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In sí gran martire...
A tonal experiment in Luigi Rossi's
*Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante**

The subject of my article is Scene 6 from Act III of Luigi Rossi's musical drama *Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante* (1642) to a libretto by Giulio Rospigliosi. This particular scene is worthy of attention, because the composer has given it a thoroughly unique musical setting as compared to early Italian *drammi per musica*. It not only features more than one key signature sign — two sharps appear at the clefs — but also five sharps as accidentals in the music itself, thus using rare pitch material for late sixteenth and early seventeenth century output.

Giulio Rospigliosi quite often drew the themes of his dramas from Renaissance epic poetry. Here, the source is Ludovico Ariosto's poem *Orlando furioso*¹. The presented action is practically based on octaves 4–32 of Song XII from Ariosto's poem. Rospigliosi does not keep strictly to the epic's sequence of events, instead arranging them according to his own plan. Rospigliosi's work was originally titled *Lealtà con valore* (Loyalty and valor), but he quickly adopted the title featuring the word "Palazzo", which nevertheless had several differing versions, such as *Il Palazzo incantato ovvero la guerriera amante* [The enchanted

* This article is an abbreviated version of the chapter from the book *Dramma per musica*, vol. II/2, ed. Zygmunt M. Szweykowski (in preparation).

¹ The author published it in the final version in 1532.

palace, or the warrior maid] and the slightly abbreviated *Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante*. As remarked by Frederick Hammond², still before the work's presentation there was talk of this spectacle exceeding anything previously shown during the pontificate of Urban VIII, or Maffeo Barberini. The spectacle, organized by Antonio Barberini, can thus be interpreted as an attempt to dim the presentations inspired by his older brother, this necessarily being the most splendid, the longest (lasting more than eight hours!), and suitably performed in the Barberinis' most impressive palace (hence the title's emphasis on "Palazzo") in Rome at the Quattro Fontane, which was also Antonio's exclusive possession. The premiere took place on February 22, 1642. The score was not published contemporaneously, and we have only three full manuscript copies³, as well as two copies with the instrumental parts reduced to basso continuo⁴.

Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante is comprised of three acts; Act I — 15 scenes; Act II — 17 scenes; and Act III — 8 scenes. A total of 30 characters appear in the work: those specifically named, several anonymous, and members of a small choral ensemble. The drama's content is built around the theme of love between Bradamante and Ruggiero, with the feeling offset by a misunderstanding due mainly to the attention lover-warrior Bradamante gives to her own honour. Unwittingly pulled into the romantic plot is Angelica. Ruggiero saved her life after she was chained to a rock and destined for devouring by a whale. Hearing Ruggiero and Angelica reminisce about this event, Bradamante draws the faulty conclusion that they are romantically involved, which causes a conflict between Ruggiero and Bradamante. This main conflict unfolds completely independently of the action in the surrounding scenes. It encompasses 11 scenes itself, to which eight more can be added with Angelica's participation (including the conjuring of her voice in Act I, Scene 1), which plays — although not entirely consciously — an important role in the leading couple's arguments. Thus, together 19 out of 40 scenes belong to the main theme. In the remaining scenes of *Palazzo* that we must emphasize have no connection to the main action, Mag Atlante wishes to gather a fine company of knights and dames to add zest to Ruggiero's stay at the Palace. Atlante had conjured up the splendid

² Frederick HAMMOND, *Music & spectacle in Baroque Rome. Barberini patronage under Urban VIII* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

³ Preserved in: I – Rvat Chigi, call no. MS Q. V. 51; I – Bc, call no. MS Q. 50/2 (BB/225); GB – Lem, call no. MS 656 I-II.

⁴ Preserved in: I – Rvat Barb. lat., call no. 4389; and in: I – Rvat Barb. lat., call no. 4388.

Palace to safekeep his protégé Ruggiero, to whom the stars foretold a heroic death at young age. The gates of the Enchanted Palace are wide open to all guests, but exit is utterly impossible.

Act III, Scene 6, hence set to music in an extraordinary manner, also has episodic characters. The scene begins with a lengthy monologue by Alceste, followed by his aria, and closed by a dialogue of Scripante and Alceste lasting several verses. Alceste, in love with Lidia, is romantically betrayed and begrieved; his monologue is perhaps the most tragic lament in the drama, and is interrupted by an exclamatory, ritornello-like verse:

Alceste

[12, 22, 35] *Aspro dolor, che non trabocchi in pianto?* [Bitter suffering, why do you not burst into tears?]

The verse divides Alceste's lament into three parts:

1. verses 1–12 – apostrophe to his lover Lidia,
2. verses 14–22 – apostrophe to the Breeze, to remind Lidia of faithful Alceste,
3. verses 24–35 – apostrophe to Death, to “deliver” into him the “final arrow”.

The monologue's melody, apart from the exclamatory ritornello verse differentiated by the span of an octave, is rather limited musically, with mostly note repetition (63.9 percent) and only 25.2 percent with second steps. In addition, only two long phrases can be discerned on the background of frequent repetitions. One rises by a minor seventh, building from verse seven to nine, and the other falls by a major sixth, consisting of verses 27–29 that clearly indicate a *res tristes*, an expression of resignation from life, just as the monologue's entire third part.

The basso continuo figuration has only four notations of sevenths (mm. 14, 16, 31 and 63) and four notations of fourths. The somewhat larger number of dissonant harmonies results from the melodic line, where dissonances are usually prepared and realized as passing or change notes; very rarely do they occur as a direct clash of two or three dissonant notes. Chromaticism, especially in the vocal part, is present only in three locations (mm. 14/16, 38; m. 17 in basso continuo).

Working with such limited musical means related to a very emotionally charged text, Luigi Rossi turned his main attention to special, rarely used, or even non-occurrent timbral nuances in the field of *dramma per musica*. They were meant to expose, emphasize, and particularly underline the emotions carried by the libretto, the latter being unusual in Giulio Rospigliosi's *oeuvre* itself: replete with words and phrases relating Lidia's treachery and Alceste's great suffering.

Below, we shall define how the composer interprets Alceste's drama. In the aforementioned rising phrase (v. 7–9, mm: 11–17), the e^1 appearing seven times in measure 15 is raised to e^\sharp , forming the vertical interval of a augmented sixth with a g^\sharp in the bass. Introducing this atypical sharp, Luigi Rossi characterized Lidia's *fiero desire* [utter hate], in the poet's expression *più crudo* [ever fiercer], as she increasingly mistreats her adorator. In the end of verse nine, at the words *al mio cordoglio* [to my chagrin], Luigi Rossi expresses the emotion melodically by a descending fourth, and after stepping up a second, a descending third.

Raising a to a^\sharp in measure 38 by a potentially diminished chord, $a^\sharp-c^\sharp-e$ in the first inversion, he emphasizes still another negative trait of the lover: she is *inumana* [inhuman]. In measure 59, when the same harmonic situation recurs, Alceste expresses his resignation: he no longer cares for life, and is ready to “continue on this steepest route” — of course to death.

The chief mode is b-aolian, clearly defined in *exordium* and emphasized in the ritornello. But measures 6–7 arrive with an expansion of the pitch material. To obtain a specific sonority and underline the word *perfidia* [perfidiousness], the composer momentarily introduces d^\sharp and a^\sharp , and directly afterwards, a *caesura* closed with a harmony based on e at the word *tormento* [torment]. Closing the subsequent, sixth verse (m. 10), Luigi Rossi returns, with a cadence ending on *finalis b*, to the main mode. The beginning of verse 99 (mm. 15–16) — *Si mostra ogn'or più crudo* [She is ever more cruel] — brings the entire monologue's strongest foray into the *durus*, initiated by the chromatic step $e-e^\sharp$, thus introducing a special accidental, and directly afterwards (in m. 17), another atypical sharp, b^\sharp (at the words *gran martire* [great suffering]), not as a courtesy, but actually raising function⁵.

⁵ The composer used two different graphic signs here: \sharp and one approaching the letter x , the letter is used before b and e exclusively. Both signs remained in the music example at the end of this article.

The ritornello verse (m. 20) contrasts in every respect with the entire monologue: it has the widest range (octave) and internally differentiated melody comprised of three descending jumps of a third, two rising fourths, and one falling fifth. It moreover introduces a *grazia* in the penultimate measure and an *e#* in the bass at the word *trabocchi* [you shall overflow]. It is all designed to define Alceste's emotional state: the desire to weep, at least, for a measure of solace. Alas, his lover's behavior and her complete insensitivity to his suffering refuses even this. The tonality of the entire verse, despite the employment of five sharps, is indicated by the final cadence ending on *b*: the main b-aeolian mode.

Measure 25 begins the monologue's second part, which highly contrasts (especially at the outset) with the first part. It is an apostrophe to the Breeze: almost lyrical in character, unpretentious, and without harsh words; the melody — as previously — has a preponderance of repetition, but also a somewhat increased number of second steps (30 percent) in the dominant b-aeolian mode. The situation changes in verse 20 (m. 38):

Alceste

[20] *Ond' ella d'inumana*

Thus she – of inhumanity,

[21] *Io di fedele ho il vanto.*

I – boast of faithfulness.

This verse is a kind of preparation for the ritornello verse. At the word *d'inhumana*, Luigi Rossi introduces a *patopoiá* figure that begins on *a*. Two measures later, the ritornello verse appears in identical shape as before. Verse 23 opens the third section with the words:

Alceste

[23] *Quando, misero me, quando s'udii*

When, oh misery me, has one heard

[24] *Di sventurato amor, d'indegna sorte*

Of such misfortunate love, unworthy fate

It spans a fourth and is initially kept in b-aeolian mode, but already beginning in the next verse (m. 47), the *c#* is cancelled and G-lydian mode takes over, rendered permanent with a cadence to the dominant (m. 54) (which is simultaneously the dominant of b-hypoaolian mode). This is the monologue's sole part where throughout a section of several verses (v. 24–27), a different, clearly defined mode is in force. In this context, verse 26 (Act III, Scene 6) sets itself apart:

Alceste

- [26] *Spenga una volta, oh Dio,* Oh God, let it extinguish for one time,
[27] *Spenga il foco d'amor gelo di morte,* Let icy death extinguish the fire of love,

It is also the sole verse (besides the ritornello) that spans an octave, due to Luigi Rossi's special emphasis on the exclamation *oh*. It is placed on *a'*, the highest note of the entire monologue, obtained with an octave leap (after a breath rest) and followed by a descending jump of a perfect fourth.

Finally, in verse 31 at the words *più l'aspro sentiero* [this steepest path], do we have for the third time, along with a *patopoia* figure, the preparation for the ritornello verse.

In conclusion, we must again emphasize the uniqueness of Scene 6, Act II in Luigi Rossi's *Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante* (1642), which stems not only from the employment of two sharps in the key signature, but also the use of five accidental sharps. The composer resorts to transposing the a-aeolian mode by a whole tone upwards, thus emphasizing *b* as *finalis* (not included in the canon of *finales*, even in the dodecachordal system), and likely purposefully choosing a rare key in late Renaissance and early Baroque music, one that carries a pointedly expressive sense. He simultaneously enriched — with such 'sharpened key' as background — the monologue's pitch material, radically mining the tendency to the *durus* tonal sphere. In tandem, the phenomena appear here for the first time on the terrain of Italian *dramma per musica*. We can presume with a high degree of probability that the reason for introducing this compositional solution was the content of Giulio Rospigliosi's libretto, laden with nearly harsh words relating Lidia's cruelty and Alceste's suffering. This text also demanded an extraordinary musical setting.

Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante

Act III, scene 6

Alceste

[B.c.]

1. Deh, fer-ma il pie fu-ga-cc 2. In-gra-tis-si-ma Li-dia, 3. E poi-ché tan-to

4. Al-l'em-pia tua per-fi-di-a 5. Il mio gra-ve tor-men-to, 6. Ar-re-sta-ti-a mi-

7. Un sol mo-men-to. 8. Ma, in van' pre-go, in van pian-go,

9. in van' mi-do-glio, 10. Ch' il suo fie-ro de-si-re 11. Si mo-stra, agn' or più cru-do al mio cor-

12. Sen-to mo-ri-r-mi e pur non mo-ro, in-tan-to; 13. A-spro do-

14. lor che non tra-boc-chi in pian-to? che non tra-boc-chi in pian-to.

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25 26 27 28

14. Tu che t'ag - gi - ri al suo bel u - so in - tor - no 15. Au - ra dim - mi, se l'sa - i 16. Del - la pu - ra mia

Detailed description: This system contains measures 25 through 28. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 25: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 26: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 27: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 28: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

29 30 31 32

fe sov - vien - le ma - i sov - vien - le ma - i 17. Che se d'A - mor ru - bel - la, 18. Il mia ser - vir dis - prez - za,

Detailed description: This system contains measures 29 through 32. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 29: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 30: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 31: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 32: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

33 34 35 36

19. Con im - mo - bil fer - mez - za, 20. Tan - to sta - bil son io, quant' es - sa è bel - la,

Detailed description: This system contains measures 33 through 36. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 33: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 34: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 35: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 36: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

37 38 39 40

21. Ond' el - la d'in - u - ma - na 22. lo di fe - del' ho il van - to. 23. A - spro do -

Detailed description: This system contains measures 37 through 40. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 37: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 38: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 39: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 40: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

41 42 43 44

- lor, che non tra - boc - chi in pian - to? Che non tra - boc - chi in pian - to

Detailed description: This system contains measures 41 through 44. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 41: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 42: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 43: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 44: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

45 46 47 48

24. Quan - do mi - se - ro me, quan - do s'u - di - i. 25. Di sven - tu - ra - to a - mor, d'in - de - gna

Detailed description: This system contains measures 45 through 48. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The bass line is in bass clef with the same key signature. Measure 45: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 46: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 47: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2. Measure 48: Treble clef has a half note G4, quarter note A4, quarter note B4, quarter note C5, quarter note B4, quarter note A4, quarter note G4. Bass clef has a whole note G2.

"In sí gran martire..." A tonal experiment in Luigi Rossi's "Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante"

49 sor - te 26. E - sem - pio, e - gual' al 50 mi - o 27. Spen - gau - na - vol - ta 51 oh Di - o 28. Spen - ga, il 52 fo - co d'a - mor ge -

53 - lo di mor - te, 54 29. Che se, il de - stin se - ve - ro 30. O - gni spe - me, a me to - glic, 31. Del - la

57 vi - ta mor - ta - le 58 32. Pre - mer non cu - ro più l'as - pro sen - tie - ro 33. Con af - fan - no - se do - glic 34. Deh 60 scoc - ca mor - te, in me

61 l'ul - ti - mo stra - le 62 35. E tro - vi pos - sa, al fi - ne 63 il fra - gil man - to. 64 36. As - pro do -

65 - lor che non tra - 66 boc - chi, in pian - to? Che 67 non tra boc - chi 68 in pian - to

Summary

The subject of the article is Scene 6 from Act III of Luigi Rossi's musical drama *Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante* (1642) to a libretto by Giulio Rospigliosi. This particular scene is worthy of attention, because the composer has given it a thoroughly unique musical setting as compared to early Italian drammi per musica. It not only features more than one key signature sign — two sharps appear at the clefs — but also five sharps as accidentals in the music itself, thus using rare pitch material for late sixteenth and early seventeenth century output. The composer resorts to transposing the a-aeolian mode by a whole tone upwards, thus emphasizing b as finalis (not included in the canon of finales, even in the dodecachordal system), and likely purposefully choosing a rare key in late Renaissance and early Baroque music, one that carries a pointedly expressive sense. He simultaneously enriched — with such 'sharpened key' as background — the monologue's pitch material, radically mining the tendency to the durus tonal sphere. In tandem, the phenomena appear here for the first time on the terrain of Italian dramma per musica. The reason for introducing this compositional solution was the content of Giulio Rospigliosi's libretto, laden with nearly harsh words relating Lidia's cruelty and Alceste's suffering. This text also demanded an extraordinary musical setting.

Keywords: Luigi Rossi, *Il Palazzo incantato d'Atlante*, lament of Alceste, tonal experiment