

*PADRE MARTINI'S COLLECTION OF LETTERS: AN OVERVIEW*¹

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One of the many treasures of the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale in Bologna is the collection of some six thousand letters written to one of the dominating musical personalities of the 18th century, Padre Giambattista Martini. His correspondents were musicians from all parts of Italy, and from Europe's most important courts and musical centers. The collection spans the years from 1730 to 1784, the year of Martini's death, and comprises letters from some 970 correspondents, along with more than six hundred drafts of Martini's answers. Recently this author has been engaged in making an annotated index of the collection. In the course of reading each letter, any contents of musical interest have been summarized and the names of musical works, musicians, and other important persons extracted for indexing.²

The collection is certainly not unknown to scholars. The first to note its importance was Guglielmo della Valle in 1785, who selected twenty-five letters for inclusion in his *Memorie storiche del Padre Maestro Giambattista Martini*.³ In 1888 Federico Parisini, the incumbent librarian, published 136 of the letters in his *Carteggio inedito del Padre G. B. Martini*.⁴ Leonida Busi's biography of Martini, of which only one of the projected two volumes was completed, makes extensive use of the letters.⁵ Selected letters have appeared in several collections of musicians' correspondence, and biographers of various composers have published and translated others, such as the letters from Johann Christian Bach, Quantz, and Rameau, to name but a few.

Until now, no serious attempt has been made to index the entire collection. Gaetano Gaspari, librarian from 1856 to 1881, listed on the back page of each volume of letters the ones he thought most interesting and important, usually with a brief note regarding their contents. In a recent study on Martini, Vittore Zaccaria made a listing, volume by volume, of the authors of these letters.⁶ However, it is doubtful that he examined all the letters because there are many inaccuracies in the list. It is likely that he worked from a list made by Napoleone Fanti, librarian at that time.

The collection has been preserved in what were originally thirty-five volumes, probably collected and bound by Martini's hand-picked successor, Padre Stanislao Mattei. The last four volumes contain other documents in addition to letters. No particular order is evident in the original compilation of the volumes. Letters from a given person are not always in the same volume and are not necessarily in chronological

order. Each letter was assigned a number within the volume, evidently at the time of binding. Drafts of Martini's responses, where they exist, were usually written on a blank page of the letter to which they responded. The volumes were originally labeled with Roman numerals. However, some time between this numeration and a later one made by Gaspari when he arranged the library into its present order, two volumes were removed—perhaps sold or traded. These are volumes XXIII and XXIX in the older numbering. The numeration provided by Gaspari is made according to the cabinets in which the books were placed: three volumes at the end of the *H* section, the remainder in the *I* section. This numeration is successive, indicating that the two volumes were missing before Gaspari's ordering was made. One might expect to find letters from Leopold Mozart or his son, given the famous relationship with Martini, but no such letters exist in the collection today.⁷ Also conspicuously missing are letters from Gluck. His connections with Bologna were close, and since the library owns a score of *Alceste* inscribed to Martini in Gluck's hand, one might expect to find some correspondence.⁸ In fact, a letter from Gluck to Martini was published in J. G. Prod'homme's collection of musicians' correspondence;⁹ perhaps this letter and others like it were once part of the two missing volumes.

Other things have occurred to disturb the original order of the collection. Someone, perhaps Padre Mattei or one of his successors, extracted some letters from their original volumes and placed them in a separate volume with a cardboard binding similar to the others. It was assigned by Gaspari to the *L* cabinet, quite apart from the other volumes. A later librarian made yet another selection of letters from the best-known correspondents and placed them in a box of "autograph letters" intended for exhibit to visitors. With the permission and cooperation of the present librarian, Sergio Paganelli, some of these letters have been restored to their original places in the collection.¹⁰ Letters have also been found, bound or loose, in other books acquired or copied during Martini's lifetime. They usually refer in some way to the book in question, and were probably placed there by Martini himself.¹¹

There is strong evidence that Gaspari traded or sold many of the letters to Egidio Succi, member of the *Accademia Filarmonica* and collector of letters from musicians. In 1888 his daughter, Emilia Succi, published a catalogue of his collection,¹² one year before the letters were sold at auction in Berlin¹³ and evidently dispersed. When a gap appears in the numeration within a volume, indicating a missing letter, such a letter can often be found described in the Succi catalogue. Even within the sometimes informal sequence of Martini's collection, many letters in the catalogue can readily fill the gaps. Occasionally, Gaspari made note of a trade to Succi for some other letter or merely noted "given to Dr. Succi," but in the majority of cases he did not indicate the whereabouts of

missing letters. Fortunately, Succi's catalogue contains a brief summary of content for each letter so that one may ascertain the sense of the missing correspondence in many cases.

The general characteristics of the collection may be outlined as follows: requests for letters of recommendation; requests for Martini's own compositions, usually from fellow Franciscans or former pupils; requests to settle musical disputes of various kinds, ranging from the theoretical to questions of musical protocol; letters regarding Martini's constant quest for historical information, especially for his *Storia della musica*; letters introducing the bearer who wishes to meet Martini; letters regarding the acquisition of books and music—buying, copying, or receiving them as gifts from the author; letters from nobility and ecclesiastics, usually thanking Martini for a copy of one of his books; polemical letters regarding the several controversies in which Martini was personally involved; letters from former pupils describing the musical scene at the various courts where they were employed; letters regarding the acquisition of portraits for Martini's famous collection; finally, letters of purely personal or religious matters. Occasionally letters are included which are addressed to other persons, but these exceptions usually contain a message or request evidently transmitted to Martini by the addressee.

His better-known correspondents include: Agricola, J. C. Bach, Burney, Feo, Gasparini, Gerbert, Grétry, Jommelli, LaBorde, Leo, Marpurg, Metastasio, Pepusch, Quantz, Rameau, Rutini, and Tartini. In addition there are many other lesser-known and unknown correspondents whose comments, questions, and reports contribute to this fascinating collection.¹⁴

The largest group of letters consists of the correspondence between Martini and Girolamo Chiti, *maestro di cappella* at St. John Lateran in Rome. Some 440 items, including many drafts of Martini's answers, span the years from 1745 to 1759, the year of Chiti's death.¹⁵ Besides being an enthusiastic correspondent, Chiti was one of Martini's best suppliers of music and books. Much of the famous Martini library is due to Chiti's tenacious pursuit of materials from the past and present. When one of his Roman colleagues died, Chiti was on the spot to examine his music collection and indicate its value to Martini. When a Roman bookseller acquired a new stock of music, Chiti was there to examine it and report its contents. Many of the letters include long lists of books and music, provided so that Martini could check them against his holdings and indicate which ones he wanted to buy.

Chiti himself was a collector whose personal library included, by his own reckoning, "from seventy to eighty books on music theory, the labor of more than forty years of diligent research."¹⁶ He was most generous to Martini, giving him any duplicate copies he possessed, and exchanging items from his collection to fill the gaps in Martini's library. Chiti

eventually left his books to the Biblioteca Corsiniana at the Lateran, expressing frequent concern that otherwise they would end up as wrapping paper in a salami shop (a fruitful source in his own quest for old books).¹⁷

The name of Palestrina runs like a red thread through this correspondence. Vincent Duckles has pointed out that the revival of Palestrina did not begin with Baini in the 19th century, but with Martini and Chiti and Giuseppe Pitoni in the 18th century.¹⁸ Many of the letters concern the copying into score of Palestrina's music for Martini's library. Fittingly, he cites Palestrina as the final authority in several disputes he arbitrated among members of the Roman academy of musicians.

Martini's correspondence with librarians takes up another large segment of the collection. For instance, in 1762 he writes to Antonio del Valleppo, librarian at the Escorial, asking for a list of all music manuscripts and prints contained in that library. He reveals his intention "to give notice to the public of all printed and manuscript works and where they are found."¹⁹ This list was to appear at the end of his *Storia della musica*—an ambitious project of Eitner-like proportions, unfortunately never completed. On the lighter side, a letter from the librarian at the Biblioteca Laurenziana reports the completion of the copying of a manuscript for Martini, and requests that Martini send two copies of his published work when it appears—one for the library and one for the librarian.

Martini maintained a network of friends, brethren, and former pupils constantly on the lookout for items to augment his collection of books and music. The earliest letter of the correspondence (10 October 1730)²⁰ concerns music sent by Fra Giovanni Sbaraglia in Ferrara, who continued to supply Martini with music by the sackful for several years. In 1738 a fellow Franciscan in Venice reports that a friend of his, the *maestro di cappella* in Spalatro,²¹ would like to have two copies of Martini's published *Litanies*, for which he will exchange "four books of Masses by French authors printed in the quattrocento; the authors are Alessandro Agricola, de Orto, Enrico Izac, Brumel, Obret, et cetera. They are beautifully printed and very well preserved."²² He was a bit premature with his date, but what he is describing are probably the Petrucci prints from 1503 to 1506 which made their way to Martini's shelves. They are presently in five volumes, all bound alike with successive pagination evidently added at the time of binding, beginning with Agricola's Masses, as described in the letter.²³

One of the most bizarre stories to emerge from the collection regards a copy of the *Odhecaton*. A friend writing from the shores of Lake Garda in 1753 reports that he has heard of a copy of "a book called *Odhecaton*," seen in the hands of a hunter who was using it to load the shot into his gun. He promises to try to obtain it for Martini, but a few months later

reports that the hunter had already torn it up for his own purposes. He comments that it would have been nice to have even the fragments but implies that he was too late.²⁴

It may be that Martini's generosity with his own materials was not so great as his acquisitive talents. Martin Gerbert writes to Martini about the terrible fire in 1768 which destroyed his monastery and his library, including the manuscript of his book *De cantu et musica sacra*. The first volume was already in print and a few copies were salvaged, but all of Gerbert's notes for the proposed second volume were destroyed. He asks Martini's help in replacing his materials, especially by providing copies of manuscript treatises. Four years later he is still reminding Martini of the fire and still asking his help.²⁵ An exchange of materials went on until Martini's death, evidently aided by some prodding on Gerbert's part.

Another constant preoccupation revealed in the correspondence is Martini's portrait collection, which eventually included a Gainsborough portrait of Johann Christian Bach, and one of Charles Burney painted by Joshua Reynolds.²⁶ Persons requested to contribute their portraits to the collection inevitably proclaimed their unworthiness to have their images hanging in the company of such eminent musicians. Persons delegated to obtain the portraits of other musicians sometimes reported that the prospective honorees were too tight-fisted to pay for having the portrait painted. On the other hand, Padre Giuseppe Paolucci, Martini's pupil and the author of a treatise on counterpoint,²⁷ writes that it is impossible to have his portrait done because in Assisi there are no painters to be had. He suggests that, since he is relatively little known by sight, Martini should just have a portrait painted of a fat friar and put Paolucci's name under it.²⁸

Comments on contemporary musical taste are frequent, if somewhat biased in favor of the so-called true ecclesiastical style. A certain amount of tongue-clucking is done over the present decadent state of music in both church and theatre, some of it obviously done to obtain Martini's favor, or perhaps to encourage him in his crusade to purify church music. Among his most candid correspondents are the singers, usually former pupils, who report the successes and failures of opera composers and performers, and in doing so, give many insights into 18th-century performance practice. In a letter from Rome early in 1753, the singer Giuseppe Tibaldi reports that Jommelli's current opera failed because a certain singer was too old and too full of trills, mordents, acciaccature, and appoggiature of half a measure's length, which does not please the Romans, nor, he believes, anyone else.²⁹ A letter from Antonio Raaff, the tenor who was later to be Mozart's first Idomeneo, quotes the words of Antonio Bernacchi, the great Bolognese singing teacher. The singer "must place the voice well, draw it out of the throat, and must cultivate a good portamento, in which consists the essence of beautiful singing. Once

having acquired that, every ornament comes out well; without it, everything is wasted and amounts to nothing."³⁰

Martini was frequently called upon to arbitrate controversies, or at least to lend the considerable weight of his opinion to one side or the other. He always did this with the utmost diplomacy, sometimes with such skill that the result was no opinion at all. Asked to make a judgment about Tartini's treatise on "the true science of harmony," generally acknowledged by his contemporaries to be incomprehensible, Martini refused to criticize it even to his friend Chiti in secret. He says the work is singular and surpasses the common knowledge of musicians, and one must wait to hear the judgment of learned men, especially foreigners, in order to formulate a just idea of it.³¹

The most significant of these controversies was the Gluck-Piccinni battle that raged in Paris in 1777. Martini was asked to intervene, and to obtain a statement of support for Italian music from the Accademia Filarmonica. As was his wont, he took a firm stand in the middle of the road. His correspondence with the Marchese Caracciolo, Neapolitan ambassador to Paris and staunch defender of all things Italian, and the Abbé François Arnaud, equally staunch partisan of Gluck, was partially chronicled in 1914 by Francesco Vatielli.³² Martini characteristically refused to take sides, but the correspondence reveals that he may well have had good reason. Etienne-Joseph Floquet, a musician from Aix-en-Provence who had studied counterpoint with Martini, counsels him not to take sides in the quarrel, but to say that both parties have merit; otherwise they will print things against Martini. He confides that Gluck's party is very strong and has made Piccinni so afraid that he has resorted to visiting the homes of influential Parisians, performing his music in order to promote his cause.³³ By the time this warning arrived, Martini had already drafted several versions of his statement, which praised both Gluck and Piccinni for different qualities in their music. He said later that he never indulged in fierce or satirical criticism, and always preferred to praise rather than to criticize.³⁴

Martini, who was in ill health much of his life, kept up his epistolary efforts until the very end. On July 31, 1784, he arbitrated his final quarrel involving two young musicians who had been refused admission to the Roman academy. Once again, he called upon the authority of Palestrina in this last draft preserved in the collection.³⁵ His death occurred three days later at the age of seventy-eight.

These are but a few of the many facets of this collection, certainly one of the most important of its kind. One cannot help but admire the man who inspired and probably answered all or most of these letters, especially in the light of his many other activities. It is the author's hope that the index, upon its publication, will facilitate the use of these letters to increase our knowledge of the musical world of Padre Martini.

NOTES

¹ A version of this paper was read at the Midwest Chapter meeting of the American Musicological Society at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, on 15 February 1974.

² When completed, the index will list each letter in alphabetical order by author, and in chronological order within each author's group of letters. Identification will be made by collocation number, preserving the numeration established by the librarian Gaetano Gaspari (see the main text), and the letter will be further identified by an incipit. Where Martini's answers are extant, their entries will be placed immediately following the letter to which they respond. A separate listing of the entire collection in chronological order will also be made. In the process of indexing, the letters have been removed from their original bound volumes and placed into individual envelopes for storage in modern file cabinets. The advantages of this for preservation and photocopying are obvious.

³ Naples: stamperia Simoniana, 1785.

⁴ Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1888.

⁵ Leonida Busi, *Il Padre G. B. Martini* (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1891).

⁶ Vittore Zaccaria, O.F.M., *Padre Giambattista Martini Compositore Musicologo e Maestro* (Padova: Grafiche Il messaggero di S. Antonio [1970?]).

⁷ However, the Vienna Nationalbibliothek holds letters from both Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart to Martini. See, for example, Wilhelm Bauer and Otto E. Deutsch, *Mozart, Briefe und Aufzeichnungen I* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1962), nos. 226 and 323.

⁸ For example, Gluck's opera, *Il Trionfo di Clelia*, was chosen to open the new Teatro Comunale in 1763; also, Martini negotiated, though unsuccessfully, to have Gluck come to Bologna to conduct a performance of *Alceste* in 1778. (Letter from G. B. Mancini, 9 March 1778, Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, H.86.43. Since all letters referred to are from this library, only the call number will be given hereafter.)

⁹ J. G. Prod'homme, *Écrit de Musiciens* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1912). Cited in Francesco Vatielli, "Riflessi della lotta Gluckista in Italia," *Rivista musicale italiana* 21 (1914) p. 644, fn. 1.

¹⁰ The author wishes to acknowledge the generous aid of Signor Paganelli, without which this project would not have been possible.

¹¹ See, for example, a letter bound into Martini's partial copy of the Faenza Codex, referring to the ms. (Letter from G. B. Archetti to Ferdinando Salvi, 12 Oct. 1753, S. Paolo, Ferrara. Cod. 34.A.32, p. 59.)

¹² *Catalogo . . . degli Autografi e Documenti di Celebri o Distinti Musicisti posseduti da Emilia Succi Accademica Filarmonica di Bologna* (Bologna: Società tipografica, 1888).

¹³ *Catalogue de la Collection d'autographes de Musiciens formée par feu M^r Egidio Francesco Succi (de Bologna) qui sera vendue aux enchères le Lundi, 6 Mai 1889 et jour suivants* (Berlin: Leo Liepmannsohn).

¹⁴ Perhaps one of the most interesting results of this project was the locating of Quantz's autobiographical sketch, which Martini had requested of him, and which had been placed in that volume of extracted letters (L.117.145). Edward Reilly, due to lack of a proper index, listed it as missing in his recent book on *Quantz and his Versuch* (New York: American Musicological Society, 1971) p. 82.

¹⁵ The importance of this correspondence has recently been noted by Vincent Duckles, who with the aid of this "index in progress" gave a paper on "The Revival of Early Music in 18th-century Italy" at a colloquium on *Fétis et la redécouverte de la musique ancienne*, Mons, Belgium, June 28, 1972. A modified version was read at the joint meeting of the Northern and Southern California Chapters of AMS, Stanford University, 7 April 1974.

¹⁶ Letter from Chiti to Martini, 9 April 1745, I.6.137. " . . . da 70 in 80 pezzi di Libri Teorici Musicali ma questa è una fatica raccolta da me in sopra 40 ànni di diligente ricerca."

¹⁷ Letter from Chiti to Martini, 31 January 1750, I.12.105. " . . . non voglio vadino al Pizzicarolo, o altro di dove l'ho comprato."

¹⁸ See note 15.

¹⁹ Letter of Martini to A. del Valleppo [1762], I.22.28a. " . . . io possa dar notizia al pubblico . . . di tutte le opere si ms. e stampate, e dove si ritrovano."

²⁰ Letter of Giovanni Sbaraglia to Martini, 10 October 1730, I.7.103.

²¹ Probably Spalato, the Italian for the city of Split in Yugoslavia, then part of the Venetian Republic.

²² Letter from D. M. Cavallini to Martini, 8 March 1738, I.3.10. " . . . quattro Libri di Messe di Autori francesi stampati del 400 li Autori sono Alessandro Agricola, de Orto, Enrico Izac, Brumel, Obret, etc. Sono di una bellissima stampa, e molto ben conservati."

²³ Following are, in the order of their pagination and with their call numbers, the volumes to which this letter may well refer:

- 1) Misse Alexandri Agricola (1504) Q.60
- 2) Missae de Orto (1505) Q.62
- 3) Misse Henrici Izac (1506) Q.68
- 4) Without title; contains 5 Masses by Brumel (1503) Q.57
- 5) Misse Obrecht (1503) Q.55

Note that the pagination reflects the order in which the composers are mentioned in the letter. Between volumes 2 and 3 is a gap in the pagination, indicating a missing fascicle. I am indebted to Sergio Paganelli for this reconstruction.

²⁴ Letters from G. M. Patuzzi to Martini, 10 November 1753 and 12 Feb. 1754, I.18.38-39.

²⁵ Letters from M. Gerbert to Martini, 10 Sept. 1768 and 1 Aug. 1772, H.86.123 and H.86.127.

²⁶ Both these portraits are presently hanging in the newly-refurbished reading room of the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale.

²⁷ *Arte pratica di contrappunto* . . . 3 vols. (Venice, 1765-1772).

²⁸ Letter from G. Paolucci to Martini, 26 Feb. 1774, I.5.139.

²⁹ Letter from G. Tibaldi to Martini, 10 Jan. 1753, I.19.1.74.

³⁰ Letter from A. Raaff to Martini, 9 Feb. 1768, I.4.99. " . . . di mettere bene la voce, di tirarla fuori dalla gola, d'applicarsi al portamento, che in quello consistere essenzialmente il bel cantare, perche una volta acquistato quello, ogni ornamento riuscire bene, e senza quello, tutto era sciupato e non concludeva a nulla."

³¹ Letter of Martini to G. Chiti, 22 Feb. 1755, I.6.85a.

³² Vatielli, "Riflessi . . .," *Rivista musicale italiana* 21 (1914) pp. 639-671.

³³ Letters from E.-J. Floquet to Martini, 20 May 1777 and 20 December 1777, I.8.103-104.

³⁴ Letter of Martini to unknown addressee (probably the Marchese Caracciolo), without date, H.78.13.

³⁵ Letter of Martini to L. A. Sabbatini, 31 July 1784, I.29.11a.