

MARIA MARGHERITA GRIMANI (1680-1720?) – Barbara Garvey Jackson

Seven women are known to have composed oratorios and other dramatic works that were performed in northern Italy or Vienna between 1670 and 1724. Among the works performed at court in Vienna were two oratorios and a dramatic work (which may have been staged) by Maria Margherita Grimani. Became the first woman composer to have an opera, *Pallade e Marte*, performed at the Hoftheater.

Nothing is known of Grimani's life except the dates of these performances. It is not even certain that she was ever resident in Vienna; the manuscript score of *Pallade e Marte* is inscribed "April 5, 1713, Bologna." An important family of Venetian aristocrats bears the name Grimani, but it has not been possible to establish a definite relationship between them and the composer. It may be significant that one Pietro Grimani was the ambassador negotiating an alliance with Emperor Charles VI in 1713, the very year the composer's works began appearing in Vienna. We do not even know whether Maria Margherita was a nun or whether Grimani was her maiden name or her married name.

Pallade e Marte, an "opus dramaticum" for two singers, was performed on the name day of the emperor in Vienna on 6 November 1713. Later the same year Grimani's oratorio *La Visitazione di Santa Elisabetta* appeared, and two years later her *La Decollazione di S. Giovanni Battista* was heard. *La Visitazione* was revived in 1718, the last time her name appears in Vienna. All Grimani's surviving works are for soloists and orchestra. Like other oratorios and similar works of the early eighteenth century, they used da capo arias, often followed (if they are continuo arias) by short orchestral ritornelli as interludes. The recitatives are all secco, that is, with only a figured bass accompaniment. Several arias are performed with concertante instruments, and some are accompanied by string orchestra. The works open with sinfonie in several movements. An ensemble of soloists often appears at the conclusion; typically, there is a vocal duet at the end of *Pallade e Marte*.

Pallade e Marte is the shortest of Grimani's works (sixty-five pages of manuscript). It is set for soprano and alto, with solo cello, oboe, theorbo, strings, and continuo, the same scoring (except for the theorbo) as in *La decollazione*. The vocal soloists sing alternate arias: Pallas is accompanied by the strings, and Marte responds along with cello obbligato, theorbo, and continuo.

Her works reveal no evidence of the contemporary Viennese penchant for counterpoint and instead owe much to Alessandro Scarlatti.

The aria types are typical of the Italian and Viennese oratorios of the period, as cultivated by Alessandro Scarlatti and others, and they are similar to those used by the other contemporary women composers whose music survives.

The movements of the opening sinfonia are appropriately short for a work of this scale. The three-movement sinfonia form of fast-slow-fast will be followed by later compatriots such as Giovanni Battista Sammartini, in his works from about 1720-1740. Like Sammartini, Grimani retains the string orchestra of the Baroque ripieno concerto, but she also prefers the tuneful nature of the early Classic.