

16th International Congress for Eighteenth-Century Studies
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Antiquity and the Shaping of the Future in the Age of Enlightenment
L'Antiquité et la construction de l'avenir à l'âge des Lumières
L'Antichità e la costruzione del futuro nel secolo dei Lumi

Rome, 3-7 July 2023
Rome, 3-7 juillet 2023
Roma, 3-7 luglio 2023

PANEL PROPOSAL FORM
FORMULAIRE POUR LA PRESENTATION D'UNE SESSION
SCHEMA PER LA PRESENTAZIONE DI UNA SESSIONE

**1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PANEL / DESCRIPTION DE LA SESSION /
DESCRIZIONE DELLA SESSIONE**

**PANEL CONVENOR(S) / PRESIDENT.E(S) DE LA SESSION / PRESIDENTE(I)
DELLA SESSIONE**

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TITLE / TITRE/ TITOLO

Ahead of Their Time? Women and Italian Opera in the Eighteenth Century

ABSTRACT / RESUME / BREVE SINTESI

The eighteenth century was a time of drastic change for women across Europe. Women began to play a more prominent role in public life as *salonières*, theatre-goers, and members of reading circles. They gained better access to education and professions, and questions about their role in society took a central place in public discourse. With the advent of commercial theatres, Italian opera became a versatile mass medium for shaping public opinion about women and served as a training ground for critical public reflection on the question of women. Yet, the role of women – both as opera singers and as objects of the spectators' gaze – in Italian opera performed throughout Europe is still not fully understood. This panel aims to nuance the place of Italian opera and female performers in the cultural history of women by examining the extent to which they offered women opportunities for agency, autonomy, and social

mobility, and by exploring the towering presence of female characters on the operatic stage. We invite proposals that both explore the general theme of the congress and address, expand, and open a forum for discussion on any of the following topics:

–How did female performers and celebrities shape the future of women in Enlightenment Europe by questioning or challenging ideas about femininity and male-female relationships?

–How did operatic representations of heroines from myths and tales of Antiquity construct new models for women in a modern, “enlightened” society? By what mechanisms did these characters and their interpreters convey authority and power?

–How were heroines from tales and myths of classical antiquity reinterpreted in Italian opera to embody female agency and advance the process of women’s emancipation? What impact did these reinterpretations have on a woman singer’s theatrical career?

This session invites papers that explore the contribution of female opera performers to the representation of femininity and gender in scores and libretti, and through their voice, costumes, body language, and acting practise.

2. PAPERS INCLUDED IN THE PANEL / COMMUNICATIONS REUNIES DANS LA SESSION / COMUNICAZIONI INSERITE NELLA SESSIONE

PAPER 1 / COMMUNICATION 1 / COMUNICAZIONE 1

AUTHOR(S) / AUTEUR.E(S) / AUTORE(I)

Teresa Chirico, Conservatorio di musica “Santa Cecilia”, Professor, techiri@libero.it

PAPER TITLE / TITRE DE LA COMMUNICATION / TITOLO DELLA COMUNICAZIONE

A Powerful Arcadian Goddess: Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel in the Serenade *Sacrificio a Venere* by Giovanni Bononcini (1714)

ABSTRACT / RESUME / BREVE SINTESI

After the War of the Spanish Succession, Europe experienced a gradual détente. In this spirit the Imperial ambassador in Rome, Johann Wenzel von Gallas, organized a public tribute to the Empress Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (1691–1750), wife of Charles VI, on the occasion of her birthday: the performance of the serenade *Sacrificio a Venere* by Giovanni Bononcini to a text by Paolo Antonio Rolli, which took place on 28 of August 1714 in an ephemeral theatre in front of his own residence, palace Odescalchi in piazza SS. Apostoli. The serenade was the first composition patronized by the Austrian ambassador in Rome, an important showcase for the Habsburgs to display to the Roman nobility and people. Gallas aimed to create a new image of the Holy Roman Empire – no longer an enemy but a new generous, if still powerful, companion – by basing the serenade on the figure of the empress. The text of this composition makes Elisabeth Christine a kind of “doppelgänger” of the goddess Venus, and not only in terms of her famous beauty. The “sweet mother of the Roman Empire” is linked to the myth of the foundation of Rome by Aeneas, the son of the goddess: the ancient legend became the vessel of a new political era in which the empress is transformed into a charismatic and maternal icon. The construction of this figure – transformed into an Arcadian goddess by the poet Paolo Rolli – sheds light on various aspects, including its relationship with Bononcini’s music, which shows a clear Viennese influence (it was the first composition with hunting horns in Rome). This paper examines the influence of this female model and whether it survived in later musical works on the threshold of the European Enlightenment.

KEYWORDS / MOTS-CLES / PAROLE CHIAVE

serenata *Sacrificio a Venere*; Giovanni Bononcini; Elisabetta Cristina di Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel; Paolo Antonio Rolli

BIONOTE / NOTE BIOGRAPHIQUE / NOTA BIOGRAFICA

Teresa Chirico is a tenured professor of music history and historiography at the Conservatory Santa Cecilia in Rome. She studied literature and musicology at the University “La Sapienza” in Rome; and obtained conservatory diplomas in both piano and singing. She obtained her PhD in Beni Culturali e Territorio – Musicologia e Storia della musica at the Università di Roma “Tor Vergata”. She has attended many international conferences and has written two research monographs. Her articles have been published in prestigious international musicological journals in English, Italian, German, Spanish and Portuguese. She has contributed to the DBI and the MGG.

PAPER 2 / COMMUNICATION 2 / COMUNICAZIONE 2

AUTHOR(S) / AUTEUR.E(S) / AUTORE(I)

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PAPER TITLE / TITRE DE LA COMMUNICATION / TITOLO DELLA COMUNICAZIONE

Representing Antiquity on the Venetian Operatic Stage. Female Performers and Eighteenth-Century Costume Design

ABSTRACT / RESUME / BREVE SINTESI

Operatic costumes played a crucial role as eloquent visual tools; as soon as the *prime donne* would enter the stage, their costumes would tell a narrative and gives clues about their rank, their personality, their provenance, and their psychological state. The Enlightenment focus on reason and historical accuracy had a strong impact on costume design and acting during the eighteenth century. Baroque unrealistic extravagances were ferociously condemned and led to the costume reform, advocating a new simplicity and historical erudition. For the first time, costumes were designed in an attempt at a realistic portrayal of the character’s provenance and historicity and they acquired a whole new function as dramatic resources, enhancing the body’s mobility and expressivity.

Based on visual and textual sources on costumes, this paper will explore the evolution of representation of Antiquity, with female characters performing in historical costumes on the Venetian stage. Paintings and caricatures of *prime donne* will be analyzed in the light of one of the rare Italian treatises on theatrical costumes written by the Genoese costume designer, Leonardo Marini, *Ragionamento intorno alla foggia degli abiti teatrali* (*Reasoning on the Style of Theatrical Costumes* (1771), including several colored plates of costume drawings. Marini advocates for simplicity and erudition; the designer “has to read history again” in order to respect the “customs of Antiquity.” His precepts will be compared to representations of famous *divas* in ancient costumes across the eighteenth century (before and during the costume reform), such as Margherita Durastanti, Faustina Bordoni, Vittoria Tesi, Catherina Gabrielli and Anna Maria Strada.

KEYWORDS / MOTS-CLES / PAROLE CHIAVE

Italian Opera, Costumes, Antiquity, Staging, Representation, 18th-century Venice

BIONOTE / NOTE BIOGRAPHIQUE / NOTA BIOGRAFICA

Christine Jeanneret is a musicologist and she specializes in early modern music, gender studies, performance, Italian opera, staging and costumes. She has held positions in Europe (University of Geneva, École française de Rome, Centre de recherche du château de Versailles, University of Copenhagen) and in the USA (Yale and Columbia universities). She currently is Associate Professor at the Centre for Privacy studies (University of Copenhagen) as PI of *SOUND*, an innovative research aiming at listening and reconstructing the soundscapes of the Danish court at Rosenborg Castle during the seventeenth century.

PAPER 3 / COMMUNICATION 3 / COMUNICAZIONE 3

AUTHOR(S) / AUTEUR.E(S) / AUTORE(I)

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PAPER TITLE / TITRE DE LA COMMUNICATION / TITOLO DELLA COMUNICAZIONE

Circe on the Seria Stage: Cecilia Davies in Venice and the Imagination of Magic

ABSTRACT / RESUME / BREVE SINTESI

The Enlightenment-era fascination with the glass harmonica, its ethereal qualities, and its deployment in the musical language of female madness in nineteenth-century Italian opera are by now well known. Many eighteenth-century audiences came to know the instrument through the public and private concerts of Marianne and Cecilia Davies, women performers who toured widely, playing the instrument and singing (respectively), in Venice, Naples, Paris, London, and elsewhere.

Cecilia later acquired fame as the first English soprano to achieve success as a prima donna in the opera theaters of Italy. Possessed of a young voice that was indistinguishable from the glass harmonica, according to contemporary reports, she often sang in musical dramas in which the title roles conjured magical associations or involved incantations. Chief among these was *La Circe*, a new, Venetian production on an original libretto (Domenico Perrelli and Johann Mysliveček, 1779). The choice of Circe as a vehicle for Davies speaks to the singer's ability to connect with audiences through contemporary ideas around magic as she brought to life this mythological sorceress.

Of eighteenth-century opera's supernatural female characters, which provided women with roles of unusual power and authority, Circe is perhaps the least well understood. Sources from Classical Antiquity furnished the *dramma per musica* with colorful images of the enchantress; Circe operas were popular in Venice earlier, and enjoyed an efflorescence there after Davies's performance. Although the production's music is reportedly lost, newly-discovered excerpts reveal some of its emphases. Contextualizing these sources within Davies's personal music collection leads to insights on her public persona and magical roles in the shape of a woman singer's career, and enhances our view of Venetian opera and its audiences in the late eighteenth century.

KEYWORDS / MOTS-CLES / PAROLE CHIAVE

Venice; opera; Circe; magic; supernatural; celebrity

BIONOTE / NOTE BIOGRAPHIQUE / NOTA BIOGRAFICA

Margaret Butler is an associate professor of musicology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her publications include *Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century Parma: Entertainment, Sovereignty, Reform*; chapters in *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House* and *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*; and articles in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Eighteenth-Century Music*, *Early Music*, *Music in Art*, and *Fontes Artis Musicae* (Vladimir Fédorov Award, 2021). Her work has been supported by grants

and fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, the American Musicological Society, the Newberry Library, and the Delmas Foundation for Venetian Research.

PAPER 4 / COMMUNICATION 4 / COMUNICAZIONE 4

AUTHOR(S) / AUTEUR.E(S) / AUTORE(I)

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PAPER TITLE / TITRE DE LA COMMUNICATION / TITOLO DELLA COMUNICAZIONE

Sorceress, Empress, and “the singer of all the centuries”: the St Peterburg *Armida*

ABSTRACT / RESUME / BREVE SINTESI

Viewing opera seria as “a reenactment, framed as a performance; the sum total of a text, an enactment, and a reception” (Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*, 2006), I explore *Armida e Rinaldo*, premiered on 15/29 January 1786 for the inauguration of the court Hermitage theater in St Petersburg as an allegory of a fascinating coalescence of feminine power on the stage, at court, and in politics. Its history is extraordinary: the libretto was chosen by the empress herself, reusing a text by the deceased court poet Marco Coltellini for Giuseppe Scarlatti (1766), reworked for Antonio Salieri (1771, Vienna), and performed previously in the Russian capital (in 1774 and 1776). Coltellini’s version omits all the secondary events and descriptions of the *merveilleux*, concentrating on the emotional development of the Saracen sorceress’s yearning for the love of a Christian knight, metaphorically conveying Catherine’s zeal for eternal union with Russia.

Armida’s unusual début (an opulent double premiere and triple benefit) and the inventive modes of dissemination and afterlife of its magnificent music by the court composer Giuseppe Sarti all break the paradigm of operatic production at that time.

Nevertheless, the main reason for the stunning success of this particular rendition was due to Catherine’s favourite, the Portuguese mezzo Luísa Todi (1753–1833), whose stage embodiment of the eponymous protagonist outshone the famous male castrato Luigi Marchesi. Todi’s astonishing career, from her earning the title of “the Nation’s singer” at *Concert Spirituel*

to a special authorization to perform in public theater in her native country at the zenith of her fame, remains unexplored; her glittering Russian period (1784–1788) culminated in the Moscow performance of *festa teatrale Pollinia* (1787) on her own libretto, dedicated to her royal patron. Todi’s *Armida* inculcated in Russian society the model of a powerful woman, obscuring the line between the theater and the empire.

KEYWORDS / MOTS-CLES / PAROLE CHIAVE

Italian opera; gender and power; Luisa Todi; Marco Coltellini; Giuseppe Sarti; Catherine II

BIONOTE / NOTE BIOGRAPHIQUE / NOTA BIOGRAFICA

Bella Brover-Lubovsky is a Professor of Musicology and Vice-President for Academic Affairs at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. She is the author of *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* (Indiana University Press, 2008), editions of dramatic and sacred compositions by Giuseppe Sarti, articles published in international periodicals and volumes; and a recipient of the Thurnau Award (Bayreuth University), research grants from the Einstein Foundation (Berlin), the Israel Science Foundation, the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America (Columbia University), the Vittore Branca Center for the Study of Italian Culture (Fondazione Cini, Venice), the Newberry Library (Chicago).