



**Lawrence Bennett.** *The Italian Cantata in Vienna: Entertainment in the Age of Absolutism.* Publications of the Early Music Institute Series. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013. xvi + 368 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-01018-6.



**Reviewed by** Erika Quinn (Eureka College)

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## Viennese-Italian Chamber Music in Vienna

Lawrence Bennett's work of musicology focuses on Italian-language cantatas composed and performed for the Habsburg court in Vienna between 1640 and 1711. The book is clearly a labor of love for the author, who found inspiration in the topic from his dissertation research in the late 1960s. Cantatas are a secular vocal composition with an Italian text intended for one or a few solo singers accompanied by the continuo instruments only or by continuo and a few concertato instruments (p. 4). Bennett argues that between the reigns of Leopold I and Joseph I, the cantata form in Vienna evolved, growing in complexity to approach the realm of one-act opera by the 1830s.

The baroque period was an era of growing Italian cultural influence in the Habsburg lands, which appeared in architecture and other elite cultural forms, including the cantata. The cosmopolitan absolutist court exercised great power via patronage over musical culture: emperors or their representatives often assigned court musicians their positions based on nationality, with Italians composing dramatic music (opera, oratorio, or can-

tata), while Austrians were responsible for instrumental ensembles. Cantatas served as central musical components of imperial court culture, by the fact that they often served as *Gebrauchsmusik*—music composed for specific special occasions like name days, anniversaries, or birthdays. Indeed, cantatas were often performed by the imperial family on such occasions.

The book is organized into two main sections centered on each emperor's reign. Each section addresses the political and cultural milieu, composers' biographies, the repertoire and sources, and text and music in individual chapters. Bennett notes that both periods display a pattern of early innovation as the emperors appointed new court conductors, which slowly ceded to growing stagnation as composers and their ideas aged. Part 1 focuses on 1640-1705. The Italian court composer Antonio Draghi enjoyed a very close relationship to the emperor Leopold I, much as Jean-Louis Lully had enjoyed with France's Louis XIV, and he established a dominant form and style for the cantata. Many of his cantatas were for ensembles rather than solos because the imperial fam-

ily loved to perform them. For the repertoire section, the author works with fifty-three cantatas. These cantatasâ original manuscripts are described in detail with information about the paper, binding, and other minutiae. The lyrics of such cantatas often figured around romance, but there was also a philosophical tradition, which raised questions of etiquette and morality. Absolutist political style precluded cantatas from including political content, but cantatas written for academic meetings could also include philosophical debates about the nature of love. This first part is weakened by the authorâs need to flesh out a thin amount of evidence with speculation. For example, the chapter about composers includes quite a few who âmay haveâ written cantatas for the Viennese court during the period.

Part 2, which covers the period 1700-1711, analyzes 104 cantatas in terms of style, form, and the relationship of text and music. Part 2 is significantly more developed than part 1 because Bennett uses much more abundant source material. Cantata form was becoming more varied as operaâs influence grew more pronounced. The aria and recitative started to alternate, whereas in the earlier period they were strictly separated. Other new developments of the period were more varied writing for string instruments as well as more varied instrumental and vocal combinations. Dynamics and phrasing became much

more specifically noted and key became an organizing compositional principle. While these changes may be important, Bennett offers no explanation of why they occurred.

Although the authorâs fascination for the topic is evident, it is unfortunate that several serious shortcomings do not allow the reader to share his interest. The scholarship undertaken here is that of establishing the historical record by recording facts and filling in gaps in knowledge. This means that while Bennett discusses important political events, such as the Ottoman siege of Vienna, he does little to anchor these events closely to the development of the cantata form; context and data are unconnected. For example, the bookâs conclusion chronicles the arrival of Charles VI to the throne and his many broken relationships with composers but does not summarize the argument, nor even relate to it. The book also suffers from structural flaws. In deciding to treat the composersâ biographies in one chapter, the author could have elected to discuss their compositions in another chapter using parallel structure, but chose not to. Given the unfamiliarity of these figures, clearer organization would have served the reader as an aide-memoire. This book is intended for a narrow specialist audience: H-Urban readers will not learn all that much about Viennese culture from this book.

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