

A SYMPHONY OF INTERNATIONAL VOICES AND INSTRUMENTS IN POLAND

In the 17th century, when the fashion for music in the Italian style prevailed in Europe, singers and instrumentalists from Italy headed north across the Alps, invited by wealthy patrons. Some came to Poland, enriching the ensembles at the courts of kings and magnates with their talent.



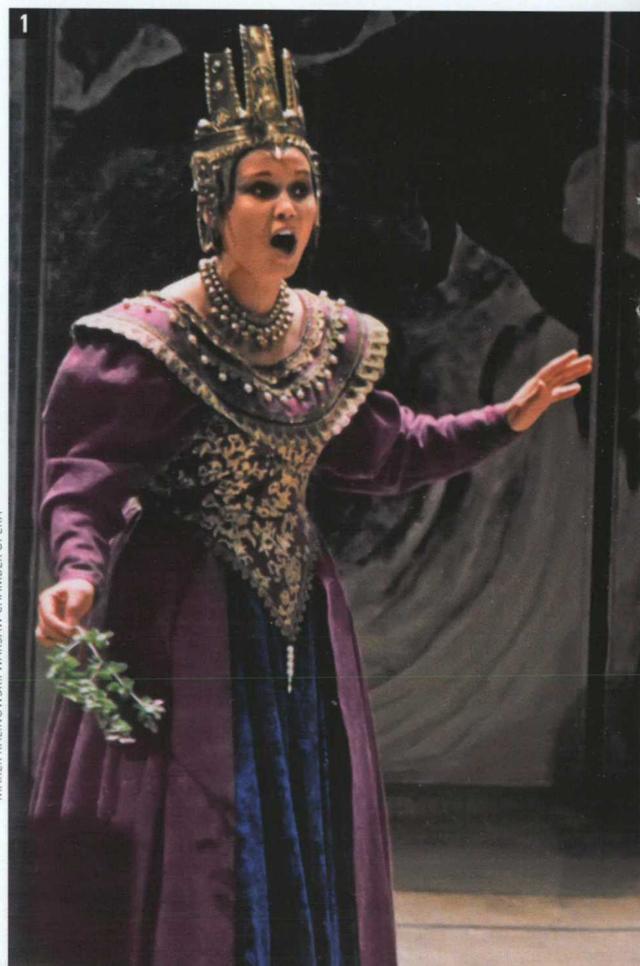
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The best contemporary orchestras, choirs and smaller ensembles have a multinational membership. Elite musicians from various countries, selected in special competitions, become integral parts of a single whole. Together they create a symphony of sound (Lat. *symphonia* = harmony), making beautiful music. Such cooperation among instrumentalists and singers from various parts of the world has led to the development of both a universal language of music, and a generally known musical notation. To understand the conductor's comments, a small vocabulary in the language of the country in which the ensemble operates is generally required. The lingua franca of modern times, English, is interspersed with Italian terms and instructions.



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This musical terminology in Italian first became dominant in the 17th century, when a fashion for music in the Italian style prevailed in Europe, and singers and instrumentalists from Italy started a great migration to countries further north. They were often invited, recruited and lured northward with promises of incredible earnings. There were also times when they were even forced to come or outright stolen by emperors, kings and princes (or even by lay and clerical magnates, emulating the former). Back in the 16th century, famous groups were international in nature – such as that hosted by the Munich court of the Bavarian dukes from the house of Wittelsbach, which was led for decades by Orlando di Lasso (d. 1594) or in the courts of the Habsburgs, especially the imperial and that of Charles II, Archduke of Inner Austria. Although in the 17th century the number of musicians from Italy increased in the countries north of the Alps, the majority were still local musicians, born in various German principalities, although often trained in Italy.

Musicians from Italy

In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, musicians from Italy, the German states and Hungary were present at the courts of the Jagiellonian dynasty kings and then Stefan Batory, although they were still outnumbered by Poles and Ruthenians. The situation changed greatly in 1595, during the reign of

Sigismund III Vasa, who brought over 20 musicians from Italy, mainly from Rome, to Kraków. For several years there were two groups at his court – one “Italian”, the other “Polish”. Later, however, they were merged into a single group in which the majority were Italians. The chapel masters of the royal ensemble until the mid-17th century were exclusively recognized composers from Italy, specifically (with one exception) from Rome: Annibale Stabile, Luca Marenzio, Giulio Cesare Gabussi, Asprilio Pacelli, Giovanni Francesco Anerio, and Marco Scacchi. Many musicians left the royal ensemble after a short time, deciding to return to their homeland or moving on to other courts – magnates in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or rulers in other countries, especially the Holy Roman Empire and the Kingdom of Denmark. In their place came others, from Rome, but also from Northern Italy. Some transferred to serve in the ensemble of Sigismund III and subsequent Polish kings – especially Ladislaus IV and John II Casimir Vasa, but also Michael I – from the courts of the Austrian Habsburgs, with whom the Polish rulers were related through marriages.

Despite the poor state of preservation of the surviving sources, it can be said that the participation of local musicians in the ensembles of Polish kings continued to increase in the successive decades of the 17th century. At the same time they were joined by newcomers from the German countries and France. Here it is worth noting that although the ensembles

Photo 1:
Francesca Caccini's opera
“Salvation of Ruggiero
from the Alcyna Islands”
(Italian performance
in 1625) dedicated to the
Polish prince Ladislaus
Vasa, opera was staged
in Poland after more than
three hundred years by the
Warsaw Chamber Opera



Photo 2:

A scene from the opera *Tetide in Sciro* ("Tethys on the Island of Skyros", 1712) which the Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti wrote for the Queen Marie Casimire Louise de La Grange d'Arquien, John III Sobieski's widow, as performed by the Warsaw Chamber Opera

Photo 3:

Melodiae sacrae, Kraków 1604, Cantus, title page

Photo 4:

La S. Cecilia, *Dramma musicale*, Warsaw, 1637, front page. Libretto dedicated to Claudia de' Medici

were dominated by Roman chapel masters there were also many musicians, including outstanding composers, from the northern part of the Italian peninsula – from Venice, Cremona, Brescia, Bologna, Parma, Mantua, Milan and other centers. The repertoire of music therefore came to incorporate characteristics specific to various regions of Italy. As a consequence, those composers from Italy working at the courts of Polish kings, as well as non-Italians like Marcin Mielczewski, Bartłomiej Pękiel, Kaspar Förster Junior and Jacek Rozycki, created stylistically Italian music that was not an imitation of any single Italian model, but rather contained original elements, including some that were local.

Valuable relationships

The "Italianization" of musical life at the Polish royal courts in the 17th century was encouraged by the direct contacts that the Polish rulers and also lay and clerical magnates maintained with the Roman Curia and the courts of princes from different parts of Italy. In the early days of when Sigismund III was bringing together his ensemble, he was certainly helped by Pope Clement VIII himself in attracting musicians. It was thanks to the pope's intervention that the distinguished composer of madrigals, Luca Marenzio, came to Poland. Even then, however, individual musicians had been coming to Kraków from the Austrian courts. Among them was Vincenzo Gigli (Vincentius Lilius), a Roman singer (tenor), who came from Graz and went down in history for preparing an anthology of pieces composed by members of Sigismund III's ensemble – "*Melodiae sacrae*" (Kraków 1604). He dedicated it to the Archduke Ferdinand of Habsburg, the future Emperor Ferdinand II. In later years, the family ties between the kings of Poland and Austrian Habsburgs, who through marriages were related to Italian princes, took on special meaning.

From the "Polish" perspective: two successive wives of Sigismund III were the Austrian Archduchesses Anna and Constance, who came from Graz and were the sisters of the aforementioned Ferdinand, the daughters of Archduke Charles II of Austria and Maria of Bavaria; Ladislaus IV's first wife was Archduchess Cecilia Renata, the daughter of Archduke Ferdinand (the groom's own uncle) and his first wife Anna Maria of Bavaria; the wife of Michael Korybut Wiśniowiecki was Eleanor Mary Joseph, the daughter of Emperor Ferdinand III and Eleonora Gonzaga. Certain other marriages, between Italians and Austrian Habsburgs, also proved important for the advancement of the musical culture in the courts of the Polish kings: those of Mary Magdalene, the sister of Polish queens Anna and Constance, to Grand Duke of Tuscany Cosimo de' Medici, the marriage of her brother Ferdinand with the Mantuan Prin-



JAROSŁAW BUDZIŃSKI/WARSAW CHAMBER OPERA

cess Eleonora Gonzaga, and the Archduke of Tyrol Leopold V's union with the Tuscan Princess Claudia de' Medici. The Habsburg family relationships with the families of the rulers in Florence and Mantua, the centers where opera was born, contributed to the relatively early reception of this new genre in Poland and to the creation of the famous court theater of Ladislaus IV, who in the years 1635–1648 in Warsaw, Vilnius and Gdansk staged at least ten original *drammi per musica* – dramas with music – written and printed by those courtiers employed by the king.

Opera for a wedding celebration

While still a prince, Ladislaus IV Vasa established a closer relationship with his Habsburg family during a trip round Europe in the years 1624–1625. His family contacts, and especially the theatrical performances he saw, were fundamental to the introduction of opera to the Polish court. The first confirmed performance of a *dramma per musica* in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth occurred during the reign of



Sigismund III, although on the initiative of Prince Ladislaus – the presentation of the *favola* (plot) of *Acis and Galatea*, which took place in Warsaw’s Royal Castle on 27 February 1628. The opera was slightly expanded version of the work adapted to the new circumstances. It was originally presented during the wedding of Ferdinand Gonzaga and Catherine de’ Medici in Mantua in 1617 (*Gli Amori d’Acis e Galatea* with a libretto by Gabrielle Chiabrera and music by the court chapel master of the Duke of Mantua Santi Orlandi). We can be almost certain that the score of the piece, as well as part of the troupe that performed the opera in Warsaw, were brought from Vienna, probably thanks to Ladislaus’ aunt, Empress Eleanor.

When Ladislaus married the Archduchess Cecilia Renata in 1637, his court had already seen the premieres of three operas. The biggest event in the history of Ladislaus’ theater, however, was the performance of the newly composed opera *La Santa Cecilia* (libretto by Virgilio Puccitelli, a royal secretary, and music, almost certainly, by the court chapel master Marco Scacchi) prepared for his wedding celebrations

in September 1637. The idea of performing a drama with music on a religious topic during a wedding celebration was not new. In this case, it is important first of all that in Florence in 1625 Prince Ladislaus had seen *La Regina Sant’Orsola* – an opera written for the marriage of Claudia de’ Medici and Frederick, Duke of Urbino, celebrated in the capital of the Duchy of Tuscany in 1621. After the untimely death of Frederick, Claudia was married to Leopold V, Archduke of Tyrol, another Habsburg uncle of Ladislaus. It is said she suggested the topic prepared for the ceremony in Warsaw opera (or so Virgilio Puccitelli wrote, dedicating to her the libretto of the piece).

In 1637 Claudia represented the family of the bride at the wedding of Cecilia Renata and Ladislaus. Some operatic performers also came from the Viennese court. Since Ladislaus’ ensemble included no women, attention is drawn especially by the Mantuan singers “borrowed” from the imperial court: Margherita Basile Cattanea and Lucia Rubini. Cecilia Renata’s retinue also included – as her butler – the German singer (tenor) and lutenist Johann Nauwach. It is possible that the Italian Franciscan, singer (another tenor) and composer Vincenzo Scapitta also came to the Commonwealth together with Archduchess Claudia. The Austrian contribution to the preparation of the wedding ceremonies also almost certainly involved the Italian ballet master and choreographer Santi Ventura being sent to Warsaw. Some of these remained in Poland for a longer period, probably contributing to the transmission of the new repertoire.

Wandering music

The fascinating topic of musical migration in the 17th (and also 18th) century, the movement of musicians and transmission of repertoires across sociological, economic and political contexts and the attendant cultural impact, is the subject of an international project “Music migrations in the early modern age: the meeting of the European East, West and South,” financed by a grant from HERA [Humanities in the European Research Area], obtained through the Cultural Encounters Project competition. I am delighted to be participating in it together with researchers from Croatia, Germany, Poland and Slovenia, as well as invited scholars from many other countries. The result of this collaboration, in addition to the new findings and interpretations published in articles and books and editions of scores previously known only to a few musicologists, will be a widely available database containing information about the musicians who travelled around the new Europe, participated in various “musical meetings” and in popularizing national music styles, also participated in the emergence of a universal style, which is still extant today.

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