

I gladly like to respond to Michael Reichenbach's request for an overview of the e-book "**GIOVANNI BATTISTA GERVASIO, mandolinist, composer and teacher to FREDERIKA SOPHIA WILHELMINA, Crown Princess of all Prussia, Princess of Orange-Nassau, and Gervasio's acquaintance with the most prominent DUTCH MUSIC PRINTERS**", as follows:

This work, divided into two parts, reflects my years of research into the life and work of the Neapolitan mandolinist, composer and teacher Giovanni Battista Gervasio (c. 1725 – after 1785). It is a study that also endeavours to place Gervasio's life, and that of several of his contemporaries, within a historical framework. By exploring the environment in which he moved, the book attempts to recreate a picture of daily life and how musicians earned a living in that era. Particular attention is paid to the inner workings of the music engravers active in The Hague and the music publishers operating in Amsterdam. This focus was chosen primarily because very little research has been conducted on this subject until now, and because many new facts came to light during the process. Spanning more than 365 pages, this work not only presents new biographical facts and insights regarding Gervasio, his family, and their travels, but also examines the 18th-century mandolin methods of Gervasio, Leone, Fouchetti, Corrette, and Denis. These sources shed new light on historical playing techniques, plectrum (quill) making, playing posture, left- and right-hand positions, and other essential aspects of historical performance practice. Consequently, it offers a solid foundation for those aiming for a more historically informed interpretation of the 18th-century mandolin repertoire. The book highlights, among others, the following historical aspects:

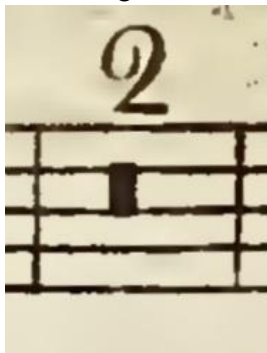
The first part of the book explores the life and work of Giovanni Battista Gervasio and his connections to, among others, the French Royal Court and his relationship with Crown Princess Frederika Sophia Wilhelmina of Prussia (who, through her marriage to William V, Stadtholder of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands, was also Princess of Orange-Nassau). Furthermore, it illustrates the Gervasio family's familiarity with European royal courts and the presence of the mandolin within Italian, German, French, English, and Dutch high society. Gervasio's musical connections are also revealed; for instance, a letter from Anna Maria Mozart to Leopold Mozart dated November 4, 1777, indicates that Gervasio was already present in the Netherlands in 1766 where he met the Mozart family. This demonstrates that Gervasio was already an itinerant musician traveling across Europe at the very beginning of his career, and that it was only later that he settled for several years first in Paris and then in London. It was in those cities that his *Mandolin Method* (1767) and his Op. III, "*Airs for the Mandoline*" (c. 1772), were published respectively. The latter music album was long considered lost but has been rediscovered through this research and has since been (re)published. Moreover, this research brings to light a wealth of unknown facts about Gervasio's personal life. He initially lived and worked as a mandolinist and composer in Naples, from where he undertook travels beyond the borders of Italy. One of the earliest foreign journeys uncovered by this study is his trip to the Netherlands in 1766, during the festivities surrounding the wedding of William V and Frederika Sophia Wilhelmina, Crown Princess of Prussia. It was here that Giovanni Battista Gervasio met the Mozart family, who were also present in the Netherlands for the wedding celebrations, among others. From 1775 to 1777, Gervasio stayed in the Netherlands for a second and longer period, this time accompanied by his wife, the soprano Marguerite Prenseng. Together, the couple had a daughter named Catharina. Sadly, the girl passed away three months later and was buried in Rotterdam on March 24, 1777. Later that year, Gervasio seemingly travelled to Paris to have his "*Six Sonates pour mandoline, ou violon & basse*" (Op. VI?) published. Following this, the Gervasios travelled to Germany, where they gave concerts in Mannheim and Frankfurt am Main. In 1779, their names reappear in the local newspaper of Warsaw, the capital of Poland, where the birth of their second daughter, named Catherine (likely after their first-born child), took place. Here it also becomes evident that Gervasio, much like Frederick the Great, for instance, and many of his music colleagues, was a Freemason and that he was known as a "*frère*" (brother) in the Warsaw and Berlin Masonic lodges. Berlin, incidentally, is also the place where Gervasio's wife performed as *Prima Donna* at the

Royal Opera in 1779, in the presence of Frederick the Great and his court. It is not until 1781 that the Gervasios resurface in Italy, where they gave a performance at the *Teatro S. Pietro* in Trieste in August of that year. Virtually nothing is known about the long period of three and a half years that followed. Gervasio is not heard of again until December 1784, when a review in a Parisian newspaper mentioned that he had performed his own compositions during a *Concert Spirituel* in the French capital. Months after this notice, an advertisement appeared in a 1785 newspaper in Grenoble, a city in southeastern France near the Italian border, in which Gervasio promoted himself to the local population as a teacher of singing and mandolin, profiling himself as the teacher of the Hereditary Princess of Prussia. He had evidently travelled from Paris to Grenoble sometime between December 1784 and July 1785. After that, the record falls silent regarding Giovanni Battista Gervasio, leading to the general assumption that he passed away not long thereafter.

The most important component of this first section of the book, however, concerns the Op. V album titled “*SEI DUETTI per Due Mandolini o Due Violini*” (SIX DUETS for two mandolins or two violins) composed by Sign. Giovan BATTISTA GERVASIO. What attracted the most attention was that the music volume was dedicated by Gervasio to an unspecified “*PRINCIPESSA EREDITARIA DI TUTTE LE PRUSSIE*” (Hereditary/Crown Princess of all Prussia). And this was not the only detail that aroused the author’s curiosity. The highly unusual fact that there are absolutely no indications regarding the year of publication, place name, engraver, or publisher on the cover or within the album itself also prompted a detailed investigation, especially since musicologists in the past had only resorted to speculation and continued to air incorrect conclusions about this subject in their publications.

In addition, the research includes an in-depth study of the most prominent Dutch music printers and music dealers/publishers active in the second half of the 18th century. An attempt is made to present a vivid and accurate picture of the activities of the The Hague-based music engravers Anton Stechwey and James Turpin, as well as those of the Amsterdam-based music dealers and publishers (mostly of German origin) Siegfried Markordt, Johann Julius Hummel, and his brother, the Hague-based publisher Burghard Hummel. In particular, the research into the specific work of music printing of these craftsmen for their clients, including Dutch and Italian composers like i.e. Karel van Boetzelaaer, Johann Andreas Kauchlitz Colizzi, Francesco Pasquale Ricci, and Giovanni Battista Gervasio, yielded previously unpublished insights. These insights demonstrate, among other things, the involvement of the Stechwey firm and the music dealer Markordt in the creation of Gervasio’s 1775 Op. V, the music album containing the six duets for two mandolins or two violins. A striking example regarding the evidence for this is the numbering sequence used by Anton Stechwey and Siegfried Markordt for their music editions.

Within this sequence, it is particularly notable that the numeral “2”, used for instance in the page numbering or above “silent” bars, differs from practically all other sheet music issued by other



publishers both within the Netherlands and abroad. This discovery puts an end to the uncertainty regarding where Giovanni Battista Gervasio’s Op. V was published at the time, leading to the conclusion that the Op. V album was engraved, printed, and published in the Netherlands. Added to this is the discovery of a deluxe leather-bound and gold-stamped copy of Gervasio’s Op. V in the State Library of Moscow.

This album further heightened the significance of the research. Apart from a few pages and a full-page illustration of a young lady playing the mandolin outdoors, it is identical to the most well-known copy of Gervasio’s Op. V, which is held in the library of the Civico Museo Teatrale in Trieste. Based on

the extra watermarked pages used in this luxury album, it has been established that this was handmade paper of the highest quality, originating from the renowned Dutch paper mill of the papermakers firm by J. Honig & Zoonen in Zaandijk. These were the exact same papermakers who, in 1776, supplied the paper for the broadsides used to print the *American Declaration of Independence*. Partly through

an analysis of the initials on this deluxe leather-bound copy, it could be concluded that the "*Principessa Ereditaria di Tutte le Prussie*" could be none other than the Prussian Crown Princess Frederika Sophia Wilhelmina, Princess of Orange-Nassau and Princess of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands.



A photo of the deluxe edition that holds the six duets for two mandolins or two violins in Giovanni Battista Gervasio's Op. V. Dedicated to the Hereditary Princess of all Prussia, the volume is enhanced by an illustration of a young lady playing a Neapolitan mandolin outdoor. Photo by the Russian State Library, Moscow.

And these are just a few of the many new facts that have come to light through this research and are discussed in the book.

The second part of the book concerns the republication of Gervasio's Op. V. This particular edition surfaced at a music auction several years ago and differs from the first edition (discussed above) in that it explicitly states Amsterdam as the place of publication and S. Markordt as the publisher on the title page. The largest and most striking difference, however, is that the title page dedicates the musical work to an entirely different person than the Prussian Crown Princess. Indeed, this second edition is dedicated to a certain *Signor Conte di Naimberg*. The research into this figure within Dutch and German history, during the era of French expansionism led by Napoleon Bonaparte, proves to be a fascinating quest across Europe between the years 1780 and 1820 in many respects. Furthermore, it uncovers previously unknown facts about the inner workings and lines of succession within the Markordt and Hummel family music businesses. Operating out of Amsterdam, The Hague, and Berlin, the Hummel firm in particular had grown by 1800 into one of Europe's most prominent and innovative music publishers, eventually absorbing the rival Markordt music warehouse.

Whether you are an aficionado of music history, a mandolin student or teacher, or a performing mandolinist, this publication, with all its historical background, is a "must-have" to expand your knowledge and will make an essential addition to your music library.

With kind regards,
Alex Timmerman, Zwolle, July, 2026. ©