L'Arpicordo: Liner Notes
by Ian Pritchard (c) 2014.

L'Arpicordo
### 16th~Century Venetian Keyboard Music

Recorded on three
historical instruments at
Fenton House, London

Ian Pritchard

Although not a household name today, the *arpicordo* was one of the more common domestic keyboard instruments in late Renaissance Venice. The notion that the arpicordo enjoyed a high level of popularity is supported by its frequent appearance in domestic inventories, the amount of repertoire explicitly designated for it, and by the sheer number of instruments that survive today.[1] The instrument's obscurity today stems from differences between modern and sixteenth-century terminological practice. In late sixteenth-century Italian terminology, the term *arpicordo* referred to the polygonal virginal, as opposed to the *cimbalo* (harpsichord) and the *spinetto* (which apparently referred to a square virginal as opposed to a polygonal one).[2] Although musicological scholarship -- based upon a careful reading of sixteenth century primary source material -- has made these identifications fairly clear, a degree of ambiguity unfortunately persists among both historians and present-day performers of early keyboard music. For example, it is quite common to see the term "arpicordo" translated as its deceptive false cognate "harpsichord" in various historical studies, and many performers of early keyboard music perform music expressly designated for the arpicordo on other instruments: harpsichords, clavichords, and the organ. While this is undoubtedly a result of today's carefree attitude regarding such matters (and I certainly submit to the argument that an equally carefree attitude was likely shared by our sixteenth-century counterparts), a complete disregard for an historical instrumental designation is perhaps somewhat unfortunate. *L'arpicordo* attempts to rectify the situation to a small degree, by presenting a recital of Venetian keyboard music on three original sixteenth-century Italian keyboard instruments in the Benton Fletcher collection in London: two *arpicordi* and one *cimbalo* (harpsichord).

That the *arpicordo* was an important domestic musical instrument in Renaissance Venice is strongly supported by historical evidence. A close study of sixteenth-century Venetian iconography and documents (such as inventory lists) reveals the extent of its popularity. For example, an inventory for the Venetian courtesan Julia Lombardo reveals an "arpicordo verde"[3]; iconography that depicts scenes of domestic music-making also clearly
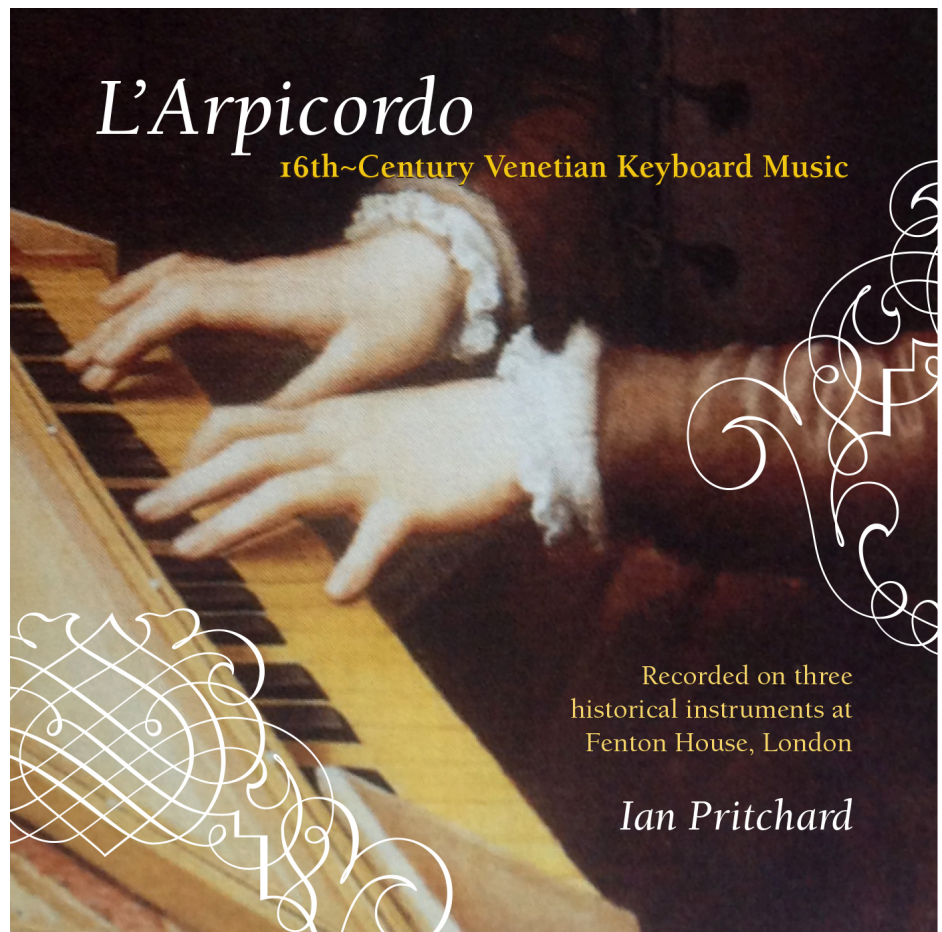
show the familiar angled shape of the instrument. Attesting to the extent of the instrument's popularity abroad is the presence of a lavishly decorated arpicordo (the Queen Elizabeth virginals) in the Victoria and Albert museum, London. As a domestic keyboard instrument, the arpicordo was certainly used in ensembles and in social gatherings (perhaps similar to the sorts of musical sessions described -- albeit in stylized fashion -- in sixteenth-century literary dialogues, such as the salon portrayed in Antonfrancesco Doni's *Dialogo*). As alluded to earlier, the arpicordo seemed to have held a similar role to the lute, undoubtedly the most popular tool for music-making in private spaces. Many instances of shared repertoire can be cited, such as popular dance music types like the *passemezzo,* the *paduan*, and the *saltarello*, as well as settings of *arie,* short repeated melodic / harmonic formulae suited for the recitation of poetry in specific poetic meters.   The role and function of the arpicordo in ensemble was also probably not dissimilar to the role of the lute, as indicated by sources such as Agazzari's well-known early continuo treatise *Del sonare sopra il basso* (1607).   Overall, the arpicordo's "crossover" with the lute -- including similar function within ensemble contexts, popularity as a domestic instrument, and shared repertoire types -- is rather extensive.

Additional clues as to the arpicordo's use as a solo and an ensemble instrument can be found by examining one of the instrument's more interesting historical spaces: many of the documentary sources supporting the important role of the arpicordo in domestic life can be found within research on the Venetian courtesan. These sources include iconography, property inventory lists, as well as evidence contained within the music itself.   Part of the reason for the strong amount of evidence supporting the arpicordo as a "courtesan instrument" is that much scholarship on the period has been focused on the Venetian courtesan, perhaps more so than on the lives of other Venetian citizens. (However, it must also be stressed that courtesan's lives arguably offer a window through which to view the lives of other Venetians of similar social class. [4]) Courtesans played a unique role in Venetian society, and various studies have documented the ways in which the need to cultivate social graces and artistic skills allowed them to circumvent many of the traditional barriers faced by women in Venetian Renaissance society.[5] One of the most important of these social graces was, of course, musical ability; in fact, courtesans were some of the most accomplished musicians in the Renaissance. The courtesan connection is supported by the musical repertory of the arpicordo itself. Marco Facoli's *Primo Libro* contains several *arie*, poetic formulae of the type described above; not only have these types of pieces been tied to courtesans, but many of Facoli's settings are named after known *cortegiane oneste* in Venetian society.[6]

The portrait of the arpicordo painted by the historical evidence cited so far is one of domestic entertainment. This notion is also supported by the core repertory of music identified with the instrument, at least as demonstrated by the printed sources of keyboard music that carry the instrumental designation of "arpicordo". These can be classified as a distinct genre type: the so-called keyboard *ballo* (or dance) repertory, consisting of several volumes with titles that contain variations on the phrase "balli d'arpicordo". These include printed volumes by Giovanni Picchi, Marco Facoli, and Giovanni Maria Radino. These lively dances point to entertainment; one is even tempted to notice a degree of musical "exoticism" in Facoli's large-scale *Passemezzo* set, the second track of the present disc.   The passemezzo was one of the principle dances of the late Renaissance, represented by two major types, the passemezzo antico and the passemezzo moderno; these consisted of repeated ground bass

patterns upon which were crafted often elaborate variations. Certain musical elements in the large-scale passemezzo set heard here are even suggestive of an Eastern influence; its frequent *ficta* inflections on the sharpened fourth and its extensive use of the augmented second are evocative of music from the Balkans or even Turkey. One is highly tempted to consider a case of early musical "exoticism." Melodic inflections such as these are common in other Venetian instrumental music of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; witness, for example, the parallel fourths and augmented seconds that typically end Dario Castello's instrumental sonatas. Speculation of this sort is perhaps not so far-fetched, especially as one of Facoli's labeled *aria* formulas in the *Primo Libro* is named after a Dalmatian courtesan.

The arpicordo dance prints can be seen as a distinct genre of keyboard print, consisting almost exclusively of dance music (with the exception of Facoli's *arie* formulae in the Primo Libro) and exclusively carrying the indication *arpicordo*. As such, one wonders what other types of keyboard music was performed on the instrument. Girolamo Diruta, in his well-known treatise *Il Transilvano,* associated the arpicordo with dance; his clear biases are apparent in his largely negative description of the instrument and its players (we must also consider the fact that his treatise was written for organists during the climate of the Counter-Reformation). Indeed, the San Marco organist Andrea Gabrieli (Giovanni's uncle) carries the inclusive designation "per ogni sorte di stromento di tasto" (for any keyboard instrument) on his prints: the repertory in these prints includes *ricercari, canzoni,* intabulations, and even a passemezzo. Many of Andrea's *canzoni* are called "arioso," recalling Facoli's *arie* and possibly suggestive of a light (and secular) tone, as are the intabulations of secular French chansons and Italian madrigals. It is undoubtedly the case that many of Andrea's compositions were performed on plucked keyboard instruments (or even conceived primarily for them). In addition, Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini has pointed to the many instances in the works of Claudio Merulo that clearly suggest plucked keyboard instruments rather than the organ, despite the fact that all of his printed volumes carry the designation "intavolatura d'organo."[7] Crossover between the organists who dominated late sixteenth-century musical life in Venice (including Claudio Merulo and Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli) and the "secular" world are common; Facoli sent his nephew to study with Andrea, and the earlier San Marco organist and *literato* Girolamo Parabosco was quite possibly the keyboardist depicted in Titian's *Venus and the Organist* -- a painting which almost certainly depicts a courtesan.[8] Parabosco's associations with the literary salons (and the courtesans who frequented them) are well known.[9] Just as the organists themselves crossed between the sacred in San Marco and the secular world of the courtesan, so did their keyboard music.

A final clue as to possible solo repertory for the arpicordo can be found in the manuscript Gb-lcm-2088, currently held in the manuscript collection at the Royal College of Music, London . A familiar source for early Italian keyboard music, this small oblong volume also holds the distinction of being one of a handful of sources of solo keyboard music designated explicitly for the arpicordo. Howard Mayer Brown had speculated that it is a copy of Facoli's missing *Primo Libro.* This is very likely the case for the first two pieces in the collection, the *Passmezzo di nome anticho* and the *Paduan deta La Paganina*, both of which are recorded here. The rest of the collection, however, is problematic: it consists primarily of a number of "skeletal" arrangements of vocal and instrumental polyphony, including the ubiquitous Palestrina madrigal "Vestiva i colli" and the Crecquillon chanson "Ung gai

bergier" (one of the most popular vehicles for instrumental transcription and elaboration). The manuscript also contains the first canzona from the popular 16th-century collection by Maschera, also in skeletal form. This notational convention, typically known as "short score," consisted of a keyboard score with two voices: a top part and a bottom part, both composite voices constructed by "extracting" the highest and lowest sounding voices in the polyphonic texture at any given point (the same procedure used in another proto-continuo form, the *basso seguente*). Short scores were a type of "proto-continuo" notation, and the use of the format in RCM 2088 strongly indicate an ensemble function; however, this does not in any way exclude the possibility of a solo function as well. The close relationship between the role of the lute and keyboard in ensemble (including function and specific accompaniment style) and the development of solo repertoire is well-known; in addition, the proto-continuo style of notation could easily serve as the springboard for a virtuosic solo intabulation. Late sixteenth-century intabulations are typically given to toccata-like flights of fantasy and extensive ornamentation. The two intabulations by Merulo recorded here, *Susanne un jour* and *La Zambecarra,* are good examples of this style. Read along these lines, RCM 2088's repertoire concords well with printed intabulations by composers such as Andrea Gabrieli (whose affinity to the "baser" elements of Venetian keyboard culture have already been demonstrated) and Merulo; there is no reason to not consider this music as suitable solo repertoire for the arpicordo.

Track Information:

Canzon francese detta *Ie prens en gré* a quattro voci [1605] di Clemens non Papa Source: a	Andrea Gabrieli (ca. 1532 – 1585)
Passmezo di nome anticho (RCM ms 2088) [1586] Source: b	Marco Facoli (fl. late 16th-century)
Canzona Prima *La Capriola* [1584] Source: c	Florentio Maschera (c. 1540 – c. 1548)
Canzona *La Zambeccara* [1592] Source: d	Claudio Merulo (1533 – 1604)
Canzona Quinta *La Maggia* [1584] Source: c	Florentio Maschera (c. 1540 – c. 1548)

Un gai bergier (Crecquillon) [1599]   intavolata da Simone Molinaro
Source: e   (c. 1570 – 1633)

Padoana La Paganina   Facoli
Source: a

Pass'e mezo   [1592]   Giovanni Maria Radino
Gagliarda del ditto Pass'e mezzo   [1592]   Radino
Source: f   (fl. late 16th-century)

Padoana Prima dita *Marucina*   [1588]   Facoli
Padoana Terza dita *la Finetta* [1588]   Facoli
Source: g

Un gai berger (Crecquillon)   [1591]   intavolata da Sperindio Bertoldo
Source: h   (c. 1530 – 1570)

Susanne un jour (Roland de Lassus)   [1592]   Merulo
Source: i

Ricercare del Setttimo Tono [1595]   Andrea Gabrieli
Source: j

Un gai Bergier (Crecquillon) [1605]   Andrea Gabrieli
Source: a

a: Andrea Gabrieli: *Canzoni alla francese per sonar sopra stromenti da tasti ... libro sesto et ultimo,* (Venice: Angelo Gardane, 1605)

b: RCM ms 2088, Royal College of Music, London, 1586.

c: Florentio Maschera: *Libro primo de canzoni da sonare, a quattro voci* 1584. Edition: Ian Pritchard.

d: Claudio Merulo: *Canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo ... a quattro voci, fatte alla francese ... libro primo* (Venice: Angelo Gardane, 1592)

e: Simone Molinaro, *Intavolatura di liuto libro primo,* (Venice: , 1599.) Transcribed and edited by Ian Pritchard

f: Giovanni Maria Radino. *Il primo libro d'intavolatura di balli d'arpicordo* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1592).

g: Marco Facoli. *Il secondo libro d'intavolatura di balli d'arpicordo, pass'e mezzi, saltarelli, paduoane, & alcuni aeri novi dilettevoli da cantar ogni sorte de rima* (Venice: Angelo Gardane, 1588).

h: Sperindio Bertoldo, *Canzoni francese intavolate per sonar d'organo* (Venice: Giacomo Vincenti, 1591)

i: Claudio Merulo, *Terzo libro de canzoni d'intavolatura d'organo ... a cinque voci fatte alla francese* (Venice: Angelo Gardane, 1611).

j: Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli: *Ricercari di Andrea Gabrieli ... composti & tabulati per ogni sorte di stromenti da tasti ... libro secondo* (Venice: Angelo Gardane, 1595).

[1] Dirk Hamoen, "The Arpicordo Problem: Arnaud Neven's Solution Reconsidered," *Acta Musicologica* (1976): 181. Also see Sibyl Marcuse, *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1964): 23. Edwin M. Ripin / Denzil Wraight, "Virginal: 1: Nomenclature and Construction, and 2: Italy," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.usc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43136 (accessed February 29, 2012).

[2] Ripin / Wraight, "Virginal".

[3] Cathy Santore, "Julia Lombardo, 'Sumtuosa Meritrice': A Portrait by Property," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988): 58.

[4] Sheila Schonbrun, "Ambiguous Artists: Music-making among Italian Renaissance Courtesans." (DMA diss: CUNY, 1998): 10

[5] For more on the courtesan and the arts, see Martha Feldman, and Gordon, Bonnie, eds. *Courtesan's Arts.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[6] Berthe Marianne Eugénie Dedoyard, "Des Musiques pour Arpicordo de Marco Facoli a la découverte d'un testament inconnu," *Revue Belge de Musicologie/Belgisch tijdschrift voor muziekwetenschap* 41 (1987): 63 - 74.

[7] Luigi Ferdinando Tagliavini, "The Art of 'Not Leaving the Instrument Empty': Comments on Early Italian Harpsichord Playing," *Early Music* 11 (1983): 304.

[8] Dedoyard, 63.

[9] Nino Pirrota, "*Commedia dell'Arte* and Opera," in *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: A Collection of Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984): 347 - 348.