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The three research articles in this issue are interrelated by subject. They are concerned with singers, opera (especially pasticcios) and arias. Judit Zsovár discusses the soprano voice, arguing that qualities prized in nineteenth-century sopranos were already found in some earlier singers and teachers. Carlo Lanfossi considers the processes of compiling, performing and listening to Handel's pasticcios (and 'imported' arias), while Michael Burden introduces a database of eighteenth-century Italian arias that clearly will assist future researchers in the field. Natassa Varka, winner of the fourth International Handel Research Prize, reports on this year's Handel conference in Halle; Chris Scobie reviews the Foundling Museum's exhibition *'Two Last Nights!': Show Business in Georgian Britain* and we invite applications for Handel Institute awards.

Colin Timms

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## BAROQUE PROTOTYPES OF THE SOPRANO SFOGATO?

The institution of Baroque opera was established largely on the supremacy of the castrato voice, whose range and technical capacity generally surpassed all the qualities of the various female voice types. Nevertheless, the ability of some female singers did match up to that of the *castrati*. Through their pioneering work, these women paved the way for the (much later) restoration or fulfilment of female vocal expression.

The phenomenon of the *castrati* (outside Rome) eventually gave rise to a demand for strong female voices. These fall into two groups. The larger group consists of female singers who substituted for *castrati*. In London, both in the early days of staged Italian opera and under Handel, women played male parts: Goffredo's role in *Rinaldo* was written for Francesca Vanini-Boschi; Mrs Barbier replaced Nicolini in the title-role of the same opera when it was revived in 1713, and Margherita Durastanti sang Radamisto in 1720. When Handel wrote to Francis Colman, in Florence, on 19 June 1730, he asked that 'the woman he [Owen Swinny] might propose to you can sing a male role as well as a female one'.<sup>1</sup> According to Reinhard Strohm, Vivaldi as an impresario engaged

female voices because they were less expensive than castratos<sup>2</sup> – a practice that was adopted in Germany and Spain as well.

In addition, however, Vivaldi tried to give women an advantage in a competitive environment, so as to promote female values against a bias for males and to provide them with the professional challenges that they sought.<sup>3</sup> His virtuoso contralto-soprano Margherita Giacomazzi, for instance, excelled equally in male and female roles, frequently singing castrato arias of extreme virtuosity and wide compass. She, together with Faustina Bordoni, Lucia Facchinelli, Vittoria Tesi, Diana Vico, Antonia Merighi and others, represented an answer to the question, whether women could properly take the place of *castrati*. The story of Casanova falling for a certain Bellino who turned out to be a female singer (Teresa Lanti or Angiola Calori) comes to mind: if true, it proves that, occasionally, a female voice could be mistaken for that of a *musico*.<sup>4</sup>

However, it is the smaller group of singers that interests me here. This group comprises exceptional female sopranos whose comprehensive abilities may correspond with what Pier Francesco Tosi called 'una

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<sup>1</sup> *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents*, ed. Donald Burrows and others (Cambridge, 2013–), ii, 366–8.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhard Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 2 vols. (Florence, 2008), i, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, i, 57–8.

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Tråvén, 'Voicing the Third Gender – The Castrato Voice and the Stigma of Emasculation in Eighteenth-century Society', *Revue de littérature et de civilisation (XVIe – XVIIIe siècles)*, 29 (2016) (<https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/1220>), accessed 4 May 2019), paragraph 32.

voce tutta di petto' (an overall chest voice).<sup>5</sup> Reaching its full potential in the early nineteenth century, this voice was known as a *soprano sfogato* (vented, poured out, unlimited).<sup>6</sup> This *voce assoluta* has been described as one that integrates all the desirable features of the female voice: in addition to a penetrating upper register, it has sufficient agility to execute virtuoso coloratura passages fluently and the ability to produce head notes with softness and delicacy.<sup>7</sup> Its wide range, encompassing both contralto and high soprano, makes it capable of singing lower phrases with intensity and power, while its flexibility permits it to change colour like a chameleon, indicating a versatile, lyric-dramatic talent. No wonder the *soprano sfogato* was regarded as comparable to a castrato voice.<sup>8</sup>

Although this term described Romantic prima donnas such as Isabella Colbran, Giuditta Pasta, Giulia Grisi and Maria Malibran, these performers were trained and still sang in the way glorified by Tosi, Giovanni Battista Mancini and Johann Joachim Quantz in their eighteenth-century treatises (*i.e.*, applying full-body resonance to execute coloraturas). Both Colbran and Pasta were pupils of the castrato Girolamo Crescentini. Martha Feldman projects the teacher-pupil relationship of the Bolognese singing method from *castrati* of the late 1700s on to dramatic coloratura sopranos of the early twentieth century (such as Elvira de Hidalgo, Rosa Ponselle and Maria Callas).<sup>9</sup> A crucial piece of evidence for this is the fact that, in his influential *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1840–47), Manuel García – Malibran's father and teacher, and founder of modern singing technique (particularly the use of the chest in the upper register) – used castrato exercises to demonstrate his method.<sup>10</sup>

Through formal vocal instruction, castrato singing defined operatic voice production from the mid-1600s to the early nineteenth century, reaching its peak in the eighteenth century via the Bolognese schools of Tosi and Francesco Antonio Pistocchi. Pistocchi trained the castrato Antonio Bernacchi, and also natural voices such as the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri. Bernacchi taught the

*castrati* Senesino (Francesco Bernardi), Mancini and Giovanni Carestini, the contraltos Tesi and Merighi, and the tenor Anton Raaff, Mozart's first Idomeneo.<sup>11</sup> However, as Naomi André observed, an important shift occurred between the late seventeenth century, as represented by Tosi (whose zenith as a singer fell in the 1680s–90s), and the 1720s–30s (when Mancini was trained by Leonardo Leo and Bernacchi):<sup>12</sup>

While Mancini adapts the same terminology that Tosi uses (*voce di petto, voce di testa / falsetto*), he very strongly emphasizes the importance of blending the registers. Mancini's ideal *bel canto* voice has a consistent core throughout the range, not just an evenness between the break.

This blended voice, identified by Rodolfo Celletti as a *voce mista*, provided energy and fullness to the upper notes.<sup>13</sup>

On the basis of my current knowledge, only two Baroque sopranos can be placed in this second group: Anna Maria Strada, the long-term prima donna of Handel's 'second Academy', and Giacomazzi. Two further singers, Lucia Facchinelli (mezzo-soprano) and Elisabetta Pilotti-Schiavonetti (Handel's soprano from 1711 to 1715 – his Armida in *Rinaldo* and Melissa in *Amadigi*) possessed several of the above-mentioned attributes but lacked the wide range and the equal strength in both low and high notes.

The *soprano sfogato* voice does not produce masculine singing. On the contrary, it adapts the principles and achievements of the ideal or idealised voice production of the *castrati* to the natural female vocal organ and physical proportions, in order to explore the complete palette of feminine musical and technical expression. Charles de Brosses well observed the difference between *castrati* and female singers:<sup>14</sup>

Their [the castratos'] voices are mostly somewhat dry and sharp, quite different from the fresh, agreeable softness of female voices; but they are brilliant, light, [and] very strong with a wide range.

<sup>5</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi, e moderni* (Bologna, 1723), 38. See also Giovanni Battista Mancini, *Pensieri, e Riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (1774), 3rd edn, (Milan, 1777), articolo 4.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest example of the term *soprano sfogato* that I have found dates from 1821 and refers to Adelaide Tosi as Malcolm in the first Milan performance of Rossini's *La donna del lago* ('la parte del contralto fu affidata ad un soprano sfogato ... [Tosi] è dotata d'un soprano che nella sua acutezza conserva tutta l'omogeneità del contralto'): see 'Teatro alla Scala. *La donna del lago*', *La Gazzetta di Milano*, 41 (11 February 1821), 199–201. See also Heather Hadlock, 'Different masculinities: Androgyny, effeminacy, and sentiment in Rossini's *La donna del lago*', in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, ed. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge, 2015), 170–213: 187.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey S. Riggs, *The Assoluta Voice in Opera, 1797–1847* (Jefferson, N.C., 2003), 6–7.

<sup>8</sup> With reference to Adelaide Tosi and Giulia Grisi, see 'On the Opera, No. IV: Italian Opera', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, no. 30 (July 1832), 727–30: 729–30. See also Jeffrey Snider, 'In Search of the Soprano Sfogato', *Journal of Singing*, 68/3 (Jan/Feb. 2012), 329–34.

<sup>9</sup> Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Oakland, Calif., 2015), 110.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman, *The Castrato*, 151–3. See also Manuel García, *Art of Singing* (London, 1924), i–ii.

<sup>11</sup> Dan H. Marek, *Alto: The Voice of Bel Canto* (Lanham, Md, 2016), 29–30.

<sup>12</sup> Naomi Adele André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-nineteenth-century Italian Opera* (Bloomington, Ind., 2006), 43.

<sup>13</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *Storia del Belcanto* (Florence, 1986), 122; trans. as *A History of Bel Canto* (Oxford, 1991), 113.

<sup>14</sup> Charles de Brosses, *Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 et 1740*, as translated by Trâvén, 'Voicing the Third Gender', paragraph 11.

With the rise of virtuoso female singers, composers started producing arias with all the castrato characteristics, yet shaped for women's voices. Vivaldi, for example, addressed this challenge in the roles of Costanza in *Griselda* and Irene in *Bajazet* (both 1735), where he presented Giacomazzi as the female equivalent of a castrato. Grand arias mark these portraits, among them 'Ritorna a lusingarmi' (*Griselda*; attributed to Giuseppe Maria Orlandini), 'Agitata da due venti' (*Griselda*; previously sung by Giacomazzi in Vivaldi's *Adelaide*) and 'Qual guerriero in campo armato' (*Bajazet*; composed by Riccardo Broschi and sung by his brother, Farinelli). The last two of these are built on an instrumental type of virtuosity: arpeggios, violin idioms and extensive use of *martellato* and *cantar di sbalzo*. Both require extreme agility and a range that extends from low g to b<sup>♭</sup>-flat or c<sup>♯</sup>. 'Ritorna a lusingarmi', however, is a perfect female air, and Handel gave it to Strada in his pasticcio *Didone* (1737). From the score it looks like a typical castrato *bravura* aria, yet its tone and liquid vocal flexibility are wonderfully feminine. Although it abounds in florid triplets, regularly hitting b<sup>♭</sup>-flat, it also contains two low *a* notes in *stile di basso*. As Arsace in Vivaldi's *Rosmira fedele* (1738), Giacomazzi also sang another feminine aria, 'La rondinella ch'a noi sen' viene', which employs a low range with b-flats, rising and falling scales, birdsong imitations and demisemiquaver adornments. Arsace's other arias are lyrical movements: 'Vorrei dirti il mio dolore', also low in tessitura, though with leaps from c' to a<sup>♭</sup>-flat, and 'La bella mia nemica', high in range and with attacked or at least stressed a<sup>♯</sup> and b<sup>♯</sup> notes.

For women, another practical way of learning was 'by example'. As André has suggested, if female singers were romantically paired in the plot with a castrato, they had the 'benefit of singing on stage with, and learning formally or informally from their castrato colleagues'; Cuzzoni and Faustina enjoyed such a collaboration with Senesino.<sup>15</sup> For Strada (see Fig. 1), who probably had a genuine ability for full-body singing and must have been receptive to the castrato method of singing, the years spent in Naples (1724-6) as stage partner of the young Farinelli must have been a vital period of learning. Being a high coloratura soprano with natural flexibility, she developed a comprehensive range (a-c<sup>♯</sup>). During her career she sang together with Bernacchi, Senesino, Carestini, Gizziello (Gioacchino Conti), Caffarelli (Gaetano Maiorano) and Giovanni Manzuoli (Mozart's first Ascanio). Paolo Rolli's description of her diverse capacities anticipates some of the attributes of a *soprano sfogato*: 'Signora Strada has all the rapid execution of Faustina, and all the sweetness of Cuzzona'.<sup>16</sup> In the arias written especially for her, high notes as dynamic and musical climaxes are often textually and



Fig. 1: Johannes Verelst (1648-1734), portrait of Anna Maria Strada (© Gerald Coke Handel Foundation)

rhythmically accented, contrary to the general practice of the era and to Handel's way of composing for the sopranos who preceded and succeeded her (Cuzzoni and Élisabeth Duparc).<sup>17</sup> This is a strong indication that her voice production in the high range was chest-like, sonorous and naturally loud.

Strada's qualities can be illustrated by a selection of Handel opera arias: 'Scherza in mar la navicella' (*Lotario*), a castrato-type *bravura* aria with accented high notes and a swirl of octave jumps over rich orchestration, and with a chromatic middle section; 'La mia costanza' (*Ezio*), with attacked a<sup>♯</sup> notes and *messe di voce*; the dramatic 'Ah! non son io che parlo' (*Ezio*), with the note b, the lowest that Handel ever wrote for her; the pathetic 'Menti eterne' (*Lotario*), with a *portamento* leap of a tenth (e'-g<sup>♯</sup>), and three of Partenope's arias - 'L'amor ed il destin', including top c<sup>♯</sup>, the highest note ever written for Strada, and 'Io ti levo l'impero dell'armi' and 'Voglio amare', two dense Andante arias in the Neapolitan style, the first finely ornamented and with accented b<sup>♯</sup> notes, the other requiring a rich vocal sound. In 'Dite pace' (*Sosarme*) Strada's power is evident from the presence of three violin parts playing their own material, regularly above the vocal line. The crown is the Ariostean *Alcina*, and the jewel therein the final scene of Act II - the aria 'Ombre pallide', prepared by exclamations (with stressed a<sup>♯</sup> and g<sup>♯</sup> notes and tenth leaps) in the preceding *accompagnato* recitative, 'Ah! Ruggiero

<sup>15</sup> André, *Voicing Gender*, 37-8.

<sup>16</sup> 'La Sig[no]rja Stradina à tutta La rapidità della Faustina, e tutta La Dolcezza della Cuzzona' (Paolo Rolli to Giuseppe Riva, 6 November 1729), in *Handel: Collected Documents*, ii, 316-17'.

<sup>17</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Das Verhältnis von Lautstärke und Stimmlage im Barockgesang', in *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper: Bericht über die Symposien der internationalen Händel-Akademie Karlsruhe 1988 und 1989*, ed. Hans Joachim Marx (Laaber, 1990), 157-71: 167-9.

crudel'. The sorceress's dramatic collapse is embodied in a lyric Andante that stresses, in particular, Strada's strong and ringing high range. In fact, the entire role of Alcina is designed to fit like a glove with the rare combination of Strada's vocal and dramatic skills.

Strada was also the prima donna in most of Handel's Italian pasticcios. In *Ormisda* she sang Carlo Scalzi's 'Passaggier che in selva oscura' (from Hasse's *Sesostrate*, 1726), displaying trills and repeated notes. In *Venceslao* she was given both 'Son belle in ciel le stelle' (Porta, *Ullisse*, 1725), an impressive coloratura number previously sung by Carestini, and 'Come nave in ria tempesta', Farinelli's showcase aria from Porpora's *Semiramide, regina dell'Assiria* (1724), with its two-octave compass (b to b''), hammered notes and numerous virtuoso passages. In *Catone* she performed Carestini's emblematic 'Vo solcando un mar crudele' from Vinci's *Artaserse* (1730), one of the most famous castrato simile arias, marked by brilliant ascending *terzini*. In her last London season Strada played the title-role in Handel's pasticcio *Didone*, based on Vinci's opera of 1726. Here, in addition to 'Ritorna a lusingarmi' (compass: a-b''-flat), she sang Domenico Gizzi's virtuoso 'Già si desta', which offers many opportunities for trills. This aria was dramatically balanced by a final, three-part *accompagnato*, with lurching chromatics, sighs and exclamations on high a'' in the vocal line', paired with rugged rhythms, tremolos and furious scales in the orchestra, marvellously depicting the decay of a still passionate queen (the Alcina of the pasticcios).

In conclusion, the music that Handel composed for (or gave to) Strada suggests that she was both an early and a splendid example of what later was known as a *soprano sfogato* – in short, a Baroque prototype.

Judit Zsovár

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## LISTENING TO DIDONE ABBANDONATA

On 30 May 2016 I attended a new production of one of the last pasticcios arranged by Handel during his London career, *Didone abbandonata* (1737). Hearing it at the Händel-Festspiele in Halle was part of my research on the phenomenon of listening to pasticcios both in early and in modern times: supported by a generous award from the Handel Institute, I knew that my doctoral dissertation would benefit from a live pasticcio 'experience'. The production was lively and fresh, and generally entertaining, yet I could feel a certain unease. Listening to a pasticcio today was no different from any other operatic experience.

After months spent in London and Hamburg libraries studying the conducting scores of Handel's pasticcios, including their intricate textual genealogy, I realised that the material aspects of recycling and rearranging music were intrinsically connected to their aural counterpart—to the notion of listening to something already heard (whether in the composer's

or the audience's ears). Yet the production system in early eighteenth-century London was different from today's standards, and much of the soundscape to which Londoners were attuned (including Italian opera tunes and broadside ballads) is no longer part of our sonic expectations. If a pasticcio is already the performance of a previous performance (introducing music that has already been performed)—a performance of a repeat—then the historically-informed revival of a repetition is a sensory and theoretical conundrum.

The pasticcio *Didone abbandonata* is a good example of the importance placed on the listening aspects of repetition and recurrence by those who worked in the theatre at the time. It saw the light on 13 April 1737, more than three years after the spectacular 'rival' season in which the Opera of the Nobility and the 'second Academy' fought for supremacy in the field of opera. At Covent Garden, after having regained the protection of the Prince of Wales, Handel was able to put on a company of international renown by hiring two Italian castrati: Gioacchino Conti (Gizziello) and Domenico Annibali. It was around the time of the première of *Didone* that the composer suffered a stroke that caused paralysis in his right hand, thus making it difficult for him to direct the pasticcio. It is unlikely that this was the reason for the meagre success of the opera, which achieved only four sparsely attended performances between 13 and 27 April and an isolated encore on 1 June.

The story of *Didone abbandonata* was widely known among London audiences. Not only was the unhappy story of Dido, queen of Carthage, the subject of one of the first masterpieces of English musical theatre, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, but the city had experienced numerous productions and retellings of the tale in dramas and printed editions that contributed to the popularity of the Virgilian episode. This was clearly stated in the prefatory pages of the printed libretto for the 1737 pasticcio: 'The Story of *Dido and Aeneas* is so well known, that it is unnecessary to enlarge on it here'.

Moreover, Metastasio's *Didone abbandonata* circulated in London long before the pasticcio was performed. A quasi-prose version of his libretto, in Italian, was printed there in 1726 for a single performance on 17 December—part of a long residence in town by a company of 'Comici Italiani'. In fact, this 'Tragedia Heroicomica' follows Metastasio's first edition almost *verbatim*, even though it was intended for a non-musical performance before the monarchy in the King's Theatre. The fact that *Didone* was selected to be performed and printed in London shortly after its Italian première at Naples in 1724—the Roman setting by Leonardo Vinci, from which most of the pasticcio music is taken, dates from 1726—demonstrates the town's interest in Italian drama and makes the subject a sort of emblem of operatic recurrence. Although the *comici* were not actually singing (at least, not in full mode as in operas), they were nonetheless reciting Metastasio as the 'memory'

of the opera, their prose version of the drama being a non-sung opera, a libretto not meant to be sung.

Thus, when *Didone abbandonata* was next staged in London, ten years later as a pasticcio, its performances came after a long history of re-materialisations of Metastasio's text that had already influenced London audiences. A pasticcio, with its intrinsic quality of retelling and re-sounding the past, was the right match for a subject that already was felt to be charged with meta-theatricality. What is even more intriguing about the city's involvement with *Didone* is the fact that, around the time when Handel (at Covent Garden) presented this pasticcio, the Opera of the Nobility (at the King's Theatre) staged Metastasio's *L'impresario* as an intermezzo in the operas *Demetrio*, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Sabrina* (a pasticcio). This intermezzo, published in English as *The Master of the Opera*, was one of the poet's most successful comic pieces, the one that he had chosen for performance during the intervals in the première of *Didone abbandonata*. It was also a meta-theatrical piece, created by Metastasio and Domenico Sarri to make fun of the Italian opera production system of the 1720s. That the Opera of the Nobility performed it just when Handel presented its associated opera (*Didone*) makes a case for a larger 'intertheatrical' meta-effect: while Covent Garden was preparing to stage an Italian opera, opera was being mocked at the King's Theatre. In a sense, both companies were staging meta-opera at the same time, one from the perspective of an intermezzo, the other with that most meta-theatrical of genres, a pasticcio.

*Didone* featured a selection of songs that went beyond the simple assemblage of Vinci's musical version. Here, Handel and his collaborators included nine arias that had already been performed by their own first singers, and also some pieces that had already been heard in London in previous pasticcios. This was the case for both Conti, who closed Act I of *Didone* by singing 'Tra fieri opposti venti' to the same music as 'Scherza il nocchier talora' (which he had sung at Naples in 1732 in Leonardo Leo's *Demetrio*), and for Annibali, whose songs deserve closer examination.

Annibali sang the first aria of Act III, 'Mi tradì l'infida sorte', to music by Giovanni Alberto Ristori. It is possible to identify this music with the aid of Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MU. MS 258, which bears a list of five arias relating to *Didone* and to the revival of Handel's *Poro* in 1736. The aria listed as no. 5, 'Quel pastor che unendo [*recte* udendo] al suono', is ascribed to Ristori and marked for 'Sig.r Annibali in der Opera Didone'. At the bottom of the next page there are two separate chunks of music from 'Quel pastor' under the heading 'die noten von Quel Pastor'. The origins of this aria lie in the festive serenata composed by Ristori for the sixth anniversary of the coronation of the Russian empress Anna, on 9 May 1736.<sup>18</sup> Annibali had sung in this work and was probably responsible for the inclusion of the aria in the pasticcio.

In addition, in *Didone* Annibali sang an aria that had already been used in another Handel pasticcio, *Semiramide riconosciuta* (October 1733). He had first sung this aria to the words 'Non sempre oprar' in Hasse's *Caio Fabricio* in Rome in 1732. In London it was initially meant to be included in Handel's pasticcio *Caio Fabricio* (December 1733) but had to be removed, because it had just been performed in *Semiramide*, to the words 'Trovo ch'è gran follia'. In *Didone* the same music was set to the aria 'Cadrà fra poco in cenere' (Ex. 1): its revival, through the voice of the singer who had first sung it years before, was probably conceded to allow Annibali to perform music with which he was familiar. But there's more.



Ex. 1: *Didone abbandonata* (1737), 'Cadrà fra poco'



Ex. 2: *L'Elpidia* (1725), 'Amor deh lasciarmi'



Ex. 3: *Ormisda* (1730), 'Sì sì lasciatemi'



Ex. 4: *Didone abbandonata* (1737), 'Amor che nasce'

What has gone unnoticed about the revival of this song from Hasse's *Caio Fabricio* is that the music is strikingly similar to that of another song used in two different Handel pasticcios: 'Amor deh lasciarmi' and 'Sì, sì, lasciatemi' in *Elpidia* (1725) and *Ormisda* (1730) (Exx. 2 and 3). Moreover, another aria in *Didone*, 'Amor che nasce colla speranza', begins like that in *Elpidia* and *Ormisda* (Ex. 4). It seems as if there was something peculiar, acoustically appealing, about this incipit, something that the singer and the composer thought would connect these arias to previous performances and previous audiences. Conti, too, opted for an

<sup>18</sup> 'Versi cantati in Varsavia': Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. Mus. 2455-G-1.

already-used song, 'Vede il nocchier la sponda' from Hasse's *Euristeo* (May 1732), which was included in the London pasticcio *Catone* (November 1732) and presented in *Didone* with the words 'A trionfar mi chiama'. All in all, *Didone* seems to evoke the ghosts of past performances in London and abroad.

The possibility of recognising familiar music was linked to two factors: the availability of music circulating in either manuscript or printed form, and the bias towards anything related to Handel among intellectual circles in London. With *Didone*, this paradigm was made explicit in a letter of 5 May 1737 from his friend, the philosopher James Harris, to the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury:<sup>19</sup>

If Mr Handel gives off his Opera [*Didone abbandonata*], it will be the only Pleasure I shall have left in ye musical way, to look over his Scores, and recollect past Events. Here Strada used to shine—there Annibale—This was an Excellent Chorus, and that a Charming piece of Recitative—In that I shall amuse my Self much in the Same manner as Virgil tells of ye Trojans ...

Harris did not attend the pasticcio in person, and yet he was able to create a mental vision, an aural image of the performance through the reconstructed voices of Strada, Annibali and the chorus. He did this by 'looking over' his collection of scores, reading music not just as a prompt for new performances but as a recollection of 'past events', even if he had not been present. The pasticcio as a genre, inherently concerned with the idea of returning, recycling and reviving, with Italian singers who had already sung what they were about to sing, was the perfect medium in which to stage such a fantasy of music-making and listening. In 2016, the lovely performances of *Didone* in Halle just could not fulfil the same fantasy.

Carlo Lanfossi

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## BUT WHICH SONG?

### A CAUSERIE ON THE DATABASE 'THE ITALIAN OPERA ARIA ON THE LONDON STAGE 1705-1801'

Going to the Italian opera in eighteenth-century London could require many things: sending a footman on ahead to reserve a place, ordering supper to a box, or reminding the coachman to approach the opera house in the Haymarket from the right direction. In the case of real aficionados, it might also mean buying a wordbook (containing the libretto) in advance of the

season and perusing its contents, perhaps looking at the argument, perhaps at the *dramatis personae* and, for those who were so inclined, the arias, the musical numbers performed by the singers whose names were probably already known to the *cognoscenti*. The opera books could be had at bookshops, at music shops, at shops near the theatre and at the theatre itself, where, for example, 'of Mr. Gallerino ... the Books of the Operas are to be had'.<sup>1</sup> So far, so good, even if the small number of surviving wordbooks and the general paucity of iconographical information suggest that fewer were used than the frequent advertisements imply.

But what did the libretto represent? To the purchaser, it meant an expectation that its contents would be reflected on the stage. To us, it is potentially a bibliographical nightmare, examples frequently posing insoluble problems in understanding the structure both of the physical book and of the opera it represents, and hinting at unknowable issues of performance. One example of this last comes from one of my favourite sopranos, Regina Mingotti, of the King's Theatre. The house composer for the season 1755/56, Giovanni Lampugnani, set for her some arias in Metastasio's *Siroe* to which the impresario Francesco Vanneschi took exception, and – she reported – he 'begged of me as a Favour to substitute other Songs of other Masters, knowing that I had better Compositions in my Possession'.<sup>2</sup> As can be seen, we cannot know the extent of these substitutions; if Mingotti's 'better compositions' were simply different settings of Metastasio's texts that were retained in Lampugnani's version, then their substitution would not necessarily have been (and, indeed, is not) marked in the libretto. And we only know this much because the formidable soprano, instead of simply complaining to colleagues, published her views in a text laced with words such as 'stupid', 'ill-bred', and 'mutilations', and describing Vanneschi's attempts to revise *Ipermestra* as being done in 'a most unskilful and absurd manner'.<sup>3</sup>

More often, the evidence is that the text of one aria was simply replaced by that of another. Two cases illustrate some of the results of this practice. The aria 'Disperato in mar turbato' appears in Metastasio's 1731 libretto *Demetrio*, an opera first seen in London in 1737. The aria can also be found in *Artamene* (1746), *Alessandro nell'Indie* (1764), *Adriano in Siria* (1765), *Euemene* (1765), *Astarto, re di Tiro* (1770) and *Quinto Fabio* (1780): in all, it appeared in no fewer than nine librettos of six different works. But it was never performed in the context for which it was written, for although after 1737 *Demetrio* was seen in 1744, 1757, 1763, 1772, 1785 and 1786, the aria was never included in the show. Turning to the operas themselves,

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<sup>19</sup> See *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732-1780*, ed. Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill (Oxford, 2002), 27–8.

<sup>1</sup> Ranieri de Calzabigi, *Alceste, ossia il trionfo dell'amor conjugale; A tragedy in two acts, as represented at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market* (London, 1795), 'Advertisement'. This advertisement also appears in Lorenzo Da Ponte's, *La cifra* (1798) and the anonymous *Cinna* (1798), while 'M. Gallerino' is listed as the publisher of Da Ponte's *La cosa rara* (1789).

<sup>2</sup> Regina Mingotti, *An Appeal to the Public* (London, 1756), in Michael Burden, *Regina Mingotti: Diva and Impresario at the King's Theatre, London*, Royal Musical Association Monograph 22 (Farnham, 2013), 159.

<sup>3</sup> Mingotti, *An Appeal*, in Burden, *Regina Mingotti*, 157.

*Antigono*, first set in 1743, provides an example. Metastasio provided twenty-six numbers for the libretto; when the opera was staged in London, it included eighteen of them, plus two insertions (18/2). Subsequent versions show a gradual reduction in Metastasio's contribution: 1757 (14/5), 1764 (13/9), 1774 (8/20) and 1776 (5/14). In most cases, the newly introduced numbers are not retained in the next version, and only three of them are from other works by Metastasio. These two examples reflect different phenomena: the shifting position of 'Disperato in mar turbato' is likely to represent choices made by, for example, the house composer, the impresario, or the singer, while the latter is more likely to illustrate changing fashions in style of text or dramatic structure. When we move away from Metastasio's works, the frequency of repetition of musical numbers decreases, but the range of works from which they are drawn becomes ever more varied – and obscure!

These are not new or unidentified problems: scholars have addressed the issues over many years. My own interest in the broader picture raised by these processes was sparked by a request from Don Neville to write an essay on Metastasio in London. After a few (catastrophic) false starts, it became clear that for this to be done, a listing was required; this task then spiralled out of control into a catalogue which, in order to fit into even a whole issue of the *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, had to be shorn of most of its appendices.<sup>4</sup> The situation it exposed was even more confused than might have been expected. For example, it revealed that nearly 300 different arias texts by Metastasio were used in contexts other than their original ones, and that some of the works from which the texts were drawn – such as the festa *Alcide al bivio*, or the opera *Il trionfo di Clelia* – were not staged or published in Britain before the date of the text's employment in a new context, if at all.

The aim of this current project, then, is to produce as comprehensive an index as possible of Italian opera arias that were performed in London between the arrival of Italian opera in 1705, and 1801. The project in its nascent form started in 2007, with myself as the Lead Investigator, and with Christopher Chowrimootoo, then an Oxford MSt student and now on the Faculty at the University of Notre Dame, as Co-researcher. And as with the Metastasio project, it became clear that a catalogue of sources, in this case librettos, needed to be compiled, one that would provide the overall bibliographical framework; the catalogue also provided a home for material from the wordbooks – the names of dancers, scene designers, machinists, and so on – that would not be included in the database. There already existed two major listings of wordbooks – Claudio Sartori's *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800* and the English Short-Title Catalogue, the former Euro-centric, the latter Euro-shy – yet many of the items listed in the catalogue are new to the eye. The catalogue also allowed for the inclusion of performances – the only data in the project

not to be drawn from the wordbooks themselves – and enabled each one to be tied to a particular season and to a particular series of performances. By doing this, it became easier for us to identify librettos which might be missing or might never, for whatever reason, have been printed.

One bibliographic problem arose early on. In the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library in California are 156 librettos, all but a handful of them manuscript. The collection is a run of (mostly) fair copies of works to be staged in the London theatres. The theatre would prepare the copy and send it to the Lord Chamberlain, who would examine it (hence the title 'Examiner of Plays'), make any alterations he considered appropriate, and grant (or refuse) the licence to perform that work. This was a process that applied to both new and old works. The Larpent Collection does, however, have a number of peculiarities. The first is that these copies are often thought to be 'the Lord Chamberlain's copies', whereas in fact many of them are simply generic copies made that season for the theatre. A second is that there is no evidence that any Italian opera was censored by the Lord Chamberlain. And a third is that the collection is far from complete, comprising less than a quarter of what there should be. Should the Larpent librettos be included? After some discussion, they were: they clearly represent the circulation of Italian arias on the London stage, and counted among them are a number of works – such as the 1785 *La finta principessa* – that were performed, but of which no printed copy survives.

A further problem was the question of genre: some of the Italian works performed at the theatres were billed as a serenata (*La pace in Europa*, 1749), some as a dramatic cantata (*La difesa d'amore*, 1775) and others as a festa teatrale (*L'omaggio: di paesani al signore de contado, festa teatrale* (1781)). Given that the project is based on the portability of the aria and not on the 'work', these, too, have been included. Numbers such as duets, trios, ensembles and finales presented another challenge; these are clearly not solo arias, but they have been entered in the same way, nevertheless, since all of them were subjected to the same types of treatment. The search function therefore allows the user to locate all the numbers in a given opera, and to undertake searches that will locate all those in which any individual singer performed.

The project was deliberately conceived in two versions, one online ([italianaria.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/](http://italianaria.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/)), the other in print (*The Italian Aria on the London Stage*, 3 vols., forthcoming). In the online version, each number has seventeen possible pieces of information: Incipit; Type of Number; Act, Scene, and Placing in the Scene; Work title; Date of libretto; Number of libretto (used when there is more than one source of the same wordbook); Character; Singer; Librettist; Text arranger; Translator; Composer; Music arranger; Director; and Location of the libretto. This methodology resulted in 22,784 lines of data, representing (at a guess) some

<sup>4</sup> Michael Burden, 'Metastasio on the British Stage 1728–1840', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*, 49 (2007), whole issue.

16,000 individual numbers. The print version will offer the same material in volume II; volume I will be the catalogue of the librettos, and volume III, the supplementary tables, opera criticism, bibliography, and indices. The supplementary tables allow us to see the subject through some statistics: there were approximately 4,765 performances of Italian operas and related works in London theatres in the period of the catalogue; the interrelationship of the performances with the printed sources suggests that there are 192 supposititious wordbooks (which may be out there, somewhere); and the collation of previous scholarship has identified some thirty-five 'ghost' librettos.

It is important to emphasise exactly what this project does and does not do. What it *does* do is report the content of the wordbooks. What it does *not* do is attempt to add information to the report from other sources; the aim has been to avoid producing amalgam entries that cannot be verified by reference to the wordbooks. The project has now moved on to the 'Favourite Songs' publications, with the goal of producing a database of settings of Italian aria texts published in London, one that works in parallel with the present database. Like all projects, it has had its teething problems, and a number of scholars have written (politely) with corrections and comments, all of which have been pertinent and have been addressed, if not resolved. To date, new versions of the main aria list and the singers' authority list have been uploaded. In the end, the project provides a road map for others' research; it cannot – and will never be able to – answer all the bibliographic questions it suggests.

**Michael Burden**

### **Bibliography arising from the project**

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## **HANDEL RESEARCH PRIZE 2019**

The fourth **International Handel Research Prize**, awarded by the Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft and the Saalesparkasse (Saale Savings Bank) Foundation, has been won by the English musicologist Natassa Varka (Cambridge) for her doctoral dissertation entitled 'Charles Jennens's collection of Handel's sacred oratorios from *Saul* to *Jephtha*: Sources, contexts, and revisions'. The presentation took place in Halle on 3 June.



Dr Natassa Varka receives the International Handel Research Prize from Professor Wolfgang Hirschmann

The 'Laudatio' was delivered by Dr Wolfgang Hirschmann, Professor of Historical Musicology at the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, President of the Händel-Gesellschaft, and chairman of the Prize jury. Commending Dr Varka on her achievement, he praised both her exemplary comparison of the variant readings in the primary sources of Handel's oratorios and in the copies made for his librettist Charles Jennens—a comparison that clarifies the complex interrelationships between these important sources—and also her analysis and interpretation of Jennens's annotations, which show him to have been acting almost as an arranger of Handel's works. Professor Hirschmann described Dr Varka's dissertation as an outstanding study that opens up fundamentally new possibilities for Handel research.

## HALLE HANDEL CONFERENCE JUNE 2019

### 'From Alcina to Theodora: Female Figures in the Works of Handel and his Contemporaries'

This year's conference began on Saturday 1 June, when Silke Leopold (Heidelberg) was awarded the City of Halle Handel Prize 2019 in recognition of her outstanding services to research into Handel's music. I was not the only delegate to lament that I was unable to reach Halle in time to hear her festival lecture, entitled 'Von A(thalia) bis Z(enobia): Händels Galerie der starken Frauen' ('From (A)thalia to (Z)enobia: Handel's gallery of strong women'); it is to be hoped that this will be printed in next year's *Händel-Jahrbuch*.

The main part of the conference took place between 3 and 5 June and began with the presentation of the International Handel Research Prize for 2019 (see above: Ed.). After introductory speeches, three arias from Handel operas were sung by students of the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg. The first paper was given by Elisabeth Birnbaum (Vienna), who provided an overview of the qualities of the female Biblical figures in Handel's oratorios; together with papers by Irmtraud Fischer (Graz) on Biblical reception studies and Sabine Volk-Birke (Halle) on gender roles and the way in which associated character traits and behaviours were perceived in the eighteenth century, this formed a neat starting point for the rest of the conference.

As one might expect, several of the contributions focused on individual characters or works. My own paper examined the contrast between Jennens's Nitocris (*Belshazzar*) and the same woman as described by Herodotus; a more famous Babylonian queen was the subject of a paper given by John H. Roberts (Berkeley), who analysed the recitatives that Handel composed for *Semiramide*. Handel's operas were not neglected: Graydon Beeks (Claremont) examined some of Handel's alterations to *Ariodante*, particularly in relation to Dalinda; Ruth Smith (Cambridge) provided a welcome re-reading of Handel's characterisation of Dorinda (*Orlando*); and Ivan Ćurković (Zagreb) considered Atalanta's royal and pastoral identities from various angles, including the visual arts. Ćurković's study of *Atalanta* was complemented by a paper given later by Florian Mehlretter (Munich), who traced the transformation of the pastoral from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth century through the female characters in *Il pastor fido*.

Individual singers provided the focus of three papers: Ina Knoth (Hamburg) took a new approach to *Muzio Scevola*, using it as a way of understanding Margherita Durastanti and the type of character she played; Berta Joncus (London) examined how Giulia Frasi used her appearances at Ranelagh to strengthen both her career and her place in society, and Donald Burrows (Milton Keynes) shed light on the first cast of *Jephtha*.

Several of the speakers took broader approaches to the topic. Suzanne Aspden (Oxford) discussed emblematic and allegorical characters in the early eighteenth century, while Matthew Gardner (Tübingen) explored themes of female virtue in early English oratorios and placed these within their broader cultural contexts, making striking allegorical connections with individual people. Reinhard Strohm (Oxford) took a musical approach, considering whether it is possible to discern features or at least tendencies in Handel's music for female characters, as it is in the case of Venetian opera in the first half of the eighteenth century. Venetian opera also featured in a paper by Wendy Heller (Princeton), who explored Handel's treatment of female characters and their various acts of dissimulation in operas that have their roots in seventeenth-century Venice; and Anke Charton (Vienna) discussed tropes of female agency in *opera seria*. Ellen T. Harris (Cambridge, Mass.) presented a brilliant and mind-boggling analysis of the lineage of various plots concerning imperilled women in Handel's operas and oratorios.

The conference was interesting, lively and extremely enjoyable, and I am looking forward to reliving it by reading the *Händel-Jahrbuch* 2020.

Natassa Varka

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## HANDEL INSTITUTE AWARDS

### AWARDS FOR CONFERENCES

Handel Institute Conference Awards help individuals attend an overseas conference to read a paper on a Handel-related subject that has already been accepted by the conference organisers. The awards, which relate to the cost of travel and/or accommodation, are open to UK residents who wish to attend a conference elsewhere and to overseas residents who wish to attend one in the UK; preference is given to postgraduate students and early-career academics. For further details see <http://handelinstitute.org>

Applications should be sent, before expenditure is incurred, to Professor Matthew Gardner ([matthew.gardner@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:matthew.gardner@uni-tuebingen.de)).

Deadlines: **30 November 2019, 30 April and 31 August 2020.**

### AWARDS FOR RESEARCH

Handel Institute Research Awards help individual scholars pursue a research project relating to Handel or his associates or contemporaries. No single award exceeds £1000, but more than one award may be made. Awards cannot be used to pay university or college fees. There is no application form. For further details see <http://handelinstitute.org>

Applications and two references should be sent, before expenditure is incurred, to Professor Matthew Gardner (matthew.gardner@uni-tuebingen.de).

Deadline: **30 November 2019**.

## AWARDS FOR HANDEL OPERA PRODUCTIONS

The Handel Institute offers grants of up to £5000 towards a staged production of an opera by Handel. The production should be planned to take place in Great Britain by the end of 2021. The production company may be professional or amateur or a combination. For further particulars see <https://handelinstitute.org/award/opera-awards/>

Enquiries and applications to Dr Ruth Smith (res1000@cam.ac.uk)

Closing date this year: **31 October 2019**.

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## EXHIBITION 'TWO LAST NIGHTS!' The Foundling Museum (to 5 January)

*Two Last Nights! Show Business in Georgian Britain* is billed as 'a how-to guide to going to a show in the eighteenth century'. That certainly captures the engaging way the curators approach the subject, combining contemporary practices with suggestions of modern parallels. The exhibition, in the main space downstairs, is unobtrusively but effectively structured to imply the outside, inside and back-stage area of a theatre building.

As was the case for audiences at the time, the focus is as much, if not more, on things that surrounded the show as on particular works. Taking centre stage, therefore, are not elaborate sets or costumes, but two fans, opened out to reveal the names of box-owners for the 1787/88 and 1800 seasons at the King's Theatre. Serving the dual purpose of keeping their users cool in the crowded theatre and informing them who else was present, they also looked very attractive!

Preening and posing in the audience (which included more of the middle classes as the number of theatres increased) was fertile ground for the satirical depictions of Hogarth and Rowlandson. Our view of these audiences may be excessively coloured by this parade of grotesques, with their over-elaborate clothes and hairstyles, but the exhibition manages to nuance this impression by presenting a wide array of objects. In many ways it is a celebration of the ephemeral, the items on display providing the context in which a more rounded image of the times can emerge.

Meticulous care has been taken over the presentation and explanation of the objects, so their point is always made clearly and strikingly. This is as true of the knick-knacks – tickets, opera glasses, ear trumpets – as of

manuscripts and more obviously starry items. Multiple playbills for performances of 'Israelites in Egypt' – an intriguing mash-up of Rossini and Handel – line one of the walls. Produced quickly and cheaply in response to circumstances, they also whip up excitement by their busy juxtaposition of font sizes and countdown to the 'two last nights'.

Handel is present throughout, of course, although the exhibition is not concerned only with opera. Rather, he appears as one of many commodities, his operas as something to be seen and sold. Queen Caroline's list of expenses includes an entry for how much she spent on Handel opera tickets, giving a sense of their price at the time, while a libretto for *Radamisto* includes annotations relating to sound-effects and provides vital evidence of eighteenth-century stagecraft.

The composer is featured more on the upper floors of the Museum, where we see his reputation being cemented as the century progresses – through a series of benefit concerts, memorials and commemorations. Here, too, we learn more about concert-going in general, sacred and secular being mixed in exhibits on pleasure gardens and music festivals.

All in all, this exhibition provides a vivid sense of the sights, the (non-musical) sounds and even the smells of Georgian theatre, as Handel would have known it.

Chris Scobie

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## HANDEL NEWS

*Handel News* is published three times a year by The Handel Friends. The May 2019 issue (No.75) includes articles by Graham Cummings (royal acrimony and the Water Music), James Conway (directing Handel's operas), Tadashi Mikajiri (Handel in Japan), Tony Watts (interview with Donna Leon) and Graham Pont (a Handel anecdote), plus a review by David Vickers of Jane Glover's *Handel in London*. The September 2019 issue (No.76) includes articles by Richard Wistreich (singing Handel, then and now), Joseph Crouch (a cellist's perspective on Handel), Thelma Lovell (music and mysticism in the *Brookes Passion*), David Kimbell (tragic voices in *Tamerlano*), Ruth Smith (Handel's management of his PR), Bridget Cunningham (recording Handel), Tatty Theo (education projects) and Graham Pont (bells of Keynsham), plus a review by Judit Zsovár of Berta Joncus's book on Kitty Clive. Both issues include reviews of the German Handel festivals, a 'review of reviews' of recent Handel performances in England, and a global listing of forthcoming performances of Handel operas and oratorios. Miranda Houghton is replacing Tony Watts as editor from the January 2020 issue (No.77). Subscriptions and enquiries to: The Handel Friends, PO Box 83, Ilminster, Somerset, TA19 9XU.

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*The Handel Institute is a registered charity, No. 296615. All correspondence should be addressed to the editor, Professor Colin Timms, Department of Music, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK (c.r.timms@bham.ac.uk).*

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