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Dolce Napoli: Approaches for performance

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Title: Dolce Napoli : approaches for performance - Recorders for the Neapolitan Baroque repertoire, 1695-1759

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Summary

This thesis examined two previously neglected topics, Baroque Italian recorders and the Neapolitan Baroque repertoire for the recorder, and then combined both aspects in an artistic outcome.

Chapter 1 presented a compilation of all Italian Baroque recorders currently extant, with comparisons of their technical qualities and information on their makers; all the details on the instruments which were studied are included in Appendix 1. This chapter showed that the twenty-seven Italian Baroque recorders that are currently extant have unjustifiably been neglected in previous studies. The aesthetic, constructional and musical qualities of all these instruments confirm that in parallel to a blossoming repertoire, there was also high-level recorder making in Italy in the Baroque period. The seven makers identified thus far are all concentrated in the north (Venice, Milan, Turin etc.), the only exception being Panormo, who was active in Naples. The materials used in the Italian recorders that were studied range from simple fruitwood to ivory, and all are finely turned on the outside and carefully designed and bored on the inside. With the data extracted from the technical information of the instruments which were studied it was evidenced that, as a whole, the bore of Italian Baroque recorders stands midway between English and German instruments, demonstrating the wish to balance a broad sound and ease of speech.

The ninety-one instrumental works and fifty-three vocal works presented in detail in Chapter 2 form a sizeable repertoire for the recorder in the Baroque period in Naples, and one which is still mostly unfamiliar to modern performers. Furthermore, two of the works discussed in the present study had been hitherto unknown. The more demanding of these Neapolitan works, which make use especially of the higher range of the recorder, are indicative of the existence in Naples of recorders that work well in the higher range, and attest to the level of technical skills of the players for which the works were composed. Only thirty of the 144 works that were listed hint at the possible need for a recorder with double holes. Considering the scarcity of recorders with double-holes extant today, this suggests that our modern expectations of how those notes should sound in order to be 'acceptable' is far from the reality of how they sounded in the eighteenth century. Stylistic traits that are observable in the Neapolitan repertoire for the recorder were described, e.g. theatrical elements such as contrasting fast/slow sections, abrupt pauses, surprising harmonic progressions; tempo indications such as *Amoroso*, *Spiritoso*, *Comodo* etc. The examples of ornamentation in the

solfeggi and in the sonatas that were included at the end of this chapter show that ornamenting was also a compositional skill that was taught and exercised. The vast majority of the Neapolitan recorder repertoire exists only in manuscript form, and this attests to the private life of the instrument in that city; but the fact that these works are dispersed in a variety of 'foreign' collections serves as proof of the popularity of the composers outside of Naples. Although the greater part of the dated works falls within the years 1724–1725, the totality of the repertoire of vocal and instrumental music is dated between 1695 and 1759. All the works are listed in detail in Appendix 2.

Chapter 3 provided a landscape for the surroundings of the music which was studied. Naples has a rich past, which has left a diverse and interesting cultural legacy. It was not only a musical capital in the eighteenth century, sought after by music lovers, but also made popular by the beauty and dramatic backdrop of its geographic location. The dichotomy created by beauty and pleasure on the one side, and turbulence and sorrow on the other, was explored by artists of the city, as well as described in the chronicles of visitors through the centuries. The recorder or "flauto" was present in the conservatories of Naples, where it was clearly distinguished from the traverso. Although the conservatories bought recorders for the students, as the expense lists presented in this chapter show, we unfortunately have no mention of the names of makers. The presence in Naples of an abundant variety of foreign musicians and *luthiers* offers us the possibility of considering that the recorders used in the city also came from abroad. Since, for example, the famous instruments by the Denners reached not only the north of Italy but also as far as China, they could have easily reached Naples. The conservatories were financially supported by various patrons, some foreign, for example, from the Low Lands; diplomats and the viceroys of Naples were also foreigners who had strong links with their own countries and who were art patrons during their Neapolitan stay. In this case, it is plausible to link Naples with instrument makers in these regions as well. A further avenue for the arrival of foreign instruments in Naples was presented by retracing Ignatio Rion's travel south. Inventory lists of aristocratic figures of the time confirm the presence of the recorder in this private realm, a fact that is corroborated by two paintings, by Giuseppe Bonito and Carlo Amalfi, which portray the recorder exactly in this setting. A review of the Baroque recorders found in the iconography of the rest of Italy, especially Venice, for traces of their design, confirmed that the depicted instruments can actually be easily linked to some of the actual instruments studied in a variety of their design profiles.

Reviewing all the information presented in the previous chapters, in view of combining all this knowledge with performance in mind, Chapter 4 confirmed the main origins of recorders for the Neapolitan repertoire: from Habsburg cities, from Venice and made in Naples. Further to those, it was noted that instruments brought to Naples by foreigners might have originated further afield, such as the instruments by Peter Bressan, among others. Reversing the order of inquiry, and looking at what the music tells us, it was possible to conclude that the majority of the repertoire can be played on (a copy of) the Panormo alto, for example, but that a few of the more technically virtuosic works would be better rendered by using an instrument with easier high notes, such as those by Jacob Denner. On further aspects of performance practice this chapter proposed that the works with strings be performed with one player to a part, for textural as well as acoustic balance. We saw that the continuo group indicated for these kinds of works varies considerably, but includes cello, double bass and harpsichord, and possibly archlute. Still, this chapter suggested that the sonatas be performed with only a harpsichord when the writing is one of equality between soprano and bass voices, and with harpsichord and cello in the works in which the bass is simpler and more Galant. On the matter of pitch in Naples, A=410–415 Hz seems to be the point where diverse sources meet, and that means that many of the recorders studied would be 'suitable'. Finally, combining the tuning found on the recorders with other relevant historical information, an adjusted form of 1/6 comma meantone was proposed to be what would work best for the performance of the Neapolitan repertoire, as a compromise demanded by the impossibilities of 'just intonation'. Last, the author's reflections on the impact of this study on her own playing made her realize that more than finding instruments for the Neapolitan repertoire that was mapped – the original quest – she discovered a world of possibilities for the performance of this music through re-evaluating her relationship with the recorder, through learning to listen to the instruments themselves, old and new.