

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

International Conference

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU),  
Trondheim, 11-13 April 2024

Call for papers

This conference is organised within the framework of the 5-year research project ‘Women, Opera and the Public Stage in Eighteenth-Century Venice’ ([WoVen](#)), funded by the Norwegian Research Council and based at the Music Institute, NTNU.

The project explores the role of women in European operatic culture during the Enlightenment. More specifically, WoVen focuses on Venice, a hub for critical debate and a prominent operatic centre of international significance in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. WoVen seeks to uncover how opera and operatic women contributed to the ‘women question’ through their multiple activities within and around the opera world in Venice at a time of profound change for women throughout Europe.

We invite contributions for 20-minute papers (or 30-minute papers with performance/demonstration) within these four thematic areas:

### **1. Women's Roles and Images of Femininity on the Venetian Stage**

We encourage papers that explore both archetypal and atypical operatic roles and constructions of femininity on the Venetian public stage. We encourage the investigation of operatic roles in relation to literary and theatrical models; current ideas about marriage, family, motherhood, love and education; as well as the contemporary phenomenon of the castrato and the practice of cross-gender casting. Among the many genres and subgenres, we particularly encourage focus on the *dramma giocoso* and the *farsa per musica* on libretti by Goldoni, Gozzi, Chiari, and less studied librettists such as Mazzolà, who directly participated in the critical debates about women.

### **2. Performing Celebrity on the Venetian Stage**

In this thematic area, we invite proposals that focus on women singers, staging practices and celebrity culture in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Venice. We welcome new information about singers’s careers, individual singers’s vocal qualities and ornamentation, acting techniques and dramatic roles also in comparison with castrati. We are particularly interested in papers that assess the impact that the ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ female body had on the stage and explore the interaction between stage role and public persona, agency and the mechanisms of celebrity’s creation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3. Audiences, Patrons and Women's Participation in the Opera Business in Venice**

Here we encourage papers that focus on public and operatic life in the Serenissima, the network of women (Venetian and non) that, as singers, managers, patrons and audiences, participated in the operatic life of the lagoon city. The activity of operatic women in authorial and leadership roles, such as Luisa Bergalli and Faustina Bordoni, in particular, may provide a lens through which to explore how such activities may have functioned as platforms for claiming a female authorial voice in the male-dominated space of theatre direction and libretto writing.

#### **4. Performing Eighteenth-Century Operatic Women and Gender: A Practice-Based Approach**

The unwritten conventions upon which the performance of 18<sup>th</sup>-century opera relied offer an example of embodied practice as both a way of storing and transmitting knowledge. This repertory opens a wealth of opportunities for interpretation and co-creation, as timbre variations, breathing, hesitation sounds, gestures and facial expressions, as well as ornamentation, articulation, dynamics, tempo ornamentation and basso continuo realization, are largely unnotated in the sources and left to performers' creativity. We thus encourage practiced-based presentations/demonstrations to exemplify how gesture and ornamentation and other unnotated paralinguistic signs could have been used as codes in 18<sup>th</sup>-century opera to stage gender, and how gesture techniques can be used or re-invented on the stage today.

Some of the questions we would like our participants to address in their presentations, related to the themes above, are:

- 1. Who were the women performers that brought women to stage life? What information and insight can be gained from musical, dramatic, archival, iconographic, legal, literary and autobiographical sources, concerning their career objectives, agency and preoccupation with their public image?*
- 2. What kinds of images of femininity did opera in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Venice stage? How do the images of mothers, wives, daughters, educated women relate to notions of authority, marriage, family, sexuality and love? Which musical and dramaturgical conventions shaped these representations? What role did literary, historical and dramatic models play in their construction?*
- 3. How did women perform on stage? Which gestures and acting techniques did they use to perform gender and sexuality?*
- 4. To what extent did singers' professional profile, public persona and celebrity status impact the construction and meaning of these representations?*
- 5. How did authorial and managerial responsibilities help women establish their voice in the male-dominated space of theatre direction and opera writing?*
- 6. What was the profile of the female opera audience in Venice in the 18th century? What place did theatre and opera-going have in women's life?*
- 7. How can musico-dramatic acts of performance convey gender and sexuality? How can they be understood and staged today?*

Proposals for individual, unpublished papers must be submitted as Word files and include the following information: presenter's name; paper title; session for which the paper is being proposed; abstract (max. 300 words); short biography (max. 150 words); institutional affiliation; e-mail address.

The official language of the conference is English

Proposals must be sent to [woven@musikk.ntnu.no](mailto:woven@musikk.ntnu.no) by **15 August 2023**, and will be evaluated by 15 September 2023. Please indicate the subject of your email as: WoVen – call for papers.

WoVen will reserve and cover for 3 nights at a local hotel (10-13 April 2024). Please let us know if you require additional nights at the same hotel. We can make the reservation for you (so that the NTNU discount can be applied) but the additional nights will need to be covered by yourself and paid directly at the hotel.

Buffet lunch on 11, 12 and 13 April, as well as the Conference dinner on 12 April, are offered by WoVen.

We ask participants to book their travel early (economy class/2<sup>nd</sup> class train) in order to take advantage of reduced fares. Many University departments are able to cover such costs and we ask you to take advantage of this support if this is available to you. Please briefly outline your circumstances when sending your abstract. We will consider each case individually.

The Scientific committee will select the best papers presented at the conference for peer-reviewed publication.

Scientific committee: Melania Bucciarelli (NTNU); Tatiana Korneeva (NTNU); Francesca Menchelli-Buttini (Conservatorio di Musica 'G. Rossini', Pesaro)