Here is yet another operatic masterpiece reborn thanks to Juan Bautista Otero and his splendid Réal Compania Opera de Camara. ‘Aminta, il re pastore’ is an extraordinary work which the famed castrato Farinelli commissioned from the Bolognese composer Mazzoni after the huge
success of his two operas produced in Lisbon, 'La clemenza di Tito' and 'Antigono'. Faithfully following Metastasio's original libretto, Mazzoni composed here a sublime opera seria in 3 acts, shorter than usual, with a blend of pathos, delicacy of expression and virtuosity that gives a marvelously complete picture of what one might call 'the Farinelli sound'. --- arkivmusic.com

Antonio Mazzoni was admired in his day for his “fire and fancy” but quickly fell into oblivion after his death in 1785. His career in his native Bologna was broken by a brief spell in Lisbon; and though the evidence is not watertight, Aminta was probably commissioned by Farinelli, as impresario to King Ferdinand VI, when Mazzoni fled the Portuguese capital after the 1755 earthquake. Contrary to the implication in the cover blurb, though, Farinelli had virtually retired from singing by 1756, and did not perform any of the roles in the opera.

Juan Bautista Otero sums up Aminta as “a sublime opera seria” and goes on to praise the “surprisingly avant-garde elements of refined musical dramaturgy”. To my ears, though, Mazzoni’s opera – using the Metastasio libretto that Mozart later drew on in his Il rè pastore – is thoroughly conventional in its structure and musical language. Typically, the central theme is the tug between love and duty, resolved by a model ruler (Alexander the Great) who is almost too good to be true. The shepherd-king Aminta and Elisa, and the secondary lovers, Agenore and Tamiri, face painful dilemmas; but all the characters act from honourable motives and utter noble Enlightenment sentiments.

Mazzoni responds to this slender, slow-moving drama with a sequence of florid da capo arias, many of them virtually interchangeable. There is virtuosity galore, though I hear little of the pathos and delicacy identified by Otero. Still, the curious will find the performance lively and accomplished, with rhythmically springy playing from the period orchestra and a generally stylish cast. --- Richard Wigmore, gramophone.co.uk

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