

Angelica. Libretto by PIETRO METASTASIO, first set by Nicola Porpora (1720, Naples). The title *Angelica e Medoro* is also common for this libretto.

Metastasio based this serenata, the first of four written in Naples between 1720 and 1722, upon events drawn from Cantos 18,19 and 23 of Lodovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* which, in turn, is a continuation of Matteo Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*, both works being set against the background of Charlamagne's war with Agramante, the Saracen King of Africa, and his allies from Spain. In Boiardo's epic, Argalia, son of the King of Cathay, brings Angelica, his sister, to the court of Charlemagne. Here, she gains the undesired attentions of all the knights, particularly of the two cousins, Orlando and Rinaldo. She escapes, and several of Ariosto's episodes recount her attempts to avoid her admirers. On such an occasion, while fleeing from Orlando, she encounters Medorus, a Saracen knight who has been wounded while attempting in vain to recover the body of his slain king. Angelica applies herbs to heal Medorus's wounds and the couple fall in love. The plot, as it then unfolds, contrasts the practised liaisons of courtly relationships with the simpler bonds that exist between rustics. It also touches upon the dependency of the courtly upon the less sophisticated characters once having strayed into their pastoral environment, and the discomfort encountered by the simpler folk once drawn into the stratagems of the courtly.

PART I The serenata begins as Angelica and Titirus, an elderly shepherd, lead Medorus away from the scene of his misadventure towards the latter's humble abode. Licora, a shepherdess, enters, anxious for the arrival of her beloved Thyrsis, ever fearing the loss of his love and fidelity. He soon arrives, however, to reassure her. An angry Orlando, in pursuit of an enemy, startles the couple, but subsequently accepts shelter from Licora. Inevitably, Angelica comes face to face with him and realizes that she must appease him until such time as she and Medorus can escape together. To this end, she bewilders Licora and momentarily alarms Medorus with the apparent sincerity of her expression of feigned love for Orlando. Medorus, however, understands instantly and is soon convinced otherwise.

PART 2 For Angelica and Medoro, deception in matters of love is simply a part of the courtier's arsenal. For the more artless, like Licora and Thyrsis, it remains foreign, even in jest. Although still bewildered by Angelica's behaviour towards Orlando, Licora wonders how such deception can be accomplished. Medorus recommends she learn from Angelica, but adds a little advice himself, enough for Licora to summon sufficient bravado to try the courtly practice on Orlando. Obsessed as he is with Angelica, she succeeds only in enraging Thyrsis who chances to observe the scene. With such devastating results, Licora is unwilling to try further courtly methods to regain his affections. As for Angelica, her own machinations are thwarted by further rustic naivety when Titirus innocently draws Orlando's attention to the entwined names of Angelica and Medorus carved on the tree trunks. The knight's immediate frenzy not only informs Thyrsis that his anger towards Licora is groundless, but also compels him to mobilize a hasty escape for the two practised lovers. Orlando, in calmer mood, longs for Angelica's return, love, and forgiveness.

Angelica was Metastasio's first dramatic work specifically written for musical setting. It served as part of the celebrations surrounding the birthday, on August 28, of the Empress Elizabeth Christine of Austria to whom Metastasio pays tribute in the *licenza* that follows the serenata itself. The first performance actually took place on November 4 in the garden theatre of Antonio Carmine Caracciolo, Prince of Torella, a member of one of the established noble families of Naples and of the aristocratic circle which included the Austrian viceroy. To add to the Austrian association, the serenata was dedicated to Caracciolo's house guest at the time, Count Johann Wilhelm Graf von Sinzendorf, son of the Austrian Chancellor, Count Philipp Ludwig Wenzel von Sinzendorf. The nobility of the audience, however, was matched by the stellar cast. Not only did the soprano castrato, Domenico Gizzi sing the role of Medoro, but Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli appeared as Angelica and Carlo Broschi [Farinelli] as Thyrsis. Both were to become life-long friends of the poet, Metastasio often referring to Farinelli as his *gemello* (twin), in deference to each of them having made his theatrical debut in this same production.

Settings: Porpora (Naples 1720); Pescetti (as *Angelica and Medorus* – London 1739); G.F. Milano (as *Angelica e Medoro* – ?Naples 1740); Fiorillo (Venice 1744); Scalabrini (as *Angelica e Medoro* – Hamburg 1746); Mele (as *Angelica y Medoro*

– Madrid 1747); Brusa (Venice 1756); Zonca (Munich 1758); Carvalho (Queluz 1778); Moneta (as *Angelica e Medoro*
– Porta Rossa 1780); Cimarosa (with Millico, as *Angelica e Medoro* – Vienna 1783); Cinque (as *Angelica e Medoro* – ?
c.1800); ?Valero (? 1843).