

## Componimenti minori

Between 1741 and 1760, Metastasio wrote fifteen dramatic pieces which include several with generic designations that underline their direct relationship with the typical Italian solo cantata of the time of which the poet wrote thirty-seven. Nicola Porpora's *12 cantate da camera* published in London in 1735, all with Metastasian texts, provide ample examples, each one with recitative connecting two arias (no.8 of the set, "Or che una nube ingrata," also adding an opening cavatina). The expansion of the soliloquy-like solo cantata into a *cantata a due voci* or a *cantata a tre voci* automatically adds a further dramatic dimension by way of a discourse between *dramatis personae*. The most expanded of such pieces are the five *cantate a due voci* intended for two professional singers with each one retaining two arias and both uniting in a final duet: *Amor prigioniero* (1741), *Il vero omaggio* (1743), *La danza* (1744), *La ritrosia disarmata* (1759), and *L'ape* (1760). All but one of these *cantate* is also identified as a *componimento drammatico* in the Hérissant edition, *La danza* being the exception. As a work of limited action and set for performance by a lady and gentleman of the court, it remains simply as a *cantata a due voci* in the Hérissant entry. It is named a *componimento drammatico*, however, on the title page of the later scores of Gluck (1755) and Conforto (1756), both now showing instrumental and vocal expansion for professional singers. Also identified as *componimenti drammatici* are four *cantate a tre voci* which, like all the remaining *componimenti minori*, are written for amateur performers, including the royal archduchesses: *Le cinesi* (version 1 - 1735), *Tributo di rispetto e d'amore* (1754), *La gara* (1755), and *Il sogno* (1756). With the exception of *Il sogno*, where Archduchess Maria Anna is given two arias and the work ends with a final "coro," each performer is allotted one aria and each work concludes with a final trio.

The remaining six works divide, according to length, layout, content, and performing forces into three pairs. *Il ciclope* (1754) and *Il quadro animato* (1760) are each identified as a *breve cantata a due* – in the case of *Il ciclope*, also as a *cantatine a due voci* in one of Metastasio's letters to Frinelli (15:02:1753). Both are short and contain only one aria for each singer and a final duet. The two "complimenti" are even shorter. They are written for two archduchess and consist of a shared recitative followed by an aria for one archduchess and a short *recit. ed aria* for the other, the content being nothing further than an encomium to an honoured parent. Such also is the content of the twin pieces, *Augurio di felicità* (1749), listed in the Hérissant edition as a *cantata a tre voci*, and *La rispettosa tenerezza* (1750) listed as a *componimento drammatico*, the latter serving as a reminder, perhaps, that Metastasio also uses this term quite freely in its literal sense of a "dramatic composition." This usage is clear from a letter to Giuseppe Bettinelli (14:11:1733) which begins: "I have read the three *feste teatrali*, that is *L'asilo d'Amore*, the *Enea negli Elisi*, and the *componimento drammatico* for the birth of the Royal Dauphin [i.e. *the festa teatrale, La contesa de' numi*]." The two works in question consist simply of a recitative shared by three very young archduchesses that leads into a final trio, hardly a match for *Amor prigioniero* or *Il sogno*. Furthermore, Metastasio provides the final word in his correspondence, referring to *La rispettosa* as both a *brevissimo complimento* (letters to Giovanna di Montoia-Hermannstadt [29:09:1750] and Tommaso Filippini [22:10:1750]), and a *piccolo complimento* (two letters to his brother, Leopoldo Trapassi [05:10:1750] and [19:10:1750]).

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