



# IMAGO MUSICAE

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INHALT  
CONTENTS  
INDICE  
TABLE DES MATIÈRES

---

ARTICLES

Jordi Ballester

Musical iconography in the ephemeral Kingdom of Majorca (1262–1349):  
symbolic and metaphoric meanings in the *Leges Palatinae* (1337) miniatures ♦ 7

Fabien Guilloux

Saint François d'Assise et l'ange musicien : un *topos* iconographique et musical chrétien ♦ 29

Florence Gétreau

Le monument de Henry Du Mont et la sculpture funéraire à l'époque du père Ménestrier ♦ 77

Werner Telesko

Die Musikerdenkmäler und ihre Stellung innerhalb des Denkmalkults der  
Habsburgermonarchie des 19. Jahrhunderts ♦ 107

Wolfgang Sandberger

Johannes Brahms im Komponistenhimmel: zum Deckengemälde der Zürcher Tonhalle  
von 1895 ♦ 129

Maren Goltz

Feine Unterschiede: Komponisten, Dichter und Interpreten in der Memorialikonographie  
Meinings ♦ 145

Jean-Michel Nectoux

Isadora et Nijinski : danser l'antique ♦ 187

RECENSIONES

Anne Ibos-Augé

Martine Clouzot, *Le jongleur. Mémoire de l'image au Moyen Âge. Figures, figurations et musicalité  
dans les manuscrits enluminés (1200–1330)*. Berne : Peter Lang, 2011 ♦ 201

Aaron S. Allen

Benedetta Saggiotti, *Beethoven, ritratti e immagini. Uno studio sull'iconografia*. Torino: EDT / De  
Sono Associazione per la Musica, 2010 ♦ 205

Auctores ♦ 213

Directions to contributors / Hinweise für Autoren / Consignes aux auteurs / Istruzioni  
per gli autori ♦ 215

Benedetta Saglietti, *Beethoven, ritratti e immagini. Uno studio sull'iconografia*. Torino: EDT / De Sono Associazione per la Musica, 2010. xvi, 208 pp., [24] pp. of color plates, appendices, bibliography, index of names (*Tesi* 13).

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In 1987, the art historian *Alessandra Comini* published her monumental *The Changing Image of Beethoven*, which was both justifiably critiqued (see Newman 1988) and well regarded enough to merit a paperback reprint in 2008. Just two years later, Benedetta Saglietti published *Beethoven, ritratti e immagini*, based on her “tesi di laurea” (university thesis) from studies with the eminent Italian musicologist and Beethoven scholar Giorgio Pestelli in Turin. Saglietti’s book collects in one place all the iconography (regardless of medium) of Beethoven that appeared before 1827. Comini’s second chapter also deals with the images of Beethoven from during his lifetime; she compares them with his appearance and character as described then and as we understand today.

How is Saglietti’s book distinct from Comini’s? Comini’s work followed the iconographic reception of Beethoven for a century, up to the *fin de siècle*; Saglietti remains in the period up to 1827 with only the occasional foray beyond the composer’s lifetime. Where Comini was interested in the myth of Beethoven (as well as the man), Saglietti is concerned with the man himself and others’ perceptions of him (as well as the myth). While Comini’s work is a fluid text (i. e., each chapter does not contain subsections or section breaks) that develops in thematic and non-chronological ways, Saglietti’s is well organized in clearly chronological sections. In essence, Comini’s book is a reception history of images of Beethoven; Saglietti’s, meanwhile, is an iconographic study that parallels Beethoven’s biography.

Saglietti has a further aim: *divulgazione*, although she likely would not use that term to describe her work. The English translation “popularizing” has some negative connotations; but by no means is Saglietti’s book – amply researched, rich with primary sources, heavily footnoted – a popular approach to Beethoven intended for wide audiences. Rather, this book is distinctly scholarly. Saglietti recognizes (xi) that the area of Beethoven iconography scholarship is lacking in Italian language literature, and so she has included in translation many foreign-language (especially German and English) primary and secondary sources herein and has worked with major archives from Bonn to New York to Vienna. In addition to Beethoven’s letters and conversation books, she makes ample use of the biographers Anton Felix Schindler – “il biografo meno attendibile” – and Alexander Wheelock Thayer – “quello [biografo] più rigoroso” (xii) – as well as the psychoanalytic approach of Maynard Solomon (1977). *Beethoven, ritratti e immagini* can be *divulgativo* in the sense that it is making available resources for scholars in general and Italians in particular. Rather than just regurgitate previous findings, however, she occasionally offers correctives (e. g., an improved dating of the drawing by Gustav Adolph Hippus, 65) and new insights (e. g., an analysis of what an average Viennese person before 1827 might have seen and known of Beethoven’s visage, 138–40).

To distinguish her method, Saglietti categorized previous authors' approaches to Beethoven iconography: the life and works model (Schmidt-Görg and Schmidt 1970), reception and metamorphosis with chronology as secondary (Comini 1987 [2008]), galleries that have the images as mere support to biography (Robbins Landon 1970, Ley 1925), and discussions of the pictorial and plastic arts (Frimmel 1905 and 1923). Saglietti says: "Per la prima volta, con questa pubblicazione, viene discusso criticamente l'intero *corpus* di saggi relativi all'iconografia beethoveniana, compresi i più recenti" (xiv). Saglietti's method is to take all the images produced during Beethoven's life as documents to illustrate, literally and intellectually, his biography. In essence, she seeks an "equilibrio" between iconographic discussion (material aspects of the works, artists, transmission, provenance, etc.) and biography (from the letters, reminiscences of friends, social relations, press reports, etc.) in order to "tratteggiare un'immagine beethoveniana complessiva" (xv).

I find this approach interesting, but it also results in some problems. The organization of the book as a whole makes it useful as a reference, and indeed it is a careful iconographic study that considers an immense body of literature and material. But to read it as biographical, even if it is not intended to be a biography per se, I am less convinced. Before I return to my critique, I will first address the mostly successful form of the book and a few interesting elements.

The book is divided into an introduction, nine chronological chapters, a conclusion, color plates, two biographical appendices (of artists and of others), an extensive bibliography (with fifteen category subdivisions), and a names index. The text proper takes up only 142 of the approximately 250 pages of the book; the rest are dedicated to the prefatory and end matter and to the plates. The color plates in the "Apparato iconografico" are small — most are 6 x 8 cm, but a few are larger, up to ca. 11 x 14 cm — yet nicely reproduced on glossy pages in a separate section of the book (between the text proper and end matter). For most images, online versions are available in larger formats; the bibliography includes web resources (often signaled in footnotes) to pursue such research so one can make more detailed examinations than the reproductions in the book allow. Nevertheless, it is immensely useful to have the plates in hand for quick reference. The fact that the price of the book is so affordable — likely thanks to the small size of the reproductions, but also probably to the subventions of the De Sono Association and the Turin Chamber of Commerce — makes purchasing it an excellent investment: even if one cannot read Italian, the well-labeled thirty nine plates are worth the price of the book alone.

Eight of the nine chapters are titled "Ritratti" ("Portraits") plus a chronological scope, with one titled "Vienna 1801." That uniquely titled chapter, however, functions in the same manner as the others: amidst a summary of details regarding Beethoven's biography and musical works, each chapter contains labeled sections in which Saglietti focuses on a single portrait or closely related group of portraits from each period; she then relates them to sources such as Beethoven's letters and contemporaneous observations of him. Saglietti says (25) that her chronological division of the chapters is a function of the iconographic discourse rather than any existing schema (the traditional

three periods; Lockwood's first, second and final maturities; or Dalhaus's five periods). The chapters are divided as follows: 1770–1800, 1801, 1802–05, 1806–09, 1810–14, 1815–18, 1819–20, 1821–23, 1824–27.

Such organization makes the book useful for reference and consultation. Thankfully, Saglietti's text does not follow such rigid chronology in a slavish manner. For example, figures 3, 4 and 5 are three related engravings; the latter two (1801 and 1804) were based on Johann Joseph Neidl's first (1801), and Saglietti discusses all three in the chapter "Vienna 1801" and keeps them together in the iconographic apparatus — despite figure 5 dating from outside that chapter's chronological scope, and despite figure 6 being dated two years before figure 5. Of course, Saglietti's goal is to provide an iconographical study to parallel Beethoven's biography, and life does unfold chronologically — although a thematic (e. g. by medium, artist, anecdote, issue, etc.) rather than chronological structure could be equally productive for an iconographic reference and for general understanding. Regardless, the chronology and the chapter sub-sections that clearly indicate which image is to be discussed together provide a well-organized reference framework.

Saglietti relies extensively on primary sources: the letters, conversation books, and reminiscences of others, in addition to the iconography. The most interesting sections are those that contextualize the portraits, for example through analysis of the clothes and fashions (28–29, 61–62, *passim*); through symbolism (e. g. of Apollo, 31–5); or through a productive synthesis of iconography with letters, posthumous observations, twentieth-century scholarly observations, and provenance (e. g. the case of Joseph Karl Stieler, 91–100). The discussion of Christian Horneman's 1802 ivory miniature (25–30) is introduced nicely with Beethoven's letter to Franz Wegeler. This letter indicated an improvement in the composer's spirits, which Saglietti relates to invigorated connections with Beethoven's Rhenish compatriots, such as Stephan von Breuning. Later, Breuning and Beethoven had a brief falling out, but in November 1804 Beethoven apologized and sent the miniature to him. Such gifting of portraits also informs Saglietti's interpretations of Beethoven's opinion about the artistic works (121): after Johann Stephan Decker's portrait appeared (1824, fig. 32), Beethoven gave a copy of Friedrich Dürck's lithograph (1826, fig. 27) of the famous Stieler portrait to his friend Wegeler, indicating, perhaps, Beethoven's dislike of the Decker / approval of the Dürck.

A particularly successful and oft-referenced connection that Saglietti makes is between particular portraits and Franz Klein's life mask and bust of Beethoven. Given the numerous references to Klein throughout the book, this discussion or some derivative of it might have been worthy of a place earlier in the book had it not been organized chronologically. Often the details of provenance are themselves interesting, such as those regarding Johann Christoph Heckel's portrait that was held privately and ended up in the United States, thus not being the subject of much reproduction (67–69); this is an example of the moments when Saglietti abandons the chronological biographical approach and heads more for an iconographic study by considering provenance, reception, and dissemination.

Saglietti departs from the method of relying on just pre-1827 portraits with her discussion of August von Klöber (74–82). Here she includes the well known images of Johann Peter Lyser (published 1833, fig. 20) and of Franz Hegi (published 1834, fig. 21) that depict Beethoven composing the Pastoral Symphony. Saglietti relates these to Klöber's reminiscences, published in 1864, in which he told of his meetings with Beethoven in Mödling, indoors while the composer posed for the artist and outdoors when they encountered each other taking walks in the area. Saglietti uses Klöber's and Lyser's portraits to provide some conjecture regarding the lost painting by Klöber, of which there remain only studies (fig. 22, a well known pencil portrait with Beethoven's hair awry, and fig. 23, of Beethoven's hands). Likewise, Saglietti includes some copies (fig. 4), but not others, even when they come from during Beethoven's life (e. g. "Thayer's copy" from ca. 1808 of Willibrord Joseph Mähler's portrait of 1804–05; 31, fn. 24). Further, Saglietti includes some initial portrait studies and drafts, such as fig. 22 and fig. 23, yet not others, such as Stieler's study for what many, including Saglietti (91), refer to as the most famous portrait of Beethoven; instead, Saglietti mentions Stieler's draft study only in a footnote (92, fn. 47) and indicates that it is available online from the Beethoven-Haus. In a later footnote (124, fn. 38), Saglietti indicates that the original drawing by Johann Nepomuk Hoehle of Beethoven in the rain was lost, but that black and white photographic reproductions exist (see B 43 in the Beethoven-Haus collection). Why were those not included? Keeping down cost and providing quality reproductions may have been factors, and of course not everything could be included (particularly lost items), but the end result with Saglietti's flexibility with method is that there are some curious omissions.

Saglietti makes an interesting connection with Czerny's observation comparing Beethoven to Robinson Crusoe (29):

Czerny mette a confronto il compositore, progressivamente sempre più isolato dal mondo sonoro circostante, con il naufrago dell'omonimo romanzo, a quel tempo popolarissimo: nel periodo intercorso tra le opere di Neidl, Riedel e Scheffner risalenti al 1801 (figg. 3, 4 e 5) e quella di Horneman (realizzata nel 1802 e spedita nel 1804), Beethoven aveva preso coscienza dei suoi problemi d'udito (ipoacusia) e steso il Testamento di Heiligenstadt, anche se non aveva ancora smarrito del tutto la fiducia in una possibile guarigione.

Such observations successfully contextualize and explain the extant Beethoven iconography. Yet the brief discussion that follows – mostly outlining the great productivity of these years and listing many of the works Beethoven completed leading up to the *Eroica* – does not connect nearly as well with the iconography. The beginnings and ends of many other sections also seem like attempts to fill in the details of Beethoven's life, make the biography seem somehow complete, demonstrate facility with using the letters to reconstruct a historical narrative (e. g., 83–84), and/or just move on to the next portrait. These dense and somewhat disorienting moments rarely offer insights connected to the main endeavor of examining the iconography. (For example on page 43: do we really need to be reminded about the switching of the numeration and naming of the Fifth and Sixth

Symphonies, particularly when it has no bearing on the iconography under discussion?) This problem likely arises from the confused (or hybrid) genre status of the book.

Because of portraits and artists that come up throughout the book and because of the chronological ordering, the book does require some extensive cross-referencing, which Saglietti usually (but not always: e. g., 119) keeps in footnotes. The footnotes can often be overwhelmingly detailed, combining both extensive citations with further primary sources and further observations; sometimes the footnotes themselves take up more space on the page than the text proper (cf. 16, 54, 63, 104, 110, 124, and many others). At the same time, however, there are occasionally details in the text that should be in footnotes (e. g., cf. 79, fig. 22, and fig. 23). Materials in the footnotes and the text often reproduce materials from the biographies in the appendix (e. g., cf. 45 and 153, fn. 31, fig. 10). While the appendices and footnotes might seem to be there to make the text less dense, they end up making the book a convoluted read, particularly when one must also necessarily jump back and forth between the text and the color plates. Regarding the color plates, this complexity is not an easy problem to solve (particularly when keeping the price of the book so affordable), but it is one that is exacerbated by the extensive footnotes and duplications.

Piecing together the genesis, dissemination, and provenance of various works can be delicate work. But in the discussion of sculptures by Anton Dietrich and Josef Danhauser, the aforementioned complexity combined with that delicacy to cause a bit of confusion; I have conferred with Saglietti to provide some clarification regarding the following four points. Dietrich made multiple busts of Beethoven, and Saglietti discusses two of them in addition to his (now lost) pencil drawing. First, the initial bust is discussed in the chapter “Ritratti 1821–23,” and the text of the plate (fig. 28) gives the date 1821. Yet Saglietti’s text twice says 1820: on page 101 it is referred to as “il primo, del 1820”; and on page 94, in the previous chapter “Ritratti 1819–20,” we learn that the exposition held at S. Anna in April 1820 included Dietrich’s bust. The confusion stems in part from the Wien Museum catalog dating the bust to 1821, but either it or another like it appeared in 1820 at S. Anna; it is entirely possible (as Saglietti expressed to me) that Dietrich made the bust in 1820 for the exposition but later he or someone else dated it or a copy of it to 1821. Second, Dietrich’s second bust, from 1822, has shorter hair than the earlier one, in classical style (“all’antica”). Saglietti has seen photographs of it, yet in a complicated sentence (103, beginning “Del busto all’antica...”) she reports that they are “attualmente perdute,” with the confusion being if those photographs (“fotografie”) or the copies of the bust (“due copie”) are lost. Saglietti did see photographs of reproductions (in the Beethoven-Haus, shelfmark Ley, Band VIII, Nr. 57) that were out of the scope of inclusion because the original statues were lost. Third, Dietrich made a pencil drawing of Beethoven, which Saglietti reports erroneously as B 59 in the Beethoven-Haus collection (103, fn. 9); B 59 is a lithograph by Faustin Herr after Dietrich’s drawing, while there are numerous other such lithographs based on Dietrich’s busts and drawings (many held by the Beethoven-Haus). Fourth, Danhauser’s bust is included in

the chapter “Ritratti 1821–23,” even though Saglietti dates it to after Beethoven’s death and fig. 29 provides the Beethoven-Haus dating of “1827 (?)” Saglietti broke the chronological ordering here to bring together two works of similar medium (plaster) and emphasize the relations between the two men. Understood, but for me, and given the above confusion, this inclusion of Danhauser only provided further disorientation. The section ends with interesting indications that later works and artists — Danhauser’s famous “Liszt Playing Piano” (c.1840) and Caspar Clemens von Zumbusch’s monument in Vienna (1873–80) — made use of these busts, but given the chronological limitations, Saglietti chose not to deal with them further than brief mentions and footnotes.

I find the most successful part of the book to be the conclusion (137–42), and in particular two aspects of it. The first regards Saglietti’s analysis of the image that a Viennese individual would have of Beethoven between 1770 and 1827. Seven artists’ works — five portraits and two sculptures (and their immediate copies) — are enumerated as providing the public images of Beethoven: Neidl’s engraving of 1801 (fig. 3, which resulted in widely disseminated copies), Klein’s bust of 1812 (fig. 12, based on his life mask of Beethoven), Blasius Höfel’s engraving of 1814 (fig. 14, copied and eventually on the cover of the 1817 volume of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*), Mähler’s portrait of 1815 (fig. 19), Dürck’s lithograph (fig. 27) of Stieler’s famous portrait of 1820, Dietrich’s bust of 1821 (fig. 28), and Decker’s portrait of 1824 (fig. 32). (Oddly, in this section, 138–40, Saglietti reports diffusion to the United Kingdom regarding Neidl, and she digresses midway to mention the “rappresentazione eroico-mitica” by von Klöber and by Hippius — neither of which, per Saglietti, even circulated during Beethoven’s life.)

Saglietti’s second important conclusion regards the aspect of perspective — not just artistic but also scholarly and popular. Even in considering those visual works created during Beethoven’s lifetime, the result is kaleidoscopic (138):

Gli oggetti d’arte allineati in questa galleria formano una sorta di mosaico che offre interpretazioni diverse dello stesso soggetto [...] si può affermare che la figura poliedrica che oggi emerge grazie a esse [sc. il ristretto numero di opere diffuse] restò per lungo tempo una rappresentazione intima, nota unicamente agli amici più stretti e ai mecenati.

This conclusion is similar to Comini’s point (2008: 34) regarding the images of Beethoven from during his lifetime: “The one factor in common is that they [the major effigies] are all different. Even during his lifetime the visual Beethoven was a theme with intriguing and independent variations.” Saglietti rightly states that “un’iconografia non può mai essere fissata una volta per tutte” (142). This point connects nicely with one from Saglietti’s introduction: As Carl Dahlhaus (1987) recognized, the Beethoven of our imagination is made up of objective biographical elements as well as legends. Saglietti, citing Dahlhaus, recognizes that it may well be impossible to extirpate such composite images but hopes that her book offers an opportunity “per precisarle e per sondare come quelle raffigurazioni siano venute formandosi dentro di noi” (xvi).

In the end, this book demonstrates that deciphering biography from myth — even when drawing on tangible and supposedly unchanging iconographic and primary

literary sources — is difficult when dealing with a figure such as Beethoven. On the whole, Saglietti's book is interesting and useful, but given this challenge I find that it tries to do too many things. This is probably due to its didactic origins as a thesis; its blending of genre as a biography and iconographic study; its further status as a reference work; and, to some extent, its being targeted at both the musicological world (i. e., Beethoven scholars) and a more general (if scholarly oriented) Italian audience. As a thesis, Saglietti's work is very impressive, particularly for a first university degree. As a biographical study, I find it less successful, suffering as it does from a hard-to-follow narrative and confusing digressions; instead of trying to provide a quasi-comprehensive chronology/biography, perhaps more attention could have been given to considering the issue of the Beethoven myth. As an iconographic study, Saglietti's work is more successful, even if it is not always methodologically consistent. As a reference book, pulling together as it does many sources in the bibliography and plates (in an affordable print), this book is a useful contribution to Beethoven studies, particularly in Italian-language scholarship.

Aaron S. Allen

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