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MICHELE PUCCINI'S COUNTERPOINT TREATISE

Michele Puccini (27 November 1813 - 23 January 1864), father of Giacomo Puccini, was known to have written two unpublished treatises, one on counterpoint, and the other on harmony. This fact is mentioned by Bonaccorsi¹, Carner² and, most recently, Cresti³. Yet there has been no trace of either work until 1991 when this author located the manuscript of the counterpoint treatise at the Museo Puccini in Celle (Pescaglia). The document was acquired relatively recently, in 1979, by the Associazione Lucchese nel Mondo, long after the cataloging of the original donations was completed⁴. Those initial bequests, given by the three daughters of Ramelde Puccini Franceschini (the sister of the Maestro), have been well-documented elsewhere⁵. In 1992, the treatise was finally registered with the Ufficio Ricerche Musicali in Milan, as the other documents housed at the Celle museum had been. The discovery of this treatise, whose history and description are detailed below, sheds light on one aspect of the tragically brief life and career of Michele Puccini, but at the same time, it raises several questions which, for the present, must remain unanswered.

I. History of the treatise

Like Michele Puccini, his father Domenico died prematurely, when the boy was only eighteen months old. Therefore, the child was given musical training by his grandfather Antonio, Maestro of the Public Chapel of

Lucca and organist in the church of S. Martino. The young Michele grew up in an environment which included a family musical library of great importance, the contents of which Antonio catalogued in 1818⁶. As Guidotti writes, "Nel Settecento e primo Ottocento l'archivio musicale dei Puccini dovette essere il principale della città, assieme a quello del Seminario di S. Martino"⁷. Antonio had proudly noted in the second part of his catalogue that the library contained "tutte le altre composizioni che sono descritte / e poste per esemplari tanto nei due Tomi dell'Esemplare, o / Saggio Fondamentale pratico di Pre. Martini quanto neli tre / Tomi dell'Arte pratica di Contrapunto del Pre. Paolucci"⁸. Young Michele thus had access to a library which contained the major works of Western musicology and theory, listed here in part:

Aaron	<i>Lucidario in musica</i> (1605) ⁹ <i>Toscanello in musica</i> (1539) <i>De institutione harmonica</i> (1516)
Artusi	<i>Seconda parte dell'Arte del Contrapunto</i> (1589)
Asioli	<i>Trattato d'armonia</i> (1814) <i>Dialoghi sul 2° Trattato</i> (n.d.)
Fux	<i>Salita al Parnasso</i> (1761)
Galilei, V.	<i>Dialogo della Musica antica e moderna</i> (1602)
Gasparini	<i>L'Armonico pratico al Cimbalo</i> (1708)
Kalkbrenner	<i>Histoire de la Musique</i> (1802)
Martini	<i>Esemplare, o saggio fondamentale pratico di Contrapunto</i> (1774) <i>Storia della Musica</i> (1757) <i>Regole per accompagnare, ed elementi di Contropunto</i> (ms, n.d.)
Paolucci	<i>Arte pratica di Contrapunto</i> (1772)
Quantz	<i>Essai d'une methode pour apprendre à jouer de flute traversière</i> (1752)
Rameau	<i>Démonstration du principe de l'Harmonie</i> (1750)
Rousseau	<i>Dictionnaire de musique</i> (1768)
Tartini	<i>Trattato di Musica secondo la vera scienza dell'Armonia</i> (1754)

Vicentino	<i>L'antica Musica ridotta alla moderna pratica</i> (1555)
Zarlino	<i>Istituzioni armoniche</i> (1573)

In total, there were 136 “didactic” books, to which Michele later added many, including Fétis’ *Trattato completo d’armonia* (n.d.) and Mattei’s *Trattato di contrappunto fuggato* (1827).

In sharp contrast to this astonishing collection, was the library of the Regio Istituto Musicale of Lucca (as the Istituto Musicale Boccherini was then known). According to an inventory completed on 24 December 1843 for the President of the Regio Consiglio di Stato, the library contained only twenty-two books, including the instrumental “methods”¹⁰. It was that very scholastic year that Michele Puccini, who had returned home to Lucca after completing his studies in Bologna and in Naples¹¹, became associated with the Institute. He must have found the library very wanting. By the time Puccini had assumed direction of the Institute in 1852, the school’s collection had grown to seventy-eight text-books, according to an inventory completed that year¹², but only five of these (treatises by Pacini¹³, Asioli (2), Mattei and Fenaroli) regarded harmony or counterpoint.

The pivotal year for this discussion, however, is 1846. At that time, Michele Puccini was appointed “maestro d’armonia e d’accompagnamento”¹⁴ at the Institute and he began to write, “a di 10 agosto”, his *Corso Pratico / di Contrappunto Compilato da / Michele Puccini / per uso de’ suoi allievi*¹⁵. Puccini fitted his course of instruction to the particular course requirements of the Institute at the time:

L’istruzione musicale, che durava otto anni, era suddivisa in primaria e secondaria; nella prima fase si impartivano lezioni di solfeggio, pianoforte e bel canto; la seconda fase iniziava dal quarto anno e comprendeva lo studio dell’armonia, del contrappunto e della composizione¹⁶.

Accordingly, Puccini’s treatise supplied a completely organized program of study perfectly adapted to the latter five years of training. As professor of “accompaniment”, he taught the practical aspects of this curriculum (the hands-on keyboard skills) from the simplest scales and

cadences, to complex double fugues. Puccini also interpolated some exercises preparative to ecclesiastical functions, reflecting both the strong ties between the Institute and the Church, and his own preference for sacred music. It is quite unusual that, even though the existence of this treatise was known, there was no record of its location. It is not listed in the Institute's inventory of 1852, although other works by Puccini are: a Sacred Cantata con Cori e Orchestra, a Solleggi per Canto, and a Sinfonia per Orchestra piccola¹⁷. Nor did Michele Puccini append it to the catalogue of the Puccinis' home library, although he did add other theoretical and musical works. The treatise's unpublished status could not have hindered its inclusion, since many works listed in both places were in manuscript form. The answer lies in the examination of the document itself: it was never finished. That this is so will be demonstrated below, in the description of the treatise.

The manuscript ultimately came into the hands of Carlo Angeloni¹⁸, who was both Michele's student, and the teacher of young Giacomo Puccini. It is unknown whether Angeloni received the work from his teacher, or as a gift from his grateful student. In either case, it is logical to assume that Giacomo Puccini knew of this manuscript and might indeed have used it. The document remained in the Angeloni family until 1979 when his relatives allowed it to be acquired by Prof. Guglielmo Lera, representing the Associazione dei Lucchesi nel Mondo, and it became part of the collection of the Puccini Museum at Celle.

II. Description of the Manuscript

The title page of the manuscript announces that the work is a practical course in counterpoint, compiled by Michele Puccini. Why, one wonders, did he use the word "compiled"? In choosing this term Puccini was overly modest. It is true that in parts (chiefly the third section, "Studio a 4 voci") he has included numerous examples by other writers, but the major part of the material was composed by the "compiler" himself.

The treatise is written on fascicles of 12-staved paper, bound together in a hard cover overlaid with marbled paper. It measures 28 cm. in height, 22.2 cm in width, and 2 cm. in depth. Written in ink with numerous stray marks

probably not belonging to the author, the manuscript is in fairly good condition. There are five major sections: Studio a 2 voci, Studio a 3 voci, Studio a 4 voci, Temi o soggetti per le fughe, and Soggetti doppi.

The first section, Studio a 2 voci, begins, at the simplest level with cadences (simple, composed and double) and scales. These are scales to be harmonized in various ways: with the scale played in the bass or in the upper part, in major mode, with harmonic or arithmetic divisions, in minor mode and its variants (Puccini refers to these last using the Latin term "alio modo", or "another way"), and the scale as a rhythmicized, legato, descending bass line. These are followed by a series of exercises illustrating bass "movimenti o andamenti regolari", bass lines which are constructed using combinations of various repetitive intervallie patterns, such as single steps, thirds, fourths, fifths or sixths¹⁹. The next grouping in this section consists of twelve unfigured bass lines to be realized by the student, one of which is credited to Fenaroli. These are followed by six "Parti o solfeggi" intended perhaps to be sung or accompanied, and twelve "Coralì o Canto fermi" to be harmonized.

The "Studio a 3 Voci" begins with the directions for the student to repeat "Tutte le scale nel grave, e nell'acuto, tutti i moti regolare dal Basso / nel grave e nell'acuto come nello Studio a 2"²⁰, but now, clearly, in three parts. After completing these exercises, the student could then move ahead to the "Intonazioni del Canto Ecclesiastico", nine sacred chants to be accompanied, a necessary preparation for any church musician. The succeeding exercises are "Disposizioni", a group of twelve figured bases to be realized.

The "Studio a 4" commences with another exhortation to the student to repeat "Tutte le scale sì nel grave come nell'acuto / a salire e scendere in modo maggiore, e minore / Tutti i movimenti regolari dal Basso sì nel grave / come nell'acuto, come addietro nello studio a 2"²¹, but now in four parts. Then Puccini includes a group of twenty-four figured bass lines "con semplice disposizione" (meaning that all of the figures are supplied) and forty "Bassi con disposizione ricercata ed imitativa, e fugata" which have far fewer figures and whose imitative characters provide the student with a useful stepping-stone towards full-fledged fugue creation. It is in this section that

Puccini borrows the most from other musicians. There are twenty-two examples here from Mattei, ten from Fenaroli, two from Fétis, three from Sala and two from Durante.

At this point we can observe some evidence that this early part of the treatise was brought to completion. Each of the sections we have seen so far has been comprised of a "plenary" number of exercises (six, nine, twelve, twenty-four, forty) which hold some traditional ecclesiastical significance (e.g., the twelve Apostles, or the forty years in the desert) and which also bring to mind other musical groupings (such the twenty-four *Preludes and Fugues* of Bach). Moreover, each of the sections above is followed by little or no blank space on the page. The only exception is the section just discussed, which ends in the middle of the page. But, to dispel any doubt, Puccini has added, "fine dei Bassi / seguono i / temi, o soggetti per le fughe"²². We will see that this sense of completion is not at all in evidence in the final two sections.

These last portions, containing fugue subjects, illustrate the special brilliance Michele Puccini had as a contrapuntist. The fourth part, "Temi, o soggetti per le fughe a 2 a 3 a 4 a 5" contains 224 fugue subjects, and the fifth part contains 163 "Soggetti doppi", all composed by the author. However, these sections are clearly unfinished. In the fourth, the last fugue subject is number 224, written on the penultimate staff of the page, and the staves which follow below it and the next page are pre-numbered to 237. Then follow nine blank pages (enough space to add over 100 more fugue subjects) before the last section of 163 double subjects begin. This last part, too, is pre-numbered to the end of the page (to 165), but no further, and followed by two blank pages. There is no "fine" written in, as there had been earlier. Thus, although one cannot be certain how many fugue subjects Puccini had hoped to eventually enter, one can confidently conclude that the work is indeed incomplete. This lack of closure seems to be most likely reason why the manuscript was not listed in either the inventories of the Puccini library or of the Institute.

As a polyphonist, Puccini belonged to a tradition that had passed its zenith. Yet there were a few Italian composers who continued to compose in that style, such as Raimondi, Platania, Bossi and Tebaldini²³. Raimondi also wrote a counterpoint textbook for his students not dissimilar to the one under discussion here²⁴. Michele Puccini

numbered among these “old-fashioned” artists, and demonstrated his polyphonic virtuosity most notably with a canon, the *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus* in 32 parts, written for the visit of Pope Pius IX to Lucca in 1857. Puccini was also reported by a contemporary writer to have introduced the fugato style while he was organist at S. Martino²⁵. The counterpoint treatise described here is yet another testament to Michele Puccini’s mastery of the art of the fugue, his belief in its proper and thorough instruction, and perhaps also his steadfast conviction in the vitality and viability of the style.

Ashbrook writes that Michele’s student, Carlo Angeloni, did not adhere to these ideas, that he believed strongly in composing within the current style and idiom, and that he passed this credo along to Giacomo Puccini, who followed it assiduously²⁶. One might then conclude that, for Giacomo, the study of counterpoint was an anachronistic relic to be admired and then shelved away forgotten, like the treatise itself had been. But one has only to listen to the fugato opening of *Madama Butterfly* to realize that its composer had not completely renounced the polyphonic artistry of his ancestors.

While the discovery of Michele Puccini’s *Corso pratico di contrappunto* answers some questions, it raises several others. For example, one wonders why the treatise was never finished. Where is his other treatise on harmony? Why did Puccini write his own textbooks when he had access to the finest musical literature available? What happened to the distinguished Puccini family library?

Unfortunately, only this last question has even a partial answer. In 1891, Giacomo Puccini donated some of the contents of the family library to the Istituto Musicale Puccini (the Institute’s contemporary name); but the donation comprised only about half of the works listed in Antonio’s catalogue. As Guidotti writes,

Mancano in particolare le musiche della seconda sezione del Repertorio, di autori ‘per la maggior parte Antichi’. [...] Non c’è poi traccia delle opere di letteratura musicale. [...] Dei pezzi di maggior valore antiquario, scelti probabilmente in buona parte tra i volumi teorico-didattici, fu da Giacomo effettuata o tentata una vendita a Milano; in varie lettere alla madre egli sollecita l’invio dell’elenco che gli avrebbe permesso le trattative²⁷.

In fact there exist three urgent letters, written in early 1884, in which Giacomo asks his mother for the catalogue. Since it was a time of great financial distress in the lives of the composer and his family, we can assume that the books were sacrificed. Fortunately, this treatise was not among them, and today we have the opportunity to glimpse the polyphonic and pedagogic talents of Michele Puccini.

- 1 - ALFREDO BONACCORSI, *Giacomo Puccini e i suoi antenati Musicali* (Milan: Curci, 1950), p. 22.
- 2 - MURDO CARVER, *Puccini: a critical biography*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), p. 14.
- 3 - RENZO CRISTI, "L'Istituto Musicale di Lucca e i suoi direttori", in *I Tesori della Musica Lucchese*, ed. Giulio Battelli (Lucca: Fazzi, 1990), p. 132.
- 4 - Responsible for this fortuitous acquisition were Professor Guglielmo Lera, director of the Museum, and Dott. Valerio Cecchetti, president of the Associazione Lucchese nel Mondo. I would like to thank Professor Lera who has been extremely helpful in the preparation of this essay.
- 5 - SUE HOKINSOON, *A Bibliography of the works of Giacomo Puccini* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1968), p. 61-66, and Alberto Cavalli, "I frammenti Pucciniani di Celle", *Critica Pucciniana* (Lucca, Comitato Nazionale per le onoranze a Giacomo Puccini nel cinquantenario della morte, 1976), p. 16-34.
- 6 - ANTONIO PUCCINI, *Repertorio di musica di Antonio Puccini*, now housed in the Biblioteca dell'Istituto Musicale Boccherini, Lucca.
- 7 - FABRIZIO GUMORTI, "La biblioteca di casa Puccini e il suo catalogo: il Repertorio di musica di Antonio Puccini (1818)", in *I tesori della Musica Lucchese*, ed. Giulio Battelli (Lucca: Fazzi, 1990), p. 38. [In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the musical archive of the Puccinis had been the principal one of the city, together with that of the Seminary of S. Martino].
- 8 - [all the other compositions that are described and used as examples in both the two volumes of the *Esemplare or Practical Fundamental Essay* by Padre Martini and in three volumes of *The Practical Art of Counterpoint* by Padre Paolucci].
- 9 - The dates and spellings given are Antonio Puccini's and are not necessarily correct.
- 10 - GIULIO BATELLI, "La Biblioteca dell'Istituto Musicale 'L. Boccherini': note storiche", in *I tesori della Musica Lucchese*, ed. Giulio Battelli (Lucca: Fazzi, 1990), p. 14.
- 11 - CARVER, p. 14.
- 12 - BATELLI, p. 14.

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- 13 - GIOVANNI PACINI (Catania 1796-Pescia, Pistoia, 1867), a former student of Mattei in Bologna, had founded the R. Istituto Musicale in 1839, and was its director when Michele Puccini began his association there. His treatise, "Corso teorico-pratico di Lezioni di Armonia", was written circa 1844. [Dizionario della Musica e dei Musicisti, V (Turin: UTET, 1988)].
 - 14 - GIOVANNI PACINI, *Ne' funerali di M. Puccini*, 18.2.1864.
 - 15 - [Practical Course in Counterpoint, compiled by Michele Puccini for the use of his students].
 - 16 - CRESTI, p. 132. [The musical instruction, which lasted eight years, was subdivided into primary and secondary: in the first phase, lesson were given in solfeggio, pianoforte and singing; the second phase began in the fourth year and comprised the study of harmony, counterpoint and composition].
 - 17 - It is not clear which Puccini wrote these works.
 - 18 - CARLO ANGELOMI (Lucca 1834 - ivi 1901), composed several operas including *Popolano di Londra* (1854), *Carlo di Viana* (1855), *Assaie degli Abecceangi* (1871), and *Dramma in montagna* (1900). His sacred works include: *Credo a 4 voci* (1849), *Magnificat* (1851), *Missa* (1877), *Requiem* (1879) and *Sabat Mater* (1898). [Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, III (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1961)].
 - 19 - For example, the first "movimento" is a bass line beginning on C (do), which rises by third and descend by step.
 - 20 - [All scales in the bass and the treble, all regular bass movements in the lower and the upper parts as in Study for two voices].
 - 21 - [All the scales in both the bass and the treble, rising and descending in Major and minor modes, all the regular bass movements in both the lower and upper parts as above in the Study for two voices].
 - 22 - [End of the basses, themes or fugue subjects follow].
 - 23 - BONACCORSI, p. 93-94.
 - 24 - PIETRO RAIMONDI (1786-1853), *Bassi imitati e fugati divisi in tre libri, composti per uso de' suoi scolari*, (Milan: Ricordi, [1885]. For further information about Raimondi, see Jesse Rosenberg, *The Experimental Music of Pietro Raimondi*. (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1995).
 - 25 - L. NERCI, *Storia della musica in Lucca*, Lucca, 1880. Quoted in Bonaccorsi, p. 22.
 - 26 - WILLIAM ANSBROOK, *The Operas of Puccini*, (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985 ed.), p. 5.
 - 27 - GUIDOTTI, p. 39-41. [Missing in particular is the music from the second section of the Repertory, by authors "for the most part Ancient". [...] There is no trace thereafter of the works of musical literature. [...] In Milan, Giacomo either sold or attempted to sell the pieces of greatest antiquary value, probably chosen from the theoretical-didactic volumes; in various letters to his mother, he asked her to send the list, which would have permitted him to carry out the negotiations].