Sellers and Buyers of Italian Music around 1700: The Silvani Firm and G.B. Bassani’s Music in Italy and Central Europe

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The popularity and, consequently, the circulation of Italian music throughout Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are well-known and well-studied facts, but many of the details of exactly how, what, and via whom music circulated still remain to be investigated. Although, for instance, the circulation of printed music is testified through surviving copies and early inventories, only relatively rarely do we have precise information on the distribution network through which these books disseminated from printer to buyer. The problem in uncovering these ‘mechanisms of the music trade’ is compounded by many factors, including the scarcity of archival records documenting actual transactions, the often low numbers of surviving copies, and the sometimes rather succinct descriptions in early inventories.

This essay concerns the Italian and central-European dissemination of music printed by the Monti-Silvani firm in Bologna. By pulling together a diverse range of new and previously published sources, it tries to gain a more precise sense of how the firm’s editions reached buyers in Italy as well as across the Alps into Switzerland, the Habsburg empire, and the German states. Giacomo Monti’s firm in Bologna, the most productive music publisher in seventeenth-century Bologna, was continued from 1697 by his long-standing collaborator and business partner Marino Silvani (from 1667 most editions

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1 See for example Reinhard Strohm (ed.), The eighteenth-century diaspora of Italian music and musicians (Turnhout, Brepols, 2001), and Rudolf Rasch (ed.), The circulation of music in Europe 1600–1900: A collection of essays and case studies (Berlin, Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2008).

already had an imprint stating they were printed by Monti and sold in Silvani’s shop.3 After Marino’s death in 1710, his son Giuseppe Antonio eventually continued the business, not without some problems, until his death in 1726.4

The Monti-Silvani firm printed numerous editions of new repertoire that found their way to a national and international clientele, but they also had to compete with other printers in Europe who reprinted some of the same music.5 One of the most popular authors in their catalogue and a prime example of such international competition was Giovanni Battista Bassani. Born in Padua around 1650, he worked in Ferrara most of his active life, both as maestro di cappella of the cathedral and in various other positions, and died in Bergamo in 1716. During his lifetime no fewer than 32 opus numbers – comprising sonatas, cantatas, motets, and large-scale liturgical music – were published in first editions in Bologna by the Monti-Silvani firm and in Venice by Giuseppe Sala.6

Reprints of many of these editions were issued, often remarkably quickly, by printers across Europe: primarily Hendrick Aertssens III in Antwerp and Estienne Roger in Amsterdam, but also William Pearson in London reprinted two collections of Bassani’s motets.7 One aria appeared in an anthology printed by Christophe Ballard in Paris in 1708, and, above all, a volume of Masses by

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6 For a useful but partly superseded account of his life and works see Richard Haselbach, Giovanni Battista Bassani: Werkkatalog, Biographie und künstlerische Würdigung mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der konzertierenden kirchlichen Vokalmusik (Kassel and Basel, Bärenreiter, 1954).
7 On Aertssens see Godelieve Spiessens, ‘Muziektypografische bedrijvigheid van de Antwerpse drukker Hendrik IIII Aertssens (1661–1741)’, in J. Hanselaer and H. Meeus (eds.), E codicibus impressisque: Opstellen over het boek in de Lage Landen voor Elly Cockx (Leuven, Peeters,