



## Di divina pazzia, Amore è dono

«[Socrates] *The greatest goods come to us from madness*»  
Plato, *Phaedrus*

Eric Dodds quoted these words in his important essay *The Greeks and the Irrational*. He certainly did not mean to say that abandoning oneself to madness is better than being sensible; instead, he argued that man, being powerless, is subject to the manifestations of ‘divine fury’, alterations of normal psycho-physical conditions, of divine origin, that Plato distinguishes in: prophetic fury, ritual fury, poetic fury and erotic fury. Each of these *furors* is inspired by a divinity; the erotic one by Aphrodite and Eros. Plato recognises the divine’s intervention especially in the fourth type: man is not aware of the reasons for which he has been chosen; he accepts it without question, letting himself be completely overwhelmed by the otherworldly. Eros, moreover, is not only the moment in which the two natures of human beings, the divine and the animal, converge, but it also drives the soul toward satisfying supernatural experiences; it represents the means by which man can aspire to his full realisation.

If we look at the arias proposed this evening through the eyes of the glaucopid owl, we catch a glimpse of man's evolution: from the feral state, mirroring his animal inheritance, in the grip of uncontrolled excitement provoked by erotic impetus (the sorceress Melissa in *Amadigi di Gaula*), to the attainment of the suave otherworldly bliss for which man has always yearned (Almirena in *Rinaldo*).

Actually, this evolutionary process can find its beginning only in the alteration of Ruggiero's sobriety, in ‘Sol da te, mio dolce amore’ (*Orlando furioso*, 1727); he has been administered a love potion by the sorceress Alcina. Vivaldi depicts the paladin's bewitchment with an instrumental accompaniment that is, to say the least, significant: ‘*violini sordini*’ and with the bass ‘*1 violone con Arco, Violette, e bassi Pizzicati, Senza Cembali*’, on which rests a virtuoso flute *traversiere*, a rarity in opera arias of this time. The use of mutes is attested in Europe as early as the 17th century; in Venice, in particular, it seems that two silencers existed for string instruments: the ‘*sordina*’, probably made of wood, and the ‘*piombi*’. The atmosphere they produced was imbued with an ethereal, celestial, unattainable sweetness, which is enhanced by the absence of the metallic sound of cymbals also contributes. Vivaldi also uses this strategy in other arias, such as *Sovente il sole* from *Andromeda Liberata*.

Unrequited love - as we know - blinds reason: Orlando goes mad on seeing Angelica with Medoro; the sorceress Melissa in *Amadigi di Gaula* (1715) does not accept Amadigi's denial and is ready to make war on Oriana, the object of the hero's desire. And it is precisely a direct confrontation with her rival that the sorceress seeks with the aria ‘*Desterò dall'empia Dite*’: she hurls maleficent spells; she sets the Harpies against her, they who dwell in the infernal city. The music, too, seems to imitate a battle cry: the trumpet and oboe exchange ascending arpeggios that incite the charge, in addition to the excitement expressed by the short, repeated incisives of the strings.

After the fury and the storm, after the disappointment, comes the self-pity of a broken heart singing ‘*Sì dolce è 'l tormento*’, a strophic aria by Claudio Monteverdi published by Carlo Milanuzzi

in *Quarto scherzo delle ariose vaghezze* (Venice, 1624). The tormenter seems to be an *aoidos* or a troubadour from Provence who wanders and sings of his amorous troubles; he prefers torment to ‘*speme fallace*’. The ‘*dolce tormento*’ finds its musical realisation in the characteristic initial descending trend. To conclude, a prophecy: that ungrateful soul, which did not feel the flame of love, will one day regret it, ‘*languente*’.

“*Lascia la spina, cogli la rosa*” Leave the thorn, pluck the rose; do not wallow in your worries: seize the moment. This is what Piacere says to Bellezza in the oratorio *Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno* (1707), before the latter asks Disinganno to look at herself in the ‘*mirror of truth*’. Beauty, in fact, is persuaded to go to the ‘*palace, where Truth resides*’; after a rhetorical duel between Pleasure, Time and Disenchantment, she discovers that she is deformed and, having caught the deception, can now ascend to the Heaven of God.

Thus, from the feral state, man, through many multiple experiences of Eros, turns his feelings of love towards what allows him to fulfill himself completely. One perceives this state of bliss from the aria ‘*Augelletti che cantate*’ from *Rinaldo* (1711). Almirena, Rinaldo's betrothed, sings in a pleasant spot: a bucolic little garden, inhabited by birds, rendered by recorders, joyfully conversing with each other.

A few final indications regarding the *concerti grossi* of this evening. With Opera VI by **Arcangelo Corelli**, the *concerto grosso* genre reaches its definitive codification; it was dedicated to the Elector John Wilhelm of the Palatinate and published posthumously in 1714. The fame achieved by Corelli throughout Europe meant that his Opera VI was among the most eagerly awaited of that era and became a ‘classic’ almost immediately. The collection is divided into two parts: the first eight concertos are ‘*da chiesa*’, for church, divided into 4 or 5 movements, while the last four are defined as ‘*da camera*’ (for private concerts) and have more movements, each named after dances (allemande, corrente, gavotte etc.). Following Stradelli and the Roman practice, Corelli divides the orchestra into ‘*concertino*’ and ‘*concerto grosso*’, and makes them dialogue: the former consists of two violins and basso continuo, the latter the rest of the orchestra.

The connecting link between **Francesco Geminiani** and Corelli is not Op. VI, but Op. V, the twelve Violin Sonatas, the last of which contains the Variations on ‘*Follia*’. From 1714 Geminiani was in London, where in 1725 he was among the founders of the Masonic lodge *Philomusicae et Architecturae Societas*. The lodge immediately raised funds through the mechanism of subscription to publish Geminiani's arrangements of Corelli's sonatas. The initiative was a great success, coming off the presses the following year, with a dedication to King George I; three years later the second part was released, with the *Concerto grosso, La follia*. Corelli's variations are ‘stuffed’ with new musical material; the more virtuosic ones are left to the concertino, while the concerto grosso either falls silent or plays musical lines composed ex novo by Geminiani.

In 1739, the twelve concertos of Op. VI by **G. F. Händel** was published in London by John Walsh; they were composed bearing in mind the model of Corelli's concertos, and they were performed to be performed during *oratorios*. The model is indeed Corelli, but Händel reworks it in his own way: sometimes the role of the concertino is entirely marginal; in other concertos, such as the fifth, he inserts an introductory French-style *overture* that Corelli never used. And in the French manner there is also the ballet that Händel inserts in *Ariodante* (1734): at the end of the first act, when Ariodante and Ginevra celebrate their imminent wedding, and at the end of the third act, to celebrate a double wedding this time. At the end of the second act, on the other hand, the good and bad dreams of Ginevra dance; disowned by her father, she is considered ‘impudent’ and therefore responsible for the death of Ariodante, who everyone believes has thrown himself into the sea.

Mattia Marcolongo  
in collaboration with



UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA  
Dipartimento di  
Musicologia e Beni Culturali