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THE CONTRIBUTION OF MUSICOLOGY TO METASTASIO STUDIES

Eighteenth-century opera, as understood today, is a musical genre, like other musical genres such as the symphony or the sonata. The term *eighteenth-century opera* implies a history of opera, and the concept of opera history implies music: it is a history of voices and instruments, of musical styles and performance techniques, but above all of composers. Every visit to a bookshop will confirm that opera is a subject belonging to music and not to literature, not even necessarily to theatre.

Now this *musicalisation* of opera in the public mind is very much a result of the history of opera, of music itself. Because of the transformations of European society and its changing attitude towards the performing arts, the nineteenth-century musical theatre became the arena of composers rather than poets. The Classic-romantic concept of music as a self-expressive, authorial art was now fully applied to compositions for the stage. This concept is indeed justified for Classic-romantic opera – though when applied to the eighteenth century it would seriously under-rate opera's literary and theatrical loyalties.

The Metastasian *dramma per musica*, in particular, appears in this perspective as an anomaly, above all because the librettist involved here is culturally more important than the composers. Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito* has attracted more research than any other individual Metastasio setting, because it is only in this work that the balance librettist-composer feels right to us¹. In reality, the balance is abandoned here: Mozart made an end to Metastasian opera. From the new perspective of a composer-driven history of opera which his music requires, the *dramma per musica* (or *opera seria*) appears distorted: a curious social practice of pre-enlightened court culture rather than a tradition of European art. In other words, its artistic character is in danger of becoming unintelligible to our retrospection.

If, for example, we automatically assume the composer to be the master of the expression in *opera seria* (which would be appropriate in Verdi), close searches for dramatic expression in eighteenth-century opera scores lead time and again to dis-

¹ This opera is not only the most-studied musical setting of a Metastasian drama, Mozart's music has also caused the drama itself to become the most-studied of Metastasio's works. See TABLE, classifying the literature on Metastasio reported in the musicological reference-work *RILM* (which of course covers publications of literary history and criticism).

appointment. As a result of such negative experiences, the absence of musical 'drama' from *opera seria* typically worries not only historians of literature and general culture whose view of the stylistic responsibilities of music is understandably one-dimensional, but also music historians. *Opera without Drama* is the title of an influential musicological study, and the even more famous book entitled *Opera as Drama* emphatically sidelines the *dramma per musica*². Starting from an anachronistic concept of the respective roles of music and drama in *opera seria*, these studies diagnose an exaggerated contrast between them. Under these preconditions, it has become difficult to operate in fairness to the music of *dramma per musica*, and perhaps as a consequence many music historians now limit their investigation to the non-musical side of the genre.

Musicological studies of such matters as musical style or performance in *opera seria* are surprisingly scarce³; some of those that do appear can be narrow, single-mindedly analytical – focussing, for example, on aria forms – or oblivious to the theatrical side of this music.

On the other hand, the contribution of musicologists to the cultural history of *dramma per musica*, and of opera in general, has strongly increased in the last two decades. A recent segment of these endeavours is the study of *opera seria* in a framework of cultural anthropology⁴. Other musicologists are wedded to the study of opera as a business and institutional culture. To present opera in its socio-cultural context is a recipe for success which musical writers cannot ignore⁵, though at the bottom of the story there may sometimes be an evasion: a disappointment with the music, perhaps, or a lack of confidence in the chances of drawing the musical phenomenon into the general cultural picture.

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The expansion and interpenetration of musical and cultural research in opera has other imbalances, too, which are mostly a matter of academic politics. Whereas socio-cultural studies are usually seen as an enrichment of musicology and welcomed by colleagues and students, the close study of dramatic literature by a musicologist would be considered an interdisciplinary step. Those authors who attempt it, may fall into the interdisciplinary trap: nobody reads them. Musical colleagues

² See, respectively, ROBERT S. FREEMAN, *Opera without Drama. Currents of Change in Italian Opera 1675–1725* (Studies in Musicology 35) Ann Arbor 1981; and JOSEPH KERMAN, *Opera as Drama*, New York 1956.

³ See TABLE.

⁴ See MARTHA FELDMAN, *Magic Mirrors and the Seria Stage. Thoughts Toward a Ritual View*, in: *JAMS* 48 (1995) 423–484.

⁵ The preferred canvas for cultural history-painting in eighteenth-century opera is of course Vienna, for more than one reason. Successful examples can be found in the writings of Jacques Joly, Daniel Heartz, Don Neville, Andrea Sommer-Mathis, or in volumes published by Gianfranco Folena and Maria Teresa Muraro.

ignore their writings because they are not about music. literary scholars because they are in the wrong journal. Self-consciously interdisciplinary projects and conferences on Italian opera, such as have been held at Venice, London (Ontario) or Münster⁶, are a promising strategy, but the participating researcher better republishes her paper also in a journal of the home discipline, otherwise it will go unnoticed. Sometimes the publication is in the wrong language, for example Italian: there are signs of a rapid decline in the use of Italian (and German) in Anglo-American music departments. In Britain, the progress of European unification seems to have diminished, rather than enhanced, the attractiveness of modern language studies to native English speakers. Italian studies and music studies, born sisters, have become strangers to each other, not only in the university but also in the conservatoire and even on the stage. Under these circumstances, the preference of some of the leading Italian literary historians to remain among themselves when it comes to studies of Metastasio and the *melodramma* seems understandable⁷.

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And yet, historians of Italian literature, theatre and culture all need the musicologists and their specifically musical contribution. Many texts in the literary canon were written to form amalgams with musical compositions, just as medieval texts were intended to be read aloud. Nor is the cooperation of music in dramatic or lyrical poetry only a performative issue: such musical-literary amalgams retain their text status after the performance event and have a history of themselves. If the musicologist investigating an eighteenth-century cantata, oratorio or opera score is mistaken in the assumption that the composer's style is all that can be learned from it, the claim, on the other hand, that composed music was just a performative vehicle or hedonistic appendix to poetry is just as self-serving, even if it has already been made by contemporaries. As regards patterns of cultural history, Italian poetry was a courtly practice in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe in addition to, and often because of, the cultivation of Italian music. Charles VI, Maria Theresa, and their ancestors were not literary specialists, they were music enthusiasts. Metastasio's very career was furthered already in Naples by

⁶ See, respectively, MARIA TERESA MURARO (ed.), *Metastasio e il mondo musicale*, Florence 1986; DON J. NEVILLE (ed.), *Crosscurrents and the Mainstream of Italian Serious Opera, 1730–1790* (Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario 7, vols 1/2) London/Ontario 1982 and DON J. NEVILLE (ed.), *Metastasio at Home and Abroad* (Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario 16) London/Ontario 1997; KLAUS HORTSCHANSKY (ed.), *Opernheld und Opernheldin im 18. Jahrhundert. Aspekte der Librettoforschung. Ein Tagungsbericht*, Hamburg–Eisenach 1991.

⁷ See, for example, the splendid but virtually music-less volumes *Metastasio. Convegno indetto in occasione del II centenario della morte*, (Atti dei Convegni Lincei 65) Rome 1985; and ELENA SALA DI FELICE – LAURA SANNIA NOWÉ (eds.), *Metastasio e il melodramma*, Padua 1985. A representative research survey published after the bicentenary of 1982 which does include musicological contributions is GIOVANNA GRONDA, *Metastasiana*, in: *RIM* 19 (1984) 314–332.

the performances of great musicians, for example Marianna Benti Bulgarelli and Carlo Broschi detto Farinelli to name but two. It might also be shortsighted to ignore the role of musicians in Apostolo Zeno's career, for example of Antonio and Santa Stella Lotti, or Francesco Borosini.

Musicology produces much evidence pertaining to literary history. The conventional, one-sided view of a composer-driven opera history may distort the image of music, but it may help to correct an absurd history of literature which isolates Metastasio the dramatic poet from his age, his predecessors (except for Zeno, the archetypal precursor)⁸ and his rivals in the field of musical drama. It may seem, in fact, that literary historians have a somewhat old-fashioned view of the development of libretto-writing and still very much neglect the authors falling under Benedetto Croce's verdict of *non-poesia*. Music historians, by contrast, are interested – perhaps too exclusively – in creators of musical *poesia* such as Hasse, Vivaldi, Galuppi, Jommelli or Handel. In this context, attention has been drawn – partly by musicologists – to the *non-poesia* of Salvi, Lalli, Pariati, Verazi or Rolli⁹. Antonio Salvi, one of the most significant forerunners of Metastasio, has no entry in the *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo* but he did receive one in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*¹⁰. Occasionally, music historians are also aware of the cultural relationships between *opera seria* and other traditions of theatre (such as *intermezzi*, *commedia* and *opera buffa*, French and Spanish theatre) or its debts to literature in general. This may be because they study composers who catered for various theatrical genres or who show signs of literary education or interest in the spoken theatre (such as Handel, Jommelli, Gluck, Piccinni, Mozart).

For all these reasons, a purely literary or cultural critique of these texts would seem no more justified than a purely musical one of their settings. We have to study the musical application in both its performative and its wider cultural role if we wish to understand the poetry. The objection that Metastasio's *drammi* attained

⁸ Although there is also the patriotic-romantic suggestion – not well-known today – of a Neapolitan *commedia* influence on the early Metastasio: MICHELE SCHERILLO, *L'opera buffa napoletana durante il settecento*, *Storia letteraria*, Milano 1917.

⁹ On Rolli and others, see GIOVANNA GRONDA, *Poesia e metrica*, in: G. GRONDA, *Le passioni della ragione. Studi sul settecento*, Pisa 1984, 55–154; CARLO CARUSO, *Italian opera libretti 1679–1721: universality and flexibility of a literary genre*, in: M. LUTOLF (ed.), *Alessandro Scarlatti und seine Zeit*, Berne 1995, 21–37; on Lalli, see BRUNO BRIZI, *Domenico Lalli librettista di Vivaldi?*, in: F. DEGRADA (ed.), *Vivaldi veneziano europeo*, Florence 1980, 183–204; on Pariati, see G. GRONDA (ed.), *La carriera di un librettista. Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia*, Bologna 1990; on Verazi, see MARITA PETZOLD McClymonds, *Transforming opera seria: Verazi's invocations and their impact on opera in Italy*, in: T. BAUMAN – M. P. McClymonds (eds.), *Opera and the Enlightenment*, Cambridge 1995, 119–132, all with further literature.

¹⁰ Recent studies of Salvi are FRANCESCO GIUNTINI, *I drammi per musica di Antonio Salvi. Aspetti della "riforma" del libretto nel primo settecento*, Bologna 1994, and REINHARD STROHM, *Dramma per Musica. Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century*, London–New Haven 1997, 165–198.

work status whereas their contemporary settings did not would be erroneous; already in 1760, a complete edition of Hasse's operas was being prepared in Dresden, and some of Jommelli's operas were printed at the court of Württemberg. Not only these demonstrations of courtly patronage but also contemporary writings on musical aesthetics and musical life paid respect to the composers of *drammi per musica*. Johann Mattheson, Charles Burney and Johann Joachim Eschenburg considered operas by Handel, Jommelli and Hasse as epoch-making artistic statements, and Vinci and Jommelli were household names in the narratives of Enlightenment and pre-Romanticism¹¹. Clearly, opera was both a business or cultural practice and an artistic statement or work. It is an advantage for us musicians to have excellent critical editions of Metastasio's *drammi* – but it is a terrible disadvantage for all his admirers including literary scholars not to have at least their first settings available in critically edited and competently performed recordings – video recordings of course.

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With this proposal, I am approaching the main question. What can musicologists do for Metastasio? For what part of this trans-disciplinary study are they most needed, and what part of the subject matter should they focus upon? As just said, musicologists should make sure that the operas are being studied and performed, and to that end they should edit. An even more pressing concern, however, is that the music will not speak to us unless we hear it as part of a larger whole that eighteenth-century opera was. It is true that this larger whole changed so much over the centuries that we can hardly do more than reconstruct its relativities and contingencies. One overriding contingency was, as said above, the shift of the relationship between music and drama itself. An art-form which might be described as *poetry wrapped in music wrapped in theatre* became something more like *musical drama*. This process of transformation of a detachable ingredient into a defining essence can be measured, for example, against the backdrop of traditional dramatic theory. The Aristotelian and classicist theory of the six integral parts of tragedy (*parties integrantes, parti di qualità*), for example, is explained by Pierre Corneille in his *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique* and by Metastasio in chapter VI of his *Estratto dell'arte poetica di Aristotile*¹². This theory maps out a hierarchical structure of the ingredients of drama where music is present but placed, together with scenography, in a bottom layer. Above it there are (in ascending order) diction, pathos, ethos and subject matter. The great change of music's role

¹¹ On Vinci's reputation, see KURT SVEN MARKSTROM, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoleotano*, Ph.D. Diss., University of Toronto 1993, 313–345.

¹² PIETRO METASTASIO, *Tutte le opere*, a cura di Bruno Brunelli, Milano 1947, 2, 1027–1034; highlighted, for example, in STROHM, *Dramma per Musica*, 17f. and 239. See also PIERO WEISS, *Metastasio, Aristotle, and the Opera seria*, in: *Journal of Musicology* 1 (1982) 385–394; ital. in MURARO (ed.), *Metastasio e il mondo musicale*, 1–12.

in opera between the mid-seventeenth and the late eighteenth century can be described, without forcing the issue, as an ascent from the lowly position of a helper of poetry to that of a main communicator of the passions and ideas, then of the ethos and message and ultimately of the subject matter itself. These are also processes of individualisation and authorisation of the musical setting which ultimately turn against Metastasio. If these overriding processes are ignored, any consideration of the development of the music alone or of the poetry or dramaturgy alone will not be a partial view, it will be a distorted view. But if the overriding shift is taken into account, partial views of the music, of the drama, the stagecraft, the audience and so forth will all contribute positively. Now Mozart is relevant indeed – *Idomeneo* has a different sort of music from *Il re pastore* because its music is thoroughly expressive of all the aspects of the drama.

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The Aristotelian theory, which pertains to dramaturgy, represents only one layer of the transformations we need to describe. Of the other areas in which such transformations can be investigated, four may briefly be characterised:

- a) Musical structure and musical dramaturgy,
- b) The attitude of dramatists and critics to music,
- c) Performance and audience, and
- d) The aesthetics of sung poetry.

a) *Musical structure and musical dramaturgy*

The musical *work*, as a result of compositional choices, is often approached with exploratory structural readings or *analysis*. Either individual arias or whole operas can be taken as the basic structural unit. One way of demonstrating compositional choices in the music is to ask whether there are musical patterns across a whole (for example the opera score), and to what extent these are individual to this score or drama. In order to find out, for example, whether the aria keys in a *dramma per musica* are due to haphazard, performative or structural-compositional choices, we may investigate whether they form any sort of pattern against a performative or dramaturgical background. Their semantic significance might become clear from the same investigation, and it may well appear related to the hierarchy of characters or roles in the drama or cast¹³. But patterns of aria keys, or metres, or orchestrations are only a few of many possible structures, and their significance is easily

¹³ Examples are found in writings on Handel operas since the 1920s (for example by Rudolf Steglich, Helmut Hücke, Reinhard Strohm, Ellen T. Harris, Robin Fenton). This type of research has again been advocated, without regard to the older literature, by ANSELM GERHARD, *Rollenhierarchie und dramaturgische Hierarchien in der italienischen Oper des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in: K. HORTSCHANSKY (ed.), *Opernheld und Opernheldin*, 35–55.

overrated. Also, the possibility that structural choices of composers are tied in with their reading of the drama in one way or other, is being increasingly demonstrated in studies of 'musical dramaturgy'¹⁴. Many musical-dramatic areas need further exploration, for example the musical setting of pathos and ethos, or timing and tessitura, or musical-semantic systems of *concetti*¹⁵. Pier Jacopo Martello mentions the *intreccio*, the interweaving (or plotting) of the voices¹⁶. This aural landscape is set against the *intreccio* of appearances, of genders, family relations, costumes and disguises, social positions, and so forth. The rhetoric of a musical setting, if there is one, ought to show itself in disposition as well as elocution, and may be checked against a backdrop of textual and theatrical – for example scenographic – dispositions. Here and in the analysis of single aria settings, I have often been helped by Mattheson's emphasis on the concept of emphasis¹⁷: even where music does not actually imitate it may yet emphasize, which is how not only the composer but also the singer contributes to the balance of a theatrical presentation. The concern with compositional choices leads, furthermore, to the question of the theatrical status, and the semantics, of instrumental music or orchestration, and of harmony and melody in general. This question was an obvious one to dramatic poets including Metastasio, who grappled with the role of the ancient classical terms *melody* and *harmony* in opera identifying the former with arias and the latter with recitative in order to justify this dramatic genre itself¹⁸.

b) *The attitude of dramatists and critics to music*

The value of musical studies such as mentioned here for the understanding of the *dramma per musica* might depend on whether contemporary poets, critics and audiences had any awareness of, or interest in, musical structure and balance. We

¹⁴ A few examples: LORENZO BIANCONI, *Die pastorale Szene in Metastasios Olimpiade*, in: *Kongressbericht Gesellschaft für Musikforschung Bonn 1970*, Kassel etc. 1971, 185–191; DANIEL HEARTZ, *Hasse, Galuppi, and Metastasio*, in: M.T. MURARO (ed.), *Venezia e il melodramma del Settecento* [1], Florence 1978, 309–339; RAYMOND MONELLE, *Recitative and Dramaturgy in the Dramma per Musica*, in: *Music & Letters* 59 (1978) 245–267; HELGA LÜHNING, *Titus-Vertonungen im 18. Jahrhundert*, *Untersuchungen zur Tradition der Opera seria von Hasse bis Mozart* (Analecta Musicologica 20) Laaber 1983; WOLFGANG OSTHOFF, 'Attilio Regolo': *Metastasios musikdramatische Konzeptionen und Hasses Ausführung*, in: *Dresdener Operntraditionen*, Dresden 1986, 147–173; REINHARD STROHM, *Arianna in Creta: musical dramaturgy*, in: STROHM, *Dramma per Musica*, 220–236.

¹⁵ On systems of keys, metres, affetti and concetti, see REINHARD STROHM (ed.), *Antonio Vivaldi: Giustino*, 2 vols, Milano 1991, introduction.

¹⁶ *Della tragedia antica e moderna*, Rome 1715; see PIERO WEISS, *Pier Jacopo Martello on Opera (1715): An Annotated Translation*, in: *Musical Quarterly* 66 (1980) 378–403, at 386.

¹⁷ Expounded, for example, in: *Der Vollkommene Kapellmeister*, Hamburg 1739, part II, ch. 8 (*Vom Nachdruck in der Melodie*) 174–180.

¹⁸ *Estratto dell'arte poetica*, 963f.

should not legislate about the extent of such interests, but it seems they were more frequent than is conventionally admitted. Apostolo Zeno's letters on the aesthetics and structure of his *drammi per musica*, and on their performances, have been read by Elena Sala di Felice as documenting a total lack of sympathy for musical or even theatrical considerations¹⁹. A letter of 1728 in which Zeno, from Vienna, makes only a few (perhaps token) comments on the revision of a libretto for a new production in Venice, suggests to her the "low esteem in which he held the moment of the stage production, as opposed to the poetic text"²⁰. Zeno, however, drew his experiences from the pragmatic, performative sphere of Venetian opera, which he wished to transcend while being materially dependent on it. He had good reason to emphasize his Arcadian and literary credentials in his correspondence with *letterati*, to take full credit as librettist for successful performances, or to criticise musical performers for failures. Metastasio did not behave very differently. Although we know of his continuous care for the musical performances of his *drammi*, we also accept his self-flattery in sometimes believing that their performances without the music were especially successful (although he probably never volunteered suggestions for those stage productions). Both poets must be read in proper relation to their backgrounds. Zeno made a huge step towards theatricality and musical dramaturgy within his chosen kind of production – literary drama clothed in music – at a time when the Italian spoken, literary theatre was still firmly divorced from the routines of commercial stage production²¹.

Writers gifted with a different temperament took different attitudes, to be sure. Pier Jacopo Martello, for example, is a commentator who in his *Della tragedia antica e moderna* ostensibly speaks to the poet and discusses the legitimacy of the musical drama, i.e. he comments on literary work structures and dramaturgy²². In reality, his music-loving Pseudo-Aristotle also speaks to and about the musician and particularly, to and about the listener. Performance memories litter his prose. He records pleasure and displeasure of listening and performing; recalls the delights of hearing while seeing pleasant things (a bird in a garden, a precious instrument, a female singer). He urges care for costumes and scenery, ostensibly more than for poetry; he contrasts the effects of operatic verse when heard sung and when read; he recommends poets who find facile words at the harpsichord; he warns that the audience will grow cool if at the rise of the curtain it sees but two characters discoursing gravely about their private affairs. All this is only half ironical: Martello does not really resent all the limitations to the poet's choices nor his

¹⁹ ELENA SALA DI FELICE, *Alla vigilia del Metastasio: Zeno*, in: SALA DI FELICE – NOWÉ, *Metastasio*, 79–109.

²⁰ *Ibidem* 93.

²¹ For analyses, see REINHARD STROHM, *Tragedie into dramma per musica*, in: STROHM, *Dramma per Musica*, 121–164.

²² See n. 16 above.

interactions with singers, composer, impresario, audience – matters which were to become the main theme of Martello's more openly satirical followers Gigli, Marcello, Metastasio, Goldoni and Calzabigi. It is this sort of text which the expert of musical composition and performance needs to know and interpret for others.

c) Performance and audience

The musicological contribution to the subject of performance and audiences is still in its infancy. Far from advocating another shopping-spree in performance studies, I do believe we have asked too few questions about the performing business: for example, about the mechanisms and ambitions leading to performance decisions, about how they related to compositional decisions, on the one hand, and audience perceptions, on the other. As one example of many, consider Klaus Hortschansky's excellent study of the role of singers²³. Carestini performed the role of Timante in several *Demofoonte* settings of the 1740s; where these settings are similar, for example in aspects of nature imitation, melodic contour and rhythm, Hortschansky assumes Carestini's influence on the composers in question. Could the composers not have influenced each other more directly? It seems bold to wish to demonstrate the performer's influence with devices such as tone-painting and rhythmic structure, traditionally reckoned among the composer's choices, rather than with vocal technicalities. But the implication is worth considering that Carestini might have had an interest in exactly those compositional matters, whereas his vocal preferences were to be taken for granted.

Performance also overlaps largely with the operatic business, with matters of stagecraft and with art history altogether – research areas now well cultivated by theatre historians as well as musicologists. Nevertheless, we know far too little about the precise stages of planning, composing and rehearsing operas; whether singers influenced the choice of drama and role before or after being hired, how they learned the recitatives, how they rehearsed them on stage, whether they studied Metastasio's dramas as texts (it does seem so), whether choices of dramatic emphasis were made not only to suit performance forces but also on their behalf. Singer personalities did influence even the poet's choices of subject matter and treatment, but on the other hand, performers were the constructs of authors, impresarios and audiences. Composers taught castratos and composed their roles for a formative period. Handel personally engaged singers in Italy to support his compositional projects: is this evidence for a high or a low rank of the singers' import? Hasse had large reservoirs of suitable arias ready for parodying when new singers were hired in Dresden or commissions came at short notice. The service which he rendered to his performers seems to have included make-belief and placebo pills.

²³ KLAUS HORTSCHANSKY, *Die Rolle des Sängers im Drama Metastasio. Giovanni Carestini als Timante im „Demofoonte“*, in: MURARO (ed.), *Metastasio e il mondo musicale*, 207–234.

When, in Bologna in 1733, Anna Maria Peruzzi (a notorious querulant) criticised his composition of an aria written for her, she had to sing it nevertheless²⁴.

It is likely that audiences of the mid-eighteenth century heard or read Metastasio's poetry against an aural memory of musical performances – quite certainly he himself did – and enjoyed singing it at the harpsichord. In European libraries there are tens of thousands of individual aria manuscripts which have been copied for members of the audience as souvenirs and for private music-making²⁵ – just as spectators collected libretti for private reading. Operatic poetry not only lived in the memory of stage performances heard, it also received new settings that were suitable for home performance. In Vienna, the genre of the social part-song (*Gesellschaftsmusik*) flourished throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, from Caldara to Salieri²⁶: this tradition of domestic music-making widely and stubbornly used Metastasio's dramatic poetry, which is how not only Mozart's *Notturmi* but Beethoven's and Schubert's Metastasio settings came about. It is not widely recognised that Metastasio's own musical settings of some of his *canzonettas* (as arias would be called at least when heard outside the theatre) are just such part-songs for domestic use, and they were of course sung at court. There was apparently no essential difference between the domestic consumption of opera arias and that of songs from vaudeville comedies or indeed non-theatrical songs. The implication may be that also the writing of new dramatic poetry happened against an aural background which was musical as well as verbal.

d) *The aesthetics of sung poetry*

Performance and compositional choices partly converge in the matter of poetry as musically recited. Here, in the area of language, taste and style, is the largest backlog of research. New investigation of the musical aesthetics of Metastasio's dramas could start from his own neglected remark that the immense variety of melodies and rhythms of arias are *characters* just like the physiognomies of people²⁷. Despite a few pioneering studies on rhetoric in the theatre²⁸, we do not know very much

²⁴ SERGIO DURANTE, *Alcune considerazioni sui cantanti di teatro del primo settecento e la loro formazione*, in: LORENZO BIANCONI – G. MORELLI (eds.), *Antonio Vivaldi*. Florence 1982. 2, 427–481.

²⁵ That these copies do reflect general tastes is borne out by the near absence of Caldara's *dramma per musica* settings from this circulation even in Viennese collections, whereas his part-songs, on the one hand, and opera arias by Galuppi or Hasse, on the other, are extremely frequent there.

²⁶ RUDOLF ANGERMÜLLER, *Salieris Gesellschaftsmusik*, in: *Studien zur italienischdeutschen Musikgeschichte* 11 (= *Analecta Musicologica* 17) Cologne 1976, 146–193.

²⁷ *Estratto dell'arte poetica*, 963f. Word-setting and typologies of Metastasian arias are discussed in REINHARD STROHM, *Italianische Opernarien des frühen Settecento (1720–30)* 2 vols. Cologne 1976; see also DANIELA GOLDIN, *Per una morfologia dell'aria metastasiana*, in: MURARO (ed.), *Metastasio e il mondo musicale*, 13–37.

²⁸ DENE BARNETT, *The Art of Gesture. The Practices and Principles of Eighteenth-century Acting*. Heidelberg 1987.

about the aesthetic conventions of the Metastasian theatre *as performed*, from the aesthetics and rhetoric of gestures, action and its musical underpinning to the ideals of artistic control of nature through bodily motion and voice, which may be fundamental also for poetic structures because arias are sung in a choreographic timing (with the orchestra) rather than an oratorical one. Musicality and timing are almost equivalents; tempo is hugely relevant for the aesthetics of theatrical performance even without music. Literary criticism adopting such parameters might reach beyond the old observation of a vague *musicality* in Metastasio's verse, which simply reacted to a certain rhythmic patterning destined for musical recitation anyway. A conspicuous development of musical style in Metastasio's era involved rhythm and phrase structures; but the facile assumption of a stylistic congruence between the *regularity* of musical phrasing and poetic patterning in Metastasio settings should be augmented by a reevaluation of the changing role of music altogether.

The historical advance in the role of music in the eighteenth century could be metaphorically described as the *dramatisation of song* and the *musicalisation of drama*: singing on stage is no longer that old *inverosimile* but a natural form of self-expression in the theatre, and musical poetry is the *energeia* by which characters (physiognomies) construct, legitimate and differentiate themselves.

The role of music in drama, and consequently the status of compositional choices in opera as an art and a business, needs to be judged by musicians because the role music can play is interdependent with the language it can speak. I propose that we also need to investigate the reverse side of this interaction: the language which music learned to speak as a result of being active within drama. The complex process of rhetorical and imitative endeavours which musicians undertook for the sake of Metastasio's dramatic poetry led to opera as we know it – an expression of human beings through music – and profoundly affected the recent history of Western music.