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‘The Queen’s lov’d presence to each step adds life’: Caroline of Ansbach’s Musical Patronage and Dance’s Theatre

[THANK HANDEL DOCS, DONALD, HELEN COFFEY, Giando]

When Caroline arrived in London in 1714 she was faced with a dilemma. Her musical connoisseurship gave her little guidance about how to patronize music in England. British secular music belonged to the public sphere; to patronize music, Caroline had to share with audiences the music she endorsed, and tolerate musical representations over which she had no control. Reviewing three musical genres – cantata, opera, and *la danse noble* – this paper shows how Caroline and those seeking her support invoked her *ancien regime* taste to represent her. By establishing the terms of approval, Caroline elicited compositions and dedications that strengthened her official representations elsewhere. But when Caroline sought to steer her public representation with *Merlin’s Cave*, a commissioned garden installation showing her British lineage, her image-brokering faltered. *Merlin’s Cave* sparked the *Royal Chase*, a hit pantomime that, while representing her sympathetically, dumbed-down her *Merlin’s Cave* programme. Thus theatricalized, Caroline’s project then also provoked a ribald poem that sneeringly compared *Merlin’s Cave* to a vagina.

CANTATA

Caroline’s early mentor, **Electress of Brandenburg Sophie Charlotte** [Fig] ¹ was perhaps her most important musical influence. Sophie Charlotte arranged for Caroline to take keyboard lessons from Sophie Charlotte’s Hanover-based teacher Johann Anton Coberg, whom Sophie Charlotte twice ordered to Berlin.² More importantly, Sophie Caroline exposed Caroline to another Hanover-based musician, Agostino Steffani who composed two duets for Sophie Charlotte that he included in two MS volumes of duets for her.³ This collection was apparently gifted to Caroline, because they entered Caroline’s personal library.⁴ Through this bequest, Caroline became the guardian of Steffani’s erudite musical legacy.

Caroline's association with Steffani duets dovetailed neatly with her patronage of male intellectual pursuits – science, philosophy and theological debate.⁵ In 1739 the music critic Johann Mattheson described the genre's frank gendering:

'Duets ... because ... fugal, artificial [i.e. complex] and [of] intertwined nature ... require a true man, and are a great pleasure to the musically-trained ear ... The said Steffani was incomparably outstanding in this type.'⁶

Steffani's duets placed Caroline in a male province where intellect and rules dominated, and felicitously distanced her from the irrational prima donna. When a certain young George Friedrich Handel was made Hanover's Kapellmeister in 1710 – an appointment that Caroline strongly supported – he composed five duets, which became part of a collection for Caroline's 'practice'. As Colin Timms has shown, Handel consciously copied Steffani's, borrowing ideas and imitating his style; this homage was perhaps as much a homage to Caroline's taste as it was to Steffani's.

Once in London, Caroline could extract another advantage vocal duets and cantatas: distinguishing royal from common musical taste. From 1721 to 1730, Italian composers in London produced a brief flurry of chamber vocal music by subscription. Caroline showed solidarity, joining in 1721 a dazzling list of 238 subscribers to **Giovanni Bononcini's *Cantate e Duetti*** [Fig *]. In a 1732 cantata collection dedicated to Caroline, Carlo Arrigoni linked her more concretely with cantatas, making the genre stand for the music under her protection. Arrigoni concluded his volume with **a musical portrait of Caroline, twisting Arcadian** conceits into testimony about her patriotism. Titled 'L'Amor della Patria', the 'Adagio' features a protagonist who places love of her homeland above all things [Fig *].

The 'Adagio' is learned. The bass line dictates the melody: instead of melismatic melody, Arrigoni here deployed species counterpoint, generating Steffani-esque chains of dissonances and suspensions. Most importantly, by weaving remote keys into a contrapuntal

fabric, the composer, rather than singer, communicates pathos and ‘wandering’. [audio file]
 In sum, verses told of Caroline’s loyalty to Britain, while music represented her loyalty to the *musica rara* of Steffani’s world.⁷

OPERA

Arrigoni’s strategy was adroit, because the British music market confronted Caroline with a need to prove her patriotism. The House of Hanover stoutly supported Italian opera, a genre typically held in in the British press to be proof of the nobility’s degeneracy and profligacy. How could Caroline patronise opera without being condemned for doing so? Evidence suggests two strategies may have been in play: first, to keep patronage out of public view; second, to elevate patronage above the fetishism around singing stars.

In chronicling music at court for Caroline, Peggy Daub notes how rarely newspapers reported the private performances by Italian singers.⁸ I believe this was deliberate: the bad press around Italian opera incentivized keeping quiet about court concerts. Accounts financial and anecdotal capture neither the quantity nor the content of these concerts. A recently discovered letter of 7 February 1735 by Caroline to Princess Anne in Holland at least gives a glimpse into how Caroline had a hand in organizing these concerts [Fig *]: ‘Yesterday I entertained my favourite Bishops, him of a free-thinking Chichester, and Salisbury, with Porpora’s opera, which is very fine; Cuzzoni, Farinelli and Senesino sang, and your little violinist played ... in the coming week I will give them Strada’. Caroline refers apparently to a private concert at St James’s Palace for her two favourite bishops – Thomas Sherlock (Salisbury) and Francis Hare (Chichester). She wrote of ‘giving’ concerts by Handel’s soprano Anna Maria Strada, and stars from the Opera of the Nobility – Cuzzoni, Farinelli and Senesino – whom Prince Frederick was patronising as part of his opposition to his father. Out of public view, Caroline may have sought to compete with Frederick for patronage of opera stars.

Librettists pursued a second strategy, that of elevation, by making Caroline's opera patronage acceptable: they claimed that hers was a 'scientific' appreciation of works, and not a fixation the Italian singing stars, enticed to London by huge salaries. In his 1715 dedication of *Lucio Vero*, Nicolas Haym lauded Caroline's 'scientific' grasp of music;⁹ Rolli, who claimed he was Caroline's Italian teacher, praised the 'Science' underpinning her knowledge of opera and poetry, in his dedication to her in *Narciso* (1720).¹⁰ In the dedication to Caroline of his most successful opera, *Giulio Cesare in Egitto*, Haym spoke of Caroline's 'perfect and judicious knowledge' of music, together with characteristics key to Caroline's public representation generally.¹¹

The 1726 rivalry staged between the *prima donna* Cuzzoni, of whom Caroline was a known supporter, and another *prima donna*, Faustina Bordoni,¹² threatened Caroline with being drawn into bad press about the Cuzzoni-Faustina competition. This rivalry was first staged in *Handel's Alessandro, with a libretto by Rolli*. In a privately-funded edition, Rolli dedicated *Alessandro* to Caroline, invoking her reputation for impartiality and learnedness, and praising how she assessed music by engaging with 'the intellect' [Fig *]. He emphasised how his poetry offset the music's sensuality. Most important of all, Rolli claimed that Caroline had seen in Hanover Steffani's *Alessandro* – unlikely, since this production was in 1690, when Caroline was seven, and residing in Berlin – and that Steffani's *Alessandro* inspired the London production. Here Bononcini deftly masked the true motivation of the London *Alessandro* – the crass staging of a celebrity battle.¹³

DANCE

The 'public' that Caroline faced at the operas was pleasingly select. Even more select was the company at court balls where French choreography, or *la danse noble*, was performed [Fig *]. Caroline was pivotal to reviving court dance. She probably chose the renowned Anthony L'Abbé to teach her children, and to choreograph dances representing her

and her family. L'Abbé refined the royals' representation, using for his royal dances Handel's semantically rich operatic music.

Dance schooled body and mind in ancien regim practices, forming the aesthetic basis for deportment as well as for dances that mediated affective display. When performed at court, the dances reinforced court hierarchy: performance was designed for the monarch's gaze [Fig *] and loaded with signifiers. For the *danses a deux*, the order of the dancers mirrored their rank at court. Each dance type – minuet, gavotte, passpied etc – utilized standardized gestures, step sequences and floor patterns, performed to music usually from the theatre. Embodied, theatricalized and conventionalized, dance types – minuet, gavotte, passpied, etc – were assigned the task of communicating specific passions, that later music critics catalogued for instrumental playing.

Court balls languished during the last years of Queen Anne's reign, probably due to her deteriorating health.¹⁴ Soon after Caroline arrived in England, the dance master John Essex squarely credited her with revitalizing the tradition of balls. He did so in a likely bid to replace Mr Isaac, who choreographed court dances until 1714 or 1715. Essex dedicated to Caroline his revised English version of *Chorégraphie*,¹⁵ a 1701 treatise by one of the fathers of French court dance, Raoul Auger Feuillet.¹⁶ Essex began his dedication to Caroline with, 'I am sensible your most Valuable thoughts and Actions are Employ'd upon the Princely Education of your Illustrious Issue'. That is, Caroline would choose her children's dance master, and he was putting himself forward. To woo her support, he painted Caroline as the catalyst for the rebirth of la belle danse in England [Fig *]:

In the Grandure & Gayety of the Court ... your Highness may Justly be said to have retriiv'd the English Gallantry, which for these last late years has been Entirely Neglected ... Your Royal Highness hath more particularly Encourage'd the Art of

Dancing ... you give such peculiar Grace to it, that we may Expect to See it rise to the Highest perfection from your Patronage and Encouragement.

Rather than Essex, however, Anthony L'Abbé got the job as dance master. L'Abbé was a former star, first of the Paris Opéra, then of principal theatres in London, where from 1698 he dominated for a decade and a half; he also performed at Queen Anne's birthday entertainments.¹⁷ By 1715 L'Abbé was Princess Anne's dance master; Caroline, the acknowledged manager of her children's education, probably selected him.¹⁸ In 1720, the year Caroline regained access to her children since her 1717 court exile, L'Abbé became the court's dance master, the first such appointment since 1688¹⁹. His salary reflected his importance: by 1726 he was earning, after tax, £234 per annum compared to Handel's £195²⁰.

Besides a teacher, L'Abbé was a choreographer. Thirteen of his dances, titled, according to longstanding tradition, after their honorees – The Princess Anna, The Prince of Wales – passed into print. Like court odes, British court dances routinely honoured a monarch's birthday, or the new year; but unlike odes, dances were performed in London theatres.²¹²² Through their dissemination on stage and page, Abbé's dances inscribed their royal dedicatees with a set of affects, and facilitated an embodiment of these affects that a broader public could emulate.

Playwright Philip Frowde, in his 1727 birthday verses to Caroline, singled out dance as her domain. He describes a court dance presided over by Caroline, whose 'loved presence to each step adds life'. Frowde made dance into physical proof of her effect on subjects: thanks to Caroline's presence, the male dancer's 'active strength' increases, while the female gains 'smoother grace' [Fig].²³

In 1714/15, John Essex had sought Caroline's favour not just in words, but in movement, concluding his dedicated volume with his choreography, 'The Princess's Passpied' [Fig]. The passpied was one of the French court's earliest official dances. It shares

with the minuet a 3+3 phrase structure, but is quick, full of unexpected offbeats, and is more vigorously accented than the minuet, with fewer points of arrival.²⁴ Although Essex's choreography is subtly graceful, the passpied was characterized typically as 'gay' 'playful' and 'frivolous'. Such attributes ill-matched the highbrow Caroline. No wonder Essex didn't get the job.

L'Abbé, in contrast to Essex, deftly captured Caroline's profile in his 1728 birthday 'March' for her [Fig]. The dance type alludes to her date of birth: the first of March. L'Abbé cunningly followed French theatrical tradition by using Handel's 1726 'March in Scipio' which like in French productions began the work. More important still were the topical politics that the March could refer to. Stage directions in Rolli's libretto called for Scipio, 'on a Triumphal Car' to be followed by a 'victorious Army, and Slaves' as Scipio enters the newly-conquered New Carthage – that is, Cartagena in Spain. In 1728 Cartagena was the new home of the Spanish Navy, over which Britain had prevailed when Spain had tried to seize Gibraltar back from Britain the year before. The March's music invoked British and Caroline's authority, as did L'Abbé's choreography. [demo Edith The dance opens regally, with steps alternating with suspended motion. Because strictly symmetrical, the dancers' movements and floor patterns demonstrate control. L'Abbé heightened the refinement by relying on eighth, rather than quarter or half turns].

In the playhouse, dance also aided Caroline's public representation. The 1736 pantomime *The Royal Chace or Merlin's Cave*, deployed dance and song to defend Caroline's taste against critics.²⁵ From 1727, Caroline had employed artists and architects to create programmatic installations at Richmond, her dowager residence, to be viewed by visitors. Two installations were particularly crucial to Caroline: the rustic Hermitage of 1732, filled with busts of pioneering scientists, philosophers and theologians, and 'Merlin's Cave', a Gothic thatched cottage, with six waxworks [Figs.] The waxworks formed a tableau with

Merlin, his secretary and storied British heroines connected to the King Arthur legend. While the Hermitage's design and programme of Worthies was easily comprehensible, 'Merlin's Cave' confused audiences.²⁶ The Opposition seized on the figure of Merlin to make him stand for first Minister Robert Walpole and his devilish powers; for Richmond locals, Merlin became a marketing tool, used at taverns, fair booths, and coffee houses where 'Merlin in Miniature' figures were sold.²⁷

In short, as a means of legitimizing Caroline's British lineage, Merlin's Cave failed.²⁸ *The Royal Chase* aimed both to aid the Cave's reception while rivalling the revival, Dryden's and Purcell's *King Arthur, or Merlin the British Enchanter*.²⁹ In contrast to *King Arthur*, the *Royal Chase* was a new work, with music by John Galliard, a student of Steffani's. It featured 'Exact Representations' not just of Merlin's Cave – as in *King Arthur* – but also 'A View of the Hermitage in the Royal Gardens at Richmond' which opened the work [Fig]. Against this backdrop appeared the 'royal huntsman', who sang an elaborate hunting air about the Gardens' charms [audio]. Thanks to this scene, the young John Beard – a Chapel Royal and Handel singer employed also for Hanoverian court entertainments – made his playhouse break-through, and Galliard's song became an entr'acte staple.

After the Hermitage scene, the action then moves to just outside Merlin's Cave. Merlin praises the Cave for the contemplation it provides – a reference both to the Cave's Merlin waxfigure [Fig] depicted at study, and to the books housed in the Cave [Fig]. Suddenly, the goddess Diana descends; to entertain her, Merlin, by waving his wand, changes the scene to the Cave's interior, and conjures up 'Cupid, Zephyrs, Psyche and Aerial Spirits' [Fig] who, as at a court ball, 'express their Love and Honour to Diana' through *la danse noble*. After Diana bids farewell, Merlin concludes the scene with the words: Ne'er before/ Cou'd this my humble Roof the Presence boast/ Of such Divinity, nor ever shall/ Till Pallas, like a British Queen, descend,/ And her great Mind from Toils of Empire here unbend.' With

this conclusion, the Royal Chase radically simplified the Cave's purpose and message, reducing it to place of respite from Caroline's 'Toils of Empire'.

Other interpretations were less sympathetic, as in the **anonymous printed poem**, 'Little Merlin's cave. As it was lately discover'd, by a Gentleman's Gardener, in Maidenhead-Thicket', published 7 Feb 1737.³⁰ Here, Merlin's Cave is compared to another cave that is 'every whit as good', with 'Bushes all without' and 'Crimson velvet' within; the speaker then elaborates in increasingly graphic terms on the cave's pleasures. The poem's illustration [Fig *] visually parodied Merlin's Cave (Fig *) by depicting a vagina-shaped rustic cottage in the middle of a reclining nude landscape.

Conclusion

As a patron, Caroline's impact on music slight, but music and dance dedicated to her tell us much about how she wanted to be seen, and how others thought she wanted to be seen. Caroline belonged musically to absolutist court traditions which had little traction in London. Sophie Charlotte's bequest of Steffani duets to Caroline captured a fading musical heritage; Handel honoured that heritage, as did Italian composers in London seeking Caroline's support. Caroline's patronage at court of Italian opera singers was necessarily discreet, but librettists could link her love of opera to her musical expertise and intellect. Opera gave Caroline the chance to display her taste, and herself, to her subjects. Her greatest impact was on *la belle danse*. She reportedly revived court ball traditions, probably appointed the star dance master L'Abbé, and inspired honorific choreographies through which her subjects embodied how she wanted to be recalled. But she was helpless before London's freewheeling market for fads, oversimplification and smut, as evidenced Merlin-mania, The Royal Chase, and the reduction of her temple of contemplation to a human orifice.

¹ Johann Wilhelm von Kolm, Deutsch: Wachsporträt von Sophie Charlotte von Hannover, Ehefrau des Friedrich III., Kurfürst von Brandenburg (später als Friedrich I. König in Preußen), English: Portrait of Sophia Charlotte of Hanover (1668-1705), Queen in Prussia; circa 1700; wax; Skulpturensammlung (from the Royal

„Kunstammer“ collection), Bode-Museum Berlin. Photograph by Andreas Praefcke. |Counterpart: wax portrait of Sophia Charlotte's husband, Frederick III. of Prussia

² Timms (2003), 46; NGD, ‘Coberg, Johann Anton’

³ Lbl RM 23 K.7-8, carry a monogram (crown and letters ‘SC’) and title ‘Duets: Music Worthy of Royal Ear’, indicating they were intended for, or owned by, Sophie Charlotte. Timms, Preface, x. A 1743 inventory of Caroline’s library lists two MS volumes of Steffani’s duets, assumed to be RM 23 K. 7-8

⁴ BL RM 23.k.7 See Timms, Preface, xi Other Steffani duets – including the three Handel later conspicuously drew on – were bound into a collection during Caroline’s residency.

⁵ Marschner, see esp. 170-73.

⁶ Mattheson, 1739 in Timms, Handel Tercentenary, 223

⁷ who in January 1727 had been made long-distant president of London’s Academy of Vocal Music – founded the year before by composers, among them Bononcini, to defend music against commercial taste By 1732, Arrigoni could easily have accessed Steffani’s biography – published ** - and duets. Eight years earlier Bononcini had, because Steffani stood for a craft under siege, made Steffani the president of their newly-formed the Academy of Vocal Taste, and Steffani’s duets had circulated in manuscript among Academy members.

⁸ Daub [add]

⁹ Haym, Lucio Vera 1715

¹⁰ Rolli, Narciso 1720

¹¹ Handel Docs: BJ, no.1. Performances: 20, 22, 25, 27, 29 February; 3, 7, 10, 14, 21, 24, 28 March; 7, 11 April. For revivals under Handel, see 2 January 1725, 17 January 1730 and 1 February 1732. There was also a performance involving some of the original singers, but not Handel, in Paris in the summer of 1724: see [August – September]. In all the opera received 38 performances in London; the 13 performances of the initial run were broken only by Durastanti’s benefit on 17 March.

¹² See Aspden, chaps 1-4

¹³ Alessandro, Drama, di Paolo Rolli (Thomas Edlin, London, 1726), pp. (3)-(6), (8).. The dedication to Caroline, Princess of Wales, is not in the theatre wordbook. Unlike the Rolli/Edlin edition of Scipione, which was published three weeks after the first performance, that for Alessandro does not appear to have been advertised, and the publication date is uncertain.

¹⁴ Marsh diss; Kay low Martin diss

¹⁵ Marsh points out that Smith’s attribution of 1715 to Essex’s volume is based on error.

¹⁶ Marsh diss, 23-24; 76-8. Smith thought the date of pubn to be 1715, but Marsh shows he based his assumption on an error.

¹⁷ ODNB: get other literature

¹⁸ Gerrard, 151; Marschner

¹⁹ Thorpe, Dance and Patronage, 86.

²⁰ 29 September 1726, Court Establishment of the three Princesses, Handel Documents, 1726-7, [doc 10 BJ, p.13]

²¹ Eleven choreographies were titled the monarch’s birthday; two were ‘for the Year of’. Indexed in Marsh, 302-4 and Marsh and Little; Four of L’Abbé’s generically named dances were published; 13 L’Abbé dances were included in a 1725 collection Ibid

²² These are listed Marsh, 214, Table 2 and catalogued in Little and Marsh.

²³ Frowde, in *The Flower-piece* (1731). On representations of motherhood in writings about Caroline see Nussbaum, cited in Gerrard (2002)

²⁴ Little, Jenne 83-85

²⁵ It opened 23 Jan

²⁶ ‘An ogee-shaped doorway, flanked by Gothic buttresses, one entered a large vaulted circular room, the walls covered with blind tracery into which niches were set. On either side of the main room there were octagonal ap

²⁷ Gerrard, Meixel, Colton

²⁸ Marchner 63

²⁹ See Burden’s article

³⁰ *Common Sense or The Englishman's Journal* (London, England), Saturday, February 5, 1737; Issue 1; *Common Sense or The Englishman's Journal* (London, England), Saturday, February 12, 1737; Issue 2.