

La danza. Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Giuseppe Bonno (1744, Vienna).

It is sunset, and although Tirsi and Nice are lovers, he insists that she must leave for the dance alone in order to conceal their relationship. Aware of her beauty, he realizes that her absence will immediately be noticed, and such is his love for her that he fears possible rivals, in spite of her assurance to the contrary. For Tirsi, Nice is the desired prize of all shepherds and the envy of all nymphs, claims which she refutes while also questioning his concerns, even if they were, indeed, true. Finally, Tirsi confesses his apprehension that if others sigh for her, she may be tempted to respond. Disconcerted, Nice counters: how can Tirsi bid her go while burdening her with the knowledge of the misery her absence will cause him; any moment of pleasure away from him would thus become a moment of guilt. Ashamed of his jealousy, Tirsi bids her go to adorn the gathering, but only after a duet in which the couple express their mutual devotion.

In the Hérissant edition of Metastasio's works, *La danza* is identified simply as a *cantata a due voci* in reference to Bonno's setting performed at the *Hofburg* by a lady and gentleman of the court. Metastasio subsequently sent a copy of the text to Carlo Broschi (Farinelli) in Madrid where, partnered by the soprano castrato, Gioacchino Conti (Gizziello), he performed the piece in 1756. Nicola Conforto's score for this performance, now written for professional singers, identifies the work as a *componimento drammatico*, thus bringing the piece in line with other *cantate a due voci* where each of the two performers retains two arias and both unite in a final duet. The same can be said of Christoph Gluck's setting performed one year earlier, on May 5, 1755 at the Laxenburg Palace just south of Vienna. The singers on this occasion were soprano, Caterina Gabriell, engaged by the imperial court across the years 1755-56 who sang the role of Nice, with Joseph Frieber, the Silango from Gluck's *Le cinesi* at Schlosshof the year before as Tirsi. Gluck's score identifies the work as a *componimento drammatico pastorale*, and *La danza* preceded a pastoral ballet choreographed by Franz Hilverding with music by Joseph Starzer. Although no formal celebrations had been planned, this performance coincided with the eighth birthday of the Archduke Leopold. The work was repeated the next evening without the ballet and again the following year on May 30. *La danza* is almost devoid of action, a situation that enabled Metastasio to reduce the recitative, a feature he mentioned to Farinelli in a letter dated 09:07 1749. As a result, a cantata-like simplicity prevails.

Settings:

Bonno (Vienna 1744); Gluck (Vienna 1755); Conforto (Madrid 1756); Santos (Lisbon 1766); Hasse (Venice 1775); Zur Wohnung (Halle 1786); Reichardt (St. Petersburg c.1788); Himmel (Berlin 1792); Zingarelli (? ?); Capece, Scondito duca (? ?); Celli (? ?); Kanne (? ?).