

## Preface

This edition presents the 15 anonymous keyboard pieces contained in the manuscript D. 2358 of the library of the Florence Conservatory of Music (Biblioteca del Conservatorio Statale di Musica Luigi Cherubini). This little book probably dating from the two last decades of the 17th century is bound in leather with a gold-tooled design showing the Medici coat of arms, thus indicating the previous ownership of a Grand Duke of Tuscany. The handwriting is neat and relatively free from error. The manuscript is clearly the work of a single copyist as well as a single composer.

The manuscript is written in stave notation, six lines for the upper staff and eight for the lower. The pieces are grouped according to key, effectively forming four suites, each opening with a *Preludio* and each containing at least one *Aria alla francese*. The latter are no more French in style than the rest of the collection, but have the typically French binary structure with a ‘petite reprise’ at the end. Otherwise, the music is written in a manner rarely encountered in publications of the period, but shares points in common with many other Italian manuscripts around the turn of the century, such as violinistic textures and thick acciaccatura chords.

On the flyleaf of the manuscript there is a pencilled attribution to Girolamo Frescobaldi, probably in the hand of Riccardo Gandolfi who published a catalogue of the library’s musical holdings in 1929. This attribution is certainly mistaken. None of the works have known concordances, so they may have been written more for private pleasure rather than public circulation. Professor Alexander Silbiger suggests a member of the ducal family may in fact have been the author of its content – and there is a plausible candidate: the heir apparent Ferdinando III de’ Medici (1663-1713), known as a youth to have studied counterpoint and harpsichord with the court opera composer, priest Giovanni Maria Pagliardi. No other compositions of Grand Prince Ferdinando – known as *Orfeo dei Principe* – are known to exist, but his role as a musical patron was crucial during the reign of his father Cosimo III, who cared little for music. He supported both private and public performances of operas, ballets and oratorios, helped launch the early careers of Domenico Scarlatti and George Frideric Handel among others, and encouraged and supported the experiments of Bartolomeo Cristofori to create a *clavicembalo col piano e forte* – a harpsichord that could play shades of soft and loud. In any case, the musical sphere in which the composer of these fascinating pieces worked must have been that of the melomane Grand Prince. If indeed the compositions are his own work, they deserve our attention as illuminating a little-known creative side of a man apparently as much endowed with musical talent and foresight as he was with wealth and power.

Editorial emendations are indicated with small notes, accidentals or other signs, discontinuous slurs, ties and bar lines, or listed in the critical report. Editorial ties have been added in a few exceptionally clear cases; many more could be added. Accidentals remain valid until the following bar line (whether original or editorial). No cautionary accidentals have been added. The original beaming has been preserved.

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