

INTRODUCTION

Geminiani's Opus 8 *Rules for Playing in a True Taste* probably appeared in 1748, between the Opus 7 *Concerti Grossi* (which, after delays, were finally issued in February 1748)¹ and *A Treatise of Good Taste*, dated 1749, in which Geminiani referred to the *Rules* as "the last Work that I made public". The two manuals are intimately connected, a relationship made explicit in the catalogue of Geminiani's works that appeared in John Johnson's edition of *The Art of Accompaniment* where the *Treatise* is described as "the second part of the Rules".²

The place of treatises in Geminiani's work

The publication of the *Rules* marked a turning point in Geminiani's career – a change in orientation that had been in preparation throughout the 1740s. The remaining fourteen years of his life were dominated by writing about music rather than by composition itself. He was to publish eight treatises altogether in this period while his original musical output was limited to the *The Enchanted Forest* (1756), the two "unison" concertos (1761)³ and *The Second Collection of Pieces for the Harpsichord* (published posthumously in 1762). Geminiani's commitment to his pedagogical mission comes through strongly in the peroration of the *Treatise* where he declares, "the chief End I have in view, is to contribute as far as my Abilities will permit, to the Perfection of an Art that I love". It is, on the face of it, an inestimable bonus for the study of historical performance practice to have a major composer like Geminiani reflecting on the principles of good composition and stylish performance in the later stages of his career. It is important to note, however, that the point at which he started to write on these matters followed hard on the heels of a significant shift in his own aesthetic perspective. In the great *Querelle* of the first half of the 18th century between supporters of Italian and French taste, Geminiani seems to have shifted his allegiance, or at least, through his growing interest in French music, to have developed a style that was distinctively his own. Even the title of the *Pièces de Clavecin* (1743) signals a re-orientation on Geminiani's part and the Opus 5 Cello/Violin Sonatas (1746) look and sound more like Leclair than Corelli.

Nothing could alert us more to the idiosyncratic nature of Geminiani's stylistic preferences at this time than the tributes he paid to musical judgement in the *Rules* and *Treatise*. True, he displays his personal acquaintance with Arcangelo Corelli in the Preface to the *Treatise* and acknowledges that the latter's "Follia" (Op. 5, no. XII) provided something of a model for his own variations on popular melodies. But in the preface to the *Rules*, Louis XIV is portrayed as a monarch of wit and taste, while in the *Treatise*, Lully and David Rizzio end up as improbable bedfellows, viewed by Geminiani as the composers who deserve to stand in the highest regard. From this alone it would be unwise to consider Geminiani in his treatises as a wholly reliable spokesman for Italian baroque performance practice. By the mid-1740s, he seems to have developed his own *goût réuni* – a hybrid that inevitably reflects his formative years in Italy but is heavily influenced by sustained first-hand exposure to French musical culture, and coloured by a fascination with Scottish, Irish and English folk idioms. His taste, as John Potter observed in 1753, was "peculiar to himself".⁴

¹ On the dating of the *Concerti Grossi* Op. 7 see Careri p. 76 and Richard Maunder's introduction to *Geminiani Opera Omnia* vol. 6.

² *The Art of Accompaniment* (London: John Johnson, c1756).

³ *Two Concertos to be performed by the first and second Violins in Unison. The Tenors in unison with the Violoncellos & other Basses and particularly by a Harpsichord* (London: John Johnson, 1761: see *Geminiani Opera Omnia* vol. 8). The revised versions of the Op. 2 and Op. 3 Concerti appeared in 1755 (*Geminiani Opera Omnia* vols 2 and 3).

⁴ See Reception and footnote 40, below. On Geminiani's stylistic reorientation see Walls, "Ill compliments and arbitrary taste": Geminiani's Directions for Performers', *Early Music*, 14 (1986), pp. 221-35.