



Pietro Antonio Locatelli: Introduzioni teatrali

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Pietro Antonio Locatelli is known first and foremost as the composer of twelve virtuosic violin concertos which were published as his opus 3 in 1733. In this capacity he is considered the “founding-father of modern instrumental virtuosity” as the Dutch musicologist Albert Dunning writes in New Grove.

Locatelli was a child prodigy and became a member of the instrumental ensemble of the basilica in his birthplace, Bergamo, at the age of 14. In 1711 he went to Rome, where he came under the influence of Corelli, although there is no evidence that he was his pupil. Locatelli spent most of his lifetime in Amsterdam, probably mainly because the city was the centre of music publishing in Europe. His opus 1 was published by Le Cène, who also printed other collections of orchestral music. Locatelli took care of printing and selling his own chamber music, though, which resulted in the publication of seven collections, from the Op 2 to the Op 8. As at his death he turned out to be quite prosperous, he must have been a pretty good entrepreneur. He also sold musical instruments and strings, and he collected books and art. Although he mostly kept his distance from social life in the city, he regularly gave concerts at his home, probably for a circle of wealthy citizens.

Locatelli was arguably the greatest virtuoso of his time, and he himself certainly thought so. The story goes that after performing a dazzling solo he exclaimed: “Ah! What do you have to say about that?” However, many of his contemporaries found his style of playing and his compositions hard to swallow. The Dutch organist Jacob Wilhelm Lustig, while acknowledging Locatelli’s ability to captivate his audience with his virtuosity, stated that his playing was “so brutal that sensitive ears found it unbearable”. The English journalist Charles Burney showed little enthusiasm for Locatelli’s music, which “excites more surprise than pleasure”. His contemporary Charles Avison, a staunch admirer of Locatelli’s colleague Francesco Geminiani, characterised Locatelli’s music as “defective in various harmony and true invention”.

The controversies about Locatelli’s violin concertos have largely overshadowed other parts of his oeuvre. In 2015 Brilliant Classics released a recording of his entire oeuvre, which revealed that there is more to Locatelli than these concertos. He also composed a substantial amount of chamber music (trio sonatas, solo sonatas for violin and flute respectively) and concerti grossi. The present disc includes the largest part of his Op. 4, a set of six Introduzioni teatrali and six concerti grossi. This collection was published in 1735 by Le Cène in Amsterdam. Despite their different titles, the two sets have in common that they are scored in the way of a concerto grosso. Both the concertino and the ripieno consist of two violins, viola and cello. The



edition was dedicated to Abraham Vermeeren, a rich Amsterdam merchant, who is described as a “lover of music”. At his death, his estate included several instruments. He may have been a member of a collegium musicum, and in this capacity have played Locatelli’s music.

The title *Introduzzione teatrale* suggests that these pieces have been written as overtures to operas. Their form also points in this direction, as they are not any different from opera overtures of the time. Locatelli himself did never compose an opera, and these pieces may have served as overtures to operas by colleagues of his. Another possibility is that they were performed as introductions to plays in the theatre in Amsterdam, close to Locatelli’s home. The first movements are most notable for their effects and virtuosity, and may have served as curtain raisers. The second movements, mostly with the tempo indication *andante* (the first *Introduzzione* is the exception), have the indication *sempre piano*, and have the character of a *cantabile*. The closing movements are written in a dance rhythm.

These pieces are rather short: the longest takes a little under seven minutes. That leaves space for some of the *concerti grossi* from the same collection. The performers decided to record the first two of them, meaning the numbers seven and eight of the Op 4. The most remarkable is the No 8 which has the addition a *imitazione de’ corni da caccia* (in imitation of hunting horns). In the first two movements – a grave and a fugue – the concertino plays in unison with the corresponding *ripieno* parts, which points in the direction of the *stile antico*. In the last two movements the first violin has a solo role and at this point we hear some of the virtuosity of the solo concertos; that includes double stopping suggesting the two horns the title refers to.

Even in these pieces, which are formally rather conventional, it is impossible to overlook the peculiarities which make Locatelli a unique figure in the musical landscape of his time. That concerns the use of harmony, musical figures and solo episodes which can be quite demanding, even if they are short. The violin concertos are never far away. It is rather surprising that – apart from the concertos – his oeuvre is seldom performed. The Op 4 has been recorded a few times complete, by the Ensemble *Violini Capricciosi* as part of the above-mentioned *Brilliant Classics* set, and by the *Raglan Baroque Players* (Hyperion, 1997). The *Introduzzioni teatrali* have also been recorded by the *Freiburger Barockorchester* (*deutsche harmonia mundi*, 1993). A new recording is not superfluous, and the *Thüringer Bach Collegium* delivers fine performances which do full justice to these interesting pieces. If you have kept your distance from Locatelli because of his violin concertos, this recording offers a good opportunity to see him in a different light. It could even be a bridge to the violin concertos.

JUNE 18, 2023

SHARE: [TWITTER](#) [FACEBOOK](#) [EMAIL](#)**Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695-1764)****Introduzioni teatrali**

Introduzione teatrale in D, Op 4,1
 Introduzione teatrale in F, Op 4,2
 Introduzione teatrale in B-flat, Op 4,3
 Introduzione teatrale in G, Op 4,4
 Introduzione teatrale in D, Op 4,5
 Introduzione teatrale in C, Op 4,6
 Concerto grosso in D, Op 4,7
 Concerto grosso in F, Op 4,8 'à imitation de corni da caccia'
 Thüringer Bach Collegium/Gernot Süßmuth
 rec. 2022, Oberkirche, Arnstadt, Germany

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Johan van Veen

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