

Il Cavaliere Errante / Vocal Score

Composer: TOMMASO TRAETTA



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Il Cavaliere Errante (The Errant Knight), a comic-heroic drama, belongs to the last creative period of Tommaso Traetta: here he first developed the amiable side of his talent arriving to originality and acquired lightness in his musical expression. The opera is essentially a fairy tale:: a Spanish prince makes his men abduct the lady whom he is in love with, he holds her prisoner in an enchanted island, and there, with the aid of the spells of a magician, tries to convince her to marry him. The lady, however, is in love with the Errant Knight who, with the help of a good witch and with his faithful servant, is able to dissolve the incantations, free his beloved and marry her. The score is full of parodies, recitatives and virtuosic arias for all the characters and presents some topoi used by his successors, from Mozart to Rossini.

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Tommaso Traetta

Who is then Tommaso Traetta?

"Musician and composer of European fame": so he is described by his biographer Jörg Riedlbauer in his book "Die Opern von Tommaso Traetta," published by OLMS, in which the author collected the results of a considerable research he carried out as part of his Doctorate degree requirements.

Tommaso Traetta was born in Bitonto on March 30th, 1727, and was baptized in this town's cathedral (Chiesa madre) the 3rd of April of that year. He was orphaned of the father when he was seven years old. When he turned 14, he moved to Naples and joined the seminary, receiving the clerical tonsure, the first level needed to become a priest, but he soon discovered his passion for music; he therefore left the theological studies to embrace the musical ones under the guidance of the instructors Francesco Durante, Nicola Porpora and Leonardo Leo, obtaining the diploma of Choirmaster from one of the conservatories of that city. From this initial point started his artistic career as a musician and proficient composer for the most important theaters and Courts of his times, reaching even the far Saint Petersburg.

He worked for seven years (1758-1765) in the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, where the first attempts of the melodrama reform had started.

Prolific composer, he composed more than forty operas (Ippolito ed Aricia, i Tindaridi, Le Feste di Imeneo, La Pace di Mercurio, Le Serve Rivali, Didone abbandonata, Olimpiade, Zenobia, etc.), of which the original scores are in archives and libraries in Europe and America.

In the Parma period he also travelled to Vienna (where there were performances of Armida and Ifigenia in Tauride), Mannheim (Sofonisba), Munich (Siroè) and other important musical centers.

In Vienna he met Christopher Gluck. A strong bond of friendship and respect was soon born among them, so much that Gluck directed in Florence Traetta's Ifigenia in Tauride and Traetta inserted a piece from Gluck's Orfeo ed Euridice in his own opera Il Cavaliere Errante.

At the beginning of 1766 he was hired as a choirmaster at the Ospedaletto of Venice and here he created – by contract – his sacred music compositions: Oratorio Rex Salomon – Miserere - Messa in Do Maggiore - Alma Redemptoris Mater – Regina Laetare – In te Domine Speravi – Sicut Sol and

other motets and antiphons. To this sacred music corpus we have to add the two Stabat Mater, true masterpieces. First of all his Naples version of Stabat Mater, an early work composed between 1751 and 1755 which has found a great appreciation among the local musicologists, as it's proven in an essay by Adelmo Damerini published under the title "A precious page of Sacred Music of the 1700s: Tommaso Traetta's Stabat Mater." The other Stabat Mater, written in Munich around 1767 and only recently discovered, in 1994, belongs to his mature years and represents a true masterwork. The two compositions are therefore distinguished by the place where they were composed and performed: the early one labeled as "versione Napoli" (Naples version) and the later one "versione Monaco di Baviera" (Munich version).

In 1768 he transferred to Saint Petersburg, at the court of Catherine the Second, where he remained until 1775. In this period he completes the composition of the opera Antigone, considered one of the major works of the 1700s and still performed and appreciated in our times. Many are the operas and compositions that belong to the Saint Petersburg's period. For various reasons, the study and research activities on this time span unfortunately have not been able to be completed appropriately. It's our wish that in a near future, with a new trend of cultural exchanges, the precious and unseen material related to Traetta will finally see the light.

It is here, at the court of Catherine the Second, that the 40 years old Traetta met the Swedish Elizabeth Sund, who followed him to Italy, as a faithful friend, upon his return to Italy, accompanying him under this guise until their wedding, celebrated with the Catholic rite in Venice in 1777. From this union was born a son, Filippo (Philip).

Venice became the chosen city for Tommaso Traetta, and there he was buried, upon his death on April 6, 1779, in the church of S.Maria dei Derelitti.

Philip followed the father's footsteps. In 1799, due to the revolutionary movements of Naples, he was forced to move to America, where he founded music schools in Boston, New York and finally Philadelphia. Philip Trajetta, as he became to be known, was very respected and appreciated for his moral and cultural qualities (he knew and spoke properly four languages) and became friend and counsellor of various American presidents.