

John A. Rice

"Lodi al gran Dio": The Final Chorus of Metastasio's *Betulia liberata* as Set by Mozart and Gassmann

Among the major vocal works of Mozart's youth, *Betulia liberata* is perhaps the least known--both the oratorio itself, of which even now a good recording is hard to find, and also its origins, which are mysterious. What we know of these origins can be recounted quickly. Leopold Mozart wrote from Vicenza on 14 March 1771 that Wolfgang had received a commission "indem er ein Oratorium nach Padua Componieren muß, und solches nach gelegenheit machen kann."¹ Four months later, on 19 July, Leopold wrote to Count Giovanni Luca Pallavicini in Bologna: "Fratanto sta componendo il mio figlio un Oratorio di Metastasio per Padua ordinato del Sgr: Don Giuseppe Ximenes de Ppi d'Aragona, quest'oratorio mandero, passando per Verona, à Padua per essere copiato, e ritornando da Milano anderemo à Padua per sentirne la Prova."² But we do not know if Mozart in fact sent a copy of the oratorio to Padua or if it was ever performed there (or anywhere else for that matter). Thirteen years later, in 1784, Mozart wrote to his sister from Vienna, asking her to pass on a request to their father: "wenn er mir auch das alte Oratorium *betulia liberata* schicken könnte, wäre es mir recht lieb."³ Mozart scholars have always assumed that the setting of *Betulia* that Mozart referred to as "das alte Oratorium" in 1784 was the oratorio he wrote for Padua in 1771--and there is no reason to call this assumption into question.

One of the parts of *Betulia* that has won the lasting admiration of Mozart connoisseurs is the final chorus, in which four harmonizations of the plainchant known as the *tonus peregrinus* serve as a frame for three statements by Judith. Gerhard Croll, in an article published in 1991, revealed that the choral passages are slightly altered versions of passages in a chorus by Michael Haydn, "Cantate Domino laeta pueri cantica." Mozart's achievement, argued Croll, consists in the clever way in which he used Haydn's music as part of a

¹ *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* I, 425.

² *Briefe* I, 428.

³ *Briefe* III, 319.

larger musical and dramatic structure.⁴

In this paper I would like to build on Croll's argument by comparing Mozart's "Lodi al gran Dio" to several other choruses, including a setting of the same text almost contemporary with Mozart's by the Viennese composer Florian Gassmann and another chorus by Michael Haydn that subjects a plainchant to several harmonizations.⁵ I will suggest that Mozart's appropriation of parts of Haydn's "Cantate Domino" was part of a larger and more complex network of mutual influences from which not only Mozart but also Haydn benefited.

First it is necessary to say something of the source situation of Michael Haydn's "Cantate Domino" (No. 142 in Charles Sherman's thematic catalogue) which is not easy to reconstruct. No autograph of Haydn's work survives. The earliest source is a set of manuscript parts dated 1775. The title page of the 1775 manuscript refers to "Cantate Domino" as an offertory; but the text is not part of the Catholic liturgy. (This is not Psalm 95, "Cantate Domino canticum novum.") A Latin play performed in Salzburg in August 1770, Florian Reichssiegel's *Pietas Christiana*, contains the text, and that is why Croll and others, including Manfred Hermann Schmid and Johanna Senigl, have concluded that Haydn set this text for performance in *Pietas Christiana*.⁶ The idea of using the *tonus peregrinus* in "Cantate Domino" may have been Reichssiegel's. According to a stage direction in the play, "Titi familia cantat hymnum in tono peregrino."⁷ Although no musical sources directly connected with *Pietas Christiana* have come to light, Croll and Senigl combined the music preserved in the manuscript of 1775 and the text of the play from 1770 to reconstruct the chorus as it was probably sung in *Pietas Christiana*. The text consists of ten verses: three verses sung by soloists (six in all) alternate with two

⁴ Gerhard Croll, "In Tono Peregrino" - Annotazioni su "La Betulia liberata," in *Mozart, Padova e La Betulia liberata*, ed. Paolo Pinamonti, Florence, 1991, 87-100 (German version: "Im Tonus Peregrinus: Bemerkungen zur *Betulia liberata* von Mozart," *Mozart-Studien* II, ed. Manfred Hermann Schmid, Tutzing, 1993, 73-89).

⁵ For Gassmann's *Betulia liberata* I have used the unpublished edition by Mario Aschauer, to whom I am most grateful for sending me a copy not only of the edition but of a recording of his performance of the oratorio in 2003.

⁶ Manfred Hermann Schmid, *Die Musikaliensammlung der Erzabtei St. Peter in Salzburg: Katalog, Erster Teil, Leopold und Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph und Michael Haydn*, Salzburg, 1970, 276; Johanna Senigl, *Johann Michael Haydn: Beiträge zum Salzburger Theaterleben*, dissertation, Universität Salzburg, 1987, 66-77.

⁷ Quoted by Senigl, *Johann Michael Haydn*, 70.

verses sung by chorus (four in all). Each verse is set to a different arrangement of the *tonus peregrinus* (see Table 1).

Table 1. Michael Haydn, "Cantate Domino laeta pueri cantica," Salzburg, 1770

Orchestral introduction

Verse 1	bass solo
Verse 2	soprano solo
Verse 3	tenor solo
Verse 4	chorus: "Frustra minatur hostis" (mm. 43-52)
Verse 5	chorus: "Laus nostra, virtus nostra" (mm. 53-64)
Verse 6	bass solo
Verse 7	soprano solo
Verse 8	tenor solo
Verse 9	chorus: "Adiutor et protector" (mm. 118-127)
Verse 10	chorus: "Post bella clemens Domine" (mm. 131-145)

In writing the text of "Lodi al gran Dio" and the oratorio's concluding tutti, "Solo di tante squadre," Metastasio seems to have conceived of them as two separate numbers, the first consisting of ten stanzas of *settenari* with a rhyme scheme *abbc*, the second consisting of three stanzas, each with two *settenari* and one *endecasillabo*, with a rhyme scheme *abb*:

CORO Lodi al gran Dio, che oppresse
 Gli empi nemici suoi,

Che combatté per noi,

Che trionfò così.

GIUDITTA Venne l'Assiro e intorno

Con le falangi Perse,

Le valli ricoperse,

I fiumi inaridi.

Parve oscurato il giorno;

Parve con quel crudele

Al timido Israele

Giunto l'estremo dì.

CORO Lodi al gran Dio...

GIUDITTA Fiamme, catene e morte

Ne minacciò feroce,

Alla terribil voce

Betulia impallidi.

Ma inaspettata sorte

L'istinse in un momento,

E come nebbia al vento

Tanto furor spari.

CORO Lodi al gran Dio...

GIUDITTA Dispersi, abbandonati,

I barbari fuggiro;

Si spaventò l'Assiro,

Il Medo inorridì.

Nè fur giganti usati

Ad assalir le stelle;

Fu donna sola e imbelle

Quella che gli atterri.

CORO Lodi al gran Dio...

TUTTI Solo di tante squadre

Veggasi il duce estinto,

Sciolta è Betulia, ogni nemico è vinto.

Alma, i nemici rei

Che t'insidiano la luce

I vizi son, ma la superbia è il duce.

Spegnila, e spento in lei

Tutto il seguace stuolo,

Mieterai mille palme a un colpo solo.

Judith introduces the chorus by urging her companions, in recitative, to praise God: "I cantici festivi offransi a lui." It may have been the word "cantici" that suggested to Mozart the use of parts of Haydn's "Cantate Domino." The plural noun "cantica" in the first line of Haydn's piece is the Latin equivalent of the Italian "cantici."

Croll pointed out further evidence of Mozart's debt to Haydn in the autograph of "Lodi al gran Dio," where Mozart wrote (and then cancelled) a measure of music that makes perfect sense in Haydn's work but not in his own. Haydn joined the first two choral versions of the *tonus peregrinus* (Verses 4 and 5) by harmonizing the sopranos' descent to tonic E (on the words "excelsus est") with a deceptive cadence, and then having the lower three voices cadence again while the sopranos remain silent. The sopranos enter to begin Verse 5 (on the word "Laus") as the lower voices reach the delayed ending of Verse 4 (Musical Example 1). Mozart copied all this into his score before realizing that the dove-tailing would not work when each statement of the cantus

firmus was completely separate, as it had to be in a rondo (in which each statement of the main theme is separated by solo episodes), and he crossed out the extra measure.

S
no - stra De - us ex - cel - sus est. Laus

A
no - stra De - us ex - cel - sus est, ex - cel - sus est.

T
no - stra De - us ex - cel - sus est, ex - cel - sus est.

B
no - stra De - us ex - cel - sus est, ex - cel - sus

I refer to Mozart's "Lodi al gran Dio" as a rondo; and indeed Metastasio's fourfold statement of the "Lodi al gran Dio" stanza caused the many composers who set *Betulia* during the eighteenth century, including Gassmann, to cast this chorus in the form of a rondo. Table 2 consists of outlines of the settings by Mozart and Gassmann, arranged side by side so that their similarities and differences are easy to see:

Table 2	Mozart, "Lodi al gran Dio" Salzburg, 1771	Gassmann, "Lodi al grand Dio" Vienna, 1772
Lodi al gran Dio	E minor ⁸	C major

⁸Based on Haydn's "Frustra minatur hostis"

Venne l'Assiro	G major-D major		G major	
Lodi al gran Dio	E minor ⁹	Andante	C major	3/4, 266 mm.
Fiamme, catene	B minor-E minor	4/4, 140 mm.	A minor (sung by Amital)	rondo form
Lodi al gran Dio	E minor ¹⁰	rondo form	C major	
Dispersi, abbandonati	C major-E minor		F major (sung by Ozia)	
Lodi al gran Dio	E minor ¹¹		C major	
Solo di tante squadre	Allegro, 55 mm.		F major,	4/4, fugue, 96 mm.
Alma, i nemici rei	D major, binary form		Bb major	4/4, Andante, 67 mm.
Spegnila			F major	4/4, Allegro, 70 mm.

Gassmann departed from Metastasio's libretto in assigning two solo episodes to singers other than Judith. This seems to have been a common practice among composers of *Betulia*, several of whom had two or even three soloists sing some of the episodes. In so doing, they increased the contrast offered by each episode and allowed soloists other than Judith to appear before the public as the oratorio approached its conclusion.

Comparing the settings of *Betulia* by Mozart and Gassmann gives one a clear impression of how different the musical worlds of Salzburg and Vienna were in the early 1770s. In 1771 Gassmann, imperial Hofkapellmeister, helped to found the Tonkünstler-Sozietät, an organization that raised funds for the support of musicians' widows and orphans by giving two big charity concerts each year, one during Lent and one during Advent. These concerts generally consisted, in the 1770s and 1780s, of an Italian oratorio. The musicians who belonged to the society were expected to take part in these concerts or to contribute compositions; large

⁹Based on Haydn's "Laus nostra, virtus nostra"

¹⁰Based on Haydn's "Adiutor et protector"

¹¹Based on Haydn's "Post bella clemens Domine"

performing forces, choral and instrumental, were characteristic of the concerts. Gassmann wrote *Betulia* for the very first Tonkünstler concert. With it, he helped to redefine the Viennese oratorio as a "groses Oratorium" (as Dittersdorf put it in his autobiography¹²)--a work that dominated a concert program and rivaled opera in the length and richness of its musical setting. The large number of musicians who took part in the performance encouraged Gassmann and his successors (such as Hasse, Dittersdorf, Joseph Haydn, and Salieri) to use the orchestra more than they might have done under different circumstances--in long overtures, in instrumental pieces at the beginning of the second act of several Tonkünstler oratorios, and in rich and varied orchestration. Gassmann called for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, English horns, and trumpets, as well as four horns and two trombones. Another aspect of the sheer massiveness of Tonkünstler-Sozietät oratorios is the expansion in the number and length of choral fugues beyond what was expected in earlier Italian oratorios. While the tradition of composing a part of least one chorus in polyphonic texture was a venerable one in Italian oratorios, fugal passages tended to be short. Some oratorios (such as Mozart's *Betulia*) lack fugues altogether. Starting with Gassmann's *Betulia*, however, Tonkünstler oratorios typically contain two or even three massive fugal movements.¹³

All this helps to explain the extraordinary difference in scale between the settings of "Lodi al gran Dio" by Mozart and Gassmann, whose music falls into four distinct parts, together amounting to 499 measures. It is especially in his setting of Metastasio's last nine lines that the grandiosity of the Tonkünstler oratorio becomes apparent. Instead of Mozart's lively and concise movement in binary form, 55 measures in length, Gassmann presented three movements, starting with a *stile antico* fugue. The Andante for soloists constitutes a kind of central slow movement, where the clarinets have a chance to shine. Finally, in "Spegnila, e spento in lei," Gassmann underlined the very last words of Metastasio's text -- "a un colpo solo" -- as a way of both celebrating Judith's killing of Holofernes and emphasizing the lesson to be learned from her deed: that by destroying pride, one destroys all its accompanying vices "at a single blow." He invented a musical motto for

¹² Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, *Lebensbeschreibung*, ed. Norbert Miller, Munich, 1967, 197.

¹³ John A. Rice, "Hasse's Viennese Setting of *Sant'Elena al Calvario* and the Tonkünstler-Sozietät Oratorio of the 1770s," *Johann Adolf Hasse in seiner Zeit*, ed. Reinhard Wiesend, Stuttgart, 2006, 261-72.

this five-syllable phrase and presented it several times.

Earlier I quoted from the letter of 1784 in which Mozart asked his father to send his old oratorio *Betulia liberata* to him in Vienna. He went on to explain: "ich muß dieses oratorium für die hiesige Societät schreiben -- vielleicht könnte ich doch Ja und da etwas davon Stückweise brauchen."¹⁴ "die hiesige Societät" was of course the Tonkünstler-Sozietät, for whose inaugural concert Gassmann had composed his *Betulia liberata*.

For Mozart to present a setting of *Betulia* at the Tonkünstler-Sozietät was a direct challenge to Gassmann's setting, which he almost certainly knew. Schubert's friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner preserved in his reminiscences an intriguing image of Mozart and Salieri studying old music together: "Von Mozart sprach er stets mit ausnehmender Hochachtung. Er, der Unübertreffliche, kam oft zu Salieri mit den Worten: Lieber Papa, geben sie mir einige alte Partituren aus der Hofbibliothek; ich will sie bey Ihnen durchblättern; wobey er manchmal das Mittagsbrot versäumte."¹⁵ That Mozart, only six years younger than Salieri, would have called him "Papa" seems extremely doubtful. But there is no reason to doubt the rest of the story, nor is it unreasonable to speculate that one of the "alte Partituren" that Salieri showed Mozart was the oratorio by his old teacher Gassmann--not only because of Mozart's intention of setting this text for Vienna; but also because Salieri himself thought highly enough of Gassmann's setting to revive it in 1821 in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Tonkünstler-Societät.

If Mozart did indeed study the score of Gassmann's *Betulia* he would not have been the first composer to do so. Dittersdorf wrote of a visit to Gassmann in 1772:

Gaßmann hatte im verwichenen Fasten zum Besten des musikalischen Witwen-Instituts ein Metastasisches Oratorium, *Betulia liberata*, geschrieben, welches von einem Orchester von 200 Personen aufgeführt worden war. Ich hatte erfahren, daß es großen Beifall gefunden hatte, und bat den

¹⁴ *Briefe* III, 319

¹⁵ Anselm Hüttenbrenner, "Kleiner Beytrag zu Salieri's Biographie," *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* XXVII (1825), cols. 796-99.

Komponisten daher um Durchsicht der Partitur. Er legte sie mir vor, und ich saß gerade ein paar Stunden darüber, es mit Aufmerksamkeit durchzusehen, und fand wirkliche Schönheiten darin.... So sagte ich: "Hätte ich gewußt, um welche Zeit Ihr Oratorium aufgeführt worden wäre, so würde ich die Kosten nicht gescheut haben, die Reise von Schlesien nach Wien bloß darum zu machen, um so ein Meisterstück zu hören."¹⁶

An interesting glimpse at one composer studying the score of another--and one can imagine Mozart doing much the same.

Mozart, of course, never did make a new setting of *Betulia liberata*. But Gassmann's treatment of the five-syllable motto at the end of the oratorio--a passage resembling nothing in Mozart's setting of the same words--seems to have left a significant trace in another work of Mozart. When he invented a musical motto for another five-syllable phrase, "Cosi fan tutte," he came up with a rhythm identical to Gassmann's and a similar harmonic plan (Musical Example 2a and b).

Every statement of the rondo theme in Gassmann's "Lodi al gran Dio" is identical, and this is typical of settings of "Lodi al gran Dio" from the very first one (by Reutter in 1734) and throughout the century. Mozart's rondo is exceptional in that each statement of the *tonus peregrinus* is different. This is, it seems to me, a crucial imaginative leap for Mozart--the incorporation into a rondo of Michael Haydn's richly creative and varied cantus firmus technique. Mozart had something to teach Haydn himself in this respect. When Haydn subjected another plainchant to a series of variations later in his career, in another song of praise, he used those variations, just as Mozart had, within a rondo (Table 3).

¹⁶ Dittersdorf, *Lebensbeschreibung*, 197.

Gassmann

S *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo, *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo
 A *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo, *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo
 T *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo, *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo
 B *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo, *p* a un col - po *f* so - - - lo

The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand features chords and melodic lines, while the left hand provides a bass line. Dynamics *p* and *f* are indicated throughout.

Mozart

Ferrando
 Co - si fan tut - - - te!
 Don Alfonso
 Co - si fan tut - - - te! Co - si fan tut - - - te!
 Guilelmo
 Co - si fan tut - - - te!

The piano accompaniment includes a right-hand staff with chords and a left-hand staff with a bass line. Dynamics *p* and *f* are marked.

Table 3. Michael Haydn, "Laudate populi" (1800)

Laudate populi universi Dominum, Deo nostro, sit iucunda, decoraque laudatio.	Unison chorus, D major
Ipse sanat contritos corde et alligat contritiones eorum.	Soprano solo, alto solo, D major - A major
Laudate magnum Dominum nostrum, nam magna virtus eius et sapientia eius non est numerus	Unison chorus, D major
Regnum tuum, regnum omnium saeculorum, et dominatio tua in omni generatione et generationem	Tenor solo, bass solo G major
Laudate Dominum justum in omnibus viis suis, et sanctum in omnibus operibus suis	Unison chorus, D major
Ipse custodit veritatem in saeculum, facit iudicium iniuriam patientibus, dat escam esurientibus	Soprano solo, alto solo, tenor solo, bass solo, B minor
Laudate populi universi Dominum, Deo nostro, sit iucunda, decoraque laudatio	Unison chorus, D major

Fiat!

Coda

This music differs from Mozart's "Lodi al gran Dio" in several obvious respects, one of which is that the chorus sings the cantus firmus in unison most of the time; but in overall concept--the idea of using variations on a plainchant within a rondo structure--Haydn comes very close here to what Mozart did in "Lodi al gran Dio." The fact that both choruses consist of four statements of the plainchant and three solo episodes helps to reinforce the parallels between them.

We know of several instances in which Michael Haydn and Mozart collaborated, starting in 1767 with *Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots*, to which each of them contributed one act, and continuing with Mozart's composition of the duets for violin and viola, K. 423 and 424, to help Haydn fulfill a commission for such works. Perhaps the works that we have examined here, taken together, constitute another product of mutually beneficial collaboration and influence. Haydn's "Cantate Domino" provided Mozart with material for "Lodi al gran Dio." But in the way that Mozart used that material--entirely different from the way Haydn had used it--he may have inspired Haydn to the combination of rondo form and cantus-firmus technique that he used so successfully in "Laudate populi."