

AXEL TEICH GEERTINGER

“They just begin together, as in other places!”

Orchestral Effects in Seventeenth-Century Italian Opera Sinfonia¹

The aim of this article is to present some early examples of the use of effects that may be described as genuinely orchestral in some Italian seventeenth-century opera sinfonias. As the present study is intended partly as a reply to John Spitzer and Neal Zaslaw's recently published work *The Birth of the Orchestra*,² a few introductory remarks on that book may be appropriate.

The Birth of the Orchestra is an ambitious study of the formation of the orchestra as an institution somewhere between mid-seventeenth and early nineteenth century. Chapter thirteen is devoted to the birth of orchestration, and includes a discussion of orchestral effects. A distinction is made between effects of unity and grandeur on the one hand, and effects of variety and nuance on the other. Among the former we find the *premier coup d'archet*, which according to Spitzer and Zaslaw means “beginning a piece with a simultaneous downbow in all the string parts”. According to the authors “such beginnings were rare in seventeenth-century ensemble music. Much more common were passages like the *sinfonia* to the second act of Landi's *Sant'Alessio* (Rome, c.1632), where the parts enter one by one in fugal imitation”.³ Significantly, no mention is made that the opera's primary introduction, the *Sinfonia per introduzione del prologo*, starts with a homorythmic tutti. One might add that the very generalisation of the entire seventeenth century's ensemble music seems questionable in the first place. Landi's second act *sinfonia* has little in common with late seventeenth-century ensemble music such as, say, Corelli's or Albinoni's concertos.

What makes Spitzer and Zaslaw's definition of the *premier coup* somewhat problematic is that it includes both elements of composition (beginning a piece simultaneously in all the string parts) and elements of performance practice (a simultaneous down-bow). We are informed that the *premier coup d'archet*-effect is used in Paris towards the end of the century by Lully, who seems to have adopted it from existing string band practices at the French court, and that it is then adopted by Corelli in

1 Based on a paper presented at the 12th Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music in Warsaw, July 2006.

2 JOHN SPITZER & NEAL ZASLAW: *The Birth of the Orchestra. History of an Institution, 1650-1815*, Oxford 2004.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 439.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 441. A similar view was presented in NEAL ZASLAW: “Lully's Orchestra”, in Jérôme DE LA GORCE & Herbert SCHNEIDER (eds.): *Jean-Baptiste Lully. Actes du colloque* (Neue Heidelberger Studien zur Musikwissenschaft 18), Laaber 1990, pp. 539-553.

Rome.⁴ For illustration, examples are given from these composers' works: the overture to Lully's *Amadis* (1684) and Corelli's well-known "Christmas" Concerto (Concerto grosso Op. 6, No. 8, published 1714). The arguments connecting the *premier coup* with Paris (Lully in particular) and Corelli, however, are based solely on performance practice, the writings of Georg Muffat and Charles Burney being principal sources.⁵ Certainly, Italian opera ensembles may not have been as disciplined and skilful as Lully's string orchestra at the French court, which was strongly admired by e.g. Georg Muffat. However, Muffat comments on the style and precision of performance, not the very existence of the *premier coup* as an element of composition.⁶ The same goes for Charles Burney's description of Corelli's string band in Rome, in which Alessandro Scarlatti allegedly notes the band's "uncommon accuracy" of performance: "At the time of Corelli's greatest reputation, Geminiani asked Scarlatti what he thought of him; who answered, that 'he found nothing greatly to admire in his composition, but was extremely struck with the manner in which he played his concertos, and his nice management of his band, the uncommon accuracy of whose performance, gave the concertos an amazing effect; and that, even to the eye as well as the ear:' for, continued Geminiani, 'Corelli regarded it essential to the *ensemble* of a band, that their bows should all move exactly together, all up, or all down; so that at his rehearsals, which constantly preceded every public performance of his concertos, he would immediately stop the band if he discovered one irregular bow'.⁷

If Burney's testimony – which is not first hand but fourth – about Corelli's ensemble is given credibility, it should be placed alongside another of Burney's anecdotes, the one concerning Corelli playing in Naples with Scarlatti: "At Naples he [i.e. Corelli] found Alessandro Scarlatti, and several other masters, who entreated him to play some of his concertos before the King; this he for some time declined, on account of his whole band not being with him, and there was no time, he said, for a rehearsal. At length, however, he consented; and in great fear performed the first of his concertos. His astonishment was very great to find that the Neapolitan band executed his concertos almost as accurately at sight, as his own band, after repeated rehearsals, when they had almost got them by heart. *Si suona*, (says he to Matteo, his second violin) à

5 No direct reference is made to Burney here, though. An indirect reference to Burney is made in Zaslav: *Lully's Orchestra*, p. 547. See also John SPITZER & Neal ZASLAW: "Improvised Ornamentation in Eighteenth-Century Orchestras", in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 39/3 (1986), pp. 524-577 (p. 563).

6 Most detailed instructions for Lullist style of performance are given in Georg MUFFAT: *Florilegium secundum*, Passau 1698, also reproduced in Walter KOLNEDER: *Georg Muffat zur Aufführungspraxis*, (Sammlung musikwissenschaftlicher Abhandlungen 50). Verlag Heitz GmbH, Strasbourg/Baden-Baden 1970.

7 Charles BURNEY: *A general history of music, from the earliest ages to the present period*, Vol. 3, London 1789, p. 557f. Burney's report is based on a letter from Thomas Twining. See Enrico CARERI: "The Correspondence between Burney and Twining about Corelli and Geminiani", in *Music and Letters* 72/1 (1991), pp. 38-47. Likewise, Muffat reports from his stay in Rome, that he had heard "... mit grosser Anzahl Instrumentisten auff's genaueste producirten Concerten vom Kunstreichen Hrn. Archangelo Corelli mit grossem Lust und Wunder". Muffat: *Florilegium secundum*, quoted from Kolneder: *Georg Muffat zur Aufführungspraxis*, p. 113f.

Napoli! [...] Afterwards, he was desired to lead in the performance of a masque composed by Scarlatti, which was to be executed before the King; this he undertook, but from Scarlatti's little knowledge of the violin, the part was somewhat awkward and difficult: in one place it went up to F; and when they came to that passage, Corelli failed, and was unable to execute it; but he was astonished beyond measure to hear Petrillo, the Neapolitan leader, and the other violins, perform that which had baffled his skill".⁸ Though Burney's report does not specifically concern the string bands' attack or bowing, it nevertheless suggests that Scarlatti's band in Naples maintained a level of skill at least comparable to that of Corelli's.

Of course, also Scarlatti's Neapolitan court ensemble may have been an outstanding one, like Corelli's, compared to other Italian ensembles. It is probably true that the unanimous attack of the average Italian opera ensemble could not match the precision of Corelli's or Lully's orchestras. Still, the issue here is that the effect intended by the composer was most likely the same in many Italian opera sinfonias as in the aforementioned works by Corelli and Lully. That it was cultivated and executed with greater precision by Parisian ensembles does not necessarily mean that it originated there nor that the *premier coup* as such is to be considered a French peculiarity, provided it is to be understood primarily as a textural device and not as a matter of performance. Interestingly, Neal Zaslaw himself provided a definition in agreement with this view in 1990. Though listed under the heading "Performance practices" (referring to Lully and his orchestra), the *premier coup* is described far more operational than in *The Birth of the Orchestra* as simply "suddenly beginning all together".⁹ In this article, the term will be used in this sense – perhaps with the specification needed that "all" means "all strings", which is self-evident in the case of Lully's string bands. Potentially, the continuo may play along, though.

Opening gestures closely related to the *premier coup d'archet* are the so-called "curtain chords",¹⁰ i.e. beginning a piece with one or more chords, often repeating the same chord several times or forming some simple harmonic progression, establishing tonality, e.g. I-V-I. Curtain chords are usually scored for the entire ensemble (*tutti*), but in larger seventeenth-century ensembles the wind instruments are often not involved, making it chiefly – but not exclusively – a string band effect. In such cases curtain chords could be described as a specific, emphatic application of the *premier coup*. Nevertheless, both effects will be referred to here in accordance with common usage as *tutti* effects, as their effectiveness lies in their being perceived as a sudden, massive sound, the specific instruments' timbre being a secondary quality.

Curtain chords are sometimes used in combination with another *tutti* effect, the grand pause, as a means of even intensifying their impact. According to Spitzer and

8 Burney: *A general history of music*, Vol. 3, p. 553. This report is also based on Twining's letters to Burney.

9 Zaslaw: "Lully's Orchestra", p. 545f.

10 The term "curtain" (German "Vorhang") for this effect was introduced by Hugo Riemann. In German, the term has a significant ambiguity, as it can also be understood as something literally hung in front of something else. When used with the opera sinfonia, it also has a convenient affinity to the operatic context and the sinfonia's place in it. Hugo RIEMANN: *System der musikalischen Rhythmik und Metrik*, Leipzig 1903, p. 230ff.

Zaslaw “the use of tutti chords to introduce and define the orchestra at the beginning of a piece evolved in the first half of the eighteenth century into the familiar ‘curtain chords’ of opera overtures and symphonies”.¹¹ Niccolò Jommelli is used for an example.

The descriptions of tutti effects provided by *The Birth of the Orchestra* appear to neglect much of the seventeenth-century opera sinfonia repertoire. In the following, a few examples shall demonstrate the use of orchestral opening effects in the opera sinfonias of Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676), Carlo Francesco Pollarolo (ca. 1653-1723) and Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), thus drawing attention to some incipient orchestral compositional techniques in use at the time. The reason for choosing these composers is mainly that they are within the author’s current field of work, though similar compositional features are found in numerous other seventeenth-century opera and oratorio sinfonias by composers such as Pietro Andrea Ziani (1620-1684), Antonio Sartorio (1630-1680), Carlo Pallavicino (1630-1688), Giovanni Paolo Colonna (1637-1695), Marc’Antonio Ziani (ca. 1653-1715), Domenico Gabrielli (1659-1690), Giacomo Antonio Perti (1661-1756), and Giovanni Bononcini (1670-1747).

But before investigating further the use of orchestral opening effects in Italy, we must consider what “orchestral” means. Here, the term will designate the use of the special sound qualities and effects that an ensemble, including bowed strings and other instruments, produces as a whole in a way that indicates a conception of the ensemble as a single body, somewhat similar to a single instrument. In other words, focus here is on the changing interest in the sound of the full ensemble from being the more or less accidental result of all the individual instruments playing simultaneously into being a single unit with an idiom of its own. Consequently, effects of variety and nuance are not treated in this article.

Whether the ensemble actually performing the music may be called an orchestra by modern definitions is not considered crucial in this context – one criterion, for instance, being the number of players on each part.¹² Therefore, this question shall be touched on only briefly. Little is known about the exact size of opera ensembles towards the end of the seventeenth century, but at least a few instruments on each of the upper parts and one or two on viola parts would be plausible.¹³ In the sinfonia from Scarlatti’s *Eraclea* (1700) we find some of the instruments labelled in the plural. The score calls for *Due Trombe* (playing in unison), *Obue e flauti*, *Viol.ⁿⁱ all’unis.ⁿⁱ*, *Violette*, and *Cembalo* for the sinfonia. According to the title page, celli have been present and may

11 Spitzer & Zaslaw: *The Birth of the Orchestra*, p. 446.

12 For a recent debate on this question see Michael TALBOT: “The Scoring of Baroque Concertos (Review)”, in *Music and Letters* 86/2 (2005); the book reviewed is Richard MAUNDER: *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos*, Woodbridge 2004.

13 The size of the ensemble at, for instance, Teatro S Bartolomeo in Naples, where many of Scarlatti’s works from the 1690s onwards were staged, is unknown. It is known only that the larger Teatro S Carlo, replacing the S Bartolomeo in 1737, for its first production employed 45 instrumentalists, counting 24 violins, 6 violas, 3 cellos, 3 basses, 2 harpsichords, 2 oboes, 3 bassoons and 2 trumpets. It was a time of rapidly growing orchestras, however, and not much can be concluded about the ensemble size 40 years earlier. Michael F. ROBINSON: *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, Oxford 1972, p. 160.

have been used for the performance of the *sinfonia* as well.¹⁴ The indication *Violini all'unisoni* does not, of course, tell us anything about the number of violins, as it refers to the 1st and 2nd violin playing in unison, scored on a single staff. With two trumpets, more than one viola and more than one flute doubling the oboe(s), however, we can ascertain that several 1st and 2nd violins must have been involved. In others of Scarlatti's *sinfonias*, e.g. those from *La Statira* and *Emireno*, the markings *solo* and *tutti* in the score indicate that at least the two upper parts were played by more than one to the part.¹⁵

The ensembles performing Cavalli's operas, on the other hand, were quite small, the upper parts probably being played one on each part, not least due to the limited financial capabilities of public opera houses in mid-century Venice.¹⁶ The performing forces of seventeenth-century composers may thus in many cases be categorised as pre-orchestral according to the definitions set up by Spitzer and Zaslav, and this – along with their focusing on performance practice rather than on texture – may also be the reason for disregarding the early opera *sinfonia* in the context of a discussion on orchestral effects. Nevertheless, the compositional findings in these pieces make them worthwhile taking into consideration in the study of the history of orchestral composition.

Francesco Cavalli

The *premier coup d'archet* effect as well as the *tutti* chords and their extension into whole sections of homorhythmic texture form a constituent part of the opera *sinfonias* of Francesco Cavalli. All of his extant opening *sinfonias*, spanning nearly 30 years from 1639 to 1667, begin with a chordal *tutti* structure, and indeed many of the early ones are nothing more than a short opening gesture entirely based on chordal texture.¹⁷ Imitation is never used for openings. In general, the style of Cavalli's *sinfonias* is quite far from that of Landi's *canzone*-like Roman *sinfonias*, which are reminiscent of early seventeenth-century instrumental music. The stylistic difference of course also

14 The title page reads *Atto Primo: Arie / Dell'Opera Intitolata l'Eraclea / Con Violini, Trombe, Obuè, Viollette / Flauti, e Violoncelli [...]*. Citations from the manuscript B-Br Ms. II 3964 Mus. Grout's edition changed the plural into singular (Tromba I, II; Oboe e Flauto; Violino I, II; Violetta; Continuo). Donald J. GROUT (ed.): *Eraclea* (The Operas of Alessandro Scarlatti 1), Cambridge Mass. 1974.

15 As the markings are found in the scores (parts missing), they are hardly meant as warnings to a single violinist that he is playing alone while the lower parts pause. According to Richard Maunders such warnings were standard practice in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century (Maunder: *The Scoring of Baroque Concertos*, p. 63 et passim). His controversial study, whose main point is that baroque ensemble music (concertos) was usually played one to the part, is based on printed and manuscript parts from a large number of concertos from the baroque era. However, finding solo- and *tutti*-markings in scores, where warnings would obviously be redundant, seems to contradict his conclusions. Even if they really are warnings, they could still be addressing a group of 1st violinists.

16 Jane GLOVER: *Cavalli*. B. T. Batsford, London 1978, p. 108; Ellen ROSAND: *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, Berkeley 1991, p. 24.

17 At best, the *Concilio infernale*-*sinfonia* opening the first act of Cavalli's first opera, *Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo* (1639), may be called an exception. Three middle parts join slowly beating E minor chords one by one. On the other hand, this *sinfonia* was not the primary opening *sinfonia*, as the prologue is lost from the manuscript. For reference see Axel Teich GEERTINGER: "Die Opersinfonien Francesco Cavallis", in *Schütz-Jahrbuch 25* (2003), Kassel 2003, pp. 105-143, including an edition of Cavalli's opening opera *sinfonias*.

reflects the very different contexts of Landi's religious work and Venetian public opera. The curtain chord effect is frequently used in Cavalli's opera sinfonias. An example from *L'Ormindo* (1644) may illustrate this. The sinfonia opens with two curtain chords, an effect repeated in bars 6 and 10.¹⁸



Ex. 1. Cavalli: *L'Ormindo*. Sinfonia, b. 1-7 (I-Vnm It. IV, 368)

Such multiple curtain chords also occur in *Ercole amante* (1662), *Scipione africano* (1664), and *Mutio Scevola* (1665). The effect is perhaps even more pronounced through the use of the grand pause in this early example from *La Doriclea* (1645):

Ex. 2. Cavalli: *La Doriclea*. Sinfonia, b. 1-6 (I-Vnm It. IV, 356)

Even when starting with a fast section, we find the same effect, as in *L'Eliogabalo* (1667) – Cavalli's last extant opera, and one of the few not starting with a slow section:¹⁹

Ex. 3. Cavalli: *L'Eliogabalo*. Sinfonia, b. 1-5 (I-Vnm It. IV, 358)

18 A note on editorial practice: Examples reflect the sources' incompleteness as to instrumentation, tempo indications and the sporadic bass figures. The standard 5-part instrumentation is usually to be interpreted as two violin parts, two viola parts and basso continuo. For convenience, scores are reduced to one system for violins and violas respectively whenever possible. Original clefs are retained except for the second viola (tenor), which is usually written in the tenor clef. In 4-part writing, only one viola part is present. The source indicated with each example mentions only the primary source, also if other sources have been consulted. For a complete critical commentary on examples other than Cavalli see the author's PhD dissertation *Die italienische Opernsinfonia 1680-1710*, Copenhagen 2008 (forthcoming).

19 As no tempo is indicated in Cavalli's sinfonias, reference to (relatively) slow and fast sections is based on the author's judgement. In duple meter, Cavalli's notation in half and whole notes is gene-

Despite the statement that "Written-out silence in all parts is rare in seventeenth-century instrumental music",²⁰ the use of the grand pause is not at all unusual in Cavalli's *sinfonias*, as suggested by these examples. About half of his *sinfonias* incorporate the grand pause as an effect within *tutti* sections as seen in the examples from *La Doriclea* and *L'Eliogabalo*.

Carlo Francesco Pollarolo

The *sinfonias* of the generation of composers succeeding Cavalli are not quite as homogeneous as Cavalli's. Due to their variety in form and texture, Pollarolo's opera *sinfonias* are particularly difficult to describe in a few words. Many of them feature solo instruments, especially trumpets, and in one case even a solo *cornetto* (cornett) is called for (*La costanza gelosa nell'amori di Cefalo e Procri*, 1688). With regard to form and tempo sequence Pollarolo does not seem to settle on any specific pattern. He sometimes uses *tutti*-effects for his openings, but equally often his *sinfonias* introduce the violins or solo wind instruments first, with the rest of the ensemble joining in after one or two bars. Except for a slight suggestion of imitation in the violin parts of *L'Irene* (1694), imitational openings do not occur. Some instances of *premier coup*-openings exist, e.g. *Il Rodrigo* (1684), *La Rosimonda* (1695), and of course the *Ouverture* – explicitly called so to distinguish it from the usual *Sinfonia* – from *Il Faramondo* (1698), beginning in the manner of a French overture with a *tutti* in dotted rhythms.

Pollarolo's *Alfonso primo* (1694) makes an interesting case in this context, highlighting the problems arising from the entanglement of texture and performance practice. *Alfonso primo* clearly has an orchestrally conceived, near-*tutti* opening presumably intended for strings and continuo, leaving out only the trumpets, which are silent throughout the *sinfonia*'s entire first section.

The image shows a musical score for Trombe (Trumpets) in the first section of the Sinfonia from Alfonso primo. The score is written in G major and common time. The first six measures show the trumpets in a grand pause, indicated by a large 'Z' symbol. The strings and continuo play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and eighth notes. In the seventh measure, the trumpets enter with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes.

Ex. 4. Pollarolo: *Alfonso primo*. Sinfonia, b. 1-7 (US-SFsc *M2.1 M419)

Using Spitzer and Zaslav's definition, its classification as a *premier coup*-opening would however depend on local practice, as we would need to ask whether the upbeat would have been performed up-bow or down-bow, leading to the somewhat odd con-

rally associated with slow or moderate tempo, whereas smaller values usually indicate a lively one. The *Eliogabalo*-*sinfonia* is indeed performable as a slow introduction of a tragic mood. I believe, though, that a lively tempo, conveying a highly dramatic expression, would be more appropriate.

²⁰ Spitzer & Zaslav: *The Birth of the Orchestra*, p. 443.

clusion that this opening could probably not be labelled *premier coup d'archet* if played in Italy, and certainly not if played in Paris: According to the rules given by Muffat, the *Lullist* style of performance would be up-bow on the upbeat and down-bow on down-beat.²¹ The same bowing would probably have been used in Italy, though it seems from Burney's report quoted above that perfectly uniform bowing were rather uncommon in Italian ensembles at the time, usually leaving some tolerance for individual bowing practices. Bowing instructions largely in agreement with the French practice as described by Mersenne²² and Muffat were outlined also in Italy by Francesco Rognoni in 1620 and Gasparo Zannetti in 1645.²³ This includes the principles of the so-called "Rule of Down-Bow", i.e. beginning a bar – especially the initial one – with a down-bow. Though according to Rognoni's instructions one should always use a down-bow "at the beginning of a melody",²⁴ which – if taken literally – would imply two consecutive down-bows on the first two notes in the above example, Zannetti's rules specify that an uneven number of notes in the initial bar implies starting with an up-bow.²⁵ Still, *premier coup d'archet* arguably seems to be an appropriate description of the *Alfonso primo*-opening.

But Pollarolo is notable here also for another reason. We find in his *Tito Manlio* (1696) yet another effect of unity, described with reference to Vivaldi and Bach by Spitzer and Zaslaw as an effect coming into use in the early eighteenth century: the orchestral unison.²⁶ The first use of the orchestral unison known today seems to be the opening *sinfonia* from Albinoni's *Zenobia, regina de' Palmireni*, predating Pollarolo's *Tito Manlio* by two years. As *Zenobia* is Albinoni's first opera, probably composed when Albinoni was twenty-two years of age, it seems unlikely that this is the very first orchestral unison, though earlier examples still remain to be found. Pollarolo presumably knew Albinoni's work (shown in example 6 for comparison), as his use of the unison is very similar to that of Albinoni: agitated unison sixteenths prepare the trumpet's entry. Pollarolo introduces the trumpets after three bars of strings in unison. The strings re-enter in unison before spreading out into a pulsating, chordal texture.

21 Muffat: *Florilegium secundum*, rule no. X; see Kolneder: *Georg Muffat zur Aufführungspraxis*, p. 62.

22 Marin MERSENNE: *Harmonie Universelle*, Paris 1636.

23 Francesco ROGNONI: *Selva de varii passaggi secondo l'uso moderno*, Milano 1620; Gasparo ZANNETTI: *Il Scolaro di Gasparo Zannetti per imparare a suonare di Violino et altri stromenti*, Milano 1645; Cf. David D. BOYDEN: *The History of Violin Playing from its Origins to 1761 and its Relationship to the Violin and Violin Music*, London 1965, pp. 157-163.

24 "la maniera di portar l'arco e questa che sempre si tira l'arco in giù nel principar del canto". Quoted from Boyden: *The History of Violin Playing*, p. 158.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 159f.

26 Spitzer & Zaslaw: *The Birth of the Orchestra*, p. 447.

Musical score for Trombe and Violini. The score is in common time (C) and consists of two systems. The first system shows the Trombe (Trumpets) and Violini (Violins) parts. The second system shows the Violini (Violins) and Violoni (Violas) parts. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

Ex.5. Pollarolo: *Tito Manlio*. Sinfonia, b. 1-8 (D-SWI Mus 49)

Allegro

Musical score for Tromba, Violino 1&2, Viola 1&2, and Fagotto o violone & basso continuo. The score is in common time (C) and consists of two systems. The first system shows the Tromba (Trumpet), Violino 1&2 (Violins 1&2), Viola 1&2 (Violas 1&2), and Fagotto o violone & basso continuo (Bassoon or Viola & Cello/Double Bass) parts. The second system shows the same parts. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes.

Ex. 6. Albinoni: *Zenobia, regina de' Palmireni*. Sinfonia, b. 1-7 (US-Wc M 1500.A72Z4)

Alessandro Scarlatti

Until the mid-1690s, Scarlatti – with some exceptions, such as *Tutto il mal non vien per nuocere* (1681; the sinfonia may have been composed between 1683 and 1687, but definitely before the December 1687 production in Naples as *Dal male il bene*)²⁷ – usually begins his sinfonias with a slow introduction like most of mid-seventeenth-century Venetian sinfonias. Starting with *Le nozze col' nemico* (1695), Scarlatti tends to reverse the overall tempo sequence from slow-fast (and potentially another one or two sections), into what was to become the tripartite “Neapolitan” norm of fast-slow-fast, fully implemented in *Emireno* (1697).

Some of Scarlatti’s sinfonias have imitational openings, but also orchestral opening effects such as the *premier coup d’archet* or curtain chords are frequently found in both slow and fast openings. For example, *La Statira* (1690) begins with two sets of tutti chords I-V-I, echoed piano in the dominant key. Each set is followed by a grand pause.

Ex. 7. Scarlatti: *La Statira*. Sinfonia avanti l'alzar della tenda, b. 1-6 (I-MOe Mus F 1538)

The sinfonia from *Pirro e Demetrio* (1694) still has a slow introduction for strings and continuo, in some aspects resembling the mid-century Venetian opera sinfonia and beginning with the *premier coup*. The two faster sections that follow introduce a solo instrument, presumably a trumpet.

Ex. 8. Scarlatti: *Pirro e Demetrio*. Sinfonia, b. 1-9 (B-Br Ms. II 3963 Mus.)

27 The dating of the Montecassino score containing the sinfonia is discussed in detail in the author’s PhD dissertation: *Die italienische Opersinfonia 1680-1710*, Copenhagen 2008 (forthcoming). See also Alfred LORENZ: *Alessandro Scarlatti’s Jugendoper. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Italienischen Oper*, Augsburg 1927, pp. 66-78 and 227f.

As a final example, in *Emireno* (1697) the *premier coup* is used in a fast opening. Though noted in bar 2, the *allegro* is probably to be valid from bar 1 as follows from the repetition in bar 6.

The musical score is for Scarlatti's *Emireno*, Sinfonia, bars 1-10. It is written for Violin I, Violin II, and Bass. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system contains bars 1 through 5. Bar 1 is marked 'Staccato' and bar 2 is marked 'Allegro'. The second system contains bars 6 through 10. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 below the notes in several places.

Ex. 9. Scarlatti: *Emireno*. Sinfonia, b. 1-10 (I-Nc Rari 7.1.5)

Despite the diversity of the seventeenth-century opera sinfonia, these examples may show that orchestral tutti effects were definitely included in the standard vocabulary of instrumental pieces in Italian opera through more than half of the century. After all, neither considerations concerning the definition of an orchestra nor descriptions of performance practice should make us blind to compositional ideas observable regardless of the actual performing forces at hand and the quality of performance.

A century later, Mozart pinpointed the issue in a famous passage from a letter to his father, written during his stay in Paris. Obviously, the Parisian *premier coup d'archet* had been extensively hyped. Annoyed and perhaps also disappointed, Mozart wrote: "What a fuss the oxen here make of it! What the devil! I don't see any difference – they just begin together, as in other places. It is ridiculous."²⁸ Mozart of course made his statement without any historical reference or claim for historical validity whatsoever.²⁹ As we see from the musical evidence, his verdict would nonetheless have been astoundingly valid also more than a century earlier.

28 In a letter to his father dated June 12, 1778. Translated from Wilhelm A. BAUER & Otto Erich DEUTSCH (eds.): *Mozart. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen*, Vol. II, Kassel 1962, p. 379. In German, the passage reads "da machen die oxen hier ein weesen daraus! – was teüfel! ich mercke keinen unterschied – sie fangen halt auch zu gleich an – wie in anderen orten. das ist zum lachen." Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 443.

29 In his article on Lully, Neal Zaslaw comments on Mozart's "lack of historical perspective" in this statement. Zaslaw: "Lully's Orchestra", p. 547.