

Domenico CIMAROSA

Overtures

Cleopatra • Voldomiro • Il matrimonio segreto

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia • Alessandro Amoretti



Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801)

Overtures, Vol. 1

Domenico Cimarosa was the most famous and popular Italian composer of the second half of the eighteenth century. In the course of a brilliantly successful career he composed more than 65 operas as well as a significant body of instrumental music and works for the church. His operas were performed all over Europe both in Italian and in translation. A number of Cimarosa's operas continued to enjoy occasional stagings during the nineteenth century and his most famous work, *Il matrimonio segreto*, is one of only a handful of operas of the period never to have left the repertoire. The others are by Mozart.

Born in 1749 at Aversa, Cimarosa moved with his family to Naples, shortly after his own birth and shortly before the death of his father, a stonemason. His musical gifts, however, enabled him to study at the Conservatorio di S. Maria di Loreto and to embark on a career as a composer of opera in Naples. He subsequently entered the service of Catherine the Great in St Petersburg, then moving to the imperial service in Vienna and, in 1793, to Naples once more, a city from which he was expelled in 1799, when the monarchy was restored after a brief republican interlude. He spent his final years in Venice, where he died in 1801.

Cimarosa's operas are remarkable for their delineation of character, sureness of dramatic touch, melodic invention and assured handling of the orchestra. The overtures are themselves of particular interest. Some conform to the three-movement pattern of earlier Neapolitan composers, while others are cast in a single movement similar to the sonata-form structures of the contemporary symphony. Cimarosa's orchestration is deft and the equal of any symphonist of the period. He retains a fondness for three-part string textures throughout his career, typically with the first violin and viola presenting the melodic material while the second violin is assigned an accompanying figure. For all the similarities, however, the overtures are not symphonies

and serve, rather, as scene-setters for the drama to follow, without thematic links to the opera itself and to an extent, therefore, interchangeable. The present overtures include that written for his very first work, *Le stravaganze del conte*, and that for his most famous opera, *Il matrimonio segreto*.

Voldomiro was commissioned by the Teatro Regio in Turin for the carnival season of 1787, the only recorded performance. Copies of the score and of the libretto survive, however, in Lisbon and in Liège, respectively, suggesting wider contemporary interest. In Turin the king, who had insisted on restricting the length of operas and arias, was persuaded to allow Cimarosa five minutes more for one of the arias in *Voldomiro*, although the composer's reward for a successful performance was less generous.

Cimarosa created his two-act *opera buffa*, *Il credulo* (The Gullible One), for the Carnival season of 1786 at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples, and wrote *La baronessa Stramba* to go with it as the third act of the evening. The work is probably a revision of Cimarosa's earlier *I matrimoni in ballo* (The Weddings in Dance).

Cimarosa received his first commission to compose an opera from the Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples for the Carnival season of 1772. With a libretto by the well-established Neapolitan poet Pasquale Mililotti, *Le stravaganze del conte* (The Eccentricities of the Count) opened on 6th January 1772. It is possible that some of the opera was composed while he was still a student. Since the only extant manuscript of *Le stravaganze del conte* is the holograph score it can be assumed that this opera was never restaged.

Not only is *Il matrimonio segreto* (The Secret Marriage) the best-known and most popular of all Cimarosa's theatrical creations, it is perhaps the most popular *opera buffa* of all time. First staged in Vienna exactly two months after Mozart's death, it enjoyed a greater success at the time than any of Mozart's operas

and continued in operatic repertory through the following century. The opera quickly achieved international fame outside Vienna, soon staged in Leipzig, Dresden, Berlin, Paris, Milan, Florence, Naples, Turin, Madrid and Lisbon. By the mid-nineteenth century it had been performed in German, French, Spanish, Danish, Swedish, Polish, Dutch, Russian, English and Czech; the opera reached Calcutta in 1870. From the many contemporary manuscript copies of the score, two well-known versions of the opera's Overture emerge, differing in length. The present version, recorded here for the first time, is based on Cimarosa's score for Vienna and is substantially different, particularly in the inclusion of a fine oboe melody as a second theme, omitted in other versions.

Cimarosa's *commedia per musica*, *L'infedeltà fedele* (Faithful Infidelity), his fifteenth opera, is unique in its early mixture of elements of *opera buffa* with those of *opera seria*. The work was intended for a new theatre in Naples, established by the king to provide *opera buffa*, otherwise a comic form popular with ordinary citizens, as an entertainment also for the nobility. On 20th July 1779 the king's Teatro del Fondo opened with the work, described by the court librettist, Gianbattista Lorenzi, as a middle-of-the-road kind of entertainment, with its *opera seria* setting in classical Greece and the story itself full of the "buffooneries which are so fashionable" in *opera buffa*. The only known performance after this was in Dresden at the court theatre on 5th October 1782, under the title *Treu in der Untreue*.

Il ritorno di Don Calandrino (The Return of Don Calandrino), an *intermezzo* in two acts, was first staged during the Carnival season of 1778 at the Teatro Valle in Rome. Well received by the public, further performances of it were mounted in Florence, Livorno, and Rome, with stagings in Prague, Barcelona and Vienna. The overture borrows from the recently composed *L'Armida imaginara*, to which Cimarosa added two completely new movements, a central *Andantino* and a closing movement marked *Allegro con spirito*.

The comic opera *Il falegname* (The Carpenter) was

written as the second opera for the 1780 season at Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples, where it achieved great success, to be staged many times in the next few years elsewhere in Italy, and in 1783 at the Burgtheater in Vienna. Haydn produced the opera at Eszterháza for the season 1783-84. Foreign language productions followed, including one in Russian in Moscow in 1783, and one in Spanish in Madrid ten years later.

Cleopatra, a two-act *dramma serio*, was written for Catherine the Great and probably intended to mark the anniversary of her coronation, a few days before its first performance on 27th September 1789 at the Kamennyi Theatre. The opera enjoyed a measure of success and was given several performances in St Petersburg, where it was later restaged. Cimarosa used the overture again for early performances of *Penelope* written five years later for the Teatro del Fondo in Naples to open the Carnival season of 1794-95. The *Penelope* version of the overture differs in a number of minor details.

Il convito (The Banquet) was Cimarosa's 28th opera, written for the Teatro San Samuele in Venice for the Carnival season of 1782. With a successful performance in Venice, after which the composer was carried by torchlight back to his hotel, the opera was produced the following season in Prague, Trieste, Dresden (as *Das Gastmahl*), Turin (as *Il convito di pietra*) and Nice, and further stagings followed throughout Europe. There are two different overtures to *Il convito*. The three-movement work recorded here is from the composer's holograph score in the Conservatorio di musica S Pietro a Majella library in Naples. The second overture, in one movement, preserved in manuscript in the British Library, was apparently prepared for a performance of the opera before the court of Naples. Scored for pairs of oboes and horns, timpani and strings (with divided violas and separate violoncello and contra basso lines), it is identical to the fifth overture of the five written for *L'impresario in angustie*.

La vergine del sole (The Sun Virgin) is a *dramma serio*, written for the Russian Court, where it was first staged in 1788. Further performances followed, in

Russia and elsewhere. Because of the opera's dramatic story, set in Peru, Cimarosa made full use of the St Petersburg orchestra, scoring the overture for pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons and horns in addition to timpani and strings, and implying, with loud bursts of strings and timpani, the forthcoming volcanic eruption and earthquake. His unusual use of the timpani also possibly suggests native Peruvian sacrificial drums.

Cimarosa was commissioned to write an *opera buffa* for the Carnival season of 1786 by the Teatro Nuovo in Naples. With a libretto by Giuseppe Diodati, with whom he had worked on his *Il capriccio drammatico* of 1781, the two-act comedy, *Il credulo* (The Gullible One) tells of the attempts of a man to marry off his daughter to a gullible gentleman from Naples, hampered by a jealous lover who spreads the rumour that the young lady in question has gone mad. Scheduled as the third opera of the 1786 Carnival season, together with Cimarosa's one-act comedy *L'impresario in angustie* (The Impresario in Distress), it was well received and rescheduled as the fourth opera of the same season, coupled with *La baronessa Stramba*.

The one-act *farsetta per musica*, *L'impresario in angustie* (The Impresario in Distress), proved to be one of Cimarosa's most successful works. Within a year of its staging in 1786 at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples, it played in Rome and was soon heard in Paris and Barcelona, and at Eszterháza. Further performances followed elsewhere, with versions in various other languages. Goethe heard the work in Rome, where, with a papal ban on the stage appearance of women, it was performed by an all-male cast. Impressed by the work, he introduced it to the court theatre in Weimar in 1791, in his own German version and with additional songs. When he revived it a year later, he interpolated selections from Mozart's *Schauspieldirektor*. There are at least five different overtures for *L'impresario in angustie*, each resembling overtures for other operas, oratorios and cantatas. The best known version, offered here, is based on an eighteenth-century manuscript preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the source of the Paris printed edition of 1802.

Nick Rossi and Allan Badley

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia

The Hungarian-based Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia was formed in 1992 by Ibolya Tóth, recording producer of the Hungarian Phoenix Studio, initially as a recording orchestra for Naxos. Under its permanent conductor, Béla Drahos, the Sinfonia also undertakes public concerts. The orchestra consists of the leading players in Budapest, including string and wind principals of the major Hungarian orchestras, many of whom have already recorded concertos for Naxos. The Sinfonia ranges in size from a Baroque string orchestra to an ensemble suitable for Haydn or Mozart, or, augmented, for performance of Beethoven. The orchestra's recordings of Haydn and Beethoven symphonies and Beethoven's *Fidelio* have met with particularly warm critical acclaim, and its recording of Vanhal symphonies (Naxos 8.554341) was rewarded by a Cannes Classical Award at Midem 2000.

Alessandro Amoretti

The Italian conductor Alessandro Amoretti completed his musical studies in Italy, at the Conservatory of Lucca and the Accademia Musicale Pescarese, before continuing his training in Moscow. For some years he worked in Italy and in the United States as a conductor and vocal coach, concentrating primarily on nineteenth century opera. As musical director and principal conductor of the Studio Lirico summer workshop in Cortona, Italy, he has directed several productions of operas by Cimarosa and also conducted the first American performance of Salieri's *Falstaff*. In 1998-9 he joined the Drottningholms Slottsteater, Norrlands Opera, as well as Operastudio '67, and is now vocal coach at the Royal Opera Academy of Copenhagen, appearing as guest conductor at the Royal Opera House of Copenhagen, with the Danish Radio Choir and with the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki.

The orchestral parts and scores of all the works on this recording are available from:

ARTARIA EDITIONS LTD

<http://www.artaria.com>

Sources

The sources upon which the editions used in this recording have been made are:

Voldomiro

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE247
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-5-7

La baronessa Stramba

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE239
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-2-12

Le stravaganze del conte

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE245
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-4-12

Il matrimonio segreto

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE292
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-5-16, 17

L'infedeltà fedele

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE244
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale – D.10349

Il ritorno di Don Calandrino

Edited by Allan Badley – Artaria Editions AE267
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –

Rari 1-4-5

Il falegname

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE260
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-1-7

Cleopatra

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE240
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-2-7

Il convito

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE241
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-2-9, 10

La vergine del sole

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE246
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-5-1

Il credulo

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE242
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-2-11

L'impresario in angustie

Edited by Nick Rossi – Artaria Editions AE243
Naples, Conservatorio di musica ‘S. Pietro a Majella’ –
Rari 1-3-17

Domenico Cimarosa was the most famous and popular Italian composer of the second half of the eighteenth century. In the course of a brilliantly successful career he composed more than 65 operas, as well as a significant body of instrumental music and works for the church. His operas were performed all over Europe, both in Italian and in translation. A number of Cimarosa's operas continued to enjoy occasional stagings during the nineteenth century, and his most famous work, *Il matrimonio segreto*, is one of only a handful of operas of the period never to have left the repertory. Cimarosa's overtures are remarkable for their melodic invention, assured handling of the orchestra and sheer vitality.

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(1749–1801)

Overtures • 1



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|----|------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Voldomiro | 4:06 |
| 2 | La baronessa Stramba | 6:16 |
| 3 | Le stravaganze del conte | 3:27 |
| 4 | Il matrimonio segreto * | 6:00 |
| 5 | L'infedeltà fedele | 5:26 |
| 6 | Il ritorno di Don Calandrino | 9:11 |
| 7 | Il falegname | 5:22 |
| 8 | Cleopatra | 4:21 |
| 9 | Il convito | 9:12 |
| 10 | La vergine del sole | 5:34 |
| 11 | Il credulo | 4:53 |
| 12 | L'impresario in angustie | 5:18 |

* First recording of Vienna version

Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia • Alessandro Amoretti

Recorded at Phoenix Studio, Hungary, 6–9 April 2000 • Previously released on Marco Polo 8.225181

Producer: Ibolya Tóth • Engineer: János Bohus • Digital editing: Mária Falvay & Veronika Vincze

Booklet notes: Nick Rossi & Allan Badley • Publishers: Artaria Editions

Cover image: Il Teatro di Palazzo Polignac in Rome, c. 1750

NAXOS

8.570508

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Playing Time
69:06



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