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"Learning Is Doing:" A Scholar's Impact on the Arts

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"Learning is doing." These words of John O'Malley, albeit terse in nature, landed suddenly on me with weight and clarity. They crystallize in many ways the essence of Jesuit education, philosophy, and their "manner of proceeding." I had asked John to read a work in progress, an essay on the cultivation and patronage of music by the Society in eighteenth-century Naples for a forthcoming conference in Italy entitled, "The Jesuits and Music." In the process, I had located within the vast fragmented archives of the city a sacred oratorio whose provenance pointed towards the principal local Jesuit school, the "Collegio Nobile." Beyond the music manuscript itself, there was little supporting documentation to understand its place in Naples.

John's succinct point, uttered after a leisurely dinner featuring a nice Barolo and several courses of his favored Italian cuisine, prefaced his detailed recounting of themes in my paper, offering in equal measures praise and points to reflect upon. Although it was difficult to move on from his initial comment ("Anthony, I really liked your essay"), as I wanted it to linger, the ensuing dialogue broadened my purview considerably. As a historical musicologist, my training focused first and foremost on the music of the oratorio itself, the musician who created it, and the standard vocabularies of composition. John invited me into a new world, one in which music served as an integral form of human expression which had the potential to articulate the broader themes of faith, while engaging the larger communities of the city, even the Italian peninsula, both past and present.

A historian whose keen sense of larger cultural context (grounded always in humanistic and intellectual rigor), John's interest in the essay reflected an eagerness to expand his own knowledge of "Art and Performance" within the

Society and church. Referenced originally in the aforesaid chapter of his seminal *Four Cultures of the West*, John raised the issue of how to interpret musical works imparting catechism and evangelization, while also valuing them as purely aesthetic objects. This essential question implored my predecessors (most notably T. Frank Kennedy, S.J. and Piotr Nawrot, SVM) and me to delve more carefully into the tradition of creating original music not solely for the liturgy (Mass and Hours primarily), but also works of literature, art, and dance for performances open to the public, often within educational institutions. John's contributions provided the keys to unlocking—which had seemed to be to musicologists a parallel world of existence—the profound role of the Society in shaping both artistic practices and larger cultural forces.

This dichotomy struck at the heart of my article, which brought into dialogue the early modern Kingdom of Naples, its four Jesuit colleges, and associated churches with their wider impact on contemporary artistic culture, focusing on music. My essay illustrated how the Collegio Nobile in Naples enlisted the finest contemporary composers and performers in the eighteenth century, who taught the students, helping them to create their own vocal music ranging from opera to oratorio to an array of instrumental genres. This manner of "accompaniment" by the engaged musical luminaries extended to performing alongside students in the colleges. Utilizing the recovered oratorio, entitled *Trionfo per l'Assunzione della Santissima Vergine* (1705) by the long-forgotten priest and composer Nicola Ceva, my article demonstrated (with John's own work in mind) how its poetic narrative, dramatic themes, and characters themselves reflected the carefully calibrated curriculum of a Jesuit education. Its musical language also fit the well-established

manner of accommodation, using contemporary modes to inform, to enlighten, to guide. The result was a much more holistic interpretation of the original composition, one befitting the interrelated religious, social, and artistic networks that often coalesced in the creation of art and its performance.

What followed in the aftermath of the conference, to which John graciously contributed the keynote address, surprised me even more. He suggested to a colleague and me that we take a further, even bolder step: present the oratorio at Georgetown University in the coming year. In the subsequent Fall term, I led a seminar, whose outward intention was to perform the oratorio in public at the residence of the Jesuit community on campus. Through the generous collaboration of numerous colleagues, eight handpicked students read Jesuit history, studied primary musical sources, acquired the diverse frameworks of early modern education, contemporary society and the church. They also received a primer of the Spiritual Exercises from John himself. The impacts of this approach were both subtle and yet profound: students were immersed in not only the learning of the musical composition, but also the embodiment (in John's words, "doing") of the historical narrative regarding the Society and early modern culture.

The influence of John's scholarship on the arts (and me) has extended far beyond this singular experience. Yet, it is symptomatic of his engagement and understanding of the arts to envision his own work within broader contexts, often beyond traditional notions of scholarship. His gift for the *ars rhetorica*, moreover, has led me down paths unexpected in my own work. What unfolded in the next fourteen years at Georgetown University underlined John's continued commitment to the arts and to higher education. Ensuing collaborations included annual class visits with his students, ongoing partnerships for Jesuit Heritage Week featuring music from the Jesuit Reductions of Bolivia (and elsewhere) as well as a rare public performance of the Palestrina *Missa Papae Marvelli* in 2013. With each experience, John's scholarship and his warm generosity accompanied us to learn and to do. 