

Santino Garsi da Parma

Rediscovering a Musician

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ABSTRACT

When I read the name of Santino Garsi da Parma for the first time in one of the music history books I was studying for the ten year guitar graduation exam, I was surprised and intrigued. Even if Santino Garsi was listed among the greatest XVI century lute players (*suonatori de leuto*), I had neither heard about him before nor heard his music played in concerts or even his name pronounced somewhere else.

This seemed even more surprising to me, because the name of Parma (my city, related to many great musicians) was put alongside Santino Garsi's name: Santino Garsi da Parma.

Unaware of the adventure I was about to embark upon, but incredibly taken by that name and the history of an oblivion I wanted to reveal, I began the research for more information on the forgotten Santino Garsi da Parma.

My first encounter with Santino Garsi da Parma took place thanks to a book by the musicologist Giuseppe Radole. In his book "Lute, guitar and vihuela; History and literature" ("Liuto, chitarra e vihuela; Storia e letteratura", 1986, last Italian edition, p.55) Radole wrote:

"Santino Garsi da Parma (+ 1604), who served the Farnese family for many years, is the author of lute music of a considerable expressive significance, such that he can be compared to J. Dowland. His dances are of extraordinary elegance and strong rhythmic vitality."

Despite this statement, and the important comparison with Dowland, the most famous lutenist and composer of all time (whose music has been played and sung even by the pop star Sting), musicology seemed to have been disinterested in Santino Garsi.

In any case, his name was attracting me with such intensity that it did not leave room for discouragement.

With the collaboration of important Italian lutenists and musicologists such as Massimo Lonardi (possibly the most important and famous Italian lutenist alive today) and Franco Pavan, I carried out this long and fascinating research in order to track down the main manuscripts by Santino Garsi da Parma, and eventually reevaluate his work.

The research proceeded through these phases:

1. recovery of historical and biographical information about the lutenist Santino Garsi da Parma;
2. recovery and analysis of the very few transcriptions made in modern age up until that time;
3. research and recovery of the original manuscripts, facing several difficulties: dispersion of the manuscripts, bibliographic inconsistencies, loss, deterioration and damage of the manuscripts as a consequence of the Second World War;
4. analysis of the style of the found manuscripts as well as selection of certain music samples for in depth analysis and transcription;
5. beginning of the recovery of the material throughout transcription and transposition into modern guitar notation.

The research has made it possible to bring many original manuscripts with Garsi's music to light. They were originally preserved at Berlin State Library, but traces of them were lost during the Second World War when they were transported in secret to eastern European countries to protect

them from the impending bombings.

A long and highly demanding work of analysis and transcription has been started on these manuscripts for the purpose of bringing Garsi's music before the public once again. This aspect of the research was further complicated due to the frequent mistakes made by those who transcribed Garsi's music to the manuscripts as well as the complexity of his works, rich in inventive musical structures, which was highly unusual for Garsi's period. The transcriptions in modern notation, however, have demonstrated the great merit of his music, expression of a truly exceptional artistic and compositional spirit. This part of the work has also revealed how the few transcripts of Garsi's compositions which have survived to modern times in comparison do not at all reflect the personality of the composer: it is of lower quality than those found during the research, which rediscover the Santino Garsi as defined by Radole.

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