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Music for Mandora

Gábor Tokodi
mandora

Music for Mandora

Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello
(1690-1757)

Sonata in G minor

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|---------|---------------|------|
| 1. I. | Allegro | 2'18 |
| 2. II. | Menuet – Trio | 4'47 |
| 3. III. | Bourée | 2'05 |
| 4. IV. | Menuet | 1'19 |
| 5. V. | Gigue | 1'56 |

Anonym, Bratislava

Suite in G

Universitna Kniznica, Ms 1092

- | | | |
|---------|-----------|------|
| 6. I. | Allegro | 1'32 |
| 7. II. | Capriccio | 5'46 |
| 8. III. | Arioso | 2'29 |
| 9. IV. | Menuet | 2'44 |
| 10. V. | Andantino | 1'50 |
| 11. VI. | Presto | 2'06 |

Gábor Tokodi *mandora*

8 coursed mandora by Robert Lundberg, Portland – 1987

Recording: 12-14 September 2017, Hubay Concert Hall, Budapest, Hungary

Recording engineer: Sándor Árok

Photo page 8: Anonym Suite in C major, Alamand (Budapest University Library, Ms. F 36)

Cover photo and artist photo p.10: by Csaba Csutkai

Artist photo on back of booklet: by György Tóth

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The Harmony of Contrasts

*Viva fui in sylvis
tandem percussa securi
Viva nihil dixi
mortua dulce cano*

Alive I was in the woods,
Finally, though, the axe struck me.
Alive I spoke nothing,
Dead I now sing sweetly.

This Latin distich, describing the transformation of a tree into a resonating body, was commonplace from the 16th until the 18th century. Usually it was associated with the lute and related instruments. Here two examples. On the endpaper of an 18th century lute manuscript now in the Bavarian State Library (Mus. Ms. 5362), the distich appears with the following introduction: *Olim locuta Testudo* – Once spoke the Lute. The same distich appears as the motto of a book of tablature from the Hungarian monastery Marienthal; the introduction there, however, is different: *Mandora olim locuta*.

It almost seems like a competition, when two instruments of the lute family, the so-called Baroque lute and the mandora, both lay claim to an especially sweet sound. Yet the two instruments do not differ greatly. The biggest difference is their outward appearance – a lute with 13 courses is required by the Munich manuscript, whereas the Budapest manuscript requires an instrument with only six. The inner construction of the Baroque lute and the mandora, on the other hand, is essentially the same, especially the barring of the acoustically-important sound table. Both follow the centuries-old principle of proportional ratios inside the body of the instrument, from which the much-lauded lute sound – transparent, silvery, diverse-timbred, even « divine » – proceeds.

How could it be that a new instrument like the mandora competed seriously with the well-established Baroque lute? The answer is simple: the Baroque lute became the victim of its players' demands. The Renaissance lute had made do with six courses, but music and musicians, as time progressed, required an ever greater range. This

was achieved most easily by adding bass courses until, in the 18th century, there were 13 or even 14 of them. Thus the Baroque lute evolved into an instrument that, along with its repertory, could be handled by highly-skilled specialists only. But it was not only the added bass-courses which distinguished the Baroque lute. In order to optimize the Baroque lute's sound, a new tuning of the six highest courses was adopted in the 17th century: A - d - f - a - d^e - f^e. The range which resulted from this tuning was a major third smaller than that of the Renaissance lute (e.g. A - d - g - h - e^e - a^e). That the Renaissance-lute tuning was perhaps better suited to the needs of dilettantes as well as professionals is suggested by the lute literature of the 16th century. Here we find a broad spectrum of compositions on a par with the finest works for any instrument of the time. In the Renaissance, the lute was, after all, the most frequently-played instrument and had the largest repertory. The virtue of its perfect-fourth-tuning is suggested furthermore by the fact that it was chosen for the newly-invented mandora. In order to provide potential players with an easily-playable instrument, the mandora's courses were limited to the original six, tuned in fourths with a range of two octaves. Thus in the course of the 18th century, a mandora-type evolved whose courses were tuned to E - A - d - g - h - e^e. This tuning will be familiar to many a musician of today: it is the tuning of the classical guitar.

To be sure, the above is but a brief summary covering merely the broad outlines of the mandora's development. A closer look will bring us closer to the repertory of the present CD.

Predecessors along the way to the mandora included bass instruments like the pandora and the colachon. They featured long string-lengths, in order to reach the deep tones required by the repertory. Thus it is not surprising that in the early 17th century the highest string of the mandora, pitched at d^e, was only as high as the 2nd course of the Baroque lute. Only later were different-sized mandoras built, not only lower- but also, mostly, higher-pitched ones. The longer string-lengths demanded frequent left-hand stretching, especially on the lowest string-pair. Thus the 6th course

was tuned such that it need only be played "open".

Usually this meant tuning the 6th course a major second below the 5th course, resulting in the tuning F - G - c - f - a - d^e (early 17th century, but also later); depending on the key of a given piece, the 6th course could also be tuned to F-sharp, E or E-flat. Should however the 6th course be tuned a fourth or minor third below the 5th course, it was necessary to finger it, unless one accepted the lack of certain bass tones.

The size, the pitch level and the 6th-course tuning of the mandora varied, seemingly without correlation to geographic area. Music for mandora, like that for the Baroque lute, was written in so-called French tablature; it employs the usual system of horizontal, parallel lines upon which letters are written indicating the fret to be stopped. The mandora also borrowed the playing technique and ornamentation of its 'big sister' the Baroque lute. In one respect, however, it is possible to observe a national peculiarity. Whereas South German mandoras do not go beyond six courses, Austrian manuscripts of mandora music show the use of 8 or even 9 courses. Thus the mandora was going the way of the Baroque lute several decades before. And here too the story of a simpler instrument edging out a more complicated one, repeats itself. For toward the end of the 18th century the guitar - tuned similarly to the mandora but simpler in construction, stringing and playing, and cheaper to buy - quickly assumed the mandora's role as solo- and accompanimental-instrument.

The mandora and its music were cultivated primarily in South Germany and in the neighboring Donau-region of the Habsburg Empire. Why, is uncertain; was it the trade routes along the mighty river, or was the population of the Donau Basin especially predisposed to such an instrument? Suffice it to say that the mandora was popular above all in amateur circles, and was often played in monasteries and by women.

Among prominent mandora players we find Marie Antonie Walpurgis. The daughter of the Bavarian Elector Karl Albrecht, she was married in 1747 to the Elector of Saxony Friedrich Christian. A singing- and composition-student of

Giovanni Baptista Ferrandini, she brought a large amount of music with her upon moving from Munich to Dresden, including many tablatures for mandora. The largest of these is a fascicle with 18 sonatas by Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello. Although he had served as violinist in Munich for only a year before moving on to Stuttgart, he remained in contact with the Bavarian court and supplied it with compositions, confident that they would be appreciated there. That must have been especially the case regarding the mandora, for the composers whose music appears in Marie Antonie's manuscripts include her brother Maximilian III Joseph as well as her cousin Clemens Franz von Paula. The Brescianello-Sonatas appear twice each in Marie Antonie's manuscripts, perhaps a sign of the special esteem in which she held them. They are written carefully on the six-line system standard in South Germany for the six-course mandora and demonstrate three different 6th-course tunings: a fourth below the 5th course (8 sonatas), a major third below (two sonatas) and a major second below (8 sonatas). It's unclear whether these tablature manuscripts require a mandora tuned in d⁴ or in e⁷. For the present recording a mandora in d⁴ was used. Sonata 15, recorded here, requires that the 6th course be tuned a fourth below the 5th and is one of the technically most-difficult compositions in the collection. In Sonata 15 the entire range of the mandora is used, including the first course right up to the 12th fret. Thus its demands surpass by far the skills of a dilettante and suggest that Marie Antoine was an accomplished performer upon the mandora.

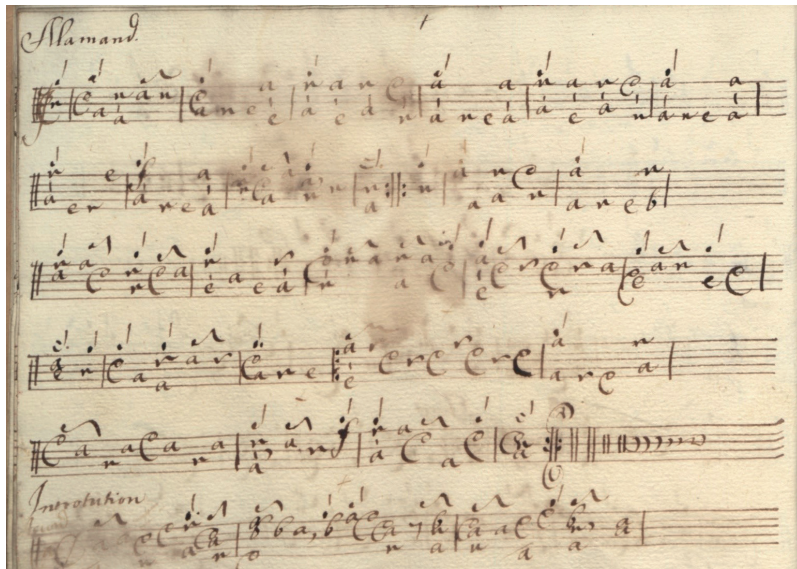
Another manuscript with music for mandora is found today in the library of the University of Bratislava; it was compiled in Austrian territory, since the five-line tablature foresees a 7th and an 8th course. The 6th course is indicated by letters below the bottom tablature-line, the 7th course by one ledger-line and the 8th by two ledger-lines. Unlike Brescianello's sonatas, the pieces in the Bratislava manuscript are not arranged in coherent sequence, but – assuming d⁷-tuning – they are all in G major or G minor. Thus one can put pieces together into suites as desired, as has been done for the present recording. Two features locate the manuscript in the second half of the

18th century: occasionally the 7th course must be stopped, and the dynamic marking "piano" is sometimes indicated. Thus the technical demands of the Bratislava manuscript, like those of Marie Antonie's manuscripts, surpass those posed by the mandora repertory in general.

The third source of mandora music recorded here originated in the Monastery Marienthal in Hungary. It comes closer to the dilettantish kind of mandora-music than do the sources mentioned above. The compositional style is deliberately simple and not always 'correct', and upper positions are avoided. To help less-experienced players, left-hand fingerings are indicated, and a short appendix contains basic information on tuning the six courses, on transcribing violin music for mandora and on tuning the 6th course, indicated by a letter and ledger-line, to four different pitches. Several factors indicate a tuning in e⁷. Occasionally headings such as "Partia pro Mandora" suggest that several individual pieces can be played in sequence as a suite or partita. But many other pieces show no relation to one another and are to be played independently. According to 18th century performance practice, though, we have put together several such pieces and record them here on a mandora tuned in d⁷. Thus from the broad *instrumentarium* of the 18th century we offer a rarity: the mandora and its music. May the present recording serve to recall this long forgotten instrument.

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Translation: Roger Harmon



Budapest University Library, Manuscript F 36

In 2010, while looking for additional citations of the saying *Olim locuta Testudo. Viva fui in Sylvis, tandem percussa Securi Viva nihil dixi, mortua dulce cano*, which can be traced back to the Homeric Hymn to Hermes and variations of which turn up in connection with lute making and lute music, I happened upon the *Catalogus manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Reg. Scien. Universitatis Budapestensis*, Tomus II, pars I, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Regiae Scientiarum Universitatis Budapestensis* (Budapest 1889). There, on page 142 under number 36, a manuscript is listed bearing the title *Mandora olim locuta*. A description follows: *Viva fui in silvis, tandem percussa securi Viva nihil dixi, mortua dulce cano*.

According to an inscription on the title page, this manuscript, hitherto unknown to scholarship, once belonged to the library of the Pauline Monastery Maria Thallensis (Slovakian « Marianka », Hungarian « Máriavölgy », German « Mariathal »), located in today's Slovakia near Bratislava. After the dissolution of this monastery under Emperor Joseph II, a number of the library's books entered the Budapest University Library – including the mandora manuscript F 36.

The manuscript was badly damaged over the centuries. Above all, water damage has rendered many pages of tablature illegible.

The manuscript numbers 74 pages and contains 71 mandora pieces, written out by several copyists. The pieces which bear titles are mostly preludes and dance movements, e.g. allemands and minuets.

21 pieces are untitled. Above one such piece, though, the word *Geduld* (patience) appears. Whether this word is meant to serve as a title cannot be said for sure.

Let us hope that further research will lead to additional insights concerning this interesting manuscript.

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Translation: Robert Holmes



Gábor Tokodi

“The most important challenge of being a musician is that the love we felt towards the pieces reaches the audience so that to transmit the secret and joy what we hope we have found, as clear as possible, by only one listening.”

His repertoire is impressively wide and colourful due to his proficiency in numerous plucked string instruments (renaissance lutes, theorbo, mandora, baroque and classical guitars) which offers him a possibility of participating in various chamber music formations – from the intimate vocal-lute duos to the larger baroque operas and oratorical music works – in addition to his solo appearances.

His first instrument was the cello, he began playing guitar at the age of fifteen. After finishing his guitar studies in Hungary led by Andrea Bozoki and Ede Roth, he was awarded a scholarship (DAAD) at the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. He gained his Artist Diploma in classical guitar as a student of Michael Teuchert and Thomas Bittermann, then in lute and early music as a member of Yasunori Imamura’s class.

He has been performing both as a soloist and as a chamber musician since the beginning of his college years all over Europe (London, Frankfurt, Barcelona, Versailles, Brussels, Copenhagen, Turku etc.), as well as he was playing renaissance music in several major cities in India.

He was performing together with many representatives and ensembles of early music and other genres. He participated in numerous projects represent various musical worlds, such as the Baroque Ensemble of the Budapest Festival Orchestra conducted by Midori Seiler or Jonathan Cohen, the Duo Venite vocal-lute formation, world music projects inspired by Ágnes Herczku and Éva Bodrogi, the Rozetta lute duo or the Savaria Baroque Orchestra led by Pál Németh.

The aim of his new project with the mandora is bring back to prominence this unjustly forgotten instrument and to represent some of the latest musicological research in this field.

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