

Accademia di Dame, Vienna 1697

by Susanne Abed-Navandi and Margit Legler

The work presents selected parts of a women's academy in the form of a short film, which was originally performed once at the Viennese court in 1697. The video is the result of an interpretative approach based on the acting techniques of the period when this academy was created. The music harmonises with the movement, which, in turn, follows the affect of the text. The filmed scene was rehearsed by students, graduates and teachers of the Department of Early Music at the University of Music and Arts of the City of Vienna (MUK) as part of the course “Period Acting Techniques“ under the direction of Margit Legler. This work contributes to the visualisation and imaginability of this historical event, where five authors and singers presented speeches, poems and music they had composed themselves on a specific research question. In addition to the score of the selected parts, this publication includes a historical report on the creation of the academy, summarising the findings of a dissertation on music history dedicated to this event (Pumhösl 2014). It concludes with a personal reflection on how the performance of today's interpreters changes when they employ period acting techniques in speeches, recitatives and arias.



Photo: today's interpreters of the *Accademia di Dame* from left to right:

Susanne Abed-Navandi, harpsichord
Hannah Pichler, baroque cello
Bianca von Oppell, voice, dance
Margit Legler, scene
Ilia Marinescu, voice
Alicja Ciesielczuk, voice
(Photo credit: Simon Kupferschmied)

The Story behind the *Accademia di Dame anno 1697*

Se sia più giovevole? Fortuna ò Merito?

On 15 November 1697, the name day of the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I, an extraordinary event took place in Vienna. Four ladies of the court of Empress Eleonore Magdalena of Pfalz-Neuburg and her daughter, Archduchess Maria Elisabeth, dedicated an evening's performance to reflecting upon the question of whether it was more important to build one's life on merit (*merito*) or to rely on luck (*fortuna*). This event is notable for the fact that both the speeches and the vocal music have been preserved in their entirety. This compilation of speeches and music has enabled the reconstruction of the format of a Baroque academy in its Viennese manifestation.

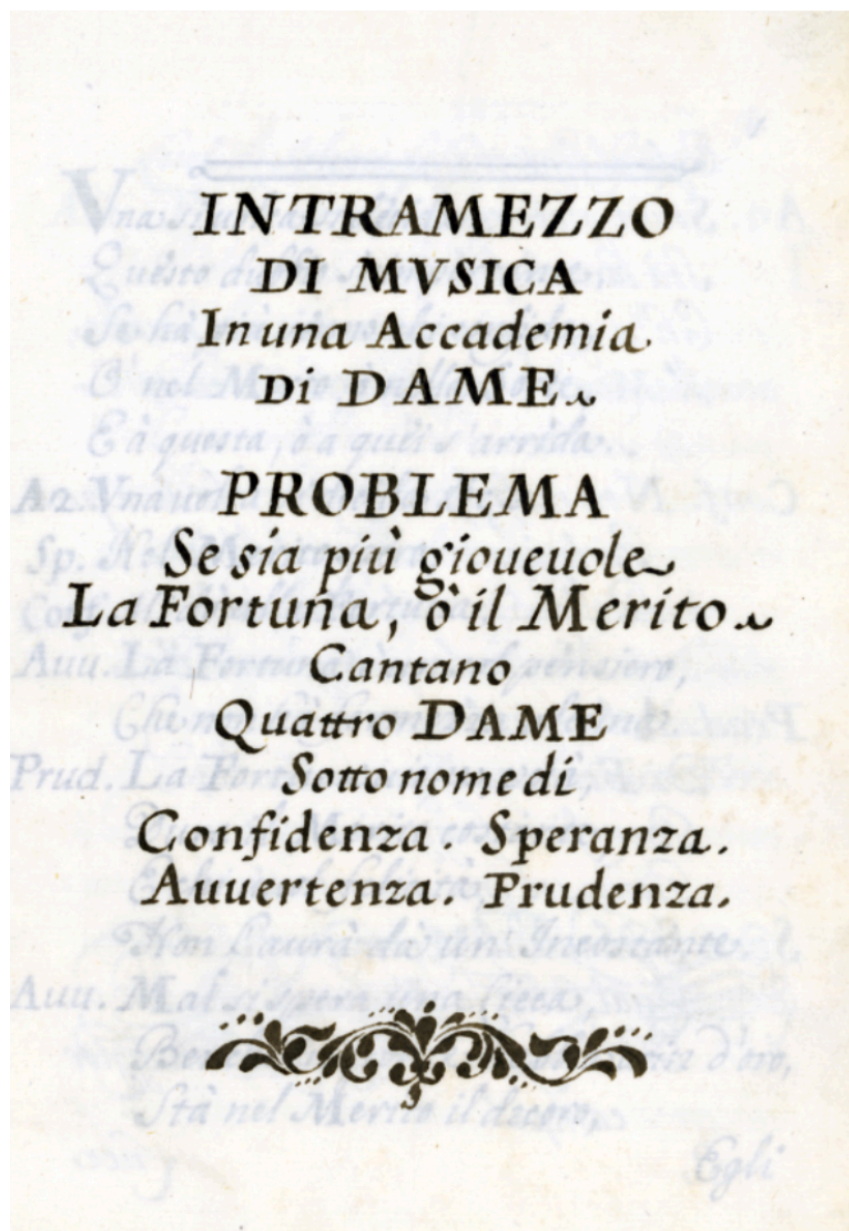
The speakers at the academy were active and former ladies of the Court, whose key biographical details (birth and death dates, marriages, children) have been traced in Austrian archives. The final speech, *Decisione*, was delivered by the sixteen-year-old Archduchess Maria Elisabeth, who later became governor of the Netherlands and whose life is generally better documented. The educational background of the academicians is revealed through their speeches, which indicate that they were educated in Italian (the court language) and Latin, as well as in oratory and poetry. Given the prevailing educational standards for aristocratic daughters, it is likely that they were also instructed in singing and playing musical instruments, typically the harpsichord, lute, guitar, or harp.

The Authors and Interpreters of 1697

The first speaker, **Countess von Rindsmaul**, was presumably a young unmarried woman between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, hailing from a Styrian noble family. She completed the usual period of service at court required of a noblewoman's daughter to receive additional education. As the first speaker tasked with defending *Merito*, she addresses the peculiarity of appearing before an emperor as a woman and notes her limited experience in rhetorical performance compared with noblemen. As a listener, she remarks that she has often encountered women as speakers and also references performances by women singing in churches.

Foto:

*Se sia più giovevole La Fortuna,
ò il Merito* - cover page of the
speeches kept in the Austrian
State Archive (Anon, AVA cf.
Pumhösl 2014, S. 9)



The **Countess von Traun**, born Julia Esther Apollonia von Opersdorff, is referenced in the manuscript as a former lady-in-waiting to the Empress. She was the oldest lecturer at the Academy, being approximately thirty-two years of age. She was married at the time of the event and passed away four years later.

The second interpreter at the Academy designated as a former lady-in-waiting was the **Countess von Czernin**, an advocate of *Merito*. Born Susanna Renata von Martinitz in 1670, she married the Bohemian Vice-Chancellor, Zacharias Czernin von Chudenitz, at the age of fifteen. By the time of the event, at the age of twenty-seven, she had already given birth to six children, three of whom survived to adulthood. Following the death of

a seventh child in 1698 and that of her first husband, she entered into a second, childless marriage. After the death of her second husband in 1705, Countess Czernin was widowed once more and died at the age of forty-seven.

Although the origins and identity of the **Countess von Mollart** remain uncertain, the name of a *Fräulein Mollart* frequently appears in contemporary archival documents from this period. It seems highly probable that she was the daughter of the court music director, Ferdinand Ernst Graf Mollart (Mollard), and Katharina von Seeau. Mollart's career began as a lady-in-waiting to Empress Eleonore Magdalene's daughter, Maria Anna, and concluded as *Obersthofmeisterin*, the highest office at court. She became the closest confidante of Empress Maria Theresia. As Countess Karoline von Fuchs-Mollard, married to Christoph Ernst von Fuchs zu Bimbach und Dornheim and mother of two daughters, she lived to over seventy years of age. In her speech, she advocates for Fortuna.



Photo: Archducess Maria Elisabeth at the age of 23 (cf. Luyken,[...], *Maria Elisabetha, Archidux Austria*, printed 1703, Weigel, der Ältere, in: http://www.gogmsite.net/end_of_the_era_-_1684_to_1717/1703-maria-elisabeth-archdu.html [13.09.2013] cf. Pumhösl 2014, p. 219)

The life of the young **Archduchess Maria Elisabeth** (1680-1741) also provides valuable insights into the *Accademia di Dame*. In addition to receiving an education in five languages and history, Maria Elisabeth was trained in poetry and oratory, as per her mother's instructions. A daily schedule for the daughters of Emperor Leopold I, as described by the court biographer Franciscus Wagner, included daily dance lessons and daily practice on a keyboard instrument, presumably a harpsichord.

| | |
|-----|--|
| 8h | Aufstehen Gebet |
| 9h | Ankleiden und „Aufbutz“ |
| 10h | Latein |
| 11h | Messe |
| 12h | Mittagessen |
| 13h | Beschäftigung nach Belieben |
| 14h | Tanz |
| 15h | Clavier Französisch oder Schrift |
| 16h | Stick- und andere Handarbeiten Religion |
| 17h | Ruhe und Ergötzung |
| 18h | |
| 19h | Gebet |
| 20h | Abendessen |
| 21h | Konversation |
| 22h | Abendgebet Nachtruhe |

Foto: Archduchess Maria Elisabeth's daily schedule, as described by the court biographer Franciscus Wagner, was as follows: In the afternoon at two o'clock there was an hour of dancing lessons, followed by a lesson in playing the keyboard instrument, French or writing. (cf. Pumhösl 2014, p. 198)

Music and Libretto

The two-part cantata *Applauso Musicale D'Una Accademia Di Dame L'Anno 1697* is regarded as a late work by the court conductor Antonio Draghi and the court poet Nicolò Minato. The libretto presents the central question of the academy and explores the advantages and disadvantages of *Fortuna* and *Merito*. In the concluding second part, it affirms Maria Elisabeth's decision in favour of *Merito*. The cantata is scored for four vocal parts, representing the roles of *Confidenza*, *Speranza*, *Avvertenza* and *Prudenza*. It is likely that these roles were played by the four speakers: Rindsmaul, Traun, Czernin and Mollart.

From the speeches, it is evident that considerable preparatory work was undertaken in advance of the event. Leopold I was responsible for determining the theme, which bears a striking resemblance to a topic from Queen Christine of Sweden's *Accademia Clementina*. His wife, Eleonore Magdalena, selected the lady-in-waiting Mollart as a

speaker and stipulated that their daughter, Maria Elisabeth, was to write and perform the concluding decision.

These indications suggest that the *Accademia di Dame* event was the culmination of an educational project for the emperor's daughter, preceded by a workshop-like preparatory phase. This raises the question of whether the music was solely composed by Draghi, or whether it could be argued that it was the result of a collaborative composition exercise involving the various performers. This theory is supported by the observation that the quality of the individual recitatives and arias varies considerably in terms of their performability. Some are highly singable, while others, which were not selected for the film, appear to consist of a series of compositional patterns that are considerably less ear-catching.

Dramaturgy

The format can be reconstructed as follows:

- Instrumental introduction with the participation of Joseph I (19), the elder brother of Maria Elisabeth
- Cantata *Applauso musicale: part one* with the participation of four singing ladies-in-waiting
- 1st speech by Fräulein von Rindsmaul: *Pro merito*
- Musical Interlude
- 2nd speech by the Countess von Traun: *Pro fortuna*
- Musical Interlude
- 3rd speech by the Countess von Czernin: *Pro merito*
- Musical Interlude

- 4th speech by the Fräulein von Mollart: *Pro fortuna*
- Musical Interlude
- *Decisione* by the Archduchess Maria Elisabeth: *Pro merito*
- *Applauso musicale: part two* with the participation of four singing ladies-in-waiting and the Archduchess Maria Elisabeth
- Instrumental *finale* with the participation of Joseph I on the recorder
- Sonnet “*Della più debole delle Dame Accademiche*“, with which Maria Elisabeth probably described herself

The *Accademia di Dame anno 1697* can be summarised as a unique evening performance in which the participants danced, sang, wrote poetry, recited their own speeches, acted and played musical instruments, resulting in a comprehensively planned and prepared *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Evidence suggests that the event was preceded by an interdisciplinary learning process involving various teachers: the court composer, court poet and ladies-in-waiting. The answer to the musical and rhetorical question “*Se sia più giovevole, la fortuna ò il merito?*“ was celebrated at the end of the evening's event with the Archduchess's closing speech and contributions of poetry and music. The winner was *Merito*, but *Fortuna* should always be respected and never feared.

Current theories suggest that this extraordinary event featuring female performers occurred as a result of the evolving educational ideals at princely courts, where the growing influence of humanist ideas made it fashionable to consider children's interests in the design of their educational programs. Archduchess Maria Elisabeth, known for her keen interest in history and rhetoric, was given the opportunity to present a self-written decision before the entire court (cf. Pumhösl 2014, p. 253-260).



Foto: Bianca von Oppell (singer) in the role of the sixteen-year-old Archduchess Maria Elisabeth, reciting the sonnet "*E mia felicità*".
(Credit: S. Kupferschmied)

The Reenactment 2024

The part of the interpretation that builds on from the findings of Susanne Abed-Navandi's dissertation (Pumhösl 2014) is based on the research of musicologist Reinhold Kubik and Margit Legler. The focus was on the physical aspects of performing speeches and arias.

In the initial phase, sections of the Academy were selected that were suitable as practice material for the “Period Acting Techniques” course. Susanne Abed-Navandi and Margit Legler met several times prior to the course commencing to familiarise themselves with the cantata *Applauso musicale* and to conduct a sort of "casting" to identify the most suitable pieces. They considered the singability and quality of the recitatives and arias, as well as the number and variety of affects present in the text. The availability of singers with sufficient experience in period acting also played a role in the selection process. The performers commenced rehearsals of the selected speeches, recitatives and arias in January 2024, under the direction of Margit Legler, accompanied by Susanne Abed-Navandi on the harpsichord. This process culminated in April 2024 with the documentation of the results in the form of a video.



Foto: Alicja Ciesielczuk (singer) in the role of a lady-in-waiting, advocate of *Fortuna*, showing the *Wheel of Fortuna*.
(Credit: S. Kupferschmied)

Foto: the interpreters of the *Accademia di Dame* from left to right:



Susanne Abed-Navandi, harpsichord
Hannah Pichler, baroque cello
Bianca von Oppell, Ilia Marinescu, Alicja Ciesielczuk, voice
Scene: Margit Legler, Photo credit: Simon Kupferschmied

In the final section of this essay, you will find personal reflections from **Margit Legler**, along with a brief overview of the sources as a foundation for the collaborative stage work.

Period Acting and Rhetoric

Since every speech is intended to convey meaning, its gestural performance is not merely decorative, but serves to clarify semantic or affective content. Many theorists have written on the subject. Below is a summary of key primary sources tracing the tradition from Marcus Fabius Quintilianus' rediscovery of the historical art of acting in 35 AD to the 18th century.

- As early as 1623, **Marin Mersenne** asserted that all of the singer's movements must correspond to the affective and semantic content of the song.

- The Jesuit priest, playwright and theatre director **Franciscus Lang** attributed great importance not only to gestures but particularly to the language of the eyes. He believed that all affects should be expressed through the eyes, which, in his opinion, were eloquent enough even without a voice. In numerous illustrations he showed correct and incorrect poses and provided insights into stage movements, entrances and exits.
- The singer and instrumentalist **Johann Mattheson** was perhaps most persuasive when he compared the interaction of gestures, words and music to a string made of three threads. His goal was for gestures, words and sound to form a triple cord in perfect harmony, capable of moving the listener's mind. Just as a painting is a silent poem, all singing poems must be speaking, sounding pictures: with words instead of drawings, with sound instead of colours.
- **Jean-Antoine Bérard** expressed a similar sentiment in 1755 in his singing school dedicated to Madame de Pompadour. In summary, the appropriate action for singing is the art of expressing thoughts and feelings through gestures, using the whole body, but above all, the face. Only a few years later, in 1761, the English politician **James Burgh** wrote in *The Art of Speaking* that a skilled speaker should never move without purpose.
- **Gilbert Austin (1806)**, an Irish pedagogue, established a new notation system and annotated speeches and poems with a sequence of gestures. His annotations and remarks offer beginnings, endings and transitions of the gestures and provide valuable advice on how often and in what rhythm actions should be performed and pauses observed. Together with these illustrations, his instructions provide us with a very precise picture of a speech performance. To immerse oneself in the depths of the art of this style of acting, it is recommended to study and practice regularly using his comprehensive textbook. Austin's *Chironomia* is a book that illuminates all aspects of this art.
- **Johann Jakob Engel**, a very practice-oriented theatre director, developed entirely new aspects of the art of acting in his *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (Ideas for Mimicry), printed in Berlin towards the end of the 18th century. In 1802, he developed these ideas further. As director of the newly founded Berlin National Theatre from 1784 to 1794, he was deeply involved with performance and practice techniques. He describes how to convey the soul's impulses through expressive changes in the body. Simply put: to make the invisible visible.

- The trained painter **Johannes Jelgerhuis** left behind a particularly richly illustrated book, *Theoretische lessen over de gesticulatie en mimiek*, published in 1827, where he used numerous illustrations to depict incorrect and correct stage performances, movement sequences, facial expressions, postural affects, and gave instructions on how to interact with objects.

The steps involved in crafting a speech can easily be compared to those in producing an opera. The librettist is responsible for the invention and structure, while the composer handles the elaboration. Memorisation occurs during rehearsals, and the performance, like a speech, consists of something audible (the singing) and something visible (the acting).

The aim of staging a work using Baroque acting techniques is thus to achieve the unity of word, music and movement in accordance with the creators' intentions. It culminates in a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. It is not merely about stringing together frozen images and gestures, but about visually uniting the textual thoughts and musical figures in the spirit of rhetoric (cf. Legler 2024 - for all sources mentioned, please see the list of primary sources in the appendix).

Personal Reflections by Susanne Abed-Navandi:

I was theoretically familiar with the interpretative approach of first studying the text of a piece (even as an instrumentalist), then combining the affects discerned from it with movements, 'placing' the scenes spatially, and finally integrating the music with these movements to emphasize the affect. However, it only became truly tangible and visible through this production.

- **Memory:** the rehearsal approach that prioritised spatial orientation proved beneficial for memorising spoken and musical texts. By the end of the process, from a harpsichordist's perspective, it was evident that the scenes became easier to play, as the music was easier to memorise thanks to the new spatial dimension. Singers reported that they could memorise the text more effectively when they rehearsed it with concrete movements.
- There were clear **effects on the choice of tempo**. During rehearsals, for instance, it became apparent that the music for the last aria, "*E mia felicità*", was a danceable minuet. This insight necessitated adjusting the tempo to align with the singer's

movements. When compared to a musical recording of the same piece produced in 2015 (Pumhösl 2015), it was clear that the tempo of the current video recording was significantly faster.

- Incorporating movement-based music interpretation into lessons helps simplify lengthy cognitive explanations. Upon observing a singer's movement within the performance space, I responded as a musician, akin to a musician improvising to a film. It is evident that there are no discussions about tempo in this context, as the physical eloquence of the performer is undoubtedly the most significant factor in determining the interpretation of the music. The music is contingent upon the movement, which is in itself a consequence of the emotional response that the interpreter evokes from the text to be sung or spoken. The significance of dance education at the Viennese court is exemplified by Archduchess Maria Elisabeth's daily schedule, which included daily dance lessons, with music lessons being secondary.

From the perspective of a participating harpsichordist, period acting techniques turned out to be much more than the mere execution of gestures to music. It emerged as a language of the whole body that had to be specifically learned, encompassing many levels of spatial awareness: leg positions, the arch of the spine, facial expressions, the language of the eyes, and the language of the hands. It required an understanding of music theatre as the result of a multifaceted choreographic rehearsal, demanding a high degree of training and physical awareness from the singers. This was the key to understanding Baroque stagecraft!

In addition to these insights, the production video now available has created new documentary material for imagining and visualising the multidimensional approach of this event format. The insights gained from this recording will be incorporated into another artistic and educational project called *Method of Vienna* (www.methodofvienna.com), in which the historical format of the Academy will be presented as a tool for multidimensional learning and as a multisensory experience of diverse perspectives in schools and universities.

Text: Susanne Abed-Navandi

With great gratitude for the valuable advice that **Reinhold Kubik** († May 25, 2024) provided for this video project in the final days of his life.

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Appendix: score of selected scenes (Pumhösl 2014)

Confidenza.

Una Volta si de= cida una volta si decida questo dubbio s' impor

The first system of the musical score for 'Confidenza.' consists of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. The lyrics are written below the treble staff.

tante s'hà più senno chi confida ò nel merto ò nella sorte

The second system of the musical score continues the melody and accompaniment. It includes a measure rest of 4 measures at the beginning. The lyrics continue below the treble staff.

et à questa ò à quei s'arrida et à

The third system of the musical score continues the melody and accompaniment. It includes a measure rest of 7 measures at the beginning. The lyrics continue below the treble staff.

questa ò à quei s'ar = rida s'arr = = rida

The fourth system of the musical score concludes the selected scene. It includes a measure rest of 10 measures at the beginning. The lyrics continue below the treble staff.

Segue à 2.

13 **Avertenza. à 2.**

Confidenza. una volta si decida si de=
Una volta si de=cida: una volta si de=

16

cida una volta si decida una volta: si decida.
cida una volta si decida una volta: si decida.

20 **Speranza**

Nel merito spero **Confi.**
mi dò alla for -

6

24

tuna mi dò alla fortuna.

6 4 #

Avvertenza

28

Aria.

La fortuna è un sol pen= siero è un sol pensiero che non

6

35

hà fer= mezza alcuna che non ha fer

40

mez= = = = za alcuna.

#

Prudenza.

47

Aria.

La for= tuna viene e

55

và La fortuna viene e và viene e và

6

63
viene e v`a dura il merito costan = = te e chi

72
vuol fe= licit`a non l'havr`a d'un incostante non l'hav=

80
r`a d'un incostan = = = = te e chi

88
vuol felicit`a non l'havr`a d'un incostante non l'havr`a

97
d'un incostan = = = te non l'havr`a d'un incos

104
tan = = te d'un incostan = = = te.

(Draghi 1697 cf. Pumhösl 2014, S. 37-40)

195 **Speranza**

Splende il merto qual so = = le qual balen la for

201

tuna chi dunque d'illus = trar hà maggior campo luce di sole?

205

ò folgo= rar = = di lampo ò folgorar =

208

= = = di lampo luce di sole? luce di

211

sole? ò folgorar = = di lampo.

*Amico mira ben questa figura,
Et in arcano mentis reponatur,
Ut magnus indè fructus extrahatur Considerando ben la sua
natura.*

*Amico questa è Ruota di ventura,
Que in eodem statu non firmatur,
Sed casibus diversis variatur,
E quale abbassa, e qual pone in altura.*

[..] (Sonetto of Contessa di Mollart cf. Pumhösl 2014, S. 108)

229



**Avvertenza.
Prudenza. à2**

233

di tè mi duole mi duol di tè

di tè mi duole mi duol di tè di tè mi

65 # 76 #

238

di tè mi duole mi duol di tè. mi duol di tè.

duo= le mi duol di tè mi duol di tè.

Confidenza.

244

del sonoro metallo v'è pur loguace diva à publicar cò

247

tuoi sonori fiati giudicio si giocondo.

249 **Confidenza. à2**
Speranza.

S'ha premio il merto havrà vir= tude il mondo

S'ha premio il merto havrà vir= tude il mondo

7

255

s'ha premio il merto s'ha premio il merto havrà vir=

s'ha premio il merto s'ha premio il merto havrà vir=

260

tude il mondo, havrà vir= tude il mondo.

tude il mondo, havrà vir= tude il mondo.

Segue.

(Draghi 1697 cf. Pumhösl 2014, S.133-134)

*E' mia felicità
Che in età
Bambina ancora
Il Merto s'avvalora:
E prometto
D'ir cercando sempre il Merto.
E sia prospera, ò importuna,
Nulla temer, nulla stimar
F o r t u n a.*

(Archduchess Maria Elisabeth 1697 cf. Pumhösl 2014, S. 34)