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Tafelmusik

Music and Banqueting in the Premodern Era

For Susanne Fontaine on her 60th birthday

Abstract

Music that is not listened to for its own sake but which, such as dance music or table music (*Tafelmusik*), fulfils a specific social function has been considered inferior in musicology. This evaluation has stemmed from two very different influences. On the one hand, the self-contained and autonomous aesthetics of the 19th century sought to derive the quality of a piece of music solely from the complexity of the composition and consequently considered as lesser such works as demanded less attention to the compositional process and details. On the other hand, the field was for a long time dominated by an interest in extant written scores, which meant that music which was only documented in pictorial or written sources received less critical attention. The combination of these two aspects has led to a false conclusion: because the majority of pre-modern table music has not been handed down, its musical value must not be that great. By using examples from the 15th to 18th centuries – including courtly celebrations in Lille, Ferrara, and Florence, courtly musicians such as Heinrich Schütz, Michael Praetorius, and Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, as well as 18th-century middle-class table music – this chapter examines the role table music played in social life and how the quality and complexity of the music related to the occasion for which it was conceived.

Keywords

Occasional Music, Professional Singer, Feast of the Pheasant, Christofaro di Messisbugo, Heinrich Schütz, Immanuel Kant, D'Este, Medici

1. Table Music for Digestion

"Bravi! Cosa rara!" No cost is spared when Mozart's Don Giovanni arranges a festive dinner for the Guest of Stone. He spends a fistful of money to engage two oboists, two clarinetists, two bassoonists, and two horn players. Such wind ensembles, also known as *Harmoniemusik*, had lately become very popular among the nobility. Players arranged music specifically for this instrumentation – otherwise heard only in the military, at

* Translated by David B. Dollenmayer. Quotations for which no other translation is cited have also been translated by Dollenmayer.

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masked balls, or in the opera – and they regaled their patrons and their guests with everything that was entertaining, spirited, or simply in style.

To accompany roasted pheasant and gleaming red Marzemino wine, Don Giovanni's musicians play the best and most popular Viennese opera tunes of the last few years. Of course, Mozart was probably not sure if the public in Prague (where *Don Giovanni* premiered in late October 1787) would recognize the musical references, so as an aid to guessing, he had Leporello allude to the title of the opera each tune comes from. Things get underway with "O quanto un si bel giubilo," a melody from Vicente Martin y Soler's opera *Una cosa rara*, which had been enjoying huge success at the Burgtheater since November 1786. It is followed by the somewhat older "Come un agnello," an aria from Giuseppe Sarti's *Fra I due litiganti il terzo gode*, which premiered in Milan in 1782 and had a successful run in Vienna in 1783. Already in 1784, Mozart had written a set of piano variations on this aria. There was no need for Leporello to announce the third and last piece, Figaro's aria "Non più andrai farfallone amoroso" ("Now forget quiet pleading, sweet caressing"). Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* had premiered on May 1, 1786 in Vienna, and although it was bumped from the schedule by *Una cosa rara*, it was such a huge and long-lived hit in Prague after its first performance there in December 1786 that it earned Mozart the commission to compose *Don Giovanni*. *Figaro* continued to be performed until a few days before the opening of the new opera. So it was enough for Leporello to point out that he knew very well the piece just now being played by the wind ensemble ("Questa poi la conosco pur troppo"), establishing a winking conspiracy with his audience.

With the table music in the second finale of *Don Giovanni*, Mozart audibly transferred the old Don Juan story to the present and musically confronted his audience with the world of their own experience – at a time when the idea of table music had already come under criticism. Immanuel Kant, who was not much of a music fan to begin with and declared in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Critique of Judgement, 1790) that music "possesses less worth in the judgement of reason than any other of the fine arts,"[1] had already revealed a certain disdain for table music in his lectures on anthropology in 1772–1773:

> There is nothing more absurd than table music. There are much finer sorts of pleasure at table, but music fills the empty space where thought could be taking place and can contribute to digestion.[2]

1 Kant: Critique of Judgement, p. 156 f.
2 Kant: Anthropologie, p. 414.

Later, in his *Critique of Judgement*, he describes it as

> a quaint idea intended to act on the mind merely as an agreeable noise fostering a genial spirit, which, without anyone paying the smallest attention to the composition, promotes the free flow of conversation between guest and guest.[3]

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* could have disabused Kant. Even in the late 18th century, table music by no means served primarily as background music. Leporello definitely pays some attention to composition and invites the audience to form their own judgments about the music. To be sure, in his disparaging remarks about table music, Kant was less concerned with the quality of its composition and more with the use of music in a context that was not focused on the work of art.[4] Nevertheless, his remarks established a disparagement of table music that became the majority opinion in the 19th century and even found its way into music history. In the middle of that century, Eduard Hanslick coined the famous phrase describing music as "tönend bewegte Formen" (sonically moved forms)[5] and became thereby the main proponent of an aesthetics of autonomy that accepted music only as an absolute art, free of any extramusical contents and requirements.[6] Hanslick was obviously referring to Kant in his influential work *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (On the Musically Beautiful, 1854) with respect to table music when he chided its "accillary service":

> A picture, a church, a play cannot be guzzled, but an aria certainly can. That is also why the enjoyment of no other art lends itself to such ancillary service. The best compositions can be played as dinner music and facilitate the digestion of pheasants.[7]

It almost seems as if Hanslick were referring explicitly to Don Giovanni's roast pheasant. Of course, Hanslick's critique too does not call the quality of music into question. On the contrary: At a time when table music was attracting enemies on all sides, he was defending it from cooptation by supposedly non-artistic activities. For the 19th century had not only developed a new understanding of music as an autonomous art, but also produced composers and musicians who defined themselves as artists instead of service providers and had increasing difficulty playing a background role at aristocratic or bourgeois dinner parties. The belief that music is good for digestion reaches back to the Middle

3 Kant: Critique of Judgement, p. 135.
4 Mohr 2013 advocates this interpretation.
5 Hanslick: Vom Musikalisch-Schönen, p. 32; Hanslick: On the Musically Beautiful, p. 41.
6 From the legion of literature on absolute music, the influential work of Dahlhaus 1989 can serve as representative. Cf. on this problem area also the contribution of Annette Gerok-Reiter and Jörg Robert in this volume, pp. 3–48.
7 Hanslick: On the Muscially Beautiful, p. 83.

Ages; in 1618, the poet and composer Thomas Campion asserted in his *Ayres sung and played at Brougham Castle in Westmerland in the Kings Entertainment* that "Musicke helps digesting."[8] But 19th-century physicians supplemented this old doctrine with the opinion that music hinders unimpeded ingestion. Moreover, culinary experts began to complain that music deprived dishes of the attention they deserved and was at best tolerable at table to calm heated tempers. In his *Geist der Kochkunst* (The Spirit of Culinary Art, 1832), Karl Friedrich Freiherr von Rumohr suggested "making a noisy table music" for choleric individuals at table, "which in all other cases I reject as harmful and disruptive."[9]

In the course of the 19th century, a judgment about the quality of the music itself did indeed insinuate itself into the new disapproval of table music. Richard Wagner used the example of symphonies by Mozart, of all people, to announce what he thought about table music. He criticized them because of their proximity to Italian opera arias, with their shifts from (sung) melody to instrumental interludes, "these dubious voids between the melodic main motifs." Mozart, wrote Wagner,

> often – indeed, almost habitually – fell back into that banal phrasing that frequently casts his symphonic movements in the light of so-called table music, namely, the music that, between the performance of pleasant melodies, offers pleasant noise for conversation: at least for me, it is as if during the so frequently recurring, noisily intrusive half cadences of Mozart's symphonies, I hear the noise of serving and clearing at a princely banquet set to music.[10]

In music history, which in the mid-19th century was just establishing itself as an academic discipline, the term *Tafelmusik* had acquired a bad sound. On the one hand, it belonged together with *Gebrauchsmusik* (utilitarian music) and *Gelegenheitsmusik* (occasional music) to the group of terms that describe not the music itself but the context of its performance. On the other hand, it is subsumed under the rubric *Unterhaltungsmusik* (entertainment or light music), which was (and is) also suspect as being trivial, banal, and marginal. And although an increasing number of voices consider the distinction between "art music" and "entertainment music" to be outdated, attempts to define the latter are still characterized by value judgments about lack of originality and compositional simplicity.[11]

Is table music entertainment music? Yes, is the answer. Is entertainment music trivial? Only a historically differentiated answer to this question is possible, for it would be a mistake to transfer the dichotomy between art music and light music, autono-

8 Cf. also on this aspect the contribution of Lorenz Adamer and Thomas Schipperges in this volume, pp. 117–149. Cited from Kümmel 1976, p. 390.

9 Cited from Kümmel 1976, p. 396.

10 Wagner: Zukunftsmusik, p. 126. See also Reimer 1971, p. 7

11 Representative of these failed attempts to assess light music without prejudice, see the article in the new MGG by Ballstaedt 1998.

mous and utilitarian music, as it emerged in the German-language discussion of the 19th century, into earlier centuries and apply it to their music. Is table music trivial? My answer is: on the contrary. If it were possible to judge the table music of previous centuries on the basis of contemporary sources, the result would be: the more prestigious, exclusive, and luxurious the presentation of dishes at a princely banquet, the more prestigious, exclusive, and luxurious the arrangement of the table music with which the host hoped to impress his guests. Unlike in the 19th century, where the prevailing wisdom was that music and eating were mutually harmful, the ruling classes of earlier centuries placed great value on demonstrating their power, wealth, and culture not only with sumptuous banquets but also with table music. The fact that we do not know most of that music since it has not been preserved in notation, i.e., in written, reproducible form, should not be taken as proof that there was no interest in it. On the contrary, it suggests an intention to emphasize the uniqueness of the event and the privilege of those in the circle of invited guests. Few other arts were better suited to celebrate extravagance – that "most splendid form of annihilating capital,"[12] – than food and music. As art, both were materialized in the act of "consumption" – the best dishes were those of which nothing was left over, and the music developed its efficacy by fading away. Sometimes the aim was a conjunction of culinary and musical effect, as when a celebration took place under a specific motto. In a chapter on "table ceremonial" in Julius Bernhard von Rohr's *Einleitung zur Ceremoniel-Wissenschafft der großen Herren* (Introduction to the Study of Ceremony in the Houses of Great Lords, 1733), the author describes the practice of selecting table music according to the requirements of the particular event:

> On solemn occasions, one hears beautiful musical pieces at the table. Sometimes they include only trumpets and drums, but sometimes also the most beautiful vocal and instrumental music. One hears castrati and cantatrices who sing mostly Italian pieces. If it pleases the princely lords to dine in military tents, in hunting lodges or forester's cabins, or in the manner of a peasant wedding or in some other costume, the music is adjusted accordingly, so that everything harmonizes.[13]

At great celebratory banquets at the tables of princes, music served not as background noise but was considered an equal, integral component of the splendid staging of sovereignty and affluence. And even at the quotidian table, music helped to ennoble mere ingestion and make it a special moment in the course of a day, a significant social event.

Three areas of investigation help us understand how table music was perceived by contemporaries: first, the occupational profiles of musicians; second, musical publica-

12 The quote referred originally to fireworks. See Kohler 1988, p. 10.

13 Rohr: Ceremoniel-Wissenschafft, p. 120.

tions together with their paratexts (i. e., their dedications and forewords); and third, reports and descriptions of celebrations, including documentation of courtly events but also cookbooks.

2. Table Music as a Profession

The files of court administrators and the correspondence of responsible officials often provide information about how table music was perceived and evaluated. It is striking that it was often not lesser-known musicians but the most prominent who were engaged to perform at banquets – performers like the virtuoso Venetian violinist Biagio Marini, whom Count Palatinate Wolfgang Wilhelm "hired for table music and concerts" in 1624.[14] Table music was one of the normal duties of a court musician, and the court Kapellmeister was responsible for organizing it.

Heinrich Schütz is an especially good example of such an official, since for a musician of the 17th century his life is comparatively well documented. In addition to court files, many letters and memoranda from his own hand have survived. Under the patronage of Landgrave Moritz of Hessen, Schütz matured as a musician and began service as the second organist at the court in Kassel in 1613. Before the landgrave had time to reap the benefits of his patronage, however, Schütz came to the notice of the Saxon Prince-Elector Johann Georg I, who hired the promising composer away. From 1615, Schütz worked in Dresden, at first quasi on loan from Kassel, but later as official court Kapellmeister. According to the privy councilor and lord steward of the household Christof von Loß, Schütz's presence in Dresden was indispensable "if the *musica* at the church and at the table is to be conducted as before."[15] As this passage makes clear, service at the princely table was as much a part of the court musician's profession as service in church.

There was no question of Schütz the organist himself playing at the princely table. As court Kapellmeister, however, he was expected to see to it that the table music was appealing and appropriate. How important this was is clear from a memorandum that Lord Steward von Loß wrote to the attention of Court Kapellmeister Schütz on the occasion of the visit of Emperor Matthias to Dresden from July 25th to August 13th, 1617. Accompanying the emperor was his wife Anna; his brother Archduke Maximilian, Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights; Archduke Ferdinand, the emperor's cousin, recently crowned king of Bohemia and the future Emperor Ferdinand II; and a string of highly-placed dignitaries, among them Adam von Wallenstein, uncle of the field marshal. Lord Steward von Loß laid out precisely what he expected of his kapellmeister in eight items – five of which have to do with table music:

14 Quoted from Reimer 1971, p. 1.
15 Quoted from Moser 1959, p. 89.

1. Schütz was to see that all instruments were in good working condition and well-tuned.
2. He was also to make sure that all musicians – singers as well as instrumentalists – were on constant call and also well-behaved.
3. Whenever the emperor held an open table, Schütz was to make a careful selection of good pieces – not too many – and to assign the best court musicians to perform them, not play too much pompous music but rather pleasant things in various styles, and to arrange them such that the emperor and his retinue could derive fame and honor from it.
4. But when a princely banquet was to be held simultaneously with the emperor's in a separate room, Schütz was to put together another ensemble of musicians not performing at the imperial table – for example, capable young players. He should instruct them to play at the princely table and not to get drunk.
5. If Archduke Ferdinand or Archduke Maximilian wished to dine in their private chambers and wanted some music to accompany the meal, Schütz should put together an appropriate small ensemble and carefully select the music to be played.
6. If the emperor dined alone and the prince elector dined with Archduke Ferdinand, Archduke Maximilian, and other gentlemen, the entire court orchestra should be at the disposal of the prince elector. Some of them – namely, the best players – should be available to the emperor.
7. Early each morning, Schütz was to inquire of the lord steward which banquets were planned and for where, so he could promptly prepare the music appropriate for each one.
8. And in case an evening dance was planned for the Great Hall, Schütz should pledge all the instrumentalists to perform with care and play appropriate dances. In no case should they be negligent, or the prince elector would punish them.[16]

The lord steward himself gave thought to the musical accompaniment to the banquets and even to more intimate meals; there could be no better evidence that in the pre-modern era, table music was by no means a marginal phenomenon but a central event in a court's self-presentation. In this particular case, there was also an extra diplomatic difficulty: Before the assembled leadership elite of the Catholic Reformation, who soon thereafter would resort to arms to assert their determination to re-Catholicize the empire, the Saxon prince elector could hardly show off his sacred music, which would surely have been featured during a visit by Protestant princes. The practice of singing several hymns before the meal as a part of the table music was unthinkable in the context of an imperial visit. But with exquisite table music tailored to the situation and performed by the best musicians, the ruler of Saxony could let the emperor know

16 The exact wording of the instructions is in Kobuch 1986, pp. 85–87.

every day that his court ranked very high among the empire's competing principalities. Thus the table music – as well as the food itself and the exertions of the elector's kitchen staff – became an act of political communication.

Johann Georg I also took his court musicians along to the Electoral Diet in Mühlhausen in the fall of 1627, and Schütz provided him with an "extensive list [...] of those persons from among the musicians who could be taken along to Mulhaussen to attend both on the days of preaching and at table."[17] He chose nineteen musicians for this occasion, or sixteen as a less expensive alternative. But he asked his lord to approve the larger number, since the smaller group would make a lesser impression.

Thinking about how a court orchestra should be composed is a common thread running through all of Schütz's professional life and through the surviving documents. After his second journey to Italy in 1628/1629, he wrote that

> ever since the first time I was in these places, this whole undertaking has changed greatly, and the music that is useful for representational purposes at princely tables, comedies, ballets, and the like has now noticeably improved and increased.[18]

Schütz was often asked to provide expert opinion and recommendations on the organization of court music at courts smaller than Dresden – for the first time in December 1617, when he advised Heinrich Posthumus Reuß, the Lord of Gera, on how even with limited funds, a functioning court music could be established. He recommended a court organist, other instrumentalists, and singers, and finally wrote extensively about how the schoolboys at the recently established Gymnasium Ruthenaeum could be integrated into the court music. Table music also played a prominent role: Schütz recommended that Heinrich Posthumus Reuß have musically talented boys trained specifically for service at banquets:

> With regard to the two boys to be kept, gracious Lord, I append the recommendation that Your Grace could make them the foundation of your music, for the reason that they will be partly supported free of charge, as I also understand from Your Grace, and thus will have to accommodate themselves totaliter ad nutum of Your Grace. And when hereafter Your Grace's intention will be put into practice, those same boys – be they few or many – can be trained in singing by the cantor and can take lessons from Your Grace's court instrumentalists on the violin (of necessity), but also on other instruments such as cornett and sackbut, according to their preference. In this endeavor, God willing, Your Grace will make good order, and for my part, I shall always be happy to advise you if God lend me life, etc.[19]

17 Schütz: Briefe, pp. 85 f.
18 Schütz: Briefe, p. 96.
19 This report is reproduced in Jung 1961, here p. 245.

"Table boys or descants who serve at table"[20] are also mentioned in a memorandum Schütz wrote shortly after his return from Italy in 1629, in which he discusses the improvement of the Dresden court music. In 1645, he responded to Countess Sophie Elisabeth von Braunschweig's request for recommendations about her court music. Schütz asked for more information, including on

> the use of religious music
> 1. at table
> 2. with a sermon
> 3. at an important-extraordinary musical service in church

and

> secular table music.[21]

And at the end of his long life, probably after 1667, as Schütz was advising the new dean and court preacher von Zeitz on establishing a library of scores, table music still played an important role. After the rubric of psalms and religious concerts for full orchestra and chorus, the next rubric was psalms and religious concerts scored for fewer voices, which could also be performed "at a princely table."[22] And the last of six rubrics had the title, "Secular and Moral Songs for a Princely Table Music."[23]

To be sure, no composition is ever mentioned by name, so that we cannot know which pieces were actually performed at table. Besides, we can assume that the compositions of the Dresden court Kapellmeister that have survived in print or manuscript, as numerous as they are, represent only part of his total œuvre. Not a single instrumental composition by Schütz has survived, as have none of his many works for the stage. Schütz chose very carefully the image he wanted to leave posterity – the image of a composer of Protestant sacred music, not that of a secular servant of a prince. We know of no instrumental work by Monteverdi either, except when it is embedded in a larger dramatic context like the ballet music in *Il Ballo delle ingrate* (1608).

3. Table Music on Paper

In order to imagine what table music sounded like, one must turn to other sources. At the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries, there is an increase in musical publications, suggesting that published scores were being used for table music.[24] For

20 Schütz: Briefe, p. 107.
21 Schütz: Briefe, p. 156.
22 Schütz: Briefe, p. 295.
23 Schütz: Briefe, p. 295.
24 A collection of these musical sources can be found in Reimer 1971.

one thing, there are collections with titles such as *Christliche Hauß und Tisch Musica*[25] (Christian Music for House and Table) by Bartholomäus Gesius or *Kirchen- und Tafel-Music*[26] (Music for Church and Table) by Andreas Hammerschmidt, both of which confirm the practice of including religious songs at table, also evident in the Schütz documents. Moreover, there are collections of clearly secular vocal music, for example, Johann Melchior Caesar's *Musicalischer Wend-Unmuth, bestehend in underschidlichen lustigen Quodlibeten und kurtzweiligen Teutschen Concerten*[27] (Music to Banish Discontent, Consisting of Various Jolly Quodlibets and Entertaining German Concerts) or Valentin Rathgeber's famous *Augsburger Tafelkonfekt*[28] (Augsburg Table Confection). And finally, there is an increasing number of publications with instrumental music. An early and prominent example is a collection by Michael Praetorius, published in 1612, with the title

> *Terpsichore*
> Musarum Aoniarum Quinta
> Darinnen Allerley Frantzösische Däntze und Lieder [...] Wie dieselbige von den Frantzösischen Dantzmeistern in Franckreich gespielet / etc. unnd vor Fürstlichen Taffeln / auch sonsten in Conviviis zur recreation und ergötzung gantz wol gebraucht werden können.
> In which all sorts of French dances and songs [...] as they are played by French dancing masters in France / and at princely tables /
> and also otherwise can be used very well in conviviis for recreation and delight.

Terpsichore is also one of the earliest publications to explicitly link dance music and table music. Praetorius began his extensive introduction with a justification for why – after composing religious music – he was now presenting the public with a secular work, and stated more precisely what was already said in his title:

> Considering that it is customary not only at princely tables / but sometimes also at other honest and often secular conventibus, conviviis, weddings / and similar joyful gatherings of respectable people / not to let the occasion pass without special charming entertainment.

If Praetorius had not explicitly intended *Terpsichore* for table music as well as dancing, one could conclude that he wanted above all to document the high level of dance culture – both in the ballroom and on stage – at the court in Wolfenbüttel. Many of the over three hundred dance movements are stand-alone compositions, such as the pan-European hit "Branle de la Torche" or the equally popular "Spagnoletta." Others are grouped together, like the first nineteen dances in the collection, consisting of

25 Gesius: Christliche Hauß Und Tisch Musica.
26 Hammerschmidt: Kirchen- und Tafel Music.
27 Caesar: Musicalischer Wendunmuth.
28 Rathgeber: Tafel-Confect.

various branles and diverse gavottes. Some of these suites of dances are called "ballets," and their titles indicate either a theatrical performance – for example the "Ballet des coqs" or "Ballet de trois aages" [sic] – or they honor specific persons, such as the "Ballet de Monseigneur le Prince de Brunswieg," written for the heir to the throne of Braunschweig, Friedrich Ulrich, to whom the entire collection is dedicated. Which genre should claim the "Ballet du Roy pour sonner apres" remains, alas, unknowable.[29]

But with *Terpsichore*, Praetorius had more in mind than praising the high standard of dance culture at the Braunschweig court. Above all, he intended to enhance the artistic status of dance music and understand it as more than just the necessary accompaniment for a social activity, but instead give it a distinct compositional identity. Many of the dances were, like "Branle de la Torche" and "Spagnoletta," tunes known across Europe. By embedding them in a multi-voiced setting, Praetorius conferred artistic ennoblement. He did not see it as his task to invent new thematic material but to clothe familiar melodies in compositionally sophisticated settings. These polyphonic settings would not have been necessary for dancing, since all a dance needed was a clearly audible rhythm and a melody, in which one could recognize the dance and its appropriate choreography. For centuries, dance music was not written down at all. Beginning in the mid-15th century, melodies began to be written down in choreographic primers – usually monophonically – quasi as a reminder for dancing masters. Until almost the end of the century, dance music occupied a very low rung in the hierarchy of instrumental music. It was text-less and therefore sense-less music, unlike instrumental arrangements of motets and madrigals, where one could assume that listeners would be familiar with their original texts. Here is where table music comes into play. As music for a banquet, dance music could not be presented without being embedded in a polyphonic movement. By composing such arrangements, Praetorius elevated traditional dance tunes to the status of art music. The princely table was the place where music for dancing became music for listening. It no longer served primarily to regulate sequences of movement but now demanded to be recognized and taken seriously as an artistic product. The musical promotion of traditional dance tunes to polyphonic instrumental pieces must not be misunderstood as an advance in artistic autonomy. There was no change in the music's functionality, but only in its function. Table music too was functional music, but its task was no longer to set the rhythm for bodily movement, but rather to enhance a meal – whether formal or informal – by adding a musical sensation to the culinary one. At first, the increase in musical complexity led not to more compositional independence from the music's assigned role but continued to be understood as part of a social act.

Later, however, as instrumental music established itself as an expressive form equal to vocal music, it also began to free itself from functional assignments. If one regards

29 Praetorius: Terpsichore is published by Günther Oberst.

the continued development of instrumental table music in the 17th and 18th centuries, it becomes clear how much 19th-century aesthetic theory – which decried table music as trivial – misunderstood its actual historical development. Rather than retiring behind the function it was supposed to fulfill as seemingly worthless *Gebrauchsmusik* (utilitarian music), instrumental table music developed an inherent artistic dynamic and made a significant contribution to freeing instrumental music gradually from its dependence on vocal music – a process that in the last third of the 18th century came to an end in so-called Viennese classicism.

This functional change from dance music to table music is evident in the third part of Wolfgang Caspar Printz's primer on composition, *Phrynis Mytilenaeus* (written in 1679 and published in 1696). With a satirical wink, he draws a distinction between dance music for dancing, which must be played with rhythmic precision for the sake of coordinating the steps and figures, and dance music at table, which allows for more rhythmic freedom.[30] This component of performance practice must not be underestimated; in the act of performance, table music could be artistically reshaped and become the focus of attention, while dance music could only be effective in the background as the maintainer of rhythm. One did not engage a musician like Biagio Marini in order to play dance tunes, but to play at table – possibly between courses to allow full concentration on the music and his virtuoso performance.

In any event, *Terpsichore* soon set the standard. In 1617 Johann Hermann Schein, cantor of the Church of St. Thomas in Leipzig, published a collection entitled *Banchetto musicale*, in which the sequence of dances – padoana, gagliarda, courante, allemanda with tripla – became established as what was later called a "suite." Moreover, although Schein's individual movements had become so polyphonic that they made dancing to them noticeably more difficult, they still retained an ideal relationship to their original function. In the course of the 17th century, many composers followed in his footsteps. In 1680, a collection entitled *Mensa sonora seu Musica instrumentalis. Sonatis aliquot liberius sonantibus Ad Mensam* from the pen of the violin virtuoso and Vice Kapellmeister Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber and dedicated to Archbishop Maximilian Gandolph appeared in Salzburg. Its German title was *Die klingende Taffel oder Instrumentalische Taffel-Music Mit frisch-lautenden Geigen-Klang* (The Sonorous Table or Instrumental Table Music with a Fresh Violin Sound).[31] This collection also contained suites – called "Pars" – with the sequence sonata, allamanda, courante, sarabanda, gavotte, gigue, sonatina. The fact that their character went beyond providing a pattern for the movements of a dance is evident from the freely composed "sonatas" that appear at the beginning and the end of each suite like a musical frame for the dances. In his foreword, Biber emphasizes that his table music is not meant to show off musically, but rather to revere simplicity:

30 Printz: Phrynidis Mytilenaei, p. 110. See also Reimer 1971, p. 5.

31 Biber: Mensa sonora.

> It is thus not my concern to set a rare delicacy from the notoriously profligate Apicius on Your Princely Highness's table, nor to lay thereon an incalculable little pearl from the extravagant Cleopatra, but rather with obedient and humble admiration and indebtedness to entrust to You the noble jewel of simplicity.[32]

And in 1698 Georg Muffat, Kapellmeister and supervisor of pages at the court of Johann Philipp von Lamberg, Prince-Bishop of Passau, published his *Florilegium Secundum* with a series of instrumental dance sequences, each with an overture and some, as in the case of Praetorius, with a connection to scenic presentation. Thus the movements of the second fasciculus have titles such as "Cooks Stirring Something in Their Pots," "Chopping Meat," or "The Kitchen Boys." In his foreword, Muffat explains how the published suites came to be:

> It contains not a few of the ballets, newly set by me in Passau, that resounded pleasantly at dances and many instrumental performances at Your Princely Court, which – although they also served various other functions, as for example chamber, table, or night music – nevertheless owe their existence more to Your Princely Grace's all-encompassing zeal for the rearing of the aristocratic youth at Your Court than to my desire to delight the ears.[33]

Dance music, chamber music, table music, or serenade: Muffat lengthened the list of occasions for his suites by two more applications. In both cases – in a chamber or in a nocturnal garden – the extramusical context receded further into the background, making more space for attention to the music. Nevertheless, when Georg Philipp Telemann published *Musique de Table* in 1733, it was a clear indication that he intended to present exquisite art music – in various settings, with and without winds, in differing genres such as suite, quatuor, trio sonata, and solo sonata. Telemann's *Musique de Table* presented the entire spectrum of what the art of instrumental composition had accomplished in the meantime. At the same time, his title kept alive the functional aspect of the music, be it for dancing or at table.

Printed scores like Praetorius's *Terpsichore*, Biber's *Mensa Sonora*, or Muffat's *Florilegium Secundum* also served to carry the prestige of the dedicatees into the world beyond the narrow circle of their own court. They were documents – documentation, really – of the splendor and importance of the place where they originated. If aristocrats such as the heir to the throne of Braunschweig, the archbishop of Salzburg, and the brothers Johann Traugott and Liebgott von Kueffstein, cathedral canon and lord steward of Passau, had not financed these publications, the brilliance of their courts would not have been able to shine so wide and bright. Such collections were especially suited as costly gifts for their equals; for the public music market, they would have been, as a

32 The title and dedication in Latin and German are reproduced in Biber: Mensa sonora, p. VIII.
33 Muffat: Florilegium Secundum, foreword, p. 19.

rule, too expensive. In this regard, Telemann's *Musique de Table* represents a further development. The income from over two hundred subscriptions enabled him to cover the costs of production. Among the subscribers were princes such as the margrave of Brandenburg and the duke of Sachsen-Weimar, musicians like Johann Joachim Quantz in Dresden and George Frideric Handel in London, diplomats from many countries, but also simple – although no doubt wealthy – citizens of Germany and elsewhere. The price of the *Musique de Table* was exorbitant.[34] Mademoiselle Rhode from Frankfurt an der Oder or Monsieur Nebelthau from Meerholz no doubt subscribed in order to acquire and study the music itself rather than have it for performance at their modest tables.

4. Table Music in the Pie

In an age when the success of artistic expression is measured by the extent of its availability and the media attention it garners, it is hard to imagine that there were also times when music, to whose performance only a small, exclusive circle was invited, was much more highly regarded than music available to everyone. However, evidence from several points in the premodern era suggests that the sovereign aura with which a prince surrounded himself could also be created by music intended not for the public, but only for the most intimate circle of the privileged – quiet instruments like the lute or theorbo, solo performances by select virtuosos or members of the court who would never have appeared on a public stage. In this regard too, the role played by Biagio Marini in the Wittelsbach court in Neuburg was remarkable. Before Marini entered service there in 1623, the Neuburg court had already sent out its feelers and formulated a list of conditions under which the Italian violin virtuoso would work. In the corresponding contract, which also engaged him to perform at table, his role was described as that of a "musico riservato" not obliged to play in the orchestra, since one would not have been able to distinguish his playing from the total sound.[35] From his personal correspondence with the count palatinate, we also know that Marini wished to report directly to him.[36]

There is ample evidence for the role of a "musico riservato" – although this phrase is not encountered anywhere else – and for music that was only made available to a small circle of the elect. Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria was well known for preferring to keep the music of his court kapellmeister Orlando di Lasso to himself rather than granting Lasso permission to have it printed, much to the latter's displeasure. But the most famous example is probably the "Concerto delle Dame" in Ferrara, an ensemble of three virtuoso singers who could be heard only in the private rooms of Duke Alfonso II and his wife

34 The list of subscribers is in Georg Philipp Telemann: Tafelmusik.

35 On this point, see Clark 1957. This chapter is intended to be a contribution to the discussion of the concept "Musica Reservata," which belongs in a different context and will not be explained here.

36 Clark 1966, pp. 254 f.

Margherita. Whoever was invited to an intimate dinner or just a recital of these three musically trained ladies-in-waiting to the duchess could consider themselves fortunate, and they spread the fame of those angelic voices far and wide.[37] Music composed for the ensemble was kept under lock and key. Not until Alfonso II died without a legitimate heir in 1597 and the duchy was reabsorbed into the Papal States was the composer for the "Concerto delle Dame," Luzzasco Luzzaschi, permitted to publish the compositions. In 1601, his collection of madrigals from the repertoire of the three singers – called "Dame principalissime" in the foreword – appeared, including the virtuoso embellishments that adorned the melodies. Thereby, the mystery that surrounded this music was at least partly revealed.

Exclusivity by means of non-disclosure – from this angle, the fact that table music was specifically *not* written down when played at a large, important feast or celebration gains new significance. For it was especially at the most brilliant, sensationally staged events that fireworks, delectable dishes, decorated dining halls, and music all lived from their unrepeatability, the irretrievability of the moment reserved for those permitted to attend. But they were often communicated in extensive descriptions to those who were expected to react with amazement and admiration. Three examples – one each from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries – will support the thesis that table music belonged to the exclusive attractions.

4.1. Lille

One of the most famous banquets of the 15th century was the so-called Feast of the Pheasant, hosted in Lille in 1454 by the Burgundian Duke Philip the Good to raise money for a crusade to retake Constantinople, conquered by the Ottoman Empire the previous year.[38] The feast, at whose conclusion the guests swore an oath to make the crusade possible, comprised a luxurious banquet of forty-eight courses on each individual plate, elaborate decorations, *tableaux vivants*, and staged scenes. The latter ran the gamut from a lifelike, naked little boy standing on a rock and urinating rosewater, to a magical forest with animated exotic animals, to a series of extended representations of Jason's heroic deeds – battles with steers, serpents, and dragons – as a tribute to the Order of the Golden Fleece and its founder, the host Philip the Good. Probably the most important source for the description of the feast are the memoirs of the chronicler Olivier de la Marche, who devoted a long chapter to it.[39]

37 Reports on the singing of the "Concerto delle Dame" can be found in Newcomb 1980, especially pp. 53–56.

38 A summary of this banquet is in the chapter "Der 'Voeu du faisan'" in: Müller 1993, pp. 60–64.

39 Olivier de la Marche: Les Memoires, pp. 160–194. There are numerous reprintings of the description of the Feast of the Pheasant, most recently in Régnier-Bohler 1995, pp. 1135–1163.

Up to the present day, historians and musicologists have cast a cold eye on this event. This began in 1919, when Johan Huizinga spoke of "manifestations of barbaric princely luxury," "excessive, foolish ostentation," and "all that bizarre adornment that has vanished without a trace," and also deplored the "pies in which musicians play."[40] That set the tone for subsequent evaluations of the Feast of the Pheasant as a "laughable masquerade" or a "county fair farce."[41] Even Peter Gülke, who devoted several pages of his Dufay monograph to the Feast of the Pheasant and translated Olivier de la Marche's report into German, rated the event as a "weirdly bizarre, gigantomaniacal spectacle" and "ceremonious mummery."[42]

Gülke's observation that in Olivier de la Marche's description, there is "frequent but seldom concrete or detailed talk about music"[43] needs to be supplemented. For one gleans from the report how important music was for the organization of the event and how it gave order to the supposed confusion of scenes. Music demands attention, interrupts conversation, and contributes to framing events. Since the Middle Ages, the task of calling guests to the table, announcing individual noble guests, and indicating the next course to be served fell to the loud wind instruments – the shawms, pommers, and brass that since the 15th century were collectively known as the "Alta."[44] At the Feast of the Pheasant as well, trumpets blared out fanfares now and then to announce a new event, usually another deed of Jason. The church and the pie, however, had an additional function: They signaled the caesura between two moments of the feast with artistic offerings instead of acoustic events. They acted like a musical curtain between two numbers of a revue. Remarks about the music in the memoir usually begin with "Quand chacun fut assis," "Cest entremets acompli," or simply "Aprè ce."[45] Music was part of an enactment that regarded church and state, religion, and representation as equally important and complementary. On the middle table of three in the hall, a church with glass windows and a bell had been erected, with an organ and three singers inside. On the largest table, however, was a pie in which twenty-eight musicians sat with their instruments. All the musical caesuras Olivier de la Marche describes began with music from the church and ended with music from the pie. Sometimes the bell began to toll, sometimes the organ began to play, sometimes the singers began a motet. Sometimes a shepherd climbed out of the pie and played the bagpipe, sometimes three singers in the pie sang a chanson, sometimes one heard flutes, a horn, or a hurdy-gurdy. And quite incidentally, Olivier de la Marche confirms that music marked the caesura between per-

40 Huizinga 2024, pp. 263–270.
41 Müller 1993, p. 62.
42 Gülke 2003, pp. 272f.
43 Gülke 2003, p. 272.
44 See Welker 1994.
45 Olivier de la Marche: Les Memoires, pp. 172, 175.

formances when he remarks, "faisoyent ansi tousjours l'eglise et la pasté quelque chose entre les entremets."[46]

As if that were not enough, music even contributed to little surprises in one of the performances: At one point in the festivities, when the church and the pie had sung and played four times in turn, a white stag entered the hall, ridden by a twelve-year-old boy. The lad began to sing in his bright, clear child soprano and was accompanied by the stag, that sang the "teneur," or lower voice. The two circled the tables until they had sung all eight verses of the chanson. Olivier de la Marche even names the tune, *Je ne vis oncque la pareille*,[47] and adds that this number was a great success. "I never saw a woman your equal, my lovely lady" – that may have been an homage to the ladies present in the hall. Today the song *Je ne vis oncque la pareille* is attributed to the Franco-Flemish composer Guillaume Dufay as well as the Burgundian Gilles Binchois; contemporaries regarded them as equally talented artists. But whoever was the composer, the mention of this chanson again makes clear that the music at the Feast of the Pheasant was by no means music to be ignored, mere sonic background. On the contrary, it came from the most important composers and demanded full attention. It may be regrettable that Olivier de la Marche did not describe it more precisely or name its creators, but it would be a misunderstanding to take that as proof of its unimportance. That he mentions it so many times underscores the significance he attributed to it.

4.2. Ferrara

In the course of a century or two of advantageous marriages with several aristocratic European houses, the d'Este family, lords of the city of Ferrara, rose from margraves to dukes and their territory, strategically located between the Republic of Venice and the Papal States, from a margravate to a duchy. In 1471, Pope Paul II had named Borso d'Este Duke of Ferrara, with the proviso that Ferrara would revert to the Papal States if no legitimate heir were available. Until that eventuality occurred with the death of Alfonso II in 1597, five successive dukes made Ferrara into a cultural center of the highest order. What they lacked in terms of the lengthy family tree needed to join the circle of rulers by God's grace, they strove to make up for by promoting culture. In his epic poem *Orlando furioso*, published and repeatedly expanded between 1516 and 1532, the d'Este courtier Lodovico Ariosto traced the family tree back to Troy and reshaped genealogical reality with literary fantasy. With their municipal construction projects, palace architecture, painting, literature, music, and an extravagant culture of theater and celebration, the dukes of Ferrara set a standard that was known and copied throughout Europe.

46 "Church and pie always do something between the courses"; Olivier de la Marche: Les Memoires, p. 175.

47 An edition of this song is most accessible in Gülke 2003, p. 454.

Cuisine too was an art for which the Ferrara Court was internationally famous. Christofaro di Messisbugo, who worked his way up the ladder of court offices as majordomo and seneschal and married into the Ferrara aristocracy, oversaw the ducal kitchen for decades and organized countless banquets in Ferrara, Mantua, and various country estates. His position in the social hierarchy is clear from the fact that he was often able to invite the ducal family and their entourage to dine at his own house. One such banquet occurred on Carnival Saturday in February 1548, shortly before his death that same year. A year later, his culinary legacy was published as *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande e apparecchio generale*, and under that or the alternative title *Libro novo nel qual s'insegna a far d'ogni sorte di vivande secondo la diversità de i tempi così di carne come di pesce* had gone through fifteen editions by 1626.[48] As the dedication to Ippolito d'Este on the occasion of his appointment to a cardinalate in March 1539 reveals, the manuscript of this book had evidently originated years earlier and had been expanded by the descriptions of several later banquets. The book comprised several sections. The first gave recommendations about all the things to keep in mind when planning a banquet, from accommodations for the guests, tableware and table linen, wine selection, ingredients and spices, and batterie de cuisine, to the necessary personnel and their duties. Among the latter were also the musicians, along with the advice that the "piffari" – the brass fanfare players – should see to their own meal while the duke was eating.[49] Conversely, that meant that the trumpeters were to accompany the duke's every step – his arrival as well as his departure – with a fanfare and were therefore constantly on call. This is confirmed by a remark in the description of a banquet at which the *piffari* began to blow between two courses and everyone thought the meal was over, but the tablecloths were only being replaced.[50] A second part of the book describes fourteen banquets between 1529 and 1548 with their menus, and four of them include the music played at table. The third and longest part contains the recipes of the dishes served as well as of many other dishes.

Messisbugo's work is an important source for the performance practice of instrumental ensemble music in an era when it was usually not noted down.[51] However, the literature contains no reflection on the function of this music as table music. Howard M. Brown and Pierre M. Tagmann devoted their attention primarily to the instruments and the composition of the ensembles at two great banquets celebrating the marriage of the heir apparent Ercole d'Este to Renée de France on January 24 and May 20, 1529. And indeed, the descriptions of these two events contain the most extensive documen-

48 See Westbury 1963.

49 Messisbugo: Libro novo, fol. 8^{r}.

50 "Il che fatto cominciarono a sonare i Piffari, & quinvi pensò ogni uno che fosse finita la cena, si levò solo il primo Mantile [...]"; Messisbugo: Libro novo, fol. 12^{r}.

51 Brown 1975; Tagmann 1978.

tation in that regard. But an interesting comparison is to a rather intimate dinner that Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara gave at the home of his sister Isabella, marchioness of Mantua, for several high imperial dignitaries. All of these descriptions indicate that Messisbugo placed great importance on striking a balance between the culinary and the musical. While the music in Mantua was varied but of rather small dimension, at the court feasts in Ferrara, one sensation followed another. Thus the first course on January 24 consisted of

- chicken dredged in almond batter, deep fried, and sprinkled with fine sugar
- roast quail, meat dumplings, and chicken livers
- roast pheasant dressed with orange slices
- onion soup
- puff pastry with pine nuts
- tartlets stuffed with fish innards
- deep fried and pickled trout tails
- deep fried red mullet
- eel wrapped in marzipan dough
- fish soup

The music for this course was composed by Alfonso della Viola; Madama Dalida and four other voices sang; besides, there were Maestro Alfonso with five musicians and five viola da gambas, a harpsichord with two stops, a lute, and a tenor and an alto recorder. For the second course, four singers performed madrigals. The third course was accompanied by dialogues in a mixed ensemble of eight voices and instruments. For the fourth course, in addition to five singers, the duke's entire instrumental forces were deployed: five viola da gambas plus a violin and a contrabass dubbed "orchessa" (the ogress), a dulcian as second contrabass, a krummhorn, two alto recorders, an organ with several stops, and a mute cornett. Five sackbuts and a cornett played for the fifth course. During the sixth course, the writer of comedies, Angelo Beolco – who owed his nickname "Ruzante" to his caricature of a Paduan peasant –, with five other men and two women circled the tables, sang madrigals in dialect, and argued with each other like Paduan peasants. The seventh course too was accompanied by buffoonish foolery in Venetian, Bergamasque, and Paduan dialects. During the eighth and final course, wind instruments intoned and the following desserts were further sweetened by five singers, five viols, a harpsichord, a tenor recorder, a lirone, a sackbut, and a flute.

The banquet in the Palazzo Belfiore, some distance outside the city, in May of the same year went off with similar opulence. Since the weather was warm, the table was set beneath an arbor in the garden. In another arbor near the head of the table, there were musicians playing and singing through the entire evening. There were ensembles similar to those in January, and this time there were several special attractions: a musician with a "fagotto" he had built himself, a young woman singer who accompanied

herself on the lute, four French boys singing chansons with many ornamentations, and a singer with a "lirone" who sang "al modo d'Orpheo" and "divinely," as Messisbugo notes.[52] During the final course, Alfonso della Viola once again deployed the full contingent of ducal musicians: six singers, six viola da gambas, a lirone, a lute and a "cittara," a sackbut, a tenor and an alto recorder, a flute, a "sordina," and one large and one small harpsichord. According to Messisbugo, the music was so wonderfully performed that the audience thought they were in paradise.

At all three banquets, one finds a thought-out dramaturgy based on the principle of variety. Each course of a banquet had its own table music, and each table music was differently populated than the preceding one. Vocal and instrumental music succeeded each other, or a new instrumental ensemble followed its predecessor. Little dramatic scenes and dances injected variety of mood, and at the end everyone who could sing or play was mobilized. In between, individual musicians could show off the finesse they were capable of. What the sophisticated dishes offered the palate, the table music claimed for the ear. And of course, these celebrations of the senses offered something for the eye as well. On the tables were decorated statues made of sugar, each a half meter ("tre palmi") high, that were always traded out whenever the tablecloth, napkins, knives, and salt cellars were changed. In honor of the heir apparent Ercole, these statues told the Labors of Hercules – how he bested the Nemean Lion and the Hydra. These sugar statues were painted in lifelike colors with some gilding. There could have been no clearer demonstration of the host's wealth, for sugar – along with the extravagantly employed spices – was one of the most expensive ingredients on the market. At the garden feast at the Palazzo Belfiore in May 1529, the Labors of Hercules were not featured, but instead themes paying tribute to nature, spring, inebriation, and love: five statues of Venus, five of Bacchus, and five of Cupid, all gilded. As the second table decoration, however, Messisbugo presented something so unusual that he wanted it accompanied by unusual music as well.

The tables were reset for the tenth course. Fifteen figures baked from a firm, very sweet short pastry seasoned with cinnamon, pepper, and rose water represented "eight naked Moors and seven naked Moorish women," partially gilded, with laurel wreaths on their heads, while the anatomical parts conventionally concealed were covered with vegetables and flowers.[53] For this course, "M. Aphranio" played "il suo fagotto" – a statement that needs some explaining. Afranio degli Albonesi was a canon of the Ferrara Cathedral and, at this juncture, already more than sixty years old. He was a music lover and a collector of instruments who, in the 1520s, had worked on an instrument that he

52 Messisbugo: Libro novo, fol. 14^{r}.

53 "Quindeci figure, che furono otto mori ignudi, & sette femine ignude pur more, di pasta di Sosameli, con ghirlande di Lauro in testa dorate in parte, & concie con certe Verdure, & diversi fiori, che coprivano le parti che naturalmente si nascondono." Messisbugo: Libro novo, fol. 12^{v}.

called a "phagotum."[54] This was a sort of bagpipe, a complicated device of several pipes and various materials that could play two voices at once. If one can believe his nephew, who wrote an extensive report on the instrument and its invention in 1539, Reverend Afranio preferred to play religious music on his instrument. But at this banquet, his phagotum – with its authentic-sounding bagpipe skirling and "exotic" appearance – undergirded the presentation of the supposedly exotic and primordial statues with a dash of frivolity. When Duke Alfonso I hosted the imperial dignitaries in Mantua in 1532, Alfranio with his phagotum was among the performers in his musical entourage.

The great significance Messisbugo and his duke attributed to table music is also evident from the names of the musicians who are mentioned. Alfonso della Viola was the director of instrumental music and thus one of the leading musicians at the court in Ferrara. And the aforementioned Madama Dalida had already had a long career at the court: First mentioned in 1507 as a singer at the court of Lucrezia Borgia, she moved in 1512 to the household of Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este, the brother of Duke Alfonso I.[55] She became the cardinal's mistress and bore him two children. After his death in 1520, she apparently remained at the court of Ferrara and preserved her reputation as an excellent singer; in 1529 she must have been about forty years old. Of special significance is also the singer, who sang "like Orpheus" to the sound of the lirone. "Like Orpheus" – at the beginning of the 16th century, that meant a solo vocalist accompanied by a lira da braccio, a stringed instrument played chordally. With it, a performer could accompany themselves and recite musically, i. e., sing epic poetry in particular. For the performance of epics, there was a standard melodic model available that was either repeated unchanged for each strophe, or could be varied ad libitum depending on the textual content and situation. This epic recitation was not noted down; its fascination consisted in the fleeting moment of musical improvisation, the art of the singer to convey the content in a different way each time. In times when polyphonic composition represented the high point of musical art and complex arrangements were often better understood by reading and studying than listening to them, epic recitation was in principle a different art form: oriented on the text, free of the technical rules of composition, improvisational, bordering on dramatic presentation. A vocalist who sang "al modo d'Orpheo" demanded undivided attention, for their performance was unique and unrepeatable.

Unlike the names of the most famous musicians, we do not know the title of even one of the pieces played at the ducal table. Thanks to Messisbugo, we know how magnificent the music was, but unlike the dishes whose recipes he wrote down, he kept secret what had sounded in the guests' ears.

54 See Tagliavini 1960. On the instrument, see Galpin 2001.

55 See Prizer 1985.

4.3. Florence

Dalida dei Putti may have been one of the first women to become a paid, professional singer. For singing was a masculine profession. In church, women were to keep silent, and there were no opportunities elsewhere for female vocalists to perform in public. But at princely courts, talented female singers could find a place as ladies-in-waiting to an aristocratic lady. Especially at the court of Ferrara, female voices were prized, and the rulers were aware that with the unusual sonic experience of this high, virtuoso singing, they could attract the attention of the aristocratic and musical world far beyond the borders of their duchy. The charisma emanating from the mysterious "Concerto delle Dame" toward the end of the 16th century resulted from the deliberate promotion of musically gifted women who otherwise would have had no opportunity to turn their talent into a profession. In Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano* of 1528, one could read that musical training belonged in the repertoire of courtly behavior for both sexes. But the author insisted that the courtier should play music only as a pastime and by no means exhibit his talent like a professional musician before an audience of his inferiors. Castiglione also knew exactly how musical ladies should behave: Since women were bidden to be delicate, gentle, and modest, when singing or playing instruments they should forego all loud and repeated embellishments that are more virtuosic than charming. But it was exactly this virtuosity that characterized the art of the "Concerto delle Dame." Music as a profession was made possible by Margherita Gonzaga, the wife of Duke Alfonso II, who took these singers into her household and saw to their musical training. Tarquinia Molza, Anna Guarini, and Laura Peverara were the daughters of bourgeois merchants or intellectuals and thus actually not part of court society. Livia d'Arco belonged to the lesser nobility in Mantua, and without her musical talent, would probably never have found a place in the entourage of the duchess. With their glamorous musical performances, the duchess's ladies became a model for a new generation of female vocalists who began to make a profession of their art.

One was Vittoria Archilei, a celebrated singer from Rome, wife of a lutenist, who made her first international debut at the Florentine Intermedi in 1589. Another was Ippolita Recupito, who, as the wife of a Roman composer, performed in the entourage of Cardinal Montalto and was famous far beyond the boundaries of the Vatican. Also among this group were the female members of the family of the composer, singer, and vocal teacher Giulio Caccini: his wife Lucia and especially his two daughters Francesca and Settimia. Virtuoso singers of their caliber were few and far between, so it is not surprising that the entire family was hired for one of the most ostentatious celebrations of the early 17th century. The wedding of the Tuscan heir apparent Cosimo de' Medici with a woman from the House of Habsburg was one more connection between the former banking family of the Medici and the most prominent royal families of Europe. The bride, Maria Magdalena, was the sister of the future Emperor Ferdinand II. As in Ferrara,

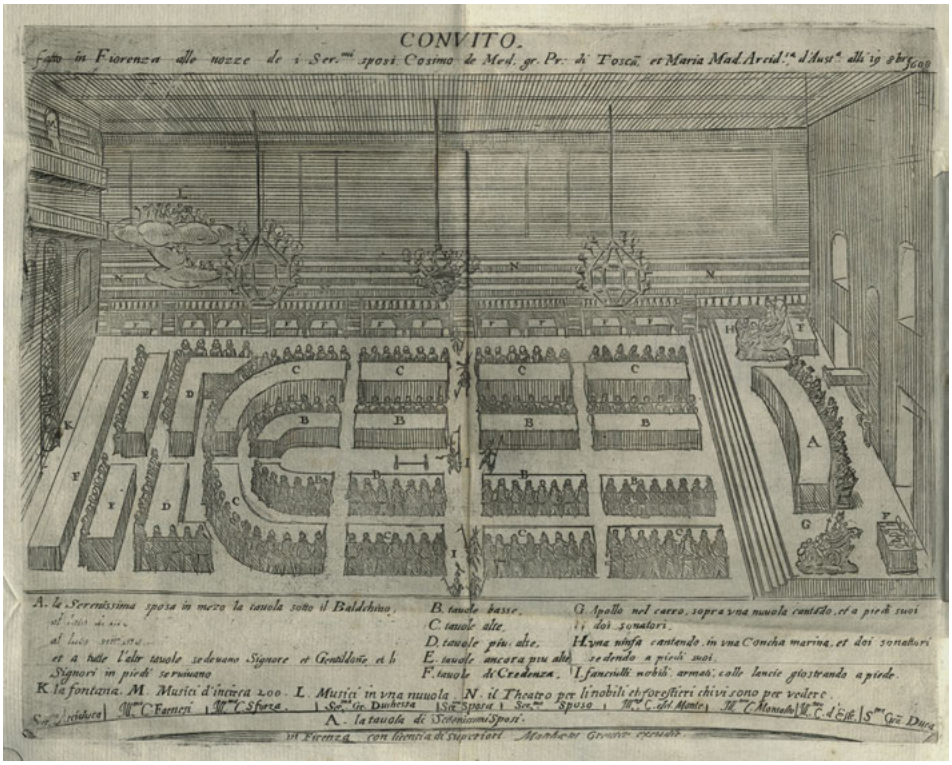

Fig. 1. Matthäus Greuter: Wedding banquet of Cosimo de' Medici and Maria Magdalena, Archduchess of Austria in 1608, Copperplate engraving, in: Camillo Rinuccini / Francesco Cini: Descrizione delle feste fatte nele rali nozze de' serenissimi principi di Toscana D. Cosimo de' Medici, e Maria Maddalena arciduchessa d'Austria, Florence: Appresso I Giunti, 1608. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, 4 P.o. it. 99 # Supplement 1.

here in Florence, pomp and pageantry made up for the relative brevity of the family tree. For days, one sensational event followed another. The banquet of the evening of the wedding was only one, but one that all the reports describe as particularly successful. Cesare Tinghi, chronicler at the Medici court between 1600 and 1615, wrote in his diary that the table music played in the banquet hall was so beautiful one could imagine that the Heavenly Gates were opening.[56] A print of the banquet[57] shows a group of musicians on a cloud, as if to confirm Tinghi's report.

56 "et mentre si cenava fu cantato una gran musica in alto sopra la credenza che parea il paradiso s'aprisse tanto bene erano accomodati"; quoted from Solerti 1905, p. 44.

57 Solerti 1905, p. 43. See also https://tuttatoscana.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/wedding_banquet_-_matthc3a4us_greutercpsimomariamaddalena.jpg?w=720 (last accessed: October 25, 2024).

A book in the tradition of Messisbugo again provides a description of the table music. In 1627, Vittorio Lancellotti, the majordomo of a cardinal, published the work *Lo scalco prattico*, which describes the numerous banquets he arranged in the course of his career. Lancellotti devoted himself to describing the dishes, the decorations, and in one case the music as well. His specialty was statuettes of sugar, marzipan, and even butter. Twice he mentions an Orpheus holding a lyre and surrounded by many animals – all sculpted from the latter ingredient.[58] He had organized the banquet for the marriage of Cosimo II to Maria Magdalena von Habsburg, and in his description of that feast at the end of the book, he also mentions the music, especially the female vocalists.

As the first course was being served in the grand hall of the Palazzo Vecchio, Vittoria Archilei and Ippolita Recupito, gorgeously attired, floated down on two clouds and sang "singolarissimamente"[59] (most uniquely) poems in honor of the bride for a quarter hour, until the next course was brought out and the clouds disappeared. During the second course, a triumphal chariot appeared in the air, from which the bass Melchiorre Palantrotti, a singer in the service of Cardinal Montalto, sang verses in honor of the couple until the third course was served. Then another triumphal chariot carrying the sisters Francesca and Settimia Caccini and another with Vittoria Archilei and Ippolita Recupito appeared and competed – sometimes in solo song and sometimes in ensemble – with such virtuosity that Lancellotti lacked the words to adequately describe the beauty of their music. The closing performance too, featuring all the singers and instrumentalists (the print of the banquet mentions two hundred musicians) before a backdrop of Paradise, caused Lancellotti to compare it to the music of heaven.

Four prima donnas, the most famous singers of their time, performing together at a banquet – there can be no clearer indication that as much care was devoted to the table music as to the other components of a celebratory banquet. Why would the Medici have gone to so much trouble if the music at table were considered a minor matter? There was probably no one present at the banquet who was not enthralled by the performance of these four "human nightingales." This is confirmed by a remark of the Ferrara envoy in his report on another event during the wedding celebrations; he wrote that the room was filled with noise except when Ippolita Recupito sang. Then, an exquisite silence reigned.[60] Once again, we do not know what the singers sang. However, it could hardly have been written down, even if they had wanted to. For their art lived from improvisation, embellishing the melody, from the sensation at the moment of performance.

58 Lancellotti: Lo scalco prattico 1627, pp. 30, 281.

59 Lancellotti: Lo scalco prattico 1627, p. 238. Excerpts from the report are published in Bianconi 1987, pp. 266–271.

60 "Il vanto nella musica toccò alla Sig.ra Hippolita del S.re Car.le Montalto, e ben si conoscceva, poichè sempre vi era strepito, se non quando essa cantava, ch'allora si serbava universalmente uno esquisito silentio." Solerti 1905, p. 47.

Particularly in this situation, when four of them were singing – in any case, one more than the Ferrara "Concerto delle Dame" - the competition for the most seductive Siren song must have been an added incentive.

5. Conclusion

When one stops seeing table music through the derogatory lens of the 19th-century aesthetics of autonomy, it raises one of the fundamental problems of dealing with music in general. For music is embodied not only in written – and therefore unchanging – compositions but also in sonic – and therefore ephemeral – events. The latter, however, elude the knowledge of future generations. Over the centuries, the steadily increasing amount of written music – which allows us to recreate the compositions of a Heinrich Schütz, a Georg Philipp Telemann, or a Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – should not blind us to the fact that the essence of music was its realization as sound. But for music to sound, it needed interpreters who put their own stamp on the music. In the table music I have been investigating, there were frequent situations in which the interpretation went beyond serving the composition and played its own, completely independent, creative role.

In describing table music in the premodern era, then, it would be false to accept the surviving musical examples as pars pro toto and equate table music in general with the pieces published as such by Michael Pretorius, Heinrich Ignaz Franz Biber, or Valentin Rathgeber. Table music was a European phenomenon, and if it was not defined or published as such in other countries, we must take this as further evidence that music made at table was no different from music played on other aristocratic or bourgeois occasions. At least, that is suggested by the *Symphonies pour les soupez du roy*, a large manuscript collection assembled in 1703 by Michel-Richard Lalande. It comprises the usual suites and, to a large extent, Lalande's music for the theater. What was published in England as a "Musicall Banquet" had little to do with table music but presented instead various compositions "like a banquet." Robert Dowland, who invented the designation, entitled a volume published in 1610 *A Musicall Banquet. Furnished with varietie of delicious Ayres, Collected out of the best Authors in English, French, Spanish and Italian.* In his foreword, Dowland continued to play with the metaphorical comparison of the musical and the culinary: "I have fitted my Banquet for all tastes."[61]

Of course, the idea that only the surviving table music scores provide information about this music would lead us astray. According to everything we learn from the forewords and dedications of the surviving collections, table music was not a separate

61 Dowland: A Musicall Banquet 1610, unpaginated. URL: https://search.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2248508070/Sec0008/1?accountid=11359 (last accessed: October 25, 2024).

genre but was assembled from the best music also played in other places – madrigals and frottolas, religious songs, Italian arias and cantatas, instrumental arrangements of vocal music, dance music, and independent instrumental compositions. That is what the sources teach us if we read them with the eyes of their own time. Table music was a musical snapshot, appropriate for its occasion; it could be discreet and elegant but also outlandish and startling. And according to what the reports on the successful banquets teach us, the quality of the table music rose with the quality of the culinary arrangements. If you were going to eat a dove stuffed with veal sweetbreads, beef fat and marrow, sliced truffles, ground salami, and egg yolk, served on a marzipan plate, coated with fondant and sprinkled with gold dust,[62] you could expect to hear similarly exquisite table music.

Familiar opera arias were enough for Don Giovanni, the country squire from the Spanish provinces, but for a Maria Magdalena von Habsburg, it had to be the unprecedented vocal art of four prima donnas who had never before been heard singing together.

We don't know what this courtly table music sounded like. It was not written down, probably in order to preserve its aura of uniqueness and unrepeatability. There is no mention of table music in contemporary theoretical discussions of music. An aesthetics of table music first developed when the phenomenon fell under critical examination and was found wanting. Only if we succeed in letting table music come alive as a performative phenomenon can we accurately determine its importance in the life of music. It is true that we lack almost all the necessary scores so that an "immanent or implicit aesthetics" could develop "in the texts or objects themselves."[63] However, all the evidence about table music that goes beyond its musical transmission can help us understand the social, artistic, and aesthetic dimension of this musical practice. It is a fundamentally different aesthetics than that of the 19th century. Embedded in a network of contemporary descriptions of feasts and graphic documents, ego-documents, official files, cookbooks, and writings of majordomos, an image of table music emerges that helps us understand why this cultural practice claimed such a large place in social intercourse.

62 Lancellotti: Lo scalco prattico, p. 238.

63 Gerok-Reiter / Robert 2019, p. 20.

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