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Link to published version: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-0208.2011.00404.x

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Modern musicology has witnessed an unprecedented interest in the quasi-archaeological recovery of female composers from past epochs of Western music history whose lives and works have been largely forgotten since their own day. In this publication, the scholarly spotlight has fallen upon Anna Catharina Martinez (1744-1812), who came to be known as Marianna Martines. Written by Irving Godt and completed by John A. Rice following the author’s death, it represents the fruits of over a decade of meticulous archival research in that Martines’s surviving musical and biographical documents have, perhaps inevitably, not remained together as a single collection.

As scholarly biography, the volume narrates the captivating tale of an accomplished musician who had attained recognition as a prolific composer by early adulthood. Educated under Metastasio, who assumed a paternal role following the passing of her own father in 1764, Martines was so highly regarded as a singer and keyboardist by the Imperial family that she was frequently invited to perform for the Empress Maria Theresa, with Joseph II customarily page-turning for her. She impressed scholars of music including Charles Burney and Padre Martini, her epistolary relations with the latter being instrumental in securing her election to membership of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna in 1773 (the first female upon whom this honour was bestowed in the society’s century-long history). And, as the book’s subtitle hints, Martines also played a part in the biographies of late eighteenth-
century music’s two dominating forces. Her earliest music teacher was the then
unknown Haydn, himself merely a teenager at the time, while her output may have
even provided a model emulated by the young Mozart, with whom she was
subsequently to perform keyboard duets.

Yet this particular study of a hitherto little-known female personage does not
simply fall into the oft-encountered trap of compensating for unfamiliarity by
appealing to connections with celebrated (predominantly male) figures whose paths
she crossed. Much amplification of known historical facts is indeed needed to flesh
out a tale that is sparse in certain areas given the relative dearth of documentary
evidence, but this is instead achieved via in-depth discussions of selected works,
replete with music examples. The transitions from historical narrative to musical
exegesis are sometimes slightly uncomfortable and the preoccupation in the latter on
identifying instances of galant compositional formulae (Do-Re-Mi and Sol-Fa-Mi
schemata, abb’ phrase structures, and the so-called Romanesca and Prinner) feels
repetitive after a while, but these detailed interludes are always illuminating
nonetheless.

In the course of recounting Martines’s life story, discussion turns to
representative examples of her oeuvre including Masses, solo motets, keyboard
sonatas and concertos, Italian arias (set exclusively to Metastasian texts) and psalms,
chamber cantatas, her oratorio Isacco figura del Redentore, and her setting of the
Dixit Dominus for the Accademia Filarmonica. These sections are complemented by
some enlightening contextual information on the subject’s latterly ennobled family
and on the culturally-thriving city in which she was active, with a concluding chapter
encompassing her work in the last two decades of the eighteenth century as a
noteworthy singing teacher and host to weekly private musical academies. As the first
full-length book study of Martines’s life and works, many of the excerpts from her correspondence (which are collected into an appendix and presented in both the Italian original and English translation) and her musical oeuvre appear here in a modern edition for the first time. Though its emphasis on the music is such that it is likely to be of greater interest to specialists than the general populace, the overall result is an engaging and comprehensively researched narrative of a fascinating, acclaimed, and well-connected musician.

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