A Sonata Offering for the Prince of Tuscany

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Item 73 in Bianca Becherini's *Catalogo dei manoscritti musical della Biblioteca nazionale di Firenze*[1] is a set of twelve sonatas. The title page of the manuscript reads as follows:

> *Sonate/à/Violino, e Violoncello/Dedicate/*
> *All' Altezza Reale di Gio: Gastone de Medici/*
> *Principe di Toscana/dà/Giuseppe Maria Fanfani.*

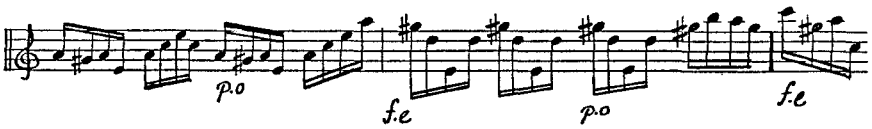
There is an abundance of information on the dedicatee, Giovanni (Gian) Gastone de Medici, the last Medici Grand Duke, who reigned from 1723 to 1737. Almost nothing is known, on the other hand, about the composer. His name appears in none of the standard reference works; no mention of his compositions, manuscript or printed, occurs in the catalogues of collections in other Italian libraries. Indeed, it had begun to appear as if Fanfani had sunk into almost total oblivion, leaving only this set of sonatas. Recently, however, the Veracini scholar John Hill notified me that he has unearthed biographical information about Fanfani which he plans to incorporate in a note on the composers at the court of the last Medici Grand Duke.[2] Since Prof. Hill can demonstrate that Fanfani's activities extended well into the 18th century, it seems appropriate to examine in detail the Florentine collection of early sonatas.

The manuscript contains six works (labeled *Sonate*) in the mold of the *sonata da chiesa* and six others preceded by the designation *Sonate da Camera*. Although the precise year of origin cannot be established, the sonatas must have been composed between 1713 and 1723, because the title page is addressed specifically to the "Principe di Toscana." Such a date would place Fanfani in the period immediately following Corelli, thus making him roughly contemporaneous with more celebrated figures such as Veracini, Vivaldi, and Tartini.

A few notational characteristics of the manuscript should be mentioned. Although the standard G and F clefs are used almost exclusively, on three occasions Fanfani or his copyist, to avoid an excessive number of leger lines, no doubt, has either substituted a different clef sign (tenor clef, Court Sonatas II/2 and VI/3) or placed a familiar symbol on another line of the staff (G clef, lowest line, Church Sonata VI/2). Fanfani frequently, but not consistently, indicates in his key signature one sharp or flat fewer than dictated by the chosen key (Court Sonata II, A major, two sharps). The absence of a reference to a keyboard instrument and the lack of figures in ten of the twelve sonatas suggest that these compositions are simply string duets without continuo. A few figures do appear, however, specifying in all but one instance a seventh chord in 6–4–2 position (Church Sonatas III/2,

3, 4, and IV/1). In all probability, a continuo instrument participated in each sonata, but because the harmonic vocabulary used was, on the whole, self-evident, figures were not deemed necessary. Dynamic indications occur in five sonatas and involve a total of eight movements (Church Sonatas IV/4, VI/2, 4; Court Sonatas II/1, 2, III/1, V/1, 2). Normally, the term *piano* appears in conjunction with a restatement of a two- to five-measure block of cadential material. In Church Sonata VI/2, on the other hand, the echo principle is applied to motivic fragments (Ex. 1).[3]

EXAMPLE 1: Church Sonata VI/2, mm. 20–22



Fanfani constructs the six church sonatas in the four-movement sequence which was standard with many of Corelli's contemporaries and immediate successors.[4] In the six court sonatas, on the contrary, he offers three designs (see Appendix). Cyclic relationships between movements are not in evidence. In the matter of tempo markings, Fanfani favored adagio and allegro in the church sonatas while admitting a broader selection in the court sonatas. Although a specific dance term (*Giga*) appears only in the finale of the first court sonata, it is evident nonetheless that dance models frequently furnished the stylistic basis of individual movements.

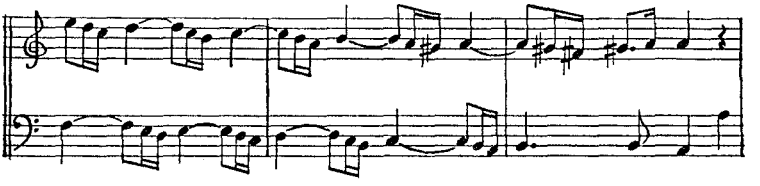
The proportions of the individual movements and, consequently, of the sonatas as a whole are considerably smaller than those suggested by Newman for Corelli: church sonatas, 112 measures versus 150; court sonatas, 70 measures versus 100.[5] In fact, Fanfani exhibits a certain discomfort in longer movements, especially in a first allegro. The choice and sequence of meters derive from Corelli (see Appendix). Fanfani selects the minor mode for four of the church sonatas and only two of the court sonatas. Unlike Corelli, who either placed all the movements of a sonata in the same key or, at most, wrote one of the slow movements in the relative minor, Fanfani demonstrates a marked preference for the dominant as the tonal area of the third movement of the church sonatas (five of the six). Within none of Fanfani's individual movements is there an interpenetration of contrasting meters, tempos, or styles. Even short, essentially transitional movements invariably begin and end in the same key; Fanfani thereby eschews the connecting device of a Phrygian cadence on the dominant of a key.

Fanfani's music is clearly tonal, his modulations customarily do not range far from the main key, and his harmonic vocabulary is limited; the primary progressions are enlivened occasionally at cadences by a Neapolitan sixth or, even more rarely, a diminished seventh. Technical demands are limited as well, since the composer rarely requires the performer to go beyond the third position. One major exception occurs in Church Sonata VI/2, where

he calls for the fifth position (the only time in the collection), as violin figurations inexorably climb to a ′ ′ ′.[6] Similarly, only in this same movement does Fanfani write an extended passage in double stops.

As in the works of numerous contemporaries, the character of the individual movement is determined by its position within the sonata. The slow, introductory movement that opens each of the church sonatas often displays dotted rhythms of the kind familiar in the French overture (see III/1, V/1). Division of these movements into regular phrases and periods is not possible. Only Sonata I/1 is imitative at its beginning. At later points in these movements, Fanfani offers several passages in which the violin and violoncello imitate one another motivically, the descending line producing in this instance a chain of suspensions (Ex. 2).

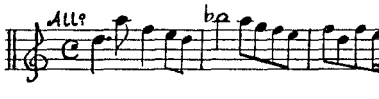
EXAMPLE 2: Church Sonata VI/1, mm. 3–5



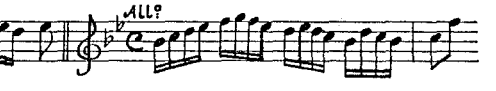
Primarily, however, the texture is homophonic, and the violoncello provides the harmonic foundation in quarter- and eighth-note motion, with the melody unfolding above, sometimes lyrically (I/1), sometimes pompously (III/1, V/1). Because these opening movements are so brief (nine to fourteen measures), they remain in the chosen key as a rule, with perhaps a momentary departure to the dominant. The more adventurous opening movement of Sonata III provides the sole exception.

The ensuing allegro, almost always the longest movement of the composition (thirty-one to sixty-seven measures), is customarily treated fugally, at least initially. The subject matter is at times rhythmically and melodically striking, displaying a distinct profile (as in I/2); at other times, it is simply a figurative idea of the *perpetuum mobile* type (as in III/2; see Exx. 3a and 3b).

EXAMPLE 3a: Church Sonata I/2



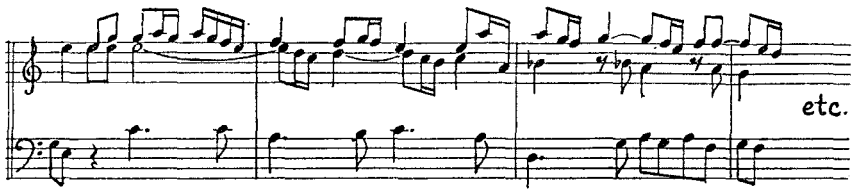
EXAMPLE 3b: Church Sonata III/2



In either case the strict initial contrapuntal entry and those that occur after significant points of articulation soon give way to freer treatment; the bass eventually ceases all imitative activity and assumes a purely supportive function for the violin figurations, often in conjunction with that overworked device of the Baroque, the sequence. Sonata II/2 provides a representative example of Fanfani's preferred method of constructing a fugal movement

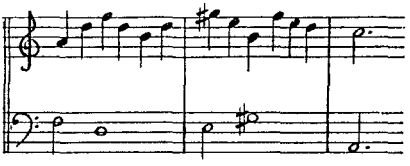
but each church sonata allegro contains noteworthy details. The close point of imitation in Sonata IV/2 results in an intense beginning of a movement which, for its first eighteen measures, is a surprisingly compact example of contrapuntal writing. In Sonata V/2 the violoncello participates actively in the figurative work, at times in motivic imitation with the violin, at times in a relationship that amounts almost to invertible counterpoint. Brief passages that approach stretto (m. 11) and canon (mm. 38–39) make this the most adventurous contrapuntally of the fugal movements in the church sonatas. From measures 9 to 13, the soloist plays two real parts, in which motivic imitation and suspensions are prominent (Ex. 4).

EXAMPLE 4: Church Sonata VI/2, beg. m. 9



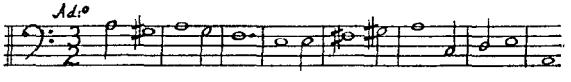
The relatively brief third movements are usually in saraband rhythm. No. III/3, in French overture style, is an exception. Save for the imitative opening of No. VI/3, the movements are homophonic, the bass supporting unornamented melodic lines that consist primarily of whole notes, halves, and quarters. In all probability, these outlines are merely skeletons that were embellished in performance, as in Corelli's Opus 5. This theory is supported in Sonata V/3 by a particularly awkward upward leap of an augmented fourth in the solo that occurs in conjunction with a stepwise ascent of the bass (Ex. 5).

EXAMPLE 5: Church Sonata V/3, mm. 18–20

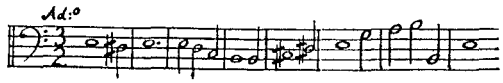


Although he shuns strict ground basses, Fanfani exhibits some preference for a bass line that descends by step and half-step, the practically identical lines of Sonatas I/3 and IV/3 providing illustrations of this (Exx. 6a and 6b).

EXAMPLE 6a: Church Sonata I/3



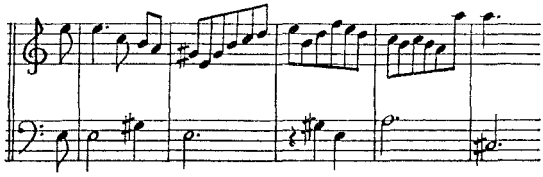
EXAMPLE 6b: Church Sonata IV/3



Characteristically, chains of suspensions unfold above such passages.

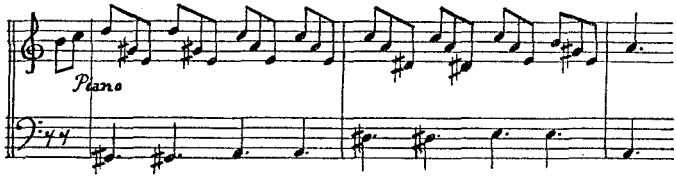
The six finales are of the giga (3/4) or gigue (6/8, 12/8) type. No. II/4 is undivided; the remaining five are in bipartite dance form, with the two sections being of approximately equal length. In the second section of No. IV/4, five of the eight "extra" measures may be attributed to an echoed restatement of immediately preceding material. Invariably the harmonic goal of the first section is the dominant. Favorite goals of tonicization within the second section are the subdominant and the submediant. Two of the five bipartite movements display a relation of head motives (III/4, VI/4), and three show a similarity of cadential formation (I/4, IV/4, VI/4). No. V/4 exemplifies the Baroque predilection for spinning out material, but several other finales exhibit relatively regular phrase and period structure, which is not surprising in view of their dance heritage. For example, the first twelve measures of the second section of Sonata I/4 consist of one block of four measures in A minor that is simply transposed to D minor and then to G minor, the sequential arrangement accentuating the regularity of the phrase structure (Ex. 7).

EXAMPLE 7: Church Sonata I/4, mm. 23–26



Among stylistic details that may be mentioned are: (1) the interruption of a steady flow of eighth notes with triplets to accentuate a final cadence (III/4); (2) the acceleration of motion in the bass to accentuate the drive to the final cadences of sections (V/4); and (3) the use of the diminished seventh to approach the final cadence (V/4, VI/4). Also in VI/4, voice-leading occurs that probably would not have pleased those critics who had censured Corelli some years earlier[7] (Ex. 8).

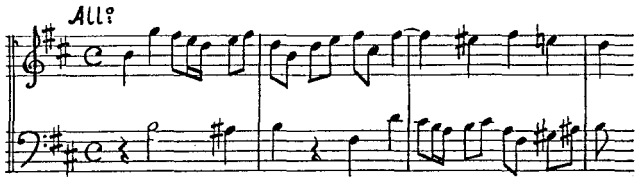
EXAMPLE 8: Church Sonata VI/4, last 3 mm.



Of the eighteen movements in the court sonatas, sixteen are constructed in bipartite dance form, the only exceptions being a Largo in saraband style (V/3) and the fugal Allegro of VI/2. Modulatory goals and sectional proportions conform generally to the practices noted in connection with the dance movements of the church sonatas. Although the second section of No. III/2 is considerably longer than the first (fifteen measures), the bipartite structure is not affected. Sonata II/2 most closely approaches ternary form when, in the second section, the main theme appears complete in the dominant and again, as a kind of recapitulation, in the tonic. In thirteen of the sixteen movements, a palpable relationship of head motives exists. Court Sonatas II/1, III/1, and III/2 are the only exceptions, and they account also for three of the nine movements that display no relationship of cadential figures. (The others are II/2, 3, V/1, 2, and VI/1, 3.)

Stylistically the character of the individual movements is once again determined by their position in the sonata (see Appendix). With the exception of No. III, the court sonatas have an allegro or spiritoso second movement. The Allegro of No. I is in 6/4; the others employ common duple meter, suggesting the allemand perhaps. Of greatest interest is Sonata VI/2 (B minor), which is the only allegro not in dance form. Of the fugal movements in the complete collection, it is the most complex and the most continuously imitative (Ex. 9).

EXAMPLE 9: Court Sonata VI/2



A countersubject unfolds in conjunction with a fugal subject, which itself appears not only in tonal areas (E minor, A minor) other than the tonic and dominant, but also in canonic relationship at the octave. As with the bipartite dance design used as finales in five of the church sonatas, the fugal movements and saraband in the court sonatas illustrate the overlap of church and court styles.

The preceding survey of Fanfani's twelve sonatas, it is hoped, adds yet another piece of information to the history of sonata evolution in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In spite of the composer's often stereotyped approach to form, which relied upon formulas and mechanical figurations, there are moments of great interest and beauty, especially in the shorter movements. Fanfani's chronological position in the evolution of the sonata makes it useful pedagogically to compare his works with those of his more illustrious contemporaries. When the forthcoming note of Prof. Hill establishes authoritatively the period of Fanfani's activities, future research might

well unearth subsequent compositions that reflect the fascinating transitional period from Baroque to Classic in Italy.

Appendix: The Twelve Sonatas

Church Sonatas					Court Sonatas				
Tempo	*Key*	*Meter*	*Mm.*	*Dance char.*	*Tempo*	*Key*	*Meter*	*Mm.*	*Dance char.*
I					I				
1 Adagio	d	C	9		1 Largo	g	C	13	(Fr. ov.)*
2 Allo.	d	C	67		2 Allo.	g	6/4	31	*
3 Adagio	a	3/2	13	saraband	3 Giga	g	12/8	22	giga*
4 Allo.	d	3/4	43	giga*					
II					II				
1 Grave	A	C	14		1 Largo	A	C	18	(Fr. ov.)*
2 Allo.	A	C	49		2 Allo.	A	C	20	allem.*
3 Adagio	E	3/2	21	saraband	3 _____	A	3/8	16	giga*
4 Allo.	A	6/8	38	gigue					
III					III				
1 _____	B♭	C	10	(Fr. ov.)	1 Adagio	B♭	C	26	(Fr. ov.)*
2 Allo.	B♭	C	31		2 _____	B♭	3/4	29	giga*
3 Adagio	g	C	9	(Fr. ov.)					
4 Allo.	B♭	3/4	39	giga*					
IV					IV				
1 Adagio	a	C	14		1 _____	D	C	12	*
2 Allo.	a	C	38		2 Spir.	D	C	15	allem.*
3 Adagio	e	3/2	19	saraband	3 _____	D	3/4	35	*
4 Allo.	a	3/4	36	giga*					
V					V				
1 Adagio	d	C	13	(Fr. ov.)	1 Largo	E	C	20	(Fr. ov.)*
2 Allo.	d	C	42		2 Spir.	E	C	25	allem.*
3 Adagio	a	3/2	22	saraband	3 Largo	B/b	3/2	13	saraband
4 Allo.	d	12/8	27	gigue*	4 Allo.	E	3/4	40	giga*
VI					VI				
1 Grave	a	C	11		1 And.	b	C	14	(Fr. ov.)*
2 Allo.	a	C	59		2 Allo.	b	C	27	
3 Adagio	e	3/4	18		3 _____	b	3/8	41	giga*
4 Allo.	a	12/8	31	giga*					

* Denotes a movement in bipartite dance form.

NOTES

[1] Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1959, p. 79. The title is taken from the author's photocopy of the manuscript.

[2] I am deeply grateful both to Mr. Emanuele Casamassima, director of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale in Florence, for communicating to me Prof. Hill's interest in composers at the Florentine grand ducal court and to Prof. Hill himself, with whom I have enjoyed a warm and lively exchange of correspondence. Prof. Hill, who is on the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, has prepared a "Fanfani" entry for the sixth edition of *Groves*. Two broader studies devoted to Fanfani's more illustrious contemporary F. M. Veracini are in progress.

[3] All musical examples are by the author.

[4] The monumental work by William S. Newman, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1959), pp. 50–91, represents a model methodology for the investigation of the sonata.

[5] Newman, *The Sonata*, p. 70.

[6] For a discussion of violin technique in the early 18th century, *see* David Boyden, *The History of Violin Playing from Its Origins to 1761* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 338–41.

[7] Marc Pincherle, *Corelli: His Life, His Work*, trans. H. E. M. Russell (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1956), pp. 47–50; compare with the original *Corelli* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1933), pp. 37–40.