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ALBINONI

12 CANTATAS FOR SOPRANO
AND CONTRALTO Op.4

SILVIA FRIGATO *soprano* · ELENA BISCUOLA *contralto*

L'ARTE DELL'ARCO

FRANCESCO GALLIGIONI *cello*

ROBERTO LOREGGIAN *harpsichord*

Tomaso Albinoni 1671-1751
12 Cantatas for Soprano and Contralto Op.4

CD1 **51'44**

Cantatas for soprano

AMOR, SORTE, DESTINO!

1. Recitativo:
Amor, Sorte, Destino! 0'52
2. Aria (Largo):
M'è più caro, o Dio bambino 4'18
3. Recitativo:
Ma ohimè ch'invan sospiro 0'41
4. Aria (Allegro): S'il mio penar 1'29

DEL CHIARO RIO

5. Aria (Allegro ma non presto):
Del chiaro rio il mormorio 2'53
6. Recitativo: E tu, crudel mia Filli 0'58
7. Aria (Larghetto):
Senza offesa del tuo bello 2'51
8. Recitativo:
Rispondi, o mia tiranna 0'11
9. Aria (Largo):
Et è trionfo vil volermi morto 1'32

LONTANANZA CRUDEL

10. Recitativo: Lontananza crudel 1'13
11. Aria (/): Lontananza crudel 1'11
12. Aria (Larghetto):
Core amabile del caro bene 3'55
13. Recitativo: Irene amata Irene 0'33
14. Aria (Adagio): Pianger lungi dal
nume che s'ama 3'38

OVE RIVOLGO IL PIEDE

15. Recitativo: Ove rivolgo il piede 0'59
16. Aria (Larghetto): Io non dovrei 4'35
17. Recitativo:
Chiamo lo sdegno e l'ira 0'47
18. Aria (Allegro):
Così languir mi fa 2'14

CD2 **48'04**

Cantatas for contralto

PARTI MI LASCI

19. Recitativo: Parti, mi lasci 0'55
20. Aria (Largo):
Vanne ch'io resto a piangere 3'16
21. Recitativo:
Disciolta in amarissimi sospiri 1'31
22. Aria (Allegro e non presto):
Deh caro ben mia vita 2'02

POICHE' AL VAGO SEREN

23. Recitativo: Poiché al vago
seren di due pupille 1'58
24. Aria: Fille cara 3'16
25. Recitativo: Misero ben veggio 0'57
26. Aria (Andante):
Alma di questo core 2'51

SON QUAL TANTALO NOVELLO

1. Aria (Largo):
Son qual Tantalo novello 4'04
2. Recitativo:
Di stravagante affanno 0'46
3. Aria (Allegro):
La pena del mio cor 2'09

MI DA' PENA QUANDO SPIRA

4. Aria (Largo):
Mi dà pena quando spira 4'31
5. Recitativo:
Forse temer non deggio 0'51
6. Aria (Allegro):
Del mio cor sarei geloso 1'28
7. Recitativo:
Ma che portento è questo 0'16
8. Aria (Larghetto):
Prende sempre più forza 1'14

RIEDI A ME

9. Aria (Larghetto):
Riedi a me, luce gradita 4'59
10. Recitativo:
Lungi da què begl'occhi 0'52
11. Aria (Allegro):
Solo voi, luci mie belle 1'54

DALL'ARCO DI UN BEL CIGLIO

12. Recitativo:
Dall'arco di un bel ciglio 0'50
13. Aria (Larghetto):
Che tu m'abbia incatenato 4'04
14. Recitativo: Sì, mia bella tiranna 0'59
15. Aria (Allegro):
Vago amabile mio viso 2'20

FILLI, CHIEDI AL MIO CORE

16. Recitativo:
Filli, chiedi al mio core 0'54
17. Aria (Allegro ma non presto):
Senza il vanto di candida fede 2'44
18. Recitativo:
La fede è un certo incanto 0'48
19. Aria (Allegro):
Impara a serbar fede 2'34

CHI NON SA QUANTO INUMANO

20. Aria (Largo):
Chi non sa quanto inumano 5'03
21. Recitativo: Gli dirà veritiero 1'02
22. Aria (Allegro assai):
Tanto dolce è quella piaga 2'25
23. Recitativo: Così si cangia 0'11
24. Aria: L'inferno delle pene 1'00

Silvia Frigato *soprano* · Elena Biscuola *contralto*

L'Arte dell'Arco

Francesco Galligioni *cello* · Roberto Loreggian *harpsichord*

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«Tanto dolce è quella piaga»

Refinement and hedonism in the *Cantate a voce sola opera quarta* by Tomaso Albinoni

Tomaso Giovanni Albinoni was born in Venice on June 8th 1671. His family manufactured paper and was prosperous enough to allow him to devote himself to violin studies as well as singing and counterpoint. As the oldest son, he was expected to take over the family firm, but in 1705 he decided to make over much of the concern to his two younger brothers. By the end of the 1600s he was already in contact with Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, to whom he dedicated the *Suonate a tre* (1694). Then in the early years of the following century he came into contact with the de' Medici family. The dedication of the *Balletti a tre* (1701) to the Grand Prince of Tuscany Ferdinando de' Medici bears witness to this connection, as indeed does the dedication of the *Cantate a voce sola opera quarta* (1702) to Cardinal Francesco Maria de' Medici, the prince's uncle and advisor. It may well be that these dedications led to a temporary move to Tuscany. In 1703 an aria by Albinoni was included in the oratorio compilation *I furori di Giosuè* that also comprised works by some of the foremost composers of the period: Giovanni Bononcini, Azzolino Bernardino della Ciaia, Alessandro Scarlatti, Francesco Conti, Giacomo Antonio Perti and Antonio Veracini. He is also likely to have taken part, as a violinist, in the performance of his own *Griselda*, as well as composing the «drama regio-pastorale per musica» *Aminta*.

Although Albinoni liked to refer to himself as «a Venetian amateur violinist» («*musicò di violino dilettañte veneto*»), once he had made the family company over to his brothers he lived solely on his music; indeed, following the publication of his Opera VI he actually dropped the term «*dilettañte*» (amateur). Although he never took on an institutional role in Venice, it was here that most of his over fifty (possibly as many as eighty) operas were successfully staged between the end of the 1600s through to the 1740s. Apart from a few sacred works, such as the oratorio *Maria annunziata* (Florence, 1718) on verse by the Venetian poet Francesco Silvani, Albinoni

largely focused his creative energies on secular vocal music (in collaboration with librettists such as Pietro Pariati and Apostolo Zeno) and instrumental music. The high point of his brilliant career as a composer of operas was the performance in Munich of *Veri amici* and *Trionfo d'amore* (1722) for the marriage of the prince elector of Bavaria Karl Albrecht Wittelsbach to Maria Amalia of Habsburg. He certainly continued to work as an opera composer until 1741, the year he left the musical scene as such. He died on January 17th 1751 in Venice.

Albinoni's deep understanding of the voice also derived from his constant activity as a teacher, as the Venetian historiographer Francesco Caffi reported the following century. According to various sources he not only married the soprano Margherita Raimondi (c. 1684 – 1721), but also had a fine singing voice himself. This was a trait he shared with other virtuoso violinists of the time, who also taught singing, including Carlo Ambrogio Lonati.

Around fifty of Albinoni's cantatas have come down to us, and except for the cantata for soprano *Là dove il nobil Giano* (Amsterdam, c. 1701), those belonging to the *Opera quarta* are his only published collection of vocal works, his remaining printed oeuvre being instrumental music.

The only surviving printed edition of the *Cantate opera quarta* is now kept at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. Long thought to be lost, the works were rediscovered in the early 1900s by Edward J. Dent. One of the reasons they had vanished into oblivion was the fact that there had also been a second "Opera quarta" by Albinoni: an unauthorized edition of a group of *Sonata da chiesa* for violin and basso continuo published by Estienne Roger, first in Amsterdam and then also in London. The surviving edition of the *Cantate opera quarta* is missing the frontispiece and the dedicatory letter, if there was one. Thanks to information supplied by Johann Gottfried Walther's *Musicalisches Lexikon* and the analysis of other manuscripts it is nevertheless possible to work out to whom the collection was dedicated and when and where it was published: in 1702 in Venice, at Giuseppe Sala's printing works. There are also manuscript copies of several of the cantatas. Moreover,

some of the arias of the second and the eighth cantata were also published around 1730 as *contrafacta* with English texts.

Michael Talbot considers the cantatas to be highly homogeneous in style, which means that they differ from the idiom of Albinoni's later works as a composer of operas. This suggests that most of the cantatas date back to the years around 1700, when he was in contact with certain Italian court circles that particularly appreciated the genre.

They are works that largely comprise two arias and one or two recitatives. The handling of tonic identity tends to be straightforward, with the first and the last piece in the principal key. The texts are anonymous, although Talbot has suggested that they might be by Albinoni himself. At all events they reveal a degree of refinement that the court of Ferdinando de' Medici would certainly have appreciated. Several reveal sophisticated articulation and convincing use of rhetorical devices such as brilliant hyperbole, refined references to classicism and effective use of oxymoron. The musicality of the verse is also expressed in the semantically adroit recourse to alliteration.

With love as the basic subject, on occasions the poet's psychological and phenomenological analysis also embraces eroticism (see the sixth cantata in the collection) and moments of extreme bitterness and fear, all of which speaks for deep knowledge of the models of classical and Italian culture. The influence of Torquato Tasso is evident in the continual references to the amorous «arena», but there are also frequent reminiscences of Dante, Petrarch, the Stil Novo of the 13th century and even Provençal poetry.

The meter of the arias is conventional enough, with single verse forms made up of *ottonari*, (eight-syllable lines), plain *quinari* (five syllables), *settenari* (seven syllables) or decasyllables, or truncated or plain *quinari* and plain *settenari*. Certain forms stand out as more refined, such as that of the aria «*Così languir mi fa*» in truncated *settenari* and plain *quinari* (CD1: 18) and polymetric combinations such as the sobbing effect created with limping *ottonari*, truncated *settenari* and plain *quinari* in

the aria «*Vanne ch'io resto a piangere*» (CD1: 20).

As for the alternation of recitatives and arias, all the cantatas in the collection embody the same R-A-R-A form, with the exception of *Riedi a me luce gradita* and *Son qual Tantalo novello*, that have a shortened A-R-A form, omitting the initial recitative. This was a formula that was to gain ground in coming years.

The cantatas *Del chiaro rio*, *Mi dà pena quando spira* and *Chi non sa quanto inumano* present a form that was certainly in use at the time, but was less common. They open with an aria and end with a couplet or a triplet in blank verse. In these cases the composer treats the first line or the first two lines as recitative, and the third – always a hendecasyllable – as an arietta or a sort of *cavata* in fugue form.

In actual fact these structures are not only found at the end of the cantatas, but also in the middle. In *Lontananza crudel*, the line «*Lontananza crudel, mi squarci il core*» is reiterated three times like a refrain. The composer is thus spurred to transform the line at the end of the first series in free rhyme into a passionate *cavata*, a poignant lyrical meditation on what was exposed previously and at the same time a bridge towards the first real aria (CD1: 10-11).

The arias all have a *da capo* using melodic material from the central section that often differs in subject from that of the *da capo*. Talbot refers to these as «binary vestigias» inherent in arias with a dance-like meter, like the ones at the end of the cantatas *Riedi a me*, *luce gradita* and *Poiché al vago seren di tue pupille*. Numerous arias have a richly intricate double *Devise*, a feature typical in Albinoni, while the refrains in the basso continuo are often used as nuclei for the development of the material composed in the melody.

When the two parts of the aria are of different lengths, the composer tends to balance or sometimes even overturn the balance of the text in favour of the music: the aria «*Impara a serbar fede*» presents an ample and articulated *da capo* on two lines that open the aria itself and a brief but dense central section on the three lines that constitute the second part of the composition (CD2: 19).

The recitatives are often conventional, relying on the power of the word,

underlined by modulation that is sometimes circuitous and by certain harmonic embellishments typical of finales. These were originally chamber works, which explains why the recitatives in the cantatas are musically more complex and sophisticated than they would have been in the wider context of a theatre, where greater importance was attributed to the sense of flow and convention that made works easier to learn by heart. All the recitatives in the collection end with cadenzas that Pier Francesco Tosi in his *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* described as «*tronche*» (truncated). They involved accompanying the final melodic cadenza (coinciding with the last accentuated syllable of the line) with an articulated chord in the dominant that resolves on the tonic “following” the explication of the accompanied melodic phrase. Various period sources, including Francesco Gasparini's *Armonico pratico al cimbalo* (Venice 1708), the most authentic coeval document regarding continuo playing, would seem to indicate this practice. In fact it was probably one of the features of the *suonar pieno* that was fashionable in Italy from the last decades of the 1600s and that consisted in a densely harmonic basso continuo with plenty of opulent harmonic embellishments. There are numerous period sources that bear witness to the considerable degree of complexity of accompaniment: anonymous accounts such as the manuscript *Regole per accompagnar sopra la parte* in the library of the Accademia dei Lincei and Corsiniana in Rome, or authoritative precepts such as those attributed to Alessandro Scarlatti. During the same period Gasparini's *Cantate da camera a voce sola opera prima* (1695) provide examples of a wider range of accompaniments achieved by introducing *obbligato* parts played by the right hand of the harpsichord or a second instrument such as the cello or archlute.

There's no way of knowing whether the frontispiece provided more precise information regarding the instrument intended for the basso continuo. If it did, in all probability the suggested accompaniment would have been for a bowed or a keyboard instrument, with the possibility of performing certain sections with just one of the two instruments (the solution adopted for this recording), thereby emphasizing the primary features of the piece. In the cantata *Lontananza crudel* the recitative

«*Irene, amata Irene*» (CD1:13) has a solo cello accompaniment, whereas in the recitative «*Rispondi, o mia tiranna*» (CD1:8) of the cantata *Del chiaro rio* there are *ribattuti* notes in the cello as well as a *serried* arpeggio in the harpsichord.

The compilation comprises six cantatas for soprano (CD1) and a further six for contralto (CD2). The anthology begins with the highly theatrical recitative that opens the cantata *Amor, sorte, destino* (CD1:1). As with the other compositions in the collection, this cantata features a well-balanced distribution of affects within the overall poetic and musical framework. The soprano part is moderately virtuosic, but hugely expressive.

The rendering of voluptuous affliction caused by the arrow unleashed by Cupid, the «*dio d'amor*», is immediately evident in the aria «*Che tu mi abbia incatenato*» that opens the second cantata *Dall'arco d'un bel ciglio*. Trenchant *appoggiatura* and harmonies that are not so much unusual as richly expressive contrast and overlap the succession of “indifferent” quavers in the bass part (CD2:13). Delving deep into the lover's feelings, Albinoni uses tonal iteration and progression to emphasize the line «*Il piacer del mio penar*», which encapsulates the real meaning of the cantata in the last aria «*Vago amabile mio viso*» (CD2:15).

The lush vocal line and the cradling progression of the bass part in the aria «*Del chiaro rio il mormorio*» (CD1:5) suggest an Arcadian burgeoning of spring in the cantata *Del chiaro rio*. A storm breaks out in the following recitative, and plaintive affects alternate with expressions of pride in the continuation.

There is skilful use of carefully articulated *coloratura* in the contralto part of the cantatas *Riedi a me* (CD2:9-11) and *Filli chiedi al mio core*, where the opening recitative embodies a harmonic progression that stands out for its relative harshness. The song of the lover suffering on account of her loved one's infidelity is fully expressed in the aria «*Senza il vanto di candida fede*»: faithfulness is «*un certo incanto*» (a certain enchantment) that calls for self-defence in the form of proud disenchantment (CD2:16-19).

The cantata *Lontananza crudel mi squarci il cuore* begins with a languorous

recitative of the same name. Delays, anticipations and painful outbursts towards the high notes fully portray the terrible suffering of the unrequited lover (CD1:10-11). The solo cello part that accompanies the moments of acute pain and the use of *pizzicato* in the aria «*Pianger lungi dal lume*» describe the wretched individual's struggle to avoid soaking the ground in tears: «*saziare di pianto l'arena*» (CD1:12-14).

Changing affections and their reversal are well portrayed in the cantata *Ove rivolgo il piede*. The painful, insinuating mood of the aria «*Io non dovrei*» is achieved by gentle embellishment and persuasive phrasing in the solo voice part, interspersed with brief elements in the bass. It thus contrasts with the unrelenting «*furore*» of the following aria in truncated pentasyllables «*Così languir mi fa*» (CD1:16, 18). The intensity of certain sublimely lyrical outbursts expresses the tumultuous feelings of the lover who desires revenge, but cannot stop loving, returning to the *affetto* that pervaded the beginning of the cantata.

The meditative character of the aria «*Mi dà pena quando spira zeffiretto*» (CD2:4) continues throughout the cantata of the same name, which starts out from a placidly airy refrain in C major (a similar refrain is also found at the start of the tenth cantata in the collection, which also begins with an aria). In the central part of the aria in E minor, the spiralling vocal response is full of heartfelt pathos. Here the concept of jealousy (*gelosia*) is portrayed through wordplay, where «*gelo*» (freeze, frozen) makes its way into the human heart. This glacial feeling is then contrasted with the «*gran foco*» (great fire) that enflames the final aria of the composition, obtained from the last hendecasyllable of the recitative that concludes the work (CD2:8).

Abandonment, nostalgia and the faint hope of love interweave in *Parti, mi lasci, ah quale* (CD1:19-22). The doubts expressed in the first recitative echo with the «*sospir di morte*» (sighs of death) of the protagonist. Diminished sevenths, anticipations and chromatic *appoggiatura* suggest the «*amarissimi sospiri*» (most bitter sighs) that only the return of the beloved can stem.

The jealous lover's grief and heartache is portrayed in the melancholy initial aria of *Son qual Tantalò novello* (CD2:1-3), where the protagonist compares his own

suffering with that of the Titan Tantalus in the netherworld, where he must undergo the punishment inflicted for his impious deeds. Never can he quench his constant thirst or appease his hunger because the lake in which he stands and the fruits on the trees above him always draw back, leaving his hands empty. The «*stravagante affanno*» (extraordinary affliction) that afflicts him is presented as the most terrible a lover could ever experience. In the final aria «*Pena del mio cor*» (grief of my heart) Albinoni reveals the depth of his psychological insight in the accompaniment to the contralto, which moves from pulsating insistence to a sense of deluge followed by magmatic essence: a descent that skilfully evokes katabasis.

For the singer the two most demanding cantatas in terms of virtuoso skill and expression are the last one for soprano, *Poiché al vago seren di due pupille*, along with the following cantata for contralto. The long initial recitative is full of chromatic effects and sudden leaps in interval in both the bass part and the voice. The passage to the following aria features a heartfelt *cavata* in which the irregular vocal line is sometimes melismatic, accompanied by a refined bass part in harmonic crotchets full of dissonance, delays and consecutive sevenths (CD1:23). The opulent vocal line with its heady spiralling developments prepares the way for the two following arias, respectively accompanied by a leisurely and a delightfully jaunty bass part (CD1:24).

The collection ends with *Chi non sa quanto inumano*, where the initial aria focuses on the central sound range of the contralto by means of expressive diminutions and delicate flourishes (CD2:20). Pain and pleasure are interwoven in the fond perception of love's pains, emblematically described in the aria «*Tanto dolce è quella piaga*» (How sweet is the wound) (CD2:22), through to the final sublimation as the image of the beloved is transformed into a vision of paradise (CD2:24).

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Translation by Kate Singleton

Mezzo-soprano **Elena Biscuola** has garnered widespread critical acclaim for appearances in some of the most noted European early music festivals, (Regensburg, Resonanzen, Ambronay, Beaune, Utrecht, and Brugge) with such esteemed groups as La Risonanza, L'Arte dell'Arco, Concerto Italiano, Concerto Köln, Cappella Artemisia, Complesso Barocco, La Venexiana, under the direction of such leaders as Ton Koopman, Allan Curtis, Fabio Bonizzoni, Rinaldo Alessandrini, Davide Pozzi, and Federico Guglielmo.



She can be heard on a wide range of recordings, released on the Amadeus, Brilliant, Chados, Clavis, Carlus-Verlag, Gaudeamus, Onclassical, Naxos, Stradivarius, and Tactus labels. Among her most recent CDs is the 2017 Glossa release of *La Liberazione di Ruggiero dall'Isola d'Alcina* by Francesca Caccini. Her performance in the role of Alcina under the baton of Elena Sartori earned enthusiastic critical acclaim from many media outlets, including *Grammophone*, the *Sunday Times* of London, and *Orpheus*.

Performances of contemporary compositions include the modern-day premiere of the opera *Menocchio* by R. Miani, presented as part of the Mittelfest Festival, while competition awards include the Vercelli International Lieder Competition, the International Vocal Chamber Music Competition of Conegliano, and the International Competition "Luca Marenzio." She has performed Romantic repertoire under the batons of A. Ballista, R. Buchbunderm and T. Severini, having studied German Lieder with Dietrich Fischer Dieskau.

Ms. Biscuola obtained a first class diploma from the Vicenza Conservatoire, where she studied with Gloria Banditelli. She also holds a degree from the Turin Conservatoire, where she graduated with full marks under the guidance of Erik Battaglia.

“lovely dark color, accomplished technique and dramatic panache”

– Carlo Vitali, Opera Today

“Biscuola’s rich, honeyed alto and impassioned delivery breathed life into Alba Tressina’s *Vulnerasti cor meum* (You have ravished my heart); her vivid declamation and carefully nuanced phrases made this piece a standout of the evening.”

– Joseph Sargent, San Francisco Classical Voice

“Elena Biscuola is a seductive and mature Alcina”

– Alexandra Coghlan, Grammophone

“Elena Biscuola’s superbly controlled and dramatically paced performance successfully exploits every textual nuance, in a finely shaded depiction of Alcina’s shifting emotional states.”

Silvia Frigato studied Piano and Voice at the Music Conservatoire in Adria (Italy).

She then continued her studies at the Music Academy in Modena (with Raina Kabaivanska), at the Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena and at the State University in Sofia.

She studied the 17th and 18th Century repertoire at the Académie Baroque Européenne in Ambronay and at the International Music Academy in Milan under the guidance of Roberta Invernizzi, Roberto Balconi, Lorenzo Ghielmi, Marina De Liso, and Sara Mingardo.

She won the first prize in the 4th edition of the “Francesco Provenzale” International Baroque Singing Competition in Naples (2007) and was awarded the first prize at the “Fatima Terzo” early music competition in Vicenza (2010).



She regularly performs in the most prestigious European festivals and venues, including the Monteverdi Festival in Cremona, Bologna Festival, Musica e Poesia a San Maurizio in Milan, Centro di Musica Antica Pietà de’ Turchini in Naples, Festival della Valle d’Itria, Festival in Martina Franca, Misteria Paschalia in Kraków, KunstFestSpiele Herrenhausen in Hannover, Konzerthaus in Vienna and the Festival de Radio France in Montpellier.

She collaborates with such artists as Rinaldo Alessandrini, Ottavio Dantone, Philippe Herreweghe, Sigiswald Kuijken, Nicholas McGegan, Gianluca Capuano, Claudio Cavina, Antonio Florio, Lorenzo Ghielmi, Michael Radulescu and Paolo Zuccheri.

She has performed with prestigious early music ensembles, including Concerto Italiano, Collegium Vocale Gent, Accademia Bizantina, La Divina Armonia, La Venexiana, I Turchini, Gambe di Legno Consort, Sonatori de la Gioiosa Marca, I Musicali Affetti and Il Canto di Orfeo.

Most recently, Silvia Frigato participated in the production of Jommelli’s *L’isola disabitata* at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples under Rinaldo Alessandrini; *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Yniold) at the Maggio Musicale in Florence under Daniele Gatti in a new production by Daniele Abbado; Monteverdi’s *Vespro* with Collegium 1704 under Vaclav Luks in Prague and Dresden; Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* in Venice and Milan (with I Pomeriggi Musicali).