

Baldassarre Galuppi, “Buranello”

(Born in 1706 on the Island of Burano in the Venetian Lagoon - hence his nickname “Il Buranello” - Died in Venice in 1785)

KEYBOARD SONATAS

Editing of original manuscripts by Andrea Bacchetti and Mario Marcarini

Galuppi, Not Just Comedy

Mario Marcarini

In the modern-day study of music which, in recent decades, has experienced a period of particular interest in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, two terms are often misused, due perhaps to the zeal for rediscovery or to the fairly clear and more or less conscious and understandable intention of justifying the effort required to bring back to light works forgotten for centuries, sometimes jeopardising reputations, careers and fortunes in the process. These two terms are “genius” and “overlooked”, the latter not uncommonly qualified by “wrongfully”. These terms are also (not uncommonly) applied to composers who are valid and interesting and yet perhaps not always worthy of a place among the illustrious musical figures and, in some cases, not undeserving of the oblivion to which they were consigned. This is clearly not the case, however, with Baldassarre (sometimes spelt “Baldassare”) Galuppi. That he was a genius was established long before our time in his own era, a period of exceptional cultural fervour which, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, made Venice one of the cultural and artistic capitals of Europe and, indeed, the entire world. That he was a great composer was never in any doubt, even in the dark days when eighteenth century Venetian music was considered - with benevolent presumption and, above all, due to crass ignorance - to be an insubstantial and entirely frivolous game of elegant lace and frills that threw Vivaldi, the Marcello brothers, Lotti, Legrenzi, Galuppi, Caldara and Albinoni into one giant melting pot in which concertos, symphonies, serious and comic operas, chamber music and religious and sacred music combined to form a single, indistinguishable medley. Thanks to his well-known collaboration with Carlo Goldoni, Galuppi’s fame lived on and the artist himself came to be viewed by musicology with a certain respect, if only for the merit of having produced, in partnership with the distinguished librettist, dozens of comic operas for the theatres of Venice and the world. Some of these works (*Il filosofo di campagna*, *Il mondo alla roversa* and *Il mondo della Luna* in particular) enjoyed and continue to enjoy sporadic public revivals, in honour more of the librettist than of the composer, and, for this reason, his “overlooked” chapter might appear to have closed. A proclaimed genius, then, and not forgotten; things couldn’t be better, could they? On the contrary, the term “wrongfully” still applies, albeit, in Galuppi’s case, not so much to the quality of his wrongfully neglected music but rather to his entire style, crippled by the extremely narrow view that history has taken of his broader corpus. Indeed, in addition to his hundred or so works for theatre (serious and comic operas, many of which are of great worth and introduced important new dramaturgical elements), he wrote a large number of oratorios, various cantatas, hundreds of liturgical works, religious music and instrumental works for symphony and chamber orchestra, including over a hundred sonatas for keyboard which are generally of a high compositional standard and almost all of which have never been heard or systematically and exhaustively catalogued. This, in fact, is the true face of “Il Buranello”; a cosmopolitan composer open to all forms of music and in tune with European culture, in which he played an active role, esteemed by the sovereigns of half the world and loved by his audiences. Far less esteemed, however, by the publishing world, Galuppi’s voluminous legacy is, today, scattered in manuscript form over hundreds of libraries around the globe, generally quite accessible but not immediately available for performance or publication. This fact essentially explains the total obscurity of almost his entire musical production. During the brief biographical profile that follows, we will attempt to illustrate the multitude of musical fields to which Galuppi applied his talent, and the figure that emerges will be unrecognisable as the comic opera composer that history, in its short-sightedness or bias, has created. Galuppi was born in 1706 on the Island of Burano in the Venetian Lagoon to a family of modest origin. His father was a violinist and also a barber, an almost prophetic element for the newborn Baldassarre since Antonio Vivaldi, born around thirty years before in the shadow of St Mark’s, also grew up among his father’s razors and violin bows, a not infrequent combination in the history of music and a trend illustriously begun by Alessandro Stradella. After his training and initial musical education by his father, the ambitious sixteen year-old Baldassarre tried his hand at composing, with *La fede nell’incostanza*. It was a spectacular failure, remembered with irony by the

annals of history. After the clamorous fiasco, the boy fortunately sought help and went to complete his training under the tutelage of Benedetto Marcello. Legend has it that the nobleman made the bold youth stop performing his works in public for no less than three years and, instead, study counterpoint, polyphony and the harpsichord. On completion of his training, Marcello sent Galuppi to the school of the severe and highly esteemed Antonio Lotti, who shaped the boy's style and finally sent him out to seek his fortune. In 1726, "Il Buranello" went to work in Florence as a harpsichordist at the Teatro della Pergola, a role that brought him new experiences and preluded his return to the Venetian Republic to take up composing once again. Between 1727 and 1729, in collaboration with Giovanni Battista Pescetti, Baldassarre staged several operas, including *Gli odii delusi dal sangue* and *La Dorinda*, at the city's top theatres. This constituted his first real success in Venice which would continue for many years, culminating in 1740 with his appointment to the prestigious role of Musical Director at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti¹. As well as teaching, his work in this role involved composing liturgical music² and oratorios, and was held in such high regard as to earn him both extremely high salaries and international fame. Many faraway cities, such as Turin and Mantua, commissioned operas by him and, in 1741, Galuppi was called to the King's Theatre in the Haymarket of Handel's London where he spent two years composing serious operas, achieving great success with *Penelope*, *Scipione in Cartagine*, *Enrico* and *Sirbace*, and also making a name for himself as a virtuoso harpsichordist. One of the extremely rare printed editions of his keyboard music dates back to this period, believed to have been published in London by Walsh in 1741. On his return to Italy, Galuppi began a fruitful period of collaboration with the prestigious Teatro alla Scala (then known as the Regio Ducal Teatro) in Milan, confirmation that his international reputation was reaching dizzy heights. He continued to reside in Venice while sending scores to Rome (*Evergete*, 1747) and making an important trip to Vienna (in 1748) where he produced *Demetrio* based on the libretto by Pietro Metastasio. The musical influence of the Neapolitan school grew significantly in the Venetian Republic, particularly in the field of comic opera. It is no coincidence that, during this period, Galuppi applied himself steadfastly to the genre and, in 1749, he began an artistic association with Carlo Goldoni that would constitute a crucial step in music history. Their collaboration started with *L'Arcadia in Brenta* and finished in 1766, after a series of resounding successes, with *La cameriera spiritosa*. In the meantime, Galuppi continued to produce oratorios, masses, motets and instrumental music with great success, and it was thanks to these credentials that his city elevated him first to the highly sought-after post of Vice-Chapel Master at the Cappella Ducale in 1748 and then to Chapel Master at St Mark's in 1762, the most prestigious musical post in Venice, formerly held by Claudio Monteverdi in the seventeenth century. It was not, therefore, due exclusively to the fame he earned through his comic operas that "Il Buranello" was sought out by the Tsarina Catherine of Russia in 1765, who engaged him for functions relating to the reorganisation of her Royal Chapel and all the court music in Moscow and St Petersburg. This was Galuppi's only period of court life, and he remained an independent composer all his life, many years ahead of that yearning for compositional freedom so glorified by musicology, which (with the exceptions such as the biography and works of Vivaldi) mistakenly points to Mozart and Beethoven as the first examples of courageous composers free from the constraints of dependence on Monarchs and Bishops. During his time in Russia, Galuppi wrote just one opera (*Ifigenia in Tauride*) but produced some of the most original works of his career, the most noteworthy of which are his keyboard sonatas and, above all, his Orthodox sacred works which Russian musicology considers fundamental to the development of the country's sacred music. Galuppi returned to Venice in 1768, rich, famous and laden with Royal gifts, and began a new phase of his stylistic journey marked by gradual abandonment of opera (producing just one per year until 1773 when he abandoned it altogether), and favouring, instead, sacred music, oratorios (writing thirteen between 1769 and 1782, the year of *Il ritorno di Tobia*) and compositions for keyboard, which would enjoy great success in Venice as demonstrated by the hundreds of copies and manuscript collections still conserved in the lagoon city's library archives and private collections. Despite his now advancing years, in 1768 "Il Buranello" resumed his activities at St Mark's, accepting the new post of Chorus Master at the Ospedale degli Incurabili with a very respectable salary and the obligation to produce masses, motets, psalms and Vesper music. In the years before his death, Galuppi's productivity never slowed. He was considered one of the richest and most

¹ Of all the wonders of Venice's musical past, the intensity and quality of the musical activity at its hospitals, charitable institutions supported by the aristocracy and the community, is one of the greatest. In the sixteenth century, during the Counter-Reformation, the four main centres (Derelitti, Incurabili, Mendicanti and Pietà) were founded and reorganised to take in the sick, orphans and the needy. The "secondary" activities of these foundations, the most important of which was music, soon grew to impressive proportions. The hospitals sought out the greatest talents as composers and teachers, raising their standards to the highest pinnacles of quality that became legendary all over the world.

² This included composition of works for organ, and many such manuscripts are conserved in Venice's libraries.

famous composers in the whole of Europe, and entertained cordial relations with colleagues of the calibre of Hasse, C.P.E. Bach and Salieri. Burney, who visited him in Venice, spoke of his open, sunny disposition and noble bearing and considered him the greatest of his time, second only to Jommelli. He passed away on 3rd January 1785 at the venerable age of seventy-nine, admired by a vast crowd that came to bid him farewell and escort him to his burial place in San Vidal. A few days before succumbing to the “putrid fever” that led to his death, he was still working on his Christmas Mass for St Mark’s. The notarial registers of the day inform us, with a detailed inventory, of a rich inheritance left to his “beloved wife”, Adriana Pavan, and three sons, Girolamo, Nicolò and Antonio, a librettist who wrote the words for some of his father’s comic operas. Galuppi’s musical legacy, despite the enthusiasm of a few respected scholars, still awaits systematic, scientific and complete cataloguing, but appears to be of high quality and great significance in each of the fields to which “Il Brunello” chose to apply himself. Keyboard music is no exception and, as we have seen, this was the genre that ran through the entire life of the composer, who owes much of his success to his busy public life as a harpsichordist (in orchestras) and organist (holding permanent posts at several Venetian churches such as that of Santa Maria della Fava whose archives still conserve pages of his manuscripts for that instrument). Studies of this equally important part of Galuppi’s musical life - if compared to the unexplained silence that still surrounds his sacred music and serious opera - have revealed some good but incomplete attempts at cataloguing his work between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably by Fausto Torrefranca³, resulting in a few sporadic and unsatisfactory printed editions, limited to a laughable percentage of his entire corpus of sonatas. Two important conferences in Siena in 1947 and Venice in 1985 evaluated the progress of studies on Galuppi, stimulating qualitative and quantitative analysis of his sonatas and providing material favouring the much-needed leap that could take his music out of the dusty libraries and into the concert halls. And so it was that, after the Second World War, albeit very slowly, at the hands of Egida Sartori, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli and Lya de Barberis, some of Galuppi’s sonatas shyly entered the concert repertoire. For a short time only, regrettably, but long enough to help raise public awareness of the originality of Galuppi’s work and to dispel a few prejudices. The first of these relates to the so-called and disdained “stile galante” (literally “sensitive style”), a reassuring label that is too often used by blinkered musicologists eager to hide or dismiss material that they did not like or simply did not know. Galuppi’s sonatas, as the most recent American studies by D.E. Pullmann and R. J. Holmes show, span an extremely broad time period (some fifty years), from the strict style of the first three decades of the eighteenth century to the threshold of Romantic turmoil. Their style therefore ranges from adherence to the strict “contrappunto osservato” school of counterpoint to compositions in which pure social *divertissement* gives way, sometimes unexpectedly, to more sombre and introverted tones reflecting the pre-Romantic moods and influences to which the composer was no stranger, having had the opportunity to absorb them during his long trips to Vienna, Berlin, Milan, London, Moscow and St Petersburg. Galuppi’s pieces for keyboard hold many surprises for the listener. The first and most striking concerns the composer’s inspiration and ability to produce melodies of previously unknown sweetness, veiled, all the while, by a sensation of melancholy that can transform unexpectedly into disturbances of the soul. The slow movements, which appear almost without exception at the opening of his sonatas (there are examples of pieces consisting of a single slow movement), can generally be described as “cantabile” and expressive. It is not uncommon, when listening to them, to be reminded of operatic arias. The fast movements are almost always dominated by a virtuosity that is expressive and yet never excessively showy, supported by technical mastery denoting a sound knowledge of counterpoint. Given the extensive time period and the wide variety of styles that Galuppi’s sonatas cover, it would be pointless to attempt an exhaustive analysis of them here. This collection seeks, instead, to compare pieces with an archaic emphasis, in which the influence of Scarlatti and Bach is clearly visible, to scores that have begun to show evidence of the emerging turmoil of Romanticism, in the hope of casting new light on a composer from the past whose (rightfully) famous comic works are merely the metaphorical tip of the iceberg.

The desire to use manuscripts in order to unlock Galuppi’s keyboard music led us inevitably to Venice, where much of his legacy is conserved. Very few of the manuscripts are original copies and almost all the material is therefore derived from contemporary sources, fruit of the work of unknown copyists⁴. The first

³ “For a thematic catalogue of B.G.’s harpsichord sonatas” (1909)

⁴ “The art of printing has been almost entirely lost [...] Musical compositions have a very short life in Italy due to the love of new things and the very limited demand for copies. For this reason, it is not worth the printing expenses [...]

leg of our fascinating musical tour of the Venetian Lagoon began at the Ugo and Olga Levi Foundation (established in 1962 by Ugo Levi as a tribute to his wife, Olga, and in memory of her passion for the study of music) which now operates from the magnificent Giustinian Lolin Palace, overlooking the Grand Canal, built by the young Baldassarre Longena. Since the Foundation owns some of Galuppi's original manuscripts and also has accurate photographic reproductions of a huge number of his scores, its library is an essential starting point for learning about the composer. The Director, Alberto Polo, is a generous host, happy to share his musicology expertise. Indeed, much of our research would not have been possible without his knowledge and willingness to help. A stone's throw from the Giustinian Palace stands the imposing and stately Palazzo Pisani. This magnificent building, which, sadly, is feeling the effects of time, houses the Venice Conservatoire dedicated to Galuppi's one-time teacher, Benedetto Marcello. Its library is a real treasure trove of musical gems with a rich heritage of over fifty thousand volumes and scores, some of which are only now being catalogued. From the Giustiniani, Torre Franca and Correr Martinengo Foundations, we were able to obtain electronic copies of thirty or so of Galuppi's manuscripts in the space of just a few hours. This broad repertoire enabled us to make interesting comparisons of some of the scores that feature in our collection. We extend our thanks to the Director, Chiara Pancino, and her invaluable colleagues for their kindness and understanding and the speed with which they granted our requests (something unheard-of at Italian institutions!). We would also like to thank Mariella Sala, Director of the Luca Marenzio Music Conservatoire library in Brescia, who allowed us to copy an eighteenth century manuscript of *N. XII Sonate per Piano-Forte del Sig. Baldisera Galuppi Detto Buranello* (or XII Piano Sonatas by Mr Baldisera Galuppi, known as "Il Buranello") containing significant variations on some of the works in our collection, and Alfredo Vitolo, Head Librarian at the International Museum and Library of Music in Bologna, who gave us access to a large eighteenth century collection of Galuppi's sonatas. Over a hundred handwritten scores were thoroughly examined during the creation of our collection and, of the many friends who advised us and supported us in our work, I would like, in particular, to express my gratitude to Fabio Bonizzoni and Philip Gossett for their advice and to Andrea Rocca for his indispensable help in collecting and cataloguing all the material.

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Listener's Guide

Sonata in Sol maggiore / G major / Sol majeur / G-Dur

This handwritten score is part of a larger (sadly undated) collection, heralded by a title page on manuscript paper which, as is often the case, also features calculations and intricate decorations. The single movement bears the instruction "Allegro", although the mood evoked is clearly melancholic and meditative, alternating arpeggios with triplets. The extremely sweet theme immediately played by the right hand is easily impressed on the memory and is undeniably similar to the opening of the aria "Pupille Amate" sung by Cecilio in the third act (III, 21) of Mozart's opera "Lucio Silla", which was performed in Milan in 1772, and Wolfgang and his father had visited Venice the previous year. This circumstance does not date Galuppi's work with any certainty but does offer insight into the close link between the opera, theatre and chamber music. This is key to fully understanding the poetry of Galuppi's sonatas, which often recreate an ideal "private stage" on which the "cantabilità" of the piece plays the leading role, to the detriment of mere virtuosic exhibitionism.

Sonata in Do maggiore / C major / Ut majeur / C-Dur

This magnificent and well-structured sonata in the bright key of C major is notable for its subdivision into two movements arranged with a certain symmetry which can be expressed using the formula ABA1 (1st movement, Adagio) + CDC1 (2nd Movement, Allegro). The first theme we hear is extremely "cantabile" and expressive, almost in the manner of a great "aria amorosa" in a serious opera. Here, the simple tones accentuate the serenity of the discourse which develops placidly, delighting in the beauty of the theme. The figures in the next section (B) are hardly more virtuosic, and the slightest hint of "ostinato" in the left hand does not disturb the serene and pensive mood. This leads to a return to the opening theme, giving the performer the opportunity for embellishments and simplifications. The second movement alone embodies the Venetian mood of the entire collection. Indeed, the theme is incisive and dancing, drawing the listener into a

fast and unrestrained game of progressions, scales and arpeggios which culminates in an epigrammatic close, once again demonstrating similarities to the style of Vivaldi.

Sonata in re minore / d minor / ré mineur / d-Moll

The use of the key of D minor immediately introduces the listener to an introspective world with a melancholy theme veiled in plaintive tones. The first movement is in two parts and develops through sophisticated progressions (from the tonic to the relative minor). This is typical of Galuppi's style and demonstrates his ability to create moods of ecstatic suspension so that the discourse seems able to proceed only after repeated reflections on the same theme which undergoes changes that, although sometimes minimal, transform it in their simplicity. In this case, the first movement leads to tensions that are developed further in the second movement, which features previously heard thematic elements in order to create a mood of uncertainty, emphasised by the nervous and virtuosic activity of the right hand and the chromatic effects of the left, whose sudden modulations surprise the listener and create further tensions, heightened by the game of imitation that leads (after several repeats) to a close that does nothing to resolve the anxiety or conflicts. In this piece, Galuppi reveals himself to be a modern and artful composer, well aware of the cultural stirrings of pre-Romantic Europe. All this suggests that this piece was written during an advanced stage of the composer's stylistic journey.

***Sonata in Si bemolle maggiore / B flat major / Si bémol majeur / B-Dur**

The date of 1781 that appears on the title page of the handwritten collection of six sonatas, given as gift to the future Tsar Paul I while visiting Venice, may refer to the time of its compilation and therefore not be significant with regard to the composition data of the individual pieces. Indeed, the collection includes works with an archaic tendency alongside decidedly more modern scores which are undoubtedly the result of the European cultural climate during the last three decades of the eighteenth century, a period in which, it should be remembered, Galuppi was rightly viewed as a composer of the highest order, having written major works for London, Vienna and St Petersburg. The structure of the first two movements certainly appears modern and seems intended more for the expressive potential of the pianoforte than for that of the harpsichord. The sonata opens with a theme entrusted entirely to the right hand, leaving the left with just a few scanty chords at the beginning followed by modulating arpeggios. The section is divided into two parts (A and B) with no recapitulation. Despite the major key, the tone is pensive and, once again, introspective and flows into a second (also two-part) movement in which two "souls" recognise one another. The first is virtuosic and the second eminently lyrical, taking up thematic elements from the first movement in further proof of the unitary nature of the score's conception.

Sonata in do minore / c minor / ut mineur / c-Moll

A disarmingly simple musical progression becomes the expressive and captivating vehicle for one of the jewels in Galuppi's repertoire of sonatas. A simple arpeggio played by the left hand is taken up (and later ornamented) by the right in a polyphonic game with an archaic flavour in which the imitative development provides the performer with a starting point for countless counterpoint combinations and the opportunity for free interpretation of the material whose mood is once again sombre and melancholic. The bipartite formal development of the second movement is less predictable and also more meaningful, thanks to the juxtapositioning of two contrasting episodes resolved by unexpected developments, a sign of great technical mastery exemplified by the imperfect cadence episode. Overall, given its quality, this is an inexplicably little-known sonata of great musical value and considerable expressive power, which perfectly demonstrates the unique convergence, in Galuppi's style, of ancient and modern elements and the ever-present influence of the noblest Venetian tradition which is most evident in his handling of melodies.

Sonata in la minore / a minor / la mineur / a-Moll

Twenty sonatas by "Il Buranello" appear in a sumptuous and extremely beautiful eighteenth century volume, in a precise and elegant manuscript, conserved at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Germany (a Venetian "souvenir" owned by a German nobleman or, more probably, the fruit of Galuppi's presence in Austria). The microfilm at the Levi Foundation in Venice enables us to study the archaic side of Galuppi which, while still tied to Baroque "suite" forms, is no less inspired by the melodic invention or less artful in its mastery of counterpoint. As an example of a stylistic phase that can be dated with some certainty before the 1750s, a magnificent sonata in A minor, in two movements, has been included in this collection. The opening is surprising; a "Siciliana" with an exquisite melodic design rich in flourishes and modulations, which

accentuate the melancholic and pensive nature of the piece. The Allegro (in three parts using the formula ABA1) is based on some of the thematic elements of the “Siciliana”, masterfully reproduced in order to intensify the contrasts created in the first movement. The modulations and imitations create many effects of light and darkness, and a high level of virtuosity is required from the performer.

Sonata in Si bemolle maggiore / B flat major / Si bémol majeur / B–Dur

Sonata in Si bemolle maggiore / B flat major / Si bémol majeur / B–Dur

These two sonatas, in the same, languishing and elegant key of B flat major, share an identical last movement which is already well-known among piano enthusiasts, having received the attention and pioneering treatment of Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli who used to include it in his concerts as a concerto in its own right, glorifying it with a dash of virtuosity by calling it “Presto di Galuppi”. This circumstance provides some interesting insights. The first relates to the relatively widespread custom among Venetian (and other) copyists of taking sonatas in several movements and putting together the most popular movements from different works, often with little consideration for the wishes of the composer and probably with the aim of pleasing their customers. Some of these arrangements were, admittedly, very convincing. The second, consequently, concerns the current perception of ancient music. This collection does not seek to establish which of the two manuscripts holds the true, or original, message, for the simple reason that both sonatas teach us about equally valid historical realities. It is not to be ruled out that Galuppi himself may have been aware of the publication methods of his sonatas; indeed, he may even have approved them. The important thing was to show that the “Presto” is valid as the successful completion of two very different first movements. The Andante of the first sonata is placid and extremely elegant, allowing the composer to flex his musical muscles more than usual, indulging in ornamentations (note the descending scales) which do not, however, interrupt the flow of the enchanting melody. In the second sonata, we are presented, instead, with a more incisive Allegro which, though carrying a “galante” melody, has a tighter eloquence. The “Presto” darts here and there with an extremely virtuosic and sparkling style. The structure is tripartite (ABA1) and the mood, once again, shows the influence of opera. In the two recorded versions, Andrea Bacchetti has chosen a relatively “sostenuto” tempo for the Andante, with ritornellos that balance its proportions with the length of the previous movement. In the second recording, the ritornellos are omitted and the tempo is much faster, providing an effective contrast to the opening Allegretto.

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