

BOOK REVIEW

**Jan Dismas Zelenka. *Six Settings of 'Ave regina coelorum'* (ZWV 128)
Edited by Frederic Kiernan
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Reviewed by Denis Collins

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745) enjoyed a long and productive career at the court of Dresden, arriving in 1710 or 1711 to take up a position as violone player and later moving to duties associated with the roles of Kapellmeister or vice-Kapellmeister, 'Kirchen-Compositeur' (principal church composer to the court) and curator of the royal music library. He maintained strong relationships with members of the Dresden royal household during the reigns of Friedrich August I (also known as King August II of Poland and August the Strong) and later Friedrich August II (later King August III of Poland). The conversion of Friedrich August I to Catholicism in 1697 paved the way for a resurgence of musical activities for Catholic liturgies and devotional practices in Dresden. As a Catholic from Bohemia, Zelenka was well placed to help spearhead the musical life of the Catholic court church in Dresden. Particularly significant was the marriage in 1719 of the Electoral Prince Friedrich August to the Archduchess Maria Josepha of Austria who brought to Dresden a strongly developed devotional outlook formed by her Habsburg upbringing. As electoral princess and later as queen in Dresden, Maria Josepha exercised enormous influence on the provision and performance of Catholic sacred music. Zelenka counted as one of the most highly regarded musicians at court and seems to have had a close personal association with Maria Josepha, which may have influenced his approach to various works including his six settings of the Marian antiphon 'Ave regina coelorum' (ZWV 128). From late in Zelenka's career (1737), these settings are now available in a modern edition prepared by Frederic Kiernan. All except one of these settings (number 4) is a first edition.

Certain challenges were before Kiernan as he undertook this edition. The sole surviving source for these settings comprises the score and a single violin part (for setting number 2). The original performing parts are lost. Located at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und

Universitätsbibliothek in Dresden, the score is in Zelenka's hand, and, like many contemporary sources, is parsimonious in its provision of scoring and notational details. The result is that Kiernan undertook substantial reconstruction of the instrumental parts that likely participated in performance of these works. In his Introduction and Critical Report, Kiernan provides a succinct account of the performance resources available to Zelenka in Dresden and how this is reflected in the modern edition's groupings of families of instruments for each setting. Users of the edition can easily determine how materials have been selected and assembled because editorial parts are shown with reduced-size note values and part names placed in brackets. In the Editorial Methods section, Kiernan provides admirably clear and concise details of the editorial processes that he followed, while the Critical Report offers further information on other source details rejected for the edition. The curious reader may nevertheless be left wondering if there were any specific areas in the editorial reconstruction that were particularly challenging or required some further detailed thought alongside the principles that informed the edition more generally. In any event, Kiernan's edition is eminently suitable for both scholars and performers seeking insight into the rich performance traditions surrounding works from Zelenka's late career in Dresden.

Zelenka's biography has generated considerable debate in recent years due to dissatisfaction with the notion in much earlier literature that this composer was somehow thwarted in his ambition and misanthropic in personality. Kiernan very deftly outlines the circumstances of Zelenka's professional life and disposes of the myth of his supposed malaise with his musical surroundings. The biographical overview provided in the Introduction is a particularly valuable encapsulation of scholarly findings on Zelenka in recent decades, and is an excellent resource for users with limited access to specialised venues for the dissemination of this research. Kiernan's account of the performing forces available to Zelenka at different points is also insightful, especially the suggestion (p.xv) that the 'Ave regina coelorum' settings may have been intended for performance by the Kapellknaben—a group of boys and young men who formed one of the two principal ensembles for performing sacred music at the Catholic court. Kiernan points out that the six settings of 'Ave regina coelorum' (ZWV 128) 'appear to have been his final Marian antiphon compositions' (p.xiii) but offers no further comments on other Marian antiphons. Even if they were not settings of the same text, further information on these antiphons would provide additional context for understanding the settings comprising ZWV 128.

On matters of compositional practice, Kiernan contextualises the six 'Ave regina coelorum' settings within Viennese liturgico-musical practices that were also observed in Dresden. Thus, the six settings of ZWV 128 display elements of various stylistic traits from *stile antico* to concertante, homophonic or polyphonic textures. Kiernan also provides some useful remarks on how ZWV 128 emerged from a period of Zelenka's life that witnessed many of his most successful settings of the Mass Ordinary and litanies. Other compositional traits more generally across Zelenka's output are mentioned (p.xii): polonaise rhythms, suspensions, virtuoso writing for wind instruments, and asymmetrical phrase groupings. Nevertheless, for admirers of Zelenka's music, Kiernan may appear reticent about disclosing aspects of compositional character that are evident in the six settings of 'Ave regina coelorum.' Beyond the aforementioned features, Zelenka's vivid approach to composition can also reveal itself through unexpected melodic turns, adventurous harmonic passages, and robust contrapuntal technique. While perusing the present edition, the user's attention may often be detained

by unusual details of vocal line, such as the diminished fourth C#–F in the soprano at bars 60–61 of setting 1, or the arresting ascending A# to F# followed by a downward leap to C# in the soprano in bar 15 of setting 5. In setting 4 there is a very fine instance of a descending chromatic bass harmonisation that recalls the progression sometimes known as the *passus duriusculus* or the lament bass (a progression that Zelenka employed several times across his output, always with a different harmonic and dramatic realisation). In ZWV 128 setting 4, at bars 42–44, the descending chromatic bass supports harmonies that start innocuously with a submediant chord, followed by a passing 6/4 but continue to a long-held (dotted minim) secondary diminished seventh chord that slides downwards to a V⁷ chord in last inversion (with a fermata to maintain the listener's attention). After two crotchet rests the music hurries away on a first inversion tonic chord where the resolution of the previous chord's seventh is heard an octave higher than expected.

Devotees of Zelenka's music are also well aware of its contrapuntal prowess and will not be disappointed by the subtleties of ZWV 128 setting 5 where the opening three bars in the alto and tenor return at bars 31–33 in invertible counterpoint at the octave in the soprano and alto. Furthermore, the tenor and bass then repeat this combination and are followed by manipulations of the material by different pairings of the voices for several more bars. Setting 6 of ZWV 128 includes material with the hallmarks of a double fugue. A three-part exposition begins at bar 30 and is followed by subject entries that work their way through several keys before an instrumental interlude leads to the exposition of another subject, this time for four voices. Setting 6 has further contrapuntal and structural properties that merit close examination and point to the ingenuity and refinement of Zelenka's compositional outlook.

Notwithstanding the absence of these kinds of analytical observations, Kiernan's edition of Zelenka's six settings of 'Ave regina coelorum' (ZWV 128) provides much material to occupy the most inquisitive of Zelenka enthusiasts. The meticulous approach to editorial methods, the concise presentation of salient aspects of the composer's biography, and a well-reasoned assessment of performance considerations all instil confidence that a wide range of users from performers to analysts can productively engage with this welcome addition to Zelenka scholarship.

About the Author

Denis Collins is Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Queensland. He has published widely on the history of contrapuntal techniques in music from the late fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and he is one of the founders of the Canons Database (www.canons.org.au). His current research has been supported by Discovery Projects awarded by the Australian Research Council.