

Maria Margherita Grimani (fl. ca. 1713-1718)

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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.

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."

Pallade e Marte, an "opus dramaticum" for two singers, was performed on the name day of the emperor in Vienna on November 6, 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. As in 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, as in the example presented here. 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 from which the following three-movement Sinfonia is drawn, is the shortest of Grimani's works (65 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. Pallas then answers with strings, a continuo aria with orchestral ritornello for Mars follows, Pallade sings with oboe obbligato, and then comes the closing duet. 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.

Recording

Women's Orchestral Works, Performed by The New England Women's Symphony. Sinfonie [*sic*] (1713) by Maria Grimani. Concertmaster, Jean Lamon. Galaxia Women's Enterprises, 1980. The jacket notes incorrectly state that the longer work that the Sinfonia introduced has been lost and that no figured bass is indicated.

Further Reading

Eitner, Robert. "Grimani, Maria Margherita," *Quellen-Lexikon* IV:378-79.

Klein, Rudolph. "Grimani, Maria Margherita," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* V:922-23

———. "Grimani, Maria Margherita," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* VII:733.

The extract above is from 'Historical Anthology of Music by Women' by James R. Briscoe (1987).

The following passage is deleted from the second paragraph above as we now have more information:

Perhaps she lived there. 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.

The extract is followed by ten pages of manuscript entitled 'Pallade e Marte - Sinfonia'