ITALIAN LECTURE

UNEXPLORED RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EARLY SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VENETIAN OPERA AND CONTEMPORARY MUSIC IN FRANCE AND ENGLAND

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I AM very sensible to the honour of being asked to deliver the British Academy's forty-first Italian Lecture. But it would be dishonest if I did not at once say that no musician can at present speak of his art in the period that I have chosen without experiencing a profound sense of inadequacy. Compared with parallel studies in the other arts the scant availability of texts and the paucity of worthwhile critical work would be laughable were it not so frustrating and shaming. We have—but only in very recent years—virtually complete editions of Monteverdi, Lully, and Purcell; composers who have been ranked in our art with men like Rubens, Poussin, and Wren. If, however, we look further afield—and not to do so would seem to make our assessments of the three I have mentioned rest mainly on historical hearsay—we find ourselves with a list of composers we know to have been distinguished and successful in their generation but whose work is still but dimly known even to someone who has been passionately involved in the music of the seventeenth century for over twenty years. Of course, the time-scale in musical research holds us back. At least a painting or a building is there to be examined. A single musical manuscript may take weeks of deciphering before any sort of proper assessment of its content can be started. But the fact remains that at present only a few isolated works are generally known of men like Rossi, Landi, Mazzocchi, Cavalli, Cesti, Legrenzi, Pallavicino, Cambert, Charpentier, Campra, Matthew Locke, Pelham Humfrey—to mention but some of the more obvious names. We can for the most part only guess the quality and scope of the main body of their work which still waits in obscurity on library shelves all over Europe.

The reason lies in the fact that only in the last sixty years has

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the seventeenth century been considered a worthwhile subject for musical research. At first, like most of our historical studies, it was viewed as a confirmation of the idea of Progress. And it is significant that Sir Hubert Parry, a man deeply committed to that concept, was invited in 1905 to undertake the third volume of the Oxford History of Music, one of the earliest modern studies of the period. For him the seventeenth century could only be regarded as a stepping stone to later and better things. It is perhaps fortunate that he was not asked to prepare an earlier volume where the air of lofty, if compassionate, disdain would have been even more pronounced. As it is the views expressed in his preface to the volume indicate accurately a widely held attitude towards seventeenth-century music.

The Seventeenth Century is, musically, almost a blank. . . . But this is by no means owing to neglect of the Art, or lack of musical energy and enterprise. There was fully as much activity in musical production throughout the century as at other times: and lovers of the Art were quite under the impression that the music of their time would compare favourably with that of other times, and impress those that came after as much as it impressed themselves; the event proved itself singularly short lived and intrinsically most of it seems to casual observers little better than an archaeological curiosity. . . .

It is interesting to seek for the reasons of its appearing adequate to the people of its time, while it appears so slender and inadequate to those that come after: and it is suggestive of essential but rarely comprehended facts in relation to the very nature of Art . . . to trace the manner in which the slenderest beginnings manifested during the century, served as the foundations of all the most important and comprehensive forms of Modern Art.

The idea of Progress is now generally discredited and we have come to see that the seventeenth century has something to offer in its own right. Indeed, after the ecclesiastically orientated music of the late Renaissance in which the classical ideals of balance and order were pursued to the exclusion of any attempt at emotive, personal expressiveness, the wave of new music which broke over Italy, and subsequently over Europe, in the early years of the century swept all else aside and brought in a wonderful era, one which the editors of the New Oxford History of Music have aptly called the Age of Humanism.

The desire to make music express the human condition, to reflect man's emotions rather than imitate the order of God's Universe, manifested itself in one particular tendency and one particular fact which are especially relevant to the present subject. The most effective medium for conveying emotion in

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musical terms is the human voice, and, more specifically, the solo human voice allied to expressive poetry. There was therefore a tendency for vocal music to become separated from instrumental music in a way that it had never done before. It assumed a more exalted position and most composers concerned with the new spirit in music wrote almost exclusively for it. The tendency resulted in the fact of opera—one of the few facts about any musical form which have some definite point in time. And opera, especially Venetian opera, became the siege-engine with which the new spirit broke down all musical barriers and influenced all musical styles.

I can say nothing here of the expressive nature of this music save that from the beginning it succeeded in what it set out to do and that we, in our time, can now comprehend this and recognize its effect. But there were certain rapid changes in the form after the first experimental works in Florence and Mantua which are relevant to its later influence in France and England. Opera began as a courtly entertainment both because the facilities in the way of theatre, singers, and instrumentalists were all there ready for use and also because the courts tended to be the centre of the activities of the various Accademias, societies of learning and discussion, somewhat akin to the British Academy, where new ideas would not only flourish but receive intellectual and social backing sufficient, in this case, to see them enacted.

Courtly entertainments of necessity must owe something to the Princely head who foots the bill and even if only by way of a flattering prologue or a general masque-like concluding dance the form will be restricted and inhibited. It is easy to imagine further and more stringent restrictions should the Prince decide to take a large part in the proceedings. (Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach's frustration and irritation at trying to write music for Frederick the Great's somewhat haphazard and erratic flute give a later but none the less vivid illustration of this. A singing Prince might prove a still worse hazard.)

The influence of the classically minded Accademias can also be seen in the choice of subject. Pastoral dramas such as Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido*, or Tasso's *Aminta*, as well as the classical legends of Dafne or Orfeo, were the obvious choice for a new form which, in theory, contrived to claim classical authority for its justification. It was soon found, however, that these subjects are not ideal for the expression of human emotions simply because the characters expressing them are not humanly identifiable. They certainly become involved in deeply moving

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situations, but this is only half-way towards realizing the intention behind the spirit of the new music. For it to have a chance of making its full effect we must know *who* it is that has become involved in the situation, and one only has to try to describe the character of Orpheus in words to realize that he has none. He is the embodiment of all that is beautiful and good (with, perhaps, the one slight flaw of over-riding curiosity), but he is not a person to be identified in human terms. It is not just for religious reasons that an opera on the life of Christ would be an unthinkable undertaking.

These initially inhibiting influences were overcome in a spectacularly successful way when opera, so to speak, fell on its feet in Venice where state control, combined with liberal-minded aristocratic patronage, enabled it to turn, in the best sense, professional. No other society could, or ever did, provide the freedom and security for such development. Nor could any other society at that time have attracted so great a galaxy of talented men to use the form to such freely expressive ends.

The changes were immediately apparent. Heroes and heroines like Nero and Poppea, Ulysses and Penelope, Dido and Aeneas, Paris and Helen involved listeners in their human dramas to an extent which had never before been conceived. The conditions of performance became standardized and set the pattern for all potential imitators. Theatres were built and equipped to similar design: the orchestra was no longer made up of every available court musician but established as consisting of continuo and strings, and the cast only consisted of those who would contribute in some way to the drama. Within a few years of the opening of the first public opera house in Venice in 1637 the form became famous throughout Europe. Evelyn in 1645 called it 'doubtless one of the most magnificent and expensive diversions the wit of man can invent'. It would seem reasonable to expect that with that sort of reputation opera could quite simply cross all the international barriers and become part of the musical life of every European country. In a sense it did, but no country, except perhaps Germany, took kindly to a complete foreign importation, and in France it was used as a political instrument becoming the centre of intrigue and controversy at every sort of level. That it strongly influenced French music has always been recognized, but what has never been sufficiently explored is the degree to which the opera in France, when it finally got under way, was in its debt and to what extent French taste changed or blunted its impact.

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The political aspect need concern us only marginally. After Louis XIII's death in 1643 Cardinal Mazarin, joint Regent during the minority of Louis XIV with the Queen Mother, Anne of Austria, was active in introducing Italian opera at the French court, partly to keep the Queen happy (for she had become inordinately fond of Italian music) and partly to maintain contact with the Medici and Barberini families at Florence and Rome.

The first work to be imported, in December 1645, was scarcely an opera at all. It was called a *Festa Teatrale* and entitled *La Finta Pazza* and was dressed by Giulio Strozzi, the son of Piero Strozzi who was one of the original Florentine Camerata—the group who made the first experiments in *le nuove musiche*. The music was by one Sacrati whose name and music have vanished with the piece itself. It must have been a work close in style to the early Florentine intermezzi with little of the dramatic impact we now associate with early seventeenth-century Italian opera. To judge from contemporary accounts it was notable for its decor and eccentric ballets; one of which was for ostriches attempting to drink at a fountain. Madame de Motteville, that invaluable and indefatigable chronicler of court life, was unimpressed. 'Those who know,' she wrote, 'think highly of the Italians; for me, I find that the length of the spectacle sharply diminishes the pleasure.' In the seclusion of the Palais Royal, during the following year a performance, probably of a work unstaged, entitled *L'Egisto* took place. It may possibly have been Cavalli's opera of the same name first produced in Venice in 1643 and then performed in Paris in what we now call a concert version for the Queen's pleasure. However this may be, it incurred Madame de Motteville's displeasure. She records in her diary that 'On Shrove Tuesday (1646) the Queen had performed one of her comedies in music in the little room of the Palais Royal. We were but twenty or thirty people and thought we would die of either cold or boredom.'

We only know of a few isolated occasions when opera was sung in this intimate domestic setting, but then Madame de Motteville would surely not be invited to every occasion and her somewhat deprecating reference to 'one of the Queen's comedies in music' would seem to signify that these musical occasions were fairly numerous, sufficient at any rate to create a climate of opinion about the new music. Mazarin and Anne of Austria were unpopular both at court and in Paris so that nothing they sponsored, even in the artistic field, was likely to

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meet with much general approval. When Rossi's *L'Orfeo* was given to a much larger audience in Paris in 1647 the general response can be judged from a malicious little verse which changes the opera's title from Orpheus to Morpheus.

But the enthusiasms of Queens of France are not so easily dampened and troupes of Italian actors and singers were often to be seen and heard at court. Their influence on French musicians was very slight, and the French people much preferred the comedy-ballets of Molière for which the young Lully, also imported from Florence, was soon to write dances and to dance himself.

Most of the music performed for the Queen seems to have come from the Roman and Florentine operas, works which persisted in the Pastoral tradition which I spoke of earlier. And it was in this tradition that the first attempt at French opera was made by Pierre Perrin and Robert Cambert in 1659. Indeed the work was called *La Pastorale*.

Perrin was an immodest and untalented poet who saw and took his chance of success in writing simple verses designed for music. Cambert, a pupil of the great harpsichordist Chambourières, had a growing reputation as a composer and eventually was appointed 'maistre et compositeur de musique de la Reyne Mère'.

We are fortunate in having a contemporary account of the first performance by Père Ménestrière in a book he published in 1681 entitled *Des Représentations en musique anciennes et modernes*. He began the section on *La Pastorale* by expounding the problems of setting the French language to music—a point which was argued for another 150 years. 'Until this time', he writes, 'it was always thought that our language was not capable of furnishing proper subjects for these operas, because in our theatres we had grown used to hearing nothing but Alexandrines which are more suitable for grand declamation than for singing. However, M. Perrin, having often written words for songs which our best composers set, perceived that our language was capable of expressing the most moving passions and tender sentiments, and that if one mixed a little the manner of Italian music with our style of singing one could produce something which was neither one nor the other, and yet more agreeable than both. For there are many people who cannot stand the swaggerings (*rengorgements*) of Italian music.'

Ménestrière here puts his finger on what was perhaps the major obstacle to the success of Italian opera in France. French

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taste in the seventeenth century was as fastidious as it is now and the overt expressiveness of Italian opera was too strong, too direct for comfort. And we shall see that when Lully adapted Venetian opera for Paris the same need to veneer over the emotions was a prime cause for the changes that he made in the form.

Ménestrière goes on to describe *La Pastorale* in terms which remind one of accounts of the early Florentine intermezzi. The cast consisted of a Satyr, three Shepherds, and three Shepherdesses. Their various alarms and excursions during five short acts before finally resolving their amatory problems can have been of only minimal dramatic interest.

But the piece had a considerable success. It was performed ten times at Issy, a suburb of Paris, in the house of a Monsieur de la Haye. The King heard of it and commanded that it should be performed at Vincennes before the court. Ménestrière observes that 'the Cardinal Mazarin, who has a taste for these representations. . . praised the poet, the composer and the actors giving his word that he would call on them to produce other similar works'.

This he did, but they were to have a very difficult time of it due to the malicious machinations of Jean-Baptiste Lully whose ambitions lay in the same direction and whose jealous temperament would allow no rival to stand in his way.

Meanwhile, in the following year, 1660, at the announcement of Louis XIV's forthcoming marriage to Maria Theresa, Infanta of Spain and niece to the Queen, Mazarin arranged a visit of Francesco Cavalli, the leading composer of Venetian opera and the man who perhaps above all others was responsible for its international reputation. Cavalli was reluctant to undertake the long, arduous journey to Paris, but considerable pressure was brought to bear on him and finally he agreed. He set out, taking with him the score of *Xerse*, an opera he had already produced in Venice in 1654, and with the agreement to compose a new opera for the wedding festivities on the subject of Hercules in Love. (Hercules, of course, representing the young King.)

This was probably the first occasion that opera in the latest Venetian style would have been heard in Paris, and although it met with little popular success there can be no doubt that it demonstrated to Lully a power and potential in the form which he could not have seen in any of the other Italianate importations.

Lully came to know both *Xerse* and *Ercole Amante* intimately, for he directed and provided music for the *entrées de ballets* which

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were added to each work for the festive occasion. I believe he learned a good deal from each of them. *Xerse* is a characteristically passionate Venetian piece, concerned with jealousy and rivalry. (Incidentally Handel set virtually the whole libretto, by Nicolò Minato, nearly one hundred years later, and it is fascinating to compare the two works, not least the setting of the opening lyric '*Ombra mai fù*'.) Cavalli's opera abundantly demonstrates his particular gifts for expressive recitative and he rarely, if ever, wrote more moving arias and laments. The comic scenes, too, are of an exceptionally high standard. All this Lully must have heard and noted.

Ercole Amante is an altogether different piece and quite exceptional even for Cavalli. It is conceived more in the spirit of a court masque than a Venetian opera and, responding to the grandeur of the occasion, the composer wrote large, extended double choruses in almost every scene. They are rhythmically exciting and doubtless served as a vehicle for some of Lully's dances besides giving him ideas for similar effects in his own operas later on.

The dramatic action is slow moving and even Cavalli could not produce much of characterization for the stock Gods and Goddesses who go out of their way to make the course of Hercules' love run smoothly.

One cannot imagine that he felt very happy with this, to him, old-fashioned court opera style and he certainly felt less happy still after its failure to please. His main supporter Mazarin died in the year before its production and the young Lully ran off with all the praise for his ballets when the work was finally performed. To judge from his subsequent behaviour to Perrin and Cambert Lully most probably made life very difficult for Cavalli during the work's preparation and the poor man returned to Italy in a highly depressed state, writing to Venice to say that after that experience he would compose no more operas.

But, failures or not, these two works showed the French, and especially Lully, what opera could be like. Before he could show his paces, however, Lully had to dispose of Perrin and Cambert who were more than one step ahead of him. This he finally did by acts of Machiavellian malice that cause one a shock even at the distance of three hundred years.

Perrin obtained a Royal Licence for opera from Louis XIV in June 1669. The terms of it make interesting reading. Perrin was given the privilege of establishing, throughout France, Academies of Opera, for the presentation of opera in the French

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language after the model of those in Italy. The activities of the various Italian Accademias in Rome, Venice, and other courts of Italy are noted and Perrin is commanded to follow their example with the special purpose of putting on operas. The King hopes that not only will these operas contribute to our diversion and that of the public but that our subjects will become used to the taste of this music and gradually come to perfect themselves in this, 'one of the most noble of the liberal arts'. Perrin was allowed to charge admission, except to members of the court, and to permit any gentleman or lady to sing without fear of their losing dignity by doing so. (This was of course in direct contrast to the 'comédies récitées' of Molière whose actors were not socially convenable.)

Perrin set up first in Paris at a converted *Jeu de Paume*—Royal tennis court—and produced various works there mostly in the old-fashioned style of *La Pastorale* of 1659. But neither Perrin nor Cambert were adept business men and the Academy soon incurred sizeable debts. Lully's interference and scheming did not assist matters, so that by 1672 the King had to shut the theatre. Perrin was imprisoned for debt and in March of that year Lully was given the Royal Licence. He had meanwhile to dispose of other rivals, the poet Guichard, and a rich influential amateur composer Jean de Granouilhet who had managed to get an opera entitled *Les Amours de Diane et d'Endymion* put on before the King at Versailles in 1671. This he did by accusing Guichard of poisoning him, and he may well have tried to do so from all the evidence that came to light at the trial. Guichard at any rate was convicted and imprisoned. Through his influence with Colbert, Minister of State, Lully managed to get a protest made by Granouilhet in the Paris *Parlement* against Lully's patent quashed and from that moment he was, so to speak, master of all he surveyed. He stayed in charge, without a rival in sight, for fifteen years composing some twenty operas which, without their being much heard in modern times, have come to be regarded as the great classical foundation of French opera.

He certainly produced what the French court wanted, but I wonder if it is not time for a critical reappraisal of his work in the light of the operas of men like Cavalli and Cesti which are only now emerging from an obscurity more dim than those of Lully. I believe that we shall find that he had very little dramatic ability; that his greatly extolled recitatif is nothing much more than a pale imitation of his Italian contemporaries; that his melodies rarely rise above the trivial; and that he was a

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plagiarist with a nice touch for dance tunes scarcely any of which can compare in vitality or originality with the hundreds of marvellous dances composed by his younger English contemporary Henry Purcell.

I would like to spend a little time discussing his first opera *Cadmus et Hermione* written in 1673 to a libretto by Quinault. It is difficult to make musical points without illustration, but I can, I hope, convey something of what I mean by analogy and description.

The work begins with a lengthy prologue, in four scenes, taking up a quarter of the opera's length, in which the serpent Python born in the bowels of the earth terrifies the sylvan gods and is finally slain by the Sun who descends on a chariot. It was intended, as were all Lully's subsequent prologues, to be a compliment to the King. A prologue was the usual curtain-raiser to all Italian operas, but it was always brief and usually, like the good and the bad fairy in pantomime, prepared you in some measure for the drama ahead. Lully's prologue has virtually no preparatory dramatic purpose. There is, it is true, a dragon to be slain in *Cadmus*, but it cannot be said to be good opera construction to anticipate the climax of the plot by killing another dragon in the prologue. Of course, it will be argued that he had to conform to the social pressures of the court. But this is just what hindered the development of Italian opera and I do not see that a special case can be made for saying that it improves Lully's.

The choral writing is homophonic and rhythmic, very similar in style to that found in Rossi's *L'Orfeo* or Carissimi's oratorios. When Envy comes to conjure up the serpent she does so in a chirpy C major which pales into nothing compared to Medea's incantation scene in Cavalli's *Giasone* of 1649 or Purcell's witches in *Dido and Aeneas*, written only sixteen years after *Cadmus*. I only give these comparisons by way of illustration. I could equally well say that Envy's incantation could happily be sung by any shepherdess calling her sheep.

The triple-time melodies have a strong Italianate flavour, using familiar cadential formulae extended by sequences in a way that is commonly found in Cavalli's melodies of this type. There is, too, the occasional use of the flattened seventh of the scale played in close proximity to the leading note. This was a device used by Monteverdi for especially expressive moments and later absorbed into the general technical apparatus of the time, giving a certain piquancy to the harmony.

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The story of the opera is based on the familiar legend of Cadmus rescuing Hermione from the Giant; killing the dragon which guards her, sowing the dragon's teeth from which spring up armed men. These fight among themselves, somewhat reducing their number, before coming to the aid of Cadmus in his fight with the giant. To complicate matters Juno appears to warn him off and Pallas Athene to encourage him forward. Amor appears at one point to cheer up Hermione by making a group of statues dance. And finally Jupiter comes down to sort it all out.

This use of Gods and Goddesses, who do little or nothing to affect the dramatic action, seems to me frivolous catering to a debased taste. One only has to think of the visions in Monteverdi's *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* of Pallas to warn Seneca that he must die if he interferes on the part of the Empress Ottavia, or the intervention of Amor to save Poppea from being stabbed by Ottone, to see how such devices can be used to point the drama and heighten the tension. An even better example might be Monteverdi's *Ritorno d'Ulisse* where the hero is caught between two opposing deities: Neptune who wishes to stop him from returning to Penelope and Jupiter who wishes to help. Their struggle for power over Ulysses mounts throughout the opera in parallel with the tension of Penelope's increasingly desperate attempts to ward off the attentions of the three false suitors. The tension is only resolved in the last scene where Ulysses finally returns to Ithaca and destroys his enemies. This it seems to me is a proper dramatic use of such devices. There are two comic characters in *Cadmus* who come straight from the stock of Venetian opera, but they are sadly under-developed; an old nurse who spends a little time admonishing Hermione in characteristic fashion and at one point expresses some disappointed sentiments about the other comic character, Arbas, an African servant of Cadmus. There is little dramatic point in her being there at all; neither does she justify herself by being amusing. Lully provides her with no solo comic scene. The African servant has one amusing scene where he is scared by the corpse of the slain dragon and has a notion to claim the kill for himself. But even this cannot compare with similar moments in Venetian opera. There is in fact an almost identical scene with a dragon, much better done, in Cavalli's *L'Orimonte* (1650). The diversions in Lully's opera are all superimposed from outside the drama and the most trivial excuse is made for a ballet of Africans, Statues, Soldiers, and Sacrificateurs.

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The main drama has to hobble along in between these moments and sundry irrelevant apparitions, and only at one point, where Cadmus alone laments his lost Hermione—(she has been whisked away by Juno who is irritated by the hero for slaying the giant)—does the music rise to any high level of emotional expressiveness. It is a lament constructed exactly after the Venetian pattern with a beautiful, twice-recurring phrase 'Belle Hermione, hélas puis-je être heureux sans vous' each time separated by a fine line of expressive recitative. Had Lully managed to maintain this standard my view of the piece would be altogether different. But as a drama revealing in any exalted sense the ideals of using music for expressive, humanistic ends it cannot possibly be regarded as aught but a failure. Were we to hear it again I suspect that like Madame de Motteville 'nous pensâmes y mourir de froid et d'ennui'. As it is, the opera is an uneasy mixture of the masque and early Italian pastoral drama to which, in the name of modernity, a few mannerisms of Venetian opera have been added. The poor dramatic construction is disguised by much incidental and irrelevant dancing—some of it to delightful music.

I have left very little time to say anything about the relationship between English music and Italian opera of the period. And perhaps it is just as well, for I believe that we are on the brink of finding out a hitherto unsuspected closeness and directness of influence.

Only three years ago a copy of Cavalli's *L'Erismena* was discovered in this country decked out with, of all things, a contemporary English translation. The translation of a long opera libretto is not something anyone would undertake without an end in view and yet we have, up to now, no evidence of a performance. There is a manuscript copy of another Cavalli opera *Il Giasone* in the music faculty library at Oxford. In the latest issue of *Music and Letters* the handwriting of the famous large collection of Italian monodies, Add. 32.440, has been identified as belonging to Angelo Notari, an Italian musician who spent most of his life in England.

When you begin to assemble the names of Italian musicians to be found in Pepys's diaries you find yourself with a formidable list of men whose work is still for the most part unknown, but who could not but have brought something with them, something of the Italian atmosphere—and that would mean above all else the atmosphere of Italian opera. Two English composers, at least, went to Italy to study. Walter Porter with

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Monteverdi, Pelham Humfrey mainly with Lully in France, but he was financed by Charles II also to go to Italy. The masque of *Calisto*, performed in the Hall Theatre in 1675 has a libretto which has more than a superficial resemblance to that of Cavalli's *La Calisto* produced in Venice thirty years earlier. Most of the music for the time has now disappeared save for some seven rather paltry little songs by the ubiquitous Nicholas Staggins, later first and least distinguished professor of music at Cambridge.

There is that strange licence written in Italian and given by Charles II, dated 20 October 1660, to Giulio Gentileschi to present in London 'opere musicalic on macchine, mutationi di scene — senza essere da alcuno impedito et molestato'. The licence was to last five years and Gentileschi was to produce in that time only operas. No one yet knows what happened either to the operas or to Gentileschi. The ill-fated Cambert ended up in England and, while not much of a catch, certainly contributes something to the picture with his production of *Ariadne* in 1674 at the New Drury Lane theatre, and possibly earlier at Whitehall.

Evelyn saw an Italian opera in music, 'the first that has been seen in England of this kind' on 5 January 1673.

Commentators have always havered over the reference by Purcell (or was it Playford?) in the preface to his Sonatas in III Parts in 1683 to the 'just imitation of the most famed Italian masters principally to bring the seriousness and gravity of that sort of musik into vogue and reputation among our contrymen whose humour 'tis time now, should begin to loath the levity and balladry of our neighbours'. And after apologizing for his own inadequacy (quite unnecessarily) he 'thinks he may warrantably affirm that he is not mistaken in the power of the Italian notes or the elegancy of their compositions, which he would recommend to the English Artists'.

It has usually been assumed that Purcell was referring to similar sonatas imported from Italy, but a moment's consideration will show that there were scarcely any Italian string sonatas. He may well have known those of Vitali and he certainly knew the work of Lelio Colista, but he speaks in general terms of Italian music and that country still produced almost exclusively vocal music in the operatic style. He speaks of the music's seriousness, gravity, and power, all adjectives which apply more to Italian opera than to such instrumental compositions as he would have known.

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There is one other fascinating reference to Italian music contained in Purcell's additions to Playford's *Introduction to the Skill of Music*, written in 1694, where, on the subject of ground basses, he commends the Dividing Ground, that is the bass with divisions and transportations, an elaboration of which he was especially fond, and observes that the Italians were the first inventors of it to 'single songs or songs of two parts which to do neatly requires considerable pains, and the best way to be acquainted with them is to score much and chuse the best Authors'. It should be stressed that this time vocal music is specified.

This sort of ground bass, of which Monteverdi was perhaps the first exponent, was developed by Cavalli into a major musical form. Every opera contains several examples of it encompassing all sorts of emotions and characterized not by a short pattern of notes repeated constantly but by a long melodic bass which serves to support on each repetition a new vocal melodic line. The resemblance between Cavalli and Purcell's methods in the use of this type of bass is most striking.

This must be, for the present, mostly conjecture. But I am convinced that as more and more texts of Italian opera, and especially of those originating in Venice, come to be more widely known we shall see how greatly all European styles of the later seventeenth century are in their debt and how direct was the influence of this remarkable music of the Age of Humanism.

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