben Byram-Wigfield
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Abstract

This article describes the arias contained in an 18th-century manuscript of collected works by Antonio Lotti:– Berlin Staatsbibliothek (Mus.ms. 13195). It identifies the works from which several of the arias were culled, and suggests the possibility of a hitherto unknown Passion oratorio by the composer.

Introduction

A manuscript in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (D-B: Mus.ms. 13195) contains 39 arias for various voices, with string and continuo accompaniment, and is titled *‘Musica di diversi oratorii dell Signor Antonio Lotti’*. It is on Venetian paper from the early 18th century, and the hand may even be an autograph. Stylistic idioms in the music affirm the attribution.

A remark in the catalogue entry states: “Contrary to the title on the cover, the volume contains both spiritual and secular arias, the latter probably taken from operas or secular cantatas.” It also points out that some of the sheets have been bound in the wrong place: Folios f. 50-52 (including 51a) are incorrectly integrated and actually belong between f. 48 and f. 49.

Digital images of the manuscript are available online¹, and so re-ordering the pages of the PDF to obtain the correct order is easy enough. However, once this is done, the arias are now in a different order from that of the RISM catalogue, with N°s 22 and 23 (*Quel Dio che dal più basso centro* and *La vedren forse fra poco*) moved before aria 20 (*Non paventar bell’ alma raggio di luce*) (see Table 1 below).

Initial identifications

The last three arias of the collection (37-39) are identified on RISM as from Lotti’s secular cantata, *Bella dea che in ciel risplendi*, which exists complete in a source in Dresden (D-DI: Mus.2-L-11). However, the preceding two arias (35 and 36) are also a match for arias from that cantata.

Arias 26 and 30–34 are identified on RISM as from *San Romoaldo*, an oratorio by Lotti first performed in Rome in 1703. However, the texts of arias 27 (*Perché mai tanto rigore*), 28 (*Dura selce orrido masso*) and 29 (*L’acerbo rio dolor*) are also in the libretto of the 1703 performance, so there is no reason to exclude them from the same work.

This leaves the origin of the preceding 25 arias as yet unidentified. I have undertaken a comprehensive study of the libretti of Lotti’s operas and oratorios, in an attempt to identify the arias contained within them. Arias can usually be identified by increased

¹ <http://resolver.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/SBB0001B97D00000000>

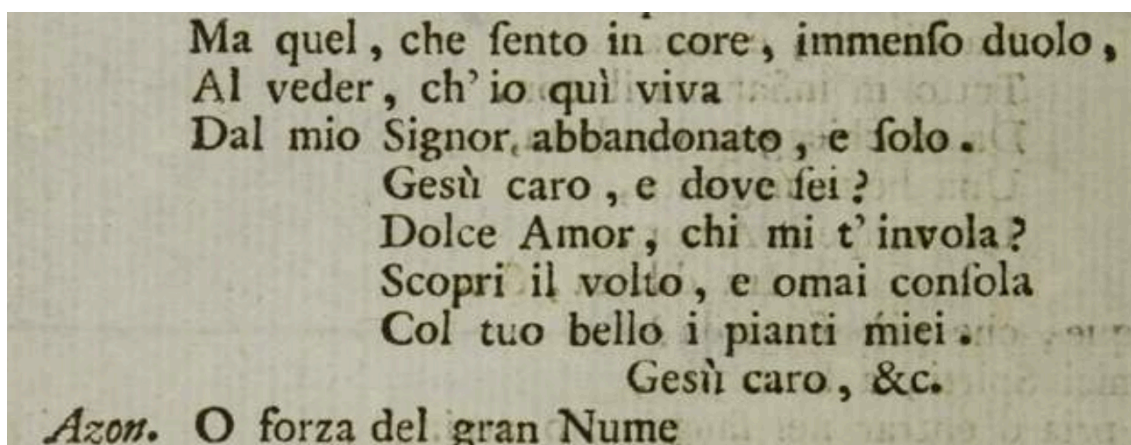


Fig. 1: Typographic identification of the aria *Gesù caro* from the libretto of *San Romaldo*.

indentation; and/or the inclusion of text showing the *Da Capo* repeat (by repeating the initial words, followed by '&c'); and/or a change in the metre or rhyming structure. There are libretti of at least eight known oratorios by Lotti (two of which are in Latin), and 27 operas. (Music survives for a small fraction: only two oratorios and seven operas exist complete; excerpts and fragments of the rest are scattered through European libraries.)

The remaining 25 arias do not match any arias identified from known libretti.

Passion themes

Reading the texts of the remaining arias, they can be split by theme fairly easily. A few speak of secular, 'romantic' love in a typically generic fashion. N° 24, *Ai tormenti alle vendette*, speaks of revenge and Giove's harsh lightning. Most strikingly, N° 14 seems to be a setting of Jesus' prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39).

<i>Padre mio, se t'è in piacere</i>	My Father, if it is your wish,
<i>quest' calice amaro altronde passi,</i>	let this bitter cup pass from me,
<i>pur si faccia il tuo volere,</i>	but your will be done,
<i>s'affrettin le mie pene a folti passi.</i>	my suffering is hastened in heavy steps.

Others also seem to relate to Passion themes. N° 9 talks of nails and thorns; N° 11 has 'rushes of the sea, made to crown the pain of the god of nature, who suffers for love'; 13 has 'Jesus is gone, under the trunk of the cross'; 15 has 'the heart of Jesus, which crosses the sea of suffering'; 16 speaks of sorrow and sinner's guilt; 18 has 'a God in mortal form, the creator tortured for the sin of the created'.

(There is perhaps a certain Venetian spin to the text, with a crown of sea rushes, instead of thorns, and 'crossing the sea' as a metaphor.)

Indeed, once you go looking for 'Passion-themed' text, it's hard to stop: N°. 5 has 'The laurels are sprinkled with blood and sweat, and the victory is only in the garland of glory, the woven palm'. Could these arias be the remnants of a hitherto unknown Passion Oratorio by Lotti?

N°.	Title	Source/Theme	Scoring
1	Da sinistra è un prato molle	Secular	A, vla, ob (2), bc
2	Se la plebe de sensi congiura	Secular	A, bc
3	S'altro non vuoi ch'amor	Secular	A, vln, vlc, bc
4	Nel penar sarai beata	Secular	S, bc
5	Per varco di rose	Passion?	A, ob, vln, vla, bc
6	Cari stenti affanni	Secular	A, 2 vln, vla, bc
7	Se lontana è la speranza	Secular	T, vlc, bc
8	Specchia quel viso tenero	Secular	S, vlc, bc
9	Se tanto godi	Passion?	S, vla, ob, bc
10	Vano amor mondo nemico		A, bc
<i>5 blank pages</i>			
11	Giunchi voi del mar fattura	Passion	S, vln, vla, bc
12	Se il sommo tuo cordoglio	Passion	T, 2 vln, 2 vla, bc
13	Manca il conforto	Passion	S, vln, bc
14	Padre mio se t'è in piacere	Passion	T, vln, vla, bc
15	Cor di Gesù che varchi	Passion	S, bc
16	Quel sudor ch'è porto del dolor	Passion	A, 2 vln, 2 vla, bc
17	Ruminando vada l'ira		B, vla, bc
18	Pecco la creatura	Passion	A, vln, bc
19	L'ultimo mio respiro	Passion	S, 2 vln, bc
<i>1 blank page</i>			
22	Quel Dio che dal più basso centro		S, 2 vln, bc
23	La vedren forse fra poco ravveduta	Passion?	T, 2 vln, vla, bc
20	Non paventar bell' alma raggio di luce		S, bc
21	A pugnar per la sua fede	Passion	S, 2 vl, vla, bc
24	Ai tormenti alle vendette	Giove	A, vl, vla, bc
25	Credea forse colle straggi **	Passion?	T, 2 vln, bc
26	Alla patria o quanto è ingrato	S Romoaldo	S, bc
27	Perché mai tanto rigore	S Romoaldo	A, bc
28	Dura selce orrido masso	S Romoaldo	S, 2 vln, vla, bc
29	L'acerbo rio dolor **	S Romoaldo	A, bc
30	Deh lasciatemi ch'io pianga **	S Romoaldo	A, bc
31	Se la pena vicina ch'io sento	S Romoaldo	A, vl, vla, bc
32	Col dolce del suo ben	S Romoaldo	S, bc
33	Gesù caro e dove sei **	S Romoaldo	A, 2 vln, vla, bc
34	Vieni o sonno e i mesti lumi	S Romoaldo	S, 2 vln, vla, bc
<i>2 blank pages</i>			
35	Non è amor ma il mio	Bella dea che in ciel risplendi	S, vln, bc
36	Prima oh Dio del mio morire **	Bella dea che in ciel risplendi	S, bc
37	Sempre è il core degl'amanti	Bella dea che in ciel risplendi	T, 2 vln, bc
38	Nutre in sen tenero affetto	Bella dea che in ciel risplendi	A, 2 vln, vla, bc
39	Taci spera che bellezza	Bella dea che in ciel risplendi	S,T, 2 vln, bc

Table 1: List of arias in Mus.ms. 13195.

The MS has some folios bound in the wrong order: these are shown in **Bold** in their correct position, but with the current (incorrect) ordinal number.

Titles marked with 2 asterisks are those that start on the same page as the preceding aria.

N° 19 exhorts God to receive a dying soul:

<i>L'ultimo mio respiro</i>	My last breath
<i>col cor in un sospiro</i>	with the heart in a sigh
<i>dono a quel Dio che adoro.</i>	I give to the God that I love.
<i>Aloro più non mi vesta</i>	Laurel? will no longer clothe me
<i>se già perdo la salma,</i>	if I lose the body,
<i>Prendi ti, oh Dio, quest' alma</i>	Take, O God, this soul
<i>nell' estrema agonia, che spiro, e moro.</i>	In extreme agony, that I sigh and die.

However, one point against this argument is that the 'Gethsemane' aria is for a Tenor, and this 'Last Words' aria is for a Soprano, so they are clearly not sung by the same 'character'. Such a final prayer could be uttered by anyone confronted by death, of course.

Order and disposition

Another consideration is the order of the arias in the volume, and the disposition of blank pages. The arias from *Bella dea che in ciel risplendi* are grouped together at the end of the volume, preceded by two blank pages. Immediately before that comes the contiguous 'block' of arias from *San Romoaldo*. The majority of the supposed Passion arias also fall into a group preceded by blank pages: N°s 11–21. Within that block, two arias are not particularly germane to the theme: N°. 20 has fairly generic words of comfort, albeit with some talk of faith and the heavens; but N° 17 is concerned with wrath and hatred, which seems incongruous (unless within the portrayal of *Lucifero*).

The first group of arias in the collection (N° 1 to 10) mostly deal with secular concerns, though two of them (5 and 9) are also contenders for a Passion oratorio, with their texts describing nails and thorns, and the victory of the palm (as cited above).

One curiosity is that N° 25 (*Credea forse colle straggi*) talks of Gesù defending life in death, though it follows on the same page from *Ai tormente alle vendette*, which calls on Giove's arrows for vengeance.

Style and idiom

There can be little doubt that the music in this collection is Lotti's. The last five arias, from *Bella dea che in ciel risplendi*, can be matched to the complete source. The arias from *San Romoaldo* contain settings of text only found in the 1703 Rome libretto, and not found in libretti of other performances (which may have been by other composers).

The music of *L'ultimo mio respiro* has many similarities to the Soprano aria *Recordare* in Lotti's concertante Requiem — indeed, the instrumental introduction is all but identical. The strings in *Giunchi vio del mar* also have echoes of *Quantus tremor* in the Requiem. *Cari stenti affanni* also has similar texture and harmonic structure to sections of the Requiem, such as *Quaerens me. Pecco la creatura* (N° 14) has similarities to the *Qui tollis* of the Missa Sapientiae; a structure which Lotti also uses throughout his oeuvre (e.g. the *Judicabit* section of several of his *Dixit Dominus* settings).

Coincidence and circumstance

Facts about Lotti's known oratorios might shed some light on the possibility of other oratorios that are unknown. A libretto survives for performances in Prague in 1724 of an

oratorio by Lotti, with the title *Jesus Christus in cruce pro nobis mortuus*. The entire text is in Latin, and it deals with the events after the death of Jesus, as witnessed by the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, John the Evangelist, and others (similar to Handel's *La Resurrezione*).

The music for this work is lost; but 1724 is quite late in Lotti's career for new material of this sort. After his return to Venice from Dresden in 1719, he seems to have given up writing dramatic music altogether; neither did he compose any more concertante sacred music, only creating sacred a cappella choral works in the *stile misto*. (His wife, the *virtuosa* Santa Stella, also never worked on the stage again.)

It could be that the 1724 Prague performance was a pastiche of earlier Passion music, re-worked to a Latin text of similar subject matter. A similar process had occurred (in reverse) with Lotti's oratorio *L'umilta coronata in Ester*. This was first performed in Latin in 1712 at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti, before being reworked into Italian by Pietro Pariati for the Imperial Chapel in Vienna in 1714. (The texts are 'parallel', if not identical.) No music of the Latin version of *Ester* survives, but the Latin text of several arias can be 'switched in' for their counterparts in the Italian version, having roughly the same metre.

Conclusions and summary

The alternative hypotheses are that these arias are from several different unknown oratorios; or that they are individual *cantate di camera*, only coincidentally themed. Neither of these seems satisfactory. It is reasonable that one oratorio might be lost, from which some arias survive in a collection. It would be less reasonable that several oratorios are lost, from which only one aria of each was collected together. As for *cantate di camera*: Lotti's known works of that type are typically scored for voice and keyboard/continuo only, and in the RARA structure ('double' Da Capo arias, each preceded by a recit, through-composed to one continuous text).

We are left with between 9 and 13 arias that do not correspond with the theme of a Passion oratorio. No match has been found for any of them in the libretti for Lotti's operas. The documentary evidence for public opera in Venice has been meticulously catalogued by such scholars as Eleanor Selfridge-Field, so the possibility of an unknown work there seems limited; however, Lotti's operas were also performed in several other Italian cities, and in Germany and Prague. Modifications to both the music and the text were frequently made in these performances. An outright *pasticchio* is one possibility, where a new text is fitted to existing music. A secular cantata, as suggested in the notes to the source, is another possibility. Lotti wrote several *serenate*, created as entertainment for secular celebrations. *Bella dea che in ciel risplendi* is one such, though the circumstances for its creation are unknown. Music survives for *Le stelle fortunate*, a cantata sung in honour of the Empress Elizabeth Christina's birthday, at a celebration by the Cesarean Ambassador to Venice, Giov. Batt. Colloredo. Lotti also wrote *serenate* for Venetian state occasions, such as the *Sposalizio del mare* at Ascension-tide.

Documentary evidence for any performances of lost works—be they oratorios, operas, or cantatas—is so far negligible. However, it is hoped that the information in this article may help to 'connect the dots' towards any new discoveries.

The texts of the arias in the manuscript are written out below (excluding those identified as in *S. Romoaldo* and *Bella dea*.)

1. Da sinistra è un prato molle,
ricamato di vezzo e fiori.
Dalla destra un erto colle,
tutto sterpi e pien d'horrori.
Ma in si dubia foresta
l'horror e calma ed il piacer tempesta.
 2. Se la plebe de sensi congiura
e rubbella a ragione si fa.
Esser puoi salutar cinosura
per far giuda lucente e sicura
alla naufraga volontà.
 3. S'altro non vuoi ch'amor,
ho appunto in petto un cuor
ch'è nato per amar.
Amerò ma un solo oggetto
così amabile e perfetto
che mi faccia vaneggiar.
 4. Nel penar sarai beata
struggerati in dolce ardor.
Lieta amante riamata
da più nobile amator.
 5. Per varco di rose
salir non si può.
Di sangue e sudori
s'innaffian gl'allori
e sol la vittoria
nei serti di gloria
le palme intreccio.
 6. Cari stenti affanni beati
Paradisi dell' anima amante,
non mi fate cotanto languir.
Vi credei già tiranni spietati,
ma sott' ombra di fiero semblante,
poi mi fatte per gioia morir.
 7. Se lontana o la speranza
così tosto a che penar.
Un momento di diporto
non t'allunga il caro porto,
nè ti può far traviar.
 8. Specchia quel viso tenero
dentro quest' onda mobile,
ch'è fonte del piacer.
Vedi come si pallido
s'ereso e sangue e squallido
che scorgo appena e venero
qualche vestiggiu nobile
del volto tuo primier.
 9. Se tanto godi
fra spine e chiodi
con quest' amor,
Perché non speri
più lieta vita,
dà me ferita
con strali d'or.
 10. Vano Amor, mondo nemico,
male dico l'arte vostra ed il poter.
Purché sia da voi disciolto
mi contento d'esser stolto,
nè mi curo di saper.
- Blank Pages*
11. Giunchi voi del mar fattura
coronate il suo dolor.
Questi e il dio della natura,
questi soffre per amor.
 12. Se il sommo tuo cordoglio
doni a questi miei tormenti,
getti il dolor.
Nel più folto di mie pene
di passion già tutto spoglio
piangerà il cor.
 13. Manca il conforto isviene il core
nè lena ha più la voce.
Or che manca Gesù Amore
sotto il tronco della croce.

“Del Sig. Anto Lotti” is written here, suggesting the start of something, though the previous aria is on the recto of the same sheet.

14. Padre mio, se t'è in piacere
quest calice amaro altronde passi,
pur si faccia il tuo volere,
s'affrettin le mie pene a folti passi.
15. Cuor di Gesù che varchi,
con l'occhio del saper,
Il mar del tuo patir,
deh, soffri in pace,
Questi affannosi incarchi
deggiono a te piacer.
Già ch'è sol tuo gioir
quel ch'a Dio piace.
16. Quel sudor ch'è parte del dolor,
il core umano in colpa.
Protervo il peccator
non ha punto rossor della sua colpa.
17. Ruminando vada l'ira
nuove foggie ai spettri ai scempi.
L'odio vostro che delira
mi vuol crudo e vi vuol empi.
18. Peccò la creatura
e per un tal error
soggiace il creator
alla tortura.
A misura dell' offeso
e l'oggetto penitente,
per placar un Dio ch'è l'esso
prende un Dio mortal natura.
19. L'ultimo mio respiro
col cor in un sospiro
dono a quel Dio che adoro.
Alloro più non mi vesta
segia perdo la salma,
Prendi ti, oh Dio, quest' alma
nell' estrema agonia, che spiro, e moro.

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22. Quel Dio, che dal più basso centro
del nulla abietto al mondo ti cercò,
Almen se lo detesti
sue leggi se calpesti
esponi la cagion in cosa ei t'olfraggio.
23. La vedren forse fra poco
raveduta del suo errore,
abiurar la fè di Christo.
E degl' Idoli all' onore
noi farem d'un alma aquisto.
20. Non paventar bell' alma
raggio di luce eterna
splende nel ciel per te.
Tu schiererai gl'errori
di chi ora foschi orrori
vive di falsa fè.
21. A pugnar per la tua fede,
tu m'assisti
o caro Dio,
ch'io non bramo altra mercede
che sacraisti
l'Amor mio.
22. Ai tormenti alle vendette,
già s'accinge questo cor,
mi dia Giove, aspre saette,
tutte armate di rigor.
23. Credea forse colle straggi superar
un alma forte,
Ne sapea ch'ella potea
da Gesù sempre difesa trovar
vita nella morte.