



REVIEW: EDITION

Latin Pastorellas

Joseph Anton Sehling (1710–1756), ed. Milada Jonášová
Prague: Academus, 2017
pp. xli + 49, ISBN 978 8 088 08117 3

Robert Rawson

Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK
robert.rawson@canterbury.ac.uk

Milada Jonášová and the rest of the editorial team at Academus Editions are to be congratulated for this splendid and enterprising volume of tuneful Christmas pastorellas by the Bohemian composer Joseph Anton Sehling (1710–1756). Academus are emerging as one of the most impressive publishers of scholarly editions of baroque-era music today. Everything about the edition is impeccably researched, edited and presented. Volumes such as this one are leaving some better-known and longer-running series looking rather threadbare in comparison. The edition is very user-friendly, with a tri-lingual table of contents listing everything from the front matter, the pieces themselves and a detailed critical report, as well as the texts for each piece. Given the approach to linguistic accessibility throughout the edition, it is odd that translations of Latin texts are not included, however. The choice of ivory paper makes for fairly easy reading – especially of the scores. One small request of mine is that editors consistently use RISM sigla for ease of use around the world, as the libraries and holding institutions are given in Czech. Still, the seventeen (!) colour plates of manuscript facsimiles, detailed material about the sources and Jonášová's original Czech text presented in good translations into German and English all make this volume feel like a luxury in this age of austerity.

The volume presents modern scores of four short Christmas pastorellas in Latin by Sehling. Although Sehling is hardly a household name, Jonášová's detailed introduction to the composer is now the most detailed biography available and will hopefully help to capture the attention of more scholars and performers. She also mentions in a footnote that a thematic catalogue of his music is forthcoming – and a very welcome addition it will be. When Charles Burney visited Bohemia in the second half of the eighteenth century, he noted that none of the musicians working in Prague actually came from there, but rather from provincial towns and villages (Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces*, two volumes (London: Becket, Robson and Robinson, 1773), volume 2, 11–12). Sehling was born in Toužim (Theusing in German), in western Bohemia, and his life is in line with the pattern described by Burney and followed by countless other musicians who moved from the provinces to the capital city. It was there where he applied (unsuccessfully) for the post of Kapellmeister of St Vitus Cathedral in 1737. Jonášová helpfully clarifies a great number of aspects of Sehling's biography and reminds readers that prior to 1737, he had been employed in the renowned ensemble of Count Morzin in Prague. This not only puts Sehling into the circle of Morzin, with his direct ties to Vivaldi (Morzin and his 'virtuosissima' orchestra were the dedicatees of the Venetian's Op. 8 collection), but also places him within a group of other very fine regional composers, including František Jiránek (1698–1778) and Antonín Reichenauer (1694–1730). Although he failed in his 1737 application for the Kapellmeister post at St Vitus, Sehling did manage to secure the position of second violinist, which he held until his death. At St Vitus he occasionally deputized for the

Kapellmeister, Novák, and in 1739 he managed to add to his duties the post of Kapellmeister at the nearby church of St Benedict (also in Hradčany, the castle district).

The pastorella genre is, by definition, a rustic one. For this reason, I would add a caveat to those for whom these pieces would be their introduction to Sehling's music: the tuneful style of the genre tends to eschew elaborate counterpoint, so readers who want a better idea of Sehling's more learned approach will have to look elsewhere. The pastorella emerged north of the Alps around the middle of the seventeenth century (and has the Czech lands as its most devoted advocates, with Austria a close second), owing a strong debt to Italian models. In the earliest examples, it was more often instrumental works that bore the 'pastorella' designation. They were pieces that evoked, among other things, the cheerful piping of shepherds and their rush to the crib of the newborn Jesus, where their rustic music was often again called to mind (often in the form of lilting triple-metre passages harmonized in parallel thirds, frequently over a drone bass). Lullabies, sung by the Virgin Mary, also formed an important part of the genre, and all of these elements and more (some even included the arrival of the three Magi) invited – and usually received – a theatrical approach by composers. Indeed, the theatricality of such pieces in the context of church music was the subject of stark rebuke from Protestant critics, such as the Spanish-born Anglican convert Antonio Gavin (*fl.* 1691–1726; Gavin, *The Frauds of Romish Monks and Priests, Set Forth in Eight Letters* (London: Samuel Roycroft, 1691)).

Unlike the majority of vocal pastorellas of the period, which tend to be multi-movement, quasi-theatrical works that narrate some or all of the Christmas story, Sehling's are all single-movement pieces in da capo form – a nod to their Italian inspiration. By the first half of the eighteenth century, pastorellas were often scenes or tableaux composed of multiple sections, commonly featuring arias, duets, choruses and recitatives, as well as including (or evoking) of some kinds of rustic instrument. Sehling's pastorellas presented here, all from the same archive (St Vitus Cathedral Archive, Prague), are compact and cheerful little pieces that ought to find favour with scholars and performers looking for new Christmastime repertory.

The first of the four Sehling pastorellas printed here, 'Non sic cervus ad fluentem' (Not even the deer runs as fast), for bass voice, two violins, viola and continuo, launches (predictably) into a 6/8 melody, whose triadic opening is intended to evoke the piping of shepherds. The change to 4/4 partway through the B section, on the words 'desidere lenite tormenta' (assuage the torment of desire), creates a striking effect, with a further theatrical flavour provided by the *portando* writing in the violins. It is a thoroughly Italianate work. 'Eja surgite pastores' (Hark, wake up, ye shepherds), for soprano, unison violins, viola and continuo, is more galant in character and features some delightful coloratura writing (especially on words like 'properate' (hurry)). The same manuscript also preserves the third work in this volume, 'Eja laeti properemus' (Let us hasten happily), for soprano, alto, unison violins plus viola and continuo. More than the others, this pastorella is reliant on a slower harmonic rhythm and a driving bass that nudges things along in a delightfully theatrical way typical of galant style. The fourth piece, 'Dormi tenellule' (Sleep gently), is for soprano, alto and four-part strings. This type of pastorella was extremely popular, presented as lullabies to the baby Jesus. Most frequently, such works are for solo voice and presented as Marian narratives. As would be expected, the two voices are frequently in parallel thirds, completely in keeping with the 'sweet' character of the genre and its devotional function. Jonášová has also traced the transmission of the sources of Sehling's pastorellas into the nineteenth century and notes that 'Dormi tenellule' was still being copied at the Strahov Monastery in Prague in the 1830s, with performances noted on the title-page up to the (crucial) year of 1848.

The edition would have been improved had the editor explained her rationale for including these four works as Sehling's only examples of the genre, while excluding other pieces, such as 'Nova dum pastor vigilo', which bears the subheading of 'pastorella' in at least one of the sources. Indeed, Pavla Semerádová and Eliška Šedivá attribute 'Nova dum pastor vigilo' – curiously scored for soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices, two trumpets and continuo – to Sehling (Pavla Semerádová and

Eliška Šedivá, *Catalogus collectionis operum artis musicae de Monasterii Siloensis* (Prague: Národní knihovna České republiky, 2016), No. 432). Even if that is a spurious attribution, it might have been worth addressing here, especially because the editor's definition of the genre is not entirely clear.

The theatrical nature of Sehling's pastorellas goes hand in hand with his work as a composer of oratorios and stage music. It is a great pity that the composer's larger-scale works do not survive, particularly the oratorio *Filius prodigus* (1730) and his drama *Judith*, performed as part of the Prague festivities for the coronation of Maria Theresa in 1743 – compositions which earned him a gold medal from the new empress. He composed further dramas and oratorios, particularly for the Jesuits at the Klementinum in Prague, though these too are lost. Jonášová's research has also turned up further evidence of multilingual theatrical productions in Prague, one of which included music by Sehling. Her introduction provides the example of the comic pantomime *Die Liebs-Raserey der Colombina*, performed during the 1754 Carnival, in which two of Columbine's arias (one as a beggar and the other as a countrywoman) were sung in German, with a third sung in Czech as Columbine plays the part of a Bohemian innkeeper (xvii). This example alone provides still further valuable evidence of multilingual productions in the Czech lands.

Another area of Sehling's life and career highlighted in Jonášová's edition is the preservation of much of his music library, which, the editor notes, includes a large number of contrafacta church pieces derived from recent operas, including those by Galuppi, Gluck, Hasse, Handel, Lotti and Vinci. This manuscript collection points to a wider pattern of dissemination for such contrafacta, not just involving local or regional composers, and invites further research into musical networks across Europe.

For those less familiar with Bohemian and Moravian repertory of the period, let alone the pastorella genre, there are a few places where some more contextualization might have helped to strengthen the edition. In the biography, Jonášová might have clarified what she meant by the 'pre-Brixí' period, not just because František Brixí (1732–1771) is not particularly well known in some parts of the world, but in particular to avoid confusion with his father, Šimon Brixí (1693–1735), who was also an important Prague-based composer. Although cited in footnotes, the quotations used by Jonášová from Jan Rozenplut would have been worth explaining to the reader. Rozenplut's Czech-language *kancionál* (hymnal) was published in Olomouc in 1601 and was the first Catholic one to be printed. It was a direct response to the popular repertory of the non-conformist hymnals that dominated at the time and also formed an important connection between the earlier non-conformist *kancionál* tradition with that which followed the defeat at White Mountain and the eventual Peace of Westphalia in 1648 – a pattern that would later be built upon and continued by the likes of Božan, Šteyer, Holan-Rovenský and others. Had this quotation from 1601 been explained in more detail, its application to the period after 1737 might have been rendered less jarring. Jonášová could also have taken a more critical tack in her survey of earlier scholars' writing on Sehling (particularly Nemeček's claim regarding 'folk' elements). These, though, are largely questions of framing, rather than criticisms of the research and editing itself.

There are a number of ways to approach editorial interventions, and Jonášová has gone for the quieter approach, where the editor's decisions that move beyond basic transcription are left in the Critical Report. This makes for a nice clean score but means that it is a bit more cumbersome to decipher which material is from the composer or copyist and which is from the editor. These are minor issues, however, typically pertaining to things such as matching slurs or articulations across parts where they were not consistently done so in the source(s).

My only actual complaint is the description of Sehling's 'group of Christmas-related pieces' as having a 'non-liturgical purpose' (xix). The editor might be trying to clarify this in the following paragraph when stating that such works are on 'non-liturgical texts' (xix). It ought to have been made clear that many Christmastime pieces in the region, be they labelled 'pastorella' or given any other title, including offertory or graduals, often had liturgical functions. This brings up the issue of genre and title: I would argue that not all pastorellas are labelled as such. In this volume,

Jonášová has favoured four pieces bearing that designation (or other similar diminutive), though I think other Christmas pieces by Sehling (some of which she mentions in the Introduction) are actually better music. Perhaps (and it is to be hoped) such additional Christmas music might form the basis for another, forthcoming Sehling volume.

Finally, Academus Editions have made getting performing parts and translations easy via their website. This latter aspect is especially important, for although scholars and admirers of this music need to be able to study it through scholarly editions such as the present one, the natural home for these works, as for all music, is in performance. The fact that Sehling's pastorellas are all in Latin (rather than in the vernacular, as was common at the time) might help encourage performers who are not accustomed to singing in Czech to include these delightful works either in Christmastime church settings or as concert pieces. In so doing, they would be taking an important step in bringing this fascinating composer from the wilds of west Bohemia, via Prague, to a concert stage near you.

Robert Rawson is Professor of Musicology and Historically Informed Performance at Canterbury Christ Church University. A performer on double bass and viola da gamba, he has a special interest in music before c1800 and more broadly an interest in Czech music and the music of central and eastern Europe. He has also written about and recorded lesser-known music in Britain between the eras of Purcell and Handel.