

This “special issue”, written in response to an invitation from Donatella Gavrilovich to celebrate the work of J. R. (Ronnie) Mulryne (May 1937-January 2019), focuses largely on one particular aspect of his teaching, personal scholarship and collaborative research, an aspect to which he was passionately committed for more than thirty years: “Performance and Spectacle in Early Modern Europe”.

European festivals from around 1400-1700, defined less by period and more by a process of generic evolution, offered a rich and enticing combination, and extension, of many of Ronnie’s life-long interests – including literature, poetry and drama, history, art history, languages (ancient and modern), the performing arts (especially the design and organisation of performance spaces, plays, music, dance and scenography), architecture and material culture. He understood the importance of studying festivals with all the tools of cross-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity – both in their own right and comparatively – in an attempt to understand their place in documenting, reflecting and shaping local, national and international events and community identities, as well as their own legacy in diaries, letters, festival accounts and engravings, in the work of poets, composers, choreographers and

playwrights and in the records of those engaged in the practical realisation of such festival events.

When invited to be editors of this issue of *Arti dello Spettacolo / Performing Arts*, we understood all too clearly the attractions and hazards of what was inevitably a wide-reaching call for papers, sent out in the late autumn of 2019 – themed not by a particular aspect of festivals research but by Ronnie’s own work and its legacy in relation to the study of what has become such a challenging and inspiring field – with the possibility for contributors to write in the language of their choice and, where appropriate, to integrate within that writing illustrations of the visual languages of the festivals they chose to discuss. Little could we have guessed that much of the world was about to enter a period of increasing restriction and lockdown in the face of what we now know as the Covid-19 pandemic.

We are grateful to all those, from among Ronnie’s long-term collaborators in European festival studies, to members the Society for European Festivals Research, and to scholars, archivists and curators – at all stages of their careers – for contributing to this issue; some working in the true spirit of collaboration to help each other access sources and to navigate the selection of images in the face of the closures of libraries, galleries, and numerous specialist collections of cultural artefacts. Many of those included have

Introduction

Margaret Shewring and Leila Zammar


asked us to make the issue-readers aware that not all the details in the contributors' writing could be developed or checked as they would have wished for the accuracy of references and quotations.

Ronnie would have been delighted with the rich variety of the articles here, from those adding to what we know of specific festivals to those offering challenges for new directions in research methodologies, or contributing to the wider analysis of the place of festivals and their legacies in the context of later centuries, including in relation to twenty-first century socio-political and economic concerns of migration, inclusivity and diversity, the significance of 'cities of culture' and the political resonances of statues. He would have appreciated, too, the articles in the Focus section, for situating his festival research within the wider context of his personal interests including his involvement with the community in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Many of the festival publications in which he was involved had their roots in conferences and study days across Europe, the US and the UK with papers subsequently further researched for publication. He understood that location and context play a crucial part in the contextual understanding of festivals past and more recent. During the last phases of editing this "special issue", while reviewing all the articles received, we came to believe that Ronnie would have

appreciated our collective offering all the more because it could be considered as fulfilling one the wishes he was not able to realize because of his untimely death: to organize a conference in Rome, the capital city of one of the countries he had loved most.

There is a particular synergy between the Focus article in which Maria Ines Aliverti – a long-time friend and research collaborator, writing in Italian, explains the scale and complexity of this field of study from the viewpoint of her own involvement – and Ronnie's own last completed intervention in festivals research, written in English, a chapter in Michele Marrapodi's edited, multi-contributor volume, the *Routledge Research Companion to Anglo-Italian Renaissance Literature and Culture*, published in late 2019. This, we think, may well not yet have been read by those contributing to this issue (again almost certainly as a consequence of Covid-19 and of the restrictions already imposed and continuing to be imposed in attempts to eradicate its threat). In his chapter on "The scholarship of Italian and English renaissance festivals" Ronnie traced the emergence of festival studies within a European context and more widely, from finding lists and bibliographies of resources and printed publications to the scholarship of Italian festival in a much broader context than the one suggested by the *Research Companion's* title, from the proliferation of electronic resources, and from



single 'national or academic-specialist' contexts to large-scale, collaborative, interdisciplinary initiatives. The final sentences of his conclusion serve as both a challenge and an inspiration:

the study of festival must rank among the most demanding academic disciplines, requiring for its satisfactory pursuit a range of interests and competences that include a command of, or at least a reasonable acquaintance with, a set of skills normally sheltered within traditional boundaries. Thus a working knowledge of, or preferably a fluency in several European languages, modern and classical, is desirable, while acquaintance with current if not cutting-edge research in say cultural and political history, economics, architecture and the theory and practice of indoor and outdoor theatre – territories often jealously guarded by accredited practitioners – is almost obligatory. Advances in printed and electronic finding aids will not make these boundaries more porous, but they may well assist the student-scholar in navigating what must seem otherwise a thoroughly intimidating landscape.

It was in 'pursuit of this hope', he explains, that what became his last sole-authored, posthumously-published, chapter was researched and written. He would, as always, have been eager to engage with, and to be a part of, what he perceived to be inspiring new directions.

