

# VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF "DANZI"

By Clive Brown

Spohr's Potpourri for violin and harp Op.118 (1814) and his *Fantasie and Variations* for clarinet with string quartet or piano Op.81 (1815) together with Weber's Grand Potpourri for cello and piano Op.20 (1808) all include versions of the same melody, which has conventionally been attributed to Franz Danzi (1763-1826). The grounds for the attribution, however, are rather flimsy, and closer consideration indicates that Danzi was almost certainly not its author.

Weber's Grand Potpourri Op.20, written for the cellist Graff, was composed during Weber's period as secretary to Duke Ludwig of Württemberg between 1807 and 1810 (the autograph is dated 31 December 1808) in Stuttgart where Danzi was Kapellmeister. The two musicians who, despite the 23-year disparity in their ages, had both been pupils of Georg Joseph (Abbé) Vogler (1749-1814), quickly struck up a friendly relationship and Danzi encouraged Weber to work at composition. The 19th century Weber scholar Otto Jähns identified two themes in the Potpourri Op.20 as being by Danzi; an Andante which Weber employed as the subject for variations and the theme on which the Finale is based; Weber himself did not identify the origins of his themes. Jähns' discussion of the matter is, however, confused and misleading. In his catalogue of Weber's works he identifies the Finale theme (the one also used by Spohr) as derived from piece No.121 in a collection of *Harmoniemusik* produced by Danzi for use at court as an accompaniment to banquets or other ceremonial occasions. He refers the reader to *Anhang* 31 for further information; but there he contradicts his earlier statement, for he observes that the melody in piece 121 also occurs in the variations for cello and piano (J.94) of 1810 though, in fact, only the Andante theme, not the Finale theme, from Op.20 is used in that work. Thus it is unclear which of the two themes, both of which Jähns attributes to Danzi, occurs as piece No.121 in the collection of *Harmoniemusik*. This problem appears to be insoluble since, though a set of manuscript parts of this wind music was in the archive of the Stuttgart Hoftheater in Jähns' time, it can, according to Folker Göthel<sup>1</sup>, no longer be traced. No original composition by Danzi which contains the theme in question has ever been identified.

Although Spohr did not name the authors of the two themes which he used as the basis for the Potpourri for violin and harp in his manuscript catalogue of his own works, Folker Göthel states<sup>2</sup> that the programme of a concert in Vienna on 19 February 1815, where Spohr and his wife Dorette performed the piece, ascribed the themes to Danzi and Abbé Vogler. A review of the concert in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* supports this: it refers to the themes as "an extremely tender one by Danzi" [ein äußerst zartes von Danzi], without identifying its source, and "the generally known and loved one from Vogler's *Castor und Pollux*" [das allgemein bekannte und beliebte aus Voglers *Castor und Pollux*] (i.e. from his opera *Castore e Polluce* of 1787)<sup>3</sup>. When Spohr reworked the material of the violin and harp piece for clarinet, at the request of his friend the clarinetist Johann Simon Hermstedt, he omitted Vogler's theme and used the "Danzi" theme, with its dotted rhythms smoothed out, as the subject for a set of free variations (see examples 2 & 3 below). The clarinet piece was published by Schlesinger in 1830 as *Fantasie et Variations sur un thème de Danzi*. [...] Op.81, but the violin and harp piece was issued by Schubert in 1845 as *Fantasie sur des Thèmes de Händel et Abbé Vogler* [...] Op.118. Why Handel's name should have been substituted for Danzi's in the later publication remains a mystery; there is nothing to suggest that the theme was in any way connected with Handel. Göthel surmises that Schubert thought the piece would sell better if the more prestigious name of Handel were substituted for that of the former Stuttgart Kapellmeister. The substitution certainly suggests that neither publisher nor composer had a very clear idea of the provenance of the theme.

It seems quite plausible that Weber found the theme for the Finale of his Grand Potpourri in the Stuttgart collection of wind music, which Danzi was responsible for preparing, or that he heard a performance of it at court. If so, it is quite possible that he assumed that Danzi had not only made the arrangement but also composed the melody. It may have been during his concert tour to Stuttgart early in 1808 that Spohr also became familiar with the "Danzi" theme; he was certainly present at least one court function where music was played and doubtless heard a considerable amount of music during his stay there. Since Spohr did not use the theme until a few years later, however, when he was settled in Vienna as Konzertmeister at the Theater an der Wien between 1812 and 1815, it is also possible that he came to know the melody in Vienna. Weber was also in Vienna in 1813 and Spohr may have heard the Op.20 Potpourri at this time, at one of the soirées which they jointly attended. But it is much more likely, given the differences between Weber's and Spohr's versions of the themes, that Spohr knew the melody from another source. Nevertheless, the attribution of the theme to Danzi in the programme of 1815 suggests some sort of connection with Weber or with Stuttgart, since, if the theme is not Danzi's, it is difficult to see whence Spohr might otherwise have derived the assumption that it was by Danzi.

Hitherto unnoticed sources for this theme, though they do not unequivocally identify the original composer, seem definitely to rule out Danzi's authorship. The theme seems almost certain to have originated as an aria in the opera *La confusione della somiglianza, ossia I due Gobbi*<sup>4</sup> of 1793 by Marcos Antonio da Fonseca Portugal, usually known as Portogallo (1762-1830). However, whether the aria was composed by Portogallo or was written by someone else for insertion in the opera remains unclear, since in manuscript sources in Vienna it is attributed to Portogallo, but in printed sources published in London its authorship is ascribed to "Sigr Scismeyer"<sup>5</sup>. Portogallo's opera (premiered in Florence in 1793) was first performed in Vienna on 28 June 1794 and in London on 15 March 1796.

The Vienna manuscript<sup>6</sup> are a score of the complete opera (catalogue number K.T.190) in the hands of various copyists, and a volume of vocal pieces (catalogue number J.M.3427) by Martin (Vicente Martin y Soler 1754-1806), Rauzzini (Venanzio Rauzzini 1746-1810), Portogallo and Niccolini (Giuseppe Niccolini 1763-1842). In both of these it is scored

for 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns and strings and the voice part (written in the soprano clef) is for a character called Cleante. In K.T.190 the aria is found as No.10 of Act I with the opening words below the vocal line "Andiamo ho Signore con alma [ ... ]"; the words: "Andiamo mio bene con alma [ ... ]" have been added above the vocal line. In S.M.3427 the piece has the title:

La confusione della Somiglianza  
Aria  
andiamo mio bene con alma  
Del Sign<sup>o</sup> Portogallo

The words throughout the aria are those which occur above the stave in the copy of the complete opera. The copyist of the aria in S.M.3427, though not the same as the copyist of the aria in K.T.190, appears to be identical with the copyist of several earlier numbers in K.T.190.

The dating of these Viennese manuscripts presents a number of difficulties. S.M.3427 contains two arias from Niccolini's *Trajano in Dacia* which was premiered in Rome on 3:7:1807; the title page of one of them refers to the fact that it had been sung in Vienna by Velutti<sup>7</sup>, who did not sing in Vienna before 1812. The different pieces in the volume, which has an early 19th century binding, are not in the same hand or on the same paper, however, so it is possible that they were bound together from various provenances after 1812 and that the copy of the Portogallo aria is considerably earlier; paper studies may enable a more precise dating. K.T.190, apparently from the Hoftheater archives, contains numerous markings, cuts, pages sewn together etc, which clearly show it to have been used for performance, and *La confusione della somiglianza* seems last to have been performed in Vienna at the Burgtheater on 17 December 1795.

The attribution to "Scismeyer" occurs in printed editions of the aria, arranged for voice and piano, with slightly different words but the same music as the Vienna manuscripts. The title page of what appears to be the original edition (in the British Library) reads:

Io parto mio bene  
Sung by Sig<sup>r</sup> Viganoni at the King's Theatre Haymarket,  
in the opera of I Due Gobbi.  
Composed by Sig<sup>r</sup> Scismeyer  
Printed for M<sup>r</sup>Viganoni by T Skillern

The watermark of this copy is 1795, and it seems almost certain that it was published at the time of the first London production of the opera<sup>8</sup>. The aria seems to have enjoyed particular popularity in London, for in addition to another British Library copy published by R. Birchall, the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek in Frankfurt possesses an edition issued by Longman and Broderip; all of these state that it was composed by Scismeyer.

These sources leave open the possibility either that the aria was an integral part of Portogallo's opera or that it was composed as an insertion aria by Süßmeyr, presumably for a Vienna performance. The Vienna score of the opera contains no hint that the aria was by anyone other than Portogallo, although a later aria in this manuscript of the opera, No.18½, is clearly credited to another composer, being headed "Rondo del Sig<sup>o</sup> Cimarosa". No positive support for the London editions' attribution of the aria to "Scismeyer" has so far come to light, but examination of other early material for Portogallo's opera strongly suggests that the aria was added for the Vienna production in 1794/95. I have been able to examine two early manuscript sources of *La confusione della somiglianza*, neither of which contain the questionable aria: one is in the King's Music Library collection in the British Library and the other is in the Musiksammlung of the Sächsische Landesbibliothek in Dresden. The London score cannot be precisely dated, but appears consistent with a date in the 1790s; the absence of markings of any kind in this score suggest that it was not connected with the London production. The material in Dresden consists of a score and a full set of orchestral parts used for the opera's Dresden première in the Kleines Churfürstliches Theater on 4 December 1793. The parts were produced in Dresden and appear to have been copied directly from this score, which is of Italian provenance, before rehearsals with the singers were far advanced; both score and parts contain numerous cuts and modifications connected with the Dresden production, but the original text is clearly discernable. The score has the following information on the title page:

Firenze; nella Primavera 1793  
Nell' Regio Teatro Nuovo delli Intrepidi detto la Palla a corda  
Opera Buffa  
La Somiglianza ò Siano i Gobbi  
Musica  
Del Sig<sup>o</sup> Marco Portogallo  
all' attual Servizio di S. M. Fedelissima

This score was evidently copied very shortly after the original production and the circumstances suggest that it represents the "authorized" version of the opera.

The likelihood of Portogallo's authorship of the aria is therefore remote, and despite the lack of a positive attribution to another composer in the Vienna manuscripts, Süßmeyr's connection with the Burgtheater at the time of the Vienna production of the opera (he was appointed continuo player and acting Kapellmeister in 1792 and full Kapellmeister in 1794) makes him a plausible candidate for its composition. The English editions of the aria suggest the hypothesis that

material for the London production was supplied from Vienna and that this material included the additional aria with an ascription to "Scismeyer".

The form of the melody in the various sources is only of limited help in establishing the connection between them, but there are grounds for believing that Spohr may not have derived his version of the theme from Weber. The printed and manuscript sources ascribed to "Scismeyer" and Portogallo are in D major and identical. Weber's version is in the same key as the original and is identical with the form of the melody as it occurs in the voice part, except for the omission of the quaver up-beat and a couple of insignificant rhythmical differences. Spohr's version in Op.81, which is in B flat major, seems an amalgamation of the oboe introduction and the vocal line with a free adaptation of the theme in the final bars; in Op.118, where it is in A major, the melody is the same as Op.81 except that the groups of four semiquavers have dotted rhythms. Spohr appears either to have written the theme from memory or to have deliberately decided to modify it, but even though Weber used phrases derived from the oboe version later in the Finale of his Potpourri, Spohr's form of the theme seems less likely to have been derived from Weber's than from Weber's source or the original aria.

Further investigation of the numerous manuscript sources of Portogallo's popular and frequently performed opera may possibly yield the key to determining the authorship of this theme with certainty. It would be nice to know whether Spohr's Op.81 should be known in future as Fantasia and Variations on a theme of Portogallo or, as seems most likely, Fantasia and Variations on a theme of Süssmeyr.

#### References

1. F. Göthel *Thematisch-Bibliographisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Louis Spohr* p.202
2. *ibid*
3. *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 1815, col.218
4. The title of this opera appears in slightly differing forms in different sources
5. Almost certainly Franz Xaver Süssmeyr 1766-1803: in contemporary documents his name is encountered in various spellings, including Süssmeyer and Siessmayr
6. In the *Musiksammlung* of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna
7. Giovanni Battista Velutti 1780-1861, one of the last celebrated castrato opera singers
8. According to Fétis' *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, the singer Giuseppi Viganoni was born in 1754 and died in 1823 (Eitner says 1822); he spent the years 1795-1801 in London where he was a successful operatic tenor

Ex. 1 Weber op. 20

Ex. 2 Spohr op. 81

Ex. 3 Spohr op. 118

Ex. 4 Portogullo/Scismeyer  
Allegretto

[S.M. 3427] and-ia-mo mio bene con alma giu-li-va a-

[Scismeyer] Io parto mio bene [etc...]

mor-e ci ar-vi-va ci fa giu-bi-lar a-mo-re ci ar-vi-va, ci

fa giu-bi-lar a-mo-re ci ar-vi-va ci fa giu-bi-lar