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„COMPOSED FOR THE ACADEMY [...] OF CARDINAL OTTOBONI“.  
EXPLORING THE IMPLICATIONS BEHIND  
MUSIC AND PATRONAGE IN CORELLI'S OP. 4

by ANTONELLA D'OVIDIO

In the extensive studies on musical patronage in Rome in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Pietro Ottoboni is definitely one of the most important and broadly studied figures.<sup>1</sup> The man defined by Francis Haskell as „the most adventurous patron of his time“<sup>2</sup>, has been over the last decades the focus of major archival and documentary studies that have greatly enriched our knowledge of the spectacles, events, and artists who enjoyed the patronage of the Ottoboni court, as well as clarifying Ottoboni's special interests (and ambitions) as an author of music librettos and as a playwright.<sup>3</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Of the many studies dedicated to Pietro Ottoboni and his patronage of the arts and music, I wish to indicate – besides the following reference – some quotations: Hans Joachim Marx, „Die Musik am Hofe Pietro Kardinal Ottobonis unter Arcangelo Corelli“, *Analecta Musicologica*, 5 (1968), 104–177; Lowell Lindgren, „Il dramma musicale a Roma durante la carriera di Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725)“, in: Bruno Cagli (ed.), *Le muse galanti. La musica a Roma nel Settecento*, Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1985, 35–57; Saverio Franchi, *Drammaturgia romana*, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1988; Maria Letizia Volpicelli, „Il teatro del cardinal Ottoboni al palazzo della Cancelleria“, in: *Il teatro a Roma nel Settecento. Convegno internazionale, Roma, 15–20 novembre 1982, organizzato dall'Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, dall'Istituto di Studi Romani*, two vols, Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1989, vol. II, 681–782; Stefano La Via, „Il cardinale Ottoboni e la musica: nuovi documenti (1700–1740), nuove letture e ipotesi“, in: Albert Dunning (ed.), *Intorno a Locatelli. Studi in occasione del tricentenario della nascita di Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695–1764)*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1995, 319–526; Teresa Chirico, „La vicenda di Adonia nelle opere di Girolamo Frigimelica Roberti (1695) e Pietro Ottoboni (1699). Un unico progetto ottoboniano?“, in: Markus Engelhardt (ed.), *Musikstadt Rom. Geschichte – Forschung – Perspektiven. Beiträge der Tagung „Rom – Die Ewige Stadt im Brennpunkt der aktuellen musikwissenschaftlichen Forschung“ am Deutschen Historischen Institut in Rom, 28.–30. September 2004*, Kassel, etc: Bärenreiter, 2011 (*Analecta musicologica* 46), 218–262; Idem, „Una ‚Vesta larga [...] tutta piena di merletto d'oro‘. Documenti inediti su costumi di rappresentazioni teatrali promosse a Roma dal cardinale Pietro Ottoboni (1689–1700)“, in: *Fashioning Opera and Musical Theatre. Stage Costumes in Europe from the Late Renaissance to 1900, international conference, Venice, Fondazione Cini, March 29 – April 1, 2012*, Venezia: Fondazione Cini, 2014, 28–53; Idem, „Et iusti intrabunt in eam“. Committenza ottoboniana, macchine e musiche per la festa delle Quaranta ore (1690–1713)“, *Studi corelliani VII*, 297–326; Tomaso Manfredi, „Il cardinale Pietro Ottoboni e l'Accademia Albana. L'utopia dell'artista universale“, *Studi corelliani VI*, 117–137; Tomaso Manfredi, „Nascita di un architetto di corte. L'ingresso di Juvarra al servizio del cardinale Ottoboni“, in: Cristina Ruggero (ed.), *La forma del pensiero. Filippo Juvarra*, Roma: Campisano Editore, 2008, 71–87; José Maria Dominguez, „Corelli, Politics and Music during the Visit of Philip V to Naples, 1702“, *Eighteenth Century Music* 10 (2013), 93–108.
- <sup>2</sup> Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963, 163. Haskell furthermore defines the Palazzo della Cancelleria as „the centre of the most enlightened and extravagant patronage in Rome“.
- <sup>3</sup> On this point see in particular: Gloria Staffieri, „I drammi per musica di Pietro Ottoboni. Il Grand Siècle del cardinal“, *Studi musicali* 35 (2006), 129–192.



However, these researches have only partially focused on the sonatas of op. 4 by Arcangelo Corelli,<sup>4</sup> mostly considered as the perfect stylistic synthesis that the composer achieved in the sonata genre.<sup>5</sup> The purely stylistic and formal aspects that distinguish these sonatas from other works have perhaps overshadowed a more extensive interest in the context in which op. 4 was written and the connection between this music and the environment in which it developed: that is, the court of Pietro Ottoboni. The aim of this paper is not to suggest parallels and correspondences in taste between the patron and the composer, as in a quasi-dialogue between beautiful souls – a trend against which Claudio Annibaldi warned us years ago.<sup>6</sup> Rather it focuses on „the relationship between the sound structure and the genesis under patronage“<sup>7</sup> of op. 4, reducing it beyond abstract stylistic considerations to its original context, namely that of the court of Ottoboni at a given time in its long history. For this purpose it is necessary to employ a diachronic perspective to retrace the establishment of the Ottoboni court, both in order to focus on the motivations and methods behind his patronage in the early years of his cardinalship, and to observe, *in fieri*, the changes in taste, orientation and cultural policy that took over in time in a polycentric cultural *milieu*, such as that of 17<sup>th</sup> century Rome.

As we know, op. 4 is a collection of sonatas expressly composed „for the academy of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni“, as we can read in the dedication. It was published in 1694, only a few years after his appointment as cardinal in 1689. The following year (1690), Corelli was called to be part of the splendid court that Ottoboni was to create in the years to come. Why was this very young patrician Venetian, just 22 years old, whose tastes and musical skills at that time we know very little about, so quick to call a musician like Corelli to the court? The question may seem banal, and the answer equally obvious: because Corelli was one of the most popular composers and instrumentalists in the papal city. The answer can be considered valid, but perhaps not exhaustive. It might be useful then to recall some specific details that led to the rise of Pietro Ottoboni in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Rome. His appointment as cardinal came exactly one month after the election of his great-uncle Pietro Ottoboni senior to the papacy with the name of Alexander VIII Ottoboni (which took place October 6, 1689): on November 7, Alexander VIII appointed his great nephew Pietro cardinal deacon, and a few days later gave him position of Vice Chancellor of

<sup>4</sup> In particular, the sonata of op. 4, no. 3 is the focus of Stefano La Via, „Dalla ‚Ragion poetica‘ di Gianvincenzo Gravina ai ‚bei concetti‘ musicali di Arcangelo Corelli. Teorie e prassi del ‚classicismo‘ romano oltre l’Arcadia“, *Studi corelliani VI*, 39–72. Some mention about the compositional strategy of the sonatas op. 4 is also made by Gloria Staffieri, „Pietro Ottoboni, il mecenate-drammaturgo. Strategie della committenza e scelte compositive“, in: *ibidem*, 139–164.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Peter Allsop, *Arcangelo Corelli. „New Orpheus of Our Time“*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 119: „Within the obvious restrictions imposed by the dance forms, these two volumes contain some of Corelli’s subtlest and most effective music“.

<sup>6</sup> Claudio Annibaldi, „Introduzione“, in: Claudio Annibaldi (ed.), *La musica e il mondo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993, 9–43.

<sup>7</sup> Annibaldi, „Introduzione“ (see n. 6), 20–21.



the Church (a position restored for the occasion), which gave him the right to reside in the palace of the Chancellery, the property of the Apostolic Camera.

The reintroduction of this position, perfectly in line with the strong nepotistic policy of Alexander VIII<sup>8</sup> had the objective of increasing the revenue of the cardinal's court, thanks to the substantial income that it entailed. Furthermore, it helped the same Pontiff to ease the huge financial problems that had plagued the different members of the Ottoboni family since they joined the 'patriziato' through aggregation in 1646. This aggregation, while elevating the entire family to a noble rank, in fact resulted in a huge outlay of money, aggravated even more by the failed management of the patrimony shared between the brothers (Giovanni Battista, Marcantonio, Agostino and Pietro Ottoboni senior), which only seemed to be solved effectively by Pietro's appointment as Pope, for which the family had also committed some of its financial resources.<sup>9</sup> In addition, there was the precarious financial state of most of the Pope's nephews, in particular Antonio Ottoboni (father of Cardinal Pietro jr.) who, addicted to gambling, was continually in dire economic straits, which he tried to solve by requesting urgently that other members of the family take care of his huge debts.<sup>10</sup> Once the appointment as Pope was obtained, Alexander VIII thought it best to settle the many financial problems through a shrewd nepotistic policy. The nephews Antonio and Marco benefited substantially with appointments to higher offices and were exempt from paying taxes, while the great-nephew Pietro, evidently considered the only one of the family capable of managing the responsibilities within the

<sup>8</sup> Pope Alexander VIII had demonstrated a clear adherence to the nepotistic policy of the papacy from the time he was still a cardinal. It is worth mentioning that he strongly opposed any moralising, in particular the intention to abolish the practice of nepotism advanced in 1679 by Pope Innocent XI. Among the cardinal's responses to the pontiff's anti-nepotistic bill, that of the future Pope sounds particularly poor on the political and ideological level, but very enlightening about the moves that he would then have made, once sitting on the throne of Peter: „The Ottoboni [...] consider[ed] the case that a cardinal elected as Pope would have many debts and also the disorder that could follow poor nephews in desperate positions.“ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottob. Lat. 792, c. 98v in: Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Fortuna e sfortune di una famiglia veneziana del Seicento. Gli Ottoboni al tempo dell'aggregazione al patriziato*, Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1996, 165. More specifically on the concept of nepotism in the papal policy of Alexander VIII see Antonio Menniti Ippolito, „Nepotisti e antinepotisti. Pietro Ottoboni, i 'conservatori' di Curia e i pontefici Odescalchi e Pignatelli“, *Studi veneziani*, new serie 25 (1993), 131–149.

<sup>9</sup> For a careful examination of all the events that led the Ottoboni family to 'patriziato', see Ippolito, *Fortuna e sfortune* (see n 8).

<sup>10</sup> Antonio Ottoboni was also the author of some librettos for oratorios, such as *L'Arsalonne ribelle* with music by Flavio Carlo Lanciani (1691). On Antonio Ottoboni as librettist see Michael Talbot and Colin Timms, „Music and Poetry of Antonio Ottoboni (1646–1720)“, in: Nino Pirrotta and Agostino Ziino (eds), *Händel e gli Scarlatti a Roma*, Florence: Olschki, 1987, 367–438.



Roman Curia,<sup>11</sup> was suddenly hurled toward the purple robes, thus assuming the delicate position of cardinal nephew.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 1: Pope Alexander VIII with his nephews Antonio and Marco, and his great nephew the cardinal Pietro Ottoboni jr. (from Aquila Adriarca, „Poesie diverse per la Santità di Nostro Signore Alessandro Ottavo [...] da Giuseppe Montani“, Roma, 1691: Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana).

It is important to recall these details, albeit briefly, because they allow for a

<sup>11</sup> Pietro Ottoboni junior already lived in Rome from 1681, after the great-uncle called him to reside in the city in the papal palace of San Marco (now Palazzo Venezia), and looking after his education. See Flavia Matitti, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, ad vocem, Roma: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2013, 79.

<sup>12</sup> Just before the election of Pietro to the papacy (Alexander VIII), which took place October 6, 1689, the marriage between Pietro Ottoboni jr. and a niece of Cardinal Flavio Chigi was being arranged. But the event suddenly offered new opportunities to the family and Ottoboni himself, including having the nephew appointed as cardinal. So it was that, in agreement with his great-uncle, Pietro renounced marriage to embrace the strategic role of 'Cardinal nipote'.



better understanding and an adequate historical perspective on the directions of the patronage of the newly elected Cardinal Pietro, especially in the early years of his long tenure as cardinal.

From this point of view, the Ottoboni patronage and commissions, while clearly corresponding to the cardinal's special fondness for music and spectacles, also finds its historical justification above all in the fact that the Ottoboni family (and especially Pietro), not being from Rome originally, needed to acquire prestige, power and reputation in the eyes of the Roman society of the time. For this purpose, a careful and strategic patronage was evidently considered as a perfect tool in order to reinforce and reaffirm the primacy of the Ottoboni family in the city. It is from this perspective that we must take a closer look at Ottoboni's first actions as patron. With the intention of emulating simultaneously his predecessors and gaining visibility and power in the eyes of Roman society, and probably directed to do this by the pontiff,<sup>13</sup> a few months after his election, Ottoboni immediately called Arcangelo Corelli to court. This was a musician who enjoyed the esteem of the aristocracy, and who had already been in the service of two other important patrons: Queen Christina of Sweden and Benedetto Pamphili, who had only left Rome in 1690, becoming cardinal legate in Bologna.<sup>14</sup> It is likely that Ottoboni was familiar with Corelli's music and that he appreciated it, but I think that, at least at the beginning of his cardinalate, calling eminent artists of the Roman scene to court should not be ascribed simply to a matter of taste but rather to political opportunity and the need for integration and emulation. For the Venetian Ottoboni, having Corelli at his own court meant, in one fell swoop, gaining credit in the eyes of all the aristocracy of that period and assuming a position in a line of continuity with other Roman patrons of the immediate past, beginning with Queen Christina of Sweden, who had died just a year earlier (1689). Evidently Ottoboni saw her as a model for seamless integration into the Roman society of the time. It was no accident that once installed in the Palace of the Chancellery, Ottoboni, in addition to the vast collection of art and his great uncle's famous library, had most of the books and manuscripts that had belonged to Queen Christina of Sweden transported.<sup>15</sup> At the advice of the pontiff himself, he also chose as Master of the Chamber, Marquis Ottavio Riario, owner of the palazzo in Lungara, where Queen Christina of Sweden had lived and in whose garden the Arcadian Academy met from 1690.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> On the strict relationship between the pontiff and the cardinal nephew, see Gianvittorio Signorotto and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (eds), *La corte di Roma tra Cinque e Seicento „teatro“ della politica europea*, Roma: Bulzoni, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Ludwig von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, Freiburg-Rom, <sup>8</sup>1960, vol. XIV/2.

<sup>15</sup> Edward J. Olszewski, „The Enlightened Patronage of Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni (1667–1740)“, *Artibus et Historiae* 45 (2002), 139–165.

<sup>16</sup> Olszewski, „The Enlightened Patronage“ (see n. 15), 141–142.



In the earliest years of his cardinalate, Pietro Ottoboni, as we know, was organising 'academies' in his Palace of the Chancellery. From archival documents, we know that as early as December 1690 Ottoboni had: „created in one of the rooms of the Chancellery a very noble theatre for the academies of music that he was thinking of holding on certain days, and had a beautiful tapestry of rich brocades woven to adorn his rooms [...].“<sup>17</sup> We do not know very much about how Ottoboni's academies were organised, or the role played by music, and particularly instrumental music. At times in the sources, particularly in the *Avvisi di Roma*, there is mention of an academy „of literature and music (belle lettere e musica)“<sup>18</sup> in which, in addition to musical performances, reciting of literary texts or discussions of poetry were also part of the programme. There is actually some evidence that might help us better understand these 'accademie', and above all give us a picture of the personalities who took part in them. With regard to this, there is the testimonial to the performance of the oratorio *La Giuditta* by Alessandro Scarlatti, performed for an 'academy' at the Palazzo della Cancelleria in 1694 (March 20), in which the anonymous author emphasises in more than one passage the great number of distinguished representatives of Roman society and men particularly devoted to literature and the arts.

On Sunday, 20 March [1694], a magnificent oratorio by the most Eminent Ottoboni was performed at the Palace of the Cancelleria. The libretto for the oratorio was written by Ottoboni himself [...]. *A large number of cardinals, almost all of the prelacy, and many aristocrats were present*, as was the Most Excellent Ambassador of the Empire, who was sitting in the tribunes. [...] Afterward, four knights each recited a sonnet, in order to observe on that evening the customary practice of the well-organized academy led by his Eminence in the said Cancelleria. The academy is formed by *very distinguished individuals, and in the fields of literature and other arts it is believed that it will soon surpass every other academy in Italy*, and his Eminence himself participates in it with such manners and *decorum* that he charms everyone, kindling every soul with virtue.<sup>19</sup>

In this case too, it is reasonable to assume that these academies that Ottoboni was hurrying to organise with great care, as soon as he was appointed cardinal, not only demonstrated a personal taste, but also reflected an attempt to

<sup>17</sup> Flavia Matitti, „Il cardinale Pietro Ottoboni mecenate delle arti. Cronache e documenti (1689–1740)“, in: *Storia dell'Arte* 85 (1995), 156–243, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Gloria Staffieri, *Colligite Fragmenta. La vita musicale romana negli Avvisi Marescotti (1683–1707)*, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1991, 115.

<sup>19</sup> Orietta Sartori, „Notizie di interesse musicale in un antico periodico a stampa. Il „Foglio di Foligno“, *Esercizi Musica e Spettacolo* 16/17 (1997–1998), 107. See also Arnaldo Morelli, „Un bell'oratorio all'uso di Roma“. Patronage and Secular Context of the Oratorio in Baroque Rome“, in: Colleen Reardon and Susan Parisi (eds), *Music Observed. Studies in Memory of William C. Holmes*, Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 2004, 333–351. The corsives are mine.



gain credit for his family and strengthen its reputation in terms of the curia and Roman aristocracy. If we take into account the political and strategic importance of the cardinal's court as a centre of power in Baroque Rome,<sup>20</sup> it is quite easy to recognise these academies as a basic self-promotional tool equal to the many architectural and artistic projects through which, to quote Irene Fosi, „the cardinal made his presence felt [...] in the city.“<sup>21</sup> And it is certainly no accident that the numerous articles about the academies organised by Ottoboni, although lacking in details as to their contents, linger at length on the description of the audience often called upon to participate, such as at the Academy of August 9, 1693: „Cardinal Ottoboni on Sunday, with the help of 7 cardinals, many bishops, Ambassador Cesareo, and many nobles, held in his palazzo a very fine academy of literature adorned with music and symphonies [...].“<sup>22</sup>

In the light of these considerations, the publication of op. 4 – the only collection that Corelli published in more than twenty years of service to the Ottoboni court – takes on an exemplary value. That the collection was *also* conceived as an instrument of self-affirmation and self-promotion by Pietro Ottoboni in Roman society could easily be found in the work's elaborate frontispiece engraved by Nicholas Dorigny, already examined and discussed some years ago by Stefano La Via.<sup>23</sup>

Ottoboni, clearly identified as Apollo, surrounded by the muses Calliope and Urania, is receiving a volume of music containing, as we might presume, sonatas by Corelli. However, as La Via rightly pointed out, one of the most innovative aspects of this allegorical representation (or better, this true allegorical disguise) of Pietro Ottoboni lies in the fact that it usually falls to the Pontiff to have himself portrayed as a god, yet here it is the cardinal himself who, beyond any laudatory advantage (and in all modesty), aspires, in the guise of Apollo, to exercise that role of sovereign of the arts, especially music, in the Roman Parnassus. Further confirmation of this is found in the words of the dedication of op. 4 which, in addition to referring explicitly to the „academies [...] that Your Eminence frequently holds in his apartments“, once again publicly emphasises the figure of Ottoboni as someone with a „propensity for literature“ and „protector of all the virtues“.

<sup>20</sup> See in particular Renata Ago, *Carriere e clientele in Roma barocca*, Bari: Laterza, 1990 and Irene Fosi, „Roma patria comune? Foreigners in Early-Modern Rome“, in: Jill Burke and Michael Bury (eds), *Art and Identity in Early Modern Rome*, Aldeshot: Ashgate, 2008, 27–43.

<sup>21</sup> Fosi, „Roma patria comune?“ (see n. 20), 34.

<sup>22</sup> Staffieri, *Colligate Fragmenta* (see n. 18), 109–110. See also Teresa Chirico, „L'inedita serenata alla regina Maria Casimira di Polonia. Pietro Ottoboni committente di cantate e serenate (1689–1708)“, in: Nicolò Maccavino (ed.), *La serenata tra Seicento e Settecento. Musica, poesia, scenotecnica. Convegno Internazionale di studi, Reggio Calabria, 16–17 May 2003*, Reggio Calabria: Laruffa, 2007, vol. 2, 397–449, 409.

<sup>23</sup> La Via, „Dalla ‚Ragion poetica‘“ (see n. 4).





Fig. 2: Nicholas Dorigny, frontispiece of the Sonate op. 4 by Arcangelo Corelli.



*L genio di VOSTRA EMINENZA tanto propenso alle belle lettere, e Protettore di tutte le Virtù, devo Consacrare queste mie fatiche Musicali, mentre sono prima sue che nate, havendole io composte nel Palazzo della Cancellaria, dove mi trovo di stanza col spetioso carattere d'attuale Servitore di VOSTRA EMINENZA. Spero haver fatto in tempo proprio il presente dono; mentre nelle Accademie che l'EMINENZA VOSTRA tiene frequentemente nelli suoi Appartamenti potrà non solamente concorrervi ancor io in servirla con la persona, ma con queste nuove Compositioni che riconoscono la loro origine dalla benignità, con la quale VOSTRA EMINENZA riguarda il mio poco talento. Con tal fondamento son più che certo d'un felicissimo evento alli miei desiderii, che sono come son'io, tutti intenti alla gloria di VOSTRA EMINENZA alla quale faccio profondissimo inchino.*

Fig. 3: Arcangelo Corelli, dedication to Pietro Ottoboni in the op. 4.



If we compare the sonatas of op. 4 with those of op. 2, they clearly show some peculiarities: the first, most obvious, regards the formal structure.

Table 1: Arcangelo Corelli, op. 4, formal structure.

1	<i>C major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Adagio</b>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>presto</i>
2	<i>g minor</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>grave</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>vivace</i>	
3	<i>A major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Corrente</b>	<b>Sarabanda</b>	<b>Tempo di gavotta</b>
4	<i>D major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>grave</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Adagio</b>	<b>Giga</b> <i>allegro</i>
5	<i>a minor</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>adagio</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>vivace</i>	<b>Gavotta</b> <i>allegro</i>
6	<i>E major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>ad.-all.-ad.- all. – ad.</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Giga</b> <i>allegro</i>	
7	<i>F major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>all.-grave</i>	<b>Sarabanda</b> <i>vivace</i>	<b>Giga</b> <i>allegro</i>
8	<i>d minor</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>grave</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Sarabanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	
9	<i>Bb major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Grave</b>	<b>Tempo di gavotta</b> <i>allegro</i>
10	<i>G major</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>ad.-all.-ad</i>	<b>Grave</b>	<b>Tempo di gavotta</b> <i>presto</i>	
11	<i>c minor</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Corrente</b> <i>allegro</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>allegro</i>	
12	<i>b minor</i>	<b>Preludio</b> <i>largo</i>	<b>Allemanda</b> <i>presto</i>	<b>Giga</b> <i>allegro</i>	

It is characterised primarily by the constant presence of the opening Prelude, in slow tempo, where in op. 2 the opening movement oscillates between a Prelude and an Allemande. However, let us look at some other details. In op. 4, the number of dances decreases (27 as opposed to the 29 dance movements of op. 2), but above all their distribution within the sonata seems mainly dictated by the need to create a rhythmic and agogic contrast. If in the sonatas of op. 2 the Allemande could have both slow and fast tempi, the allemandes of op. 4 all have fast tempi.<sup>24</sup> In this case, this different agogic choice seems to be determined (in the case of the Allemanda), mainly by the need to maintain a clear contrast with the opening Prelude, further confirmation of how the op. 4 dances gradually move away from choreutic references, but are channelled and bent so to speak by Corelli into a formal logic, which takes into account the overall structural arrangement of the sonata.

<sup>24</sup> In op. 2 the allemandes of the sonatas 1, 2, 8, 9, on the other hand, are characterised by a slow tempo („largo“).



The inclusion of the initial slow Prelude in all the sonatas is definitely the most innovative aspect of this collection. Looking at all of the opening preludes together, at least three distinctive traits are found:

- the opening mainly entrusted to the repetition and amplification of the same phrase on the fifth degree (sonatas 2, 4, 5, 11), already common in the opening movements of the church sonatas, especially op. 1 (see Ex. 1a–1d);

Ex. 1a: Op. 4, no. 2: *Preludio*, bars 1–10.

*Grave.*

Violino I.

Violino II.

Violone e Organo.

7 6 # 5 b 6 5 5 6 5 6 # 9 6 5 b #

7 6 # 5 b 6 5 5 6 5 6 # 9 6 6 5 6 5 5 4 3

Ex. 1b: Op. 4, no. 4: *Preludio*, bars 1–10.

*Grave.*

Violino I.

Violino II.

Violone e Organo.

4 5 4 5

6 9 6 5 4 8 9 5 9 6 # 5 6 6 5 6



Ex. 1c: Op. 4, no. 5: *Preludio*, bars 1–10.

*Adagio.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Violone  
e Organo.

4 6 7 7 5 6 7 6 7 6

2 6 7 7 9 6 6 5 6 6 6 6 5 3 6 5 5

Ex. 1d: Op. 4, no. 11: *Preludio*, bars 1–9.

*Largo.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Violone,  
e Organo.

6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 6 6 6 7 6

6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 6 9 8 7 5 6

- the prevalence of the violins in melodic lines that descend stepwise by degrees (sonatas 1, 2, 4), often on a walking bass (see Ex. 2 and Ex. 1a and 1b);



Ex. 2: Op. 4, no. 1: *Preludio*, bars 8–17.

7 5 # 6 5 6 5 6 7 6 6 7 5 9 6

9 5 8 7 6 5 6 4 5 6 6 6 6 5 4 3

- the frequent use of the descending tetrachord and/or chromatic basses. See, for example, sonata 1, which opens in the bass with the double descending tetrachord in C major, repeated immediately after in the relative minor key in the same pattern of violins (see Ex. 3).

Ex. 3: Op. 4, no. 1: *Preludio*.*Largo.*

Violino I.

Violino II.

Violone,  
e Organo.

5 4 6 4 6 4 6 4 6 4 6

7 7 6 6 7 6 # 6 7 6 7 5



A similar solution is found in sonata 3, which opens with a descending bass line repeated three times over the arc of eight measures, a procedure that is amplified at the opening of the second part of the Prelude (Ex. 4a and 4b); in sonata 6, the descending tetrachord is, not surprisingly, used in the two inserts with the tempo Adagio in triple meter, alternating with the Allegro in a rare case of multi-sectioned Preludes in op. 4; in sonata 9, in the bass, we can see a sort of mixed formula made up of a descending tetrachord and chaconne bass; finally, in sonata 10, the descending tetrachord becomes a kind of 'motto' (Ex. 5a and 5b).

Ex. 4a: Op. 4, no. 3: *Preludio*, bars 1–8.

*Largo.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Violone  
e Organo.

6 6# 6 7 7# 5 6 7 6 7 6 7 6#

7 6 7 6 7 5 4# 6 # 5 6 7 6 7 6 7 6# 7 6 4 3 # 5 4 # #

Ex. 4b: Op. 4, no. 3: *Preludio*, bars 9–13.

6 5# 6# 6 6# 7# 5# 6 6 5# 9 8 6 6 9 6



Ex. 5a: Op. 4: no. 10: *Preludio*, bars 1–4.

*Adagio.* *Allegro.*

*p* *f*

6 6 # 6 5 #

Ex. 5b: Op. 4, no. 10: *Grave*, bars 1–4.

*Grave*

5 4 6 7 6 6 5 3 6 5 9 5 4 5 9# 8

What is most striking is the adoption of these few, homogeneous and selected compositional procedures which, all together, give the Prelude a pathetic and expressive quality, similar to what happens with the *gravi* in the trio sonatas, particularly those of op. 3. To this end, the use of descending bass lines makes a notable contribution, often combined with one or both of the other elements listed above. The Prelude of the first sonata is representative of the strong pathos that characterises the collection, and unsurprisingly it opens the collection (Ex. 6).

As already mentioned, here the descending bass line is used three times, and the violins frequently emphasise and amplify the harmonic strengths of the pattern in different ways: the opening descending bass supports two violins that move by thirds in a dotted rhythm; the same thing – as we have already noted – is repeated immediately after this with the descending bass in a minor key. From bar nine the structure changes: the descending line is taken up by the two violins that interweave in a descending stepwise pattern, enriched by



the *ritardi* on a quasi-walking bass; the last part of the prelude again proposes violins in a new arrangement, now moving in an amplified imitative pattern, once again with a descending bass pattern. It should be noted that this procedure can be found in the same sonata in the Allemande (third movement). Besides, the same descending bass line, this time chromatic, is also found in the Adagio of the Corrente (second movement), as if the different movements of the sonata were called upon to represent the same ‘affetto’.

Ex. 6: Op. 4, no. 1: *Preludio*.

*Largo.*

Violino I.

Violino II.

Violone,  
e Organo.

5  $\frac{4}{2}$  6  $\frac{4}{2}$  6  $\frac{4}{2}$  6  $\frac{4}{2}$  6  $\frac{4}{2}$  6

7 7 6 6 6 7 6 #  $\frac{6}{4}$  7 6  $\frac{7}{\#}$  5

$\frac{7}{5}$  #  $\frac{6}{5}$   $\frac{9}{5}$   $\frac{6}{5}$  5  $\frac{6}{5}$  7 6 6 7 5 9 6

$\frac{9}{5}$   $\frac{8}{6}$   $\frac{7}{5}$  6 5  $\frac{6}{5}$   $\frac{4}{5}$   $\frac{5}{3}$  6 6 6  $\frac{5}{4}$  3



The other detail I would like to highlight concerns the tendency, much greater than in op. 2, toward a contrapuntal treatment in the greater part of the dances used and more generally a significant increase in imitative patterns in the dances.

The examples you see below illustrate the opening imitative incipits, in some cases in true *fugato* style, of some of the dance movements of op. 4. All of the dances are represented, excluding the Giga that, with the elasticity of its rhythm in 12/8 is always used by Corelli (in the vast majority of the sonatas, with the sole exception of op. 5, no. 9) in the final position with the task of 'lightening' and 'discharging', in this case, the tension of the contrapuntal density in an efficient and graceful evocation of the dance (Ex. 7a–7e).

Ex. 7a: Op. 4, no. 2: *Corrente*, bars 1–8.

*Vivace. Corrente.*

# 4/3 5 5/4 7 9 8 b 6 # 7 6

Ex. 7b: Op. 4, no. 3: *Tempo di gavotta*, bars 1–8.

*Allegro. Tempo di Gavotta.*

# 6 7 5/4 # 5/3 4/2 6 4/2 6 5/4 #

Ex. 7c: Op. 4, no. 7: *Corrente*, bars 1–8.

*Allegro. Corrente.*

6 6/4 6/5 6 7 5 6 4/2 5 6



Ex. 7d: Op. 4, no. 9: *Corrente*, bars 1–7.

*Allegro.* *Corrente.*

Ex. 7e: Op. 4, no. 9: *Tempo di gavotta*, meas. 1–7.

*Allegro.* *Tempo di Gavotta.*

The most significant feature is the number of Allemandes in the *fugato* style: of the seven Allemandes of op. 4 (1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 11 part B, 12 all marked „Allegro“), four open in *fugato* style (Ex. 8a–8d).

In light of what has been said above, how do we evaluate these particular features of op. 4, also with respect to the previous collection of chamber sonatas? To answer this question we need to shift our gaze once again from the written page of music to some historical considerations that shed light, like „distorting windows“ to quote Carlo Ginzburg,<sup>25</sup> on aspects that have received relatively little consideration to date: the relationship between the sonatas of op. 4 and the *milieu* in which and for which they were composed.

<sup>25</sup> I am referring to the expression in Carlo Ginzburg's essay on the elements used to arrive at historical knowledge. Regarding the use of the sources he said: „The sources are neither wide open windows, as the positivists believe, or walls that obstruct vision, as the skeptics believe: if anything, we could compare them to distorting window glass.“ (Carlo Ginzburg, *Rapporti di forza. Storia, retorica, prova*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 2000, 59).



Ex. 8a: Op. 4, no. 2: *Allemanda*, bars 1–4.

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*Allemanda.*

*Allegro.*

# 5 6 5 6 # 6 6 6 6 6 # #

Ex. 8b: Op. 4, no. 5: *Allemanda*, bars 1–4.

14

*Allemanda.*

*Allegro.*

6 6 9 6 5 # 6 5 6 5

Ex. 8c: Op. 4, no. 6: *Allemanda*, bars 1–4.

*Allemanda.*

*Allegro.*

6 # 7 5

Ex. 8d: Op. 4, no. 11: *Allemanda*, bars 18–21.

q 6 6 q 6 6 6 6 6 6





The sumptuous, rich and opulent image of the Ottoboni court that the studies on patronage have often revealed has led to the obscuring of the difficulties that the cardinal had to face in the very first years of his appointment, and these I want to recall briefly. Just one year after his appointment as cardinal in 1691, Pietro Ottoboni had to face numerous difficulties following the death of Pope Alessandro VIII Ottoboni. There were difficulties related to inheritance, relations with the rest of the family (he often travelled to Venice to try to resolve the issue), but also warding off the blows and the intransigence of the new Pope Innocent XII, who did not care to support the cardinal's worldliness and voracity for spectacle. The episode in which Ottoboni musicians were punished following the performance of a serenade on May 26, 1691, is a good example of this: „Some mortification was given to most of the chapel musicians who sang in the serenade [...] that Cardinal Ottoboni had them sing under the windows of his cell.“<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, from 1690 Ottoboni's reputation certainly did not play in his favour, and one only has to read the many chronicles of the time for proof of this. They were rather ungenerous towards the cardinal and his family, and his „insatiable libidinousness“, is mentioned, as well as his early failures as a librettist („his pen is wont to produce monsters that make nature bridle“; see the case of *Colombo*, produced with disastrous solemnity at the Teatro Tordinona in 1690–1691).<sup>27</sup> These were not easy years, and were marked by a thinly veiled conflict between Ottoboni and the Roman aristocracy.

Op. 4 was published in 1694 in a thriving environment of patronage, just after this rather unhappy time in the cardinal's tenure. To be precise, 1694, given the large number and tenor of the spectacles under his patronage, can be considered in a sense a real *annus mirabilis* in the history of the Ottoboni court. After the first years of adjustment and problems due to the death of his great uncle the Pope, Ottoboni in 1694 began to act vigorously as patron in a focused plan to revive and consolidate his own power (see, for example, the edifying subjects of his music librettos on which Gloria Staffieri focussed her studies).<sup>28</sup> This is the proper framework surrounding the publication of Corelli's op. 4, in which the chamber sonata assumes – right from the celebratory frontispiece, in the stylistic peculiarities of the sonatas, and even in the fleeting reference in the dedication to the figure of Ottoboni as „protector of all the virtues“ – the ability to confer symbolic significance within specific cultural contexts with an adequate and decorous guise. By incorporating some

<sup>26</sup> Staffieri, *Colligite Fragmenta* (see n. 18), 98.

<sup>27</sup> „L'opera del Colombo non piace e nelle passate sere non ci è stato la metà dell'udienza che solea esservi, onde chi spende ha risoluto far diminuire diverse parti che non piacciono et accrescerle al Cortona che è degno di applause.“ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vat. Ott. 3356, *Avvisi di Roma*, see Alberto Cametti, *Il Teatro Tor di Nona poi Apollo*, two vols, Tivoli: Arti Grafiche Chicca, 1938, II, 347.

<sup>28</sup> Staffieri, „I drammi per musica“ (see n. 3), *passim*.



of the typical procedures of the church style in the chamber sonata – such as increasing the counterpoint and pathos of the opening slow movements – there is a connotation of decorous music (there is mention of *decorum* in an account of an Ottoboni academy cited above) and at the same time delight in the music that can be adapted to the discussions and issues which, as we can imagine, were addressed in the Ottoboni academies. Yet it also makes the joy and the magnificence of the Ottoboni court tangible, through an educated, measured, and stylised use of dance (and chamber sonata).

In his book *Bolognese Instrumental Music*, Gregory Barnett amply demonstrates the richness and versatility of the chamber sonata in Bologna society of the last three decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by pointing out how the chamber sonata could be used in different contexts such as academies, amateur exercises and chivalrous exercises, and „how the chamber sonata, beyond mere accompaniment to aristocratic pastimes, was used in the very creation – and I would add consolidation – of late-Seicento aristocratic identity.“<sup>29</sup> I do not think that this phenomenon can be restricted to just the Bolognese environment, but rather, observing the sonatas of op. 4 from the perspective considered here, I believe that this assumption may also be true of an *élite* such as that of a Roman cardinal of the late Seicento, and especially for the Ottoboni circle specifically in its early years.

In this perspective, op. 4 made its contribution to creating a substantially new, powerful, and at the same time edifying image of the Ottoboni court, an image to convey and consolidate externally thanks to the patronage of music like Corelli's, nicely fulfilling the requirements of the „virtuous exercises“ (as how the Ottoboni academies were defined in the chronicles of the period). They were deemed appropriate and suitable for a high-ranking prelate who was eager to establish himself in a complex, multi-faceted and polycentric society such as that of Rome in the last years of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory Barnett, *Bolognese Instrumental Music, 1660–1710. Spiritual Comfort, Courtly Delight and Commercial Triumph*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008, 99.