

PREFACE

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY had problems with Geminiani, not least with his name: “Geminiany”, “Germiniani”, “Jeminiani”, “Gimeniani”, “Geminiary”, and even “Mr. Jammaniana” were some of the attempts to pin down a much-admired but elusive genius in their midst. His music proved in the end almost as intractable as his name — initial admiration became more dilute as Geminiani failed to behave as was expected of a star-pupil of Corelli — indeed, he was even reluctant to give public concerts at all. Then there was general suspicion at his open admission that he preferred dealing in paintings to being a musician. And when he turned to writing treatises, public bafflement was complete.

Geminiani himself compounded the problem; Tartini described him as “furibondo” (presumably meaning as a performer), and Sir John Hawkins noted delicately the “versatility of his temper”. His unwillingness to appear in public concerts was overcome only, Burney acidly pointed out, when forced by circumstances and he even demurred over playing at Royal command unless Handel were recruited to accompany him (Handel agreed). Throughout his life he valued his independence, turning down a pension from the Prince of Wales and preferring to support himself by art dealing. He was also, it now appears, fiercely litigious — two essays in the present volume provide new evidence of his legal battles with employees who he felt had failed to hold to an agreement.

The conventional verdict on Geminiani’s career is that ‘he failed to fit accepted norms and therefore fell from public favour’. Today, of course, this might be construed as a measure of his genius, but his most quoted contemporaries decided that it indicated a deficiency of ambition or inspiration (or both). Although Burney once admitted to Thomas Twining that “Handel, Geminiani & Corelli were the sole Divinities of my Youth”,¹ in the end his grudging epitaph rose no higher than “[...] he was a great Master of Harmony, & very useful in his Day”. Even Hawkins, who knew and supported Geminiani

¹ Burney to Thomas Twining, 14 December 1781 in: *The Letters of Dr Charles Burney*, edited by Alvaro Ribeiro, SJ, 4 vols, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991, vol. I, p. 328.

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rather more enthusiastically than Burney, diagnosed “the want of an active and teeming imagination”.

Succeeding generations have accepted the negative verdicts of Burney and Hawkins without noting the discrepancies with other evidence. Burney’s view, for example, that Geminiani was a “bad timist” and had (according to hearsay) been demoted on this account in the Naples opera was gleefully repeated, while Mrs Delany’s first-hand report of his playing as late as 1760 has been ignored: contrary to Burney, she specifically noted “the sweetness and melody of the tone of his fiddle, his fine and elegant taste, and the perfection of time and tune”. Even she, however, subscribed to the public belief that he was 86 when in fact he was a mere 72 — yet another area where Geminiani sowed confusion. It was left to the lesser-known Charles Avison, a pupil of Geminiani, to lead an attempt to preserve and promote his mentor’s music. He swept all criticism imperiously aside:

This extraordinary Man had a Genius in all the Arts of Taste. Music, Painting, and Sculpture, were the principal Objects of his Mind; and he was sensible in them all. He spoke all the European Languages, and his Conversation was lively and entertaining to the latest of his Life time. He had seen many Courts, many Men, many Customs. After all his Long Experience, his general Sentiments were, — “That none should be elated with Praise, when unconscious of deserving it — nor too much depressed, when their Merit is neglected. — And, that the only Power of defeating a Rival, is to excel him.” Such were the Sentiments of the ingenious Geminiani. He loved the Arts, and assisted many Artists. I speak for one, and revere his Memory in this very Expression which I have often heard him repeat, — “That Truth and Simplicity are the best Criterion of the fine Arts, as they are of the good Conduct in human Life”.²

Geminiani was more international even than Handel, and his speaking “all the European Languages” was, like his art dealing, a necessity rather than a hobby. He can be traced at various periods to Lucca, Rome, Naples, Bologna, London, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Dublin, Paris, Amsterdam and The Hague, and it seems very probable (though not yet investigated) that he would also have visited his brother, who was employed as leader of the royal orchestra in Madrid. Certainly his one recommendation for a textbook on

² *Newcastle Courant*, 17 September 1768.

harmony and counterpoint — *El Porqué de la musica* by Andres Lorente³ — optimistically assumed that his English pupils would be as fluent in Spanish as himself. He was equally at home in Italy, France, Holland, England and Ireland, and in the following essays a largely geographical organisation of topics seems natural with so footloose a subject. Disappointingly for national pride, neither London nor Dublin appear to have had much musical effect on Geminiani — certainly less than the strong influence Paris had, both on his music and on its printed appearance.

However, his sheer internationalism and what was seen (in contemporary terms) as the ‘hybrid’ character of his style had the predictable effect of making him no nation’s favourite. John Potter observed in 1762 that “his taste is peculiar to himself”,⁴ and even Hawkins doubted “whether the talents of Geminiani were of such a kind, as qualified him to give a direction to the national taste” (1776). There were few attempts at critical measurement in any broader sense; William Hayes ventured a brief comparison with the obvious target, concluding that, “In short GEMINIANI may be the *Titian* in Music, but HANDEL is undoubtedly the *RUBENS*”,⁵ and only an anonymous ‘Scale to Measure the Merits of Musicians’ published in *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle* in 1776 attempted any sort of broader rational evaluation: it was noted that, although “an ingenious Frenchman”⁶ had some years previously made a table evaluating and comparing the scores for some fifty-six major painters, judging them on their composition, drawing, colour and expression, nothing similar had been attempted for composers. The criteria and score-card (given on pp. xiii-xiv) explain how an otherwise almost equal balance between Handel and Geminiani is upset by the sheer quantity of the former’s works — under “quantity published or known” Handel scores 18,

³ The full title of this treatise is *El Porque de la musica : en que se contiene los quatro artes de ella, canto llano, canto de organo, contrapunto y composicion y en cada uno de ellos nuevas reglas, razon abreviada, en utiles preceptos, aun en las cosas mas dificiles, tocantes a la harmonia musica, numerosos exemplos...* and (for the interested) it can be found in a modern facsimile edition (Alacante, Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, 2006).

⁴ POTTER, John. *Observations on the present state of music and musicians; with general rules for studying music, in a new, easy, and familiar manner; [...] to which is added, A scheme for erecting and supporting a musical academy in this Kingdom*, London, 1762, p. 54. He added in a footnote “I believe he is still alive, but if he is, he must be very old, and past doing any thing now”.

⁵ [HAYES, William.] *Remarks on Mr. Avison’s Essay on Musical Expression. Wherein The Characters of several great Masters, both Ancient and Modern, are rescued from the Misrepresentations of the above Author; and their real Merit asserted and vindicated. In a Letter from a Gentleman in London to his Friend in the Country...*, London, 1753, p. 128.

⁶ DE PILES, Roger. *Cours de peinture par principes avec un balance de peintres*, Paris, 1708; Caravaggio, interestingly, scores 16 for colour but 0 for expression.

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Geminiani only 4. Although a little partiality may be suspected when we find Jackson of Exeter scoring higher than anyone else in most categories, as a measure of contemporary taste this table offers a well-argued system for incorporating both musical and extra-musical criteria.

Geminiani has benefited surprisingly from modern technology; our first essay lists some of the many recordings that have appeared over the last 45 years and, unexpectedly, we now find a higher proportion of Geminiani's works available in facsimile editions than of any other eighteenth-century composer's output — all his treatises and almost all of his other opus numbers, some several times over; only the miscellaneous concerti (*Select Harmony* and *Unison*) and the arrangements of Corelli Opp. 1 and 3 appear to have missed the net. At the moment he is, in fact, far better represented in facsimile than in modern editions — possibly a compliment to his scrupulous insistence on fine production and accurate engraving, but a certain deterrent to modern performers.

In fact, of all the leading composers of the 18th century, only Geminiani is lacking a complete modern critical edition of his music and writings. The on-going *Geminiani Opera Omnia* is designed to fill this gap, presenting all his works, instrumental, vocal and didactic, in full critical editions, with the composer's first versions, revisions and re-workings presented consecutively by opus number, and including a full critical commentary and facsimiles, together with complete performance material for the orchestral and chamber works. The didactic treatises issued in English are accompanied by Italian, French or German translations of the period, where these exist, together with full commentaries from modern authorities. A thematic catalogue, which will complete the 17 volumes, can already be found in a beta-version online, together with a database calendar of references extracted from newspapers and periodicals published in Britain, France and Holland between 1700 and 1800 (see <<http://www.francescogeminiani.com>>). The opening and closing essays of the present volume offer two differing views on the 'Geminiani revival' which it is hoped this edition will promote — only with a more widespread circulation of his music can the idiosyncratic composer hope to meet with the necessarily unconventional performer. The final essay in particular focuses on the difficulty of finding suitable proponents and practitioners today.

For academic researchers, Geminiani's life still contains many biographical puzzles and lacunae. There are his so far undocumented travels (just recently

it came to light that he was in Bologna in 1749 signing up a young singer for London concerts), few letters and no will. Neither his patrons nor his pupils have been systematically investigated, nor the wider phenomenon of the Italian musician employed in Britain during the eighteenth century. New here are details of his Masonic activities, the complexities of his international publishing operations, his legal tussles with performers, his highly successful dealings in art-works and his fascination with Scotland. His “re-heatings” of earlier works, so derided by Veracini, are re-interpreted here in a more positive light and his constant faith in the power of teaching is underlined in the two essays on violin playing.

Dilemmas and disagreements are also beginning to appear — a sign of health in research and a symptom of “cognitive discord” to be encouraged. Was Geminiani promoting the Corellian model or disputing it? — both theories are espoused in this volume. Was he more French than Italian? Why does so little documentary evidence survive from the four years or more he spent in Paris? Is *The Enchanted Forest* more than simply an enhanced series of concertos? Are the Op. 7 concertos really Geminiani’s transformation of Rameau’s *Scenes de Ballet*? Do literary programmes perhaps lurk behind his apparently ‘abstract’ music (as with Tartini)? — we find such a hint in William Hayes’ mysterious mention of “his *historical or poetical Plans*, which, the Advocates for GEMINIANI are so fond of saying, his Concertos are built upon.”⁷

Overarching all these activities is Geminiani’s lifelong faith in the power of teaching, and the tractability of intelligent pupils — everything, in his world, could be transmitted by demonstration and example, including good taste, style, technique and musical theory. But even in his own day such faith in the improvability of musical souls was questioned; John Gregory commented in 1774:

Geminiani, who was both a composer and performer of the highest class, first thought of reducing the art of playing on the Violin with Taste to rules, for which purpose he was obliged to make a great addition to the musical language and characters[.] The scheme was executed with great ingenuity, but has not yet met with the attention it deserved.⁸

This volume therefore offers not a last word on Geminiani but a means of opening the door to further research; as with all essay collections, what we

⁷ HAYES, William. *Op. cit.* (see note 5), p. 124.

⁸ GREGORY, John. *A Comparative View of the State and Faculties of Man with Those of the Animal World*, 2 vols, London, 1774, vol. II, pp. 30–31.

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have here is a series of snapshots, rather than a rolling film. It is very unlikely that Geminiani will ever meet with unconditional endorsement — as William Blake shrewdly observed, “the tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way”⁹ — but while his music may never induce universal tears of joy, we hope these essays may rescue Geminiani from being seen solely as an obstacle to the smooth forward flow of musical history.

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⁹ Letter to Rev. John Trusler, 23 August 1799; see *Blake’s Poetry and Designs*, edited by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant, New York, Norton, 1979, p. 448.