
Alessandro Scarlatti's chamber cantatas in Portugal

Sources and contexts of performance

Cristina Fernandes

INET-md, Universidade Nova de Lisboa

Domenico Scarlatti's relationship with the royal court of John V of Portugal, as well as the privileged master-disciple relationship he established with Maria Bárbara of Braganza, are well-known facts of musical historiography. On the contrary, the ties that linked his father, Alessandro Scarlatti, to Portugal have remained in the shadows and have only recently begun to emerge from some studies. However, Alessandro Scarlatti was one of the favorite composers of Portuguese diplomats in Rome, such as ambassador André de Melo e Castro and cardinal Nuno da Cunha e Ataíde, who chose his music for several events they promoted during their missions in the Pontifical City and commissioned works from him. Unfortunately, several of these scores were lost, but in Portugal some sources testify the circulation of Alessandro's output and the taste for his music. Beyond the autograph of the responsory *O Magum Mysterium*, that belongs to the Lisbon cathedral archive, volumes with chamber cantatas and a few loose pieces (arias and duets that are part of manuscript anthologies from the 1720s) subsist in Portuguese archives and libraries. These include also music by other composers highly appreciated in Lisbon, such as Giovanni Bononcini and Emanuele d'Astorga. Starting from a synthesis and a reassessment of the place of Alessandro Scarlatti's music in the Portuguese context, this paper intends to provide a description and analysis of the collections of cantatas for solo voice and basso continuo held in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal and the Biblioteca-Arquivo do Paço Ducal de Vila Viçosa. In dialogue with other historical documents, possible contexts of performance will also be addressed: from the royal court and aristocratic circles to their use in pedagogical practice, once some of the copies belonged to the Royal Patriarchal Seminary of Music and were afterwards inherited by the conservatory.