



Benigno Zerafa (1726-1804) and the Neapolitan Galant Style

Frederick Aquilina

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The history of Maltese music rests on a strong tradition based on the music education system of southern Italy, with influences from Sicily (seventeenth century) and Naples (eighteenth and nineteenth century). Benigno Zerafa (1726-1804), Malta's leading composer of the eighteenth century, was likewise trained and influenced by this tradition and wrote music of a high technical and artistic standard. Zerafa's oeuvre totals 148 sacred vocal works, ranging from large works for two choirs, two orchestras and soloists, to works for solo voice and continuo, and his music is now starting to be recognized by performers and via new recordings. This book emphasises the European dimension so strongly associated with the success and dominance of the Neapolitan School. It compares works by contemporary Neapolitan composers (Durante, Feo, Pergolesi, Jommelli, Vinci and Leo) with Zerafa's music, highlighting the Neapolitan galant style that defines his works. The book also situates Zerafa's music within Maltese musical and cultural history, discussing features of Maltese liturgy and religious ceremony. Benigno Zerafa's life is paradigmatic for the typical career of a chapel master born and active in peripheral areas of the Mediterranean Sea during the ancien régime. This book will be of significant interest to scholars and students of eighteenth-century music, in particular sacred music, the 'galant' style, and Italian music.

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