

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Carlo Antonio BUFFAGNOTTI (Bologna 1660 - Turin c.1717)

An Elaborate Vase Decorated with Nymphs, Snakes, a Swan and a Musical Score: An Allegorical Composition for Giovanni Battista Bassani

Pen and brown ink and brown wash.

Extensively inscribed on the musical scores at the centre and at the lower left.

195 x 130 mm. (7 5/8 x 5 1/8 in.)

Watermark: Paschal lamb in a double circle [partial].

Previously attributed to the Florentine draughtsman and etcher Stefano Della Bella (1610-1664), this fine drawing, as Anna Bianco has confirmed, is by Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti. The present sheet is, in fact, one of Buffagnotti's earliest works and was presented by the artist to the composer Giovanni Battista Bassani sometime around 1684.

In a recent doctoral thesis on drawings related to musical manuscripts, Anna Bianco devoted much of an entire chapter to the present sheet. As she writes, '*Buffagnotti aimed to impress his contemporaries and secure patronage through meticulously crafted designs incorporating musical compositions. These compositions served as "artistic offerings" and strategic endeavors to gain*

recognition and further opportunities in the art world... Unlike the printed dedications of the period, which followed a set of codified rules, Buffagnotti's manuscript presentations operated through a different logic: they were conceived as unique, richly decorated artefacts offered as gifts but with the clear expectation of financial compensation.'

The lyrics of the music which form the central motif of this drawing are excerpted from the secular cantata *Ardea di due begli'occhi* by Giovanni Battista Bassani (c.1650-1716), to whom Buffagnotti presented the present sheet as a token of his friendship. The theme of the cantata is unrequited love, and, although the text is fragmentary, it can be read as '*Dimmi fortuna / parlami al Core piaga d'Amore si risarò / cieca importuna tu dici nò nò cieca impor- / tuna tu dici cosi(?) nò nò*', while the text continues at the bottom of the sheet with a brief extract from a later passage in the cantata, with the words '*eri pur felice o*'. (A rough translation would be: '*Tell me, Fortune, speak to my heart, it feels like the wound of love has healed, blind persistence you say no, no, blind persistence you only say no, no...you used to be happy, oh...*') The *Ardea di due begli'occhi* (also sometimes known as *Amante non creduto*) was published as part of a collection of Bassani's cantatas in 1684, shortly before the composer left Bologna to settle in Ferrara, and Buffagnotti's drawing must date to around the same time.

As Bianco writes, '*Buffagnotti's gift to Bassani reflects the tradition of presenting drawings as meaningful tokens, dating back to the sixteenth century. These drawings, considered autonomous works of art, offer a direct link to the artist's creative process. Buffagnotti's meticulous incorporation of Bassani's cantata excerpts into the drawing mirrors this tradition, infusing the artwork with profound meaning: through deliberate symbolism and fragmented representation, he pays homage to the composer's musical legacy while engaging in a nuanced dialogue between visual and musical expression.*' Buffagnotti is known to have presented similar drawings or prints as gifts to his contemporaries; a comparable example, likewise indebted to decorative motifs originally invented by Della Bella, is found in an unpublished etching of a *Musical Capriccio* of 1693, dedicated by Buffagnotti to the Venetian singer Piera Ghei, in the collection of the Civico Museo della Musica in Bologna.

Much of Buffagnotti's work in the early part of his career reveals the influence of Stefano Della Bella, and in particular the ornament prints commissioned from the Florentine artist by Parisian publishers. The motif of the seated nymphs in the present drawing finds parallels in some examples from a set of decorative etchings by Della Bella, the *Raccolta di varii capriccii et nove inventioni di cartelle et ornamenti* published in Paris in 1646, while the nymphs and the form of the vase itself are akin to those found in Della Bella's suite of six etchings of several different designs for vases, published as *Raccolta di vasi diversi* in c.1646. Indeed, the nymphs in the present sheet are particularly close to those flanking one of the vases in one of the *Raccolta di vasi diversi* etchings.

Literature:

London, Bernard Quaritch Ltd, *Catalogue 1230: Art & Architecture*, 1996, pp.5-6, no.7 (as Buffagnotti); 'The Salon du Dessin, Palais de la Bourse, Paris, 17th-22nd March 2004', *The Burlington Magazine*, March 2004, p.VI [advertisement] (as Stefano Della Bella); Paris, Paul Prouté S.A., *Catalogue della Bella*, 2004, pp.16-17, no.7 (as Stefano Della Bella); Anna Bianco, *Images for the Music: Drawings and Secular Cantatas*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Leiden University, 2025, p.5, p.17, pp.426-431, pp.438-441, p.449, no.4.01, illustrated p.449 (as Buffagnotti).

Artist description:

The late 17th century Bolognese printmaker, theatre designer and musician Carlo Antonio Buffagnotti received his training in the Bolognese studio of the painter and quadraturista Domenico Santi, known

as Il Mengazzino, who provided the young artist with a grounding in ornamental design and illusionistic architecture. Buffagnotti came to be particularly known as a decorator of printed music, particularly in the early part of his career. Between 1680 and 1695 he provided engraved illustrations for a significant number of musical works, including the 'Concertino per violino e violoncello op.IV' by Giuseppe Torelli, two collections of songs by Bolognese and Emilian composers, as well as Giuseppe Jacchini's 'Sonate a violino e violoncello...opera prima' and manuscripts of secular cantatas set to music by Giovanni Paolo Colonna and presented as gifts to such important patrons as Francesco II d'Este, Duke of Modena and Reggio, and Cosimo III de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Another work extensively illustrated with engravings by Buffagnotti was a 'Sonate per camera a violino e violoncello di vari autori', containing twelve sonatas for violin and cello by ten different Bolognese composers, including Torelli, Jacchini and Giuseppe Aldovrandini. Buffagnotti was himself an accomplished musician and composer. He became a member of the Accademia Filarmonica in 1695 and, also in the 1690s, published a number of original musical compositions as 'Menuetti, sarabande et varij caprici di Carlo Buffagnotti', illustrated by his drawings.

Towards the end of the 17th century Buffagnotti began working more as a scenographer, notably for a staging of Conte Pirro Albergati's pastoral opera 'Gli amici' in Bologna in 1699, and well as a designer of ornament, as can be seen in such works as the 'Soffiti inventati intagliati p. Carlo Buffagnotti' of c.1694 and the 'Vari caprici di Carlo Buffagnotti dedicato al merito del si.re Filippo Pirotti', which appeared at around the same time. He worked closely with the architect and stage designer Ferdinando Galli Bibiena, and between 1703 and 1708 etched most of the seventy plates in Bibiena's seminal 'Varie opere di prospettive'. He is said to have worked as a painter and stage designer in Genoa and Ferrara and was also active as a drawing master to members of the Bolognese nobility. Buffagnotti is not documented after 1717. Only a handful of drawings by the artist, all in pen and ink, are known; examples are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, as well as the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice.