



Women, Opera and the Public Stage
in Eighteenth-Century Venice



WoVen online seminars programme (March-December 2024)

Time: Fridays, 17.00-18.00 (CET)

Online via Zoom

- 15 March Piermario Vescovo (Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia), *Il salto di Teodora*
Chair: Tatiana Korneeva
- 19 April Caterina Pagnini-Lorena Valieri (Università degli Studi di Firenze), *The Theatrical Ballet in the Eighteenth Century: a Glance at 'Dancing Actresses' on the Venetian Stage*
Chair: Margaret Butler
- 24 May Lorenzo Santoro (Conservatorio di Frosinone/Vicenza – Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung, Dresden), *Identità femminili, potere e raffigurazione delle relazioni nella Repubblica di Venezia: "Armida in Damasco" di Rampini e "Edvige regina d'Ungheria"*
Chair: Brad Carlton Sisk
- 14 June Aneta Markuszewska (University of Warsaw), *Annibale by Nicola Porpora (Venice 1731) or Father-Daughter Relationship*
Chair: Francesca Menchelli-Buttini
- 13 September Jeanette Joy Harris (University of Houston, McGovern School of the Arts), *Improvisation, Ornamentation, and Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Ontology*
Chair: Tatiana Korneeva
- 11 October Michele Geremia (Conservatorio di musica "Giuseppe Verdi", Como), *If Women are in Charge: Women's Role in Goldoni's drammi giocosi*
Chair: Christine Jeanneret
- 15 November Yseult Martinez (Sorbonne University, Centre Roland Mousnier), *Vivaldi's Rosmira fedele (1738): Cross-Dressing Femininity and Flawed Masculinity on Sant'Angelo's Stage*
Chair: Alene Mari Holder
- 13 December Ivan Ćurković (University of Zagreb), *Female Duality in Gasparini's Venetian Operas and Their Reimaginings*
Chair: Reinhard Strohm



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To register and join us for these events, please use the following Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83649469168?pwd=aTFyMktlSDZXbXRRQnNQSzNEa3phZz09>

Meeting ID: 836 4946 9168

Passcode: 693918

For any further information please contact Tatiana Korneeva (korneeva.t@gmail.com)

Abstracts

Piermario Vescovo, *Il salto di Teodora*

L'intervento è dedicato alla storia di due attrici della scena veneziana, Teodora Raff (1723-1761), prima amorosa col nome di Rosaura, moglie del capocomico Girolamo Medebach (1723-1761), che mette a contratto Carlo Goldoni alle fine degli anni '40, poi attrice di Chiari, e Adriana Sacco (1707-1776), sorella del celebre Truffaldino Antonio, in arte Smeraldina, attrice col primo Goldoni e poi con Gozzi. La breve carriera della prima e la più lunga della seconda mostrano due diversi tragitti, a partire da Venezia, uno sostanzialmente italiano-settentrionale con la "commedia nuova", e uno ampiamente europeo, dal Portogallo alla Russia, sulla traccia dell'eredità delle famiglie d'arte. Il titolo riprende l'immagine saliente, che riassume la carriera della prima, nella memoria di Francesco Bartoli, in un prodigioso salto in scena dell'attrice ancor giovane, prima del momento del suo declino.

Caterina Pagnini – Lorena Valieri, *The Theatrical Ballet in the Eighteenth Century: a Glance at 'Dancing Actresses' on the Venetian Stage*

The 18th century was the age of opera, hence of theatrical dance. Ballets within or as interludes to operas began to emerge as one of the most appealing elements for the paying theatre audience. Alongside the presence of the leading performers-choreographers of the time, such as Giovanna Baccelli and Susanna Dentis, from the second half of the century onwards the troupes of the most important choreographers, including Gasparo Angiolini and Onorato Viganò, performed in the major Venetian theatres. Stars of their creations and acclaimed audience favourites were, to mention few ones, Anna Favier Beretti, Caterina Curtz, Vittoria Pelosini: 'dancing-actresses' who fully embodied the main values of the reformed dance, elevating gesture and dance to their highest eloquence.



Lorenzo Santoro, *Identità femminili, potere e raffigurazione delle relazioni nella Repubblica di Venezia: “Armida in Damasco” di Rampini e “Edvige regina d’Ungheria”*

La Repubblica di Venezia per diversi motivi ha offerto una vivida occasione di confronto nelle dinamiche di potere di genere; le differenze sociali e culturali, la dislocazione geografica particolarissima ha favorito il sorgere di fenomeni del tutto originali di differenziazione e di opposizione di genere di fronte alle tradizionali dimensioni di potere proprie della religione e della sovranità. Nel 1709 e nel 1711 furono rappresentate al teatro S. Angelo due opere le quali offrono significativi spunti di analisi a riguardo. Nel frangente della performatività teatrale e musicale, il testo, diffuso nei canali dell’editoria e della alfabetizzazione femminile propri della città veneta, diviene terreno di scontro, di elaborazione e di discussione. Il presente intervento è volto alla individuazione nel testo dei libretti e nella performatività musicale di elementi di confronto e di scontro tra donne e sistema di potere maschile che possano aiutare a individuare atteggiamenti eterodossi e innovativi rispetto alla tradizionale cultura propria del familismo, della religione, della sovranità, nel tentativo di mettere in evidenza il successo del Teatro Sant’Angelo quale modello di socialità e di elaborazione culturale in qualche modo originale rispetto alla vasta produzione drammaturgica e musicale della Repubblica. Il periodo in esame – alla luce della più recente produzione storiografica – autorizza a guardare a queste fonti in maniera senz’altro più attenta e circostanziale, tenendo in considerazione il ruolo culturale e religioso del tutto peculiare di Venezia, centro dell’editoria non solo italiana, luogo di convivenza di fedi diverse e territorio di sperimentazione di diverse classi sociali, le quali, soprattutto nella loro componente femminile, mettono in campo sia nel mecenatismo, come nella beneficenza, e nella graduale emersione di una dimensione pubblica e politica, i termini di nuove inquietudini e discontinuità.

Aneta Markuszewska, *Annibale by Nicola Porpora (Venice 1731) or Father-Daughter Relationship*

In his famous letter written to a friend in 1721 Antonio Conti noticed: “Government, science and war are professions that depend on vigour of mind and body.” Women’s bodies and mind did not possess obviously these qualities in Conti’s opinion. This was one of the reasons why women were doomed to submission. The first person they were obliged to listen was their father, than the married women were subjugated to their husbands. The opera plots demonstrated that situation repeatedly. In the fall season of 1731, Nicola Porpora presented the only one opera he composed for Teatro Sant’Angelo during his career as one of the leading opera composers in the first half of the 18 century. It was *Annibale* to a libretto by F. Vanstryp. The content of the libretto evokes the historical figure of Annibale, forced by the Romans to leave Carthage. The exiled ruler and his daughter Elisa find refuge at the court of Nicomede, King of Bithynia. The latter falls in love with Elisa with reciprocity. However, after the arrival at Nicomede’s court of the Roman legate Flaminio, the situation of Annibale and his daughter becomes uncertain. Their future fate is the main plot of the opera.

The goal of my paper is the analysis of the relationship between father and daughter, fundamental in the patriarchal system of early modern Europe. How exploring ‘father-daughter relationship’ the libretto perpetuates the desired social order and gender order (Hausen)? What did it mean to be a



good daughter? What consequences awaited the disobedient daughter? The additional point in my analysis of this score which has not so far enjoyed the interest of researchers is the part of the Elisa originally composed for Maria Giustina Turcotti, one of the best voices of her time. The figure of this singer who in 1731 was at a peak of her career is of my special interest.

Jeanette Joy Harris, *Improvisation, Ornamentation, and Adriana Cavarero's Vocal Ontology*

Adriana Cavarero is an Italian feminist philosopher who has spent her career developing a philosophy of uniqueness rooted in the irreproducibility, agency, and possibilities of our enfolded, relational, and ontological bodies. A significant aspect of her philosophy of uniqueness is a reappraisal of philosophy's historical attitude toward the human voice. Cavarero proposes a landscape where our uniqueness is revealed through our voice's materiality and sonorous beauty. Her approach to voice disrupts the semantic power of speech with the pleasurable power of voice. Albeit sparingly, in *For More Than One Voice*, Cavarero uses the operatic tradition to support her argument that the voice is inherently unique. My research capitalizes upon Cavarero's cursory utilization of opera to uncover issues in her vocal ontology and reappraise how we think about the voice in operatic practices – performatively and somatically. In the context of this conference, I am interested in the symmetrical and asymmetrical lines that can be drawn between Cavarero's attitudes toward improvisation and the eighteenth-century practice of vocalization and ornamentation. Cavarero tells us that improvisation saves the voice from being a “mere” parrot and grants agency to the voice, but interestingly, she dismisses the skill of improvisation. She says that “megalomaniac performers are known to ‘improvise’ the text.” (121) This attitude is surprising given her larger emphasis on vocal uniqueness. Why would she not support improvisation? The insufficiency of Cavarero's argument is made manifest by the emergence of the opera celebrity. For example, the soprano – castrato or female – could become a prima donna with a cult following if they could improvise with technical skill and theatrical virtuosity. It seems that Cavarero would prize improvisation – lyrically and musically – because it demonstrates the instability of language and the subversive possibilities of the voice.

This paper puts Cavarero's vocal improvisation in conversation with eighteenth-century performance practices.

Michele Geremia, *If Women Are in Charge: Women's Role in Goldoni's drammi giocosi*

What would happen if the world were entirely ruled by women? Such a question would seem almost provocative even in this day and age, let alone if an eighteenth-century librettist were asking it. In the Age of Enlightenment, we have several examples of female figures at the helm of important entities: we can mention Caterina II di Russia or Maria Teresa d'Austria. So many other women distinguished themselves during the eighteenth century; Giuseppe Ortolani, in the 1970s, wrote that the 18th century saw the dominance of women in socio-political life and the gradual triumph of their freedom. However society remained, and still remains, male-dominated.

Carlo Goldoni tackles the *vexata quaestio* in the middle of the century, in one of his first collaborations with Baldassarre Galuppi, a composer who was able to understand and exalt the



librettos of his countryman. It takes shape *Il mondo alla roversa o sia Le donne che comandano, dramma bernesco* (interesting specification) in three acts first performed in November 1750 at Teatro Tron di San Cassiano.

One hundred and fifty years after Giulio Cesare Croce's *Mondo alla roversa* (Bologna, 1605), Goldoni tackled major themes. Goldoni addressed issues that were of great relevance and impact to the eighteenth-century Venetian audience: the form of government, the role of women in society, cisisbeism. What will the world ruled by women look like? Will the three female protagonists be able to find an optimal form of government? Why is the world ruled by women considered *alla roversa*? How is the female figure described in Goldoni's other *drammi giocosi*?

Thoughts and considerations taking place in the Serenissima, which is about to move toward the conclusion of its centuries-long splendor.

Yseult Martinez, *Vivaldi's Rosmira fedele (1738): Cross-Dressing Femininity and Flawed Masculinity on Sant'Angelo's Stage*

In January 1738, Vivaldi premiered his opera *Rosmira fedele* at the Teatro Sant' Angelo, based on Silvio Stampiglia's well-known libretto *La Partenope*. Venetian audiences had already heard the musical settings by Antonio Caldara in 1708 and Leonardo Vinci in 1725. Inspired by the latter, Vivaldi reorganized the libretto and composed a pasticcio: he wrote the music for all the recitatives himself, but then inserted arias of various origins (Handel, Hasse, Pergolesi, etc.) that more or less corresponded to the dramatic situation. He adapted these arias not only to the singers' voices but also to new text, which he sometimes wrote himself (Sylvie Mamy, *Antonio Vivaldi*, Paris, Fayard, 2011, pp. 696-698).

We propose to analyse the libretto as remodelled by Vivaldi, focusing in particular on the title-role, Rosmira, interpreted by his favorite mezzosoprano, Anna Girò. Stampiglia's character has been abandoned by her fickle lover, Arsace. Disguised as a man, she intends to right the wrong done to her and simultaneously takes part in the rehabilitation of the male sinner.

In 1730, Handel had also cleverly reworked Stampiglia's libretto for London audience and succeeded in considerably enriching the character of Rosmira with some new arias. In the original libretto, Rosmira was driven solely by love, despite Arsace's horrible betrayal. In Handel's work, she became a heartbroken woman who, in a vain attempt to stop suffering, silenced her feelings and sought revenge. Handel's Rosmira, as powerful as she is fragile, gave new depth to the drama. In his 1738 version, what has Vivaldi done with the character? What does the choice of arias reveal of his vision of Rosmira as a *donna forte*? Renaming the opera *Rosmira* clearly shifts the focus to this character. We can thus assume that Vivaldi sought to give her a new scope, in keeping with the talents of his favorite singer.

Ivan Ćurković: *Female Duality in Gasparini's Venetian Operas and Their Reimaginings*

Francesco Gasparini's operatic career in Venice (1701-1713) was rather influential in that many of his operas first performed at the Teatro San Cassiano were restaged elsewhere in Italy and in London, often in a heavily revised form bordering on *pasticcio*. This paper will examine the



dualities inherent in the female characters in some of Gasparini's Venetian operas and the transformation of their identity in later reimaginings of the operas, in connection with the hierarchical nature of opera seria (the *prima* and the *seconda donna* roles as well as the female portrayal of male parts) and previous research, such as the elucidation of the Cuzzoni – Bordoni 'rivalry' (Aspden 2013).

Of special note are two pairs of heroines: Veremonda and Gerilda in *Ambleto*, premiered in 1706 but used as a starting point for the 1712 London *pasticcio* of the same title, and Asteria and Irene, the female protagonists of Gasparini's 1711 *Tamerlano*, an opera that had an interesting afterlife on a variety of stages in the next thirty years. Even though *Ambleto* was conceived irrespective of William Shakespeare's more celebrated telling of the story of the famous Danish prince, this layer of reception is impossible to disregard when dealing with the early 18-the century operatic counterparts of Ophelia and Gertrude. On the other hand, Gasparini's three reworkings of the story of Timur and Bayezid (Venice 1711, Reggio Emilia 1719, Venice 1723), will be compared to Handel's *Tamerlano* (1724) and Vivaldi's *pasticcio Bajazet* (1735) in order to understand how other centres and impulses by different composers reshaped the contrasted female identities. Due to the limited availability of musical sources, recourse will be made to the study of libretti, but also to historical knowledge on their dramaturgic adaptation, musical parody, and the original performers themselves who may have embodied these roles as emblems of contrasting femininity.