

**JUDIT ZSOVÁR**

**ANNA MARIA STRADA DEL PÒ,  
HANDEL'S PRIMA DONNA**

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**ANNA MARIA STRADA DEL PÒ, HANDEL'S PRIMA DONNA:  
PORTRAIT OF AN UNCOMMON VOICE**

**JUDIT ZSOVÁR**

**SUPERVISOR: DR. GERGELY FAZEKAS**

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## Prelude

In the second act of Karel Čapek's comedy, *The Makropulos Case* (Prague, 1922), – and likewise in Leoš Janaček's opera of the same title (world première in Brno, 1926) – Vitek, the clerk, congratulates the 337-year-old *prima donna*, Emilia Marty/Elina Makropulos, after her fabulous performance that night and compares her to Anna Maria Strada del Pò, referring to history books which recorded her superb vocal artistry:

*Emilia:* Were you in the theatre? Did you like any performance?

*Vitek:* I should just think I did. Why, it was as good as Strada.

*Emilia:* Have you heard Strada sing? Let me tell you that Strada had no voice—she just made whistling noises.

*Vitek:* Why, Strada died a hundred years ago.

*Emilia:* So much the worse. You ought to have heard her. Strada! What do you mean by talking about Strada?

*Vitek:* I'm sorry, madam, but I—I—of course, I've never heard her. Only according to what the history books say—

*Emilia:* Let me tell you that the history-books are full of lies. I'll tell you something: Strada made whistling noises and Corrona had a plum in her throat. Agujari was a goose and Faustina breathed like a pair of bellows. So much for your history-books.<sup>1</sup>

Emilia denigrates Strada's voice, together that of two other singers in Janaček's opera, and of three exceptional ones in Čapek's original play: Corona Schröter, a *Kammersängerin* in Weimar, friend of Goethe and Schiller, whose strength lay in her pure vocal sound; Lucrezia Agujari who, according to Leopold Mozart, possessed an extraordinary agility and a range of three and a half octaves up to *c'''*, and had a beautiful voice with mellowness and sweetness, as testified by Fanny Burney; and the mezzo-soprano Faustina Bordoni, the most celebrated female singer of the Baroque era, with a big and penetrating voice.<sup>2</sup> Emilia's mockeries address these singers' main vocal characteristics, by asserting their opposites.

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<sup>1</sup> Karel Čapek, *The Macropulos Secret. A Comedy*, authorised English translation by Paul Selver (London: Robert Holden & Co. LTD, 1927), 86 (Act II). At Janaček the same passage is as follows: 'Did you ever hear Strada? Strada used to squeak! Corrona – she had a plum in her mouth! Agujari – she was just a silly goose!' Leoš Janaček, *The Makropulos Case. Libretto* (1923–1925).

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, 'Agujari [Agujari] Lucrezia ['La Bastardina', 'La Bastardella']', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 5 December 2015; Ronald R. Kidd, 'Schröter, Corona Elisabeth Wilhelmine', *ibid.* A French traveller's letter to Mr Fougereux, June 1728. *George Frideric Handel:*

Among George Frideric Handel's leading singers, Strada was the soprano with whom he had the longest period of continuous collaboration (1729–37) as well as the one who 'seems to have pleased him most'.<sup>3</sup> Charles Burney considered her as an artist formed by the composer himself.<sup>4</sup> I have chosen to investigate her vocal activities in connection with the music written for her not only by Handel, but also by Antonio Vivaldi, Leonardo Leo, Leonardo Vinci, Domenico Sarro and others. This singer has not become a research focus – neither in Handel research nor in the field of eighteenth-century vocality – until now. This neglect of her by modern musicology, besides the scarcity of surviving period descriptions of her singing and private life, is mainly due to the popularity of her star-contemporaries, Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, and of *castrati* such as Senesino, Farinelli and Carestini. Nevertheless, very important remarks were made about her singing for example by Ellen T. Harris ('Das Verhältnis von Lautstärke und Stimmlage im Barockgesang', In: *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper*, 1988/1989; 'Singing', *Grove Music Online*), Reinhard Strohm (*The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 2008; 'Vivaldi's career as an opera producer', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 1985), Rodolfo Celletti (*Storia del belcanto*, 1983), Winton Dean (*Handel's Operas, 1726–1741*, 2006), J. Merrill Knapp (Preface to the HHA Edition of *Flavio, rè de' Longobardi*, 1993), Panja Mücke ('Zur Entstehung und den ersten Aufführungen von Alexander's Feast', in: *Die Macht der Musik: Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Georg Friedrich Händels Alexander's Feast*, 2010) and Donald Burrows (*Handel*, 2012; 'Handel's oratorio performances', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, 1997). However, as suggested by the mention of her in *The Makropulos Case*, Strada during the nineteenth century must have still been remembered as a great musician with a strong voice production. That Čapek as playwright of the Vinohrady Theatre chose Strada's art to make a compliment to a 337-year-old singer, who in her career brought every segment of her art to perfection, refers to her long-lasting and wide-spread appreciation within professional circles.

The librettist Paolo Rolli remarked that Strada had a penetrating and delightful voice and stated that Handel thought 'she sings better than the two previous ones', meaning that the special skills of the two former divas – Francesca Cuzzoni's expressiveness and

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*Collected Documents Volume 2, 1725–1734*, ed. by Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe and Anthony Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 233.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs Julian Marshall, *Handel* (London, S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1883), 85–86; Florence Ashton Marshall was an English writer, composer and conductor, contributor of the first edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Nigel Burton, 'Marshall, Florence Ashton', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 September 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: Payne and Son, 1789), 402.

Faustina Bordoni's dramatism and vocal agility – became one in her.<sup>5</sup> The musical material written for Strada shows an increase in lyric movements connected with demanding coloratura and a weightier dramatism. This indicates an exceptional voice production entirely *di petto* – as described by Pier Francesco Tosi and Giambattista Mancini.<sup>6</sup> This type of full body singing was in fact the main characteristic of the castrato style and become essential to nineteenth-century *bel canto*.

Strada's comprehensive range and flexibility, as well as her twofold, lyric-dramatic talent, were most probably due to an uncommon, innate ability. She may have been a so called natural soprano (or to use a Romantic expression, an early *soprano sfogato* or *voce assoluta*), who, having a strong upper register, sang with a chest-like voice production in the head range as well, powerfully and sonorously. Some evidence for this in her repertoire – as Ellen T. Harris has pointed out – is that, in the arias written especially for her, high notes as dynamic and musical climaxes are often textually and rhythmically accented,<sup>7</sup> which was contrary to the general practice of the era and to Handel's way of composing for Cuzzoni and La Francesina (Élisabeth Duparc), the sopranos preceding and, succeeding Strada, respectively.<sup>8</sup> My conclusions about Strada's singing and sound features rest on three main pillars: (a) the musical sources, which focus on the original roles and arias created especially for her; (b) the surviving descriptions of her singing, and the period treatises, completed (c) with my own practical experiences as a classical singer. The musical material *per se* can easily be misleading when it comes to the quality of singing, without the opinions of listeners who heard her voice back then, verifying that Strada's skills met all the technical, acoustic, musical and expressive requirements these works imposed. Only after this foundation has been laid can the compositions – coupled with contemporary accounts of her singing – be interpreted as a sort of eighteenth-century 'sound recordings', preserving traces of her vocal personality. This is the method used by Charles Burney, for example. In the case of the soprano castrato Valeriano Pellegrini (1663–1746) he suggests certain abilities that the score might indicate concerning

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<sup>5</sup> Paolo Rolli's letters to Giuseppe Riva, 11 December and 6 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 331–332 and 316–317.

<sup>6</sup> 'Nelle Femmine, che cantano il Soprano sentesi qualche volta una voce tutta di petto'. Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (Bologna: dalla Volpe, 1723), 38; *Observations on the Florid Song or, Sentiments on the ancient and modern Singers*. Translated by John Ernest Galliard (London: Wilcox, 1743), 23; Giambattista Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), trans. in English by Pietro Buzzi, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1912), 108.

<sup>7</sup> Considering the repertoire of her early, Venetian years, especially the arias Vivaldi wrote for her, one can assume that Strada's upper vocal range naturally tended to have a solid and bright sound from the very beginning of her career.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Das Verhältnis von Lautstärke und Stimmlage im Barockgesang', in: *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper* (Karlsruhe: 1988 and 1989), 157–171: 167–169; Harris, 'Singing', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 3 November 2013.

Mirtillo's first aria, *Fato crudo, Amor severo* in *Il pastor fido* (1712),<sup>9</sup> but in the end he classifies the singer according to the general quality of singing, meaning that the requirements of the aria could have been accomplished by Valeriano but neither easily, nor excellently (the singer was nearly fifty years of age at that time):

The first air for a soprano, lets us know what kind of voice the Cavalier Valeriano possessed of; and the pathetic style of the first part of his song, as well as the agility necessary to the execution of the second, seem to imply abilities in that performer, of no mean kind. This air and many other airs in the opera, are only accompanied by a violoncello, in the old cantata style; but Handel always contrives to make this single accompaniment interesting without overwhelming the voice-part, or depriving it of attention. [...] Valeriano was only of second class;<sup>10</sup>

Since Strada's beauty of voice and manner of singing always drew admiration, and never received a negative review even from malicious critics – she was rather criticised for her 'frightfull mouths' and unfavourable looks<sup>11</sup> – one can conclude that the ideal audible parameters of the arias inspired by and dedicated to her did reflect her actual vocal characteristics.

My research has aimed at a three-dimensional reconstruction of Strada's vocal art and development, conjugated with the course of her life. Therefore, besides following her vocal progress, this thesis is framed chronologically as a monograph. Also, in contrast with the typical structure of musicians' biographies, especially of singers, that I have encountered so far, I decided not to separate the musical part from the social, geographical, cultural and personal stages of Strada's life. In so doing, I aimed to show the whole person as far as possible, which I think was inseparable from her being as an artist. More importantly, I am discussing vocal technical issues in greater detail than usual, and embedded in the analyses of selected arias. My conviction is that in this way a well-rounded vocal profile can be achieved and effectively transmitted to the reader, since the subject is a singer of the pre-recording era.

The present dissertation also contains a portfolio recorded with Fanni Edőcs harpsichordist in Budapest in 2015 (App. A), which, unfortunately, had to be made under very limited circumstances. These are neither studio, nor professional recordings; and they

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<sup>9</sup> Valeriano Pellegrini sang Nero in Handel's *Agrippina* in Venice (1709). He sang for the composer in London in 1712–1713 as well, playing Mirtillo in *Il pastor fido*, the title role in *Teseo* and probably Lepidus in *Silla*. Winton Dean and John Rosselli, 'Pellegrini, Valeriano', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 2 February 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 234 and 237.

<sup>11</sup> Mrs Pendarves's letter to her sister, Anne Granville, 29 or 30 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 320.

are unmastered ones, as I have edited them myself at home. Despite the resulting disadvantages and risks, I still consider it essential for this thesis to include an audible result of my research over the last four years, not least because Strada's singing has not yet been properly interpreted, either in musicology or in performance practice.<sup>12</sup> My vocal technique and artistic accomplishment was growing and maturing parallel to and in interaction with the writing of this study, and I am glad that this topic occurred to me (in 2011), when I was searching for historical evidence of an authentic manner of singing Baroque repertoire without vocal limitations.

The recorded portfolio consists of Strada's thirteen arias, a *recitativo secco* and an *accompagnato*, selected from her original roles and spanning from her debut years until the end of her London period (1720–37). There is no recording of mine, however, from her last professional years in Italy (1739–41). There are two reasons for that: as her vocal abilities seem to have begun to diminish somewhat, the later arias do not add anything new to her vocal profile; and the sources are incomplete, most of them being lost. The selection and balance of the repertory presented here follows the course of Strada's career as well as that of the thesis. The *da capo* embellishments and other ornaments and cadenzas are completely the products of my own creativity and sense of style – they reflect my relations to those arias, and do not attempt to reconstruct Strada's own embellishments (all the more so because none of them survives). Rather, I tried to transmit an attitude, a certain way of thinking about performance, and to present it as a living, flexible and creative entity, not as a museum piece. Through Strada's example I also hope to promote my conviction that a good and healthy vocal technique is equally suitable to any of the classical musical repertoires; the style is what is different, and the proportions of certain tools and their execution (e.g. vibrato, *portamento*, *rubato*, appoggiaturas and other ornaments, etc.) have been the changing elements throughout the centuries. Strada's way of singing – which was the inverse of the standard Baroque, as far as melodic structure, accentuation, and proportion of high and low notes are concerned—is one of the best proofs that artists with diverse vocal styles were able to successfully operate in the same era. This may teach us not to treat Baroque singing as uniform, without individual style patterns, but rather to let the characteristics of certain periods shine through in a unique and unrepeatable union with individual vocal attributes and personal features.

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<sup>12</sup> Two recordings dedicated to Strada's repertoire were released in the last few years: Karina Gauvin's *Prima Donna* (ATMA Classique, 4 September 2012) and *Anna Maria Strada: La favorita di Händel* by María Espada (Musiepoca, 1 July 2015). Apart from the latter's silvery ringing vocal substance and darker colour, in many aspects these two recordings do not correspond to my research results about Strada's vocal art and manner of singing.



## Chapter One: Early Years

Anna Maria Strada was born in 1703, and died in Naples on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1775.<sup>1</sup> Jean-Benjamin de la Borde, in his list of the ‘celebrated female singers for the theatre’, notes her as a native of Bergamo.<sup>2</sup> Her father might have been the bass Giuseppe Maria Strada, who was a member of the chapel choir of Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo between 1709 and 1711.<sup>3</sup> Giuseppe sang in Milan (*Muzio Scevola* and Giovanni Pagliardi’s *Numa Pompilio* 1690), Parma (*Furo Camillo* by Giacomo Perti 1697), Casale Monferrato (*Il gran Pompeo* 1704), Verona (Francesco Pollarolo’s *Venceslao*, 1708), Ferrara (*Partenope* by Antonio Caldara 1709), Novara (1711) and Brescia (Tomaso Albinoni’s *I rivali generosi* 1715). Besides, he received a monthly grant of three *doppie* from the Court of Mantova from the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1696 onwards.<sup>4</sup> Anna Strada surely received her first musical instructions from her father, and it may be a feasible hypothesis that later, in her mid-teens, she either spent a couple of years of training in Bologna – the centre where the modern singing method developed, becoming the chief market of opera management by the mid-century – or rather was taught by someone coming from there.<sup>5</sup> It is also very likely that Strada additionally received instrumental training on the harpsichord, a possibility which is supported by the fact that in 1731, when she was singing for Handel, an instrument built in 1729 by the harpsichord maker Burckhard Tschudi, a good friend of the composer, became her property (see ch. 3).<sup>6</sup> She probably could accompany herself, fulfilling one of a ‘Singer’s Principal Qualifications’, as set by Pier Francesco Tosi.<sup>7</sup>

The modern singing school was founded and run by the castrato Francesco Antonio Pistocchi, the ‘father of modern good taste’, from 1701–2 onwards, after he returned to Bologna from Germany;<sup>8</sup> another such school was run by the composer Niccolò Porpora,

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<sup>1</sup> Parr. di S. Anna di Palazzo Napoli, *Lib. 19° Def. f. 71*: ‘A di 20 Luglio 1775 — La Signora Donna Anna Strada, d’anni 72. Vedova, ricevuti li SS.mi Sacram: morì a di detto in Com.ne di S. Chiesa, fu seppellita alla Congr.ne di S. Maria della Salvaz.ne accanto S. Anna, abitava alla strada del Carminiello.’

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Benjamin de la Borde, *Essai sur la Musique Ancienne et Moderne*, vol. iii (Paris: Onfroy, 1780), 325.

<sup>3</sup> I am very grateful to Anita Sikora, who drew my attention to Giuseppe Strada and suggested the possibility of him being Anna Maria’s father. See K. J. Kutsch, Leo Riemens, Hansjörg Rost, *Grosses Sängerlexikon*, vol. vi (K. G. Saur: Munich, 2003), 4562.

<sup>4</sup> Paola Besutti, *La Corte Musicale du Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga Ultimo Duca di Mantova* (Mantova: 1989), 82.

<sup>5</sup> John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>6</sup> William Dale, *Tschudi the Harpsichord Maker* (London: Constable and Company, 1913), 32–34.

<sup>7</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna: Volpe, 1723; Eng. trans. by John Ernest Galliard as *Observations on the Florid Song or, Sentiments on the ancient and modern Singers* (London: Wilcox, 1743), VI.§16, VII.§14.

<sup>8</sup> Anne Schnoebelen, ‘Pistocchi, Francesco Antonio Mamiliano [‘Il Pistocchino’]’, *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 11 November 2014; John H. Roberts, ‘Handel and the Shepherds of Ansbach’, in:

from 1712 in Naples. It could be that one of Pistocchi's castrato pupils later became Strada's teacher either in Bologna or in Lombardy: in Bergamo or Milan. Probably the master's connections must have been helpful for the young soprano to get an appointment as *virtuosa da camera* at the court of Count Girolamo Colloredo-Waldsee, the new governor of Milan and patron of arts, in 1720.<sup>9</sup> Arriving there, Strada was discovered by Antonio Vivaldi, who engaged her for the 1720/21 season at the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice.

The Bolognese contralto Antonia Merighi, one of Strada's regular fellow singers, supposedly belonged to the circle of Pistocchi, and was strongly influenced by his pupils, Antonio Bernacchi and the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri, with whom she regularly performed.<sup>10</sup> Very intriguing is the fact that she used to sing with Strada in the same company in Venice; after that, Merighi was engaged in Naples, and when she left the city in 1724 Strada was appointed there. Later, from 1729 onwards, they found themselves in the same troupe again, this time in Handel's Second Academy in London, also with Bernacchi. On both occasions when Strada was engaged in Naples and London, she seems to have appeared from out of nowhere. Logically, somebody must have recommended her; in the absence of documents, only hypotheses, based on the practice of the opera business, remain. If, Strada was trained either in Bologna or by somebody from the Bolognese school, she could have known Merighi and Bernacchi too, from her teens: Merighi was around thirteen, Bernacchi eighteen years her elder. Following the logic that Bernacchi, being Pistocchi's pupil, carried on to teach his methods and later founded a school himself, and that he most probably gave some lessons to Merighi and even inspired the style of Farinelli, it seems very likely that Bernacchi himself might have been Strada's teacher for a while at least.<sup>11</sup> Strada's assumed father, Giuseppe, sang together with Bernacchi – for example in the production of Pollarolo's *Venceslao* (Verona 1708; with the young Diana Vico as well) – and therefore knew him personally, which makes this supposition feasible. During Strada's possible training years (c. 1717–20), Bernacchi appeared in several operas

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*Words on Music: Essays in Honor of Andrew Porter on the Occasion of His 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. by David Rosen and Claire Brook (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2003), 232.

<sup>9</sup> Daniela Tarabra, *European Art of the Eighteenth Century*, Trans. by Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008), 302.

<sup>10</sup> Naomi Adele André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-nineteenth-century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Vivaldi's career as an opera producer', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 122–163: 138; Anne Desler, 'Il novello Orfeo'. *Farinelli: Vocal Profile, Aesthetics, Rhetoric*. PhD thesis (Glasgow: School of Culture and Creative Arts. College of Arts. University of Glasgow, February 2014), 103–111. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5743/> See Appendix B2, the vocal lines of three arias sung by Bernacchi: *Quel fiume che in mente* (Frugoni/Vinci, *Medo* I/1, Parma 1728); *Taci, o di morte* (Frugoni/Vinci, *Medo* I/8, Parma 1728) and *Nella foresta Leon invitto* (Frugoni/Vinci, *Medo* III/6, Parma 1728), 339–341.



in Northern Italy (for example, in Milan in 1719, in Reggio nell'Emilia in 1718–19 and in Venice between 1717 and 1719), and there is no reason why Strada could not travel to him regularly to receive singing lessons. Bernacchi may have passed on to her the idea of instrumental-type coloraturas, Lombard rhythm, *arpeggiato* elements, *volatine*, various turn-figures etc.: his inheritance from Pistocchi.<sup>12</sup> Either he or Merighi could have proposed Strada not only in Naples and for Handel, but earlier too, for Count Colloredo in Milan or even for Lucca and Livorno, where Strada was active in 1722 and early 1724. Since Merighi stood in the service of Violante Beatrice, the Grand Princess of Tuscany, as a link to Strada she could mention her name concerning the productions in the two Tuscan cities.

### Venice

The Republic of Venice, due to successive wars against the Ottoman Empire, became weakened economically by the early eighteenth century. In addition, although it did not participate in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701–14), its negative impact reached the city, including its cultural life, by the breaking down of tourism.<sup>13</sup> Contrarily to the political and economic decline, the sumptuousness of the entertainments, plays and operas remained continuous, serving to gloss over the real state of the Venetian Republic. In the 1720s then, as Eleanor Selfridge-Field remarks, ‘a generation of Europeans, impeded by war since the turn of the century, now came to Venice expecting to find the legendary splendours of earlier times. Instead they encountered an escalation of ceremony and its symbols’.<sup>14</sup> The actor, playwright and theatre historian Luigi Riccoboni frequently commented on this paradox, for example that ‘no Sovereign ever spent so much upon these Representations as the Venetians have done’.<sup>15</sup> Besides, his remark about the frequency of performances and the speed of the artists’ fluctuation was that ‘One may easily judge how much Operas are in Fashion at Venice, when he is told that at certain seasons they play

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<sup>12</sup> Bernacchi was an alto and pupil of the Bologna school’s famous master, Antonio Pistocchi who introduced him ornamentations of instrumental kind. Bernacchi adopted them to such a degree that finally Pistocchi complained about him: ‘Tristo a me, io t’ho insegnato a cantare, e tu vuoi suonare!’ / ‘Poor me! I taught you to sing and you want to play (i.e. like one plays an instrument)!’ Winton Dean, ‘Bernacchi, Antonio Maria’, *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 19 August 2014; see Vincenzo Manfredini, *Regole Armoniche, o Sieno Precetti regionati* (Venice: 1775), 7; Julianne Baird, ‘An Eighteenth-Century Controversy About the Trill: Mancini v. Manfredini,’ *Early Music* 15/1 (Feb., 1987), 36–45: 39.

<sup>13</sup> Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760*, (Stanford/CA: Stanford UP, 2007), 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe*, (London: 1741), 74.

every day, and in six Theatres at the same time'.<sup>16</sup> The French writer and traveller, Charles de Brosse, took notice of the same:

Each theatre is running two operas a winter, sometimes three, so we expect to have approximately eight during our stay. Every year the pieces and the singers are different ones. No one wants to see an opera, or a ballet, stage set, or actor he has already seen the year before, unless it is a great opera by Vinci or some very famous voice.<sup>17</sup>

An individual or company undertakes to produce an opera for carnival season. They [the directors] send for singers and dancers from various Italian cities, who, arriving from different directions, find themselves united in a cast without ever having seen or met each other. They call from Naples or Bologna, where the best musical schools are, a maestro di cappella. He arrives about a month prior to December 26 when the spectacle is to begin. They designate the drama that has been chosen for him; he composes 25 or 26 arias with orchestral accompaniment and the opera is complete since the recitative costs too much trouble to notate. He gives the arias one by one, as soon as they are written to the singers, who learn them with ease, since most are great musicians.<sup>18</sup>

Naturally, the visual part of a theatrical performance was of pronounced importance all over Italy, often in a way sumptuous beyond measure, which may have overshadowed the brilliance of the music, rather than supporting it. The technical side of the shows frequently evoked amazement and led to detailed descriptions, though these visual effects could easily break the continuity of the drama. Riccoboni testifies this in his writing about his experiences of European theatres:

It were to be wished that we could give an exact Detail of all the Machines which the skilful Architects contrived on that occasion; and of all the wonderful Representations of that kind that have been executed in Venice, Rome, Naples, Florence, and other cities in Italy. As to the Decorations and the Machinery it may be safely affirmed, that no Theatre in Europe comes up to the Magnificence of the Venetian Opera; [...] In the Shepherd of Amphise, which was presented twenty Years after upon the Theatre of St.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>17</sup> 'A chaque théâtre on exécute deux opéras par hiver, quelquefois trois; si bien que nous comptons en avoir environ huit pendant notre séjour. Ce sont chaque année des opéras nouveaux et de nouveaux chanteurs. On ne veut revoir, ni une pièce, ni un ballet, ni une décoration, ni un acteur, que l'on a déjà vu une autre année, à moins que se ne soit quelque excellent opéra de Vinci, ou quelque voix bien fameuse.' Romain Colomb, ed., *Le Président de Brosse en Italie*, vol. ii (Paris: 1858), 358.

<sup>18</sup> Josse de Villeneuve, *Lettre sur le mecanisme de l'opéra italien*, 1756, quoted by Henri Bedarida in *Melanges de Musicologie* (Paris: 1933); see Kurt Sven Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoletano* (Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2007), 61.

John Chrysostome, the Palace of Apollo was seen to descend of very fine and grand Architecture, and built of Christals of different Colours which were always playing; the Lights which were placed behind these Christals were disposed in such a Manner, that so great a Flux of Rays played from the Machine, that the Eyes of the Spectators could scarcely support its Brightness.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, an oil painting on canvas, named *Teatro* (by Alessandro Piazza from 1702), depicts such a spectacle. It probably shows the interior of Teatro Sant'Angelo with expensive costumes and scenery including the appearance of elephants on stage. According to Bruno Forment's research, the conditions as shown in the picture might be an idealized performance rather than a real one, but it still sheds light on the luxurious environment of opera and the habits of the Venetian audience at the same time.<sup>20</sup> Considering expenditure, the running of opera houses was understandably unprofitable most of the time:<sup>21</sup>

Three Livres of Venetian Money gains Admittance into the Hall of the Opera, thirty Sols a Seat in the Pit, and the Boxes are in Proportion. If we compare these poor Receivings with the Expenses that are necessary for supporting the Magnificence of these Shows, we may easily account for the Losses which the Undertakers of the Opera sustain; it being impossible that for the four Months, during which these Entertainments last, the Receiving should equal the Outgiving; for the Venetian Opera begins at soonest in the Middle of November, and continues only to the last Day of the Carnival.<sup>22</sup>

Despite such lavishness or just because of it, the attitude of the Venetians frequently caused indignation. The bad morals of the audience – including fights breaking out in the pit from time to time, due to the custom of impresarios who let the vacant places filled by *gondolier* – particularly shocked foreigners, who were accustomed to the elite conditions of court performances. Riccoboni considered the spectators as impetuous people:

The Spectators in almost All the Cities of *Italy* are *restless* and *noisy*, even before the Play begins. In their Applauses they are violent; and when they would distinguish a favourite Poet or Actor, they cry as loud as they can *Viva-Viva*. But if they have a Mind to damn the one, or hiss the other, they bawl out *Va dentro*, and very often they

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<sup>19</sup> Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account*, 75. The opera referred to is Carlo Francesco Pollarolo's *Il pastore d'Anfriso*, 1695.

<sup>20</sup> Alessandro Piazza: *Teatro* (1702), oil on canvas. Worcester, MA, Worcester Art Museum. It might refer to a try-out performance of Gasparini's *Tiberio, imperatore d'Oriente* (Venice, 1702) at Sant'Angelo. See Bruno Forment, 'An enigmatic souvenir of Venetian opera', *Early Music* 38/3 (August, 2010), 387–401.

<sup>21</sup> John Rosselli, 'Sociology of Opera', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 December 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account*, 82.

make the poor Actor feel a further Proof of their Indignation by pelting him with Apples, and loading him with a great deal of Abuse.<sup>23</sup>

Their Office on this Occasion is to applaud the Actors by clapping their Hands and shouting like Madmen. I won't express . . . what Terms they use, when they congratulate the Women.<sup>24</sup>

Benedetto Marcello, the author of the famous satirical pamphlet *Il teatro alla moda* (1720), and the greatest connoisseur of Venetian operatic life, portrayed the audience's habits similarly:

Every night the impresario will hand out free tickets to his doctor, lawyer, pharmacist, barber, carpenter, and their business partners; also to his friends with their families. Thus the theater will never look empty. For the same reason he will ask all singers, the conductor, the instrumentalists, the bear, and the extras likewise to bring along each night five or six friends who will be admitted without tickets.<sup>25</sup>

They [Members of Society] will buy their tickets "on approval" and they will leave every night after fifteen minutes [and redeem their tickets]. Thus they can see the entire opera within twelve evenings. They will go to the comedy because it costs less than the opera; and if they should go to the latter they will pay no attention, not even during a first night, except perhaps during a few bars of the prima donna's aria, or during the scene with the lightning or thunderstorm. They will court Virtuosi of either sex because thus they hope to obtain some free tickets.<sup>26</sup>

The disinterest of the public concerning recitatives was recorded by De Brosses and Josse de Villeneuve, the finance minister to Charles de Lorraine in Tuscany, besides Marcello. Within the framework of formal vocal instruction, the declamatory style of recitative played an important role, as Giambattista Mancini reports. Like every good

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>24</sup> Francois Maximilien Misson writes, in his *New Voyage to Italy* (London, 1714), about *gondolieri* by whom the vacant places were filled up. See Reinhard Pauly, 'Benedetto Marcello's Satire on Early 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Opera', *The Musical Quarterly* 34/2 (April, 1948), 222–233: 225.

<sup>25</sup> 'Darò porta franca ogni sera al Medico, Avvocato, Speciale, Barbiere, Marangone, Compadre, ed Amici suoi con loro Famiglie per non restar mai a Teatro vuoto e per tal effetto pregherà Virtuosi e Virtuose, Maestro di Cappella, Suonatori, Orso, Comparsa, etc., di voler condurre parimente ogni sera cinque o sei Maschere per uno senza Biglietti.' Benedetto Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda* (Venice: 1720), Agl'Impresari; Benedetto Marcello, 'Il Teatro Alla Moda – Part II', translated and annotated by Reinhard G. Pauly. *The Musical Quarterly* 35/1 (Jan., 1949), 85–105: 86.

<sup>26</sup> 'Anderanno all'Opera col Pegno, posponendo ogni sera un quarto d'ora, e così vedranno tutta l'Opera in dodici sere. Frequenteranno Comedie per manco spesa e non baderanno all'Opera ne pure la prima sera, toltone che a qualche mezz'Aria della Prima Donna, alla Scena dell'Orso, ai Lampi, alle Saette, etc. Faranno la Corte a' Virtuosi dell'uno e dell'altro sesso, per entrar seco loro senza Biglietto, etc. etc. etc.' Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*, Alle Maschere; *ibid.*, 104.

work, it required time, and the short notice of the Venetian productions greatly limited the possibilities for learning and interpreting recitatives appropriately:

“Is it surprising” Tartini said to me one day, “that most of the time our recitatives are worthless, since the composer works only in a hurry on the declamation?” As for me, I forgive them, now that the audience is so much in the habit of not listening to recitative.<sup>27</sup>

As for the recitatives, they [the singers] do not take the trouble to study them, a fleeting glance suffices; they are content to repeat only what the prompter reads loudly to them, and the harpsichord keeps them in the key. They hold five or six rehearsals and in less than a month the opera appears on stage.<sup>28</sup>

Venetian opera houses of the early eighteenth century – with a general audience capacity of 1400 persons – were differentiated by rank depending on which noble family owned them.<sup>29</sup> This was a question of prestige and wealth rather than the quality of performances. The top ranking houses like San Giovanni Grisostomo – where star singers made their appearance – and San Samuele, together with SS. Giovanni e Paolo belonged to the Grimani clan, the most influential family of the city.<sup>30</sup> The second row of the pyramid consisted of the Teatro San Cassiano, owned by the Tron family, Teatro di San Moisè, of the Giustinianis, and Teatro Sant’Angelo, owned by the Marcello and Cappello families.<sup>31</sup> Composers such as Vivaldi, Francesco Gasparini and Tomaso Albinoni were congenial with the latter two theatres.<sup>32</sup> As far as the number of works per season was concerned, S. Moisè gave the most, followed closely by Sant’Angelo and S. G. Grisostomo.<sup>33</sup>

Although it lacked sumptuous stage machines, costumes and scenery, and whilst the more expensive and complex stage sets were reused in several productions,<sup>34</sup> ‘people like

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<sup>27</sup> “Faut-il s’étonner” me disait un jour Tartini, “si la plupart du temps le récitatif de nos opéras ne vaut rien, lorsque le musicien donne tout son soin à la composition des airs, et broche à la hâte tout ce qui est de déclamation?” Pour moi, je les excuse, aujourd’hui que les spectateurs ont si bien pris l’habitude de ne pas écouter le récitatif.’ Colomb, ed., *Le Président de Brosses en Italie*, vol. ii, 360; see Enrico Fubini, *Music & Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 206.

<sup>28</sup> Villeneuve, *Lettre sur le mecanisme de l’opéra italien*, 1756, cited by Henri Bedarida in *Melanges de Musicologie*; see Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 61.

<sup>29</sup> ‘The Theatres at Venice commonly contain *four and twenty*, and sometimes *thirty* Boxes in a Row; but these Boxes can hold no more than six Persons, so that admitting they were all full, they would contain no more than fourteen hundred Persons in all.’ Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account*, 56.

<sup>30</sup> Reinhard Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi* (Firenze: Olschki, 2008), 29; Taddeo Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani del settecento* (Venice: Visentini, 1897, repr. Leipzig: Peters, 1979), xli–xlvi.

<sup>31</sup> Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani*, xlii; Jonathan Glixon and Beth Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Talbot, ‘A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714’, in: Michael Talbot (ed.), *The Business of Music*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002), 10–61: 26–28.

<sup>33</sup> Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 350.

<sup>34</sup> Talbot, ‘A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714’, 39.

to go to Sant'Angelo because it is cheap, but the operas are decadent' asserted Giovan Battista Casotti, a visitor in 1713.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the tickets cost a third of the price of that of S. G. Grisostomo, and even the costumes and scenery were of modest financial conditions, but they were chosen in good taste and sometimes received appreciation from the audience.<sup>36</sup> Michael Talbot states that Sant'Angelo actually presented a high artistic quality, which made it competitive with the most famous Venetian houses.<sup>37</sup> Not only that: as Reinhard Strohm observes, 'Sant'Angelo specialised in discovering, nurturing and retaining (for as long as its resources permitted) new talent and inaugurating new trends'.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, it was a perfect match for Vivaldi, as he was very much interested in taking up unknown voices, helping to start the careers of young singers – of which Strada is one of the best examples, besides Merighi, Anna Girò or Margherita Giacomazzi – and himself was looking for manifold and innovative ways of composing.<sup>39</sup>

Also, the field of plot subjects came likewise under debate among theatres: there was a rivalry between S. G. Grisostomo with its classical themes and Sant'Angelo and S. Moisè, which offered all the more ironical and fantastical ones. Besides, there was another war at that time evoked by the changing singing style, that between the taste of the 'Ancients' and 'Moderns'.<sup>40</sup>

### **The new singing style**

A major shift in the style of singing at the turn of the seventeenth century, i.e. the confrontation of the *stile antico* and *stile moderno*, takes an important place in such fundamental treatises as those of Tosi and Mancini. The elaboration of the technique for blending the chest and head registers opened up new perspectives towards a higher level of virtuosity, encompassing the whole range of the human voice. This expansion of vocal technical possibilities engrossed the attention of performers and composers alike, throwing off the balance of coloratura display and melodic *cantabile* expression. As a result, the latter was oppressed by the former to some extent, generating a sore spot for Tosi and others:

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<sup>35</sup> 'Al Sant'Angelo si va volentieri perché costa poco l'entrarvi ma si fa l'opera scadente...': Remo Giazotto, *Antonio Vivaldi* (Turin: 1973), 144 and 163, fn. 5. Reinhard Strohm, *Venice Opera Market – Venice Open Market? Situations around Antonio Vivaldi* (in preparation), 1.

<sup>36</sup> 'In the period of the contract [i.e., late in 1714] Sant'Angelo was still charging only *one lira* and eleven *soldi* (a quarter ducat) for nightly entry to the theatre, as compared with the three *lire* and six *soldi* at San Giovanni Grisostomo...' Ibid., 1; Talbot, 'A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714', 26–27.

<sup>37</sup> Talbot, 'A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714', 26–27.

<sup>38</sup> Strohm, *Venice Opera Market – Venice Open Market?*, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 48–49.

<sup>40</sup> Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 351.

The Taste of the *Ancients* was a Mixture of the *Lively* and the *Cantabile* the Variety of which could not fail giving Delight; but the *Moderns* are so pre-possessed with Taste in *Mode*, that, rather than comply with the former, they are contented to lose the greatest Part of its Beauty. The Study of the *Pathetick* was the Darling of the former; and Application to the most difficult Divisions is the only Drift of the latter. *Those* perform'd with more Judgment; and *These* execute with greater Boldness. But since I have presum'd to compare the most celebrated Singers in both Stiles, pardon me if I conclude with saying, that the *Moderns* are arrived at the highest Degree of Perfection in singing to the *Ear*; and that the *Ancients* are inimitable in singing to the *Heart*.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary visitors to Venice also frequently reported on it.<sup>42</sup> Riccoboni made complaints of decadence in expression for the sake of virtuosity:

[...] *Italian* Taste of Music is now changed. In short, at present it is all a Whim; *Strength* is sought instead of *beautiful Simplicity*; and *Harshness* and *Singularity* is substituted instead of the *Expression* and *Truth* which distinguished the former Manner. The surprising Capacity of their Singers, it is true, begets *Admiration*, but moves no *Passion*; and Judges say justly, that it is unreasonable to force a Voice to execute what is too much even for a *Violin* or a *Hautboy*. This is the true Reason why the *Italian* Music falls so far short of Perfection in *Expression* and *Truth*; [...] The new Manner however has got such Footing in *Italy*, that even Masters in the Art are obliged in conformity to the general Taste, contrary to their better Judgement, to deviate from the Simplicity and Greatness of the ancient Manner, both in vocal and instrumental Performances.<sup>43</sup>

Singers of the seventeenth century – relying on Giulio Caccini's testimonial treatise and other descriptions of the castrato training system in Naples and elsewhere in Italy – considered the natural, chest voice as beautifully ringing and sonorous; therefore the essence of their study was to strengthen this register, the notes of which fall mainly in the first octave.<sup>44</sup> Until the late eighteenth century, authors of singing treatises used the terms

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<sup>41</sup> 'Il gusto de' chiamati Antichi era un misto di gajo, e di cantabilela di cui varietà non potea far di meno di dilettere; L'odierno è tanto preoccupato del suo, che purchè s'allontano dall'altro si contenta di perdere la maggior parte della sua vaghezza; Lo studio del Patetico era la più cara occupazione de' primi; E l'applicazione de' Passaggi più difficili è l'unica meta de' secondi. Quegli operavano con più fondamento; E questi eseguiscono con più bravura. Ma giacchè il mio ardire è giunto fino alla comparazione de' Cantanti più celebri dell'uno, e dell'altro stile, gli si perdoni anche la temerità di conchiuderla dicendo, Che i Moderni sono inarrivabili per cantare all'udito, e che gli Antichi erano inimitabili per cantare al cuore.' Tosi, *Opinioni*, VII.§22; *Observations*, 109–110.

<sup>42</sup> Saskia Maria Woyke, *Faustina Bordoni. Biographie – Vokalprofil - Rezeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 138–150.

<sup>43</sup> Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account*, 78–79.

<sup>44</sup> Neil Howlett, *Baroque Authenticity and the Modern Singer*. Posted on 28 September 2012. Accessed 15 October 2015. <http://neilhowlett.com/articles/baroque-authenticity-and-the-modern-singer/>

‘head voice’ and *falsetto* (*voce finta*) interchangeably, although they are produced by different techniques.<sup>45</sup> However, male singers, especially *castrati*, could use both, and this may be the reason for this obscure terminology.<sup>46</sup>

The weaker upper range was not generally recognised, although several singers – whether *castrati* or not – applied it as a further tool of virtuosity displayed in an extended vocal range. ‘The falsetto voice cannot give rise to the nobility of good singing’, Caccini claimed in his *Le nuove musiche* (1602). He said: ‘Let him choose a pitch at which he is able to sing in a full and natural voice, avoiding the *falsetto*, and at which he does not have to “cheat” or at least use force.’<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Ludovico Zacconi (1592), discussing another essential factor in the beauty of vocal sound, described the perfect balance of richness and shine, the *chiaroscuro* effect:

Among all voices, one must choose [...] the chest voices, and particularly those which have the above-mentioned delightful biting quality which pierces a little, but does not offend; and one must leave aside the dull voices and those which are simply head voices, because the dull ones cannot be heard among the others, and the head ones are overbearing.<sup>48</sup>

*Falsetto* singing did not generate a particular pedagogical literature, indicating that there was no explicit support or encouragement for its use.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the century, however, simultaneously with the revolutionary improvement of the instruments, the need to gain a wider range through the union of the chest with the *falsetto* or head range became urgent on the part of singers. A technical solution to bring high notes close to equality in power

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<sup>45</sup> James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 64–7.

<sup>46</sup> ‘The modern definition of falsetto is a voice production in which the vocalis muscles (for simplicity’s sake the thyro-arytenoids) are inactive and lengthened greatly by the action of the crico-thyroid muscles which are at their nearly maximum contraction. The sound is produced by the air blowing over the very thin edges of the thyro-arytenoids and the pitch is controlled mostly by a regulation of the breath flow. If, at any time, the thyro-arytenoids begin to resist this extreme lengthening of themselves and provide some resistance to the action of the crico-thyroids, the vocal mechanism begins to move into head voice. The sound of the falsetto voice is weak in overtones and produces no singer’s formant. This is because the very thin edges of the lengthened vocal folds, which do not display any tension in opposition to the stretching action of the thyro-arytenoids, are easily blown open by the breath and offer little resistance to the breath flow. The sound of the head voice, however, is richer in overtones and has the potential to produce a substantial singer’s formant. In other words, it has a “ring”. [...] It is possible to move gracefully between the falsetto and the head voice. If the male singer can gradually increase the activity of the thyro-arytenoids in resistance to the stretching action of the crico-thyroids the tone will change from the flute-like quality of the falsetto to the ringing sound of the head voice and the singer will also experience the increase in subglottal pressure.’ Lloyd W. Hanson, *Head voice and falsetto*. Accessed 15 October 2015. <http://chanteur.net/contribu/index.htm#http://chanteur.net/contribu/cLHfalse.htm>

<sup>47</sup> Richard Wistreich, ‘Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique’, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. by John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 178–191: 180; see Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (Florence: Giulio Marescotti, 1602).

<sup>48</sup> Ludovico Zacconi, *Prattica di musica* (Venice: 1592), f. 77; see Stark, *Bel Canto*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 36.



with lower tones became the predominant issue. Tosi, who was in his heyday around 1690, already stated in his *Opinioni* (1723):<sup>50</sup>

A diligent Master, knowing that a *Soprano*, without the *Falsetto*, is constrained to sing within the narrow Compass of a few Notes, ought not only to endeavour to help him to it, but also to leave no Means untried, so to unite the feigned and the natural Voice, that they may not be distinguished; for if they do not perfectly unite, the Voice will be of divers Registers, and must consequently lose its Beauty.<sup>51</sup>

Mancini even gave some detailed personal insight into his singing studies at the end of his treatise, *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche / Practical reflections* (1774). He emphasised the importance of *solfeggi* befitting the young singers' age and abilities, to strengthen the voice through them gradually in order to gain a great stamina, and also drew attention to further vocal exercises concerning a clear intonation, precise rhythm, declamation according to the dramatic situation of a certain scene on stage:

I was a pupil of Leonardo Leo for two years, and was then at the tender age of fourteen years. This great man wrote a new solfeggio for each pupil every third day, but he was very careful in writing one suitable to the age and talent of each.<sup>52</sup>

The above mentioned teachers have written the recitative splendidly and scientifically. Even though the student is young, he can master this kind of declamation and appear on the stage. The studying of madrigals is more than a necessity for young students, because these insure intonation, and accustom the chest to stand the work and they also refine the ear in well-mastered rhythm.<sup>53</sup>

*Solfeggi* in the castrato era did not mean merely vocalising on vowels and studying difficult scales and passages; they also helped the singers to understand the structure of

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<sup>50</sup> Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 104.

<sup>51</sup> 'Un diligente Istruttore sapendo, che un Soprano senza falsetto bisogna, che canti fra l'angustie di poche corde non solamente procura d'acquistarglielo, ma non lascia modo intentato acciò lo unisca alla voce di petto in forma, che non si distingua l'uno dall'altra, che se l'unione non è perfetta, la voce sarà di più registri, e conseguentemente perderà la sua bellezza.' Tosi, *Opinioni*, I. §21, *Observations*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> 'Io fui scolare in Napoli per due anni di Leonardo Leo; ed ero in età allora di soli quattordici anni. Questo grand'Uomo costumava di scrivere in ogni tre giorni un nuovo solfeggio a ciascun suo scolare, ma con riflessione di adattarlo alle forze ed all'abilità di ciascuno.' Giambattista Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), 179; trans. in English by Pietro Buzzi, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1912), 186–187.

<sup>53</sup> 'Gli anzi detti Maestri hanno scritto egregiamente il recitativo, nè si può proporre esercizion di maggior utile alla gioventù di questo, perchè son scritti scientificamente; se lo scolare si perfeziona con questo studio, potrà comparire la prima volta in Teatro quantunque giovane d'età, perfetto nel genere della declamazione, e se egli avrà fatto profitto, allora potrò asserire, che reciterà anche bene. Lo studio de' Madrigali è piuochè necessario alla gioventù dell'arte nostra, perchè un tale esercizio assoda l'intonazione, avvezza il petto alla fatica, e raffine l'orecchio, acciò non vacilli nel tempo.' Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 182; *Practical reflections*, 187.

composition, as well as music theory and the system of modulations, which – especially in a world with no fixed tuning for non-keyboard instruments<sup>54</sup> – were necessary tools for creating their own ornaments in the *da capo* parts of the arias they sang.<sup>55</sup> This was a measure of artistic quality and played a great role of the audience’s appreciation.

Naomi Adele André writes that the castrato legacy – their singing style, techniques and *bel canto* principles – was passed on to other noncastrated treble voices—tenors and women singers—reaching its peak throughout the eighteenth century, via the schools which Pistocchi and Tosi ran in Bologna. Through formal vocal instruction, castrato singing defined operatic voice production from the mid-1600s until the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> She notices, however, a very important shift between the late seventeenth century, as represented by Tosi, and the 1700s, when Mancini received his training from Leonardo Leo in Naples (1728-30) and from the castrato Antonio Bernacchi, Pistocchi’s former pupil (early 1730s):<sup>57</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.’<sup>58</sup> This blended voice, identified by Rodolfo Celletti as the *voce mista* (in the Romantic, *bel canto* sense of the term), provides power and fullness to the upper notes, essential to high sopranos such as Strada was.<sup>59</sup>

That Strada was taught according to the principles of the Pistocchi school is all the more possible because of the impression her early repertoire makes. It shows the quality of a clarion-sounding, well-tuned, strong, high and precise soprano voice as well as of melodic and rhythmic agility; all are necessities for a satisfactory performance of the pieces in question. The Bolognese school’s novelty lay in the full, rich, rounded sound and strength of the upper notes, reached by blending the attributes of the chest voice production into the head register.<sup>60</sup> I dare say that Strada’s existence as a singer hung on this latter phenomenon. Nevertheless, the real question is how could eunuchs, this group of singers with altered physical mechanism, establish vocal pedagogy not only of a long-term impact but also applicable to noncastrated voices as well? The key to the enigma might lie in the

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<sup>54</sup> Bruce Haynes, ‘Beyond temperament: non keyboard intonation in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries’, *Early Music* 19/3 (Aug., 1991), 356–365+367–370+372–381: 357–359.

<sup>55</sup> Owen Jander, ‘Solfeggio [Solfège]’, *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, Accessed 19 Nov. 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Naomi Adele André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-nineteenth-century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 37.

<sup>57</sup> Isabelle Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers*. Music Reference Collection 88 (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 281.

<sup>58</sup> André, *Voicing Gender*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 113.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor R. Ferranti, *A Historical Approach to Training the Vocal Registers: Can Ancient Practice Foster Contemporary Results?* Doctoral Dissertation (Louisiana State University, 2004), 27; Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto*, 112–113.

focus on breathing and unifying registers, the presumable result of which was a relaxed larynx long before García's anatomically-based method prescribed the use of a low-positioned one in the 1840s. *Castrati* had an undescended larynx with a width and consistency matching that of a boy, and a size like that of a small woman. This structure was supported by a thoracic cavity like that of a large man and was surrounded by an adult male body providing mature resonance and timbre for the voice. Due to their systematic training of extended years, including strict breathing-exercises, the muscles around the rib cage became developed and offered unlimited potential for voice projection.<sup>61</sup> Their practical experiences made it possible to explain and teach breathing technique with insight and consciousness, while their body served as a living, exaggerated example of artificially controlled, deep and natural breath.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the benefits of the position of inhaling became to some extent transmittable to the singing or exhaling phrase, opening the way for a free and strong voice production and sustained tone. In this way, after inhaling, the singer could begin a phrase with parted ribs part, sunk diaphragm, expanded lungs and with a low-positioned and flexible larynx. Doing so, the voice could more easily remain agile, sonorous and controllable in the later parts of a phrase, due to the security given by this well-founded support.

Strada's close connections to the Bolognese singing school would also very much conform with the situation which evolved around her Venetian debut season in 1720, when Benedetto Marcello wrote and published his satirical essay about the current operatic life of the city, a pamphlet called *Il teatro alla moda*, focusing on the new singing style delivered in Venice by Bolognese singers. Otherwise, being a new singer, the appearance of Strada's name seems rather to be a coincidence. Besides, her character might have been contradictory to those caricatured in *Il teatro*: she was supposedly free from excessive egoism, neither she lacked intelligence.

### **The 1720/21 season at Sant'Angelo**

In consideration of the above it is no surprise that Marcello's *Il teatro* deals with the productions, management and singers of Sant'Angelo and S. Moisè, engaged in the 1720/21 season as the embodiment of the new manner. Its frontispiece contains Strada's surname, anagrams of Vivaldi, Giovanni Orsatti, impresario of S. Moisè, and furthermore that of the Sant'Angelo's co-manager, impresario Modotto, Giovanni Palazzi, librettist of

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<sup>61</sup> André, *Voicing Gender*, 30–31.

<sup>62</sup> 'Chi sa ben respirare e sibillare, saprà ben cantare.' (He who knows how to breathe and pronounce well, knows how to sing well). A quote ascribed to the castrato and teacher Gasparo Pacchierotti (1740-1821). See Stark, *Bel Canto*, 91.

the first staged opera of the season, Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento*, and members of the cast arrived from and trained in Bologna.<sup>63</sup> According to Selfridge-Field and Strohm, this group of Bolognese singers, representatives of the *bravura* singing style, together with the composer and librettist Giuseppe Maria Buini at S. Moisè – are reflected in the pamphlet by its use of a strong Bolognese dialect in the conversations between the *prima donna* and her *mamma* – and were thus the main target of Marcello, whose family co-owned Sant'Angelo.<sup>64</sup>

Composers and vocalists seem indeed to have been coming in a large number from Naples and Bologna to Venice in the 1720s, as Villeneuve mentions it, too.<sup>65</sup> Among the Bolognese members of the company at S. Moisè there were Caterina Borghi, Cecilia Belisani and Caterina Cantelli who all participated in Buini's operas *Il Filindo* (1720) and *Cleofile* (1721) at San Moisè.<sup>66</sup> In 1721 Buini married Belisani, with whom he collaborated very frequently in Venice (*La caduta di Gelone* 1719, *Armida delusa* 1720).<sup>67</sup> From the Sant'Angelo cast Marcello mentioned the names of Chiara Orlandi and Antonia Laurenti, who shared the stage with Strada in all of the operas in which she appeared in Venice (*La verità in cimento* 1720; *Filippo rè di Macedonia*, *Antigona* and *Il pastor fido* in 1721).<sup>68</sup> Merighi, the most illustrious member of the company, was likewise Bolognese.

*Il Teatro alla moda*'s frontispiece suggests furthermore a business relationship between Vivaldi and the impresario of Sant'Angelo, Modotto, and also with that of San Moisè, Giovanni Orsatti. Beyond its general description of the practice of Venetian, and in a broader sense of the Italian operatic life, *Il teatro* speaks about particular productions of autumn 1720 at Sant'Angelo and San Moisè, namely of *La verità in cimento* (RV 739) by Vivaldi and of Buini's *Il Filindo*, as is indicated by the publication date of December that

<sup>63</sup> Pauly, 'Benedetto Marcello's Satire on Early 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Opera', 231; Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 286–287.

<sup>64</sup> Strohm, Reinhard, *Venice Opera Market*, 3; Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 286–289; Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 351–352.

<sup>65</sup> Josse de Villeneuve, *Lettre sur le mecanisme de l'opéra italien*; see Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 61.

<sup>66</sup> Marcello's *Il teatro* was not unique in its topic, though. It is interesting that Buini himself produced several *opera buffa* libretti about the singer, her mother and the manager, all speaking and singing in Bolognese dialect, like *Chi non fa non falla* (1732) as well as *La Zanina maga per amore* (1742). Edward J. Dent pointed out that 'the Venetians seem to have enjoyed seeing the main plot turn on the absurdities of a prima donna and her admirers' as opposed to the Neapolitan comic opera. Some *divertimenti comici* from earlier also deal with the figures of *opera seria*: Francesco Passarini's *La figlia che canta*, the main topic of which is the necessity of protection for a young lady who wants to become a professional singer, was introduced during the Carnival 1719 in Venice with the music by Carlo Francesco Pollarolo, ergo prior to *Il Teatro*. See Edward J. Dent, 'Giuseppe Maria Buini', in: *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* XIII/2 (January–March, 1912), 329–326: 331; Francesco Passarini, *La figlia che canta*. Printed libretto (Venice: 1719).

<sup>67</sup> Dent, 'Giuseppe Maria Buini', 329–336; Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani del settecento*, 46–63.

<sup>68</sup> Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani del settecento*, 46–63.

year.<sup>69</sup> According to Strohm, Marcello's work could have harmfully affected Vivaldi's activity in Sant'Angelo as well as in Venice more generally. After his Mantuan years he began to reappear as an opera composer in the city; already in 1721 he had little to do in the carnival season, and thereafter he disappeared entirely from Venice for four years. Since Strada might have been some kind of protégée of him, and as her patron was from Milan, the damage that befell Vivaldi's reputation most probably impacted her career as well, for she did not return to Venice any more.

Strada stood as *virtuosa di camera* in the service of Count Girolamo Colloredo-Waldsee, the Governor of Milan since summer 1720.<sup>70</sup> Colloredo himself was also quite fresh in his position; he became governor in spring 1719. Vivaldi might have got to know the soprano through his new Venetian patron, Johann Baptist of Colloredo-Waldsee, the imperial ambassador to Venice between 1715 and 1726, who was presumably related to the Milanese Count.<sup>71</sup> The composer must have heard Strada in Giuseppe Vignati's *Aquilio in Siracusa* written as part of the annual birthday celebration of the Holy Roman Empress Elisabetta Cristina di Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, wife of Charles VI, and performed at the Teatro Regio Ducale in Milan on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1720. This possibility is underlined by the fact that the *seconda donna*, Anna Maria Lodovica d'Ambreville, was one of Vivaldi's singers. She took part in two of his operas in Mantua the previous year: *Teuzzone* and *Tito Manlio*. Strada was given the *terza donna* role, but she had three arias and such fellow singers as the excellent tenor Francesco Borosini and the castrato Carlo Scalzi.<sup>72</sup> That passionate, fierce and warrior-like heroic role type, which emerged regularly during her career and seemed to befit her personal and vocal features alike, found Strada at her debut playing princess Merope, who rejects the tyrant's proposal because she loves the Roman soldier Aquilio, and does not bow to blackmail even with her brother's execution.

Strada's voice must have given a very strong impression, considering that Vivaldi hired this seventeen-year-old soprano straightaway for his *La verità in cimento*, premièred on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1720 at Sant'Angelo.<sup>73</sup> Though it is uncertain what kind of relations connected Vivaldi to the theatre in the 1720/21 season, it is well known that he regularly worked not only as a composer but also as an impresario at Venetian opera houses in the previous decade. He used to be the impresario at Sant'Angelo together with his father,

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<sup>69</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 288–289.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 48; 'Uomo di virtù, prudenza e giustizia. Signore di genio il più nobile, di sentimenti li più magnanimi, et del tatto più soave'. Gianvittorio Signorotto, *L'Italia degli Austrias. Monarchia cattolica e domini italiani nei secoli XVI e XVII*, Cheiron 9 (1992), 183–287.

<sup>71</sup> Strohm, *Venice Opera Market*, 3–4; Michael Talbot, *The Vivaldi Compendium* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011), 49.

<sup>72</sup> Giuseppe Vignati, *Aquilio in Siracusa*. Printed libretto (Milan: Giuseppe Richino Malatesta, 1720).

<sup>73</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 286.

between 1713 and 1715. Very likely he was involved into the run of this particular season of 1720/21, managing his own operas financially as well as artistically, just as he did in 1716/17 and at S. Moisè in 1716, 1717/18 as musical director.<sup>74</sup> In the case of *La verità*, therefore, Vivaldi might have functioned as kind of a producer, his duties including choosing the libretto on the one hand, hiring the cast and coordinating the succession of the performances on the other, meaning that he controlled and composed all the meanwhile inserted numbers, refreshing arias according to the singers' wishes and revisions to gain the audience's higher interest and pleasure.<sup>75</sup> According to the *avvisi*, the première was successful:

The same Saturday evening went staged for the first time at the S. Angelo Theatre the opera entitled *La verità in cimento*, which has been succeeded with universal applause, and was followed by another performance at the S. Moisè.<sup>76</sup>

The summary of the plot is as follows: Sultan Mamud switched the sons of his wife Rustena and of his favourite concubine Damira, born on the same day. In consequence, Damira's son Melindo is going to be his successor to the throne. In the midst of the preparations for Melindo's marriage with princess Rosane (played by Strada), Mamud repents and reveals that the actual heir is Zelim, Rustena's son. Zelim is in love with Rosane, who, therefore, has to decide between her emotions and ambitions of becoming queen.

Since operas, especially in Venice, were staged at short notice, (generally within one or two months including the compositional process), the first rehearsals were frequently held at the composer's house. Vivaldi, who until 1722 lived in a house next to Sant'Angelo, seems to have held auditions and coached singers directly at home.<sup>77</sup> In light of these circumstances it is easy to imagine how the voice of the young Strada could serve as a guideline for him to accommodate his compositional methods to a yet unknown dimension of vocal art – that of a high female soprano – as well as its dramatic context. There must have been an inspiration back and forth, for nothing could better build up, enlarge and deepen Strada's vocal, musical and dramatic consciousness, teaching her the appropriate and well balanced use of her skills as tools of expression, than a composer with personal insight. There was enough working time available to make progress together, during which

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 30–31.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 289.

<sup>76</sup> 'Nella sera detto stesso sabbato andò in scena per la prima volta nel Teatro à S. Angelo l'Opera intitolata *La Verità in Cimento*, che riesce d'universale sodisfazione continuandosi pure à recitare l'altra nel Teatro à S. Moisè.' Francesco Alvisi da Bologna, *Avvisi di Venezia*, 2 November 1720.

<sup>77</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 58–60; Karl Heller, *Antonio Vivaldi: The Red Priest of Venice* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1997), 57.

they could get acquainted with each other’s musical habits, reactions and way of thinking – and become inspired by it.

The creation of Rosane’s role reflects not only on Strada’s unusually high tessitura but her great stamina, too. Though she was a debutant, at least in Venice, and therefore she must have had the rank of the *seconda* or *terza donna*, Strada sang no less than five arias—while the other soprano, Chiara Orlandi as Rustena had four, and the contralto Merighi as Damira three. The musico-dramatic versatility and ambiguity of Rosane’s almost cynical character might be an indicator of vocal complexity. Assuming that Strada executed her part with an excellent vocal quality – by right of the fact that her vocal performance never received a negative critique in her entire career (moreover, its brilliancy always came in for praise) – one can take certain marks of the composition as hinting at attributes of a fresh sound and a naturally well-set *chiaroscuro* technique: a bright and silvery voice production highlighted by panther agility, and fierce passion enabled to be loosed by precise intonation.

Even Strada’s recitatives were set remarkably high, resting many times on e” (Ex. 1.1) – especially striking when considering that the contemporary Venetian tuning for opera performances was higher than elsewhere, most probably a’=440 Hz.<sup>78</sup>

Example 1.1: Excerpt from Act I scene 3 recitative of Vivaldi’s *La verità in cimento*



Strada’s first aria of the première setting, *Solo quella guancia bella* (I/3; A major, Allegro, C; Track 1) refers to a high and vented voice, the freedom of which lies in a rather wide range. Vivaldi’s stirring and shamelessly bold way of composing does not show any limitation in the use of sixth- and octave leaps, hitting a” through them regularly – eleven times, to be exact – including *da capo* (Ex. 1.2). This also shows that her range went even beyond this, and most probably she displayed it at the cadenzas or via ornaments of the recurring section.

<sup>78</sup> The ‘Chorton’ for sacred music used to be even higher, around 445–460 Hz = a’, i.e. almost a semitone higher than our modern one. Mary Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 62–64; Bruce Haynes, *A History of Performing Pitch: The Story of “A”* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 163–164.

Example 1.2: Vocal part (A and B1 sections) of *Solo quella guancia bella* from Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento*, bb. 13–34.

So - lo quel - la \_\_\_ guan - cia bel - la, \_\_\_ vez - zo - set - ta, \_\_\_ su - per - bet - ta, \_\_\_ bel - la guan - cia \_\_\_ vez - zo - set - ta, \_\_\_ guan - cia  
 bel - la \_\_\_ su - per - bet - ta \_\_\_ ha il mio a - mor, la mia pie - tà, la mia pie - tà. Vez - zo - set - ta, \_\_\_ su - per - bet - ta, \_\_\_ so - lo quel - la guan - cia  
 20 bel - la, so - lo quel - la su - per - bet - ta ha il mio a - mor, la \_\_\_ mia pie - tà, \_\_\_ la mia pie -  
 25 tà, \_\_\_ la mia pie - tà. Se cru - de - le, \_\_\_ se in - fe - de - le, \_\_\_ al tuo  
 30 me - sto a - mor so - n'ì - o gio - va al mio la cru - del - tà, \_\_\_ gio va al mio la - cru - del - tà.

The rushed interpretation which the aria requires, i.e. the rapidity of singing fifth-chains, sixth and octave leaps combined with coloratura patterns – besides the pronunciation of the text – makes it clear that Strada's strongest vocal attributes in her youth were agility, flexibility and high notes executed with ease and securely with a precise intonation. It makes me think that these abilities showed themselves with such an elemental obviousness at the beginning of her training that the logical and only right choice of her master must have been to prepare her to be a high lyric coloratura soprano. In this way, Strada's singing drew the attention of Vivaldi, who had not composed for a specifically high female soprano before. It must have meant a new challenge for him as he began to develop his compositional technique for this type of voice, being inspired by Strada, who therefore became *ab initio* an artist generating creativity in composers with whomever she collaborated.<sup>79</sup> Although the aria has a *parlante* aspect, leaps and especially coloraturas towards the end of the A section and during the whole B part go beyond this. The horse-like flouncing-bouncing melody and its playful upbeat rhythm reveal the youth of the performer and the unsteady character of Rosane at the same time: the princess is fond of Melindo whom she thinks to be the legitimate heir of Sultan Mamud's kingdom, and in this sense her infatuation expressed in words and music is corresponding. On the other hand, the voice part can be considered way too wriggling at a fast tempo to make the exclusiveness of her solid love credible.

The counterpart of this first aria is *Tu sei sol dell'alma mia* (II/8), a unison movement with the violins and *senza basso* in the manner of the Neapolitan galant style. *Terzini* prepare the zigzagging leaps which usually end in ascending *volatine semplici* and, in the A2 section, with tritone leaps interlinked with each other chromatically (Ex. 1.3). This aria

<sup>79</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 53–54.



was an addition on Strada's behalf as its text does not appear in the printed libretto. The music is in stark contrast with the verse, indicating the uncertainty of Rosane's fidelity right after both Melindo and she have learned that Zelim is actually the royal heir, not her fiancé.

Example 1.3: Vocal part (A section) of *Tu sei sol dell'alma mia* from *La verità in cimento*, bb. 9–35.

Allegro

Tu sei sol dell'alma mia, dell'alma mia, il diletto, dolcemente -  
 to nè di te più caraverà, il dolcemente - to  
 nè di te più caraverà; tu sei sol dell'alma mia, il diletto, dolcemente - to nè di  
 te più caraverà,  
 nè di te più caraverà, nè di te più caraverà.

There is a substitution aria of *Solo quella, Con più diletto* (G major, Allegro, 2/4), which must have been written in a rush between two performing nights. It seems to be supported by the fact that, although it occupies two violin parts in imitative concerto style, it rather lacks real melodic invention and applies the most common coloratura patterns mechanically.<sup>80</sup> However, it did no harm to its real goal, i.e. to offer Strada the chance to display more and variable virtuoso elements (Ex. 1.4). Though the tessitura of this aria is a third lower than that of *Solo quella*, a great freedom had been provided for Strada to introduce any kind of coloratura passages, *volatine* and embellishments in the *da capo* – whatever she pleased – harmonically quite independently, due to the pause for the violins and violas in bars 27–33 and 58–63, and also to the silence of the basses in bars 34–45 and 65–72. In addition, she could also show her skill for *messa di voce* to some extent in the middle section (Ex. 1.5), which has the simple delicacy of modulation to the parallel minor – a fine act of colouring an aria written in a major key, praised by De Brosses.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>81</sup> 'Une autre variété nait de la manière dont ils emploient les modulations. Ils ne composent guère dans le mode mineur; presque tous leurs airs sont écrits dans le mode majeur; mais ils y entremêlent, sans qu'on s'y attende, des phrases mineures qui surprennent et saisissent l'oreille jusqu'au point d'affecter le cœur.' (There is another variety in the way they are applying modulations. One hardly ever composes in the minor key for all the arias are written in the major key here; they are, however, imperceptibly mixed: the minor phrases surprise and catch the ear up to the point that they affect the heart). Colomb, ed., *Le President de Brosses en Italie*, vol. ii, 380.

Example 1.4: Vocal part (A section) of *Con più diletto* from Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento*, bb. 19–75.

Con più di - let - to il mio Cu - pi - do ad al - tro og - get - to vo - lan - do - va -  
vo - lan -  
do, vo - lan - do va.  
Con più di - let - to il mio Cu - pi - do ad al - tro og - get - to vo - lan - do - va, vo - lan  
do, vo - lan - do - va.

Example 1.5: Vocal part (B section) of *Con più diletto* from Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento*, bb. 97–115.

Allegro  
De' pian-ti tuo-i fol - le mi ri - do se tor mi vuoi - la li - ber - tà,  
Adagio  
la li - ber - tà, se tor mi vuo - i - la li - ber - tà.

De Brosses states that minor-key arias were very rare in Venice. In this light it is very intriguing that the part of Rosane includes two such arias: *Amato ben sei la mia speranza* (I/12; C minor, Andante, 2/4) and *Con cento, e cento baci* (III/7; C minor, Allegro, C). *Amato ben* (Ex. 1.6), although it was first used in Vivaldi's *La Candace* (RV 704, performed at the carnival season in Mantua the same year) as *Ingannno tu sei la mia speranza* – but not yet heard in Venice – is in fact the second movement of the violin concerto *Il sospetto* ('Suspicion', RV 199).<sup>82</sup> The concerto, also dated 1720, is the first of a group of three pieces; the other two are *L'inquietudine* ('Anxiety', RV 234) and *Il riposo* ('Rest', RV 270).<sup>83</sup> The typical *cantilena* set of a Vivaldian slow concerto movement leaves no doubt that the instrumental version is actually the original, which has been converted into a *da capo* aria form with a two-part A section (A1+A2), in which the vocal units are divided by orchestral *ritornelli*.

<sup>82</sup> Bella Brover-Lubovsky, *Tonal Space in the Music of Antonio Vivaldi* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 100; Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 297.

<sup>83</sup> Paul Everett, *Vivaldi: The Four Seasons and Other Concertos, Op. 8* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18 and 23–24.

Example 1.6: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Amato ben* from Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento*, bb. 22–39.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Amato ben' from Vivaldi's 'La verità in cimento'. It consists of two staves of music in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). The lyrics are: 'A - ma - to - ben, tu sei la mia spe - ran - za, a - ma - to - ben, tu sei il mio pia - cer, tu sei la mia spe - ran - za, tu sei la mia spe - ran - za, il mio pia - cer, il mio pia - cer.' The score includes measure numbers 25, 30, and 35.

The simple melody and the *mezzo carattere* style of the text setting in *Amato ben* conceal the high tessitura of the aria. The g<sup>''</sup>-s have to be reached by the singer through fifths, and the a<sup>b''</sup>-s through sixth leaps, requiring *portamenti*, and on the top of that the sound is meant to be rather soft – at least for the text’s sake: ‘my dear beloved, you are my hope’ – so it definitely must not be fiercely loud as would be the case at an Allegro tempo marking and with another text. In Andante, the legato has to be flexibly strong and constant but never hard nor harsh or sharp, which requires a high-level breath control as well as flexible bodily support.

In *Con cento, e cento baci* (Ex. 1.7) the same vocal technique just discussed is turned upside down, as it is built up to emphasize top notes, mainly g<sup>''</sup> – placed on main beats and accented syllables – by hitting them several times. Jumping up from an octave or a fifth below meant that the head tones were reached from notes falling in the territory of the chest register.

Example 1.7: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Con cento, e cento baci* from *La verità in cimento*, bb. 7–24.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Con cento, e cento baci' from Vivaldi's 'La verità in cimento'. It consists of four staves of music in a 2/4 time signature with a key signature of two flats (B-flat major). The lyrics are: 'Con cen-to e cen-to ba - ci sul va - go - vol - to a - ma - to, sul va - go vol-to a - ma - to del cru - do - Ciel - pla - ca - to, ren - der sap - rò il ri - gor, sap - rò il ri - gor, ren - der sap - rò il ri - gor. Con cen-to e cen-to ba - ci sul va - go - vol - to a - ma - to, sul va - go vol-to a - ma - to del cru - do - Ciel - pla - ca - to, ren - der sap - rò il ri - gor - con cen - to ba - ci,'. The score includes measure numbers 7, 11, 17, and 21.

As octave leaps regularly occur in Rosane’s part, not surprisingly, *Addio caro, tu ben sai* (II/2; B<sup>b</sup> major, Allegro, C) also contains two such occasions in the A section by hitting g<sup>''</sup> and a<sup>''</sup> in succession, and further accented g<sup>''</sup> notes reached by sixth leaps (Ex. 1.8). Once, the melody rides as high even as b<sup>b''</sup>. An embarrassingly large amount of such examples can be found in Strada’s repertoire, making it inevitable to conclude that her

registers were perfectly blended from her debutante years onwards.<sup>84</sup> It follows that her *portamento* together with the *cantar di sbalzo* technique must have been flawless, too.<sup>85</sup>

Example 1.8: Vocal part (excerpts from section A) of *Addio caro, tu ben sai* from *La verità in cimento*, bb. 8–18 and 26–34.

Adagio Allegro

Ad-dio ca-ro. Tu ben sai quan-to fi-da, quan-to fi-da t'ad-do-ra-i, mà, mà ch'io se-gua sen-za spe-ne à lan-guir, a-man-te an-co-ra, nò cor-mio, cor-mio che non si-può, cor-mi-o, cor-mi-o nò, nò che non si-può. nò cor-mio che non si-può, che non si-può, nò cor-mio, che non si-può, sen-za spe-ne nò cor-mio, che non si-può, che non si-può.

Following the performance series of *La verità*, Strada immediately had to begin preparations for the next production, *Filippo rè di Macedonia* (premiered at Sant'Angelo on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1720). Although its music is lost, one aria of Vivaldi – to whom the third act is attributed, while the first and second are to Giuseppe Boniventi –, sung by Strada, seems to survive in two different sources. The text proved to be helpful for the aria's identification, since it is almost entirely the same as one of the verses of Domenico Lalli's libretto.<sup>86</sup> *Scherza di fronda in fronda* (RV 663), a cantata of Vivaldi's authorship, is preserved in the *Sächsische Landesbibliothek*, Dresden (MUS. 1-J-7, 3, pp. 57–64) as a single manuscript copy by Johann Gottfried Grundig, the Hofkapelle's copyist.<sup>87</sup> The other

<sup>84</sup> Sixth and seventh leaps are beyond measure. Arias in Strada's early repertoire (as far as it is available) containing octave or greater leaps are: Vivaldi, *La verità* – Solo quella (6; and 2 ninth leaps), *Con più diletto* (4), *Tu sei sol* (11), *Con cento e cento baci* (2); Vivaldi, *Filippo* – *Scherza di fronda* (7); Porpora, *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria* – *Se d'Aquilon* (10); Sarro, *Tito Sempronio Gracco* – *Vorrei morire* (5), *Straniera donzella* (1st setting; 5), *Pria di lasciarmi* (2); Leo, *Zenobia in Palmira* – *Vuoi ch'io parta* (22), *Al suo amato* (1), *Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura* (8); Vinci, *Astianatte* – *Al patrio lido* (2), *Piangi pur* (6), *Quel perfido* (7), *Tortorella se rimira* (2).

<sup>85</sup> *Portamento*, not in its Romantic sense as an audible glide – for which there were two other words in use during the Baroque era, *scivolo* and *strascino*, (slur and drag) – but as putting forth of the voice, as it occurs in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatises, meaning that the two distant notes were equal in strength and quality and were joined together without a break and with expression (for a detailed discussion see Ch. 5). See Tosi, *Observations*, 29, 53, and 178–179; Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 87, 91–93; Mancini, *Practical reflections*, 108 and 111–113.

<sup>86</sup> The text of the aria from *Filippo rè di Macedonia* (III/3): *Scherza di fronda in fronda / Incerto l'augelletto / Or corre su la sponda / Del chiaro ruscelletto. / Ma palpitante il core / Ha sempre per timore / Perchè fra duri lacci / Non resti il piè ristretto.* The text of the cantata: *Scherza di fronda in fronda / Incerto l'augelletto / Or corre su la sponda / Del chiaro ruscelletto. / Tutto l'aletta e gode / Ma teme che di frode / Non resti il piè ristretto.* (The little bird hops gaily but warily / from leaf to leaf; / now it runs on the bank / of the clear-running brooklet. / But its heart always flutters / from fear / that its foot may be caught / in a cruel snare.) Translation by Michael Talbot, *The Chamber Cantatas of Antonio Vivaldi* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2006), 72.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

(Ex. 1.9) is in a large aria collection found by Francesco Degrada in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* at Paris (Vm<sup>7</sup> 7694) with the superscription ‘Aria del Signor Orlandini’. Degrada, who discovered the similarity of the aria’s text in *Filippo*, assumes that *Scherza di fronda in fronda* is Vivaldi’s composition, although the related style of Vivaldi and Orlandini is rather confusing. The attribution to Orlandini appears to be unsafe in any case, because sixteen arias are of on disputed authorship; of these, at least six are by Leonardo Vinci, Domenico Sarro, Gasparini and Francesco Mancini, and from operas performed throughout Italy in the 1720s.<sup>88</sup>

Example 1.9: A1 section of the vocal part of *Scherza di fronda in fronda* (operatic version) by Vivaldi

The original key of the aria is an important question. The cantata is, naturally, lower, in E<sup>b</sup> major, and its vocal part is slightly simpler than the Parisian operatic version in F major (Ex. 1.10).

Example 1.10: Vocal part (end of section A and B section) of *Scherza di fronda in fronda* (cantata version) by Vivaldi, bb. 26–45.

According to Michael Talbot, the aria with an orchestral accompaniment (two violins and bass) from *Filippo* was converted to a continuo aria. In the autograph manuscript of Vivaldi’s chamber concerto RV 103, on the verso of its last folio, a bass sketch for this movement can be found, in B<sup>b</sup> major. The complication caused by the key can be resolved by the assumption that this reshaping of the bass served as an exercise for a student of the composer.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 128–129.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 129–131.

What Strada sang, was most probably the F major version (in the Parisian manuscript). With her later repertoire in mind, this aria assumes a special importance among the works she performed in her early years, foreshadowing some essential features of her mature vocal profile. Besides the triplets and galant demisemiquaver rhythms, which require fine technical work, the aria shows signs of an extension of Strada's range downwards. The vocal part reaches *c'* from *d''* above through triplets in the *da capo* and through a fifth fall in the middle section, where there is also an octave leap down from *d''* to *d'*. One can observe throughout the whole movement a much more extended and accented use of lower tessitura, i.e. notes from the upper part of the first octave (*f'* and above), besides that the high register is continually present. The absolute range of the movement covers nearly two octaves, from *a''* to *c'*. In addition, almost every phrase initiates from below, and bending up, it reaches the octave in less than a bar. My personal suspicion is that Vivaldi, getting used to Strada's voice by the time of their third collaboration, took notice of its tendency to change; in doing so, he took advantage of new perspectives and wrote an aria in which he displayed these multi-coloured skills, and at the same time gave his singer further opportunity to train and strengthen her middle and lower range – in other words, her chest register.

Strada played the role of Princess Orinda, Olimpia, Filippo's daughter's closest friend and in love with the prime minister Antigono, who has romantic affections towards the Macedonian Queen Euridice. The empress is attracted to Demetrio, but for the sake of her kingdom she is interested in marrying Antigono, and therefore she feigns love for him. Orinda warns Antigono about being misled (II/10) and indeed he learns the truth. *Scherza di fronda in fronda* (III/3) is sung by her in a mentally severe situation: she has to console and calm her rival, the queen. Antigono, in the meantime, is charged for treason and is almost killed; fortunately, in the last moment Filippo grants him amnesty.

Orlandini's *Antigona*, a setting of Benedetto Pasqualigo's libretto with which he obtained his first critical success in Venice, was premièred in the carnival of 1718 at Teatro San Cassiano, with Diana Vico in the title role. Three years later Strada sang Giocasta in this opera, together with Merighi as Antigona. At S. Cassiano, Giocasta's character was embodied by Antonia Cavazzi, a contralto. Likewise, it was sung by Teresa Peruzzi detta La Denzia, also a contralto, in 1724 at the same theatre. The Sant'Angelo revival 1721 could be connected to Orlandini's involvement in that season. The texts of all these libretti are identical, as far as Giocasta's numbers are concerned, which points to the possibility that the arias were transposed upwards, maybe altered but without substitution. This seems

all the more likely for at Sant'Angelo there were only given concert performances, presumably serving as a rushed substitution for the poorly received *Filippo*.

No score of the 1721 version survives; nevertheless, the British Library holds one of its revised versions, performed in Bologna in June 1727, entitled *La fedeltà coronata*, with Bernacchi (Osmene), Farinelli (Ceraste) and Merighi (Antigona). Giocasta was given a soprano voice this time, that of Teresa Conti. The text and its proportioning differ from that of the Venetian productions: there are three acts instead of five.<sup>90</sup> However, the compositional style of Giocasta's part is suspiciously similar to that of *Scherza di fronda in fronda* from *Filippo*: there is a saliently frequent use of certain rhythmic patterns of the galant style, especially of demisemiquavers and, moreover, sixty-fourth notes, together with semiquaver triplets and dotted rhythms.

Strada's last opera in Venice was *Il pastor fido* from Carlo Luigi Pietragnua, premièred at Sant'Angelo on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1721.<sup>91</sup> That was a very busy carnival season for her as she appeared in no less than three productions during those few weeks. The *avvisi* define *Il pastor fido* as *tragicomedia pastorale* and claim that it was successful.<sup>92</sup> Strada embodied Dorinda as *seconda donna*, but she was the first soprano, since the *prima donna* was Merighi. Pietragnua likewise displays her high tessitura and agility. The aria *Fuggi pur* (II/2; G major, 3/8; Ex. 1.11) applies dance-like triple metre containing not only coloraturas but also a comparatively long sustained note, probably inspired by Strada's superb *messa di voce*. *Dal tuo stral* (IV/3; Ex. 1.12) is a dance movement, too, that of a gigue. Its triplet-rhythms seem to have suited her throat very well, and it could have provided an easy motion for her voice, so that she could naturally execute accented a" tones several times.

Example 1.11: Vocal part (excerpt from section A) of *Fuggi pur* from Pietragnua's *Il pastor fido*, bb. 28–66.

Fug - gi\_ pur, fug - gi\_ pur che al pra - to al bos - co vò - se - guir - ti al pia - no al col - le, se sa - rai  
 del cor - so stan - co, po - se - rai, po - se - rai su ques - to fian - co, e col crin\_ la bel - la  
 fron - te, dai su - do - ri ter - ge - rò,

<sup>90</sup> Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 340–341 and 357–358; Benedetto Pasqualigo, *Antigona*. Printed *libretti* (Venezia: Marino Rossetti, 1718, 1721, and 1724); Giuseppe Maria Orlandini, *Antigona*. Musical manuscript (1727), GB-Lbl Add. 16066.

<sup>91</sup> The score is preserved in *A-Wgm*.

<sup>92</sup> ‘...e martedì sera andò ancora in Scena à qtto di S. Angelo l’intitolato Il Pastor Fido Tragicomedia Pastorale, che riesce pure di sodisfazione.’ (... and Tuesday evening another one has been staged at S. Angelo entitled Il Pastor Fido, pastoral tragicomedy, likewise with satisfaction.) *Avvisi di Venezia*, 15 February 1720.

Example 1.12: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Dal tuo stral* from *Il pastor fido*, bb. 70–84.

70  
cru - del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del pas - tor, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del pas - tor.

79  
del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del, cru - del pas - tor.

Financial relations in the world of eighteenth-century opera were widely disproportioned. As the whole system was focused on singers, especially leading ones – firstly to *castrati*, and secondly to leading women –, they earned the most; the composer less than half of it, and the librettist even less. Singers received free lodgings, travel expenses, and costumes in addition, not to mention the special gifts, jewels, flowers, sonnets, etc. that were given to them by noble patrons and admirers. The ‘thousands of scudi’ mentioned in *Il teatro* as singers’ wages is not a hyperbole:<sup>93</sup> a star *prima donna* like Faustina Bordoni earned at S. G. Grisostomo in the season 1724/25 1200 zecchini (equal to 4,258 ducats), Antonia Merighi 1,900 ducats, and Rosaura Mazzanti’s salary at Sant’Angelo in the same season was 12,750 lire (ca 2,056 ducats).<sup>94</sup> Contrarily, a composer’s fee for an opera score was usually 200 ducats; in the case of a whole season with 3–4 works it meant 600–800 ducats. A *seconda* or *terza donna*’s pay per season was about 600 ducats, or 150–200 ducats per production. As Strada sang in four operas at Sant’Angelo in 1720/21, I am suggesting that her wages might have been around 700 ducats, considering her rank and debutant status.<sup>95</sup>

Besides her fellow singers at the Sant’Angelo company, Strada must have had opportunities to hear some of the most famous female voices of her era: those of the mezzo-soprano Faustina Bordoni, the lyric soprano Francesca Cuzzoni and the contralto Diana Vico, who were all prominent members of the high circles of operatic society. They appeared together in Francesco Pollarolo’s *Lucio Papirio dittatore*, premièred on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1720, and in Orlandini’s *Nerone*, run from 11<sup>th</sup> February 1721. Sitting there in

<sup>93</sup> ‘Servirà l’Impresario a pochissimo prezzo, riflettendo alle molte migliaia di Scudi, che gli costano i Virtuosi dell’Opera, che però si contenterà di Paga inferiore al più infimo di quelli, purché non gli venga fatto torto dall’Orso e dalle Comparse.’ (He should lend his services to the impresario for very little and consider the thousands of scudi that have to be paid to the famous singers. For that reason he should be satisfied with less pay than the least of them...); Benedetto Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda*. A compositori di musica; Benedetto Marcello, ‘Il Teatro Alla Moda – Part I’, translated and annotated by Reinhard G. Pauly, *The Musical Quarterly* 34/3 (Jul., 1948), 371–403: 384.

<sup>94</sup> A scudo might have been 12 lire at that time; the worth of a gold ducat (zecchino) was around 22 lire in 1717. See Michael Talbot, ‘A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714’, 60–61.

<sup>95</sup> Carlo Vitali, ‘Italy – political, religious and musical contexts’, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. by Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24–44: 34; Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 658; John Rosselli, ‘From Princely Service to the Open Market: Singers of Italian Opera and Their Patrons, 1600–1850’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1/1 (Mar., 1989), 1–32: 25; Talbot, ‘A Venetian Operatic Contract of 1714’, 31–32 and 60–61; Michael F. Robinson, ‘A Late 18th-Century Account Book of the San Carlo Theatre, Naples’, *Early Music* 18/1 (Feb., 1990): 73–81: 75.



one of the performances, could Strada ever have imagined that four years later she would have sung together with Vico and been paired with Farinelli, and that in nine years she would have been in one person the successor to the rival queens Cuzzoni and Faustina in London under Handel, and been called a better one than the two together?

### **Milan, Livorno, and Lucca**

For the next birthday celebration of the Empress a *dramma pastorale*, *La Silvia*, a *pasticcio* of Vivaldi's earlier operas, was performed on 26<sup>th</sup> August 1721 at the Teatro Regio Ducale in Milan. The mythological plot focuses on Numitore, King of Alba's bloodline. Silvia, his daughter, in spite of being forced to become a Vestal virgin, conceived by Mars – who disguised himself as the shepherd Tirsi – with the twins Romulus and Remus, founders of Rome. Strada embodied another nymph, named Nerina, a follower of Silvia, who fell in love with Niso. Later, upon seeing him embracing Silvia, she becomes furiously jealous (III/4, *Furie terribili*). Unfortunately the score of this aria is lost; it would have been very informative to see what kinds of coloraturas were given to Strada by Vivaldi after a year of collaboration. In the end it turns out that Niso is none else but Silvia's brother believed dead, Egisto.

The surviving part of Strada's role has some very intriguing aspects. In her second aria, *Mio ben, s'io ti credessi* (I/14, C minor, 2/4), Nerina is suspicious towards her beloved, because earlier that day Echo told her that Niso will betray her before sundown. This was the first time Vivaldi used 'Lombardic' rhythm in his oeuvre:<sup>96</sup> the pattern of two demisemiquavers followed by a dotted quaver, connected to accented chromatic high notes (such as a <sup>b</sup> ", g", f<sup>#</sup>) and together with the text, serves as a tool for the expression of irony – it is the sharp dagger of anger and doubt caused by painful thoughts of jealous suspicion. This was one of the two arias written entirely by Vivaldi's own hand in the manuscript; *La Silvia* namely contains many arias from his earlier operas, and mainly it was the task of the copyist to prepare the score. According to Strohm, these arias might have been part of an early draft for *La Silvia*.<sup>97</sup> It is remarkable, however, that Strada did not sing any of her earlier Vivaldian arias in a work where many numbers were taken from *La verità*. Nevertheless, she hardly ever repeated her earlier arias when it was up to her. Throughout her whole career, in similar situations she regularly showed a preference for learning yet unknown movements over recycling her repertoire.

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<sup>96</sup> Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi*, 316 and 318.

<sup>97</sup> 'Vivaldi's operas *Arsilda* 16, *Tito* 19, *Candace* 20 and *Verità* 20 provided much of the music of Silvia 21. Seventeen *Silvia* arias were copied in Vivaldi's aria repository, *I-Tn*, Foà 28.' Ibid., 315.

Strohm has also suggested that *Pronto servir* (II/11; B<sup>b</sup> major, 2/4), suited to the text in its declamatory nature, gives a large space for acting, especially with gestures. Its unusual four-part, *non-da-capo* form also refers to a focus on acting.<sup>98</sup> Nerina does not settle for less than true love: after she learns that the beloved of Silvia, Tirsi, is still alive, she is not completely happy, because a true lover would not hurt his beloved as Tirsi torments Silvia. In this context it seems that Strada might have been convincing not only as a singer but also as an actress. By this time Vivaldi must have known her quality of performance well. The thought that the composer who later chose an artist like Anna Girò (small in stature like Strada, by the way) as his first and supreme *prima donna* – a singer who inspired him primarily through her sincere and touching way of acting –, entrusted to Strada an aria in which she had limited vocal but all the more visual opportunities, is a meaningful one.

In Act II scene 4 Nerina, feeling compassion for Silvia, comforts her by singing *Nel suo carcere ristretto* (Ex. 1.13), an aria in D major from *Teuzzone* (RV 736, Mantua in 1718) originally performed by the soprano castrato Gasparo Geri/Gieri embodying Cino, a male character. It also occurred as a tenor aria with the same text in *Eurilla e Alcindo* (*Serenata a tre* RV 690) and directly inspired the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement of the *Autumn concerto* (RV 283, F major) of 1720; moreover, it relates to the D major flute concerto, *Il Gardellino* (RV 428, before 1724).<sup>99</sup> It is a *simile* aria using the picture of an imprisoned nightingale – who is not willing to sing about affections but rather producing lamenting songs of a freedom lost – as a metaphor.<sup>100</sup> Both its text and musical character are marked by the theme of *caccia d'amore* (chase of love), the result of which is a mixture of agony and lively motives of birdsong. The rhythm is based on dotted quarters and half notes while the melody is coloured a few times with chromatics. The most remarkable element of it, from the vocal technical point of view, is when the voice imitates the nightingale's motive (bb. 15–16 and 30–31) of snapping from a dotted quaver up to a fifth semiquaver – well prepared for the singer compositionally through repeated notes. Firstly these jumps occur on a'–e", then on d"–e" in *Teuzzone*, supposedly in Strada's case on d"–a", keeping in unison with the violins. This would be a clear and significant hint of Strada's technique of high notes, since there is not much time to place the semiquaver fifth above each preceding note, and as the a" notes must be exact, clear and ringing, sung with strength and with ease. The insertion

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>99</sup> Cesare Fertonani, *Antonio Vivaldi: La simbologia musicale nei concerti a programma* (Pordenone: Edizioni Studio Tesi, 1992), 51.

<sup>100</sup> 'Nel suo carcere ristretto / non d'affetto / l'usinguol cantando va. / Col soave dolce canto / piange intanto / la perdita libertà.' Enrico Bissari, *La Silvia*. Printed libretto (Milan: Giuseppe Richino Malatesta, 1721), 21–22.

of this aria into *La Silvia* indicates that Strada sang a" notes in bar 30 and 31 (at least in the *da capo*), showing her free, agile and energetic head register.

Example 1.13: Vocal part (A section) of *Nel suo carcere ristretto* by Vivaldi, bb.10–35.

In 1722 (see Table 1.1) Strada appeared as Dalinda in Sarro's *Ginevra principessa di Scozia* and as Costanza in an anonymous *Griselda* in Livorno. There is no data available from 1723, however she could have been active in the same area, because the next year she sang two roles in Lucca: Sabina in a *pasticcio*, *Lucio Papirio*, as well as Eduige in the *Rodelinda* of a local composer, Giovanni Antonio Canuti di Lucca.<sup>101</sup> How she got there from Milan is uncertain but the libretti from those years show that she still enjoyed the protection of Count Colloredo, though she was not his *virtuosa da camera* any more.<sup>102</sup> There is no other noble patron known from her early Italian years, or any impresario until late spring 1724 when she became engaged to the Teatro San Bartolomeo in Naples. Nevertheless, there must have been some impresario(s) working in the background, arranging Strada's Tuscan contracts as well as her appointment to Naples, even if she bore the recommendation and blessing of Count Colloredo or some other influential person of noble rank.<sup>103</sup> I would also risk the statement that after the splendid years of 1720 and 1721 in Venice and Milan, where she had a dashing start of a career, the period between 1722 and 1724 seems to be in a sense an enforced path of stagnation, having no first rank composer who could write arias and roles specifically for her, nor such a working environment she used to have in an opera metropolis like Venice. Luckily for Strada, she still had some fine colleagues, among them the tenor Francesco Guicciardi, who was likewise engaged to Naples in 1724.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Antonio Salvi, *Ginevra principessa di Scozia*. Printed libretto for Teatro S. Sebastiano in Livorno (Firenze: Anton Maria Albizzini, 1722); Antonio Salvi, *Lucio Papirio dittatore*. Printed libretto (Lucca: Domenico Cuffietti, 1724); Antonio Salvi, *Rodelinda*. Printed libretto (Lucca: Domenico Cuffietti, 1724).

<sup>102</sup> La Sig. Anna Maria Strada, sotto la Protezione di S. E. Colloredo Govern. di Milano. Salvi, *Ginevra principessa di Scozia* (1722).

<sup>103</sup> Michael F. Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*. Oxford Monographs on Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 88–89 and 155–156.

<sup>104</sup> Nadia Carnevale, 'Guicciardi, Francesco', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 61 (2004). Accessed 14 December 2014. [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-guicciardi\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesco-guicciardi_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/)

Table 1.1: Roles of Strada's early years, 1720–1724

Composer	Opera	City	Première	Role	Cast	Sources consulted
Giuseppe Vignati	<i>Aquilio in Siracusa</i>	Regio Ducale, Milan	26 Aug. 1720	Merope	Borosini, Mercelli, Orsini, D'Ambreville, Scalzi	lost
Antonio Vivaldi	<i>La verità in cimento</i>	Sant'Angelo, Venice	26 Oct. 1720	Rosane	Barbieri, Orlandi, Merighi, Albertini, Laurenti	<i>D-Mbs</i> Mus.ms. 1120
Vivaldi and Giuseppe Boniventi	<i>Filippo rè di Macedonia</i>	Sant'Angelo, Venice	27 Dec. 1720	Orinda	Merighi, Orlandi, Albertini, Laurenti, Barbieri	lost
Giuseppe Maria Orlandini	<i>L'Antigona</i>	Sant'Angelo, Venice	15 Jan. 1721	Giocasta	Merighi, Barbieri, Albertini, Orlandi, Laurenti	<i>GB-Lbl</i> Add. 16066
Carlo Luigi Pietragrua	<i>Il pastor fido</i>	Sant'Angelo, Venice	11 Feb. 1721	Dorinda	Albertini, Merighi, Barbieri, Orlandi, Laurenti	Score in <i>A-Wgm</i>
Vivaldi	<i>La Silvia</i>	Regio Ducale, Milan	28 Aug. 1721	Nerina	Gualandi, Minelli, Fabri, Bombaciardi, Montanari	lost, aria reconstructions, <sup>105</sup> <i>D-B</i> N.Mus.ms. 125, 99v-101v. ( <i>Teuzzone</i> )
Domenico Sarro	<i>Ginevra principessa di Scozia</i>	S. Sebastiano, Livorno	April 1722	Dalinda	Guicciardi, Guglielmini, Mengoni, Maria Caterina Negri, Mei, Pietro Baratti	lost
anonymous	<i>Griselda</i>	S. Sebastiano, Livorno	Spring 1722	Costanza	Guicciardi, Guglielmini, Mengoni, Maria Caterina Negri, Mei, Baratti	lost
anonymous /diverse authors	<i>Lucio Papirio</i>	Lucca	Carnival 1724	Sabina	Agostino Galli, Zani, Santini, Baratti, Pacini, Drejer	lost
Giovanni Antonio Canuti di Lucca	<i>Rodelinda</i>	Lucca	Carnival 1724	Eduige	Santini, Baratti, Galli, Drejer, Pacini, Zani	lost

Sarro's *Ginevra* was not a new work, performed for the first time at S. Bartolomeo Naples in 1720. The role Strada sang two years later, that of Dalinda, was created originally by Anna Vicenza Dotti, a Bolognese contralto, who joined Handel's Royal Academy at London in 1724. One can assume, therefore, that the arias were transposed one or two tones higher for the soprano.<sup>106</sup> Even in this case, the speech range or chest register had to be used primarily, and this meant a very good practice for Strada to consolidate her lower notes. The aria *S'en corre l'agnelletta* (II/8; see Ex. 1.14) for instance, even in its transposed form – from F minor up to G minor – regularly reaches d', and the vocal part almost entirely dwells in the first octave, which is still an extremely low tessitura for a soprano, not to mention a high coloratura one.

<sup>105</sup> Vivaldi. *La Silvia*. (RV 734, Milan 1721). Reconstruction of 22 arias from surviving sources at the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria di Torino and the Conservatoire royal de Bruxelles, with no recitative. Roberta Invernizzi, Gloria Banditelli, John Elwes, Philipp Cantor, Ensemble Baroque de Nice conducted by Gilbert Bezzina (Ligia Digital: 203090, 2000). Compact disc.

<sup>106</sup> She used to be the *seconda donna* to Cuzzoni in London, and embodied Irene in *Tamerlano* (1724) and Eduige in *Rodelinda* (1725). Winton Dean, 'Dotti, Anna Vicenza', *Grove Music Online*, ed. by L. Macy. Accessed 9 November 2014.

Example 1.14: Vocal part (A2 section) of *S'en corre l'agnelletta* from Sarro's *Ginevra*, bb. 25–39.

S'en cor - re l'a - gnel - let - ta al cen - no del pa - sto - re né sa, né sa, né sa da lui par -  
 ti - re, né sa da lui par - tir, al cen - no del pa - sto - re, né sa da lui par - tir.

The other Livorno opera, the *Griselda* of unknown authors – in which her character, Costanza, is going to marry her father while she is being separated from the man she loves, and her mother is forced to be her slave – was presumably a *pasticcio*, in which Strada may have sung some of her earlier arias, likely some among them the Venetian ones.

In *Lucio Papirio dittatore* the fundamental conflict of love and duty reflects itself in Strada's role, that of Sabina – sister of Quinto Fabio but also betrothed to Lucio's son, Claudio Papirio. Cuzzoni played the same role under the name of Rutilia, in Venice from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1720 onwards. Strada might have witnessed one of the performances, as she herself was present in Venice at that time: *Filippo rè di Macedonia* by Boniventi and Vivaldi was premièred on 27<sup>th</sup> December 1720. However, Strada's Sabina role gained much more importance in the drama than that of Rutilia, who in her arias always reflects others' emotions or gives counsel to someone else. As a matter of fact, the ethos of this character had been changed.<sup>107</sup> Sabina's arias are always in first person: she sings of her personal feelings and the effects of the situation she is in. Though the music is lost, the poetry of these closed numbers is of high artistic value.

The role of Eduige in *Rodelinda*, however, through its bitter passion, jealousy and manipulative nature represents another category of dramatic expression.

Concerning the characters Strada embodied in her early years and the energetic factor of most of the arias written for her – showing an agile and strong coloratura soprano voice executing accented high notes regularly – one can feel prompted to follow the logic that it may to some extent reflect her personality. Naturally, an artist specialized for the stage is able to represent qualities and manners which are not his or her own, but certainly not all the time. The fierce passion Strada showed from her debut onwards, gaining more and more ground during her career, might have been her private characteristic too. On the other hand, most of the figures she played have deeper and more complex moral aspects. They have to make serious decisions, showing compassion and respect, and yet to follow the truth; they have to meet the requirements of position and still not to lose the happiness of the heart; they need to hope against hope that their beloved ones survive. After these first

<sup>107</sup> Expression borrowed from Anne Desler, *'Il novello Orfeo'*. Farinelli, 177.

couple of years, Strada was growing out of the rank of *seconda donna* – her vocal as well as dramatic skills called for challenges of a higher level. Fortunately, she did not have to wait long. Political and musical changes simultaneously made a place for her: the great success of a production at San Bartolomeo in Naples gave cause for exchanges in its cast in the spring of 1724.

## Chapter Two: First Maturity

From the spring of 1724 Strada was engaged at the Teatro San Bartolomeo in Naples, after a significant part of the house's ensemble had been changed. The changing of the complete cast in every few years seems to have been a practice of opera management at that time, especially in Naples, where it became a tradition to hire new singers from the spring season onwards.<sup>1</sup> The other important reason for contracting a new cast was the enormous success of Pietro Metastasio's *Didone abbandonata*, set to music by Domenico Sarro and premièred on 1<sup>st</sup> February. According to Kurt Sven Markstrom, somebody from the Teatro San Cassiano Venice might have witnessed one of the performances and could have been impressed to such an extent that he brought the production, (i.e. the poet Metastasio, the cast including the soprano Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli detta 'La Romanina'<sup>2</sup> and the contralto castrato Niccolò Grimaldi detto Nicolini<sup>3</sup>, along with the intermezzo and its performers, the comic duo, Corrado and Santa Marchesina) to Venice. There it was premièred the next year with the music of Albinoni.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, they left and were replaced by the young soprano castrato Carlo Broschi detto Farinello, engaged for the first time at S. Bartolomeo,<sup>5</sup> and the contralto Diana Vico,<sup>6</sup> specialized in trouser roles. Later on, in the autumn a further contralto, Vittoria Tesi,<sup>7</sup> arrived in place of her great rival Antonia Merighi, Strada's former and later colleague who also left after *Didone* and became engaged for the next season at S. Giovanni Grisostomo in Venice.<sup>8</sup>

We may well ask how Strada had been found. Again, personal relations may have stood in the background. First of all, her protector was Girolamo Colloredo, the governor of

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<sup>1</sup> William C. Holmes, *Opera Observed: Views of a Florentine Impresario in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Libby, 'Benti, Anna Maria', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>3</sup> He sang in many of Alessandro Scarlatti's operas, just as he was engaged by Handel and achieved great success in London. Among others, he embodied Rinaldo (1711) and Amadigi (1715). 'Nicolini (Nicolino Grimaldi)', in: *The Oxford Dictionary of Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Sven Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoletano* (Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2007), 84–85; Taddeo Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani del settecento* (Venice: Visentini, 1897, repr. Leipzig: Peters, 1979), 75.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Farinelli (Broschi, Carlo; Farinello)', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 March 2013; Benedetto Croce, *I Teatri di Napoli, Secolo XV-XVIII* (Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1891), 288.

<sup>6</sup> Vico, probably around thirteen years Strada's elder, stood in the service of the Elector of Bavaria (Munich) from 1720. One of her most important appearances was the role of Ottone in Vivaldi's *Ottone in villa*, (1713). As a member of the King's Theatre Company in London (1714–16) she sang Rinaldo in the 1714–15 revival of Handel's opera, as well as Dardano in *Amadigi* (1715). Winton Dean, 'Vico, Diana', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Florentine contralto (b. 1700). Tesi had a masculine low voice but with an extraordinary wide range, and by the time she appeared in Naples she developed a 'pleasant softness' of vocal quality, too. Gerhard Croll, 'Tesi, Vittoria (La Fiorentina)', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 March 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Wiel, *I teatri veneziani del settecento*, 71–76.

Milan. He held this office from 1719 until shortly before his death in late 1725, which occurred on the return journey to the Austrian capital, from where he should have left for Italy to assume the role of the viceroy of Naples. It seems evident that he recommended his singer previously.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Merighi and the contralto Antonia Laurenti detta La Coralli had worked together with Strada in Venice at Sant'Angelo (1720–21). If a singer could have had a say in the decision at the level of suggestion at least, it is likely that Merighi could have proposed her name in Naples. Further factors might have been Strada's youth, on the one hand, and the reputation she already had mainly due to her Venetian collaboration with Vivaldi, on the other. Hence, she became the leading soprano in Naples and partner of the rising star Farinelli. Finally, after more than two years of pseudo-stagnancy and second-rank engagements, she was part of an excellent company again, similarly to her début years in Venice and Milan. But this one was even more prestigious.

### **Naples, the operatic capital of Europe**

Significant changes happened around that time in Neapolitan operatic life. First of all, the role of the S. Bartolomeo shifted. The theatre had been opened in 1621 and initially presented mainly Neapolitan works. It was destroyed by fire in 1681 and rebuilt quickly in 1682. From 1654 onwards it generally offered *opere in musica*, besides the new theatre in the Real Palazzo, which opened its doors in December 1652. Naturally, the latter had the priority, as far as important royal spectacles were concerned. Later on, however, in the autumn 1724, after S. Bartolomeo was newly renovated, it took the leading role in the operatic life of the aristocracy as well.<sup>10</sup> Besides, there were other theatres offering opera performances: for instance the Teatro dei Fiorentini, which had given up presenting spoken dramas and kept focusing on musical ones from 1706 onwards. In 1709 then, after staging a comic opera in Neapolitan dialect, a novelty which brought surprisingly great success, the Fiorentini specialized itself on the genre and the heroic opera was left almost entirely to S. Bartolomeo.<sup>11</sup> Leonardo Vinci, for instance, made his debut at the Fiorentini in 1719 as opera composer with a *commedia per musica*, *Lo cecato fauzo*, earning tremendous applause.<sup>12</sup> Noblemen visited both theatres, though mostly S. Bartolomeo. Furtheromre,

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<sup>9</sup> Giammaria Mazzuchelli, *Gli scrittori d'Italia, cioè notizie storiche, e critiche intorno alle vite, e agli scritti*, vol ii, part ii (Brescia: Giambatista Bossini, 1760), 1242–1243.

<sup>10</sup> Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 84; Croce, *I Teatri di Napoli*, 253.

<sup>11</sup> Michael F. Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*. Oxford Monographs on Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 10–12.

<sup>12</sup> Kurt Markstrom, 'Vinci, Leonardo', *Grove Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 4 December 2014.



there were two new theatres inaugurated in 1724, in order to perform comic operas: the Della Pace and the Nuovo.<sup>13</sup>

By mid-century, Naples became the ‘capital of the world’s music’ due to its ‘best schools of music’, as De Brosses stated.<sup>14</sup> Music and musical education gained wide popularity and became deeply rooted in the society. Large families destined their sons to be priests, instrumental players and singers – in that order. Naples had four excellent conservatories: S. Maria di Loreto, S. Maria della Pietà dei Turchini, Poveri di Gesù Cristo and S. Onofrio a Capuana, all founded in the sixteenth century and generally with ‘two music masters, the senior being selected from among the most celebrated composers and giving three lessons a week’.<sup>15</sup>

The presence and significant influence of renowned composers in Neapolitan musical life and especially in the field of opera began with the arrival of Alessandro Scarlatti in 1684, when he received the title of *Maestro di Cappella* from the viceroy of Naples; this was probably due to the influence of his sister, who was not only an opera singer but also a nobleman’s mistress. Scarlatti’s reputation, however, was already established earlier in Rome. Though he was absent from Naples between 1702 and 1708, after his return he held the title again until his death in 1725. In the period Scarlatti was away from Naples, a new generation of composers trained in the conservatories arose: among them were Domenico Sarro, Francesco Mancini and Niccolò Porpora, not to mention Leonardo Vinci, who was in the heyday of his life and career in the mid-1720s onwards and spread his fame outside Naples, mainly in Rome.<sup>16</sup> Music was not only exported to other parts of Italy and beyond, but young musicians also started to arrive, with the support of the Austrian court. Composers who later become famous also visited the city in order to study in private, as did Johann Adolph Hasse; he lived in Naples from 1722 till the end of the decade.<sup>17</sup>

Traditional historiography has identified the musical style of Naples in the 1720s as the beginning of a new era, that of the ‘galant style’ or even ‘pre-classical style’. The concept of a specific ‘Neapolitan school’ in musical composition, however, has been relativized more recently by researchers such as Helmut Hucke, Daniel Heartz, Francesco Degrada and Reinhard Strohm, who agree that stylistic innovation in that period was achieved

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 11; A full list of opera performances in all Neapolitan theatres 1709–1732 is in Reinhard Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien des frühen Settecento (1720–1730)*, vol. ii. *Notenbeispiele und Verzeichnisse* (Köln: Volk, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13; Josse de Villeneuve, *Lettre sur le mecanisme de l’opéra italien* (Naples: 1756), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

elsewhere in Italy, too.<sup>18</sup> The typical features of this modern compositional manner lie partly in the handling of the instruments: the violins frequently play unison while the violas *col basso* play at the octave, or providing a solely harmonic accompaniment pulsating in quavers, crochets or semiquavers.<sup>19</sup> *Colla parte* sections are also usual for the violins while the basses are pausing.<sup>20</sup> But more attention should be paid to innovation in singing styles, and in composition for the voice. As for the voice parts, besides the significance of prolonged passages the importance of cadenzas is prominent. Michael F. Robinson writes that by the second decade of the eighteenth century cadenzas were not merely stretched and embellished cadence points as was common in the seventeenth century, and as Johann Joachim Quantz stated – on the basis of observations made by Tosi in his *Opinioni de' cantori*, that between 1710 and 1716 a new custom had been established: especially in the case of final cadenzas the whole musical process in the orchestra halted, so that during its pause singers could 'execute passages of I know not how many bars together: they'll have echoes on the same passages and swellings of a prodigious length, and then, with a chuckle in the throat, exactly like that of a nightingale, they'll conclude with cadences of an equal length, and all this in the same breath'.<sup>21</sup>

The question of the official titles of Maestro di Cappella and Vice-Maestro used to be a matter of competition. It meant the directorship of the Real Cappella,<sup>22</sup> the most prestigious musical institution in Naples, which had been founded by the Spaniards during the Spanish occupation in the fifteenth century and constructed after the model of the Aragonese court. Sarro, who worked as Vice-Maestro until 1707 and was dismissed for political reasons, gained a gesture of reprieve in 1720 when he was promised his former position's succession with a salary of twenty-two ducats a month. Then, on October 22

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<sup>18</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'The Neapolitans in Venice', in: Strohm, *Dramma per musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 61–80; see Helmut Hucke and Edward O. D. Downes, 'Die neapolitanische Tradition in der Oper / The Neapolitan tradition in opera', in: IMS 8<sup>th</sup> Congress Report New York 1961, 2 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1961), vol. i, 253–284, and vol. ii, 132–134; Daniel Hertz, *Music in European Capitals. The Galant Style, 1720–1780* (New York: Norton, 2003); Francesco Degrada, "'Scuola napoletana'" e "'opera napoletana'": Nascita, sviluppo e prospettive di un concetto storiografico', in: *Il Teatro di San Carlo*, ed. by Franco Mancini (Naples: Electa Napoli, 1987), vol. ii, 9–20.

<sup>19</sup> For developments in orchestral scoring, see Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien*, vol. i; Anne Desler, '*Il novello Orfeo*'. *Farinelli: Vocal Profile, Aesthetics, Rhetoric*. PhD thesis (Glasgow: School of culture and Creative Arts. College of Arts. University of Glasgow, February 2014), 101–102.

<sup>20</sup> Benedetto Marcello, *Il teatro alla moda* (Venice: 1720), 17.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 104; Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung, die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Boß, 1752), 282–283; Quantz, *On playing the flute*, translated with notes and introduction by Edward R. Reilly (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 179–80; Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zu singekunst* (Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1757), 196.

<sup>22</sup> Francesco Cotticelli and Paologiovanni Maione, *Le istituzioni musicali a Napoli durante il Vicereame austriaco (1707–1734): materiali inediti sulla Real Cappella ed il Teatro di San Bartolomeo* (Naples: Luciano Editore, 1993), 5–22; see Dinko Fabris, *Music in Seventeenth Century Naples: Francesco Provenzale (1624–1704)* (Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington: 2007), 18–9; Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 119–122.

1725, Scarlatti died; Mancini was reappointed to his earlier Maestro position, Sarro became Vice-Maestro again, while Vinci together with Leo became so-called 'Pro Vice-Maestri'. Vocalists as well as instrumentalists were employed at the Real Cappella for royal musical service, including the new impresario-duo of S. Bartolomeo, Nicola Galtieri and Aurelio del Pò (1698–1773), who were signed up to a four-year contract in September 1721 after the elderly Nicola Serino had died that year. Since the running of the theatre was necessarily costly, and since, in spite of different sources of financial support, the budget of another applicant, Salvatore Caputo, was too large to deliver, finally these candidates, both former conservatorists of Neapolitan churches, were chosen. The two were related: Nicola was the maternal uncle of Aurelio's father, Andrea del Pò, a painter and stage designer who himself also used to be the impresario of S. Bartolomeo. He rented the House for the first time in 1693–94, then again from 1705 until 1708.

The Galtieri–Del Pò couple achieved notable results within a short time: among other things, they were the first to accomplish a collaboration of the House with Pietro Metastasio – connected to the production of Feo's *Siface* in May 1723 – and with further librettists like Pietro Pariati, Agostino Piovene, Bernardo Saddumene, Antonio Salvi, Silvio Stampiglia, Nino Zanelli and Apostolo Zeno.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, they could enlist the best composers of the 'Neapolitan school'; the music of Leo, Porpora, Sarro, Alessandro Scarlatti and Vinci was heard during the years of their activity, not to mention the greatest star singers of those days, among them Faustina Bordoni, Merighi, Benti-Bulgarelli, Tesi, Vico, Farinelli, Grimaldi and Annibale Pio Fabri.<sup>24</sup> This must have meant a glorious period in the life of the S. Bartolomeo and of the Neapolitan musical culture alike. Not surprisingly, when the contract came to an end in September 1725, they terminated it with a huge deficit.

According to Benedetto Croce, Aurelio del Pò, for instance, owed Strada an amount of 2000 ducats – most probably the total sum of her fees from 1724 onwards – which he could compensate only by marrying her that year (he was twenty-seven, Strada twenty-two years old).<sup>25</sup> Regardless of this, we may assume they were already in a relationship; otherwise, how would it be imaginable that Strada could let these debts grow and sing without payment for years? On the other hand, why did Aurelio not pay the wages even of Strada? Presumably he and Nicola could pay the other members of the company, at their own expense at least, but they withheld that of Strada, as she was to be part of their family

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<sup>23</sup> Pietro Metastasio, *Siface*. Printed libretto (1723), Argomento; see Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien*, vol. ii, 308.

<sup>24</sup> Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien*, vol. ii, 306–312. Claudio Sartori, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800* Indici I (Cuneo: Bertolli & Locatelli Musica, 1990–1994), 110.

<sup>25</sup> Croce, *I Teatri di Napoli*, 348.

soon anyway. It must have been a good marriage; they seem to have clung together for the rest of their lives in every respect. Certainly, Aurelio remained passionately interested in Strada's career not only from an artistic and financial but from a moral aspect as well, as some incidents that happened in London during the 1730s would come to show.

Although Del Pò and Galtieri were originally supposed to leave by October 1725, and be succeeded by the next impresario, Angelo Carasale – who was in the viceroy Cardinal D'Althann's favour – as Croce states, the libretti of S. Bartolomeo's performances up to the carnival season of 1726 show names of Galtieri and Del Pò as dedicators.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Carasale worked at the *Teatro Nuovo eretto di sopra Toledo* in the carnival of 1726. It follows that Aurelio and Strada left the theatre together afterwards, and that Carasale took over S. Bartolomeo after Easter, beginning with the run of Hasse's *Sesostrate* (from 13<sup>th</sup> May).<sup>27</sup> Strada was not the only singer whose contract was terminated: basically the whole company was replaced.

Interestingly enough, there is no information either about Strada or Aurelio for the next three years, until Handel engaged her for the Second Royal Academy in London. Neither have I found any libretto from those years with her name, nor any production wherein she could have participated. One logical explanation suggests itself: that of childbirth. By the time of the London engagement in 1729 Strada had enough time even for two pregnancies.

Table 2.1: Strada's Neapolitan repertoire, 1724–1726

Composer	Opera	Première	Role	Cast	Sources consulted
Niccolò Porpora	<i>Semiramide regina dell'Assiria</i>	19 May 1724	Zomira	Vico, Guicciardi, Farinelli	lost
Leonardo Vinci	<i>Eraclea</i>	1 October 1724	Flavia	Tesi, Vico, Guicciardi, Farinelli	—
Leonardo Leo / Vinci	<i>Turno Aricino</i>	3 December 1724	Livia	Tesi, Vico, Guicciardi, Farinelli	only Leo's contributions survive <sup>28</sup>
Domenico Sarro	<i>Tito Sempronio Gracco</i>	January 1725	Erminia	Tesi, Vico, Guicciardi, Farinelli	<i>I-Nc Rari</i> 7.2.12
Leo	<i>Zenobia in Palmira</i>	13 May 1725	Aspasia	Tesi, Vico, Farinelli, Francesco Costanzi	<i>I-Nc Rari</i> 7.3.9.
Giovanni Porta	<i>Amore e fortuna</i>	1 October 1725	Ormonda	Tesi, Vico, Farinelli, Costanzi	lost
Vinci	<i>Astianatte</i>	2 December 1725	Ermione	Tesi, Vico, Farinelli, Francesco Pertici	<i>I-Nc Rari</i> 7.3.13.
Porta	<i>La Lucinda fedele</i>	Carnival 1726	Erenice	Tesi, Vico, Farinelli, Pertici	lost

<sup>26</sup> *Libretti* of the performances started on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1725, and ran in December 1725 and in the carnival 1726: Francesco Passerini, *Amore e fortuna*. Printed libretto (Naples: Francesco Ricciardi, 1725); Antonio Salvi, *Astianatte*. Printed libretto (Naples: Francesco Ricciardi, 1725); Apostolo Zeno, *La Lucinda fedele*. Printed libretto (Naples: Francesco Ricciardi, 1726).

<sup>27</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 106–109.

<sup>28</sup> *Turno Aricino* was a *pasticcio* by Vinci and Leo, completed by arias of Porta, Scarlatti, Lotti, Porpora, Capelli, Vivaldi and others. The *Avvisi di Napoli* stated that 'the performers have been permitted to place in this opera diverse arias to their satisfaction'. Strada might have sung numbers new to her, or perhaps she repeated airs from Porpora's *Semiramide* and Vinci's *Eraclea*, although this is less likely. The only Vivaldi aria in the *pasticcio* was *Se fide quanto belle* (RV 749.32), for a mezzo-soprano; thus Strada does not seem to have performed anything from her Venetian repertoire. Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 97; Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien*, vol. ii, 284.

## Strada on the stage

Strada's first opera in Naples (Table 2.1) was *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria*, by Porpora. The opera is lost but one aria written for and sung by her, *Se d'aquilon* (I/5; G major, Allegro, C), survived because Porpora reused it for his *Siface* (Viriate, I/2), performed in Milan and at S. Giovanni Grisostomo Venice simultaneously during the carnival season of 1726, from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1725 onwards. This aria was sung again by Strada in London, in one of Handel's Italian *pasticci*, *Ormida* in 1730. It is very informative that whereas in Milan *Se d'Aquilon* was performed by Marianna Lorenzani Conti – at the Lombard pitch (i.e. a whole tone higher than in Naples) –, in Venice it was omitted by Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli as Viriate and was substituted by the aria *Non lascia il ben che brama*. Benti evidently was not a virtuoso singer and her range went only up to a", while *Se d'Aquilon* has a very high tessitura and requires g" and a" too frequently; moreover, these notes are placed on accented beats, and therefore they call for a powerful voice production. As far as Lorenzani is concerned, Jean-Benjamin de la Borde described her as an 'excellente et célèbre musicienne' while he only notes Benti's beauty and fine acting skills.

The case of *Se d'Aquilon* serves to classify Strada's vocal calibre (Ex. 2.1). Marked with the characteristics of a castrato aria, it musters arpeggiation, coloratura patterns, descending *volatine semplice*, syncopation, accented g" (thirty-one times) and a" (six times) notes, trills, repeated notes (*note ribattute*) and violin idioms (in the B section); all of this above a continuous drumming bass accompaniment. The aria displays an increasing limitlessness and freedom of the vocal toolbox.

Example 2.1: Vocal part of *Se d'Aquilon* by Porpora

Se d'A - qui - lon lo sde - gno tron - ca la pian - ta - ma - ta, - la vi - ta in - na - mo - ra - ta lan - gui - da - ca - de al suol. Se d'A - qui - lon lo sde - gno tron - ca la pian - ta - ma - ta la vi - ta in - na - mo - ra - ta - lan - gui - da - ca - de al suol, lan - gui - da ca - de al suol. Del ca - ro - tron - co pri - va - non ha chi la sos - ten



In *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria* the aria belongs to Zomira, the Bactrian princess who is a captive in Babylon together with her beloved, Idaspe.<sup>29</sup> The text of the recitative introducing the aria in the fifth scene of Act I makes clear how deeply she loves Idaspe, and that his loss would ruin her forever: 'Idaspe, Idaspe, you alone are a sweet support to my afflicted soul; you, dear subject of all my thoughts. Being far from you, I am deprived and diminished, descending from the golden throne. Without my beloved Idaspe I do not want to live'.<sup>30</sup> After such words one would expect everything but the type of aria described above: perhaps a lamenting, pathetic number in a minor key and with an afflicting melody would be appropriate. Instead, a *simile* aria with strong images of disaster is that which comes:

If Aquilo in his rage plucks / the beloved plant, / the dear grapevine / languidly falls to the soil. // The darling trunk bereaved, / has nobody to sustain her, / whom the river does not revive, / neither nourishes the sun.<sup>31</sup>

This anomalous situation deeply effects the consideration of Zomira's character, whom the audience would expect to be the typically helpless, victimized and fragile young second woman of the opera. *Se d'Aquilon* being her very first aria turns it all upside down and gives the strongest impression of power, generated by a mixture of bravery and fright: she fights to escape from hopelessness, which might remain if she lost the one who means everything to her.

For Strada, who must have been very receptive to adopting not only certain elements but the general voice production of the *castrato* singing method, these years must have meant a vital period of learning, having the young Farinelli as her stage partner. As Naomi Adele André has suggested about early Romantic Italian opera, but referring to the same phenomenon:

<sup>29</sup> In the end, however, she falls in love with Nino, Semiramide's son (played by Farinelli). Francesco Silvani (much altered), *Semiramide Regina dell'Assiria*. Printed libretto. (Naples: Francesco Ricciardo, 1724).

<sup>30</sup> 'Idaspe, Idaspe, ah solo De l'afflitta alma mia dolce sostegno. Tù il caro oggetto sei Di tutti I pensier miei. Lunge da te, di me son priva e poco, Mi cal d'aurato soglio. Senza Idaspe mio ben, viver non voglio.' Ibid., 11.

<sup>31</sup> 'Se d'Aquilon lo sdegno / Tronca la pianta amata, / La vita innamorata, / Languida cade al suol. // Del caro tronco priva / Non hà, chi la sostiene / Il rio non la ravviva, / Non l'alimenta il sol.' Ibid., 11. Aquilo stands for the North Wind in the Roman mythology.

In addition to formal teaching situations, the castrati's presence in opera gave other singers an opportunity to "learn by example" [...] several of the female singers who were the first interpreters of *primo ottocento* opera also had the benefit of singing onstage with, and learning formally or informally from their castrati colleagues. [...] Frequently these women sang the prima donna characters that were romantically paired with the heroic roles assigned to the castrati in the plot. This meant that these women had to blend their voices with the castrati's, coordinate complementing embellishments, and decide where they both would breathe for the numbers where they sang together.<sup>32</sup>

Strada must have noticed the obvious difference in quality when comparing Carlo Broschi to the former *castrati* she had encountered. Most probably it was also very helpful that they were of a similar age (Farinelli was nineteen in 1724, Strada two years his elder) and that both were in their early careers – already with some reputation behind them, but still in the process of maturing. Moreover, this was the very time when Farinelli – after Faustina emerged as a star with the new manner of *bravura* singing by 1720 –, with the help of his master, Porpora, acquired a greater measure of virtuosity in the execution of *passaggi*, wide leaps and a higher level of rhythmic variety, so as to compete with her.<sup>33</sup> Strada, I suppose, had enough self-assurance to work with him in a relaxed atmosphere, and, doing so, she could get as close as professionally possible to observe and learn from this extraordinary living example of rich and bright voice production, perfect *messa di voce*, incredible breath control as well as use of chest and support:<sup>34</sup>

The perfect art of holding the breath, and retaking it with such cleanness, so as to not allow anyone to know when he was breathing, started and ended with him. The perfect intonation, the unfolding, the extending and expanding of the voice, his portamento, the perfect union of registers, the sparkling agility, and perfect trill were all in him in the same degree of perfection.<sup>35</sup>

Four times they played a lover couple: in *Semiramide* as Zomira and Nino (singing the duet *Mio bel sole, Idolo mio* III/10), in *Eraclea* as Flavia and Damiro, in *Zenobia* as Aspasia and Decio, and as Ermione and Oreste in *Astianatte*. Because both were sopranos, in the case of duets they had the same unusually high tessitura, and only when singing at

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<sup>32</sup> Naomi Adele André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-nineteenth-century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 37–38.

<sup>33</sup> Desler, 'Il novello Orfeo'. Farinelli, 103–104.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27 and 30.

<sup>35</sup> Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on the figurative Art of Singing*. Translated by Pietro Buzzi (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1912), ix. *Messa di voce*, 121–122; Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), 105–106.





taken some lessons from the composer himself during the preparation period of the production of *Semiramide*, Porpora's own opera.<sup>37</sup>

Taking one of Porpora's *sofeggi* for Farinelli as an example (Ex. 2.3), one can see how he sets the octave of the middle range as default and how he focuses right after that on the strengthening of *passaggio*-notes between the chest and head register as well as on the agility of the middle ones through *terzini* which later reach the head range too. Trills are frequent; sixth, seventh and octave leaps are placed mostly in the midst of legato-phrases. It does not lack for high sustained notes or dotted rhythms either. In general, the whole piece is about creating an even voice production: binding the registers, making the naturally softer high tones powerful, the otherwise graver chest notes flexible, and preserving the legato and the unity of the sound regardless of the distance between the subsequent notes of the melody. Whoever could sing this exercise properly, he or she had practically everything an excellent singer has to have. Presuming that Strada trained herself through *sofeggi* similar to this one, it is not surprising that her voice was acclaimed to be superb everywhere she went.

In the question of acting, however, Strada might have been much more accomplished and natural than Farinelli, who, though having an advantageous appearance, lacked passion on the one hand and did not use any gesture for the expression on the other; according to the statements of Quantz and Charles Burney, he simply stood motionless like a statue.<sup>38</sup> Strada, at the same time, was reported in London to have a 'good manner', which might refer to an effective way of acting, but her small figure was out of the ordinary. This latter, I think, was only a problem to the British audience, not to the Italian one.

Further opportunities came to Strada for vocal development with the opening event of the year 1725, Domenico Sarro's *Tito Sempronio Gracco*. By good fortune, Quantz witnessed one of the performances and committed a short description to paper:

On January 13 I therefore travelled from Rome to Naples, where I immediately heard an opera composed by Sarri, almost in the style of Vinci. Farinelli, who was then

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<sup>37</sup> Porpora, besides *castrati*, also had female pupils, such as Regina Mingotti, Rosa Maddalena Cardina, Catterina Gabrielli or Maria Giovanna Gasperini, provided to him by the conservatories. Reinhard Strohm, 'Vivaldi's career as an opera producer', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 122–163: 138; Dan H. Marek, *Giovanni Battista Rubini and the Bel Canto Tenors: History and Technique* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), ch. 5: Opera Seria in Evolution.

<sup>38</sup> Desler, 'Il novello Orfeo'. Farinelli, 32–33 and 119; see Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen', in: *Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, Historisch-Kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, vol. i (Berlin: Johann Jakob Schützens Wittwe, 1754–55), 197–250: 240; Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: by the author, 1789), 379.

approaching his famous perfection, Strada, who later became more famous in England, and Tesi, were brilliant in this opera. The others were only fair.<sup>39</sup>

Strada played a *prima donna* role for the first time, since the *contralti* Vico (in the role of Mario) and Tesi (as Climene) both sang *travesti*. The musical material of Erminia's role in *Tito Sempronio Gracco* indicates the appearance of new features in Strada's singing. Her entrance aria, *Se veglia, se dorme l'amante suo core* (I/2; Ex. 2.4; Track 2; App. B1) is an energetic piece with a singular melody in Andante.<sup>40</sup> The violins play *colla parte*, while the rest of the orchestra moves in quaver notes of drumming bass. The aria is in D minor, alternating excitingly between the modal and tonal colour of the key, twisting chromatically through elaborated diminished rhythmic patterns with demisemiquaver notes on one hand, and large syncopated legato lines combined with wider leaps on the other. Exactly these large legato phrases signify a novelty in the vocal style of Strada, showing a higher technical level and a stronger voice production which cannot be found in her early repertoire. The ambivalent meaning of the text predicts the conclusion of the plot: Erminia declares her true love to Mario, but in the B section the seeds of ambiguity are sown, referring to what she prepares herself for in dreams, that may not be found in daylight. The initial melody, which sounds natural on violins, is obviously not at all comfortable for a human voice. It is no highway, rather a serpentine path. Though well built up, ascending gradually (bb. 12–15), the melody is technically complicated: not only because of repeated up-and-down movements, sixth-leaps, dotted rhythms and a coloraturas, which are placed vocally as best possible, but also by reaching a powerful  $b^b$  and descending immediately a ninth to conclude the phrase (bb. 14–15), a structure that needs conscious planning of dosing support and perfect breath control. So does the rest of the aria (Ex. 2.5). Fascinating long coloraturas occur two times at the words 'languisce d'amore sospira per tè' in both parts of the A section (A1, A2), as a motivic answer to the second half of the opening ritornello. For the first time (upbeat to b.18 to b.25) heavily chromatic second-chains appear, while for the second time (upbeat to b.42 to b.47) this process is disturbed by

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<sup>39</sup> 'Im Jahre 1725. wurden, weil es ein Jubeljahr war, in Rom keine Opern aufgeführt. Ich reisete deswegen am 13 Januar von Rom ab nach Neapolis; wo ich gleich eine Oper zu hören bekam, welche Sarri, fasi im Geschmacke des Vinci in Musik gebracht hatte. Der, seinen berühmten Vollkommenheiten damals sich immer mehr nähernde Farinello; die, nachher in England berühmter gewordene Strada; und die Tesi brillierten in dieser Oper: Die übrigen Sänger und Sängerinnen waren mittelmäßig.' Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', 197–250: 226–227.

<sup>40</sup> 'Se veglia, se dorme / L'amante suo/mio core / Contenerne forme / Languisce d'amore / Sospira per te. // Il sogno m'appresta / Quel bene che spero / Poi l'alba mi desta / E scorgo che vero [il sogno] non è. // Se veglia, se dorme...' (Awake or dreaming / His/my loving heart / Holding its form / Is languishing for love, / Sighing for you. // Dream prepares me / For the good I am hoping for / Then morning awakes me / And I behold that it is not true. // Awake...). Domenico Sarro, *Tito Sempronio Gracco*. Musical manuscript (Naples: 1725), ff. 15v–17r.

fourth and seventh leaps, adding a vocally unexpected jump up to  $b^b$  again. The latter happens on the rhythmically syncopated word ‘sospira’ (‘sigh’).

Example 2.4: Introductory ritornello to *Se veglia, se dorme* from Sarro’s *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, bb. 1–15.

Andante

Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Violas  
Erminia  
Violoncellos

6  
Vlns. 1  
Vlns. 2  
Vlas.  
E.  
Vlcs.

12  
Vlns. 1  
Vlns. 2  
Vlas.  
E.  
Vlcs.

*p* senza cembalo

Se

ve - glià se dor - me l'a - man - te suo co - re

Example 2.5: Vocal part (A section) of *Se veglia, se dorme* from Sarro’s *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, bb. 12–49.

Se ve - glià, se dor - me, l'a - man - te suo co - re con - te - ne - re for - me, l'an -

gui - sce d'a - mo re so - spi - ra per te.

Se ve - glià se dor me, l'a - man te mio co - re con

te - ne - re for - me lan - gui - sce d'a - mo - re, so - spi - ra, lan - gui - sce, so -

spi - ra per te, so - spi - ra per te.

Giving an answer of equal rank to Rosanno's (Farinelli) aria dedicated to *terzini*, *Ninfa amante* (1/9, B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Andante), Strada's *Vorrei morire* in scene 10 (G major, C) is centred on descending and ascending violin idioms in *Vivace assai* (Ex. 2.6).

Example 2.6: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Vorrei morire* from *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, bb. 3–9 and 15–19.

An interesting case emerges with *Straniera Donzella* (II/5; E major, 2/4, Allegro; Ex. 2.7) – a *simile* aria which says that Erminia does not return to her former lover but keeps the new one. Of this a second version can be found at the end of the second act in the copyist's manuscript: a substitution of the original aria with the same text and key – also by Sarro – but with a clearly different concept.<sup>41</sup> Probably it served as musical refreshment during the succession of performances. Nevertheless, it is one of the rare occasions when Strada had a substitute aria in an original role. The first E major version has a light, galant, dance-like character in 2/4 – beaten in 4/8 – which gives an easy and graceful frame to the number. Playful dotted semiquavers, octave leaps and syncopation-chains interlaced with chromatics, spice up the simple dance-base of the piece. Its range is quite wide, yet high notes do not explicitly occur. Surprisingly, the melody reaches e' fourteen times in the A section. The generally lower tessitura of this movement speaks of a fortification of Strada's chest register, even if this aria was substituted in the course of *Tito Sempronio*'s run.

<sup>41</sup> 'Straniera Donzella\* / Che in spiaggia novella / Contenta soggiorna / Al Lido non torna / Che schiva lasciò. // Le sembra si bella / La sponda seconda / Che sdegnò la prima / Nè amore, nè stima / Più avere non può. // Straniera...' (The foreign rainbow wrasse/damsel / Sojourning on a new coast / With satisfaction / Does not return to the seashore, / Timidly leaving it. // The second shore / Seems so beautiful to her / That the first one despised / Can have neither love, nor honour / Anymore. // The foreign...); \* the word *donzella* has a double definition in Italian: it means not only *Coris julis*, the Mediterranean rainbow wrasse, an extremely colourful and luminous species of fish, alternatively known as *donzella pavonina*, or peacock fish, but also damsel / maiden / young lady. Sarro, *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, ff. 115r–118r.

Example 2.7: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Straniera donzella* (first version) from Sarro's *Tito Sempronio* Gracco, bb. 15–34.

**Allegro**

15 Stra - nie - ra Don - zel - la che in piag - gia no - vel - la con - ten - ta sog - gior - na, al  
 20  
 25 li - do non tor - na che schi - va la - sciò, al  
 30 li - do non tor - na che schi - va la - sciò, la - sciò.

As soon as 1721, *c'* notes had been written for Strada by Vivaldi in *Filippo rè di Macedonia*, in the aria *Scherza di fronda in fronda*, discussed in the previous chapter. But that was rather exceptional then. In Naples, however, lower notes began to regularly occur in her repertoire. In addition, we have to take into account the pitch-difference of the Venetian and Neapolitan tuning: compared to the Baroque standard of  $a' = 415$  Hz the tuning was a semitone lower in Naples – just like in France, 392 Hz (modern  $g'$ ) – while it was around 440 Hz in Venice. Thus, there was a whole tone's difference between the Neapolitan and Venetian tuning. In light of the above, I maintain that there was an enlargement of Strada's vocal range.

The substitute version (E major, C; Ex. 2.8) turns to a high tessitura and a *bravura* character, though it retains something of the original *leggero* style and keeps some traces of chromaticism as well. Thus, this aria is more grandiose, and its virtuosity is exaggerated by the oboes added to the orchestration. This insertion may affirm that Strada's voice sounded the best in the range between  $b'$  and  $g^{\#n}$ , where other sopranos had their vulnerable *passaggi*.

Example 2.8: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Straniera donzella* (substitute version) from Sarro's *Tito Sempronio* Gracco, bb. 15–34.

10 Stra - nie - ra, stra - nie - ra - don - zel - la - che in piag - gia no - vel - la con - ten - ta -  
 15 ta - sog - gior - na, al li - do non tor - na, non tor - na, che schi - va la - sciò, che schi - va la - sciò.

The rhythmic variety of *Saetta si bella* (II/10;  $B^b$  major, C, Andante; Ex. 2.9) reflects another side of Strada's kaleidoscopic skill set. The voice part is a dense combination of syncopated arpeggiation with semiquavers, of dotted patterns with trills and demisemiquaver notes, of appoggiaturas and of sustained notes for *messe di voce*.

Example 2.9: Vocal part (A section) of *Saetta si bella* from Sarro's *Tito Sempronio Gracco*, bb. 5–27.

Andante

Sa - et - ta - si bel - la ri - cet - to - nel pet - to, che so - lo - per quel - la pe - nan - do viv - rò. Sa - et - ta - si bel - la ri - cet - to - nel pet - to che so - lo per - quel - la pe - nan do viv - rò, che so - lo per quel - la pe - nan do, pe - nan do viv - rò.

During this Neapolitan era, this kind of chiselled, galant Andante aria, in which the vocal line and verse genuinely fit each other by blurring the differentiation between the principal and ornamental notes of the melody – demisemiquaver grace notes became an essential part of the vocal line, appoggiaturas and acciaccaturas likewise, in the form of syncopation – started to multiply in Strada's repertoire.<sup>42</sup> This signals a very important process concerning her vocal profile as well as artistic personality. As for brilliance, therefore, Quantz might well have been right.

In fact, the *Avvisi di Napoli* asserted that the work met 'universal satisfaction', although this warm response was due not only to the dazzling vocal virtuosity transmitted by first-class performers. The spectacular elements, the costumes and scenery – the costly proposition of the impresario – also played a very important role in carrying the show to success:

On Thursday evening took place for the first time the opera entitled *Tito Sempronio Gracco* at the San Bartolomeo Theatre, which succeeded with universal satisfaction due to the music by the celebrated Maestro di Cappella Domenico Sarro; also because of the famous costumes of the performers as well as the up-to-date, fashionable scenery, elaborated with perfection, for which no expense has been spared by our impresari. His Princely Serene Highness was present to listen to it together with all the nobility.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 108–109 and 111–112.

<sup>43</sup> 'Giovedì a sera si diè principio alla recita della nuova Opera al Teatro di S. Bartolomeo, intitolata Tito Sempronio Gracco, quale riuscì di universal compiacimento, sì per la Musica, ch'è del celebre Maestro di Cappella Domenico Sarro, sì anche per li famosi Abiti de' rappresentanti, come per le nuove vaghissime Vedute, per far le quali con tutta perfezione, non risparmiano spesa questi Impresaj, e vi si portò ad ascoltarla detto Eminentissimo Principe con tutta questa Nobiltà.' *Avvisi di Napoli*. Num. 5. Naples, 23 January 1725. Preserved at the Biblioteca nazionale Vittorio Emanuele III in Naples.

The appreciation of the clothes is not by chance, as it occurs regularly in the *avvisi* when a theatrical evening comes under discussion. On the other hand, the expression of ‘famous costumes’ – *famosi Abiti* – and description of the new scenery implies that particular care has been taken with this production; the *impresari*, Galtieri and Del Pò, surely took this side of the productions seriously, considering their background painting and stage design. It must also be noted in passing that the description of the première evening of *Semiramide regina dell’Assiria*, Strada’s debut in Naples, is especially detailed and remarkable, not least because the quality of the singers is highlighted as being the best possible:

On Saturday evening the new opera, titled *Semiramide*, was performed for the first time at the San Bartolomeo Theatre, which succeeded with general satisfaction both for the composition in verse done by a noted man of virtue, and for the music coming from the illustrious Niccolò Porpora, Maestro di Cappella to the Serene Highness of Darmstadt, and above all for the company who performed it, the best one could wish for. To see furthermore the changes of scene all brand new, admirable in every respect, not only for the painting, but also for the architecture, all designed by the celebrated architect, engineer and academician of Milan, Giovanni Battista Oliviero, enriched by several dancers by the choreographer Sebastiano Scio, Maestro di Balli of Serene Elector Palatino. In all these good taste of our *impresari* was manifested, who did this on their own for the satisfaction of the public. On Sunday evening His Highness the Eminent Viceroy was also present to listen to it.<sup>44</sup>

The conception of a performance, the costumes and scenery influence a singer’s imagination of the drama and of the role he or she creates. Contrary to the lavishness of the costumes, scenery and stage machinery at the first-rank opera houses in Venice, what we see here is a lack of extraordinary machines and exotic animals on stage, but there are artistically painted, ‘well constructed stage sets’ and fair costumes instead. The focus fell on the planning of the scenery, a kind of directing action in service of the drama, and on clothes which, through their richness and beauty, can magnify the essential features of a

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<sup>44</sup> ‘Sabato a sera andò per la prima volta in scena nel Teatro di S. Bartolomeo la nuova Opera in Musica intitolata Semiramide, quale riuscì di universal compiacimento così per la composizione delle parole, che sono di un celebre virtuoso, come per la Musica, ch’è del rinomato Niccolò Porpora virtuoso del Serenissimo Principe Darmstadt, e più d’ogn’altro per la compagnia, che la rappresentata, non potendo desiderarsi migliore, vedendovi anco le vedute delle mutanze delle Scene tutte nuove; ammirando si in ciascheduna di esse non solo la dipintura, ma anche per l’architettura, il tutto ideato dal celebre Architetto Gio: Battista Oliviero, Architetto, Ingegnere, & Accademico di Milano, come anco avendola arricchita di molte figure di balli; il virtuose di assi Sebastiano Scio Maestro di Balli del Serenissimo Elettore Palatino; dal che si manifesta il buon gusto di questi Impresarij, che non abbandonano ad altro, che a dar sodisfazione a questo Pubblico; e Domenica a sera vi si portò ad ascoltarla Sua Em. il Signor Vicerè.’ *Avvisi di Napoli*. Num. 22. Naples, 23 May 1724.

certain character. Reading between the lines, one can surmise that these reports bespeak fine taste.

Similarly to the previous productions, the dramatic strength of text and music could show itself within a proper visual environment in the following opera of the season 1724–25, *Zenobia in Palmira* by Leonardo Leo.<sup>45</sup> The plot should not be confused with the popular and frequently set libretto of *Zenobia*,<sup>46</sup> by Metastasio (1738, first performed 1740) with completely different characters and story.<sup>47</sup> The present one does not deal with the wife of Radamisto from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (which can be read in *Annals*, Book XII by Tacitus) but concerns Zenobia, the Palmyrian Queen, a different person who lived in the 3rd century BC and was married to Odenato.

The date of the Neapolitan première fell on 13<sup>th</sup> May (the birthday of Maria Theresia, then eight years old). Interestingly, almost at the same time, on 9<sup>th</sup> May, *L'amore eroico*, a *dramma per musica* based on the same plot, started its run at S. Samuele in Venice.<sup>48</sup> Though the score by Francesco Brusa seems to have been lost, according to the British impresario Owen Swiney its musical quality was unacceptably low. A detailed description

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<sup>45</sup> 'E la sera detto Eminentissimo Signore si portò ad ascoltare l'Opera in musica, intitolata Zenobia in Palmira, che per la prima volta si recitò nel Teatro di S. Bartolomeo, quale riuscì di universal applauso, così per la musica, ch'è del celebre Maestro di Cappella Leonardo Leo, come per gli Rappresentanti, e famosi Abiti, e nuove, e ben architettate Vedute.' (In the abovementioned evening, [13<sup>th</sup> May 1725] His Highness went to listen to the opera entitled *Zenobia in Palmira*, which was represented for the first time at the S. Bartolomeo Theatre, and attained general applause due to the music by the celebrated Maestro di Cappella Leonardo Leo, as well as to the performers, together with the famous costumes and the newly and well constructed stage sets.) *Avvisi di Napoli*. Num. 21. Naples, 15 May 1725.

<sup>46</sup> *Zenobia in Palmira*. F. Chelleri, Barcelona, 1709; Milan, 1711; F. Fio, Naples, 1713; L. Leo, Naples, 1725; P. Anfossi, Venice, 1790; see Julie Anne Sadie, ed., *Companion to Baroque Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 83.

<sup>47</sup> *Zenobia* settings – to Metastasio's libretto: *Predieri*, 1740; Porpora, 1740 (as *Tiridate*); G. Sbacchi, 1740; Pellegrini, 1741; Poncini Zilioli, 1741; Latilla, 1742 (as *Zenobia und Radamistus*); Verocai, 1742; Michieli, 1746; Pulli, 1748; Perez, 1751; Uttini, 1754; Piccinni, 1756; Cocchi, 1758; G. B. Zingoni, 1760; Hasse, 1761; Pescetti, 1761; Sala, 1761; Traetta, 1761; Schwanenberger, 1765; Tozzi, 1773; G. Calegari, 1779; F. Sirotti, 1783; Mount Edgumbe, 1800; see Don Neville, 'Metastasio, Pietro (Antonio Domenico Bonaventura)', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 March 2013; Don Neville, 'Zenobia. (Tiridate)', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 March 2013; Reinhard Strohm, 'Dramatic Dualities: Metastasio and the Tradition of the Opera Pair', *Early Music* 26/4 (Nov., 1998): 551–561: 558–559; *Zenobia regina de' Palmireni*. T. Albinoni, Venice, 1694. – *Zenobia*: to various texts. G. A. Boretti, Vienna, 1661; N. A. Strungk, Leipzig, 1697; G. K. Reutter, Vienna, 1732; Paisiello, Naples, 1790; Earl of Mt. Edgumbe, London, 1800. (collected from Clement's *Diet. Lyrique* and Riemann's *Opern-Handbuch*). See <http://www.ebooksread.com/authors-eng/george-grove/a-dictionary-of-music-and-musicians-ad-1450-1889-by-eminant-writers-english-vor/page-121-a-dictionary-of-music-and-musicians-ad-1450-1889-by-eminant-writers-english-vor.shtml> Accessed 12 March 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 380–381. Here, Selfridge-Field refers to the 1709 Barcelona performance as *Zenobia e Radamisto*. Other authors name it as *Zenobia in Palmira*. See Luise K. Stein and José Máximo Leza, 'Opera, genre, and context in Spain and its American colonies', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera*, ed. by Anthony DelDonna and Pierpaolo Polzonetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 244–269: 254; Fortunato Chelleri, *Keyboard Music*, ed. by Vassilis Vavoulis (Madison, Wisconsin: A–R Editions, Inc., 2000), ix; Julie Anne Sadie, *Companion to Baroque Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 83.



of its compositional errors can be found in Johann Mattheson's *Critica Musica*. Swiney praises, however, the Bolognese contralto Santa Marchesini, who played Zenobia.<sup>49</sup>

### **Becoming the leading soprano**

This special situation, that the main female character (in the drama) was not a soprano but a contralto, occurred – presumably on behalf of Vittoria Tesi – in the majority of the *opere serie* in which Strada participated in Naples, as it did in the case of *Zenobia in Palmira*. It follows that Strada took the leading soprano role, namely that of Aspasia, while Tesi – whose fame had already spread throughout Europe – was heard as Zenobia.<sup>50</sup> The brightest star of this cast-constellation, Farinelli (as Decio) made the triangle complete.<sup>51</sup> To sing such a challenging role as that of Aspasia, surrounded by top-quality colleagues, gave an exceptional scope for Strada to develop, refine and deepen her vocal and dramatic abilities.

The two leading female figures, Zenobia and Aspasia, are not only princesses, but strong and passionate warrior women. In addition, both of them have to face a moral conflict throughout the opera in both a personal and political respect.<sup>52</sup> Zenobia, the princess of Assiria, is confronted with difficulty in reconciling her Amazon identity with her love for a man who is as strong and as confident as she is. It seems hard for her to make herself dependent on a king and a leader just as herself, and yet also simply on a man who is worthy of her heart, on someone whom she looks up to and honours.

This noble person is Odenato, the king of Palmyra (played by Diana Vico), who, in spite of the fact that he has never seen Zenobia before, admires her for her heroism and fearlessness according to reports he has been given. For this reason, Odenato refuses the offer coming from Sapore, the Persian King, to take his daughter, Princess Aspasia, in marriage. Sapore, feeling himself affronted, decides to send his general, Farnace, together with Aspasia to take revenge on Odenato. In the battle, Odenato is supported by Decio, the Roman general, who actually loves Aspasia. Odenato gets into a dangerous situation, which would cost him his life, when a mysterious Assirian commander wearing a closed helmet (i.e. Zenobia), saves him and gives him a jewel of gold. Thus, Assiria becomes a federate to Odenato's empire too. Zenobia, disguising herself as her own captain, then

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<sup>49</sup> She was specialized in the intermezzo genre mainly in Venice and Naples. Antonella Giustini, 'Marchesini, Santa' In: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Volume 69. (2007). [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santa-marchesini\\_\(Dizionario\\_Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santa-marchesini_(Dizionario_Biografico)/) Accessed 14 March 2013; Franco Piperno, 'Marchesini, Santa', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 14 March 2013.

<sup>50</sup> The singer called 'La Fiorentina', was one of the most famous female contraltos of her age. The role of Andromaca by Leonardo Vinci was inspired by her solid yet expressively sensitive voice. Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 124.

<sup>51</sup> Apostolo Zeno, *Zenobia in Palmira*. Printed libretto. (Naples: Francesco Ricciardi, 1724).

<sup>52</sup> Pietro Pariati, *L'amore eroico*. Adopted by Apostolo Zeno. Printed libretto (Venice: Marino Rossetti, 1725); Apostolo Zeno, *Zenobia in Palmira*. Printed libretto (Naples: Francesco Ricciardi, 1724).

enters Palmyra as victor together with Odenato and Decio, as well as with the defeated and captivated Farnace and Aspasia.

The libretto, by Apostolo Zeno in collaboration with Pietro Pariati, was set to music for the first time by Fortunato Chelleri in Barcelona in 1709 and was also staged in Milan the next year.<sup>53</sup> Then, in 1725, the work seems to have fallen into two different versions of the plot. *L'amore eroico*, performed in Venice, represents the version of Pariati and emphasises Zenobia as the warrior queen, which is understandable considering the enthusiasm of the Venetians for that kind of figure.<sup>54</sup>

In Naples at the same time, probably a local librettist reworked the libretto of *Zenobia* for the vigorous and energetic musical style of Leonardo Leo, and adjusted the story more to the rules of *opera seria*, as far as the hierarchy of the characters was concerned. Zenobia, the real warrior queen in the physical sense, remains contralto as voice type, but as a soprano, Aspasia has to dominate; the librettist accordingly accentuates the immense mental power with which Aspasia fights till the end to reach her goal. In this sense, she becomes another warrior queen of the opera. Zenobia, in the meantime, turns into a more sensitive and fragile figure. A typical example is the end of Act I when in *L'amore eroico* Zenobia reveals that she was the one who saved Odenato's life in a battle previously and reminds him to what she has sworn; she presents herself as a warrior only and not as a lover until Odenato proves that he can win the physical fight against her.<sup>55</sup> In the case of *Zenobia in Palmira* however, Zenobia asks Odenato to tell her that he loves her. The order of their arias concluding the first act is switched from that of *L'amore eroico* and their texts completely changed from the warrior to the amorous: Odenato's aria (*T'adoro* instead of *Qual inacuto Cacciatore*) comes first, which can be interpreted as the mental paraphrase of the conquest. Zenobia's aria immediately after that begins (instead of *Vesta usbergo, cinga Spada*) as *Benchè lieto il cor già sia combattuta* ('Thus happy, this heart is already conquered'), contrasting with the conception of the Venetian piece.

It is important to note that while in the Venetian production the biggest name was that of Carestini as Odenato, in Naples Farinelli shaped the role of Decio. In this way the musical emphasis of the drama was transposed to the Decio–Aspasia couple. It is obvious from the very fact that he sang the first aria of the opera even though his character did not appear until the fourth scene of Act I in the libretto; in the meantime, the story of the opera is essentially about Zenobia. The number of arias per character clearly shows this equality

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<sup>53</sup> Sadie ed., *Companion to Baroque Music*, 83.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel E. Freeman, "La guerriera amante". Representations of Amazons and Warrior Queens in Venetian Baroque Opera', *The Musical Quarterly* 80/3 (Autumn, 1996): 431–460.

<sup>55</sup> 'Tutto, Odenato, / Da Zenobia guerriera, / Ma nulla da Zenobia / Effeminata amante.... Sappi, che in petto ho un core, / Che Marte vincer deve, e non amore.' Pariati, *L'amore eroico* I/8, 18–19.

of the four: Aspasia and Decio have five arias each, Zenobia six (five plus an arioso), and so does Odenato. Considering this, the case of *Zenobia in Palmira* is especially intense, as the troubles in the plot are doubled by the two couples of almost equal importance. However, Aspasia would have been given five arias in total, while Decio just four, as the libretto shows.<sup>56</sup> That was balanced later by Leo, who reworked and extended Decio's (Farinelli's) role. He got the very first aria of the work (*Qual con l'aura* I/2) and took another one (*Lieto parto amato / Tamerò sì ben mio* II/2) which originally belonged to Aspasia. Moreover, it was not only composed for Farinelli with an altered text, but was also reworked and turned into a more grandiose additional aria; the interpolation in the manuscript – possibly in the author's own hand – is clearly visible and is commented upon with a posterior pencil note as well.<sup>57</sup> In compensation, Strada was given an additional *aria di bravura*, *Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura* – in place of Zenobia's *Oh Dio perchè s'oscura*. This aria is set at a crucial place in a dramatic sense, in the 11<sup>th</sup> scene of Act II, right before the greatest conflict of the drama, Zenobia's confession to Odenato about her 'giurata fede', her oath not to marry without being conquered by her beloved in single combat. Thus, both Strada and Farinelli finally ended up with five arias each.

The opening scene of the drama presents a newly written dialogue between Odenato and Decio. Their conversation is about the ladies they love, highlighting Aspasia in particular. Decio's first words are that he burns for her. In the second scene – which corresponds to the first scene of *L'amore eroico*, enriched with Decio and Tullo, his servant – Zenobia appears with Farnace who realises the Roman general's ardent love for his beloved one (the aforementioned first aria of Decio, *Qual con l'aura*). Farnace's revenge aria in the third scene (*Sento già che nel furore*), with a rewritten text, seems to have a double meaning: he wants to take vengeance not only on Odenato for political reasons but also on Decio for personal ones, which calls the Persian Princess to mind again. In I/4–5 the first arias of Zenobia and then of Odenato are taking place. Odenato must answer Aspasia's call, which arouses Zenobia's jealousy. We can see therefore a strictly and consciously built-up dramaturgy. By the time she finally enters in I/6, the audience has already experienced passionate discussions about her all along; one knows almost everything about Aspasia and how the others relate to her.

As soon as Zenobia learns the king's love for her, she suggests him to open the golden gem. Odenato looks for the first time at the portrait of his beloved and the scales fall from his eyes, realising that the Assirian captain is in fact Zenobia. (Later, the queen accepts

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<sup>56</sup> Among them took places his famous *Qual farfalla* in the second Act (scene 7), as well as *Son qual nave in rìa procella* with extreme leaps.

<sup>57</sup> Leonardo Leo, *Zenobia in Palmira*. Musical manuscript (Naples: 1725), *I-Nc Rari* 7.3.9, ff. 66v–68r.

Odenato's affections and agrees to marry him on the understanding that he has to overcome her in single combat, since she made a vow earlier to take nobody in marriage except the one who is able to fight her.) The text of his aria has been reworked:

Colomba che mira / Dipinto un Ruscello / Non può mai con quello / La sete  
ammorzar. / Ne un cor che sospira / Mai può dal pensiero / Con finto piacere / Le  
brame appagar.

The dove, which admires / A painted brook / In this way can never / Extinguish its  
thirst. / Nor can a heart that sighs / Ever with the thoughts / Of false pleasures /  
Appease its desires.

The word 'appagar' means to appease, to calm. Right after Odenato's aria another chamber opens to our view (I/6) with the anguished princess herself therein. Aspasia's entrance aria is in fact a short, one-part number. The first word of the text is 'placar', which is the synonym of 'appease' (also 'placate'), meaning to calm down. This concurrence inevitably generates an association with the previous scene and contrasts the dramatic situations which Odenato and Aspasia are in:

Placar ti dovresti / Destino severo; / E sempre più fiero / Tormenti il mio cor.

Calm yourself / Severe fate; / You, who ever more proudly / Torment my heart.

This was a conscious strategic choice of the librettist for the Neapolitan production, because the lyrics of *Placarti dovresti* do not appear in the Venetian libretto.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, originally there is a long scene with recitatives, culminating in an aria (*Vuoi, ch'io parta*). Leo's score is full of recitative corrections and aria displacements: in the case of this scene it is clearly visible that the *fogli* of *Placarti* were inserted additionally. The composer's first idea was to turn one sentence of the recitative into an aria (*Lascia, ch'io giusti ancora*; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Larghetto e amoroso) in the middle of scene 7,<sup>59</sup> Aspasia and Decio's conversation, but it was cut off and the more characteristic *Placarti* replaced it. In this way, an augmented focus fell on the princess alone, whose both sides, the social and the personal, became portrayed at the same time.

The introductory ritornello in C major is a magnificent French-style march. This rich sound, based on vertical movements – and later, when the singer enters, on the variety of

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<sup>58</sup> Pariati, *L'amore eroico*.

<sup>59</sup> Leo, *Zenobia in Palmira*. I-Nc Rari 7.3.9, f. 30v.

harmonies – and the choice of the key together with the dotted rhythms create the royal atmosphere, serving as a symbol of Aspasia’s noble rank.<sup>60</sup>

Example 2.10: *Placarti dovresti* from Leo’s *Zenobia in Palmira*

The musical score is for the aria "Placarti dovresti" from Leo's opera *Zenobia in Palmira*. It is in 3/4 time and marked "Andante". The score includes parts for Violins 1 and 2, Viola, Aspasia (soprano), and Violoncello. The vocal line features the following lyrics: "ti dov-res-ti des-ti-no se-ve-ro e sem-pre più fie-ro tor-men-ti il mio cor, tor-men-ti il mio cor, e sem-pre più fie-ro des-ti-no se-ve-ro, tor-men-ti il mio cor, tor-men-ti il mio cor." The score is divided into systems, with measure numbers 10, 20, 25, 30, and 35 indicated.

<sup>60</sup> The C major key has been connected during the centuries to the meaning of something fierce and grit but also noble, heroic, pompous and pure at the same time – to something that has majesty and grandeur in it. Mary Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 32; see Marc-Antoine Charpentier, *Règles de composition* (Paris: 1690); Jean Rousseau, *Méthode claire, certaine et facile pour apprendre à chanter la Musique* (Paris: 1691); Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713); Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie réduite à ses principes naturels* (Paris: 1722); Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung* (Berlin: 1752); Jean-Benjamin de la Borde, *Essai sur la Musique Ancienne et Moderne III* (Paris: Onfroy, 1780).

The vocal part of *Placarti dovresti* (Ex. 2.10; Track 3) brings out Aspasia's royal status, but also her personal emotions, struggles and doubts. In contrast to the orchestral ritornello it is based on horizontal legato lines, but leaps play an important role as well. This diversity clearly refers to the conflict between her social and personal situations. Vocally, the aria focuses on the display of *messa di voce* as well as generous portamento singing.<sup>61</sup> Without beautifully-executed sustained notes the number would lose its meaning. *Messa di voce* or 'placement of the voice' was considered as a proof of an accomplished vocal technique because it required a high level breath control as well as a perfect positioning of the voice to change the volume of the note without any change of intonation and timbre.<sup>62</sup> Mancini discussed it as a gift of nature, one of the most effective tools in singing and of a great beauty linked to 'real true artists' only. He brought up the most famous example, that of Farinelli, Strada's actual stage partner.<sup>63</sup> *Messa di voce*, besides that by its length it was to display the ability to control the breath, and through its swelling of *crescendo* and *decrescendo*, was also, as Naomi Adele André maintains, 'a way to make the sound stand out and resonate through the opera house. Additionally it showcased a remarkable technique; to achieve the elasticity needed to increase and decrease the volume, the note had to be placed securely on the breath; otherwise the tone would collapse, disappear in the soft sections and become harsh or shrill in the loud sections.'<sup>64</sup> Through *Placarti dovresti* Strada's blended registers, great volume, stamina, breath control, stable support and most likely her beautiful timbre has been proclaimed.

This first closed number of Aspasia has the great importance of introducing singer and character at the same time. Besides proving Strada's established technical-musical qualities, it also refers to a voice not of a light soprano. The orchestra does not help the voice with unison – moreover, the first sustained note has to be strong enough to dominate even when the first violins reach c<sup>'''</sup>; the whole melody structure, starting with a long c<sup>''</sup> lasting more than two-bars (bb. 8–10), followed by a g<sup>''</sup> (b. 10), is at once a technical difficulty to solve. Right after that comes a seventh leap comes. Continuing, there is still no time to rest because the next breath has to be taken in such a way that it can provide enough support to reach a<sup>''</sup>, dipping into an f<sup>##'''</sup>, which – being an altered note – has to be

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<sup>61</sup> 'Messa di voce chiamasi quell'atto, in cui il Professore dà a ciascuna nota di valore la sua graduazione, mettendovi al principio poca voce, e poi con proporzione rinforzandola sino al più forte, ritirandola finalmente colla medesima graduazione, che adopró nel salire'; 'Messa di voce, is that art in which the singer gives to any sustained note its graduation, starting it with almost a thread of voice and then reinforcing it proportionately to the greatest power in which it can be developed, and then takes it back with the same graduation that has been used in going from soft to loud.' Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 99; *Practical Reflections*, ix. *Messa di voce*, 117–118.

<sup>62</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Messa di voce' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 17 December 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 105–106; *Practical Reflections*, ix. *Messa di voce*, 121–122.

<sup>64</sup> André, *Voicing Gender*, 40.

well tuned, especially because at the end of the same bar (b. 15) it changes again into f" natural on the *appoggiatura*. This chromatic wiggling on words 'fiero tormenti', which has to be shown dramatically through the slight accentuation of these two notes, takes away additional support from the singer. Again, there is not much time to breathe at the end of the phrase (b. 17), and, moreover, the culmination of the first part is still coming: the wildest chromatic writing in bar 18, aggravated with dotted rhythms, is not only very hard to tune but to top it all it is placed on *passaggi*. It travels to a full-bar d" (b. 19) which has to be intense enough to involve the surprise jump to the sixteenth a" note in bar 20 organically. The second half of the aria deals with sixth (bb. 23–24, 26) and seventh leaps (bb. 33–34) as well as with an extended chromatic legato line on 'tormenti' again (bb. 27–30).

A new feature of vocal quality, a new colour emerged here which did not appear in Strada's earlier repertoire. I would suggest that this was a milestone in her vocal development and career. By this time she has already shown everything of a fine soprano's qualities: flexibility, agility in coloraturas, leaps, trills and divisions. From the very beginning, the arias sung by her show us a free voice, which can easily reach high notes like a" with prevalence. In the spring of 1725, at the age of twenty-two a new stage of vocal maturity has arrived for her. In view of her repertory, her voice became stabilized at that time; its volume was extended and became thicker and more sonorous without losing its brightness. *Placarti dovresti* can be considered as a flash of the future Alcina. Aspasia's temper does not fall too far from the enchanter queen's either.

This way, both the libretto structure and music gives to Aspasia's situation a very dramatic description. Farnace is released and free to return to Persia; he asks Aspasia to go with him. He represents the innate wish of the king's daughter to meet social requirements and thus achieve acceptance by her father. Aspasia, however, has fallen some time ago for Decio, the Roman General in Persia, who devotes his legions to defending Palmyra, and therefore becomes the princess's enemy. We can thus see a captive noblewoman who is torn between her task and the desire of her heart.

It is very important to see that *opera seria* – similarly to the spoken theatre of the era, particularly in the tragedies of Pierre Corneille – functioned as a reminder for the nobility. Mirroring society and giving high quality entertainment is just the first layer. It is all about the high responsibility they had as persons of rank. To face the fact over and over again that every decision they make, every affection that inspires them to make a decision in their lives is never theirs alone, for the future of their nation and the lives of people under them hang on their destiny. Duty and love – representing mind and emotion – are

constantly in conflict, struggling with one another inside of the characters, as is especially displayed in Metastasian libretti.<sup>65</sup> Being torn between the two, the protagonists are in search for the better decision, weighing up which value should have priority and which one has to be sacrificed along with its inherent beauties, yet deep down continually lies the overwhelming faith that in an ideal world these two could never oppose each other. On the contrary, duty should intensify true love and vice versa. To strengthen belief in the existence of a solution which can be found to establish or re-establish complete harmony in life, as well as to unite the social and private sides of it, is the very *ars poetica* of *opera seria*. Likewise, for a performer to catch the essence of this duality and to find a way to true expression meant the greatest artistic accomplishment. For Strada specifically, the role of Aspasia was probably the first experience of a character of which musical elaboration was deeply rooted in its high dramatism.

This very first impression of Aspasia has a substantial psychological significance for she is presented as *donna fragile*, so the audience could have an insight into her weaknesses. Everything authentic in her character is based here, a feature which has to be recalled from time to time because just in the next moment when the music changes into recitative she awakes from her dream of being feminine and proves herself to be a *regina*, a *donna forte*. The pride of the princess emerges as an additional factor one has to reckon with and her pique guides her to take revenge by any means.

When her two suitors, Decio and later Farnace appear, Aspasia goes at them furiously. She holds back her love until she gets full vengeance on Odenato and finally rules Palmyra. Since Decio wants her to stay, while Farnace wishes her to return to Persia with him, she offers her affections to the one who fulfils her political desires (I/8). Herewith, Aspasia makes her private life depended upon her social status, just like Zenobia in the Venetian version of the plot:

Vuoi, ch'io parta? Partirò. (a Far.) / Vuoi ch'io resti? Resterò. (a Dec.) / Ma vendetta,  
io vò da tè. / Vuoi amore? Vuoi tu affetto? / Sò, che ardir tu chiudi in petto. / Sò, che  
in sen tu vanti fé.

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<sup>65</sup> It forms the title of a very influential libretto, Antonio Salvi's *Amore e maestà* (Florence, 1715; later often titled *Arsace*). It is formulated in the text of such arias, as in Act I of Handel's *Partenope*: 'L'Amor ed il destin / Combatterà per me' (aria of Partenope, sung by Strada) or in Vivaldi's *Griselda*: 'Dal dovere da l'amore / Combattuto questo core' (aria of Costanza, *Agitata da due venti*), too; Nicholas Till, 'The operatic event: opera houses and opera audiences', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. by Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 70–94: 84; Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24.



Do you want me to leave? I will leave. (to Farnace) / Do you want me to stay? I will stay. (to Decio) / But revenge is what I am expecting from you. / Do you want love? Do you want affection? / I know that you are closing flames in your breast. / I know that you boast fidelity in your heart.

At this point of the work Aspasia is on stage ever since she entered for the first time in I/6. After *Placarti dovresti* there were recitative dialogues with Farnace and Decio together but no aria. As the next aria is also sung by Aspasia, she rules the stage during a substantial eleven-minute long scene. *Vuoi ch'io parta* (I/8; D major, C, *Larghetto e cantabile* / *Presto*; App. B2), a *bravura* number, contrasting with the preceding *cantabile*,<sup>66</sup> also does not have a simple *da capo* form: the A section is made up of two contrasting materials alternating with each other. Two completely diverse musical characters can be heard: for the first part of the text – ‘Vuoi, ch’io parta? Partirò. / Vuoi ch’io resti? Resterò’ – there is a syllabic *aria parlante* episode in D major, *Larghetto e cantabile* (bb. 1–5, 13–16). Then, it is suddenly interrupted by the *Presto* section (bb. 6–13, 17–27) – ‘Ma vendetta, io vò da tè’. Virtuoso violin idioms occur on the word ‘vendetta’, reaching a” four times within three bars (Ex. 2.11).

Example 2.11: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Vuoi ch'io parta?* from Leo's *Zenobia in Palmira*, bb. 14–25.

In the first measure of the introductory ritornello (Ex. 2.12), the violins show the different themes by creating interference rhythmically: the dotted semiquavers and ornamental demisemiquavers against the semiquaver-triplets may represent Aspasia’s unbalanced and undecided feelings towards the two men (which one is to leave and which one to stay) versus the only thing she surely wants: to take revenge.

<sup>66</sup> Strohm interprets the different aria-types of *opera seria* defined on the basis of theoretical works from 1714 to 1789: of Martello, Marcello, Tosi, Riva, De Brosses, Algarotti, Goldoni, Hiller, Burney and Brown. Strohm, *Italienische Opernarien*, vol. i, 239–245.

Example 2.12: Introductory ritornello to *Vuoi ch'io parta?* from Leo's *Zenobia in Palmira*, bb. 1–4.

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Violins 1, Violins 2, Violas, Aspasia, and Violoncello. The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Larghetto e cantabile'. The instrumental parts feature intricate sixteenth-note passages with frequent triplet markings. The vocal line for Aspasia is written in a soprano clef and includes the lyrics: 'Vuoi ch'io par - ta? par - ti - rò, vuoi ch'io re - sti? re - ste-'. The second system continues the instrumental accompaniment and the vocal line, marked with a repeat sign (♩) at the beginning.

The vocal part and the bass are stuck together in a complimentary fashion, while motivically they are the loan translation of each other. The prevalent dotted octave-leap motif on a–A in the bass is recurrent in the soprano part on a"–a' both in the *Largo* (bb. 15–16) and in the *Presto* section (b. 16, 23), making the artistic ‘patchwork’ coherent. This frequent occurrence of a", many times on metrical accents connected with large leaps, is very informative about how flexible and agile Strada’s voice was, how surely and easily could it move in the upper register, wherein she felt comfortable and secure.

As far as the further numbers of Strada are concerned, *Al suo amato verde prato* (II/4), an *aria di mezzo carattere*, has a pastoral melody in B<sup>b</sup> major, *Allegro*, also with a high tessitura (b<sup>b</sup>–g"). Aspasia appears again as *donna fragile* in this *simile* aria: her metaphor is the image of a lamb that needs its shepherd to guide it to its favoured green field. *Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura* (II/11, C; Ex. 2.13; Track 4; App. B3) is the aforementioned later-added aria in E<sup>b</sup> major, with a wide range and with the enumeration of variable and masterfully enlaced technical show-off patterns (violin idioms, *cantar di sbalzo*, *stile di basso* and trills), including bird-song imitation. The text of this one is missing from the Neapolitan libretto. That is why I think it presumably was brought forth at a very late phase of the compositional process and maybe at Strada’s special request. It is a *simile* aria picturing the increasing frustrations in Aspasia’s soul as storm, thunder and lightning, which she hopes will pass and be replaced by serenity.

Example 2.13: Vocal part of *Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura* from Leo's *Zenobia in Palmira*, bb. 9–55.

This was the most difficult and concerto-like movement sung by Strada until then, and its powerful orchestration (Ex. 2.14), with chords and repeated notes in the violins, indicates that her voice gained greater volume and stamina than before. The stops both for the soprano and the orchestra in bars 16 and 32, after a climax in the voice part and a virtuosic ascending scale in the violins (i.e. lightning), and the *sotto voce* and *piano* indications after them (when the tempest calms down), may also refer to possible places for the audience to applaud, according to Italian custom.<sup>67</sup>

Example 2.14: *Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura* from Leo's *Zenobia in Palmira*, bb. 12–34.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Descriptions such as that of the competition between Farinelli and the trumpet player in *Adelaide* suggest that 18th-century opera audiences applauded immediately following a particularly noteworthy performance element rather than waiting for the end of an aria or even a section. On the spoken stage, too, 18th-century audiences were known to applaud elegant poses or well-executed transitions between passions of actors even in the middle of important monologues.’ Desler, *‘Il novello Orfeo’*. Farinelli, 208.

*Da questo amore* (III/3; Alla breve A major) celebrates the *lieto fine* after the Persian Princess has made her decision to send Farnace as well as her political motives away and to put her emotions towards Decio in the first place. *Larghetto e amoroso* in A major is associated with love and tenderness.<sup>68</sup> A little lower, a more comfortable tessitura than before could bring out a smooth yet bright timbre, a tone of the solution when all troubles are released at last (Ex. 2.15). Besides rejoicing dotted rhythms framed in large *legato* phrases, plenty of *messe di voce* as well as trills occur. This role seems to fulfil Tosi's utopian ideal of a style such as the ancients found valuable – as a ‘Mixture of the Lively and Cantabile, the Variety of which could not fail to give delight’.<sup>69</sup>

Example 2.15: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Da questo amore* from Leo's *Zenobia in Palmira*, bb. 9–29.

**Larghetto et amoroso**

<sup>68</sup> Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung*, 203; Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*. 1784–85 (Wien: 1806), 379.

<sup>69</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*. Trans. by John Ernest Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743), 109. ‘Il gusto de’ chiamati Antichi era un misto di gajo, e di cantabile la di cui varietà non potea far di meno di dilettere.’ Tosi, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno Osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (Bologna: 1723).

Here, in *Zenobia*, Strada had the opportunity to present the whole range of her skills for the character of a queen – singing *cantabile* when pretending to be *fragile* while using her feminine wiles to control and manipulate the men around her, also showing off her agility through coloraturas to demonstrate her mental strength.

Between her appearance in two productions of Giovanni Porta,<sup>70</sup> as Ormonda in *Amore e fortuna*,<sup>71</sup> and as Erenice in *La Lucinda fedele*<sup>72</sup> (her last one in Naples), Strada played Ermione in Vinci's *Astianatte*, one of the stormiest and most unsettling dramas she ever participated in. It was premièred on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1725 with the regular cast. Vittoria Tesi had the privilege to play Andromaca, who has to choose between true love to her murdered husband, Hector, or to save her son Astianatte's life through an unwilling marriage with Pirro (Diana Vico *en travesti*).<sup>73</sup> Bringing the masculine colour of her voice into relief – in contrast to her earlier role of Eraclea –, Vinci let display her splendid acting gifts as well.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, *Astianatte* is one of his works (besides the also notable *Silla dittatore*, *Didone abbandonata* and *Artaserse*) through which he deserved Quantz's appreciation that 'he was lively, rich in invention, agreeable, natural, and often very happy in expression'.<sup>75</sup>

This very intense dramatism comes from the drama Antonio Salvi's libretto is based on, Jean Racine's *Andromaque*.<sup>76</sup> Salvi, a Florentine court poet, often used the French *tragédie lyrique* as model for his *drammi per musica*.<sup>77</sup> Although *Astianatte* was his only libretto of *opera seria* set by Vinci, Handel, for instance, regularly chose his libretti to set to music.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> 'Jeri mattina per il Compleaños del nostro Augustissimo Padrone..., e la sera detto Em. Sig. si portò ad ascoltare la nuova Opera in Musica al Teatro di S. Bartolomeo intitolata: *Amore, e Fortuna*, e riuscì di piena soddisfazione così detto Eminentissimo Principe, come di tutta la Nobiltà, ed altri ordini di persone, che vi si portarono ad ascoltarla, così per la Musica, essendo del rinomato Giovanni Porta Maestro di Cappella Veneziano, fatto qui venire a posta da questi Impresarj, e per le Scene ideate, e dipinte dal celebre Gio: Battista Olivieri Accademico di Milano, e parimente per li ricchi, e vaghi abiti.' *Avvisi di Napoli*. Num. 41. Naples, 2 October 1725.

<sup>71</sup> From 1<sup>st</sup> October, the Emperor's birthday onwards.

<sup>72</sup> Carnival of 1726.

<sup>73</sup> Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 124 and 128; Antonio Salvi, *Astianatte*. Printed libretto (Florence: Antonio Brigonci, 1701).

<sup>74</sup> Quantz gives a detailed description of Tesi's abilities apropos of Sarro's *Tito Sempronio Gracco* in January 1725: 'Tesi was gifted by nature with a strong and masculie contralto voice... (and) sang on several occasions the kind of arias which are usually composed for bassos. By now she had acquired, in addition to the magnificent serious tone in her dinging, a pleasant softness. The range of her voice was extremely wide... The display of virtuosity was not her strong point. She seemed to be born to impress the audience with her acting'. Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 124–125; see Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', in: Marpur, *Historisch-Kritische Beyträge*, vol. i.

<sup>75</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, *On playing the flute*, 327.

<sup>76</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Die klassizistische Vision der Antiche: Zur Münchner Hofoper unter den Kurfürsten Maximilian II. Emanuel und Karl Albrecht (Fortsetzung)', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 64/2 (2007): 77–104.

<sup>77</sup> Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci*, 125.

<sup>78</sup> *Rodelinda* (1725), *Scipione* (Paolo Rolli, after an original by Salvi, 1726), *Lotario* (1729), *Sosarme* (1732), *Ariodante* (1735), *Arminio* (1737) and *Berenice* (1737). All productions are directly connected to Strada as well; except *Scipione* and *Rodelinda*, which she sang in important revisions in 1730 and 1731, respectively (see ch. 4).

I believe one of his reasons was the strong dramatic power Salvi represented.<sup>79</sup> The conventional forced happy end, however, demolishes the tragic dénouement of the complex and outstanding conflicts between the characters which can be seen in Racine.<sup>80</sup>

The plot takes place in the aftermath of the Trojan War. Andromaque's and Hector's young son, Astyanax escaped death only because Ulysses unknowingly killed another child in his place. His life is henceforward in danger because he is a legitimate heir to the Trojan throne, who, growing up, could possibly try to avenge it one day. Orestes, the Greek Ambassador, arrives at the court of Pyrrhus to convince him either to put the child to death or let the Spartan Princess Hermione return home with him. Orestes hopes that Pyrrhus will refuse to hurt Astyanax because of Andromaque, whom he wants to marry, therefore he will give up on the Spartan Princess. The latter is Orestes's real goal, for he loves Hermione. As regards her, she only wishes to be married to the Epirian King. Pyrrhus, however, decides to let the son die if her mother does not want him to marry. Andromaque intends to secure grace for Astyanax, begging Hermione to plead her cause with Pyrrhus, but she meets pride and detachment. As there is no other solution left, she decides to marry the king and thus save her son, but to commit suicide right after the ceremony, remaining Hector's faithful spouse. In Racine, it turns out this way. Also, Hermione asks Orestes to avenge her scorn of Pyrrhus by killing him. Although she soon regrets her words, it is too late. Pyrrhus dies, though not at Orestes's hand, after he recognises Astyanax as King of Troy, fulfilling the greatest fear of the Greeks. Hermione follows him to death. Orestes loses his sanity and, in a vision, Furies come over him.

Salvi, naturally adjusting to the traditions of *opera seria*, changed the tragic end into happiness: at last, Ermione falls for Oreste (sung by Farinelli) and Andromaca for Pirro, who is wounded by Oreste but survives. Though both the ladies are initially set against each other, in the end when Ermione wants to save the imprisoned Oreste, Andromaca intervenes with Pirro to spare his life and the two couples are united. Despite Salvi's adjustments, the dramatic forces of the original idea are so powerful that they survive all the extenuation of the Italian version.

Extreme solutions characterise the compositional working-out of the music too. In the case of the revenge aria *Quel perfido* (II/12; B<sup>b</sup> major, 2/4, Presto; Ex. 2.16) the difficulty of execution is of the highest level. Hectically waving ascending *volatine* appear together

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<sup>79</sup> Racine's play is based on Euripides' drama and on the third book of Aeneid of Virgil. This was his third play, written at the age of twenty-seven in 1667, and served the establishment of his reputation as a playwright.

<sup>80</sup> On Salvi, see Francesco Giuntini, *I drammi per musica di Antonio Salvi: Aspetti della "riforma" del libretto nel primo Settecento* (Bologna: Mulino 1994; with a complete edition of *Astianatte*, 1701).

with various violin idioms in diverse directions, broken by sweeping syncopated sixth and seventh leaps, and applying a wide range up to B<sup>b</sup>.<sup>81</sup>

Example 2.16: Vocal part of *Quel perfido* from Vinci's *Astianatte*, bb. 41–56.

o mor-te o al - te - ra con - sor - te quel per -  
fi - do in pe - na si av - rà, in pe - na si av - rà.

Ermione is hysterically angry and momentarily vengeful, because Pirro has called off their marriage at the last moment, since Andromaca changed her mind about marrying him for her son's sake. In the meantime, Ermione has already promised herself to Oreste once he has assassinated Pirro, yet the very fact of the renunciation offends her pride as well as it humiliates her political and noble status. Hence, being a passionate Spartan Princess she behaves like a raving lunatic. Further musical symptoms of her mania are evident: the nature of the melody is unpredictable from time to time; rhythmically unaccented beats become accented, complicated by *salti di terza*, grace notes and appoggiaturas, all under *Presto* tempo indication, in the noble and magnificent B<sup>b</sup> major key.<sup>82</sup> Contrarily, the B section is a modulation-switchback: starting in G minor, crossing C minor – F major – C minor – F minor until the arrival in E<sup>b</sup> major. Vinci let Strada's vocal power show itself during the coloratura passages by joining the violins to the rest of the strings to give harmonic support.

*Tortorella se rimira* (III/5; F major, 3/8, Andante; Ex. 2.17), Ermione's last aria,<sup>83</sup> takes place when it has become already clear that Pirro has survived Oreste's attack and has only been wounded. Ermione asks for Pirro's mercy to spare the life of Oreste as a compensation for the insults to her honour, but Pirro seems to remain immovable.<sup>84</sup> Vinci uses a melody-centred, elementary accompaniment without any obbligato instrument or elements of counterpoint, in which the first violins support the voice – following a strong tendency by the 1720s to make full-bodied orchestral *ritornelli* an integral part of the

<sup>81</sup> 'Quel perfido o morte / O altera consorte / In pena si avrà.' (That traitor either death / Or a haughty bride / Will receive as his punishment.) Leonardo Vinci, *Astianatte*. Musical manuscript (Naples: 1725), ff. 128v–131v.

<sup>82</sup> Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music*, 34.

<sup>83</sup> 'Tortorella se rimira / Presa al laccio la compagna / Infelice allor si lagna / E riposo mai non ha. // A non sol mesta sospira / Ma d'intorno ognor s'aggira / Per riporla in libertà. // Tortorella se rimira...' (The dove when sees / Its mate in a snare, / Unhappily complains / And never rests. // Not only he is sighing sadly, / But also pivotes on her always / To set her free. // The dove...) Vinci, *Astianatte*, ff. 150r–154v.

<sup>84</sup> Salvi, *Astianatte*, 53–54.

aria.<sup>85</sup> The rate of harmonic change is slow, and therefore the bass moves in repeated quavers of drumming bass.

Example 2.17: *Tortorella se rimira* from Vinci's *Astianatte*, bb. 53–105.

Andante

Tor-to - rel - la se ri - mi - ra, pre - sa al lac - cio la com - pa - gna, in - fe - li - ce al - lor si  
 la - gna, e ri - po - so mai non ha, non ha,  
 e ri - po - so mai non ha, la com -  
 pa - gna, in - fe - li - ce al - lor si la - gna, e ri - po - so mai non ha, ri - po - so mai non ha.

The aria has a slow gigue character, Andante in F major. Its text is written in *ottonari* lines, with a predominantly trochaic accentuation, the latter of which the music goes against.<sup>86</sup> The voice part does not leave the c'' centreline until bar 60. Then, in section A2, the vocal line becomes thrown about both up- and downwards on the essential lines of the text 'Infelice allora si lagna / E riposo mai non ha.' (Thus, unhappily complains / And never has rest.; bb. 61–64, 83–86, 92–101), symbolizing the insanity of this hopeless situation and preparing the musical process for the upcoming determining element, i.e. repeated notes or hammering to express 'riposo mai non ha' (bb. 74–82). The B part is dominated by broken chords.

*Tortorella se rimira* in the meantime is an *aria di mezzo carattere* in which a playful major dance melody is mixed up with alien virtuosic patterns, and thus giving an unusual and multiple musical definition of craze or delirium, slightly similar to the *Larghetto* in Orlando's mad scene (*Vaghe pupille*) by Handel. The vocal challenge is to introduce the smooth *cantabile* and the diverse coloratura phrases with perfect execution and yet without breaking the timbre or losing the surrealism of the musical character.

Strada must have been in the right place at the right time in Naples during these important years of maturation. She had the unique opportunity to grow up as a singer, and to become a leading soprano by the side of Farinelli, and also to work with such great singer-actresses as Vittoria Tesi and Diana Vico. The productions in which she participated

<sup>85</sup> Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*, 98.

<sup>86</sup> Mario Fubini, *Metrica e poesia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1962), 29, 32, 66, and 121; Angelo Cardillo, *Nozioni di metrica italiana* (2002), 4. Accessed 11 March 2016. [http://www.istitutobellini.cl.it/file.php/1/nozioni\\_metrica\\_Cardillo\\_.pdf](http://www.istitutobellini.cl.it/file.php/1/nozioni_metrica_Cardillo_.pdf)



were all of the highest rank, including costumes and scenery as well as the clever activity of the *impresari*. One of the latter became her companion in life. A succession of operas – by Leo, Sarro, Vinci and Porpora – represented musical materials sensibly adjusted to her skills, yet new challenges were always offered to her: a variety of roles she could fit in as well as opportunities to develop her vocal and dramatic performance. Nevertheless, there was a third dimension Strada had not yet met, i.e. a different, more coherent musical way of thinking, a 360-degrees way of setting a drama, elevating the music to a masterpiece. By the end of this period, Strada stood on the verge of artistic consummation, was on her way to becoming a ‘Friend to the Pathetic and the Expressive’ but also of the divisions of taste; to accomplish ‘the Art of the highest degree of Perfection’,<sup>87</sup> she still needed to encounter Handel. And to have a mate to accompany him on this journey towards a deeper and yet unknown musicality, Handel perhaps needed to meet her.

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<sup>87</sup> Tosi, *Observations*, 110.



### Chapter Three: Successor to the ‘Rival Queens’

The collapse of the company of Handel’s Royal Academy of Music in 1728 had much to do with a lack of money,<sup>1</sup> though rivalry between the prima donnas Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni doubtless hastened its demise.<sup>2</sup> (Handel’s clash with the Academy’s aristocratic patrons over the castrato *primo uomo* Senesino, with whom the composer had a testy relationship, also played a part.) The singers having been dismissed, the Academy reorganized itself during the 1728/29 season; an alliance between Handel and the Swiss impresario John Jacob Heidegger, which would last five years, marked a fresh start. Though no documentary proof has been found, Burney’s description sheds light on different stages of the process: ‘For finding the theatre abandoned by the singers, and unsupported by its former patrons, he entered into an engagement with Heidegger, who was then in possession of the opera-house, to carry on the musical drama at their own risk’.<sup>3</sup>

For this reason, Heidegger set out Italy on 16<sup>th</sup> June, but could not hire any singers during the summer; therefore there was no Italian opera company in London the following season. He returned in early November, after hearing Farinelli sing in Domenico Lalli’s *Nicomede* in Munich.<sup>4</sup> Paolo Rolli, his former librettist, being a friend of Senesino was understandably very critical, and wrote detailed letters to him in Venice, unfolding the chain of events: in early November 1728 ‘The man [Heidegger] returned from his travels, very full of Farinello and extremely enthusiastic about him . The supporters of the two prima donnas here are still eyeing each other suspiciously and each party wishes to have its own way, so much so that to set up the opera again they have decided to have both of them. The man, my good friend, did not want this [...] They thought about [whom to have as] Impresario, but it seems that the man is refusing to do it, and it is my opinion that the Academy will survive, because that body is not yet dissolved’.<sup>5</sup> An agreement with the Royal Academy, leading to the establishment of the Second Academy, indeed followed on

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<sup>1</sup> Winton Dean, *Handel’s Operas 1726–1741* (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2006), 7; Donald Burrows, *Handel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 161.

<sup>2</sup> The scandal on the ninth performance of Bononcini’s *Astianatte* on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1728 and led to a snap end of the season as well as of the First Academy.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: Payne and Son, 1789), 339.

<sup>4</sup> Pietro Giuseppe Sandoni’s letter to Giuseppe Riva, 23 October / 3 November 1728. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2, 1725–1734*, ed. by Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe and Anthony Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 245–246.

<sup>5</sup> Paolo Rolli’s letter to Senesino in Venice, 21 December 1728. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 262.

18<sup>th</sup> January 1729:<sup>6</sup> the subscribers ‘permit Hydeger & Hendle to carry on Operas without disturbance for 5 years & to lend them for that time our Scenes machines clothes instruments furniture etc.’<sup>7</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> January 1729 Rolli informed Senesino again that Heidegger had returned from Italy and had not found any singers, mainly because he desired to get the two preceding leading ladies back, and that he also approached Farinelli without success.<sup>8</sup> Unlike Heidegger, Handel needed new voices to inspire him to compose from a fresh angle, and was loath to carry on the painful collaboration with the two leading ladies, especially with Faustina:

He said that there was a need for variety, and returned to the old system of changing the singers, so as to be able to compose new works for new performers. He easily found support for his new project in the Court and had it accepted – they do not want Faustina – you were quite well considered – they want Farinello, and Cuzzona, if she does not stay in Vienna, and they want whoever can come. [...] So tell Faustina that her darling Handel is coming to Italy, but not for her. [...] Poor dear! I am sorry for her. Those who sacrifice their friends to cosy up in cowardly fashion to their enemies deserve to be so treated (and I mean everybody).<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, Handel went back to Italy, and this return after almost two decades made him entirely discover the new style in singing – which he had already experienced through Faustina’s art – and a different manner of composing at the same time.<sup>10</sup> His encounter with the Neapolitan galant style prompted him to collect scores of Porpora, Vinci, Pergolesi and Hasse – the main provider of inserted numbers to his *pasticci* during the early 1730s – as well as Metastasio’s *drammi per musica*, and to bring them with him to England.<sup>11</sup> He left London for Venice on 26<sup>th</sup> January / 4<sup>th</sup> February 1729 first to engage

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<sup>6</sup> Reinhard Strohm, ‘Handel’s Pasticci’, in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 170; Dean, *Handel’s Operas 1726–1741*, 125.

<sup>7</sup> From the Diary of Viscount Percival, 18 January 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 265. Shaftesbury confirms the five-year-period, Hawkins, in reference to Mainwaring speaks of three years, though. Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., London, 1853 (repr. New York, 1963), ii. 876; Robert D. Hume, ‘Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s’, *Music & Letters*, 67 (1986), 347–362: 349.

<sup>8</sup> Rolli’s letter to Senesino in Venice, 25 January 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 268–269.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Disse esservi bisogno di varietà, rinnovò l’antico sistema di cangiare cantanti per avere occasione di compor cose nuove per nuovi esecutori. Trova facilità nella Corte al suo Progetto, e Lo persuade – Faustina non si vuole – Voi siete stato abbastanza inteso – si vuol Farinello a La Cuzzona s’ella non resta a Vienna, e si vuol da chi può. [...] Dite dunque alla Faustina che il suo caro Handelino verrà in Italia ma non per Lei. [...] Poverina! Me ne dispiace. Così merita (e ciò dico per tutti) d’esser trattato chi per fare vigliacchissima corte a i nemici; sacrifica gli amici.’ Rolli’s letter to Senesino, 25 January 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 268–269.

<sup>10</sup> *The London Evening Post*, 18 June 1728. Ibid., 229.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Chrysander, *G. F. Händel*, vol. ii (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1860), 224.

Farinelli, who refused even to see him, in spite of his calling on him three times.<sup>12</sup> According to a letter of Lady Sarah Cowper to Earl Cowper (early January 1730), he tried to hire Cuzzoni again, which she refused.<sup>13</sup> Handel then went on a longer trip, travelling at least through Bologna (end of March) and Rome (April).<sup>14</sup> He presumably met Antonio Bernacchi and Antonia Merighi – who were connected to the Teatro San Bartolomeo in Naples – in Parma while staying in Bologna, as Owen Swiney, the Academy's agent in Venice and Bologna, a former theatre and opera manager in London, reported:

Handel set out yesterday for Rome. Though His journey was something late for forming a company, fit for London next year, yet by Bernachi's, Carestini's & the Merighi's discharge from their engagements at Naples, he will have a good chance of making a very good one. He tells me that He has engaged one Madame Somis, of Turin: I have heard a very good Character, of her Voice & manner of Singing. [...] if he gets either Carestini or Bernachi, who (by the by) is the very best Singer in the world, with the Merighi or some other good Woman, he will make a formidable company<sup>15</sup>

The afore-named singers left Naples in the midst of the 1728/29 season because of a scandal that had exploded between Bernacchi and Giovanni Carestini. The viceroy of Naples, Cardinal d'Althann, engaged Bernacchi out of his enthusiasm over the castrato's way of singing. Nevertheless, Bernacchi made two conditions: on the one hand he wanted Merighi to stay but on the other hand Carestini, his own former pupil, to leave the company. While the viceroy was making an attempt to fulfil the requirement of his favourite singer and remove Carestini, all three singers appeared in Hasse's *L'Udlerica* at the Teatro San Bartolomeo during the carnival season of 1729. In the meantime, the admirers of Carestini drove d'Althann into a corner and forced him to keep the castrato in Naples. Bernacchi became so angry that he abruptly left for Parma, taking Merighi with

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<sup>12</sup> 'Si spacciò la volontà Regale, e disse che L'Handel partirebbe in breve per Italia in cerca di Cantanti. Per consenso un anime fu concesso l'uso degli abiti e scene dell'Accad[emi]a per cinque anni a i due Progettisti. Oggi appunto L'Handel parte e dieci giorni fa L'Haym mandò Lettere circolari in Italia per annunciare a' virtuosi e virtuose q[u]e[st]o nuovo Progetto, e La venuta dell'Handel. Il Farinello è di primo Predicamento'; 'The Royal wishes were made known, and it was said that Handel would leave for Italy very soon to look for singers. It was unanimously agreed to allow the two organisers the use of the Academy's costumes and scenery for five years. In fact Handel is leaving today, and ten days ago Haym sent circular letters to Italy to announce the new plans to the male and female singers, and that Handel was coming. Farinello is the primary consideration ...' Rolli's letter to Senesino in Venice, 4 February 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 271–272.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>14</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 166.

<sup>15</sup> Owen Swiney's letter from Bologna, to Charles Lennox, 2nd Duke of Richmond, 30 March 1729. See Elizabeth Gibson, *The Royal Academy of Music 1719–1728: The Institution and Its Directors* (New York and London: Garland, 1989), 380–381.

him, and in doing so, caused the Neapolitan season to be aborted.<sup>16</sup> Supposedly, Handel wanted to hear Carestini, and, if possible, to engage him, rather than Bernacchi. He travelled to Naples in April, which is mentioned by Rolli together with Handel's plan to visit Siena on his return. Rolli also gave an interim report on the nascent cast in mid-May:

Handel's new company is this: the women Stradina and Somis, Carestini, Balino, Fabbri, with his wife (if they need a third woman), and an Italian/German bass. Handel has written that Carestini emulated Bernacchi.<sup>17</sup>

This makes clear that Handel engaged the 26-year-old Strada as first woman, putting another soprano, Cristina Antonia Somis (b. 1704) back to the second place, and that he was torn between Carestini and Bernacchi. Interestingly enough, Merighi is not mentioned here. How Handel met Strada is, after all, a mystery. We only know that the Academy's secretary and librettist Nicola Haym sent announcement letters to opera houses and to professional singers in Italy,<sup>18</sup> but as Strada was not a member of the San Bartolomeo company since 1726, the best possible way to become aware of such a call could perhaps have been through her husband Aurelio del Pò's connections. The question arises, if she sang at that time at all, where then if not at the vice-royal opera? If the last two years were missed on the grounds of pregnancy, as I suspect, Strada may at the end of 1728 have been on her way back to the stage, preparing herself for the next season.<sup>19</sup> If so, she presumably had some short but regular appearances at the vice-royal court, at private concerts or in short *serenatas*. These cases, however, are seldom documented and there is no such description about her available from that period. I suggest therefore that Merighi, who collaborated with Strada in Venice in 1720 and who might have met her and heard her singing in Naples at the Palazzo Reale in the second half of the decade, might have mentioned her name and availability to Handel.<sup>20</sup> Even Bernacchi himself could have recommended Strada. In any case, she must have made such a deep impression on the composer that in the end he withdrew the contract already fixed with Somis<sup>21</sup> and rather

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<sup>16</sup> Strohm, 'Handel's Pasticci', 171.

<sup>17</sup> 'La Compagnia nuova Endeliana è questa – La Stradina, La Somis, Carestini, Balino, Fabbri, con sua moglie in occasione di terza donna, e un Basso italoalemanno. L'Handel à scritto che il Carestini era l'emulato di Bernacchi.' Rolli's letter to Senesino in Venice, 16 May 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 294–295.

<sup>18</sup> See note 13.

<sup>19</sup> Between 1726 and 1729 nothing is known about Strada. Probably she became pregnant since her name is missing from any libretto of that period.

<sup>20</sup> They appeared together in Vivaldi's *La verità in cimento* as well as in *Filippo rè di Macedonia*, his collaboration with Giuseppe Boniventi.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Cristina Antonia Somis, from Turin, was an excellent singer and the daughter of the violinist Francesco Lorenzo Somis. Later she made a great career as a concert singer and teacher in Paris, after marrying the French painter Charles Vanloo in 1733. That Handel could not hire her in 1739 might have

engaged two contraltos beside Strada: Merighi and Francesca Bertolli, who was singing in Bologna at that time.<sup>22</sup>

An additional fact has to be taken into account: the *intermezzo* specialist Celeste Resse, a mezzo-soprano who sang at San Bartolomeo, mostly in Hasse's operatic interludes, joined the Royal Academy in London later in 1732 as Celeste Gismondi or La Celestina, after she married a certain Mr. Hempson, friend of the British consul in Naples.<sup>23</sup> Handel might have known or got in touch with the consul, Mr. Hempson or another Englishman in Naples who could possibly inform him about the singers there; otherwise Gismondi might have applied directly to Handel's company in 1729.

As for a *prima donna*, Handel was looking for someone to fill the vacuum left by the two 'rival queens'. The lyric soprano Cuzzoni, as an exemplar of the pathetic *cantabile* style (*stile antico*) contrasted with the dramatic virtuoso mezzo-soprano Faustina, who specialised in the modern, *bravura* singing. Both got star billing together in London between 1726 and 1728 (and beforehand in Italy), complementing one another and demonstrating the fullness of the female voice as two sides of the same coin. Pier Francesco Tosi pondered in his famous treatise: 'What a beautiful Mixture would it be, if the Excellence of these two angelick Creatures could be united in one single Person!'<sup>24</sup> Strada fulfilled Handel's wishes: she was perfect raw material; her supreme versatility was a tabula rasa on which Handel could project his musical, vocal, dramatic and artistic priorities.<sup>25</sup> Thankfully, she lacked the overbearing egotism of her predecessors. What is more, she was much less expensive.<sup>26</sup>

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been due to that. In 1729, however, that she was not a high soprano and had no reputation yet. Besides, she excelled in the pathetic style, which may suggest that coloratura ability was not her strength. K. J. Kutsch, Leo Riemens and Hansjörg Rost, *Grosses Sängerlexikon*; vol. vi (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2003), 4843; see also *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 281.

<sup>22</sup> Dean, *Handel's Operas 1726–1741*, 126.

<sup>23</sup> Reinhard Strohm, who identified Celeste Gismondi as Celeste Resse, suggests that her story of marriage is reminiscent of the plot of *La serva padrona* published coincidentally (J. A. Nelli 1731, Giambattista Pergolesi 1733). Celeste's vocal skills went beyond *intermezzi*: in London she sang Faustina's former roles from the rivalry period with Cuzzoni, Caffarelli's virtuoso arias with difficult divisions and the role of Dorinda in *Orlando* show her wide range as well. Strohm supposes 'an analogous competition of personalities as well as singing and acting styles' between La Strada and La Celestina, regarding their vocal powers. Reinhard Strohm, 'Comic traditions in Handel's Orlando', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 249–270: 250–252.

<sup>24</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna: Volpe, 1723; Eng. trans. by John Ernest Galliard as *Observations on the Florid Song or, Sentiments on the ancient and modern Singers* (London: Wilcox, 1743), IX. §73; see Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4; Isabelle Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers* (Westport Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 71.

<sup>25</sup> Reinhard Strohm attributes to Strada a higher range than Cuzzoni and Bordoni. Reinhard Strohm, 'Vivaldi's career as an opera producer', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 122–163: 138.

<sup>26</sup> Strada, as a *prima donna*, earned £600 with a benefit performance, around a third or fourth of Faustina and Cuzzoni's annual income. See Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Opera Salaries in Eighteenth-Century London', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 46/1 (Spring 1993), 26–83: 35–36; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Handel's Opera Finances in 1732–33', *The Musical Times*, 125/1692 (Feb.,

## First impressions in London

By the end of May 1729 Handel engaged a troupe of seven new singers, a company according to Swiney far exceeding the previous one as well as any other.<sup>27</sup> Burney confirmed that Handel had fulfilled his mission: ‘These new performers gave birth to new ideas and a new style, particularly in divisions, which by writing for nearly the same singers during six or eight years, Handel often repeated’.<sup>28</sup> On 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1729 the *Daily Journal* heralded the final results, listing the singers as follows: the castrato Antonio Bernacchi, Antonia Merighi contralto, Strada herself, the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri with his wife Francesca Bertolli, another contralto and Johann Gottfried Riemschneider, a bass from Hamburg.<sup>29</sup> The announcement highlighted not only Strada’s excellent vocal quality but also her high personal standing (as opposed to the ‘rival sirens’): ‘Signora Strada, who hath a very fine Treble Voice, a Person of singular Merit’.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Mrs Pendarves (née Mary Delany), a loyal supporter and a long-lasting friend of Handel, gave a more detailed summary:

[...] Bernachi. he has a vast compass[,] his voice mellow and clear but not quite so sweet as Senesino, his manner better; his Person not so good for he has a Belly as big as the spanish fryers. Fabri has a Tenor voice, sweet, clear and firm but not strong enough I doubt for the Stage, he sings like a Gentleman, without making faces, and his manner is particularly agreable; he is the greatest master of Musick that ever Sung upon the Stage. [...] La Strada is the first woman, her voice is without exception fine, her Manner to perfection, but her Person very bad and she makes frightfull mouths. La Merighi is the next to her, her voice is not extraordinarily good or Bad, she is tall and has a very graceful Person, with a tolerable Face[;] she seems to be a woman about forty, she sings easily and agreably. the last is Bertoldi, she has neither voice, Ear nor Manner to recommend her. but she is a Perfect Beauty. quite a Cleopatra. that sort of Complexion with regular showish features, fine teeth, and when she sings has a smile

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1984), 86–89: 87 and 89; Rolli’s letter to Riva, 6 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 316–317.

<sup>27</sup> Owen Swiney’s letter from Venice, to Charles Lennox, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Richmond, 27 May 1729. Elizabeth Gibson, *The Royal Academy of Music 1719-1728: The Institution and Its Directors* (New York and London: Garland, 1989), 381–382; ‘Mr Handel, who has lately arrived from Italy, has made contracts with the best artists to put on good Italian opera,’ Gio. Giacomo Zamboni to Count Ernst Christoph Manteuffel in Dresden, 8/19 July 1729. Cited in Lowell Lindgren, ‘Musicians and Librettists in the Correspondence of Gio. Giacomo Zamboni’, (*Royal Musical Association*) *Research Chronicle* 24 (1991), 112.

<sup>28</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 340.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Journal* and *Daily Courant*, 2 July 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 299.

<sup>30</sup> See also Jean Jaques Zamboni’s letter to Count Manteuffel, 8/19 July 1729. ‘Signora Trada qui a une excellente et triple voix at personne d’un merite Singulier’; ‘Signora Trada who has an excellent voice with a wide compass, and is a woman of unusual merit’. *Ibid.*, 300.



about her mouth which is extream pretty, and I believe has Practis'd to sing before a glass for she has nevern any distortion in her Face.<sup>31</sup>

It is notable that criticism of Strada's voice is absent here or anywhere else. On the contrary, its tone, richness, colour, intonation and agility are praised more highly than Faustina's or Cuzzoni's. Her acting skills ('manner') were considered accomplished, but clearly her grimaces left much to be desired.

From Mrs Pendarves's descriptions of Merighi and Bernacchi, 'person' in this context may be interpreted as physical beauty and stage decorum according to English taste. Charles Burney on Carestini confirms this assumption: 'Carestini's person was tall, beautiful, and majestic. He was a very animated and intelligent actor'.<sup>32</sup> He affirms too that 'Strada's personal charms did not assist her much in conciliating parties, or disposing the eye to augment the pleasures of the ear; for she had so little in a Venus in her appearance, that she was usually called the "Pig"'.<sup>33</sup> Bernacchi's appearance was likened to the Spanish Friar, the role of Friar Dominic in John Dryden's play of 1681: tall, large and ungainly – hardly the figure of a *primo uomo* lover. Though 'esteem'd the best Singer in Italy',<sup>34</sup> the lumbering 44-year-old castrato found less favour with English audiences than in 1716–17, when he first appeared on the London stage.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, Strada was very well received: 'Bernachi the most famous of the Men is not approv'd of[;] he is certainly a good singer but does not suit the English ears. La Strada and the rest are very well lik'd'.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Paolo Rolli, Handel's former librettist, stated that 'Strada pleases a good deal'.<sup>37</sup> According to Edward J. Dent, the London audience visited the theatre not for the works but for the singers, or more precisely for Strada (Bernacchi was a poor substitute for Senesino, whom Handel was forced to re-engage for this reason in 1730).<sup>38</sup>

Presumably, Strada failed to conform to the English standard of beauty. Although she possessed a resplendent voice and acted exquisitely, her face looked unattractive while she sang. Furthermore, it seems that she was short – not an advantage among Europe's tallest people at the time<sup>39</sup> – and must have looked even smaller and ludicrous when amorously

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<sup>31</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her sister, Anne Granville, 29 or 30 November 1729. *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>32</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 370.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

<sup>34</sup> *Daily Journal and Daily Courant*, 2 July 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 299.

<sup>35</sup> Among others as Goffredo in the revival of Handel's *Rinaldo* in 1717.

<sup>36</sup> Mrs Pendarves's letter to her sister, Anne Granville, 6 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 324–325.

<sup>37</sup> Rolli to Riva, 11 December 1729. *Ibid.*, 331–332.

<sup>38</sup> Edward J. Dent, *Handel* (New York: A. A. Wyn, 1948), PDF format produced by Stan Goodman, ch. 5, 62.

<sup>39</sup> Franco Sassi, *Obesity and the Economics of Prevention. Fit Not Fat* (OECD: 2010), 61.

coupled with a c. six-foot-tall (183 cm) castrato (but so did other ladies of average height of 4 feet 9–11 inches – ca 145–150 cm – as caricatures by John Vanderbank, Anton Maria Zanetti, Marco Ricci and other artists amply demonstrate).<sup>40</sup> Faustina was of similarly small stature, but her face was considered beautiful and her figure symmetrical (although a French traveller found that ‘her face and looks are very ordinary’).<sup>41</sup> Cuzzoni, by contrast, was plainly ‘ugly and ill-made’.<sup>42</sup> Strada’s appearance is preserved in two images: one, a caricature, is attributed either to the Venetian count Zanetti, who dedicated the bulk of his works (mostly drawings) to singers and the opera world, or more probably to the Italian painter and set designer Marco Ricci, who in the 1720s likewise caricatured cast members of Venetian opera houses.<sup>43</sup> The other is a painting by Johannes Verelst made in 1732.

The caricature (Fig. 1) shows Strada as she appeared on stage, and emphasises her small size: her face and nose turn skywards. Presumably she is looking at her castrato partner. Such a countenance allows her little dignity but probably underscores the situation’s absurdity. Although the date of the drawing is unknown, my theory is that it may have been made in Venice in 1720–21, in connection with one of the productions of *La verità in cimento* or *Filippo rè di Macedonia*, a co-production by Vivaldi and Giuseppe Boniventi, performed at the Teatro Sant’Angelo, where Ricci worked as a set designer in those years. (Ricci died in 1730, excluding Strada’s London period; Zanetti, on the other hand, was out of Venice even in 1720/21 and did not visit England during Strada’s engagement there.)<sup>44</sup> Of the two aforementioned operas, *La verità in cimento* was the one in which Strada and the castrato Girolamo Albertini had several scenes together. The caricature hints at what may have been behind Strada’s nickname, the ‘Pig’, later on, given the upward turn of her nostrils.

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<sup>40</sup> Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon* (London: Souvenir Press, 1996), 14; Carolyn Freeman Travers, ‘Were They All Shorter Back Then?’, *Plimoth Plantation*. Accessed 7 December 2014; Roger Freitas, ‘The Eroticism of Emasculation: Confronting the Baroque Body of the Castrato’, *The Journal of Musicology* 20/2 (Spring 2003), 196–249: 215, 220; Martin Hatzinger, Dominick Vöge, Matthias Stastny, Friedrich Moll and Michael Sohn, ‘Castrati Singers—All for Fame’, *Journal of Sexual Medicine* 9/9 (2012), 2234.

<sup>41</sup> ‘... her professional perfections were enhanced by a beautiful face, a symmetric figure, though of small stature.’ Burney on Faustina. Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 308; ‘sa figure et Sa beauté son des plus mediocres.’ *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 230 and 233.

<sup>42</sup> Victor Schœlcher, *The Life of Handel* (London: Trübner and Co., 1857), 77.

<sup>43</sup> Jacob Simon, *Handel, A Celebration of his Life and Times, 1685–1759* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1985), 146; Kurt Sven Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoletano* (Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2007), 157.

<sup>44</sup> Valentina Bortoluzzi, *Anton Maria Zanetti e il ruolo di promotore della cultura artistica del suo tempo*. Graduation thesis (Venice: Università Ca’ Foscari, 2014), 14–23.



Figure 1: Marco Ricci (attributed to) or Anton Maria Zanetti: *Caricature of Anna Maria Strada, La Stradina*.

Pigs were synonymous with female ugliness going back to the middle ages. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the porcine-faced woman became widespread in British popular culture, thanks to a ballad from 1639, the fable of the Dutch lady Tannakin Skinker.<sup>45</sup> By the eighteenth century, similar stories emerged and were taken as fact in England. A lady of great fortune who sneered at the lower social classes was cursed by bearing a child with the head of a sow.<sup>46</sup> Hence ‘pig’ became a synonym for ugliness in high-ranking or famous people. Handel himself was also illustrated hog-headed: his friend, the painter and set designer Joseph Goupy, depicted him engaged in gluttony.<sup>47</sup>

It is possible that Verelst’s oil painting on canvas (1732; Fig. 2) greatly idealises Strada: she is portrayed (at the age of twenty-nine) as suspiciously young and compares favourably with her predecessor, Faustina.<sup>48</sup> Still, nothing indicates ugliness. Her body corresponds to contemporary as well as timeless notions of beauty and health: round breasts bestride an implausibly slim waist.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Laurence Price, *A Monstrous Shape: or, A Shapelesse Monster* (1639). Preserved in Samuel Pepys’s collection. Hyder E. Rollins ed., *A Pepysian Garland; Black-Letter Broadside Ballads of the Years 1595–1639* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 449–454.

<sup>46</sup> Jan Bondeson, *The Pig-Faced Lady of Manchester Square & Other Medical Marvels* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2006), 69–74.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Goupy: *The Harmonious Boar*. Painting, after 1743; *The Charming Brute*. Engraved version of the former, 1754.

<sup>48</sup> Berta Joncus, ‘Editorial’, *Eighteenth Century Music* 9/1 (March, 2012), 5–8: 6.

<sup>49</sup> Devendra Singh, Peter Renn and Adrian Singh, ‘Did the perils of abdominal obesity affect depiction of feminine beauty in the sixteenth to eighteenth century British literature? Exploring the health and beauty

Verelst represents Strada plainly clothed, off stage as a professional musician, sitting at the harpsichord, holding a page of music. Interestingly, the aria is *Sì, caro, sì*, an additional song sung by Strada in the revival of *Rinaldo* in 1731. The usual practice of using a musical piece to identify a person on a painting here becomes extraordinary, for Faustina was the original performer of *Sì, caro, sì*, which was very well known from the performance series of *Admeto* (1727), as Henry Carey mocked in his satirical poem *Blundrella: or, the Impertinent*: ‘That Song [...] which the Faustina / Sings when she hangs on Senesino [...] ’Tis that which makes the Boxes clatter’.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, this piece might have been Strada’s first real popular success in London. Headed by ‘Sung by Sig.<sup>ra</sup> Strada’, the sheet is an exact copy of the aria’s printed version, published by John Walsh in *The additional favourite songs in the opera of Rinaldo* (1731), and more importantly, in the reprint edition (1731) of the third book of *Apollo’s Feast* (p. 94), where Faustina’s name (printed in the first edition, 1729) was replaced by Strada’s. That this song was linked with Strada, can be demonstrated by an epigram, *A Dialogue between two Projectors*, published in the *Bee* on 24<sup>th</sup> March and in the *Craftsman* on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1733, soon after the première of the oratorio *Deborah* with Strada in the title role. In this satirical discourse, Handel’s policy in respect to the ticket prices is used as a political simile for the prime minister Robert Walpole’s new Excise Bill, and his first answer is ‘– sì, caro, sì’.<sup>51</sup>

Returning to the painting, the background’s simplicity in colours contrasts with the fireworks-like play of light and shadow, the *chiaroscuro* expression of the white, silvery shining clear-cut dress, annexed with fine lace as ornamentation. Strada’s large eyes rule the whole picture with an effervescent countenance. Her dynamic posture expresses activity; she communicates natural genuineness with all the movements of her body. The keyword may be self-consciousness, the intensity of which is almost tangible in both works of art.

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link’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London. Series B: Biological Sciences* 274 (2007), 891–894.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Carey, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London: E. Say, 1729), 15; see Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens*, 220.

<sup>51</sup> Handel denied admission to subscribers and raised ticket prices from half a guinea to a whole one, because he had to light the house and pay a large number of performers he never needed for an opera performance. At the same time, Walpole introduced his idea of a Tobacco Excise Bill in Parliament. See Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel’s Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 137–139; *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 606 and 611.



Figure 2: Johannes Verelst: *Anna Maria Strada* (1732).  
The Foundling Museum London © Reproduced with permission of the Gerald Coke Handel Foundation

The appearance of the harpsichord with black natural keys is also meaningful. It might possibly refer to the instrument which was built in 1729 by the Swiss harpsichord maker Burckhard Tschudi, a good friend of Handel, although that is a double harpsichord and a replica of the only one made by Hermann Tabel. On the back of the name board there is an inscription with the following words: ‘Questo cimbalò è del<sup>a</sup> Sig<sup>a</sup> Anna Strada 1731,

London'.<sup>52</sup> According to William Dale, it belonged to Handel, on which he must have accompanied Strada in rehearsals and at her benefit performance(s) of the revival of *Giulio Cesare* on 21<sup>st</sup> (and 31<sup>st</sup>) March 1730. Furthermore, 1731 was the year she gained popularity in London; the harpsichord might have been Handel's personal gift to his protégée on that occasion.<sup>53</sup> Strada even took it with her to Italy in 1738 when she left the British Isles. The harpsichord in Verelst's picture is therefore emblematic – even if Tschudi's instrument would not have fitted because of limits on space, since the focus had to remain on the singer – and functions undoubtedly as a status symbol of Strada's established success, supported by the position of the sheet music of *Sì, caro, sì*, with which she is pointing towards and is touching the keyboard. Apart from that, it can also imply the singer's possible training in harpsichord playing, which would make it understandable why Handel gave her a keyboard and not something else.

Concerning Strada's 'frightful mouths', it is not clear whether these were technical in nature and caused by the generation of coloraturas – a laziness of certain muscles or even of the larynx, the action of which might have been substituted by the easier movements of the lips – or were due to physical incapacities becoming ingrained after a certain point. Similar criticisms do not occur except once, in a letter of Thomas Gray of 11<sup>th</sup> June 1736, mentioning Gioacchino Conti's square-shaped mouth and that 'this is hardly minded when Strada stands by him'.<sup>54</sup> This comparison with the young yet already popular castrato refers to a general and ungainly grimace during singing, rather than to one caused by maladroit technique. Most probably they both lacked what Faustina possessed, a perfect 'flexibility of muscles and features'.<sup>55</sup>

Mrs Pendarves, at the same time, describes the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri as singing completely without faces, but with a voice too weak for the theatre. Despite the agility and wide range Handelian roles demanded, his easier voice production enabled him to keep his facial muscles calm.<sup>56</sup> Mrs Pendarves seems to have been charmed by the face of Francesca Bertolli, who was apparently accepted because she was easy on the eye. Although considered as a mediocre singer with an 'unmeaning voice', and later by Burney, as a 'singer of limited abilities and of small importance in a drama', Handel gave her the most roles besides Senesino and Strada.<sup>57</sup> Could it be then, that those who were able to

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<sup>52</sup> William Dale, *Tschudi the Harpsichord Maker* (London: Constable and Company, 1913), 32–34.

<sup>53</sup> Edward L. Kottlick, *A History of the Harpsichord* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), 360.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Gray's letter to Horace Walpole, to Cambridge, 11 June 1736. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: 1955; reprinted New York: 1974), 410.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 319.

<sup>56</sup> Winton Dean, 'Fabri, Annibale Pio', *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 September 2014.

<sup>57</sup> *Harmony in an Uproar: A Letter to F-d-k H-d-l Esq.*; [12 February] 1734. *George Frideric Handel*:

maintain an agreeable mien could do so because their role required no difficult technical-musical tasks? In other words, has anyone ever seen a highly dramatic coloratura aria being sung with a totally relaxed face? In the case of such long and complex passages written for leading singers, the mouth must certainly have opened at some point, and its width and length changed depending on the register. To draw a parallel with modern singers, Cecilia Bartoli or Vivica Genaux would be good examples of making needless grimaces in contrast with the necessary and minimal changes of Sandrine Piau, and more especially Joyce DiDonato, who sings with an outstandingly controlled face. However, a varying and to some extent distorted face often was and is part of technically demanding vocal performances.

According to Richard Wistreich, until the early eighteenth century the audience tolerated to some degree singers' distorted facial expressions in exchange for the pleasure given by the ravishing sound of the human voice and for the execution of neck-breaking coloraturas. In the case of women, however, the frame of toleration was narrow. It was not acceptable for a woman, for example, to play brass instruments because of the unbecoming change of the face while playing. Although there were some ladies who played these instruments masterfully, unfortunately they were hardly accepted by society.<sup>58</sup> In London, by the time of the English translated edition of Pier Francesco Tosi's treatise, entitled as *Observations on the Florid Song* (1743), the issue of the audience's expectation of singing with the most natural face possible, came into prominence.<sup>59</sup>

### **Surpassing the predecessors**

From the very beginning, Strada was compared with the two former divas in London. After Handel introduced the new troupe to the Royal Family within the confines of a private concert in October 1729, accompanying them on the harpsichord, Princess Amelia recorded the audience as 'mightily satisfied', and found Strada a 'charming voice, [we] think her beyond all her predecessors. She is mighty good and easie and hath exactly the way of talking of Cozzony'.<sup>60</sup> Further opinions were also given regarding Strada as a *prima donna* who embodies all the excellences of Cuzzoni and Faustina in one person –

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*Collected Documents Volume 2*, 737–749: 739; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 350; Winton Dean, 'Bertolli, Francesca', *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 2 March 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Will Kimball, *Women in Trombone History, 1500–1900*. <http://kimballtrombone.hubpages.com/hub/Females-in-Trombone-History-1500-1900>; Accessed 8 March 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Wistreich, *Geographical and social migrations on Italian noble singing technique: fragments of a social history*, Lecture given in Lugano, 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014 at the Conservatorio della Svizzera italiana, Divisione Ricerca e Sviluppo; an answer to my question during the discussion following the lecture.

<sup>60</sup> Princess Amelia to her governess, Lady Portland, 11 October 1729. See Richard G. King 'Two New Letters from Princess Amelia', *Händel-Jahrbuch* 40–41 (1994–95), 169–171: 169.

reflecting the same high expectation of the English society. Especially well-rounded reports came from Rolli who –being understandably hostile, having been left out by Handel of the Second Academy’s run – made as censorious and sarcastic notes as he could.<sup>61</sup>

Strada pleases mightily, and Alto [the Great Man, Handel] says that she sings better than the two who have left us, because one of them never pleased him at all and he would like to forget the other. The truth is that she has a penetrating thread of a soprano voice which delights the ear [a very loud soprano ‘voicet’ which stimulates / thrills the ear], but oh how far removed from Cuzzona! Bononcini, who was with me at the opera, agrees with me as to this.<sup>62</sup>

Signora Strada has all the rapid execution of Faustina, and all the sweetness of Cuzzona, and it is so with each of the others. We shall see the results: the proof of the pudding is in the eating, says the English proverb. The truth is that this singer is simply a copy of Faustina with a better voice and better intonation, but without her brio and charm.<sup>63</sup>

Strada pleases the very few who would like to forget Cuzzona: as the rest of the rhyme goes they are after all very similar: ‘I ask your pardon, Sir’. Concerning my ears, you were a thousand times right, but concerning my spectacles, my dear Signor Giuseppe, you were a thousand times wrong. ...<sup>64</sup>

Rolli’s partiality contradicts the opinion of Johann Joachim Quantz, who defined Strada back in Naples as ‘brilliant’ and remarked on Cuzzoni that ‘her acting was somewhat cold,

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<sup>61</sup> Rolli as librettist of the Royal Academy was once already dismissed between 1723 and 1726, but he was called back in 1726. After the Academy’s rearrangement in 1729 Handel did not hire him, most probably because of Rolli’s close friendship with Senesino. R. A. Streatfeild, ‘Handel, Rolli, and Italian Opera in London in the Eighteenth Century’, *The Musical Quarterly* 3/3 (July, 1917): 428–445: 437–438.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Strada pleases a good deal, and from on High it is said that she sings better than the two previous ones, because he never liked the one and wants the other to be forgotten. The truth is that this one has a thin and penetrating soprano voice which charms the ear, but oh how far we are from Cuzzona! This is also the opinion of Bononcini, in whose company I heard the opera’; ‘La Strada incontra molto ed ab Alto si dice che canta meglio delle due passate, perchè l’una non piacque mai, e l’altra si vuole che si scordi. il vero è che questa à un penetrante filetto di voce soprana che titilla le orecchie: ma oh quanto siamo lunge dalla Cuzzona! Q[ues]to è il parere ancora di Bon[oncin]o col quale sentij L’op[er]a.’ Rolli to Riva, 11 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 331. The translation in the main text is amplified by myself, and taken from: Deutsch, *Handel*, 249.

<sup>63</sup> ‘La Sig[nor]ja Stradina à tutta La rapidità della Faustina, e tutta La Dolcezza della Cuzzona, et sic de singulis. Ne vedremo gli effetti. La Prova del Podino consiste nel mangiarlo, dice il Proverbio Inglese, la Verità e che la d[ett]ja Virtuosa è una Copia semplice della Faust[in]ja con miglior voce e migliore intonazione, ma senza il brio e il Garbo di quella’. Rolli’s letter to Riva, 6 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 316–317.

<sup>64</sup> ‘La Strada piace a pochissimi che vorebbono scondarsi della Cuzzona: nel resto della Rima sono poi amendue somigliantissime: I ask your pardon Sir. In quanto agli orecchj, ave[v]ate mille ragioni, ma in quanto a gli occhiali, mio Caro Sig[no]r Giuseppe, avevate mille Torti.’ Rolli’s letter to Riva, 12 June 1730. *Ibid.*, 365.



and her figure was not too favourable for the theatre'.<sup>65</sup>

The most authentic portrait of Strada's voice was reported by *The Weekly Medley, and Literary Journal* on 6<sup>th</sup> December 1729, concerning the public rehearsals (of 24<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November) of *Lotario*, the Second Academy's first opera, in the form of a letter (written on 29<sup>th</sup> November). It proclaimed Strada as superior to Cuzzoni and Faustina, and matchless in having a ravishing voice, proficiency in music theory, and a great talent for acting at the same time:

Cuzzoni has certainly an enchanting Voice, and Faustina an admirable Manner; but I dare to affirm, Strada excels them both. However as the Town had form'd so advantageous an Idea of the Merits of the two Singers abovemention'd, and seem persuaded they had not their Equals in *Europe*; I suppose I shall be thought either very much prejudiced, or crazy, in being thus confident in my Assertion; yet have this to plead in favour of my Opinion, that 'twas not barely my own, but that of most of the Judges there present.

We certainly have before had very excellent Performers from *Italy*, but then most of them were deficient in some Point or other. If their Voices were fine, their Actions [sic] was insipid, or they had very little Skill in the Theory of Music. On the other Side, if they were distinguish'd for the beauty of their Action, or their Skill in the Science, their Voices were indifferent. But as for *la Strada*, she boasts a very great Perfection in the two last mention'd Particulars; and as for her Action, which indeed is the most unessential Part of an *Italian Opera* here in *England*, I am persuaded it will be far from displeasing. [...] Tho' the rest of the present Singers of the *Opera*, have not such ravishing Voices as *Strada*, yet 'tis certain they have a considerable Skill in Music,<sup>66</sup>

Summarised, Strada possessed a penetrating soprano voice with all the virtuosity admired in Faustina, but she surpassed her in vocal quality and perfectness of intonation. On the other hand, she had lyric abilities as well. Here she was so convincing that she was able to make the audience forget their former favourite, Cuzzoni. Rodolfo Celletti noted that Handel continued to apply the way of composing he used for Cuzzoni in the case of Strada, too, but he expanded it with more energy and versatile types of melody in the high register, due to Strada's improving skills. He also discovered in Strada's arias similar

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<sup>65</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', In: *Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg, Historisch-Kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, 197–250: 226–227; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 319.

<sup>66</sup> *The Weekly Medley, and Literary Journal*, 6 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 325–326.

patterns to Faustina's style, especially birdsong imitations.<sup>67</sup> Strada was indeed capable of that kind of pathetic expression Cuzzoni had, but her unlimited, wide-ranging, overall chest-like voice – spanning a-c<sup>'''</sup> – went further, demanding longer phrases requiring a weightier and more sonorous projection and a greater measure of coloraturas, all connected by a ringing vocal timbre.<sup>68</sup> Strada not only sang roles created exclusively for her, but appeared in Handel's Italian *pasticci* – singing many castrato arias – as well as in revivals of operas in which she mostly performed roles originally taken by Cuzzoni or Faustina (Table 3.1). Nevertheless, the regular occurrence of Faustina's arias in Strada's Cuzzonian roles refers to their similar vocal functioning, despite their different *tessiture*. It shows that there were but some general aspects in Faustina's style with which Strada was familiar: most probably the energetic and powerful voice production was that feature which inspired the formation of castrato-type virtuoso arias with triplets, trills, long roulades, sustained notes, leaps and trills (for the gorgeousness of which she was celebrated). Moreover, Strada was the leading soprano of Handel's first English oratorios, singing in English throughout. Unlike Senesino and Bertolli, her pronunciation was not criticised.<sup>69</sup> After the first failed attempt with *Esther* in 1732, Handel prepared Italian arias for all the other Italian singers but not for her.

Table 3.1: Strada's London repertoire: original roles, oratorios, revivals and *pasticci*

Operas of original roles	Première	Revivals	Role
<i>Lotario</i>	2 December 1729	—	Adelaide
<i>Partenope</i>	24 February 1730	December 1730, January 1737	Partenope
<i>Poro</i>	2 February 1731	November 1731, December 1736	Cleofide
<i>Ezio</i>	15 January 1732	—	Fulvia
<i>Sosarme</i>	15 February 1732	April 1734	Elmira
<i>Orlando</i>	27 January 1733	April 1733	Angelica
<i>Arianna in Creta</i>	26 January 1734	November 1734	Arianna
<i>Ariodante</i>	8 January 1735	May 1736	Ginevra
<i>Alcina</i>	16 April 1735	November 1735	Alcina
<i>Atalanta</i>	12 May 1736	November 1736	Atalanta
<i>Arminio</i>	12 January 1737	—	Tusnelda
<i>Giustino</i>	16 February 1737	—	Arianna
<i>Berenice</i>	18 May 1737	—	Berenice
Oratorios	Première	Revivals	Role
<i>Esther</i>	2 May 1732	April 1733, July 1733, March 1734, April 1736, April 1737	Esther
<i>Deborah</i>	17 March 1733	July 1733, April 1734, March 1735	Deborah
<i>Athalia</i>	10 July 1733	April 1735	Josabeth
<i>Alexander's Feast &amp; cant. Cecilia volgi</i>	19 February 1736	March 1737, June 1737	Soprano
<i>Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità</i>	23 March 1737	—	Bellezza

<sup>67</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *Storia del belcanto*, Contrappunti 15 (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1983), Transl. in German by Federica Pauli, *Geschichte des Belcanto* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 101–102.

<sup>68</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Das Verhältnis von Lautstärke und Stimmlage im Barockgesang', In: *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper*, (Karlsruhe: 1988/1989), 157–171: 167–169.

<sup>69</sup> 'Senesino and Bertolli made rare work with the *English Tongue* you would have sworn it had been *Welch*.' Reference to the oratorio *Esther* in *See and Seem Blind (Daily Journal, 8 June 1732)*, *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 535.

Revivals	Dates	Strada's role	Original performer, add. arias by others
<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	January 1730, February 1732	Cleopatra	Cuzzoni
<i>Tolomeo</i>	May 1730, January 1733	Seleuce	Cuzzoni, one aria of Faustina
<i>Scipione</i>	November 1730	Berenice	Cuzzoni, one aria of Faustina
<i>Rinaldo</i>	April 1731	Almirena	Girardeau, one aria of Faustina
<i>Rodelinda</i>	May 1731	Rodelinda	Cuzzoni
<i>Tamerlano</i>	November 1731	Asteria	Cuzzoni
<i>Admeto</i>	December 1731	Antigona	Cuzzoni, one aria of Faustina
Ariosti: <i>Coriolano</i>	March 1732	Volunnia	Cuzzoni
<i>Flavio</i>	April 1732	Emilia	Cuzzoni
<i>Acis and Galatea</i>	June 1732, December 1732 July 1733, May 1734, March 1736	Galatea	unknown
<i>Alessandro</i>	November 1732	Rossane	Faustina
<i>Ottone</i>	November 1733	Teofane	Cuzzoni
<b>Handel's self-pasticci</b>			
<i>Il Parnasso in festa</i>	March 1734, March 1737	Clio	arias of Strada
<i>Il pastor fido</i>	May 1734, November 1734	Erato, Amarilli	arias of Strada, one of Pilotti-Schiavonetti
<i>Oreste</i>	December 1734	Ermione	arias of Strada, one of Cuzzoni
<b>Italian pasticci in London</b>			
<i>Ormisda</i>	April 1730, November 1730	Arsenice	arias of Scalzi, Mazzoni and Salvai
<i>Venceslao</i>	January 1731	Erenice	arias of Faustina, Farinelli and Carestini
<i>Lucio Papirio dittatore</i>	May 1732	Papiria	Faustina
<i>Catone</i>	November 1732	Marzia	Facchinelli, one aria of Carestini
<i>Semiramide riconosciuta</i>	October 1733	Tamiri	Faustina, Cuzzoni, Mazzoni and Morici
<i>Caio Fabricio</i>	December 1733	Sestia	Monticelli
<i>Arbace</i>	January 1734	Mandane	Fontana, one aria of Facchinelli
<i>Didone abbandonata</i>	April 1737	Didone	Fontana, one aria of Giacomazzi and Gizzi

Burney described Strada's London period as a process of development, although he might exaggerate Handel's role, since Strada was already an accomplished singer at the age of twenty-six, when she arrived in London. She was certainly not a 'coarse and awkward singer', as her Neapolitan repertoire (1724–26) clearly proves:

This singer had many prejudices to combat on her first arrival in this country: the enemies of Handel were of course unwilling to be pleased with any part of the entertainment he had provided for the public; the abilities of Cuzzoni and Faustina had taken possession of the general favour; [...] However, by degrees she subdued all their prejudices, and sung herself into favour, particularly with the friends of Handel, who used to say, that by the care he took in composing for her, and his instructions, from a coarse singer with a fine voice, he rendered her equal at least to the first performer in Europe.<sup>70</sup>

A singer formed by [Handel] himself, and modelled on his own melodies. She came

<sup>70</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 342.

hither a coarse and awkward singer with improvable talents, and he at last polished her into reputation and favour,<sup>71</sup>

In his eyes, Strada was Handel's creation in an artistic sense. He repeatedly mentions Strada's 'great vocal powers of execution and expression' and portrays her as a singer 'possessed of science and feeling' for interpreting truly pathetic arias. 'Extremely spirited' vocal numbers were sung by her on one hand, and such simple and seemingly insignificant ones on the other which served nothing but as a 'canvas for a great singer that would admit of fine colouring'.<sup>72</sup>

On the basis of her contemporaries' opinions and of the roles and arias written especially for her, Strada's vocal and artistic abilities entirely correspond to the definition of an early *soprano sfogato*, of the vented, unlimited female voice, also known as *voce assoluta*. Geoffrey S. Riggs describes this universal voice type as something which integrates all the favourable features of the female voice: besides its penetrating upper register, it is agile enough to execute virtuoso coloratura passages fluently.<sup>73</sup> Possessing a wide range, it is capable of singing lower phrases with intensity and power, and changes colour chameleon-wise, with Shakespearean *infinite variety*. Though the term stems from the romantic *bel canto* to describe *prima donnas* like Rossini's wife Isabella Colbran, Giuditta Pasta, Giulia Grisi or Maria Malibran, these singers were still singing in the way glorified by Tosi, Mancini or Quantz in their eighteenth-century treatises, i.e. applying full-body resonance to execute coloraturas. Martha Feldman projects the teacher-pupil relations from the late 1700s on to dramatic coloratura sopranos of the early twentieth century like Rosa Ponselle and Maria Callas, a crucial point of evidence being that Manuel García, founder of the modern singing technique (particularly the use of the chest in the upper register) demonstrates it through castrato exercises in his method book of 1847.<sup>74</sup> Although many aspects of singing technique shifted, even changed during the centuries, especially in the second half of the 1800s and also after the 1930s, I agree that there was something essential in castrato singing which was considered as ideal and served as an example to noncastrated voices as well. Strada most probably had a genuine ability for that kind of full-body singing (see chs 4–6 and Postlude).

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>72</sup> Concerning arias: Scherza in mar, Menti eterne (*Lotario*), L'amor ed il destin, Sì, scherza, sì (*Partenope*), Ah! non son io che parlo (*Ezio*), Dite pace (*Sosarme*), Sdegno amore (*Arianna in Creta*), Custodite, o dolci sogni (*Atalanta*), Và, combatti ancor da forte (*Arminio*). Ibid., 342, 343, 345, 356, 358, 372, 397 and 402.

<sup>73</sup> Geoffrey S. Riggs, *The Assoluta Voice in Opera, 1797–1847* (Jefferson [N.C.]; London: McFarland & Co., 2003), 5 and 7.

<sup>74</sup> Martha Feldman, *Castrato De Luxe: Blood, Gifts and Goods in the Making of Early Modern Singing Stars*, lecture at the University of Chicago 32<sup>nd</sup> Humanities Day, 13 October 2010; see Manuel García, *Art of Singing*, vols i-ii (1847, 1872; repr. in London: Leonard & Co., 1924).

## Social, political, and financial matters

Despite her vocal and musical excellence, and that she proved herself to be a worthy successor of the two ‘sirens’, Strada’s artistic quality does not seem to have been reflected when it came to salaries. Her initial hire as leading soprano was also very low in comparison to the other members of the company:

Bernacchi has 1200 guineas, Merighi 1000 or 900 with a benefit performance, Stradina 600 with a benefit, Fabri – they say – 500, the bass 300.<sup>75</sup>

With that £600, which in the 1732/33 season was £565.8s precisely,<sup>76</sup> Strada earned as a *prima donna* half of the wages of the castrato *primo uomo*, Bernacchi, and around a third or fourth of Faustina’s and Cuzzoni’s annual income.<sup>77</sup> Merighi, with a greater reputation, was financially the first lady. However, she might not have taken into consideration that Strada, during those three years when she was out of the Teatro San Bartolomeo (between 1726 and 1729), had overgrown her. When Merighi’s name was placed after Strada’s in the libretto of *Lotario*, the first opera performed by the Second Academy, she even felt so offended that she did not even talk to Strada for three days (revealing her diva attitude):<sup>78</sup>

that was a Dispute which arose among the two Heroines about Precedency. One of them took it so much to heart. that she could not be prevail’d with to speak to her Rival, or even to give her so much as one kind Look for three Days together; but at last, by the Mediation of Friends, her Resentments were softned; and they are at the Instant of my writing, *Deo Gratias*, perfectly reconciled, at least in outward Appearance.<sup>79</sup>

This also sheds a light on the confusing situation in which Strada was the first lady as a soprano, and the main female character in the drama, but financially the contralto Merighi had advantage. Winton Dean’s acceptable explanation for Strada’s lower fee is that she was not yet a well-known opera star.<sup>80</sup>

At least she had a benefit which could mean an amount of £250–400 a year, a sum very

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Bernacchi à 1200 guinee – Merighi 1000 overo 900 – con beneficio. Strad[in]a 600 con benef[ici]o. Fabri dicesi 500. Basso 300’. Rolli’s letter to Riva, 6 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 316–317.

<sup>76</sup> Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, ‘Handel’s Opera Finances in 1732–33’, 87 and 89.

<sup>77</sup> Milhous and Hume, ‘Opera Salaries in Eighteenth-Century London’, 26–83: 35–36.

<sup>78</sup> Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox, 2 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 320–321.

<sup>79</sup> *The Weekly Medley, and Literary Journal* on 6 December 1729; Edward Weston to Stephen Poyntz, 4 December 1729. *Ibid.*, 326 and 324.

<sup>80</sup> Dean, *Handel’s Operas 1726–1741*, 127.

far from the £1800 stated in the *London Journal* about that of Faustina of 9<sup>th</sup> March 1727.<sup>81</sup> Yet this annual fee of c. £900, compared to Strada's Naples salary from 1724 to 1726 – when she earned 1000 silver ducats a year – must have been a change of scale. Michael Talbot remarks, referring to a guide for British travellers in 1791, that a single male tourist could subsist in Venice for a year on £80 sterling, approximately 450 ducats, including a manservant's pay. The value of the Neapolitan ducat was, however, slightly less than that of the Venetian one: 450 Venetian ducats meant 540 in Naples. Thus, Strada was wealthily honoured in London, even if not as highly paid as her famous colleagues. The equivalent of her London annual income corresponded to 4725 ducats, the highest wage she ever gained in her life, though the costs of living were also much more expensive than in Italy.<sup>82</sup> At the time of Strada's engagement, England was the country paying the highest fees in Europe for musicians, and not least singers.<sup>83</sup> In addition, it was an important consideration for Handel as well as the Academy to engage a *prima donna* for less than the two former divas.<sup>84</sup>

Still, in 1737, the year of a further essential rearrangement of London's operatic life (discussed below), after Strada agreed with Heidegger, he began negotiations for £1000 with an unnamed singer, who may have been the castrato Caffarelli, Porpora's former pupil.<sup>85</sup> One wonders for how much would Strada have been engaged then? Logically, the amount should have been more than eight years before. If under £1000, then it was probably around £700–800. Yet, an awkward thought arises: since after the early 1730s Strada had become the ruling lady of opera in England, one of the 'the firsts in Europe' as Burney puts it, how could it be possible that her remuneration had not been moved upward accordingly? This shall be explained by practical financial reasons: since the Academy had

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<sup>81</sup> This claim in the *London Journal* was reported by Elizabeth Gibson, who deemed that amount unlikely. See Milhous and Hume, 'Opera Salaries in Eighteenth-Century London', 36–37; Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660-1760*, (Stanford/CA: Stanford UP, 2007), 659.

<sup>82</sup> £1 was worth around 5.25 Neapolitan ducats. Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, 659; Thomas Martyn, *A Tour through Italy containing Full Directions for Travellers in that Interesting Country* (London: Kearsley, 1791), x, xix–xx; see Michael Talbot, 'A Venetian operatic contract of 1714', in: *The Business of Music*, ed. by M. Talbot, Liverpool University Press, 2002 (Liverpool Music Symposium, 2), 10–61:60; John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera*, 142; G. Baretta, *Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy*, (London: 1769), cited in Frederick Curtis Petty, *Italian Opera in London 1760–1800* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1980), 9–10.

<sup>83</sup> Dent, *Handel*, ch. 5, 60; 'Senesino had built a fine house with an Inscription over the door to let the world know 'twas the Folly of the English had laid the foundation of it.' Sir Lyonell Pilkington to his brother-in-law, Godfrey Wentworth, Paris on 23 April 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 290.

<sup>84</sup> 'Met Mr Smith the Opera Copyest in the Park, who told me the Performers Mr Handel Engag'd were very good and cheap.' 6 July 1729. Cited in John Grano, *Handel's Trumpeter: The Diary of John Grano*, ed. John Ginger (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1998), 284.

<sup>85</sup> *London Daily Post*, 21 June & 26 July 1738. Deutsch, *Handel*, 463–465; Chrysander, *G. F. Händel*, vol. ii, 452.

a limited budget, demanding a remarkably higher fee would have been unrealistic in the first years, and by the time Strada was standing on the top of her abilities and success, around 1735–36, the company was dealing not only with severe financial difficulties but also had to fight to survive beside the rival troupe, the Opera of the Nobility.

As the years passed by, Strada not only established her position as *prima donna* of the Second Academy but also found favour with the Royal Family, especially with Princess Anne of Orange, and took her own place as a private person in the high circles of the London society – all with Handel’s support. Princess Anne, the second child and eldest daughter of King George II, was one of the main and most loyal supporters of Handel and his singers, especially during the Second Academy.<sup>86</sup> Having received her musical education from Handel himself, she reached a relatively high standard both as a singer and harpsichordist. In addition, the Princess made progress in composing.<sup>87</sup> After her marriage to William/Willem of Orange in 1734 she gave regular concerts with the small orchestra she founded and directed from the harpsichord.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, she probably was the Kapellmeister (music director) at the Dutch court.<sup>89</sup> Princess Anne was the one who encouraged Handel to go into a partnership with Heidegger in 1728, and also to present his English oratorios to the general public at the Haymarket Theatre (beginning with *Esther* in 1732).<sup>90</sup> Above all, she gave patronage to Strada to such an extent that in the summer of 1736 Princess Anne, being pregnant, took the other Anna with her to Holland.<sup>91</sup> (This was not the first such occasion: Strada entertained the Royal family at Richmond in the summer of 1731 as well.)<sup>92</sup> Friedrich Chrysander draws a scenario – deriving from the contemporary English courtier, Lord Hervey – about the Princess from the time when her family arranged her marriage with the unattractive Prince of Orange. He quotes the Queen as stating that when Princess Anne is sitting at the harpsichord, she has the ‘opera folks’ by her (Handel and Strada, according to the author), and is as calm as ever.<sup>93</sup> Strada certainly sang with the Princess’s orchestra at private concerts in Holland. The loyalty of this royal

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<sup>86</sup> Richard G. King, ‘Anne of Hanover and Orange (1709–59) as patron and practitioner of the arts’, in: *Queenship in Britain 1660–1837: Royal patronage, court culture and dynastic politics*, ed. by Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 162–192: 170.

<sup>87</sup> Anthony Hicks, ‘Handel, George Frideric’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 5 March 2014.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Henry Lang, *Handel* (New York: Norton, 1966), 540.

<sup>89</sup> King, ‘Anne of Hanover and Orange (1709–59) as patron and practitioner of the arts’, 173.

<sup>90</sup> Dent, *Handel*, ch. 5, 60; Charles Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey ... in Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785), 100; Anthony Hicks, ‘Handel and the idea of an oratorio’, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*. Ed. by Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145–163: 152.

<sup>91</sup> *Daily Post*, 5 October 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 416.

<sup>92</sup> *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 460.

<sup>93</sup> Chrysander, *G. F. Händel*, vol. ii, 359; see also Ellen T. Harris, *George Frideric Handel: A Life with Friends* (New York: Norton, 2014), 155; King, ‘Anne of Hanover and Orange (1709–59) as patron and practitioner of the arts’, 172.

lady stood firm even after June 1737, when Strada no longer sang for Handel. Moreover, she was obliged to interrupt her journey back to Italy in June 1738 at the behest of the Princess, to pay her a visit in Holland.<sup>94</sup> According to Richard G. King, Anne, besides that she was patroness of first-class musicians and composers like Jean-Marie Leclair, Christian Ernst Graf, Gaetano Guadagni and Franx Xaver Richter, had a talent ‘throughout her reign for retaining performers and composers on their way through Holland to other destinations’.<sup>95</sup> At least in the case of Strada and Leclair, she shared patronage with the Portuguese Jew named Jacob Lopez de Liz, who gave pompous musical entertainments at the Dutch court as well as regular private concerts.<sup>96</sup> In this light, Strada’s second visit in the summer of 1738 might have lasted considerably longer: she may have sung at the court even until the next spring, since there is no account of her returning to Naples or of her appearance elsewhere until the autumn of 1739.

The spheres of eighteenth-century operatic life, however, were not restricted either to the stage or to the Royal Palace. The emerging middle class initiated a musical revolution, expanding the variety of public concert venues via the foundation of amateur musical societies and gentlemen’s clubs in the 1720s. They were based in public houses like the Crown and Anchor Tavern, the Castle Tavern and the Swan Tavern in Cornhill.<sup>97</sup> Strada herself must have made regular appearances at such places. For instance, right after returning from Holland, she gave a concert at the Swan Tavern, which was reported by the *Daily Post* on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1736:

Last night the famous Signora Strada arriv’d from Holland, who is come on purpose to sing next Thursday [the 7<sup>th</sup>] in a Concert of Musick at the Swan Tavern in Exchange-Alley.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, Mrs Pendarves often gave an account of Handel’s private performances at her home or at some other friend’s house.<sup>99</sup> Another time she visited Handel at Brook Street to attend the first unofficial rehearsals of *Alcina*.<sup>100</sup> One evening, with about fifteen friends present, seems to have been particularly special, for she claimed that she ‘never

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<sup>94</sup> Hume, ‘Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s’, 357–359; *London Daily Post*, 21 June 1738. Deutsch, *Handel*, 463–464.

<sup>95</sup> King, ‘Anne of Hanover and Orange (1709–59) as patron and practitioner of the arts’, 175.

<sup>96</sup> Veronica P. M. Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover, Princess Royal* (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1995), 57.

<sup>97</sup> Stephen Inwood, *Historic London: An Explorer’s Companion* (London: Macmillan, 2008), 180.

<sup>98</sup> *Daily Post*, 5 October 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 416; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 398.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Manson Myers, ‘Mrs Delany: An Eighteenth-Century Handelian’, *The Musical Quarterly* 32/1 (Jan. 1946), 12–36: 21–22 and 31.

<sup>100</sup> Mrs Pendarves’s letter to her mother, Mary Granville, 12 April 1735. Deutsch, *Handel*, 385.



was so well entertained at an opera':<sup>101</sup> 'Next week I shall have a very pretty party. Oh that you were to be here! The Percivals, Sir John Stanley, Bunny, Lady Rich and her daughter, Mr. Hanmer, Lady Catherine, Mr. Handel, and Strada, and if my Lady S. will lend me her harpsichord, she shall be of the party.'<sup>102</sup> She reported Handel's very good mood and humour, his playing on the harpsichord and accompaniment of Strada who was singing together with the noble ladies for four hours. This little insight is refreshing evidence of a brimming cultural life, where fine art was deeply embedded into the quotidian life of various social circles – even one of the highest. Strada's visit here was not one of those private appearances singers customarily made with a great deal of ceremony; etiquette was less important and the musicians themselves were equal participants of the company, just as amateurs did not hesitate to sing before the supreme vocalist and composer. Although Handel had been the one to introduce Strada to the world of their influential supporters, Strada in her own right proved to be suitable for conversation and amusement with the prominent members of society, and became accepted not only for her musical achievements but also for her character. It shows that her friendly relationship with Handel extended offstage too.

By the time of this meeting at Mary Delany's in 1734, Strada's illustriousness in London's operatic life had become famous. She was officially and exclusively Handel's loyal soprano, being the only one not to leave the composer for the newly established rival opera company, the Opera of the Nobility led by Niccolò Porpora, in June 1733. A further virtue of her character was shown in the same year, when she compassionately petitioned the King for a fellow countryman, Anthony l'Anglodge (alias l'Anglois or Porta Anthony) who was condemned to death for stealing.<sup>103</sup>

Strada's insistence on a strict collaboration with Handel was, however, not without precedent. In 1732, Giovanni Bononcini attempted to hire Handel's singers for his *serenata* to be performed at the Opera. Strada, together with her husband, Aurelio del Pò – who seems to have worked as his wife's manager during their English sojourn and afterwards –

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<sup>101</sup> 'I must tell you of a little entertainm[en]t of Musick I had last week, I never wish'd more heartily for you & My Mother than on that occasion. I had Lady Rich & her Daughter[,] Lady Cath: Hanmer & her Husband, Mr and Mrs. Percival, Sir John Stanley and my Bro[the]r, Mrs. Donellan, Strada, and Mr. Coot. Lord Shaftesbury begged Mr. Percival to bring him, and being a profess'd friend of Mr. Handels (who was here also) was admitted; I never was so entertain'd so well at an opera, Mr Handel was in the best humour in the world, & played Lessons & accompanied Strada & all the Ladies that sung from seven o'th'clock till Eleven. I gave them Tea & Coffee & abt. half an hour after Nine had a salver brought in of Chocolate, mull'd white wine & bisquets. Every Body was easy and seem'd pleas'd.' Mrs Pendarves's letter to her sister, Anne Granville, 12 April 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 772.

<sup>102</sup> Mrs Pendarves's letter to her sister, Anne Granville, 28 March and 4 April 1734. *Ibid.*, 769–770 and 766.

<sup>103</sup> He had stolen 15 guineas. Strada's petition was granted, although too late. The *Bee* reported the story on October 1734. Philipp H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, 14 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press: 1991), 316.

rejected the offer, which stirred up a storm and received detailed press coverage:

Whereas Signor Bononcini intends after the Serenata composed by Mr. Handel has been performed, to have one of his own at the Opera-house, and has desired Signora Strada to sing in that Entertainment: Aurelio del Po, Husband of the said Signora Strada, thinks it incumbent on him to acquaint the Nobility and Gentry, that he shall ever think himself happy in every Opportunity wherein he can have the Honour to contribute to their Satisfaction; but with respect to this particular Request of Signor Bononcini, he hopes he shall be permitted to decline complying with it, for Reasons best known to the said Aurelio del Po and his Wife; and therefore the said Aurelio del Po flatters himself that the Nobility and Gentry will esteem this a sufficient Cause for his Non-compliance with Signor Bononcini's Desire; and likewise judge it to be a proper Answer to whatever the Enemies of the said Aurelio del Po may object against him or his Wife upon this Occasion.<sup>104</sup>

The *serenata* was cancelled after Strada refused to perform it. This is documented by an anonymous author, possibly the playwright and manager Aaron Hill (who attempted to meld English and Italian operatic conventions), who describes how 'it fell out chiefly by the means of *Strada's Husband*, who would not suffer his Wife to sing in it'.<sup>105</sup> A *festa pastorale*, *Amore per amor*, was performed instead, in English, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1732, right after the revival of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, between 9<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> June.<sup>106</sup> The gesture itself signified rivalry, and to top it all Bononcini – who had to leave London the year before, after charges of plagiarism of a madrigal written by Antonio Lotti were proven against him – required Handel's singers to take part in it, a demand which was turned down only by Strada, or to be more accurate, by her and her husband.<sup>107</sup> In the meantime, Henrietta Churchill, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duchess of Marlborough and Bononcini's patroness, 'has advanc'd very largely towards a new Subscription for Italian Opera's, to be there under the direction of Bononcini and Arragoni; and a new set of Singers, are to be sent for from Italy, for that purpose'.<sup>108</sup> Both this attempt and *Amore per amor* failed, but these two matters

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<sup>104</sup> *Daily Post*, 9 June 1732. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 536–537.

<sup>105</sup> Anonymous letter published in the *Craftsman*, 12 August 1732. *Ibid.*, 547.

<sup>106</sup> Lowell Lindgren, 'The Three Great Noises "Fatal to the Interests of Bononcini"', *The Musical Quarterly* 61/4 (Oct., 1975), 560–583: 579–581.

<sup>107</sup> Political forces stood in the background of their competition from the very beginning: Handel was favoured by the Tories, while Bononcini by the Whigs. Lowell Lingren, 'Bononcini, Giovanni', *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy. Accessed 3 March 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Aaron Hill, *See and Seem Blind* (1732). Dean, *Handel's Operas 1726–1741*, 131; Christine Gerrard, *Aaron Hill: The Muses' Projector, 1685–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147; see *See and Seem Blind: Or, A Critical Dissertation on the Publick Diversions, & c. of Persons and Things, and Things and Persons, and What Not* (London, 1732), facsimile, ed. by Robert D. Hume, Augustan Reprint Society no. 235 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1986).

foreshadowed what was to come the following year. The Nobility Opera ‘gave power to contract with any Singer Except Strada’.<sup>109</sup> For that matter, Aurelio must have been well aware of the situation of London’s operatic life, (just as he used to be at Naples), of the evolving opposition to Handel and of the political motivations behind these activities. In addition, the Italian diaspora was probably a tightly more closed circle within London society, and, as such, news and rumours spread more directly, relations between parties were more transparent, and this liaison network naturally expanded to Italy. Thus Strada and Aurelio knew exactly what they were doing when voting for Handel with her denial in 1732 and they must have calculated the consequences.

The catalyst for the Nobility’s (1733–37) establishment, no doubt, was the engagement of Senesino. Handel brought him back to the Royal Academy for 1400 guineas in the fall of 1730 in place of Bernacchi.<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately their former tensions caused new problems, which made them part ways in June 1733. Carestini became Strada’s next stage partner. Thereafter Farinelli – the most celebrated castrato of all time, who used to be Strada’s colleague in Naples – Cuzzoni and, for the position of musical director, Porpora were invited from Italy by the Nobility. Nevertheless they could not hire Farinelli immediately, but from the 1734/35 season onwards; Cuzzoni returned to London only in April 1734. The idea of two Italian opera companies in London was considered nonsense by some contemporaries.<sup>111</sup> The British aristocracy had previously had difficulties in maintaining even one, and now they had two to support. A financial collapse was inevitable.

There were unmistakably political motives standing in the background of this cultural battlefield. Frederick, Prince of Wales, arrived in England in 1727 after his father George II took the throne. He had not seen his parents for fourteen years, nor was he allowed to leave Hanover for England before. In a short time he became the titular head of the political opposition as well as a patron of the arts. As the King and Queen supported Handel, the Prince conversely chose to sponsor the Nobility’s company.<sup>112</sup> Pamphlets, satires and open letters about operatic life almost always involved political allegories, such as the one published in the *Craftsman* on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1733, where Strada’s name represented Queen Caroline. Seemingly, this was an attack against Handel but its actual target was the

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<sup>109</sup> Strada may also have opposed Senesino, a great supporter of Bononcini. Earl of Delawarr’s letter to the Duke of Richmond, January 1733. Graydon Beeks, ‘Anna Strada del Pò: Handel’s “New” Soprano’, *Newsletter of the American Handel Society* 10/3 (Dec., 1995), 3.

<sup>110</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 168–169.

<sup>111</sup> Letter of Charles Jennens on 13 December 1733. Cited in McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel’s Britain*, 151.

<sup>112</sup> Dean, *Handel’s Operas 1726–1741*, 134.

prime minister Robert Walpole, Handel's supposed protector.<sup>113</sup> His main enemies, the politicians Lord Bolingbroke and William Pulteney, owned the aforementioned journal and utilised Del Pò's former declaration about Bononcini's *serenata* for transmitting coded hints.<sup>114</sup> *The Gentlemen's Magazine* of August 1732 contains a satirical discussion about Del Pò's letter published in the *Craftsman* of 12<sup>th</sup> August:

Good God! When shall I see this poor country free from practices? What dignity, what authority discovers itself in every line? Does this sound like the style of a poor Italian, who lets out his wife to sing for hire? I suppose you would make me believe this is Strada's husband, and no libel, I warrant you; no attempt against the government! 'Ay, to be sure', replied an old lady, 'everybody knows whose name begins with a P, and that it is pronounced in the beginning like those two letters P O.' The fat gentleman seemed to frown at this. 'Madam', said he, ... 'I will undertake to prove that nobody could pen this advertisement but the *Pretender* himself.' ... 'Ay, 'tis plain,' cried a sober fellow ... 'Aurelio stands for the *Pretender*, Po for the Pope, Del for the Devil. ... Is not this the style of a king and his ministers? And would an Italian singing woman's husband presume to offer terms in this manner to the nobility and gentry of Great Britain? No, no, it must be the *Pretender* who had endeavoured to impose upon the nation under this disguise, and to open a correspondence with the *Royal Academy of Music*.'<sup>115</sup>

On the musical battlefield, competition of the highest degree defined the relationship between the two groups from the first moment on. Mirroring each other, the Opera of the Nobility opened at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1733 with Porpora's *Arianna in Nasso*, while Handel came up with his *Arianna in Creta* at the King's Theatre at the Haymarket only in 26<sup>th</sup> January 1734, despite the fact that he had already completed the opera on 5<sup>th</sup> October previous year. Evidently, his idea was beating Porpora at his own game. However, at first he did really not succeed by producing Italian *pasticci*: Vinci's *Semiramide* on 30<sup>th</sup> October, Hasse's *Caio Fabricio* on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1733 and Vinci's *Arbace* on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1734. As Reinhard Strohm has observed, 'he wanted to confront Porpora with superior examples of Porpora's own kind of music'.<sup>116</sup> *Arianna in Creta*, on the other hand, was a considerable success with sixteen performances. Both companies

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<sup>113</sup> *The Country Journal: or, The Craftsman*, 7 April 1733. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 609–612.

<sup>114</sup> Aurelio's public notice was reprinted in the *Craftsman* on 12 August 1732. *Ibid.*, 547–548; McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain*, 126–149.

<sup>115</sup> Cited in Schœlcher, *The Life of Handel*, 118; The Pretender is an enemy of the government and British liberty. Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain*, 132.

<sup>116</sup> Strohm, 'Handel's pasticci', 183.

were performing deliberately on Tuesday and Saturday nights in order to press the audience to opt for one or the other with their attendance. In late 1734 the Nobility moved to the King's Theatre, while Handel relocated his activities to the newly-built Covent Garden. The great opera war was terminated by the spring of 1737, and both companies collapsed in June. Handel had to join the remainder of the Nobility at the King's Theatre, sacrificing Strada's engagement for the for the 1737–38 season.

Burney reports that by 1737 'Handel had been so great a loser by striving against the stream of fashion and opposition the preceding season, that he was obliged to fell out of the funds of many former years, to pay his performers, and was still in some danger of being arrested by the husband of Strada for the arrears of his salary.'<sup>117</sup> Aurelio del Pò must have been worried, and not without reason. His intention was to get his wife's wages via an official executive proceeding. This, if true, might be confusing at first sight, considering that he made a public statement on Handel's side in 1732 when he had not allowed his wife to sing for Bononcini, and also that he himself used to be in the same situation in 1726, owing Strada 2,000 Neapolitan ducats and was able to compensate her solely through marriage. Admittedly, this was an unrepeatable solution. At the same time, it is very important to see that Del Pò acted on Strada's behalf like a manager would have, and surely not without her approval – with the agent's pragmatism and not with the husband's partiality. The couple must have been agreed on calling Handel to account for Strada's salary. Both here and in the Bononcini case, Del Pò's reactions, again, reflect an awareness of the actual state of London's operatic life as well as the political forces driving its changes.<sup>118</sup>

According to contemporary reports, Handel finally paid his singers, albeit with some delay: Hawkins even emphasises Strada's generosity when he records that in 1737 'Strada and others of the singers were content to accept of bonds for the payment of their arrears, and left the kingdom upon Mr. Handel's assurances that they should be discharged; and he paid a due regard to his engagement by remitting them the money'.<sup>119</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Shaftesbury's account connects it to Handel's benefit concert: 'It was in this Season [1737–38] that Mr. Handell had his great Benefit at the Hay Market, which enabled him to Discharge his Debts'.<sup>120</sup> Handel suffered a stroke in April 1737. Though he recovered during the summer, faster than expected, and was able to compose again, he was physically exhausted as well as socially somewhat insecure, though not all his patrons left him. His

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<sup>117</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 426.

<sup>118</sup> McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain*, 126–149.

<sup>119</sup> Hume, 'Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', 361; Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, vol. ii. 878.

<sup>120</sup> Deutsch, *Handel*, 847.

friends and supporters gave him a benefit concert on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1738, attended by ‘nearly 1,300 persons besides the gallery and upper gallery’, as it can be read in the diary of the Earl of Egmont, who supposed that Handel received £1,000 for that night; Mainwaring said £1,500, Burney recorded £800.<sup>121</sup>

Donald Burrows’s assumption is that Handel rejoined Heidegger, who had many of the former Nobility Opera patrons behind him, meaning that the composer had no significant influence over the artistic management any more.<sup>122</sup> However, Robert D. Hume has suggested the very convincing hypothesis that the final season of the Royal Academy was in fact 1737/38, accomplished through a financial and professional fusion with the Opera of the Nobility and its directors.<sup>123</sup> Following this logic, Strada might have been the necessary loss of the deal, as most of the singers – apart from Caffarelli – were selected from among the remnants of the Nobility troupe: La Francesina, Merighi and Montagnana. Farinelli and Conti had gone in 1737, Senesino a year earlier – as Henry Carey recorded in his satiric song: ‘Fly Heidegger, fly, and my idol restore; / O, let me but hear the enchanter once more. / For Handel may study, and study in vain / While Strada’s expell’d, and my Broschi’s in Spain.’<sup>124</sup>

As a matter of fact, Handel was gradually but explicitly shifting his profile, i.e. focusing more and more on oratorios. He might have understood the actual socio-cultural changes and the gap between him and the new generation of theatre managers as well as the lassitude of the subsidy of opera, both as far as the supporters and the interest of the audience were concerned.<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, the *Daily Advertiser* of 20<sup>th</sup> February 1738 published a report about a rearrangement of subscriptions by twenty noble ladies and with Heidegger as an adviser, in order to save Italian opera playing in London. They mentioned Strada by name as desired *prima donna* for the future company:

It is pretty confidently said, that the Managers of the Italian Opera in the Hay-Market designing to give over that Enterprize, this innocent and agreeable Entertainment, which is encouraged in all the Courts of Europe, will, the next Season, be undertaken by twenty Ladies of the first Distinction ... As ‘tis said the Ladies who take upon them the Direction, design in every thing to be guided by the Advice of Mr. Heydigger [*sic*],

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<sup>121</sup> Hume, ‘Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s’, 360; *Survey of London*, xxxv (London, 1970), 71–75. *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, Part III: 1729–1747, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale, Ill., 1961), vol. ii, 710 and 823; John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frideric Handel*, London, 1760 (reprinted New York, 1980), 125–126.

<sup>122</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 258 and 260.

<sup>123</sup> Hume, ‘Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s’, 357–359.

<sup>124</sup> From Henry Carey’s Song ‘The Beau’s Lamentations for the Loss of Farinelli’, 1737–1738. Deutsch, *Handel*, 446.

<sup>125</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 265.

who is indeed the only Person capable of conducting and regulating publick Entertainments. Some go yet farther, and take upon them to name the Performers, which, say they, will be Mrs. Strada, Mr. Cafarelli, Mr. Carestini, Mrs. Francesina, Mrs. Chimenti, Mrs. Marchesini, Mr. Montagnana; and that the Composers will be Mr. Handel and Mr. Pescetti.<sup>126</sup>

Although Heidegger secured Strada in May, he could not engage Caffarelli, who refused his offer of 1,000 guineas. Besides, the number of subscriptions failed, aborting the idea of a season for 1738/39 and leading to a final breakdown of Italian opera in London.<sup>127</sup> Heidegger was waiting with the announcement until the last rays of hope vanished with Caffarelli's departure (c. 15–17 July):

Whereas the Opera's for the ensuing Season at the *King's Theatre* in the *Hay-Market*, cannot be carried on as was intended, by Reason of the Subscription not being full, and that I could not agree with the Singers tho' I offer'd *One Thousand Guineas* to One of them: I therefore think myself obliged to declare, that I give up the Undertaking for next Year<sup>128</sup>

Strada therefore – after her agreement with Heidegger failed and she was waiting for Handel in vain – had to say farewell. She left for Naples via Holland in June 1738:

On Saturday last [the 17th] set out for Breda Signora Strada del Pò, to which Place she goes in Obedience to the Command of her Royal Highness the Princess of Orange, from whence she intends to go to Italy; but before her Departure desires that the British Nobility and Gentry (from whom she has received so many signal Marks of Favour) might be acquainted that it is no ways owing to her, that the present Scheme for performing Opera's next Winter in the Haymarket, under the Direction of Mr. Heydegger, has miscarried, as has been maliciously reported: she having agreed with Mr. Heydegger above a Month ago, as the said Gentleman can testify.<sup>129</sup>

The question also emerges of whether a decay of Strada's vocal state was among the reasons why Handel released her, but this suspicion is hard to believe considering what kind of arias she performed in 1736/37, her last season in London. The scores of *Arminio*,

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<sup>126</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, no. 2207, Monday, 20 February 173[8]. Cited in Ilias Chrissochoidis, 'Handel at a Crossroads: His 1737–1738 and 1738–1739 Seasons Re-Examined', *Music & Letters* 90/4 (Nov., 2009), 599–635: 600.

<sup>127</sup> Chrissochoidis, 'Handel at a Crossroads', 599–604; Robert D. Hume, 'London (i), §V: Musical life: 1660–1800, 1. The Stage', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 7 March 2014.

<sup>128</sup> *London Daily Post*, 26 July, 1738. Deutsch, *Handel*, 464–465; with the original typographical inflections cited in Chrissochoidis, 'Handel at a Crossroads', 604.

<sup>129</sup> Farewell notice, written by Aurelio del Pò, Strada's husband. *London Daily Post*, 21 June 1738. Deutsch, *Handel*, 463–464.

*Giustino* and *Berenice* testify against this idea, showing a rich voice full of strength and energy. There has been no trace found of a break in comparison with the previous years. Neither seems her allurements as a muse, her ability of inspiration to fade away – she still motivated Handel for new ways of treating the soprano voice, and he began to set forth a flexible and modern conception matchless in the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>130</sup> Lord Shaftesbury, in his letter to James Harris of 11<sup>th</sup> June 1737, asserted Strada's unbrokenly excellent vocal quality: 'I was at the opera of Alcina last night[:] was incomparably performed. There is hopes that of the undertaker's hiring Strada for next year'.<sup>131</sup>

After all, in spite of the activity of the Nobility Opera, headed by Farinelli, Cuzzoni and Merighi as star singers, Handel was able to prevail artistically. It is noteworthy that his triumph was attributed to Strada, or at least tightly coupled with her, and that the appreciation of Handel as well as the audience towards her remained uninterrupted:

Bunny came [on Tuesday last, i.e. the 23<sup>rd</sup>] from the Haymarket Opera, and supped with me comfortably. They have Farinelli, Merighi, with no sound in her voice, but thundering action – a beauty with no other merit; and one Chimenti, a tolerable good woman with a pretty voice and Montagnana, who roars as usual! With this band of singers and dull Italian operas, such as you almost fall asleep at, they presume to rival Handel—who has Strada, that sings better than ever she did;<sup>132</sup>

that as for C[uzz]oni, you had no Thoughts of her, no Hopes of her, nor no want of her, S[tra]da being in all respects infinitely superior, in any Excellency requir'd for a Stage; [...] Have you [Handel] not this very Season imported from *Italy* an Arch-Friend, one Care[sti]no, that will play the Devil with us before he quits us, and leagu'd yourself to a notorious Witch, one Str[a]da, that never lets us be quiet Night nor Day;<sup>133</sup>

This uniquely symbiotic relationship of mutual inspiration between singer and composer reached its culmination in the moving musical description of Alcina's fallen character (1735). The impact of this symbiosis was so profound that it became publicly poeticised:

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<sup>130</sup> Celletti, *Geschichte des Belcanto*, 103.

<sup>131</sup> Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732–1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32.

<sup>132</sup> Mrs Pendarves's letter to her sister, Anne Granville, 27 November 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 418.

<sup>133</sup> *Harmony in an Uproar: A Letter to F–d–k H–d–l Esq.*; [12 February] 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 737–49: 738 and 743.



Handel, to wax the charm as strong, / Temper'd Alcina's [Strada's] with his own: /  
And now asserted by their song, / They rule the tuneful! world alone. / Or she  
improves his wonderous lay; / Or he by a superior spell / Does greater melody convey,  
/ That she may her bright self excel.<sup>134</sup>

Later reception also noticed Strada and Handel's special relationship. Among Handel's nineteenth-century biographers, Chrysander commented: 'he made his best find with Signora Strada, a true pearl of singing', calling her Handel's favourite singer; 'Surely, it served him [Handel] as a great recompense to work his way with such a singer, with whom the Faustina-cult was impossible *per se*. Having a voice similar to Cuzzoni's, she learned how to greatly upgrade her stage movements, and seemed to possess no trace of the perfidy of her famous predecessor. A cordial amity evolved between her and the composer, which proved itself to be enduring even in uncertain times'.<sup>135</sup> The English composer, musicologist and conductor Mrs Julian Marshall similarly remarked: 'Signora Anna Strada, an excellent soprano, who, of all the singers Handel ever had, seems to have pleased him most'.<sup>136</sup> The *Dictionary of National Biography 1885–1900* remarked that in Strada, Handel found 'a staunch and much needed friend'.<sup>137</sup>

Strada was a perfect match for Handel: she combined vocal and personal characteristics which inspired one of the greatest composers of all time. Hence, her unique style of singing left its mark on the musical page. She undeniably had the ability to control negative circumstances: to grow, to flourish professionally in a harsh environment, to overcome the audience's preconceptions and gain their appreciation; moreover, to compete with a rival company graced with the most prominent singer in the Western world. Strada was a perfect match for Handel: she combined vocal and personal characteristics which inspired one of the greatest composers of all time. Hence, her unique style of singing left its mark on the musical page. She undeniably had the ability to control negative

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<sup>134</sup> Verses 8 and 9 from 'On Mr Handel's performance on the Organ, and his Opera of Alcina', By a Philharmonic, *Grub-Street Journal*, 8 May 1737. Deutsch, *Handel*, 389.

<sup>135</sup> 'Den besten Fund machte er aber an Signora Strada, einer wahren Perle des Gesanges.'; 'Es gewährte ihm sicherlich eine große Genugthuung, sich mit einer Sängerin durchzubringen, bei welcher der Faustina-Kultus von vornherein unmöglich war. An Stimme der Cuzzoni ähnlich, lernte sie sich viel besser auf der Bühne bewegen, und scheint keine Spur von der Falschheit ihrer berühmten Vorsängerin besessen zu haben. Es gestaltete sich zwischen ihr und dem Tonmeister ein herzliches Freundschaftsverhältnis, das sich auch in sehr bewegten Zeiten als dauernd bewährte.' Chrysander, *G. F. Händel*, vol. ii, 234 and 373.

<sup>136</sup> Mrs Julian Marshall, *Handel* (London, S. Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1883), 85–86; Florence Ashton Marshall was an English writer, composer and conductor, contributor of the first edition of Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Nigel Burton, 'Marshall, Florence Ashton', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 12 September 2014.

<sup>137</sup> Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee ed., *Dictionary of National Biography 1885–1900*, vol. xxiv (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1890), 283.

circumstances: to grow, to flourish professionally in a harsh environment, to overcome the audience's preconceptions and gain their appreciation; moreover, to compete with a rival company graced with the most prominent singer in the Western world. She had clear sight of the musical and human values of her colleagues around her, which helped her to stand by Handel when all the others left, according to the fashion of the moment. Had she decided otherwise, the Ariosto-operas, for example – with *Alcina* the apogee – would never have been formed in the way they finally were.

## Chapter Four: In the Midst of Operatic Business

### Queen of revivals

Of the five operas introduced by the Rival Queens, Strada sang in the revivals of three: in *Tolomeo* (1730), *Admeto* (1731) and *Alessandro* (1732). In the first two, she played roles originally belonging to Cuzzoni, yet enriched with Faustina's arias; while in the third, the role of Faustina was given to her. All of those revivals took place in the first years of her engagement in London, and thus it is reasonable to believe that, so far as Strada was concerned, the goal of the productions was to establish her as a *prima donna* who possessed the qualities of both Cuzzoni and Faustina. Besides the fact that the vocal requirements of Cuzzoni's material fell short of Strada's capabilities (as shown by the respective original roles), Strada seems to have been familiar with some general aspects of Faustina's style: their energetic and powerful voice production was similar, inspiring the production of castrato-type virtuoso arias, frequently with *terzini* coloraturas.

For the new cast, Handel drastically re-shaped *Tolomeo*, transforming it almost into a *pasticcio*, since he imported twelve arias from eight different operas – mainly for the sake of Bernacchi, Merighi and Fabri.<sup>1</sup> In Strada's role of Seleuce, two arias and her two duets with Tolomeo were changed in 1730 and retained at the 1733 revival. Instead of the Allegro *Aure portate*, she sang the aria composed a month earlier for her benefit in *Giulio Cesare*, *Io vò di duolo in duolo*. In place of *Torni omai*, Faustina's favourite insertion aria – written for her at the revival of *Floridante*, 1727, and repeated by her in that of *Radamisto*, 1728 – *Parmi che giunta in porto* was performed. The recitative *E dove, e dove mai* with the simple aria *Senza il suo bene* were cut, together with the middle section of *Fonti amiche*.<sup>2</sup> With Tolomeo (Bernacchi), Strada had the duet *Io t'abbraccio* (F<sup>#</sup> minor, C, Larghetto) from *Rodelinda* instead of *Se il cor perde*, as well as *T'amo, sì* (E major, C, Adagio–Andante) from *Riccardo Primo*, replacing *Tutta contenta* – both with lower notes (c<sup>#</sup>, b) for the *primo uomo*, indicating that the changes might have been made on Bernacchi's behalf. Though *Aure portate* is the first Allegro aria in the role after two slower pathetic *parlante* numbers, *Mi volgo* (I/3; G major, 12/8, Andante) and *Fonti amiche* (I/5; G minor, C, Larghetto), its short coloraturas, medium difficulty level and restricted tessitura made it reasonable that it should be dropped for *Io vò di duolo in duolo* (G minor, 6/8; Ex. 4.1), which served as Strada's signature music for Seleuce. Although it

<sup>1</sup> Winton Dean, *Handel's Operas, 1726-1741* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 117–118.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Friedrich Händel Gesellschaft, *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*, Ser. 2, Opern. Bd. 22, *Tolomeo, re d'Egitto: dramma per musica in tre atti*, HWV 25, hrsg. von Michael Pacholke (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2000), Preface.

is neither virtuosic nor dramatic, it is connected to Strada's name as her benefit aria in *Giulio Cesare*, has a melody catchy enough for the public – the favour of which was urgently sought by both Handel and Strada – and its monumentality was hidden in the details: larger legato lines, longer coloraturas, finer rhythmic elaboration and a higher tessitura with Strada's best-tinkling notes.

Example 4.1: Vocal part (A section) of *Io vò di duolo in duolo*, Strada's benefit aria in *Giulio Cesare*, bb. 13–48.

Io vò di duo - lo in duo - lo, mà il co - re che par so - lo, la spe - me lu - sin - ghie - ra non  
 ab - ban - do - na - cor; io vò di duo - lo in  
 duo - lo, mà il co - re, che par so - lo, mà il co - re, che par so - lo, la spe - me lu - sin - ghie - ra non  
 ab - ban - do - na an - cor, mà il co - re, che par so - lo, la spe - me lu - sin - ghie - ra non ab - ban - do -  
 na, non ab - ban - do - na an - cor, non  
 ab - ban - do - na, non ab - ban - do - na an - cor.

The jewel in the crown was certainly the Faustinian *Parmi che giunta in porto* (B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4; Ex. 4.2), her last aria at the end of Act III, to which the number it substituted, *Torni omai*, cannot be compared in grandiosity or virtuosity. *Parmi che giunta* has a strong *parlante* aspect but is enriched with *terzini*, which rarely occurred in Cuzzoni's repertoire but are very frequently, however, in that of Faustina and Strada.

Example 4.2: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Parmi che giunta in porto*, originally Faustina's insertion aria, bb. 56–76 and 137–146.

Par - mi che giun - ta in por - to io strin - ga il mio con - for - to, e l'au - ra, il le - gno, e  
 l'au - ra, il le - gno, e l'on - da ac - cres - ca - no il con - ten - to,  
 to,



The same is true of Strada's own substitute aria from a month earlier, *Parolette, vezzi e sguardi*, which she sang besides *Io vò di duolo in duolo* in her benefit performances of *Giulio Cesare* (1730) and in the revival of *Rinaldo* (1731). *Parolette* is the twin of *Parmi che giunta*, one might say, as the two arias are strictly similar in their concepts. This duplication of Faustinian characteristics strengthens the assumption that Strada as a soprano had a more powerful voice production than is typical of mezzo-sopranos. It was effective, therefore, to provide for her in the midst of a lyric aria-chain which had been written with this intense way of singing in mind. This kind of penetrating and full-bodied singing used to be the main characteristic of the art of castrati in that era. The presence of the typical elements of male soprano arias, such as trills, triplets, sustained notes and wide leaps, was significant in Strada's repertoire. The message of this insertion was that Strada's singing technique was an original soprano version of Faustina's, but not her simple copy at all, as Rolli implicitly stated.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the *siciliano* *Mi volgo*, the slow air *Fonti amiche* and *Io vò di duolo* demonstrate her pathetic skills, for which Cuzzoni was best known. Thus, by proving to the audience that she sang 'better than the two previous ones', in displaying the similarities with them, nevertheless the great difference was shown which made Strada unusual.<sup>4</sup> The former leading ladies were singers of their era; Strada with her more comprehensive art created glimpses of the future, predicting the next generations.

The case of the *Admeto* revival is slightly similar to that of *Tolomeo*. Strada played Antígona, Cuzzoni's former role,<sup>5</sup> with the insertion of an *aria brillante* by Faustina, *Io son qual Fenice* (F major, C, Andante).<sup>6</sup> Two mostly *parlante* arias, *Spera allor* and *E che ci posso far* dropped out, and Strada's first aria in Act I, *E per monti* (B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.3), was taken from Act II. Thus she began with Cuzzoni's most technically demanding number of the role, with a richer orchestration than usual and with some of the castrato patterns like octave leaps and long, ascending trill-chains.

<sup>3</sup> Rolli's letter to Riva, 6 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2, 1725–1734*, ed. by Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe and Anthony Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 316–317.

<sup>4</sup> Paolo Rolli's letter to Giuseppe Riva, London, 11 December 1729. *Ibid.*, 331–332.

<sup>5</sup> By Strada taking over the role of Antígona from Cuzzoni, this character was given priority over Alceste. See Ellen T. Harris, *The Librettos of Handel's Operas: A Collection of Seventy-one Librettos Documenting Handel's Operatic Career*, vol. xii (New York: Garland, 1989), *Admeto* (London, 1731).

<sup>6</sup> Faustina's additional aria for the same opera, *Admeto* in 1728.

Example 4.3: Vocal part (excerpt from the A section) of *E per monti*, bb. 11–46.

In this way, Strada sang two virtuoso numbers in the first act, since the other one, *Sen vola* (A major, C, Allegro), which concluded the act, remained in place. The sequence continued in Act II, with Faustina’s *Io son qual Fenice* (F major, C, Andante; Ex. 4.4), fitting perfectly into Strada’s vocal profile by representing the ongoing tradition of chiselled Andante arias with manifold coloraturas, demisemiquaver patterns, dotted rhythms, trills and arpeggiations. Nevertheless, in Faustina’s arias in general there are several unnecessarily repeated coloratura patterns, tokens of sheer virtuosity which Handel practically never applied for Strada.

Example 4.4: Vocal part (A section) of *Io son qual Fenice*, bb. 31–58.

Cuzzoni’s beautiful *lamento siciliana*, *Da tanti affanni oppressa* (E minor, 12/8, Larghetto) came next, followed by *La sorte mia vacilla* (G major, 3/8, Allegro), of a similar type to *E per monti*, but in triple time. In act III, Antigona has an intimate, slow and short air solely with continuo accompaniment, *Io ti bacio* (B<sup>b</sup> major, C). Handel achieved great success by

making Cuzzoni sing such *Falsa imagine*-like numbers, which seem to have been very important for him as picked up the threads of that style with Strada not only in revivals, but also in her original roles (see ch. 5). Cuzzoni must have been able to inspire Handel to develop his naturally florid and instinctive melodiousness, for which she had been favoured by him for years. Her melodic sensitivity matched one of Handel's main characteristics as a composer, which he wanted to transmit to Strada, who possessed another affinity with his musical personality, that of energy or *élan*.

Not surprisingly, the last aria was also taken from Alceste's character as played by Faustina, *Là dove gl'occhi giro* (III/6; A major, C, Andante; Ex. 4.5). It is an aria in Strada's style: Andante and full of *terzini*, contrary to the likewise lively but more common *E che ci posso far*, the number for which it was substituted.

Example 4.5: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Là dove gl'occhi giro*, bb. 8–18.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Là dove gl'occhi giro'. It is in G major, C major, and Andante. The score consists of three staves of music. The first staff starts at measure 8 and ends at measure 11. The second staff starts at measure 12 and ends at measure 15. The third staff starts at measure 16 and ends at measure 18. The lyrics are: 'Là do-ve gli oc - chi io - gi - ro, e per-be e i fior ri - mi - ro far si più va-ghi e bel - li, più bel - li, più va - ghi, più va-ghi, va-ghi e bel - li, per - chè il mio ben frà lor mos-se le pian - te;'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, trills, and slurs.

Thus, an imposing and improved aria set was drawn up, a concentrate from Cuzzoni's and Faustina's best, consisting of seven pieces: first, two lively arias (*E per monti* and *Sen vola*), than one of greatest virtuosity (*Io son qual Fenice*), followed by a *siciliana* (*Da tanti affanni oppressa*), a coloratura one again (*La sorte mia vacilla*), a beautiful pathetic song (*Io ti bacio*), and finally a birdsong with fluent triplets (*Là dove gl'occhi*). It certainly meant a breakthrough for Strada towards the appreciation of the British audience which she in fact seems to have gained indeed in 1731.

At the revival of *Alessandro* (1732), Strada sang Faustina's role, which was a further step in her career. Nevertheless, the choice itself was made for dramatic reasons as well as for the sake of character hierarchy: though Lisaura is the soprano, Rossane is the one who finally wins the heart of the Macedonian king; therefore she is the *prima donna*. Understandably, her first aria, *Lusinghe più care* (I/4; C, Allegro, *mà non troppo*; Ex.4.6) was raised from G major to A major, which – besides resulting in a brighter sound and an extra glamour for the already fantastic coloratura passages – meant the occurrence of the

pitch a" nineteen times in the *da capo* part and once more in the B section. Five times, the pitch is expressly accented: undoubtedly this air of fireworks made for a dazzling start.<sup>7</sup>

Example 4.6: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Lusinghe più care*, bb. 28–57.

**Allegro, ma non troppo**

lu-sin-ghe più ca-re, d'A-mor-ve-ri dar-di, vez-zo-se vo-la-te su'l lab-bro ne i guar-di, e tut-ta in vo-la-te l'al-trui li-ber-tà! lu-sin-ghe più ca-re, d'A-mor-ve-ri dar-di, vez-zo-se vo-la-te su'l lab-bro, ne i-guar-di, e tut-ta in-vo-la-te l'al-trui li-ber-tà, l'al-trui li-ber-tà, vo-la-te vez-zo-se vo-la-te, vez-zo-se vo-la-te su'l lab-bro, ne i guar-di, e tut-ta in-vo-la-te l'al-trui li-ber-tà, e tut-ta in-vo-la-te l'al-trui li-ber-tà, e tut-ta in-vo-la-re l'al-trui li-ber-tà!

*Un lusinghiero dolce pensiero* (I/7; A major, 3/4, Allegro) – the first theme of which Handel re-used in 1735 for *Tornami a vagheggiar*, originally Morgana’s aria but then passed on to Strada as Alcina – has a *leggero*-styled A section, contrasting with a more dramatic minor B section, which was meant to reflect the anxiety caused by Alessandro’s vacillant emotions. For the revival in 1732 Handel shortened this exceptionally long middle section. He cut only mere repetitions of a musical material already introduced. This might have been one of the advantages of his collaboration with Strada, i.e. she did not insist singing musically superfluous material just to set a record of virtuosity. Besides, the tessitura in the second half of the B part sinks into the real mezzo-soprano range, and this long dwelling on notes such as e’ or d’ may have been not so beneficial for her voice that it would have been worth retaining. The second act opens with Rossane’s soliloquy, *Solitudini amate–Aure, fonti* (C minor, C, Adagio; Ex. 4.7); it is an entirely pathetic scene, in which Strada could show all her refined lyric talents to captivate the audience.

<sup>7</sup> Dean, *Handel’s Operas, 1726–1741*, 25.



Example 4.7: Excerpt from the arioso *Aure, fonti*, bb. 1–9.

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system includes parts for Flauto I.II., Viol. I.II., and Viola, all marked *pp*. The vocal line begins with the lyrics: "Au-re, fon-ti, om-bre gra-di-te, che mi di-te che fa-rò? lan-gui-rò, spere-rò, ame-". The second system continues the vocal line with: "-rò le mi-e fe-ri-te, purchè venga-no guari-te dalla man-che m'im-piagò, dalla man, dalla". The third system concludes with the vocal line: "man-che m'im-pia-gò".

The compulsory Andante aria with numerous rhythmic complexities again did not fail: *Alla sua gabbia d'oro* (II/4; A major, Andante, e staccato; Ex. 4.8) is also a bird song, rich in trills, demisemiquaver-patterns, triplets, and repeated notes as well as *volatine*. The recitativo *Vilipese bellezze* together with the two duets in the finale were omitted. On the whole, Strada's role of Rossane was a perfectly-proportioned alloy of strength and agility. Rodolfo Celletti drew attention to the aforementioned birdsong patterns, as a similarity between Faustina and Strada.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, besides Faustina's birdsongs, in Strada's original repertory there are nightingale imitations such as *Vola l'augello* (*Sosarme* 1732), *Se nel bosco* (*Arianna in Creta* 1734) and *Lassa! ch'io t'ho perduta* (*Atalanta* 1736).

<sup>8</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *Storia del belcanto*, Contrappunti Series 15 (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1983); transl. in German by Federica Pauli, *Geschichte des Belcanto* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 101–102.

Example 4.8: Excerpt from *Alla sua gabbia d'oro*, bb. 31–37.

The image displays a musical score for three systems. The first system features a vocal line in the upper staff and a piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The lyrics under the vocal line are: "la sua prigion gli è ca-ra più del-la li-ber-tà, più del-la li-ber-tà,". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line and a more active treble line. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, showing a dense texture of sixteenth notes in the treble and a steady eighth-note bass line. The third system shows a continuation of the piano accompaniment with a similar texture.

Although Faustina had a ‘charming voice with quite a big sound, though a little rough’,<sup>9</sup> Winton Dean has noticed that in 1727, during the run of the performances, she demanded substitutions for *Lusinghe più care* and *Brilla nell’alma*, the most brilliant aria in her part, presumably because of the fullness of their orchestral accompaniment. Moreover, the violin parts in two other numbers, those of *Un lusinghiero* and *Tempesta e calma*, were thinned out by Handel for the same reason.<sup>10</sup> Although he did not bring *Brilla nell’alma* back for Strada, this case sheds light on the difference between her and Faustina. It is remarkable, that for Strada’s sake there was never a need to make such reductions, nor did she demand substitute arias in her original roles from Handel.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary: her original roles include richly orchestrated airs, the thickness of which is far beyond the fullest that Handel ever wrote for Faustina, who was reported by Quantz to have a solid and penetrating voice projection:

Faustina had a mezzo-soprano voice that was less clear than penetrating. [...] She possessed what the Italians call *un cantar granito*; her execution was articulate and brilliant. She had a fluent tongue for pronouncing words rapidly and distinctly, and a flexible throat for divisions, with so beautiful a shake that she put it in motion upon

<sup>9</sup> ‘La faustine a un gosier Charmant et la Voix assez grande mais un peu rude’. A French traveller’s letter to Mr Fougeroux, June 1728. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 233.

<sup>10</sup> Dean, *Handel’s Operas, 1726–1741*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> There were only two occasions when Strada sang a substitution aria in an original role: in Vivaldi’s *La verità in cimento* (Venice, 1720) and in Sarro’s *Tito Sempronio Gracco* (Naples, 1725). The reason for the new material for *Through the land* in Handel’s oratorio, *Athalia*’s revival in 1735 was probably Carestini’s presence, see ch. 6. She took over other character’s numbers, probably on Handel’s demand, at the revivals of *Poro*, *Alcina* and *Esther*, see chs 5 and 6.

short notice, just when she would. The passages might be smooth, or by leaps, or consisting of iterations of the same note; their execution was equally easy to her as to any instrument whatever. She was, doubtless, the first who introduced with success a swift repetition of the same note. She sang *adagios* with great passion and expression, but was not equally successful if such deep sorrow were to be impressed on the hearer as might require dragging, sliding, or notes of syncopation and *tempo rubato*.<sup>12</sup>

It is highly likely that the unclear factor in Faustina's singing took something away from the penetration of her voice, and this could be the reason why she did not feel secure enough singing *passaggi* with full orchestra. Strada, in contrast, had a 'better voice and better intonation' than Faustina together with a penetrating soprano voice, i.e. with a higher tessitura.<sup>13</sup> These features altogether allowed her voice to be heard naturally over even a full ensemble. A voice, especially a mezzo-soprano, which operates in the middle range, however so strong, cannot be heard through the orchestra if it is not clear. By contrast, a penetrating soprano, or even a soprano with a thinner sound but clear voice production, is audible. In other words, a mezzo-soprano needs more clarity than richness to dominate over the instrumental ensemble, a gift which Faustina might have been lacking. I would also remark, that a period orchestra, when it sounded freely and at full strength, was not of a light sound at all: singers of today who regularly perform pieces from the romantic repertoire with symphony orchestras, easily disappear vocally in the midst of a Baroque aria when the orchestra (consisting of period instruments) has one or two *forte* chords under the melody.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Faustina's arias in general have the trend of repeating the same coloratura patterns, and show more of a static phrase structure. Their units with refined and subtle rhythmic alterations are regularly divided by short pauses; these indicate another significant difference between Strada and her, and also have something to do with vocal shine and penetration as well as breath control. For a naturally dynamic voice such as Strada had, buoyancy is a necessity because the voice can best operate with such a directed energy in any tempo. For a more static voice it is ideal not to have constantly mobile phrases but rather slightly separated islands, isolated group of motifs articulated with short pauses, which can be executed in themselves first and then be connected into the larger

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: Payne and Son, 1789), 319.

<sup>13</sup> Rolli's letters to Riva, 6 November and 11 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 316–317 and 331–332.

<sup>14</sup> Baroque orchestras could indeed produce a louder sound as Milizia remarked: 'The ingredients of every overture are a pair of allegros, a slow section, and a deafening noise'. Francesco Milizia, 'Complete Formal and Material Treatise on the Theater (1794)', in: *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book*, ed. by Enrico Fubini (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 252–259: 254.

structure. This difference has nothing to do with coloratura ability, as the repetition of the same patterns on the same pitch is also a form of being static, and the goal of getting from point A to point B is usually of secondary importance in such coloraturas.

Table 4.1: Revivals of non-original roles, which Strada sang during her collaboration with Handel

Revivals	Dates	Numbers of performances	Role
<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	17 January 1730, 1 February 1732	11 + 4 = 15	Cleopatra
<i>Tolomeo</i>	19 May 1730, 2 January 1733	7 + 4 = 11	Seleuce
<i>Scipione</i>	3 November 1730	6	Berenice
<i>Rinaldo</i>	6 April 1731	6/7	Almirena
<i>Rodelinda</i>	4 May 1731	8	Rodelinda
<i>Tamerlano</i>	13 November 1731	3	Asteria
<i>Admeto</i>	7 December 1731	6/7	Antigona
Ariosti: <i>Coriolano</i>	25 March 1732	5	Volumnia
<i>Flavio</i>	18 April 1732	4	Emilia
<i>Acis and Galatea</i>	10 June 1732, 5 December 1732, 11 July 1733, 7 May 1734, 24 March 1736	4 + 4 + 1 + 1 + 2 = 12	Galatea
<i>Alessandro</i>	25 November 1732	6	Rossane
<i>Ottone</i>	13 November 1733	4	Teofane
<i>Il Parnasso in festa</i>	13 March 1734, 9 March 1737	4 + 1 = 5	Clio
<i>Il pastor fido</i>	18 May 1734, 9 November 1734	9 + 5 = 14	Erato, Amarilli
<i>Oreste</i>	18 December 1734	3	Ermione

Strada also sang some of the widescreen-roles of Cuzzoni from the era (see Table 4.1), when she was the absolute *prima donna* of Handel, i.e. prior to Faustina: Berenice (*Scipione*), Rodelinda, Cleopatra (*Giulio Cesare*), Teofane (*Ottone*), Emilia (*Flavio*) and Asteria (*Tamerlano*). Generally, Handel cut his operas into pieces when it came to revivals and rendered them into sort of *pasticci* of his own works. Yet the parts Strada took over either remained untouched – in contrast to the great number of aria substitutions and transpositions of other singer’s roles, and even the reshaping of a character and its dramatic function. Or, when changed, their technical difficulty was increased. This confirms that Strada had no problem in performing Cuzzoni’s arias; and to counteract the usual lack of real *bravura* numbers in Cuzzoni’s roles, Handel imported Faustina’s songs for her. In this way, Strada’s aptness to adjust her vocal apparatus to a brand new combination and succession of diverse well-known patterns was demonstrated, an ability probably aided by her suspected instrumental training and her excellent music reading as well as memorizing skills.

*Giulio Cesare* had been revived for the Second Academy from 17<sup>th</sup> January 1730 onwards.<sup>15</sup> Strada sang the original role without any changes nine times, until 21<sup>st</sup> February. The performances used the old costumes and stage set, meaning that Strada was wearing Cuzzoni’s dresses. *Giulio Cesare* was the second production of the new cast, right after the run of *Lotario*. Lady Sarah Cowper’s surviving letter from London to her brother

<sup>15</sup> There was another revival on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1732, a shortened version of the work. In Strada’s part the benefit arias were withdrawn, *Tutto può donna* and *Piangerò* cut, and *Venere bella* reduced to its A section. Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel’s Operas, 1704–1726* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 504.

in Venice gives a good insight not only into the partiality of the audience (she repeats Rolli's sarcastic words), but also that Strada started to conquer them from the very beginning:

We have lost all taste for Musick. Our great people prefer to Cuzzoni a Second Faustina [Strada], only with a better voice. And Anna Strada del Po is going to be the Cleopatra once sung by Cuzzoni & in her very cloaths. That great Mistress of Musick [Cuzzoni] you hear every night is despis'd as an old fashion'd Singer, & such staff admir'd as was never heard before with approbation of an English Ear.<sup>16</sup>

The tenth performance, on 21<sup>st</sup> March, however, was Strada's benefit, where new songs were introduced, and this performance was repeated on the 31<sup>st</sup>.<sup>17</sup> Concerning only this last performance, the advertisement of the *Daily Journal* proclaimed that 'The Scenes and Dresses are all intirely new'.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, both the repetition of Strada's benefit version of *Giulio Cesare* with the new arias and the new costumes suggest that it was a considerable success (not excluding the possibility that as a 'second benefit', she also gained a part of the proceeds from the performance on 31<sup>st</sup>). Secondly, perhaps the new dresses and scenery were meant for 21<sup>st</sup> March, but they were not ready in time; either way, Strada's Cleopatra was so convincing that it had to be repeated, but not in the costumes of Cuzzoni. If this latter was the case, a Royal person, perhaps Princess Anne, could have initiated such an expensive change, which would have been nonsensical otherwise, because this was the very last performance of *Giulio Cesare* in the year. The opera was revived only once afterwards, in February 1732, in a shortened version and only for four performances. This circumstance sheds a clear light on Strada's growing reputation.

The stunning fact that *Io vò di duolo* substituted even *Piangerò* underlines the notion that, especially in the case of revivals, the work itself was of secondary importance, whereas and all the focus was on the vocal and musical personality of the singers, whose task was to render any performance successful. *Piangerò* – to take this example – has a static pathetic lament in the A section, with very little motion built within the melodic structure. The fierce virtuosity of the B section is mainly done by the violins, while in the vocal part it is limited to two medium-sized coloratura patterns; the rest is in *parlante* style. As this *Giulio Cesare* performance was Strada's benefit, she not only had to sing arias

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<sup>16</sup> Lady Sarah Cowper to Earl Cowper, early January 1730. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 335.

<sup>17</sup> *Daily Journal*, 21 March 1730. *Ibid.*, 348; see Dean and Knapp, *Handel's Operas, 1704–1726*, 503–505.

<sup>18</sup> *Daily Journal*, 31 March 1730. None of the other advertisements of *Giulio Cesare* have this reference to new stage sets and costumes (see the *Daily Journal* on 17, 24, 27 and 31 January, 7, 14, 17 and 21 February, and 21 March 1730). Ilias Chrissochoidis, *Handel Reference Database*. <http://ichriss.ccarh.org/HRD/1730.htm> Accessed 2 December 2015.

which she could not only perform very well but they had to be hits displaying the very essence of her vocal nature. *Io vò di duolo* has motion and energy in the frame of a moderate tempo and contains long coloraturas with some rhythmic variety, fine chromatic moments, large phrase structures, passion in interaction with the violins, and it is quite catchy enough to impress the audience. It served to highlight Strada's expressiveness, vocal colouring and rhythmic sensitiveness, connected with a proper use of declamation and to some extent, *tempo rubato*.

The other substitute aria written especially for Strada for her benefit, *Parolette, vezzi e sguardi* (A major, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.9; Track 7) – was the replacement of *Tutto può donna vezzosa* and a revised version of *Una schiera di piaceri*, Bellezza's aria from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (1707),<sup>19</sup> sung by Strada herself later, in 1737 for its revival as *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*. This aria shows the other side of the coin: it is a *virtuoso coloratura* movement marked with *terzini*. Through its special *parlante*-effect it also provides an example of Strada's presumably expressive pronunciation of words.<sup>20</sup> Its similarity to *Parmi che giunta* suggests that Strada had the same ability of a 'fluent tongue for pronouncing words rapidly and distinctly' that Faustina possessed.<sup>21</sup> As we have seen in Vivaldi's *Silvia*, one of Strada's early productions in Milan, she had effective acting skills, necessarily including a clear and meaningful presentation of the text. (Moreover, given the fact that she sang in English in Handel's oratorios while for her fellow singers the arias were translated into Italian, and that Senesino was scorned for his Welsh-like pronunciation while no stone was thrown at Strada,<sup>22</sup> it is very probable that she had a genuine ability for authentic pronunciation and accentuation, which presumably was valid in her mother tongue as well.)

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<sup>19</sup> *Una schiera*'s main ideas are based on borrowings from Francesco Antonio Pistocchi's second setting of *Alma forte*, an aria from his *pastorale per musica, Il Narciso* (1697). *Parolette* is supplemented furthermore with elements from Telemann's *Harmonischer Gottes-Dienst*. John H. Roberts, 'Handel and the Shepherds of Ansbach', in: *Words on Music: Essays in Honor of Andrew Porter on the Occasion of his 75th Birthday*, ed. by David Rosen and Claire Brook. Festschrift Series, 20. (New York, Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 2003), 230–255: 244–245.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhard Strohm suggested to me that rapid *terzini*, one by one on syllables actually give a strong *parlante* affect like this aria of Strada, *Parolette, vezzi e sguardi* or Faustina's *Parmi che giunta in porto*.

<sup>21</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 319.

<sup>22</sup> *See and Seem Blind* (*Daily Journal*, 8 June 1732), *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 535.

Example 4.9: Excerpt from *Parolette, vezzi e sguardi*, Strada's benefit aria from *Giulio Cesare*, bb. 10–63.

Pa-ro-let-te, vez-zi e sguardi,  
vez-zi e sguardi, son di donna i for-ti dar-di per combat-  
-ter o-gni cor, pa-ro-let-te, vez-zi e sguardi,  
son di donna i for-ti dar-  
di, pa-ro-let-te, vez-zi e sguardi, son di donna i for-ti dar-  
-di per combat-ter o-gni  
cor, pa-ro-let-te, vez-zi e sguardi, son di donna i for-ti

However and above all, Strada's powerful voice projection and unusual tessitura become obvious here. There are two axes in this number: e" and a", the notes displayed with *messe di voce* and strongly connected to coloratura passages. Likewise, two distinct areas can be observed in Handel's use of vocal range: below and above e", most probably indicating the axis of Strada's registers. Her most sonorous notes might have fallen between e" and a", later concentrated on the f"-f#"–g" area, as the original roles written for her in 1735–37 show. After the initial *parlante* phrases, the strength of the voice is established through accents and longer notes in the head range (bb. 17–22); then agility takes the lead (from b. 25), after which the two are mingled in bb. 33–41 and later. Finally, the culmination of this process arrives with the two-phrase-marathon between bb. 48 and 63, containing a two-bar *mesa di voce* on a", which is surrounded by *terzini* scale motifs before and after. Triplets are perfectly suited to a thicker voice production: this is why Faustina as well as the *castrati* preferred them too. The middle section – contrary to the trend of contrast with the A part which in coloratura arias, means a relaxation for the singer generally – does not change in intensity, only modulates to the parallel minor, that of C#: its demands of virtuosity are equal to the main section. To sum up, the aria goes in every respect far beyond not only *Tutto può donna vezzosa*, but is also superior to *Da tempeste*, the highest mountain of the original role.

These two of Strada's arias are widely different to the Cuzzonian music of Cleopatra in their ratio of phrase structuring, tessitura and rhythmic environment. Accentuations like those on the words 'son di donna i forti dardi' in *Parolette* would be atypical in Cuzzoni's but they regularly occur in Strada's repertoire. At the same time, the arias of Cuzzoni



interpreted by Strada must have sounded remarkably different, lacking an innocent lightness. Cuzzoni's voice, in spite of the fact that sustained notes occur regularly in her repertoire, warbled as if she had a 'nest of nightingales in her belly', a description that might refer to a continuous natural vibrato, likely of voluble and rippling waves, while Strada's might have had a slower motion with longer ones.<sup>23</sup> With the latter, one could achieve bar-long sustained notes more easily and effectively through stretching them flexibly along the course of a *messa di voce*, which includes not only the increase and the decrease of the dynamics but also the *vibrato*, automatically. Furthermore, Strada's wide range allowed Handel to extend her phrases not only up to *c*<sup>'''</sup> but also down to *b* (and she even sang the low *a* in the *pasticcio Didone* in 1737), which shows that her voice sounded with a living and tinkling resonance below *e'*, untypically of sopranos. Handel, while listening to how differently Cuzzoni's arias manifested themselves in Strada's voice (and personality) during the first performances, could thus have learned a lot more about her vocal specifics.

Comparison with Cuzzoni was also made possible by the revival of *Scipione* (March 1730). In the case of *Berenice*, two major changes shaped a medium level role with a single outstandingly brilliant grand aria to a musical portrait of versatile vocal acrobatics and colours of expression. *Com'onda incalza* and *Già cessata* were replaced by two arias from *Riccardo Primo*.<sup>24</sup> The first aria of *Berenice*, *Un caro amante*, is an *Andante siciliana* (12/8, F major) which might have been performed by Strada not in the light style of Cuzzoni but with a denser yet silvery voice production. *Dolci aurette* (1/5; E<sup>b</sup> major, C, Largo; Ex. 4.10), an intimate largo number with continuo accompaniment only, is of the same *Falsa imagine*-type which Handel established for Strada in their later productions. However, the question of size makes a great difference: a five-part *da capo* form would have been far too large for such an air, the essence of which lay in the expressiveness of small gestures and *quasi sotto voce* timbre. Although the section between bars 8 and 21 may be superfluous, Cuzzoni probably would not have been agreed to sing such a short air. I think that Handel found in Strada the person bold enough to make an impression within 10 or 16 bars (as in the operas *Atalanta* and *Berenice*, for instance – see ch. 5).

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<sup>23</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 316; see Frederick Neumann, 'The Vibrato Controversy', *Performance Practice Review* IV/1 (1991), 14–27: 18; Ellen T. Harris, 'Voices', In: *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, eds. Howard Meyer Brown and Stanley Sadie. Norton/Grove Handbooks in Music. (New York: Norton, 1989), 97–116: 105.

<sup>24</sup> Dean and Knapp, *Handel's Operas, 1704–1726*, 618–619.

Example 4.10: Excerpt from *Dolci aurette*, bb. 1–8.

*Largo.*

BERENICE.

Bassi.

Dol-ci au-ret-te che spi-

-ra-te, deh! vo-la-te all' i-dol mi-o, poi tor-na-te a dir dov' è, poi tor-na-te, dol-ci au-

-ret-te, poi tor-na-te a dir dov' è!

The other *siciliana* of Berenice, *Com'onda incalza*, was eliminated, and the more melodious *Di notte il pellegrino* (F<sup>#</sup> minor, C, Andante; Ex. 4.11), Costanza's (Cuzzoni), a lively aria from *Riccardo Primo*, took its place, full of original ideas and with a great demand for flexible vocal stretching and crystal-clear intonation.

Example 4.11: Vocal part of *Di notte il pellegrino*, bb. 18–34.

*Andante*

di notte il pel-le-gri-no, se per-de il suo ca-mi-no, non sa-do-ve gui-dar il pas-so er-ran-

te, non sa do-ve gui-dar, non sa, non sa do-ve gui-dar il pas-so er-

ran-te, non sa do-ve gui-dar il pas-so er-ran-te, il

pas-so er-ran-te, non sa do-ve gui-dar il pas-so er-ran-te.

*Scoglio d'immota fronte* (II/8; D major, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.12) is a concerto movement in grand castrato style, with an orchestration consisting of strings with three violin parts, two oboes, bassoons, and a voice part with wide notes, wide range and a display of vocal agility. Handel carefully manipulated the accompaniment for Cuzzoni so that when the vocalist enters, the body of the ensemble practically disappears. By all means, Strada's must have been a more powerful performance.

Example 4.12: Excerpt from *Scoglio d'immota fronte*, bb. 13–35.

The image displays a musical score for an excerpt from *Scoglio d'immota fronte*, spanning measures 13 to 35. The score is written for a full orchestra and a vocal soloist. It is in the key of D major and 4/4 time. The vocal line, marked *Solo.*, begins in measure 13 with the lyrics "Sco - glio d'im - mo - ta fron - te". The orchestration includes strings, woodwinds, and brass. The score features dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo) and *p* (piano). The lyrics "nel tor - bi - do e - le - men - to, nel tor - bi - do e - le - men - to," are written below the vocal line in the second system.

ci - ma d'ec - cel - so mon - te al tem - pe - star del ven -

This system contains the first three staves of a musical score. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics. The middle two staves are piano accompaniment. The bottom two staves are a double bass line. The music is in a major key and 4/4 time.

- to, è negli af - fet - ti suoi quest' - al - ma a - man -

This system contains the next three staves of the musical score. It continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment from the previous system. The lyrics are: "- to, è negli af - fet - ti suoi quest' - al - ma a - man -".

te;

This system contains the final three staves of the musical score. It continues the piano accompaniment and double bass line. The lyrics "te;" are written below the bottom staff.

*Tutta brillanti rai* (B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.13), Faustina's unmitigated *bravura* aria (in the role of Pulcheria in *Riccardo Primo*, Act III) is in common time and has more variable coloraturas than *Il fulgido seren* or its Cuzzonian substitution, *Già cessata*, both of which are in triple metre and exhibit little finesse. The fact that Strada forwent the advantages of high notes despite that two virtuoso soprano arias were available, and sang Faustina's mezzo-soprano number, speaks of a strong distinction between the ways the composer handled certain voices.

Example 4.13: Excerpt from *Tutta brillanti rai*, bb. 23–37.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Tutta brillanti rai'. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line (soprano) and a basso continuo line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: 'tut.to brillan.ti ra.i per lun.go scin.til.lar, fuor.d'a.gi.ta.to mar, fuor.d'a.gi.ta.to mar mi scor.ge.al ca.ro li.do, al ca.ro li.do, mi scor.ge.al ca.ro li.do a.mi.ca stel.la,'. The score includes various musical ornaments (trills) and dynamic markings (p, f).

A well-written aria gives the singer comfort to apply his or her accustomed voice production. In my opinion, Strada had to synchronize her voice slightly to Cuzzoni's arias – though Handel had the ingenuity to catch the universal while addressing the individual – and vice versa; she could adjust numbers to her different vocal nature without doing any harm to their musical essence.

A revival of *Rodelinda* for eight nights took place from 4<sup>th</sup> May 1731 onwards, after the splendidly successful fifteen-night run of *Poro* in January–February of the same year. The choice of the lamenting widow, in particular, might have been inspired by Strada's triumph in a fully pathetic role completely lacking Allegro *bravura* numbers: that of Cleofide.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> I would like to thank Reinhard Strohm for drawing my attention to the similarities between *Rodelinda*'s and *Cleofide*'s music.

Nevertheless, besides broadly pathetic numbers with declamatory melodies in which superb vocal quality and tone colour could give delight – *Hò perduto il caro sposo* (I/1; C minor, 3/4, Largo), *Ombre piante* (I/7; B minor, 3/8, Largo) and *Ahi perchè, giusto ciel* (III/4; C minor, 3/4, Larghetto) – Rodelinda’s role does contain Allegro and more-or-less coloratura arias, like *L’empio rigor del fato* (I/1; G minor, 3/8, Allegro), *Morra, sì; Spietati, io vi giurai* (II/3; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro) or *Mio caro bene* (III/9; G major, C, Allegro). As usual in the Cuzzonian repertoire, the coloraturas are shorter or moderate, longer phrases provide chances to steal breath, and the focus is on vocal agility rather than real virtuosity. Johann Joachim Quantz’s description of Handel’s *Admeto* performance in 1727 seems to confirm this, describing a high, clear and light soprano voice which might be not strong and penetrating enough to execute longer coloratura chains firmly:

Cuzzoni had a very agreeable and clear soprano voice, a pure intonation and a beautiful *trillo*. Her range extended from the middle c to the c above the staff. Her ornamentation did not seem to be artificial due to her nice, pleasant, and light style of delivery, and with its tenderness she won the hearts of their listeners. The *passagi* in the allegros were not done with the greatest facility, but she sang them very fully and pleasantly. Her acting was somewhat cold and her figure was not too favourable for the theatre.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, the high tessitura, including *messe di voce* in the head-register, gives an extra emphasis on the glimmering colour of the voice and thus – together with Handel’s *perpetuum mobile* type of orchestration with the violins complementing the voice part constantly – renders the sensation of those numbers more virtuoso than they actually are. The *siciliana*, *Ritorna, o caro e dolce* has been omitted. *Ahi perchè, giusto ciel* (Ex. 4.14), Cuzzoni’s substitution of *Se’l mio duol* at the 1725–26 run – an altered version of *Deh! lasciatemi il nemico* from the previous opera, *Tamerlano* (1724) – was retained for Strada as well.<sup>27</sup> A nice coincidence, indeed, because this Larghetto air still has a certain motion marked by triplets, which are typical of Strada but very exceptional for Cuzzoni.

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<sup>26</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, ‘Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf von ihm selbst entworfen’, in: Friedrich Wilhelm Marburg: *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, vol. i (1754), Eng. trans. in Paul Nettl: *Forgotten Musicians* (New York, 1951), 280–319: 312. Cited in Steven C. LaRue, ‘Handel and the Aria’, in: Donald Burrows (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Handel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111–121: 115.

<sup>27</sup> Dean and Knapp, *Handel’s Operas, 1704–1726*, 592–593.

Example 4.14: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Ahi, perchè, giusto ciel*, bb. 5–25.

**Larghetto**

5 Ahi per- chè, giu- sto ciel, tan- ta pe- na a que- sto cor? ahi- dov' è, ahi- dov' è l'in- fe- li- ce che spi-  
 13 rò? deh' ch'io ba- ci il cor- po e san- gue, poi con- ten- ta, poi con- ten- ta mo- ri- rò, mo- ri- rò,  
 21 deh, ch'io ba- ci il cor- po e san- gue, poi con- ten- ta mo- ri- rò;

*Ahi perchè* is slightly reminiscent of *Se pietà* of Cleopatra, from *Giulio Cesare*, both in melody and its text. Its strange mixture of ravishing melodiousness and sigh-gestures separated with pauses create a solemnity, similar to Strada's *Menti eterne* in *Lotario*. The duet *Se il cor* from *Tolomeo* (Act II) was performed instead of *Io t'abbraccio*, probably because it had already been used at the revival of *Tolomeo*.

The 1731 revival of *Rinaldo* caused the work to be altered very heavily, especially impacting the third act, which was almost entirely rewritten. In Strada's case (taking over the former, exceptionally modest part of Isabella Girardeau),<sup>28</sup> there were also more changes than usual: Almira's first air, *Combatti da forte*, went to Armida, and Strada sang her own first aria she performed on the London stage, *Quel cor che mi donasti* from *Lotario*. That Handel brought it back to her not only here but with a parodied text in *Il pastor fido* shows that *Quel cor* functioned a bit like a baggage aria for Strada, presumably because of the numerous occasions it holds for trills, one of the *prima donna*'s most brilliant skills – as Burney noticed concerning this particular number. She sang the 1711 versions of *Augelletti* (I/6; G major, C, Adagio) and *Lascia ch'io pianga* (II/4; F major, 3/2, Largo), while *Parolette, vezzi e sguardi*, her benefit aria – completely unsuitable for the character of Almirena – found its way into the role, closing act II. Among the two duets of Almirena in the revised version, *Scherzano sul tuo volto* (I/6; G major, C, Allegro) was transposed a whole tone lower, from A major to G major, to accommodate its range not for Strada but rather for Senesino; the other, *Al trionfo del nostro furore* (III/6; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro), with two oboe parts and bassoons, was a new one in the sense that it was taken from Armida and Argante and given to Almira and Goffredo, the latter entrusted to the contralto Francesca Bertolli. Almirena's last aria, *Bel piacere* was replaced by Faustina's *Sì, caro, sì* from *Admeto* (A major, 3/8, Allegro; Ex. 4.15) and put at the very end of the opera.

<sup>28</sup> Winton Dean, 'Girardeau, Isabella', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 20 December 2015.

Example 4.15: Vocal part (excerpt from the A section) of *Si, caro, sì*, bb. 17–66.

Since Strada in *Admeto* embodied the role of Cuzzoni, that of Antigona, she did not have the opportunity to claim this number of great importance, which ‘made the boxes clatter’ in Faustina’s time and long thereafter: Burney did not fail to remark that it was ‘pleasing every class of hearers; [...] this song was the delight of all lovers of Music throughout the kingdom many years after the opera was laid aside’.<sup>29</sup> It proved to be the jewel in the crown for Strada, too, winning the favour of the audience and finally taking the former glory of the ‘Rival Queens’ for herself: on her portrait, painted by Johannes Verelst in 1732, she is holding a printed sheet of music of this aria with the superscription of her name.

*Flavio* was revived by Handel between 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April 1732 for four performances; Strada sang the role of Emilia without any changes or adjustments. The first air, the *siciliana Quanto dolci* (I/3; G major, 3/4, Larghetto), might have been favourable to her through its triplet-coloraturas. The majority of the arias do not present technical difficulties and perhaps neither posed great challenges for Strada; only *Da te parto* (III/1; A minor, 3/8; Ex. 4.16) has a fine passage on the words ‘ch’il mio dulolo’ in the second half of the *da capo* section, very similar to that ominous phrase in Strada’s *Parolette* with the sustained note a”, but with no bass accompaniment, indicating Cuzzoni’s light voice production.

Example 4.16: Vocal part of *Da te parto*, bb. 50–86.

<sup>29</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 320.



Interestingly enough, prior to *Flavio*, Attilio Ariosto's *Coriolano* was revived by Handel – from 25<sup>th</sup> March 1732 on, for five performances – where in the former role of Cuzzoni, that of Volunnia, Strada encountered longer coloratura passages than in any Handelian Cuzzonian part.

The revival of *Ottone*, which lasted for four performances from 13<sup>th</sup> November 1733 onwards, had its difficulties. Handel had originally planned it for spring 1733, maybe to close the season with it in May and June after the oratorio *Deborah* was premièred and *Esther* revived (March and April), but he surprisingly revived *Floridante* for the second time that year (8–19<sup>th</sup> May) and Giovanni Bononcini's *Griselda* (22<sup>nd</sup> May–27<sup>th</sup> June) instead, without Strada. Earlier that season, the run of *Orlando* was interrupted twice: on 13<sup>th</sup> February and at the beginning of March, when *Floridante* was revived (3–13<sup>th</sup> March), likewise suddenly, due to Strada's illness.<sup>30</sup> Not only that: Strada was indisposed on 3<sup>rd</sup> April too, and could not sing *Deborah* (somebody must have replaced her).<sup>31</sup> This means that after May 5<sup>th</sup> until the Oxford act in July 1733, Strada did not sing for two entire months (her benefit was also delayed and took place at Oxford on 11<sup>th</sup> July with the revival of *Acis and Galatea*) because of indisposition and illness, which might suggest that she was pregnant and gave birth to a child (not necessarily, of course, but it is a possibility). In any case, it would explain Handel's improvisatory revivals and the cancellation of *Ottone*. In addition, most probably a performance of *Ottone* would have been for Strada's benefit, since *Acis and Galatea* seems very much to have been a forced solution. After all, Strada was not sick during the winter: she was indisposed once in February, whereafter she did not sing between 21<sup>st</sup> February and 16<sup>th</sup> March (*Floridante* revived); oratorios followed, requiring no action on stage (17<sup>th</sup> March–17<sup>th</sup> April), but on 4<sup>th</sup> April Strada was 'very ill' again. If she was indeed pregnant, only *Orlando*'s spring run of five performances could have meant some risk (21<sup>st</sup> April–5<sup>th</sup> May). This is at least suspicious. She might have given birth to a child around the end of May / beginning of June, having enough time to return for the Oxford 'Act'.<sup>32</sup> If this was the case, she was about two months pregnant

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<sup>30</sup> 'Signora Strada, on Account of whose Indisposition the Run of the new Opera of Orlando was interrupted, continues very ill.' *Daily Advertiser*, 5 March 1733. *The London Stage: 1660-1800. Part 3: 1729-1747*, ed. by Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960), 275.

<sup>31</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, 4 April 1733. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 609.

<sup>32</sup> The lying-in period at that time was supposed to last between four to six weeks, but actresses and singers usually returned to stage earlier. Margherita Durastanti, for instance, returned in a month (by the end of March 1721) after her daughter was born. There is no evidence of Strada being pregnant, because in the 1700s it was very rare that pregnancy was announced publicly, and no private letter or correspondence survives about her personally. Helen E. M. Brooks, "The Divided Heart of the Actress": Late Eighteenth-Century Actresses and the "Cult of Maternity", in: *Stage Mothers: Women, Work, and the Theatre, 1660-1830*, ed. by Laura Engel and Elaine M. McGirr (London: Bucknell University Press, 2014), 19-42: 27-28; Kathryn Lowerre, 'Staged Virtue: Anastasia Robinson as Ideal Mother in Two Operas of the 1720s', in: *ibid.*, 137-158: 139-140.

when the 1732/33 season began on 4<sup>th</sup> November with *Catone in Utica*. In the meantime, by mid-June 1733, the Opera of the Nobility started to form an opposition to Handel, with the policy, dated January 1733, that a contract would be offered to any singer but Strada.<sup>33</sup> According to my theory, her pregnancy might have been an open secret by then, and thus the Nobility had one more reason to exclude her (besides her fidelity to Handel and her opposition to Senesino and Handel's rivals such as Bononcini). Handel became abandoned by all his singers, except Strada.<sup>34</sup>

After the new season had begun, and a great Royal event, Princess Anne's wedding to the Prince of Orange, had been postponed from November 1733 until March 1734, the revival of *Ottone* suddenly became actual again. Although Handel had to alter the work heavily for his new singers, Strada sang Teofane, the former role of Cuzzoni, unchanged. Similarly to *Flavio*, it seems to have been a routine task for her, also because Teofane's music is not among Cuzzoni's most brilliant parts. It was her first role performed in January 1723 but written by Handel in the autumn of 1722, not yet with Cuzzoni in mind: *Falsa imagine* (I/3; A major, C; Ex. 4.17) and *Affanni del pensier* (I/10; F minor, 12/8, Larghetto) were meant for Margherita Durastanti, who used to be a soprano but never a high one, and whose tessitura gradually shifted to the mezzo-soprano range.<sup>35</sup> Cuzzoni also might have regarded the continuo aria *Falsa imagine* as old-fashioned and therefore inappropriate for her very first appearance on the London stage.

Example 4.17: Excerpt from *Falsa imagine*, bb. 1–14.

TEOFANE.  
(Bassi.)

(Violone.)

Falsa i.  
ma-gi-ne, min-gan-na-sti, mi mo-stra-sti un vol-to a-ma-bi-le, e quel vol-to mal-let-to, e quel  
vol-to mal-let-to! falsa i. ma-gi-ne, min-gan-na-sti, mi mo-stra-sti un vol-to a-  
ma-bi-le, e quel vol-to mal-let-to, e quel vol-to, e quel vol-to mal-let-to!

<sup>33</sup> Earl of Delawarr's letter to the Duke of Richmond, January 1733. Graydon Beeks, 'Anna Strada del Pò: Handel's "New" Soprano', *Newsletter of the American Handel Society* 10/3 (Dec., 1995), 3.

<sup>34</sup> Dean and Knapp, *Handel's Operas, 1704–1726*, 440.

<sup>35</sup> LaRue, 'Handel and the Aria', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, 111–121; Winton Dean, 'Durastanti, Margherita', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 19 May 2015.

Cuzzoni's higher tessitura starts to show itself in *Alla fama* (II/11; B<sup>b</sup> major, 12/8, Allegro, ma non troppo) and *Gode l'alma consola* (III/6; A major, 3/8, Andante), which could display Strada's ringing tones as well. Some opportunities to demonstrate vocal agility are provided by *Benchè mi sia crudele* (III/6; A minor, 3/8; Ex. 4.18) and *Spera si* (II/5; A minor, C, Non troppo Allegro; Ex. 4.19), a substitute and an additional aria written for Cuzzoni which most probably were kept for the 1733 revival as well.

Example 4.18: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Benchè mi sia crudele*, bb. 46–74.

ben - chè mi - sia - cru - de - le, ben - chè in - fe - del - mi - si - a, in - fi - da - l'al - ma - mi - a,  
in - fi - da l'al - ma mia, nò, non sa - rà co - si, nò, non sa - rà,  
nò, non sa - rà, nò, non sa - rà co - si.

Example 4.19: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Spera si*, bb. 27–51.

spe - ra - si, spe - ra - si, mi di - ce il - co - re, spe - ra - si, spe - ra - si, spe - ra - si, mi  
di - ce il - co - re, ch'il - de - stin - si can - ge - rà, ch'il - de - stin - si  
can - ge - rà, mi di - ce il - co - re, ch'il - de - stin - si can - ge - rà, si can - ge - rà, si can - ge - rà,  
ch'il - de - stin - si can - ge - rà.

Surprisingly, *terzini* occur in both arias and in the role of Emilia (*Flavio*) as well, probably because these were the very first roles by Handel for Cuzzoni and it might have taken some time for the composer to realize that they were not the most advantageous coloratura patterns for her, in contrast with Strada, for whom they were very favourable.

The revival of the 'fine masque'<sup>36</sup> *Acis and Galatea* on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1732 resulted in a hybrid genre in every respect: it was a half-way between opera and oratorio, sung partly in Italian, partly in English, according to the singers' nationalities. Handel kept six numbers from his English pastoral drama of 1720 and mixed them with arias refreshed from the *serenata a tre*, *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo*, which he composed back in 1708 in Naples, enriching it with various choruses, some taken from the *Birthday Ode* (*Contento sol*

<sup>36</sup> Viscount Percival's Diary, 20 June 1732. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: 1955; reprinted New York: 1974), 295.

*promette*, duet with choir, Part I) and his *Brockes' Passion* (*Vuoi veder*, for solo and choir, Part II), both with the participation of Strada.<sup>37</sup> Galatea's first aria, *Hush, ye pretty warbling choir* went to Clori, while the second one (*As when the dove*, Part I) got an Italian text (*Si lagna augel*). *È un fuoco quell d'amore* (taken from HWV83 *Aminta e Fillide*, Nr 8, 1708) was transposed a whole tone higher, from G minor to A minor, letting Strada go up to b". Similarly, *Se m'ami, o caro* (Part III; G minor, 3/4; taken from HWV 72 *Acis, Galatea e Polifemo* 1708) was raised up a minor third from E minor to G minor. Although in the short coloratura aria, *Del mar fra l'onde*, Strada could show her 'claws' as far as vocal power is concerned, it was only sung in 1732 and was not retained for the subsequent revivals: in 1733 there was no aria in its place. In 1734 *Nel mio core* (HWV 8a *Il pastor fido*, 1712), a more virtuoso number but of a light orchestration, was performed either by Silvio or by Dorinda, and taken over by Strada as Galatea in 1736. This work was performed in costumes and with scenery but without any action on the stage.<sup>38</sup> The choir was formed from the nine soloists; Strada, Mrs Roberts and Mrs Davis as Galatea, Clori and Eurilla mostly sang the same part. There was a further performance in Oxford in July 1733 (Strada's benefit),<sup>39</sup> together with the oratorios *Esther*, *Deborah* and with the première of *Athalia*, but only Strada was present from the previous year's cast; Senesino was missing and the excellent bass Montagnana was replaced by the German emigrant Gustavus Waltz, who joined Handel's company in London afterwards.<sup>40</sup> There was also a single performance with Carestini in 1734 and some further bilingual ones in 1736.<sup>41</sup>

There were three *pasticci* of Handel's own works containing arias of Strada's from former original Handelian roles: *Il Parnasso in festa*, a *festa teatrale* or *serenata*, was written for the celebration of Anne, Princess Royal, and Prince William of Orange's marriage, and performed – in costumes and with a stage set but without acting – on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1734, the evening before the wedding. This production could be considered as a revival of the oratorio *Athalia*, or at least of its arias with Italian texts.<sup>42</sup> *Athalia* had been performed in Oxford in July the previous year with huge success; no wonder Handel

<sup>37</sup> Stanley Sadie, 'Acis and Galatea', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>38</sup> 'At the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden, this Day [. . .] will be reviv'd a Serenata, call'd Acis and Galatea. There will be no Action on the Stage, but the Scene will represent a Rural Prospect of Rocks, Grotto's, &c. amongst which will be dispos'd a Chorus of Nymphs and Shepherds. The Habits and other Decorations suited to the Subject'. *London Daily Post*, 24 March 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 401.

<sup>39</sup> Deutsch, *Handel*, 325.

<sup>40</sup> Winton Dean, 'Waltz, Gustavus', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 25 May 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Donald Burrows, *Handel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 231 and 245.

<sup>42</sup> Discussed in ch. 6. Former arias of Josabeth: *Verginette dotte e belle* (Bloomin vergins), *Con un vezzo lusinghiero* (Soothing tyrants), duet *Non potrò mai il cor*, *Quanto breve è il godimento* (Faithful cares), *Nel spiegar sua voce* (Through the land); one aria used to belong to *Athalia*, that of *Circondin lor vite* (My vengeance awakes me).

wanted to introduce his superb music in London as well, especially to the Royal Family. *Il Parnasso* had a sort of oratorio style, due to the inserted chorus numbers, most probably sung by the soloists themselves, similarly to Handel's oratorio performances. The *Daily journal* recorded:

There is one standing Scene which is Mount Parnassus, on which sit Apollo and the Muses, assisted with other proper Characters, emblematically dress'd, the whole Appearance being extremely magnificent; nor is the Musick less entertaining, being contriv'd with so great a Variety, that all sorts of Musick are properly introduc'd in single Songs, Duetto's, &c. intermix'd with Chorus's, something in the Stile of Oratorio's. People have been waiting with Impatience for this Piece, the celebrated Mr Handel having exerted his utmost Skill in it.<sup>43</sup>

Another production, the revival of *Il pastor fido* – following *Il Parnasso* closely – took place on 18<sup>th</sup> May and once again on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1734, including the newly composed prologue in the French style, *Terpsichore* (with the title role danced by Marie Sallé). This is a special case, for the work is from 1712 but the revised version has completely different arias. Strada as Amarilli mainly drew her songs from *Lotario* (*Quel cor che mi donasti* with an altered text as *D'amor a fier contrasti*, *Scherza in mar la navicella*), *Ezio* (*Finchè un zeffiro soave*, *Ah! non son io che parlo*) and *Athalia* (*Through the land* with Italian text as *Di Parnasso i dolci accenti*); only one number, *Finte labbra!* (II/5; G minor, 3/8, Allegro), was taken from the first *Il pastor fido*. These arias form a fine selection for a colourful display of the best of Strada's technical and musical skill-set: *Di Parnasso i dolci accenti* stands for *terzini* and *messe di voce*, *D'amor a fier contrasti* for the abundance of trills, and *Finchè un zeffiro* in Andante for lyric agility, *Finte labbra* is an example of *parlante* declamation, *Scherza in mar* has castrato-type of virtuosity – having little to do with Amarilli's loving and rather passive and lamenting character – and *Ah! non son io che parlo* demands pathetic expression, *tempo rubato*, and the use of a tragic vocal timbre, going down to b.

The last patchwork of Handel's own arias, *Oreste*, was introduced at Covent Garden on 18<sup>th</sup> December the same year in the presence of the Royal Family and 'with a great Applause'.<sup>44</sup> According to Bernd Baselt, its 'libretto is one of the strongest that Handel

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<sup>43</sup> *Daily Journal*, 11 March 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 755.

<sup>44</sup> *Bee*, 21 December 1734. Editorial Board of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, *Dokumente zu Leben und Schaffen. Händel-Handbuch*, vol. iv, ed. by Walter Eisen (Leipzig: Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1985), 248.

ever set to music, and its conclusion one of the most credible'.<sup>45</sup> Strada created the tragic role of Ermione, who, in search for her shipwrecked husband, Oreste, is arrested by King Toante and ordered as a human sacrifice for the goddess Diana unless she gives herself to the king. The set of arias is worthy of the heroine, showing a colossal picture of Strada's multi-coloured capacities:<sup>46</sup> it consisted of the sumptuous *Io ti levo* (*Partenope*) with a parody-text as *Io sperai di veder il tuo volto* (I/5; G major, C, Andante); two numbers from *Sosarme*, the hurricane coloratura aria *Dite pace* (I/10; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro) and the pleasant pastoral bird song with flourishing trills, requiring high level agility, *Vola l'augello* (II/13; A major, 6/8, Allegro); and furthermore, *Bacia per me la mano*, Cuzzoni's aria from *Riccardo Primo* with a parody-text as *Piango dolente il sposo* (III/3; F<sup>#</sup> minor, C, Largo), of the finest lyricism, *portamenti*, and a ravishing chromatic melodiousness, and the vehemently hectic *Non sempre invendicato* from *Lotario* (III/6, B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Allegro).<sup>47</sup>

### Heroine of *pasticci*

Strada sang for Handel in the middle of his '*pasticcio* decade' (see Table 4.2). She was the *prima donna* in eight of the composer's nine patchwork operas consisting of Italian arias: *Ormisda* (4<sup>th</sup> April 1730), *Venceslao* (12<sup>th</sup> January 1731), *Lucio Papirio dittatore* (23<sup>rd</sup> May 1732), *Catone* (4<sup>th</sup> November 1732), *Semiramide riconosciuta* (30<sup>th</sup> October 1733), *Caio Fabricio* (4<sup>th</sup> December 1733), *Arbace* (5<sup>th</sup> January 1734), and *Didone abbandonata* (13<sup>th</sup> April 1737).<sup>48</sup> This involved singing arias by Johann Adolph Hasse, Niccolò Porpora, Leonardo Vinci, Geminiano Giacomelli, Giovanni Porta, Giovanni Maria Capelli and Leonardo Leo, songs or even complete roles formerly belonging to *castrati* like Carestini and Carlo Scalzi (with both of whom she sang in London), Angelo Monticelli, Giacinto Fontana, Domenico Gizzi, and Farinelli, her stage partner in Naples; furthermore to *prime*

<sup>45</sup> Based on a libretto by Giovanni Gualberto Barlucci (1723). Georg Friedrich Handel, *Oreste*, ed. by Bernd Baselt, HHA Serie II-Supplement/I (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1991), xviii.

<sup>46</sup> 'Handel offered his prima donna a chance to express herself in brilliant virtuoso passages that evoke the full impact of her tragic situation, as well as her heroic mastery of the blows of fate.' Both Strada and Cecilia Young – who played the lyric role of Iphigenia – had five arias each, 'a sign that Handel considered the dramatic role of both heroines to be of equal importance, and that he esteemed both singers equally highly'. Handel, *Oreste*, ed. by Bernd Baselt, xxiii.

<sup>47</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Handel and his Italian opera texts', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 34–79: 68; Conducting score: *Oreste* HWV A11, *D-Hs M A/1034* and *1034a*; Handel, *Oreste*, ed. by Bernd Baselt, xvii-xviii and xxiii.

<sup>48</sup> Conducting scores: *Ormisda* HWV A3, *D-Hs M A/1036*; *Venceslao* HWV A4, *D-Hs M A/189* and *D-Hs M A/1061*; *Lucio Papirio dittatore* HWV A6, *D-Hs M A/1029*; *Catone* HWV A7, *D-Hs M A/1012*; *Semiramide riconosciuta* HWV A8, *D-Hs M A/1051*; *Caio Fabricio* HWV A9, *D-Hs M A/1011*; *Arbace* HWV A10, *D-Hs M A/1004*; *Didone abbandonata* HWV A12, *GB-Lbl Add. 31607*. Other sources: George Frideric Handel, *The Favourite Songs in the Opera (Pasticcio) call'd Ormisda* (London: Walsh & Hare, 1730); Leonardo Vinci, *Didone abbandonata 1730*. Facsimile edition. Introduction by Howard Mayer Brown. Italian Opera 1640–1770, vol. xxix (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1977).

*donne* such as Faustina, Anna Maria Mazzoni, Lucia Facchinelli, Cuzzoni and Margherita Giacomazzi. During these eight productions with usually five arias each, there were only four occasions when an aria planned for Strada was replaced. One of these concerned her own former aria by Porpora; in another two cases a more virtuoso number replaced the original idea – and only two arias were cut. Three of the replacements occurred in the first *pasticcio* Strada participated in, probably due to her benefit performance.

Table 4.2: Handel's *pasticci* with Strada's participation

Pasticcio	Première	Revival	Number of performances	Role	Sources consulted
<i>Ormisda</i>	4 April 1730	24 November 1730	14 + 5 = 19	Arsenice	<i>D-Hs M A/1036</i>
<i>Venceslao</i>	12 January 1731	—	4	Erenice	<i>D-Hs M A/1061</i> , <i>D-Hs M A/189</i>
<i>Lucio Papirio dittatore</i>	23 May 1732	—	4	Papiria	<i>D-Hs M A/1029</i>
<i>Catone</i>	4 November 1732	—	5	Marzia	<i>D-Hs M A/1012</i>
<i>Semiramide riconosciuta</i>	30 October 1733	—	4	Tamiri	<i>D-Hs M A/1051</i>
<i>Caio Fabricio</i>	4 December 1733	—	4	Sestia	<i>D-Hs M A/1011</i>
<i>Arbace</i>	5 January 1734	—	9	Mandane	<i>D-Hs M A/1004</i>
<i>Didone abbandonata</i>	13 April 1737	—	4	Didone	<i>GB-Lbl Add. 31607</i>

The first *pasticcio* Strada sang in London was *Ormisda*, which was so successful that it was given fourteen times from 4<sup>th</sup> April 1730 onwards, including Strada's benefit night (the second or third in that season after *Giulio Cesare* on 21<sup>st</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March) on 21<sup>st</sup> April, when she had an additional aria replacing the final chorus (Table 4.3).<sup>49</sup> There was a revival of the work with five performances from 24<sup>th</sup> November of the same year. Therefore, three versions of Arsenice's role might have existed: that of the first performances, of Strada's benefit and of the revival of the next season.<sup>50</sup>

Table 4.3: Lists of Strada's arias performed in *Ormisda*

4 April 1730	21 April 1730 – Strada's benefit	24 November 1730
Pupillette vezzosette (Hasse)	—??	Pupillette vezzosette
O caro mio Tesoro (Vinci)	Non ti confonder (Hasse)	Non ti confonder
Se d'Aquilon (Porpora)	Se d'Aquilon	unknown aria
Sentirsi dire (Vinci)	Sentirsi dire	Sentirsi dire
Passaggier che in selva oscura (E <sup>b</sup> major)	(Hasse) Passaggier (F major)	Passaggier (E <sup>b</sup> major)
Amico il fato (Sarro)	Agitata dal vento (unknown)	Amico il fato
—	Tutto rida (unknown)	—

Walsh published three of Strada's arias among the *Favourite Songs*: *Pupillette vezzosette* (I/3; G major, 6/8, Allegro), *Amico il fato* (III/14; G major, 3/4, Allegro) and *Passaggier che in selva oscura*. The *parlante* aria, *Amico il fato*, was replaced by *Agitata dal vento*, presumably for the sake of coloratura display for Strada's benefit, or at least one

<sup>49</sup> It was advertised as having '12 songs changed'. *Daily Journal*, 21 April 1730. Burrows, *Handel*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Handel's Pasticci', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 164–211: 172–173 and 201–202; Hans Dieter Clausen, *Händels Direktionspartituren* ("Handexemplare"). *Hamburger Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* 7 (Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1972), 184–187.

can suspect so from its title, that of a typical shipwreck *simile* aria frequently used for virtuoso castrato numbers. The fact that Walsh printed *Amico il fato*, might suggest that it had been retained for Strada at the autumn revival. The only number which remained permanently unchanged during the three periods of performances was *Sentirsi dire* (II/12; B<sup>b</sup> major), an Andante castrato aria in *alla breve*, with drumming bass highlighting the singer's stamina. *O caro mio tesoro* is of the same type; probably this is why it was replaced by *Non ti confonder* (I/7; G major, C, Moderato), which has the same characteristic dotted rhythms but in *parlante* style and attacks a" once, which *O caro* lacked. *Passaggier che in selva oscura* (III/12; E<sup>b</sup>/F major, C, Moderato; Ex. 4.20) also appears all the three times but in different keys: the original E<sup>b</sup> major was transposed a whole note higher for Strada's benefit, and restored for the autumn revival. It is another castrato aria with drumming bass and a relatively wide range (from d' to a<sup>b</sup> ") and with *martellato* notes in the B section.

Example 4.20: Vocal part of *Passaggier che in selva oscura*, bb. 8–61.

The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'Passaggier che in selva oscura'. The score is in G major, C, Moderato, and is transposed a whole note higher from the original E<sup>b</sup> major. It consists of six staves of music with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: Pas - sag - gier che in sel - va os - cu - ra muo - ve er - ran - do in dub - bio — pie - de nell' or - ror non sà ne ve - de qual sen - tie - ro rin - trac - ciar, qual — sen - tie - ro rin - trac - ciar; pas - sag - gier ch'in sel - va o - scu - ra muo - ve — er - ran - do il dub - bio — pie - de nell' or - ror non sà ne ve - de qual sen - tie - ro rin - trac - ciar, qual sen - tie - ro rin - trac ciar, qual — sen - tie - ro rin - trac - ciar. Nel suo piè non las - si cu - ra e nel ri - schio di ca - de - re, o - gni pos - so il fà te - me - re o - gni — fron - da il — fà tre - mar, o - gni fron - da, o - gni fron - da il fà tre - mar, il fà tre - mar.

That Strada did not insist on keeping the only aria she had sang before London, *Se d'Aquilon* (II/1; G major, C, Allegro; see ch. 2) in Porpora's *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria* (1724), can be considered as the final proof of her ability to read a score easily and learn by heart quicker than other singers. Her fellow colleagues like Bernacchi, Merighi, Senesino and Carestini too were travelling around from production to production with their favourite and most popular arias in their suitcases, which they put even by force into whatever role they sang in order to assure success and to reduce the quantity of new



material to be memorised. The cases when Strada might have demanded to repeat arias originally written for her were very rare and done for strategic reasons in agreement with Handel.

*Venceslao* was a failure and had only four performances starting on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1731.<sup>51</sup> One of Strada's arias, *Lascia cadermi in volto* (II/9; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Spiritoso), was added later, and therefore *Del caro sposo* (III/7; G major, C, Andantino) was displaced to the third act.<sup>52</sup> The arias Merighi sang were all originally composed for her, mainly taken from Hasse's *Attalo* (Naples, 1728). Bernacchi too was to perform four arias of his own role from Vinci's *Medo* (Parma, 1728), but in the meantime he left and was replaced by Senesino, who received two additional arias from Lotti's *Alessandro Severo* (1717).<sup>53</sup> Reinhard Strohm assumes that 'La Strada, too, had already sung Erenice in Porta's setting (Naples, 1726) but was either unwilling or unable to get any of the arias that she sang then included by Handel.'<sup>54</sup> I think she was not interested in singing arias that she had done five years earlier, first of all because when, after three years of silence, she was engaged in London she probably wanted to build her career through a new repertoire and various yet unknown and greater challenges than she had before. Strada had two arias of Faustina, two of Farinelli and one of Carestini in *Venceslao*.<sup>55</sup> *Io sento al cor* (parodied text of *Tornate ancor*) was taken from Giacomelli's *Lucio Papirio dittatore*, which turned out to be Handel's next Italian *pasticcio* the subsequent year. *Lucio Papirio* was rather a revival of the work – just as the following *pasticci* *Catone*, *Caio Fabricio*, *Arbace* and *Didone* (but not *Semiramide*) were in fact revivals of Italian operas, at least from Strada's point of view – in which Strada took over Faustina's role as Papiria with arias transposed a whole or a semitone higher, but the aria she had already introduced in *Venceslao*, *Tornate ancor*, was omitted.<sup>56</sup>

*Io sento al cor* (I/8; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Allegretto) is notable for its *terzini*, a presumable reason for its later addition. Though *Son belle in ciel le stelle* (I/12; C major, C; Ex. 4.21) is an impressive coloratura (Carestini) number, Farinelli's aria from Porpora's *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria*, *Come nave in ria tempesta* (II/18; E major, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.22), overwhelms it in every respect. Strada knew this latter number because she had been

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<sup>51</sup> In fact, Owen Swiney recommended the libretto of *Venceslao* to Handel back in 1725–26, as Faustina's debut performance in London, instead of *Alessandro*. Elizabeth Gibson, 'The Royal Academy of Music (1719–28) and its Directors', in: *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. by Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (Ann Arbor / London: UMI Research Press, 1987), 138–164: 161.

<sup>52</sup> Strohm, 'Handel's Pasticci', 175.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 175 and 203–204.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>55</sup> Clausen, *Händels Direktionspartituren*, 247–248.

<sup>56</sup> Strohm, 'Handel's Pasticci', 179.

Farinelli's partner in *Semiramide* in Naples 1724 as Zomira. Probably she preserved a living memory of how this captivatingly droning aria sounded in performance by Farinelli, and caught the opportunity to try it for herself: coloraturas, repeated quaver notes, syncopations, *cantar di sbalzo*, broken chords, a range of two octaves, from b to b<sup>''</sup>, and a middle section turning into a dramatic recitative are the mountain peaks to climb.

Example 4.21: Vocal part of *Son belle in ciel le stelle*, bb. 30–57.

Example 4.21 shows the vocal part of the aria "Son belle in ciel le stelle" from the opera *Semiramide*. The score is written in C major and common time. It consists of five staves of music. The lyrics are: "son bel-le in ciel le stel-le col fiam-meg-gian-te ar-dor, ma tut-to il cor splen-dor del so-lo è un rag-gio, del sol è un rag-gio, ma tut-to il suo splen-dor del so-lo è un rag-gio, del so-lo è un rag-gio." The music features a mix of melodic lines and rhythmic patterns, including repeated quaver notes and syncopations.

Example 4.22: Vocal part (A section) of *Come nave in rìa tempesta*, bb. 14–64.

Example 4.22 shows the vocal part (A section) of the aria "Come nave in rìa tempesta" from the opera *Semiramide*. The score is written in D major and common time, marked "Allegro". It consists of seven staves of music. The lyrics are: "Co-me na-ve in rìa tem-pe-sa, com-bat-tu-to è il mio pen-sie-ro che ri-sol-ve-re, non sò ri-sol-ve-re, non sò ri-sol-ve-re, non sò. Co-me na-ve in rìa tem-pe-sa com-bat-tu-to è il mio pen-sie-ro che ri-sol-ve-re, non sò, ri-sol-ve-re non sò, nò, ri-sol-ve-re non sò, ri-sol-ve-re non sò." The music is characterized by a fast tempo and a complex rhythmic structure, including repeated quaver notes and syncopations.

As far as range is concerned, Handel might have taken a little risk with the b note in *Come nave* (b. 41), since Strada had never sung one before (as far as the written scores go). It can be concluded, however, that she was able to sing it, sonorously in fact, as Handel applied it again for her the following year in *Ezio* (*Ah! non son io che parlo*, Fulvia).

The Faustinian arias in Giacomelli's *Lucio Papirio* have rhythmic variety, but once a pattern was introduced, the virtuosity it creates tends to be somewhat monotonically repetitive: *Per dolce mio riposo* (I/6; B<sup>b</sup> major, C) is marked by dotted semiquaver rhythms and *terzini*; *Consigliando* (I/16; G major, C) likewise contains dotted rhythms, and descending semiquaver scales and note repetitions additionally. *Ti lascio m'involo* (II/5; F major, 2/4; Ex. 4.23) is a *bravura* coloratura aria, just as is *Vengo a darti* (III/11; G major, C, Ex. 4.24), the latter also with dotted semiquaver rhythms and demisemiquaver notes.

Example 4.23: Vocal part (exerpts) of *Ti lascio m'involo*, bb. 27–42 and 97–124.

The musical score for Example 4.23 consists of five staves of music in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F major). The lyrics are: "Ti la - scio m'in - vo - lo se - ve - ra sde - gna", "e il bar - ba-ro duo-lo che pro - vo in la - sciar-ti con - sa", and "cro al do - ver, con - sa cro, con - sa - cro al do - ver." The music features various rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms and semiquaver runs, with trills (tr) and a fermata (ta) indicated.

Example 4.24: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Vengo a darti*, bb. 32–42.

The musical score for Example 4.24 consists of three staves of music in treble clef, 2/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F major). The lyrics are: "se - pa - rar", "ti mai da me, se - pa - rar", and "ti mai da me." The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including dotted rhythms and semiquaver runs, with trills (tr) and triplets (3) indicated.

In *Catone* (4<sup>th</sup> November 1732), based on Leo's opera, Strada played Marzia with the original arias of Lucia Facchinelli. The newly arrived *seconda donna* was Celeste Gismondi, the Neapolitan buffa mezzo-soprano, known as Celeste Resse or La Celestina as well. She might have met Handel in 1729 when he engaged Strada for the Second Academy. After marrying an Englishman, she seems to have followed her ambition to switch to *opera seria* from *intermezzi*.<sup>57</sup> Gismondi might have been jealous of Strada because Handel chose her in 1729, and brought the air of rivalry with her. Lord Hervey,

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 181; Reinhard Strohm, 'Comic traditions in Handel's Orlando', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 249–270: 250–252.

who had known her since 1729 from Naples, remembered her when he attended *Catone* in London:

The only thing I liked in it was our Naples acquaintance, Celestina; who is not so pretty as she was, but sings better than she did. She seemed to take mightily, which I was glad of. I have a sort of friendship for her, without knowing why.<sup>58</sup>

Handel was bold enough to break up the rank restrictions of *opera seria*, reshaping and extending roles for outstanding voices like the bass Montagnana. He also left some space for Gismondi as *seconda donna*, who tried to show herself as *prima donna* or, moreover, as *primo uomo*, by singing castrato arias of the most difficult kind.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, for the sake of balance, Handel gave Strada – whose arias were generally not extremely demanding this time—the very last aria of the opera, positioned with the highest priority, and an emblematic one: Carestini’s *Vò solcando un mar crudele* (III/13; D major, alla breve, Andante; Ex. 4.25 and 4.26), the most famous castrato *simile* aria with Metastasio’s text in its most popular setting, that of Vinci (*Artaserse*, Rome, 1730).

However, the first idea for Strada to sing was Domenico Gizzi’s aria from Leo’s *Catone*, *Soffre talor* (III/13; D major, C, Andante ma non Presto), with neck-breaking and manifold coloraturas. Its hammered notes are characteristic, and Strada – who probably did not prefer those as they hardly ever appear in her original roles – had already sung plenty of them in *Passaggier che in selva oscura* (*Ormisda*; Hasse, *Sesostrate* 1726, Carlo Scalzi) and *Come nave in ria tempesta* (*Venceslao*; Porpora, *Semiramide* 1724, Farinelli). Repetition of a single note – *note ribattute* or *martellato* – can be defined as the ultimate pattern in Baroque vocal music to test the virtuosity and agility of a singer.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>58</sup> Lord Hervey’s letter to Stephen Fox, 4 November 1732. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 563.

<sup>59</sup> Strohm, ‘Handel’s Pasticci’, 181–182.

<sup>60</sup> Its execution is technically different from the early baroque *trillo*. Mancini defined it as follows: ‘One of the most difficult styles is the “Martellato” (hammered)... This is very difficult to render perfectly, as it requires an extraordinarily agile voice and great assiduity and perseverance to master it. Before undertaking this style, one must have gained perfect breath control, in order that one may break the tone and retake it without effort. The intonation must be perfect, so that every hammered note will be distinct and perfectly pitched. These tones must be marked lightly and reinforced only where the melody (Cantabile) requires it, otherwise, if they exceed the rules of art, the “Cantabile” would resemble the cackling of a hen, when she shows the joy of having laid an egg. It is because this style is difficult that it is going out of use. The last famous singers who used to perform this kind of agility were Faustina Hasse and Agostino Fontana, pupils of Antonio Pasi, and the Viscontina of Milan.’; ‘Questo genere di agilità è difficilissimo ad eseguirsi a perfezione, poiché per ben riuscirvi fa d’uopo avere una voce agilissima, un genio particolare per applicarvi, ed uno studio indefesso. Sopra ogni cosa, prima d’intraprendere questo studio, egli è necessario d’avere l’arte di perfettamente reggere il fiato, di poterlo distaccare, e ripigliare senza fatica; bisogna possedere una purgatissima intonazione, acciò ogni nota martellata sia distimamente intonata. Queste note devono essere distinte leggermente, e rinforzate solo in quel luogo, che la stessa Cantilena il richiede poiché se eccedono nella caricatura, rendono la Cantilena somigliante al canto d’una Chiocchia, che strepita, ed assorda, lieta di aver fatto un Uovo. Questo genere d’agilità si può dire in oggi fuor d’uso

*martellato* may have seemed vocally static or even musically causeless to Strada, and though *Soffre talor* contains *volatine*, *gruppetti*, trills, arpeggiations, expanding semiquaver leap-chains, and has a contrasting B section both in key and tempo, it rather lists those elements like a dictionary, whereas the magnificently rich melody line of *Vò solcando*, with its brilliant ascending *terzini*, might have highlighted much more her sonorous and glimmering voice. It is very intriguing that in the conducting score the end of the first and the beginning and end of the second vocal phrase are placed an octave higher, although all the other descending scales in the aria are untouched, and the aria itself starts on a d' note for the soprano. There can be a reason for that: Strada, perhaps with Handel together, may have wanted to display the most beautiful quality of her voice projection to match in grandeur to the aria's character and finish the long-ascending phrases gloriously. Once she showed that, all the rest was the variation and multiplication of shades of her rich vocal colours. This could have affirmed her leading status, no matter what fireworks were sung by Gismondi in Caffarelli's *Vede il nocchier* (III/9; G major, C, Allegro; Hasse, *Euristeo* 1732) a few minutes earlier, including a jump from c' to c'''. Nevertheless, *Catone* was no success in London, and after four/five performances it was taken off the schedule.

Example 4.25: Vocal part (first entry) of *Vò solcando in mar crudele* (original setting by Vinci), bb. 20–37.

Vò sol - can - do un mar cru - de - le sen - za - ve - le, e sen - za - sar -  
te, fre - me l'on - da, il ciel s'im - bru - na,

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appunto per la sua difficile esecuzione. Gli ultimi Professori, che con tanta facilità, e maestria si servirono dell' agilità Martellata, furono Àgostino Fontana scolare di Antonio Pasi, e la Viscontina di Milano'. Mancini, *Practical Reflections*, XII. The Agility of the Voice, 155–156; *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 138–139. In the edition of 1777, Mancini mentions also Faustina Bordoni as one of the last singers who used this technique authentically. Burney also refers to Faustina, but as the first one of the same, referring to Quantz's account: 'Sie ist unstreitig die erste, welche die gedachten, aus vielen Noten auf einem Tone bestehenden Passagien, im Singen, und zwar mit dem besten Erfolge, angebracht hat'. Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', in: Marburg, *Historisch-Kritische Beyträge*, vol. i, 241. Burney, on the contrary, considers her the first one, probably served the social-professional image of the singer: 'She was doubtless the first who introduced, with success, a swift repetition of the same tone.' Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 319; Lorenzo Bianconi, "«Il trionfo dell'onore» or strategies of social recognition for theatrical personnel", in: »Per ben vestir la virtuosa«. *Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, ed. by Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf. *Forum Musikwissenschaft* 6. (Schliengen: Ed. Argus, 2011), 52–61; Susanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30–31; Saskia Maria Woyke, *Faustina Bordoni. Biographie – Vokalprofil – Rezeption* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010), 124–125; Antonio Pasi was a student of Francesco Antonio Pistocchi in Bologna. Johann Adam Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation*. Trans. by Suzanne J. Beicken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43.

Example 4.26: Vocal part (A1 section and an excerpt from the middle section) of *Vò solcando in mar crudele* (as sung by Strada in London), bb. 20–62 and 131–145.

The case of *Semiramide riconosciuta* likewise has its mysterious moments. Handel, after the split of his company and in rivalry with the Nobility, opened the 1733/34 season with the revival of *Ottone*, which was followed by *Semiramide* on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1733. The new singers, Carestini, Scalzi and the Negri sisters, demanded their own numbers as additional arias, and so did Strada, though this was untypical of her. A strategic motive could be in the background: after Strada had sung Cuzzoni's role, Teofane, unchanged in *Ottone*, and when considering the competition with the rival company and the artistic habits of her new fellow singers, it was perhaps a better political choice for her to show off a variety of current Italian opera arias, even from the repertoire of Faustina and Cuzzoni. If so, the decision may have been the outcome of an agreement between Strada and, besides Handel, also with her impresario husband, Aurelio del Pò, who was watching over her career all along and according to my presumption might deserve more credit for its final shape than is apparent.

Only Strada's first aria as Tamiri was from Vinci's *Semiramide* (*Che quel cor* I/5; B<sup>b</sup> major, Alla breve; sung in Rome by the castrato Pietro Morici). Two others were taken from Hasse's *Arminio* (1730) numbers for Faustina, and there was a song for Cuzzoni from Sarro's *Artemisia* (1731; *Tortorella abbandonata* II/9; F minor, 2/4).<sup>61</sup> Strada's final aria, *Per far che risplenda* (III/10; G major, alla breve; Hasse, *Tigrane* 1729), is of grand

<sup>61</sup> Strohm, 'Handel's Pasticci', 206–207.

castrato type but was performed originally by a female soprano, the Florentine Anna Maria Mazzoni. The strategic motive mentioned before could be the reason why Strada undertook to sing hammered notes again, this time triplets ending in a trill (*Ti credo a me pietoso*, I/11, C major, Alla breve, Moderato; parody text of *Potresti esser pietoso*; Hasse, *Arminio*; Faustina; Ex. 4.27). The other Faustina-aria was a virtuoso one (Ex. 4.28; *Mi disprezzi*, II/2; G major, C, Allegro assai; parody text of *Dolce rieda*; Hasse, *Arminio*).

Example 4.27: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Ti credo a me pietoso*, bb. 36–62.

Example 4.28: Vocal part (excerpt from section A) of *Mi disprezzi*, bb. 42–60.

These inserted numbers have some common elements worthy of comment: all have frequent and special opportunities for trills (above the ordinary) and all are of dotted rhythms and applying octave leaps at some point. In *Per far che risplenda* (Ex. 4.29) Strada demonstrated for the third time her range reaching as low as b, in a phrase moving in a scale of crotchets from g" to b.

Example 4.29: Vocal part (excerpt from section A) of *Per far che risplenda*, bb. 70–78.

The performance of *Caio Fabricio* on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1733 was an adaptation of Hasse's opera, premièred in Rome in 1732. Strada took the complete role of Sestia, embodied originally by the young soprano castrato Angelo Maria Monticelli, of whom Burney noted

vocal excellence, great acting skills and a voice as ‘clear, sweet, and free from defects of every kind’.<sup>62</sup> The role has a generally high tessitura with regular a” notes; however, the most remarkable number is by all means *Non mi chiamar* (II/12; G minor, C, Allegro; Ex. 4.30), reaching b<sup>b</sup>” five times in the *da capo* and two times in the middle section through octave and sixth leaps and once by ascending *volatine*.

Example 4.30: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Non mi chiamar*, bb. 5–22.

Non mi chia-mar cru - de - le, dim - mi pie-to - so a - man - te, dim - mi pie-to - so a - man - te, ti se - gui -  
 rò - fe - de - le, ti se - gui - rò - co - stan - te a - mo - re e fe - del - tà,  
 a - mo - re e fe - del - tà, ti se - gui - rò, ti ser - ve - rò a - mo - re e  
 fe - del - tà, ti se - gui - rò, ti ser - ve - rò a - mo - re e fe - del - tà, a - mo - re e fe - del - tà.

*Arbace*, as a Handelian version of Vinci’s famous *Artaserse* (Rome 1730) had only four performances from 5<sup>th</sup> January 1734. Mrs Pendarves judged it ‘pretty enough, but not to compare to Handel’s compositions’.<sup>63</sup> Carestini reprised his original role as Arbace, but did not sing his best aria, *Vò solcando*, evidently because Strada had already performed it in *Catone*. He sang one of Farinelli’s symbols instead: *Son qual nave ch’agitata*, another shipwreck *simile* aria from Hasse’s setting of the same subject (*Artaserse*, 1730).<sup>64</sup> Strada played Mandane (originally created by Giacinto Fontana), mostly with the arias of Vinci; there were two additional numbers from Hasse’s *Issipile* (1732, Lucia Facchinelli), *Impallidisci ingrato* (I/12; G major, C, Presto; parodied text of *Impallidisce in campo*) and *Parto se vuoi così* (II/11; C major, 3/4). Both of them are important, for they rendered this role more kaleidoscopic and vocally more feminine. The former has a fine, castrato kind of virtuosity, yet was shaped for a female soprano, and this could be the reason why the arias of Lucia Facchinelli occur frequently in Strada’s *pasticcio*-repertoire; it was an excellent match for her vocal skills and priorities. It is similar to her attraction to Faustina’s songs, only that here the tessitura is also identical. *Parto se vuoi così* is a slow air of magnificence and dignity, in the legato of which is combined with rhythmically rich melismas. Strada’s last aria in *Arbace*, *Mi credi spietata* (III/4; A major, alla breve; Ex. 4.31) is an angrily

<sup>62</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 446.

<sup>63</sup> Mrs Pendarves letter to her sister, Ann Granville. Deutsch, *Handel*, 361.

<sup>64</sup> Strohm, ‘Handel’s Pasticci’, 209; Clausen, *Händels Direktionspartituren*, 109–111.



passionate piece, and through its attacked b<sup>♭</sup>, a<sup>♮</sup> and g<sup>♯</sup> notes it was especially advantageous to display her strong, chest-coloured high range.

Example 4.31: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Mi credi spietata*, bb. 18–25 and 39–46.

Mi cre-di spie-ta-ta, mi chia-mi-cru-de-le, non tan-to fu-ro-re, non tan-te que-re-le,  
 Mi cre-di spie-ta-ta, mi chia-mi-cru-de-le, non tan-to fu-ro-re, non tan-te que-re-li,

On the other hand, Margherita Giacomazzi for instance, Vivaldi's virtuoso soprano / mezzo-soprano in the 1730s, also specialised in *primo uomo* roles, singing castrato arias of an extremely wide range, part of a repertoire still very masculine and dramatically one-sided.<sup>65</sup> She, together with Faustina, Facchinelli and others, represented an answer to the crucial question of the era: whether *castrati* can be replaced by women. The presence of *castrati* raised a demand as well as served as an indicator of a need for strong feminine voices with the ability to produce full chest volume in the higher range. The act of castration itself withheld the masculine characteristics from coming into existence and gaining dominion, and preserved the feminine features of the voice. A final answer to the problem was found only in the early 1800s, mostly in connection with Rossini's works and performers. In the eighteenth century a solution emerged rather sparsely and in exceptional individual cases. I am convinced that Strada was one of these exceptions, due to her special and genuine vocal as well as musical skills, which fortunately were supported by a presumably good training, enabling her voice to mature and develop itself according its own natural timing and order, on one hand, and to the series of exclusive opportunities for working together constantly with the best composers and fellow singers of the era, on the other. In this way, the repertoire and the quality of performances she was dealing with almost on a daily basis shaped and polished her artistic value in the above-mentioned direction; it was that freedom given to her to become a female vocalist with feminine musical features performing with a strong, full and radiant sound.

The period of successive performances of *pasticci* ended in early 1734. One last production occurred separately, more than three years later, in 1737 with Strada playing the title role, that of the Carthaginian Queen of tragic fate. Vinci's *Didone abbandonata*

<sup>65</sup> Her major roles were: Matilde – *L'Adelaide* (Vivaldi) – Verona, 1734; Irene – *Il Tamerlano* (Vivaldi) – Verona, 1735; Aspasia – *Farnace* (Leo) – Naples, 1736; Erissena – *Alessandro nell'Indie* (Hasse) – Naples, 1736; Epitide – *L'oracolo in Messenia* (Vivaldi) – Venice, 1738; Emireno – *Armida al campo d'Egitto* (Vivaldi) – Venice, 1738; Ezio – *Ezio* – Modena, 1741; Artaserse – *Artaserse* (Terradellas) – Venice, 1744; Giove – *Le nozze d'Ercole e d'Ebe* (Porpora) – Venice, 1744; she played *travesti* several times until the end of her career in the late 1750's.

(Rome, 1726) had been staged with Giacinto Fontana detto Farfallino in this role—a limited one as far as range and vocal technical demands are concerned.<sup>66</sup> For this reason, two foreign songs were inserted among the seven arias Strada sang. The first of these was of a favourite type of hers, a coloratura aria attributed to Orlandini with full provision of triplets hitting  $b^b$  regularly: *Ritorna a lusingarmi* (Act II;  $B^b$  major, C; Ex. 4.32) of Margherita Giacomazzi from Vivaldi's *Griselda* (1735).<sup>67</sup> The aria contains two *a*-s in *stile di basso* in the B section, which are lower than the lowest note ever written for Strada, showing further extension of her range.

Example 4.32: Vocal part of *Ritorna a lusingarmi*, bb. 10–59.

**Allegro non molto**

Ri - tor - na a lu<sup>3</sup> - sin<sup>3</sup> - gar - mi la mia spe - ran - za in - fi - da, e a - mor per con<sup>3</sup> - so<sup>3</sup> - lar - mi gia  
 par - che — scher - zi — e ri - da vo - lan - do, vez - zeg - gian - do, vo - lan<sup>3</sup> do, in - tor - no a que - sto cor.  
 do, — vez - zeg - gian - do, in - tor - no a que - sto cor.  
 vo lan - do, — vez - zeg - gian - do in - tor - no a que - sto cor. Ri - tor - na a lu - sin<sup>3</sup> - gar - mi la  
 mia spe - ran - za in - fi - da, e a - mor per con - so<sup>3</sup> - lar - mi gia par - che — scher - zi — e ri - da, vo -  
 lan do, vo - lan do, e  
 vez - zeg - gian do, in - tor - no a que - sto cor, vo - lan do, e  
 do in - tor - no a que - sto cor, vo - lan do, e  
 do, vo - lan do, vez - zeg - gian - do, vo -  
 lando, — vez - zeg - gian - do in - tor - no a que - sto cor, in - tor - no a que - sto cor. Ma poi se ben al -  
 tie - ro il par - go - letto ar - cie - ro già fug - ge e la - scia l'ar - mi. e la<sup>3</sup> scia l'ar - mi a fron - te del ti - mor  
 scia l'ar - mi a fron - te del ti - mor già fug - ge e la - scia, la - scia l'ar - mi a fron - te del ti - mor.

*Da capo*

<sup>66</sup> Dennis Libby, 'Fontana, Giacinto [Farfallino]', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 7 June 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Vivaldi's career as an opera producer', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 147.

The other one was from *Didone* but adapted from the role of Enea created in Rome by Domenico Gizzi: *Già si desta* (Act III, B<sup>b</sup> major, C), a real castrato aria offering several opportunities for trills. The three-part *recitativo accompagnato* (*Mancano più nemici? – Vado, mà dove, oh Dio*), which closes the opera, expresses Didone’s agony. It is of the highest dramatism, and represents what made this production the ‘Alcina of the pasticci’, so to speak. Its lurching chromatics, sighs and exclamations on a” notes, dubbed with rugged rhythms, tremolos and furious scales in the orchestra, marvellously depict the decay of a strong and still passionate queen.

Furthermore, *Se vuoi ch’io mora* (II/7; G minor, 2/4, Tempo giusto; Ex. 4.24) was recomposed by Handel, not only because of Strada’s need of a high, real soprano tessitura, but also to cover the fact that he had already used the original motifs of this aria for her in his *Giustino* (*Mio dolce amato sposo*) and now the repeated vocalization by Strada had to be avoided. Handel transposed it a whole tone higher, from G minor to A minor, and the first six bars were reshaped to keep the melodic line in the second octave reaching g” regularly. Furthermore, the chromatic melisma in the B section (bb. 81–84 in Vinci’s setting) on the word ‘tormento’ was also cut, because Handel had already applied that too, likewise in *Giustino*, for *Zeffiretto che scorre nel prato* (*Giustino*).<sup>68</sup>

Example 4.24: Vocal part (excerpt) of Handel’s setting of *Se vuoi ch’io mora*, bb. 1–20.

Tempo giusto

Se vuoi ch'io mo-ra mio dol-ce a - mo-re, mio dol-ce a - mo-re, ec-co-ti il se-no pas-sa il mio co-re  
 mà non la - sciar mi, nò, sen-za di te, nò, non la - sciar-mi, nò, sen-za di te;

Charles Jennens – who regularly received Italian opera scores via his friend, the classical scholar Edward Holdsworth, and gave Handel access to this material, i.e. works of Hasse, Scarlatti and Vinci, including *Didone* – complained in a letter to Holdsworth of 17<sup>th</sup> January 1743, that ‘Handel has borrow’d a dozen of the Pieces and I dare say I shall catch him stealing from them; as I have formerly, both from Scarlatti & Vinci.’<sup>69</sup> Kurt Sven Markstrom, in his book about Vinci’s oeuvre, makes a crucial statement:

This exposure to the music of Vinci and his rivals Porpora, Leo and Hasse was of great importance to Handel’s artistic development and can be regarded as the major factor in the stylistic changes in his music during the decade 1725–1735, changes that

<sup>68</sup> John H. Roberts, ‘Handel and Vinci’s “Didone abbandonata”: Revisions and Borrowings’, *Music & Letters* 68/2 (Apr., 1987), 141–150: 146–148.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

would become an essential aspect of his oratorios, allowing for greater lyricism in the arias and, in the process, setting up greater contrasts with the solemn grandeur of the choruses.<sup>70</sup>

I would add that this could be one of the key reasons for which Handel and Strada were so familiar, and why his instinctive manner of composing for her was astonishingly well-suited. Strada became impregnated with Vivaldi's élan and then with the sophisticated melodic and rhythmic variety of the Neapolitans in her early years, and by the time she encountered with Handel, the composer too had already integrated both into himself.

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<sup>70</sup> Kurt Sven Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoletano* (Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2007), 156.

## Chapter Five: Strada's Faithful Composer

The musical material of the Handelian roles especially written for Strada (between 1729 and 1737; Table 5.1) gives the most authentic picture of her vocal, musical and dramatic skills and how they were shaped by the hands of the composer. In the first years, between 1729 and 1732, castrato-type arias were the key numbers, which at the same time hardly ever harmonised with the embodied character. Handel initially focused on impressing the audience with Strada's best features, such as her wide range (in those years spanning b–c<sup>'''</sup>, later a–c<sup>'''</sup>), virtuosity, stamina, triplets, leaps, *messe di voce* and the singer's famously gorgeous trills. Particularly her first two roles, Adelaide in *Lotario* (1729) and the title role of *Partenope* (1730) demanded a great deal vocally, heavily accumulating various difficult technical elements.

Strada, as prima donna of the Second Academy, had to gain the audience's favour, which took her no less than three years. Besides a great number of revivals and *pasticci* filling in the seasonal programs and demonstrating Strada's worthiness as successor to the 'Rival Queens', Handel undertook one or two new operas per season. Charles Burney talks about new ideas and new divisions, meaning a fresh inspiration of Handel's inventiveness regarding the new company and Strada personally.<sup>1</sup> Strada's roles certainly show a greater diversity as far as aria types are concerned, after the enforced polarisation had to be applied in the last years of the First Academy (1726–28), when Handel emphasised the pathetic for Cuzzoni and the *bravura* for Faustina. C. Steven LaRue, in research of the first Royal Academy period, noted that changes in Handel's compositional approach were connected to singers of his cast, especially to leading ones: 'the relation between singer and aria type is closely associated with the relation between arias and the drama as a whole.' He discovered that the versatility of Margherita Durastanti and Senesino enabled Handel to write for them in all kinds of different musical styles, in contrast with a much less balanced ratio of aria types for Cuzzoni and Faustina: the former is linked to the pathetic, and mainly to the *siciliana*; the latter, to the highest level of virtuosity.<sup>2</sup> Strada's arias show a greater variety than Cuzzoni's and are more individual than those of Faustina.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: by the author, 1789), 340.

<sup>2</sup> C. Steven LaRue, 'Handel and the Aria', in: Donald Burrows (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Handel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111–121: 114–16.

Table 5.1: Strada's original Handelian roles  
(with the numbers of performances in round brackets: sum = first run + revivals)

Title of the work	Theatre	Première Date	Revivals	Role	Cast
<i>Lotario</i> (10)	King's Theatre	2 December 1729	—	Adelaide	Bernacchi, Merighi, Pio Fabri
<i>Partenope</i> (18=7+7+4)	King's Theatre	24 February 1730	12 Dec. 1730 29 Jan. 1737	Partenope	Bernacchi, Merighi, Pio Fabri
<i>Poro</i> (24=16+4+4)	King's Theatre	2 February 1731	23 Nov. 1731 8 Dec. 1736	Cleofide	Senesino, Merighi, Pio Fabri
<i>Ezio</i> (5)	King's Theatre	15 January 1732	—	Fulvia	Senesino, Bagnolesi, Montagnana
<i>Sosarme</i> (14=11+3)	King's Theatre	15 February 1732	27 April 1734	Elmira	Senesino, Bagnolesi, Montagnana
<i>Orlando</i> (10=6+4)	King's Theatre	27 January 1733	21 April 1733	Angelica	Senesino, Gismondi, Montagnana
<i>Arianna in Creta</i> (21=16+5)	King's Theatre	26 January 1734	27 Nov. 1734	Arianna	Carestini, Scalzi, Maria Caterina Negri, Durastanti
<i>Ariodante</i> (13=11+2)	Covent Garden	8 January 1735	5 May 1736	Ginevra	Carestini, Young, Beard, Negri
<i>Alcina</i> (23=18+3+2)	Covent Garden	16 April 1735	6 Nov. 1736, 10 June 1737	Alcina	Carestini, Young, Beard, Negri
<i>Atalanta</i> (10=8+2)	Covent Garden	12 May 1736	20 Nov. 1736	Atalanta	Conti, Negri, Beard
<i>Arminio</i> (6)	Covent Garden	12 January 1737	—	Tusnelda	Conti, Annibali, Bertolli
<i>Giustino</i> (9)	Covent Garden	16 February 1737	—	Arianna	Conti, Annibali, Bertolli
<i>Berenice</i> (4)	Covent Garden	18 May 1737	—	Berenice	Conti, Annibali, Bertolli

### The first original roles

Strada's London debut role, i.e. Adelaide in *Lotario*, contains an extreme sequence of arias. Its music was meant to claim that she officially took the throne of the two former divas, doing all that they had been doing and more: her excellence in vocal, musical and dramatic quality covers every kind of aria type, *tempi*, rare keys, dramatic situations, pathetic expression, rhythmic variety, stamina, agility and leaps, coupled with unflinching intonation. The role requires high notes like a<sup>''</sup>, b<sup>b''</sup> and b<sup>''</sup>, frequently occurring on metric accents or at the beginnings of phrases, emphasising support, volume, power and dramatism.

At her very first appearance, Strada as Adelaide sang a dramatic *recitativo accompagnato* (*Soglie, degli avi miei* I/5) with tritone leaps. In this way, Handel got the audience focused on the character of the lamenting queen only, thereby avoiding specific reference to Cuzzoni or Faustina. However, following that, each aria evokes one of the divas, introducing their favourite style with its characteristic technical patterns, but 'à la Strada'. Thus, Handel allowed the public to recognise similarities to Faustina here, to Cuzzoni there, and to compare their current experience with still-vivid memories of the two leading ladies' rivalry (from 1726–28, the time they shared the stage in *Alessandro*,

*Admeto, Riccardo Primo, Siroe and Tolomeo*), in order to make evident Strada's superiority.

The first closed number, the lyric *Quel cor che mi donasti* (I/8; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Allegro andante; Ex. 5.1), is primarily a Cuzzoni reminiscence, but the dynamic phrase structure and its rhythmic variety goes beyond that of Cuzzoni's arias and points towards Faustina: all the melismas on the word 'combatti' end in *f*, including twice in the *da capo* part ending in an accented b<sup>b</sup>" reached by octave leaps. The lavishness of trills is overwhelming: Burney rightly recorded that 'it seems chiefly calculated to display her [Strada's] fine and brilliant shake, for which there are more than thirty occasions in the course of the song'.<sup>3</sup> In fact, there are at least sixty-two opportunities (including *da capo*). In short, the ability to produce rapid and sprawling trills is due to agility in executing the two notes, good breath control, activity of the expiratory abdominal muscles, and a periodic, flexible and easy shaking of the larynx and the soft palate simultaneously. Besides this, it relies on the singer keeping a large space in the throat (just as Karl Georg Reutter taught the young Haydn).<sup>4</sup>

Example 5.1: Vocal part (A section) of *Quel cor che mi donasti*, with all the possible places to trill marked, bb.

34–123.

Allegro andante

34 Quel cor che mi do-na-sti ri-pi-glia ti, mio ben; e con due co-ri in sen, com-bat-ti e spe-ra, com-bat -

49 ti e spe-ra, com-bat-ti, e spe-ra! quel cor che mi do -

67 na - sti ri - pi-glia-ti, mio ben; e con due co - ri in sen, com-bat - ti,

89 e con due co-ri in sen, com-bat - ti e spe-ra, e spe - ra, com - bat - ti e spe-ra, e con due -

104 co - ri in sen, com-bat - ti, com-bat - ti,

119 e spe-ra, com-bat-ti e spe-ra.

The storm breaks out at the end of act I with *Scherza in mar la navicella* (I/9; A major, C, Allegro; Exs. 5.2 and 5.3), a castrato-type aria with which Strada presented herself as Faustina's successor in England. It bears two significant marks specific to Strada: accented high notes above a rich orchestration, and a chromatic middle section containing all the

<sup>3</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 342.

<sup>4</sup> Julianne Baird, 'An Eighteenth-Century Controversy About the Trill: Mancini v. Manfredini,' *Early Music* 15/1 (Feb. 1987), 36–45: 40–41; Karl Geiringer, *Haydn: A Creative Life in Music* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 16.

twelve semitones. An advantage might have been her high tessitura, which Handel preserved for the singer in the midst of the swirl of octave leaps. It is a simple question of perception: the same aria seems more virtuoso performed at a higher pitch than at a lower one, especially in the case of women. Burney calls it an ‘aria di bravura [...] in which Handel has given her many of his favourite divisions, which frequently occurred to him afterwards in composing and playing. It is a spirited song, in which not only the singer, but orchestra, has much to do.’<sup>5</sup>

Example 5.2: Excerpt from the A section of *Scherza in mar la navicella*, bb. 10–57.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Scherza in mar la navicella'. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system includes staves for Violin I (s. Ob.), Violin II (s. Ob.), and Cello/Bass. The vocal line is written in the soprano clef. The lyrics are: 'Scher.za in — mar la na-vi-cel-la, men-tre ri-de au-ra se-con-da; mà se poi fie-ra pro-cel-la'. The score includes performance instructions such as 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'senza Bassons e Cembalo'.

<sup>5</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 342.



tur - bail Ciel, scon - vol - ge — l'on - da và per - du - ta a nau - fra - gar,

và per - du - ta a nau - fragar,

a nau - fragar;

*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*  
*pp*

scher.za in — mar la naxi.cel - la,    mentre — ri-de au ra secon - da:    mà se poi fie -

- ra pro - cel - la    tur - ba il Ciel, scon vol.ge lòn.da    và perdu-ta a nau-fra-gar,

2

mà se poi fie ra — procel - la tur - ba il Ciel, scon.

Example 5.3: B section of *Scherza in mar la navicella* (here the vocal part passes through all the twelve semitones), bb. 76–93.

The image shows a musical score for the B section of *Scherza in mar la navicella*, measures 76-93. The score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes staves for Violin I (Viol. I.), Violin II (Viol. II.), Viola (Viola), and Bass. The vocal line is written in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "Non co-sì que sto mio co-re ce - derà d'un em - pia sor.te al - lo sde.gno, ed al fu-ro-re, che per an.co in". The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics: "fac - cia a mor.te sà da grande tri - on.far,". The third system includes the instruction "Adagio." and the lyrics: "che per an.co in fac - cia a morte sà da grande tri - on.far." The score includes performance instructions such as "Soli, e piano.", "Adagio.", and "Tutti.".

While *Scherza in mar* with its *simile (tempesta)* type does not much fit either in the course of the drama or in Adelaide's character<sup>6</sup> – though this lack of context emphasises Strada's vocal power and acrobatics all the more – the air of the prison-scene in the second act, *Menti eterne* (II/4; B<sup>b</sup> minor, 3/4, Largo; Ex. 5.4), has complete emotional as well as psychological depth in service of the drama: written in B<sup>b</sup> minor, it is based on a denser legato and *portamento* singing. This number gets closest to the real picture of the royal widow who has to fight for her kingdom and is almost forced to kill herself. According to Burney, this air is 'truly pathetic, and fit only for a singer possessed of science and feeling'.<sup>7</sup> The climax falls on the phrase 'volgete grato un sguardo a' voti miei' (upbeat to b.30 to b.36), with a minor tenth leap from e' up to g'' and a four-beat long *messa di voce* on f'' progressing into a g<sup>b</sup>'' (b.35). In this case, after the swallowing effect of *crescendo* and a slightly lesser *decrescendo*, on f'' a *crescendo-estuary* has to be formed to build up

<sup>6</sup> Winton Dean, *Handel's Operas, 1726–1741* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 143.

<sup>7</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 343.

and transfer the tension uninterruptedly to  $g^b$ ". Breathing between the two tones is not appropriate, moreover:  $f$ " has to be tied to  $g^b$ " with a greater emphasis, which can only be provided by a special type of baroque *portamento*, by dragging  $f$ " audibly to  $g^b$ ", which is a sort of *strascino*, called *messa di voce crescente* (discussed later in this chapter).

Example 5.4: A section of *Menti eterne*, bb. 15–53.

The image displays a musical score for a section of 'Menti eterne', spanning measures 15 to 53. It consists of six systems of staves. Each system includes a vocal line (soprano or alto clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 3/8. The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The score features various musical notations, including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings such as *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The lyrics are: "Men-ti e - ter - ne, men - - - tie - terne che reg - ge - te de'mor - ta - li le ri - cen - de, deh! vol - ge - te, deh! vol - ge - te gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei deh! vol - ge - te, men - ti e - ter - ne, deh! vol - ge - te gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei, gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei! men - tie - ter - ne, men - tie - ter - ne, men - tie - ter - ne che - reg - ge - te de' mor - ta - li le ri - cen - de, deh! vol - ge - te gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei, gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei, deh! vol - ge - te gra - to un sguar - do a' vo - ti miei."

In the case of the last two arias, however, the features distinguishing the two former divas' style are fading away, and through that blurring a quality of Strada's own vocal art begins to reveal itself. Although the *coloratura minuta* formulas in *D'una torbida sorgente* (II/10; B minor, 3/8, Andante; Ex. 5.5) recall Faustina's style, the aria's unique, hybrid

Andante type abundant in elaborated rhythmic elements (demisemiquaver notes, dotted rhythms and triplets) is also a trademark of Strada.<sup>8</sup> Its character is founded on a speedy and energetic passion, yet the vocal part is of genuine and continual lyricism. The perfect proportion of their balance is so astonishingly natural that it could be easy overlooked. However, it becomes clear at ‘nasce il rio più chiaro figlio’ (upbeat to b. 47 to b. 56), when the rhythmically most chiselled phrase (upbeat to b. 47 to b. 53) is followed by the purest one of the aria (bb. 53–56): there are quavers only, *senza basso* and in unison with the violins. *Non sempre invendicata* (III/2; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Allegro; Ex. 5.6) also catches something of Strada’s ability to portray the contradictory affections caused by an ambiguous situation, and ‘affords opportunities for good action as well as singing; while the orchestra supports the situation of the performer with great force and effect.’<sup>9</sup> It especially recalls Aspasia’s musical portrait from Leo’s *Zenobia in Palmira* (1725, Naples; see ch. 2, aria *Vuoi ch’io parta*).

Example 5.5: Vocal part (excerpt) of *D’una trobida sorgente*, bb. 43–56.

Example 5.5 shows a vocal excerpt from *D’una trobida sorgente*, measures 43–56. The tempo is marked *Andante*. The music is in 3/8 time and one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "na - sce il ri - o più - chia - ro - fi - glio, più chia ro fi - glio, na - sce ri - o più chia - ro fi - glio,".

Example 5.6: Excerpt from the vocal part of *Non sempre invendicata*, bb. 46–58.

Example 5.6 shows a vocal excerpt from *Non sempre invendicata*, measures 46–58. The tempo is marked *Allegro*. The music is in 3/8 time and one flat (B<sup>b</sup>). The lyrics are: "non sem-pre in - ven-di - ca - ta, non sem-pre in - ven-di - ca-ta, in - ven - di - ca ta, io res-te - rò - co - si:".

Handel finished the score of *Lotario* on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1729 and it was premièred on 2<sup>nd</sup> December at the King’s Theatre ‘with great Magnificence, the Cloaths for the Singers, Attendants and Soldiers, being all embroider’d with Silver, and 7 Sets of Scenes [sic] intirely new’.<sup>10</sup> Yet, the opera was not a success; moreover, it was generally considered to be a bad piece. After ten performances Handel was forced to revive *Giulio Cesare* to fill the time-gap. Nevertheless, opinion reflected that Strada was convincing after all: ‘Strada pleases a good deal, and from on High [Alto, i.e. Handel] it is said that she sings better

<sup>8</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *Storia del belcanto*, Contrappunti Series 15 (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1983); transl. in German by Federica Pauli, *Geschichte des Belcanto* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 101.

<sup>9</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 344.

<sup>10</sup> *The Evening Post*, 18 November 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2, 1725–1734*, ed. by Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe and Anthony Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 319.

than the two previous ones [Cuzzoni and Faustina] [...] this one [Strada] has a thin and penetrating soprano voice which charms the ear [i. e., a very loud soprano “voicet” which stimulates / thrills the ear]’;<sup>11</sup> she ‘was the Cheife & best the rest little esteem’d’;<sup>12</sup> ‘her voice is without exception fine, her manner to Perfection’;<sup>13</sup> ‘La Strada and the rest are very well lik’d’.<sup>14</sup>

No doubt, the new company had a hard time debuting before a London public drowned in partiality for Cuzzoni, Faustina and Senesino. Bernacchi failed the test indeed, just as did some other members of the cast. It is also clear from period descriptions that these members of the audience knew exactly who sang well or badly, how much and why: there are technical defects precisely listed in published accounts, like singing in the nose or throat, or observing that the voice is weak for the stage, or that the acting is poor:

Nine days ago was the premiere of the opera called Lotario. I did not see it until last Tuesday [9<sup>th</sup> December], which was the third performance. It is generally considered to be a very poor opera. Bernacchi did not please on the first night, but he changed his method for the second night and made a success of it; in his person and in his voice he is not as impressive as Senesino, but his reputation as an artist obtains for him the silence of those who will not or cannot applaud. [...] The libretto was performed in Venice last year by Faustina and Senesino, with the title Adelaide. The villain! Strada pleases a good deal, and from on High it is said that she sings better than the two previous ones [Cuzzoni and Faustina], because he never liked the one and he wants the other to be forgotten. The truth is that this one [Strada] has a thin penetrating soprano voice which charms the ear [a very loud soprano ‘voicet’ which stimulates / thrills the ear], but oh how far we are from Cuzzona! This is also the opinion of Bononcini, in whose company I heard the opera. Fabri pleases greatly, he really sings well. Would you have thought that a tenor could have such a success here? Merighi is a truly perfect actress and is generally admired for it. There is a Roman girl called Bertolli who plays male roles. Oh my dear Riva, when you see her perspiring under her helmet, I am sure you will desire her in your most Modenese way, oh how lovely she is! There is a bass from Hamburg [Riemschneider] whose voice is a more natural contralto than a bass; he sings sweetly in his throat and down his nose, pronounces Italian in a German way, acts like a young wild boar, and looks more like a valet de chambre than anything else. [...] Heydegger has had much praise for the costumes,

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<sup>11</sup> ‘La Strada incontra molto ed ab Alto si dice che canta meglio delle due passate, [...] il vero è che questa a un penetrante filetto di voce soprana che titilla le orecchie’. In my opinion, the expression ‘filetto di voce’ here is a sarcastic one, caricaturising Strada’s powerful, clear and not at all little voice. Paolo Rolli to Giuseppe Riva, 11 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 331–332.

<sup>12</sup> *Colman’s Opera Register*, 2 December 1729. *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her sister, Anne Granville, 29 or 30 November 1729. *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>14</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her sister, Anne Granville, 6 December 1729. *Ibid.*, 325.

and for the scenery, in which there is at least a respectable mediocrity. And yet the audience was very thin on the first night. We shall see.<sup>15</sup>

Had Strada possessed a poor voice, writers such as Rolli would have willingly, if not with pleasure, described it in full detail. So one wonders how high must have been the quality she was singing with, how pure and powerful the voice production, how clear the intonation, how chameleonic the change of timbres, how agile the execution of coloraturas, how smooth the *legato*, in order to make her singing unassailable? Critics of Strada have basically nothing to say about her voice or her musicality, nor even her acting, but only nag about her bodily appearance, based on subjective and discriminating partiality. Mrs Pendarves, after listening to *Lotario* multiple times, dissociated herself from the general opinion, writing to her sister on 20<sup>th</sup> December:

The opera is too good for the Vile tast[e] of the town[:] it is condemn'd never more to appear on the Stage after this Night[.] I long to hear its dying Song poor Dear Swan. We are to have some Old Opera revived [Giulio Cesare], which I am sorry for, it will put people upon making comparisons between these singers and those that perform'd before which will be a disadvantage among the ill judging Multitude[.] the present Opera is dislik'd because it is too much Studied and they love nothing but Minuetts and Ballads, in short the Beggars Opera and Hurlothrumbo are only worthy of applause.<sup>16</sup>

Though *Lotario* was never revived, of the arias sung by Strada, *Quel cor che mi donasti* found its way into the 1731 revival of *Rinaldo*, and into *Il pastor fido* in 1734 together with *Scherza in mar*, while *Non sempre invendicata* reappeared in Handel's self-pasticcio *Oreste* (1734).<sup>17</sup> In *Lotario* Handel had intended to write a *Scena aggiunta* for Strada (the

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<sup>15</sup> 'Nove giorni fa si cominciò l'Opera intitolata Lotario. Io non vi fui se non Martedì passato, cioè alla terza recita. L'Opera è universalmente stimata pessima. Bernacchi non piacque La prima sera, ma cangiò metodo La seconda, e piacque; di persona e di voce non incontra come il Senesino, ma il rinome dell'arte ch'egli à; li cattura silenzio di chi non vuole o non sa fargli plauso [...] Il libro fu recitato anno passato dalla F[austin]a e dal Sen[esin]o a Venezia intitolato Adelaide. P[er]fido! La Strada incontra molto ed ab Alto si dice che canta meglio delle due passate, perchè l'una non piacque mai, e l'altra si vuole che si scordi. il vero è che questa à un penetrante filetto di voce soprana che titilla le orecchie: ma oh quanto siamo lunge dalla Cuzzona! Q[ues]to è il parere ancora di Bon[oncin]o col quale sentij L'op[er]a. Il Fabri incontra molto, veramente canta bene. avreste mai creduto che un Tenore dovesse qui aver tale incontro? La Merighi è veramente p[er]feta attrice, e tale è general[men]te stimata. V'è una Bertolli ragazza romana, che recita da uomo. oh caro Riva quando La vedrete sudar sotto L'elmetto; son certo che La desiderarete modenesisimamente, oh che bel B[ellis]s[im]a! V'è poi un Basso d'Amburgo che à voce più da contralto natural che da basso, canta dolcemente nella gola e nel naso, pronuncia l'italiano alla cimbrica, atteggia come un pargoletto Cinghiale, ed à più faccia da valet de chambre che d'altro. Bello! [...] L'Heydeger s'è fatto grand'onore negli Abiti e bastante nelle scene ove è almeno La Santa Mediocrità. e pure il concorso manca alla bella prima. Videbimus.' Rolli to Riva in Vienna, 11 December 1729. Ibid., 331.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her sister, Anne Granville, 20 December 1729. Ibid., 333.

<sup>17</sup> Dean, *Handel's Operas, 1726–1741*, 147.

recitative *Ombre di vil timore* with the aria *Io vedo, sì, più non torbida la face*, G major, 3/8), which then became part of the next opera, *Partenope*, as *Sì, scherza, sì*.<sup>18</sup>

*Partenope*'s reception was much better. Seven performances were given from 24<sup>th</sup> February 1730 onwards, and there were two revivals of the work: one of them beginning on 12<sup>th</sup> December in the same year, likewise with seven performances, the other at Covent Garden from 29<sup>th</sup> January 1737 onwards. The opera focuses on the display of strong female characters, whereas the men are either weak or cunning. *Partenope* is the Queen of Naples, a warrior Amazon, and although she knows neither herself nor her own feelings well enough, she is a straight and lively person without deliberate manipulativeness, while *Rosmira* embodies faithfulness and masculine strength through her disguise as a man. The case of staging *Partenope* deserves attention of its own from this point of view. In 1726, connected to Faustina's arrival in London, there were negotiations with the Royal Academy about a *Partenope* production, most probably on Faustina's behalf, who gained great success as *Rosmira* in Leonardo Vinci's Venetian setting of carnival 1725.<sup>19</sup> The Academy's ex-impresario Owen Swiney, however, has sent a dissuading letter to London on 18 August 1726, arguing: 'Then there's the part of Parthenope (I suppose for Cuzzoni) which is only fit for Merighi or the Diana Vico or some He-She-thing or other.'<sup>20</sup> Antonia Merighi and Diana Vico were contraltos specialized in *travesti* roles. Merighi played the Corinthian prince Arsace in Sarro's setting in Naples in 1722, and Faustina embodied *Rosmira* who disguises herself as a man. In Vinci's *La Rosmira fedele*, however, Merighi took over *Partenope*'s role, whereas Faustina kept that of *Rosmira*, which became the centre figure and the title role of that production as a tribute to her.<sup>21</sup> Swiney emphasises in this way the fact that the role of *Partenope* requires a considerable amount of vocal as well as mental strength to represent an Amazon, the warrior queen of Naples, authentically. Four years later, Handel brought his version to life (using the libretto of the 1709 Ferrara production, likewise based on that of Silvio Stampiglia from 1699), and though Merighi sang for him at that time, yet the title role went to Strada, who was also familiar with the character of a fiery and bellicose princess welcoming romantic affections from several men simultaneously. Besides thick and intense vocal expression, agility of the larynx was also

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<sup>18</sup> Dean suggests that it was probably meant to be placed in Act III, after scene 12 (Source: Fitzwilliam Mus. MS 257, p.61). *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Reinhard Strohm, *Von Neapel nach Hamburg: Die europäischen Reisen der Partenope*. International Symposium Theater an der Wien, Vienna, 23–24 February 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Gibson, *The Royal Academy of Music, 1719–1728: The Institution and Its Directors* (New York: Garland, 1989), 249.

<sup>21</sup> Suggested by Reinhard Strohm, in one of his unpublished conference papers, 'Die Reisen von Rosmira'. Strohm, *Von Neapel nach Hamburg: Die europäischen Reisen der Partenope*; Reinhard Strohm, 'The Neapolitans in Venice', in: Strohm, *Dramma per musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), 61–80: 69–71.



necessary to do justice to the queen's music. The role of Partenope can be considered as a milestone in Strada's career, since all kinds of arias, the virtuoso, energetic and sensible ones, fit to the amazon Queen's figure, and Handel indeed enlarged Strada's vocal spheres by offering a particularly rich palette of technical and musical expression.

The opera's genre as a (heroic) comedy was also exceptional in the series of Handelian operas (together with *Agrippina*). It was not a straight comedy however, but a fake *opera seria*: a feigned drama with no tragic content but with all the possibilities of heroic yet emancipated singing. Partenope dominates the work with eight arias, a trio and a quartet. Her first aria is the first solo number of the opera as well: *L'amor ed il destin* (I/3; F major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.7), containing  $c'''$ , the highest note ever written for Strada – and for a singular occasion. Besides her, Handel only applied it for Elisabetta Pilotti-Schiavonetti (as Armida in *Rinaldo*), and for the soprano castrato, Gioacchino Conti (as Meleagro in *Atalanta* and Sigismondo in *Arminio*). Handel also allowed a top C to Celeste Gismondi in the *pasticcio* *Catone*, in the case of Caffarelli's aria *Vede il noccier* (Hasse, *Euristeo*, 1732).<sup>22</sup> Burney caught the essence of *L'amor ed il destin* when wrote that it 'abounds with passages of execution of a very agreeable and uncommon kind, that required a flexibility and agility of voice superior to any difficulties which this singer had to encounter in *Lotario*'.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the skeleton of the voice part is based on the constant use of broken chords; everything else grows from and is built around it. The goal of preserving the main notes of a certain chord inspired the coloraturas to be formed in multiple instrumental ways, mainly using certain violin idioms: semiquaver repetitions, third chains and hidden two-part-elements. The majority of the acrobatics have to be executed in a high tessitura, which defines all of Partenope's arias and highlighting  $a''$  and  $b^b''$ . Sixth and even seventh leaps within coloraturas are also regular.

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<sup>22</sup> Conti, the only explicit high soprano castrato Handel ever collaborated with, had made his London debut in *Ariodante*, and 'met with an uncommon Reception; and in Justice both as to Voice and Judgement, he may truly be esteem'd one of the best Performers in this Kingdom.' *London Daily Post*, 6 May 1736. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: 1955; reprinted New York: 1974), 406.

<sup>23</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 345.

Example 5.7: A1 section of *L'amor ed il destin*, bb. 4–18.

The musical score consists of four systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with a treble clef and a bass clef. The second system introduces the vocal line for a soprano (S.) with the lyrics: "mor ed il de-stin com-bat-te-rà per me, com-bat-te-rà per me, com-bat-te-rà,". Above the vocal line, it is noted "Viol. (s. Ob.)". The third system continues the piano accompaniment and the vocal line with the lyrics: "l'a-mor ed il de-stin com-bat-te-rà per me, combat-te-rà per me,". The fourth system concludes the section with the lyrics: "bat-te-rà per me, combat-te-rà per me,". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ornaments, and dynamic markings.

Both the uncommon nature of the coloraturas and the presence of the high C lead to the question of variations in the *da capo* part and cadenzas at the end of each section. There exists a discussion about this issue contrasting a musicological point of view with the traditions of modern performance practice, i.e. an endeavour to represent a variety of creative ideas in ornaments versus a tendency to show off a wide range including the highest notes possible. I think the exclusiveness is erroneous in both sides. Sources where a composer set down ornaments for a singer cannot be considered as standard ones, because those situations were mostly exceptional. They were written down because the singer was not skilled enough to do his or her job, including to improvise ornaments and vary them from performance to performance. Besides, the composer was not necessarily a singer, after all (though there were some singing teachers amongst them like Porpora and Leo): he wrote embellishments with the priority of fitting them into the composition, even if he considered the singer's vocal features. There are, however, some examples of singers', mainly castrati's, own ornaments of arias, for instance by Farinelli and Luigi Marchesi, which unite every kind of extremity in virtuosity, while remaining completely in style (Exs 5.8–10).

Example 5.8: Selection from Marchesi's fourteen cadenzas (original cadenza and three variations)<sup>24</sup>

man - car \_\_\_\_\_ quan - to è

trillando Tutte

Example 5.9: Selection from Marchesi's fourteen variations (original tune and four variations)<sup>25</sup>

Se vo - le - te a - ver - se \_\_\_\_\_ stel - le, ch'io re - si - sta à tan - te \_\_\_\_\_ pe - ne

Example 5.10: Farinelli's ornaments on the aria *Quell'usignolo* from Geminiano Giacomelli's *Merope*, 1734 (original tune and variation)<sup>26</sup>

Quell' u - si - gno - lo, se can - ta so - lo, spie - ga del fà - to la cru - del - tà, \_\_\_\_\_  
la cru - del - tà.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Haas, *Aufführungspraxis der Musik* (Wildpark-Potsdam: Akad. Verlagsges. Athenaion, 1931), 229.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 185–186.

Quell' u - si - gno - lo, se can - ta - so - lo, spie - ga del fa - to - la - cru - del - tà,  
 la cru - del - tà.

It is known that the art of castrati was the ideal that everybody else imitated; the best female singers sang castrato arias, with which Strada also appeared in Handel's Italian *pasticci*. Logically, these female singers also wanted to show off their vocal palette on the widest screen possible. Johann Adam Hiller discussed *passaggi* and range – the two major technical elements of embellishments and cadenzas – as the two main ambitions of singers in the (later) eighteenth century; today's performers therefore cannot be blamed for behaving according to the practice of that era. Besides, Hiller, in line with Christoph Bernhard and Giambattista Mancini, emphasised the chest support as a technically fundamental matter:

Good performance of *passaggi* demands not only a very dexterous and fluent voice but also a strong and firm chest; since all singers were not granted the same gifts by nature, it follows that not every singer may achieve that which he has noticed and admired in others. Nevertheless, the desire to sing *passaggi* has been going to singers' heads for some time already, and nothing can quite stop them, except another, even more meaningless desire, to sing up to *f''* and *g'''*.<sup>27</sup>

A few simple rules are presumable: (1) in cadenzas, especially in the final one, in order to crown the whole musical process, the voice can be carried above the highest and below the lowest note of the aria, or it can at least reach them; (2) that the ornaments in every respect – pitch, range and rhythm – can greatly diverge from the original melody but have to be in line with the harmony in the orchestra – at which point the education of eighteenth-century singers and especially their training in counterpoint becomes very important; (3) not to violate the aria's main character, but rather intensify it in accordance with the meaning of the text, or more precisely, the message of the lyrics in general; (4)

<sup>27</sup> Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange* (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Junius, 1780), V/§3; English text from Johann Adam Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation*, trans. by Suzanne J. Beicken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 102.

that embellishments, other than cadential ones, cannot force the orchestra to modify the beat, but have to be executed within a strict tempo (although “rubato”, freely), as Johann Christoph Nemeitz reported about Faustina:

I heard at the theatre of San [Giovanni] Grisostomo in Venice among others the celebrated Faustina, who always sang the first part of an aria exactly as the composer had written it but at the da capo repeat introduced all kinds of *douplements* and *maniere* without taking the smallest liberties with the rhythm of the accompaniment; so that the composer himself sometimes finds his arias, in the throat of this singer, far more beautiful and pleasing than in his own original conception.<sup>28</sup>

... and as Mancini testified about Cuzzoni:

When singing a melodic song, she knew how to adorn and embellish it with such varied “gruppettos” and passages without marring the melody; now blending, then vibrated with trills and mordentes, now “staccato” then sustained, and then loose runs in a redoubled style, soaring with a portamento from a chest tone to a high head tone, and finally, all these were done with that fine perfection that caused admiration and wonder.<sup>29</sup>

In Strada’s case it is probable that the highest note she ever sang in cadenzas too, was *c*”, and the lowest must have been *a* (below the staff). Handel’s application of the high C as well as the low b, and his choice or permission for Strada to sing an aria (in *Didone* 1737) containing a notes, is rather a written reflection of the range she might have been using in cadenzas and *da capo* ornaments regularly.

Beyond the ability to move naturally within a style, the ornaments had to reflect creativity, originality and the personality of the singer, as well as to let the best features of his or her voice shine. This constant variability was twice as necessary in the eighteenth century as it is today, when some of the audience attended the same performance even five or six times in a row. Although they lived their social lives during the opera performances,

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Unter anderen habe ich in Venedig, am [Theater] San Giovanni Grisostomo, die gefeierte Faustina gehört, die den ersten Teil einer Arie genau so sang, wie sie der Komponist geschrieben hatte; aber als sie zum Da Capo kam, machte sie jede Art von Verkleinerungen und Verzierungen, und das alles, ohne auch nur im mindesten die Richtigkeit der Begleitung zu beeinträchtigen; so dass der Komponist selbst manchmal seine Arien in der Kehle dieser Sängerin schöner und angenehmer fand als in der eigenen Phantasie.’ Johann Christoph Nemeitz, *Nachlese besonderer Nachrichten von Italien*, trans. Kees Vlaardingbrock (Leipzig: Gleditsch, 1726). Cited in Isabelle Emerson, *Five Centuries of Women Singers* (Westport Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 67.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Se cantava un aria cantabile, non trascurava ne’ siti convenevoli di ravvivare la cantilena con un cantar rubato, frammischiandovi proporzionati mordenti, gruppetti, volatine, e perfetti Trilli; che il tutto unito produceva ammirazione, e diletto.’ Giambattista Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), 23–24; trans. in English by Pietro Buzzi as *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1912), 39.

chatted, had dinner, and although there was gambling, romance, fighting in the pit sometimes, the spectators listened to their favourite singers over and over again. Despite that some arias were substituted from one night to another (so called refresher arias), the majority of the closed numbers in a role still remained unchanged, meaning that they needed to be introduced variably every time.<sup>30</sup> Upon hearing Marchesi, Burney wrote:

His variety of embellishments and facility of running extempore divisions are truly marvellous. Many of his graces are new, elegant, and of his own invention; and he must have studied with intense application to enable himself to execute the divisions, and running shakes from the bottom of his compass to the top, even in a rapid series of half notes.<sup>31</sup>

... and described Carestini's creative abilities and chest-derived executions likewise:

His voice was at first a powerful and clear soprano, which afterwards changed into the fullest, finest and deepest counter-tenor that has perhaps ever been heard. ... having a considerable portion of enthusiasm in his composition, with a lively and inventive imagination, he rendered everything he sang interesting by good taste, energy, and judicious embellishments. He manifested a great agility in the execution of difficult divisions from the chest in a most articulate and admirable manner.<sup>32</sup>

The Earl of Mount Edgumbe described Gaspare Pacchierotti, the famous mezzo-soprano castrato of the late 1700s, whom he considered as 'the most perfect singer it ever fell to my lot to hear':

He could not sing a song twice exactly the same way; yet never did he introduce an ornament that was not judicious, and appropriate to the composition.<sup>33</sup>

The lack of recording techniques and of the possibility to listen to the same polished studio version of an aria (parallel with the concept of one original, stable, and unchangeable version of an opera) favoured the concept of a written work as an existing unity which was open for adjustments made by diverse and changing performers. This concept focused the listener's perception on the live performance, which drew attention to

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<sup>30</sup> Reinhard Strohm, *The Operas of Antonio Vivaldi* (Firenze: Olschki, 2008), 38–39.

<sup>31</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 530.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 369–370.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Edgumbe (2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Munt Edgumbe), *Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England for Fifty Years, from 1773 to 1823* (London: W. Clarke, 1827), 24; see Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts. Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007), 38–39.

an overall impression, from which comparatively extraordinary details emerged. Also, the performer might not have felt the pressure to create one ideal final version of a song, as far as the ornaments or cadenzas were concerned. Today it is different, but I am convinced that it is very important to be innovative, especially when performing music of the past, because the singers of the past centuries certainly were up to date in the sense that their repertoire was based on brand new works. To recreate the unique atmosphere of performing fresh music (in many cases written for one's own individual voice), one needs to have a contemporary attitude in order to be artistically and vocally creative and personal, besides being 'historically informed' as far as style is concerned. Singers back then adjusted their voices every time to the actual auditorium as well as to the audience to deliver their message most effectively. I do not believe in copying either somebody else's ornaments and cadenzas or way of singing. I think the main goal is neither to sing nor to play exactly as musicians in the Baroque era did, because one has to address today's audience, considering their life experiences, the diverse types of music they listen to, the history gone by, and all of the economic, social, geographic, political, and cultural circumstances surrounding them. My guideline is to sing in style with the best vocal quality I can achieve, and with embellishments fitting to the composition as well as to the dramatic situation. On the other hand, I always choose to show boldly my personal musical thoughts and highlight my vocal strengths.

After the pompous start of *Partenope* with the declaration of love and destiny's battle ('L'amor ed il destin combatterà per me'), softer music comes with a light orchestration as the Queen's lover, Arsace appears. However, the weakness of a love which is not established on true sentiments is displayed by their duet *Per te moro*, which highlights this by lasting for only for five bars. The details of the following aria, *Sei mia gioia* (I/11; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, Allegro; Ex. 5.11), reveal Handel's inspired ideas of musical representation. It intends to be smooth on the surface but actually shows symptoms of inner restlessness: due to the lack of passion, the strength of the heroine transforms itself to hidden agitation and dissatisfaction. She cannot pretend happiness even for the first eight bars, because in the seventh bar the melody breaks by two seventh leaps at 'mia speranza' – a hint to the future when her infatuation towards Arsace will fade away – and this is the beginning of a large number of sixth- and seventh leaps for the rest of the aria, expressing instability: her feelings are without solid ground, her words without real meaning. Interruptions by rests in bb. 22–24 and b<sup>b</sup> " notes placed on first beats point in the same direction. The types of coloraturas likewise contrast with each other: the rolling ease of 'sei mia gioia, sei mia bene' is weak in comparison with the violin idioms and arpeggiations of 'mia speranza'.

Example 5.11: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Sei mia gioia*, bb. 13–32.

Nevertheless, the really strong meat, the two grandiose arias written in the Neapolitan style with finely ornamented yet broad melodic phrases, is yet to come: the climax of Act I, *Io ti levo l'impero dell'armi* (I/11; G major, C, Andante; Ex. 5.12; Track 5), when Partenope herself leads her armies instead of Arsace, and after the battle, at the beginning of act II, *Voglio amare* (A major, 3/4, Andante allegro; Exs. 5.13–14; Track 6) with the preceding cavatina *Care mura* (II/3; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Largo, e pomposo). Burney defined *Io ti levo* as an aria 'in the style which Hasse and Vinci were now successfully cultivating, and in which the melody of the voice part more polished, and the accompaniment more simple and quiet than any that could be found in the songs of their predecessors'.<sup>34</sup> *Io ti levo* is probably one of the best examples of how exactly this union of lyricism and dramatic virtuosity manifested in Strada's vocal art. It was reused by her in Handel's self-pasticcio *Oreste* in 1734 as well. With its long legato lines, ornamental demisemiquaver elements, dotted rhythms, trills, triplets and *messe di voce*, it is rich and royally outward-looking, but sensitive in details. The simple lyricism of the melodic structure is interrupted and periodically stimulated by trills, broken chords, triplets, sprawling demisemiquavers alternating with sustained notes, which Handel also systematically applied for Faustina. The contrast of the words 'armi' and 'anima' (weapons and soul) gives an opportunity to enhance the dramatic and lyric features separately, then to blend them together. This chiselled style consists of long phrases demanding a connected manner of singing and requiring a mature and rich voice production and a darker voice colour. In Andante, at the same time, every tiny rhythmic pattern has to be brought out clearly and precisely.

<sup>34</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 346.



Example 5.12: Vocal part (A section) of *Io ti levo l'impero dell'armi*, bb. 7–30.

Io ti le - vo l'im-pe - ro dell'ar - mi, non l'im - pe - ro dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, io ti  
 le - vo l'im-pe - ro dell' ar - mi, non l'im - pe - ro dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, io ti  
 ni - ma mi - a, dell' a - ni - ma mi - a; io ti  
 le - vo l'im - pe - ro dell' ar - mi, non l'im - pe - ro dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, non l'im -  
 pe - ro dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, io ti  
 le - vo l'im-pe - ro dell' ar - mi, non l'im - pe - ro dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, non l'im - pe - ro dell' a -  
 ni - ma mi - a, dell' a - ni - ma mi - a non l'im - pe - re dell' a - ni - ma mi - a, dell' a - ni - ma mi - a.

‘*Voglio amare*, which is extremely graceful and pleasing, was likewise sung by Strada. It is an *andante allegro*, in which while the bass chiefly moves in quiet iterated notes of a modern cast, the other instruments carry on a subject, different from the principal cantilena, in a very masterly and agreeable manner. This air is so smooth and free from wrinkles that it is difficult to imagine it to be near sixty years of age’ – Burney wrote.<sup>35</sup> *Voglio amare* is the opposite of *Io ti levo*: it has a lyric form but is powerful in details, demanding great stamina and a vented voice emission at the more agile phrases of the vocal part as well, including naturally evolving vibrato (with an oscillation of less than a semitone). It has to harmonise with the almost continually full orchestration – in contrast to *Io ti levo* neither the violins nor violas, only the oboes, stop when the vocalist enters – as well as the ever-pulsating drumming bass Ex. 5.13).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 346.

Example 5.13: Excerpt from *Voglio amare*, bb. 16–31.

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.13, an excerpt from *Voglio amare*, measures 16–31. It features a vocal line and instrumental accompaniment. The vocal line is in the bass clef, and the instrumental parts include strings and a violin. The tempo is marked 'Tutti.' and the dynamic is 'pp'. The lyrics are: 'voglio a ma-re in - sin ch'io mo-ro l'i-dol mio per mio ri - sto - ro, e per - chè, e per - chè'.

Example 5.14: Vocal part (A section) of *Voglio amare*, bb. 17–90.

The image shows the vocal part of Example 5.14, measures 17–90. The tempo is marked 'Andante allegro'. The vocal line is in the treble clef. The lyrics are: 'Vo-glio a - ma-re sin ch'io mo - ro l'i-dol mio per mio ris - to - ro, e per - chè sò - che - ti - spia - ce, sò che ti - spia ce, che - ti spia - ce; vo-glio a - ma-re sin ch'io mo-ro l'i-dol mio per mio ris - to - ro, e per - chè, e per - chè, sò che - ti - spia ce, sò che ti spia - ce, e per - chè, sò che ti spia-ce, che - ti spia - ce, sò che ti spia - ce, e per - chè, sò che ti spia - ce, che - ti spia - ce.'

Although *Qual farfallotta* (II/7; A major, 3/8, Allegro) – a simile aria with neighbour-note oscillation imitating the butterfly’s motion around the light – was originally meant for the tenor Fabri as Emilio, operates with the same patterns as *Io ti levo*, but in Allegro.

In *Spera e godi* (III/2; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.15) the lyric and passionate sides of Partenope are sharply split, and the edge of the knife is the phrase-beginning on b<sup>b</sup> on the words ‘e tu pena, ingannator’. To begin a phrase with a certain note requires that that note can be sung by the singer securely and resonantly with full support and beautiful colour. Of the two occurrences here, the first contains marked notes, expressing the anger and vengeance with which the queen attacks the unfaithful Arsace; while in the second, though it is on an upbeat, the melody turns back to b<sup>b</sup>, which has to be accented to display her sharp disdain. Even *Sì, scherza, sì*, the last and most relaxed aria of Partenope was based on Strada’s second-octave silver-tones (bb. 70–74, 81–84; on the words ‘scherza ... ad un sol cor’; Ex. 5.16).<sup>36</sup>

Example 5.15: Vocal part (A section) of *Spera a godi*, bb. 24–40.

Example 5.16: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Sì, scherza, sì*, bb. 70–84.

### A multi-faceted vocal personality

Besides the series of monumental airs, Handel’s other main goal was to bring Strada’s manifold lyric abilities into blossom. The singer’s secure artistic identity allowed the unique role of Cleofide (*Poro* 1731) to be formed. It is exceptional in the sense that this was the first opera part in Strada’s career entirely dedicated to the pathetic style, lacking Allegro numbers. Burney reported: ‘This opera, though it contains but few airs in a great and elaborate style, was so dramatic and pleasing that it ran fifteen nights successively in the spring season, and was again brought on the stage in the autumn, when it sustained four repetitions more.’<sup>37</sup> He also mentioned Strada’s fine voice, good shake (trill) and elegant

<sup>36</sup> *Sì, scherza, sì* was omitted at the first revival of *Partenope* in December 1730, but restored at the second one at Covent Garden in January 1737.

<sup>37</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 353.

manner of singing.<sup>38</sup> Strada was inclined to do what no other leading lady or first man would do for Handel, i.e. to sing a role completely without an *aria di bravura*, although that role turned out to be one of her as well as the composer's greatest successes. At this time, Strada finally gained favour with the British society. In fact, *Poro* was the opera Strada sang the most times: there were twenty-four performances altogether.<sup>39</sup> Lord Hervey wrote about a revival performance in November of the same year that 'I thought the Opera to Night would never be finish'd, they encore'd so many Songs; and I have wanted this hour & half to come home'.<sup>40</sup> Cleofide's power as a character resides in her equality with Poro: she is faithful to her spouse, whom she deeply loves, yet is a politically gifted queen. Nevertheless, her beauty puts her unwillingly into dangerous situations, from which Poro's natural and sincere reactions lead to fatal misunderstandings. Committed love from both sides is displayed through suicidal attempts.

During the succession of Cleofide's arias, none faster than Andante, the legato singing and *portamento* technique as the highest level of vocal continuity come into prominence. Handel guided Strada on purpose in this direction: for instance, he simplified her first air, *Se mai turbo il tuo riposo* (I/6; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4, Larghetto andante) both rhythmically and in its range, to liberate the voice for other modes of expression.

According to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatises of Giovanni Battista Doni, Tosi, Mancini and others, *portamento* – putting forth of the voice – was considered as the ultimate proof of a singer of high artistic quality:

Portamento di voce is the perfection of vocal music; it consists in the swell and dying of the voice, the sliding and blending one note to another with delicacy and expression – and expression comprehends every charm which music can produce; the Portamento di voce may justly be compared to the highest degree of refinement in elegant pronunciation in speaking.<sup>41</sup>

It meant joining together two distant notes of equal strength and quality and were joined together without a break and with expression.<sup>42</sup> Even Nicola Vaccai as late as 1833 wrote

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 351.

<sup>39</sup> There were two revivals, the second of which must have been postponed until a week later, from 1 to 8 December 1736, because Strada got 'violently ill of a Fever and Sore Throat'. There was an influenza epidemic spread in London at that time. Strada took over the *seconda donna*, Erissena's Allegro aria, *Come il candore d'intatta neve* (II/V), in 1736, most probably because of the mezzo-soprano Rosa Negri's limited capacities. *London Daily Post*, 2 December 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 419.

<sup>40</sup> Lord Hervey's letter to Stephen Fox, 30 November 1731. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 474.

<sup>41</sup> Domenico Corri, *Singer's Preceptor. Dialogue between master and scholar* (London: 1810; repr. New York: 1995), 3–4.

<sup>42</sup> Tosi, *Observations*, 29, 53, and 178–179; Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 87, 91–93; Mancini, *Practical reflections*, 108 and 111–113.

in his *Metodo pratico*: ‘By carrying the voice from one note to another, it is not meant that you should drag or drawl the voice through all the intermediate intervals, an abuse that is frequently committed, but it means to unite perfectly the one note with the other’.<sup>43</sup> *Portamento* in the Baroque sense, therefore, functioned as an indicator of perfectly blended registers, as Mancini declared that a ‘*portamento* cannot be acquired unless the student has first blended the registers of the voice which are in every one more or less separate. [...] By *portamento* I mean the passing and blending of the voice from one tone to another, with perfect proportion and union, in ascending as well as descending’.<sup>44</sup> Burney also defined it as a proof of a good and healthy technique: ‘conduct of the voice: the *portamento* is said to be good, when the voice is neither nasal nor guttural’.<sup>45</sup> Vincenzo Manfredini likewise enumerated it among the most important features of good singing: ‘Singing with *portamento*, the drawing [sustaining] of the voice, the purity [filtering], the spinning [of the sound], the covering [shading] at the right time and place [in time and place], these are the true beauties of singing.’<sup>46</sup> In addition, *portamento* was not identical to the basic legato but a special form of it, required in places where the natural one would not have been enough: it was the legato of notes of a greater distance, of larger leaps by strictly technical means, and from a wider point of view, the most direct form of emotional and rhetorical expression connected with keywords of the sung text (Exs 5.17–18).<sup>47</sup>

Example 5.17: Baroque *portamento*: Leonardo Vinci: *Astianatte* – Piangi pur (II/1 Ermione, sung by Strada in Naples in 1725), excerpt from the vocal part, bb. 12–16.

Andante

pian-gi pur, so-spi-ra pur, pian-gi pur se tu vuoi tro - var pie - tà, se tu vuoi tro - var pie-tà;

Example 5.18: Baroque *portamento*: Leonardo Leo: *Zenobia in Palmira* – Placar ti dovresti (I/6 Aspasia, sung by Strada in Naples in 1725), excerpt from the vocal part, bb. 6–16.

Pla - car ti dov - res - ti des - ti - no se - ve - ro e sem - pre più fie - ro tor - men - ti il mio cor,

<sup>43</sup> Nicola Vaccai, *Metodo pratico* (1833), trans. and ed. Michael Aspinall (Turin: 2000), 3.

<sup>44</sup> Mancini, *Practical reflections*, 108.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London: T. Becket, 1773), vii.

<sup>46</sup> ‘Il cantar di portamento, il fermar la voce, il colarla, il filarla, lo smorzarla a tempo, e luogo ec. queste sono le vere bellezze del Canto.’ Vincenzo Manfredini, *Regole Armoniche o sieno Precetti Ragionati per apprendere la Musica*, second ed. (Venice: Zerletti, 1775), 7; Virginia Croskery, *The Bel Canto War: A Critical and Annotated Translation of Vincenzo Manfredini’s Regole Armoniche Part III (1797) with Relevant Essay*. Doctoral dissertation. (University of Iowa, 2005), 91. Accessed 1 December 2014. <http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/5066>

<sup>47</sup> John Potter, ‘Beggar at the Door: The Rise and Fall of Portamento Singing’, *Music & Letters* 87/4 (Nov., 2006), 523–550: 526.

*Portamento* was a special form of legato, binding distant intervals sung on keywords of the text, and executed with a higher measure of emotional and rhetoric expression: the stressed syllable had to be prepared by swelling the preceding note through changing breath control and measure of support. In a sense, this was a *messa di voce*, or drawing of the voice, executed on more than one tone, which Manfredini defined as the basis of *portamento* singing: ‘By *drawing the voice* is meant sustaining it as long as possible, and holding the notes for their full value. From these results the most beautiful style of singing that undoubtedly consists of singing legato, and carried (*portato*) as one is wont to say. For this reason, one would call this style *singing with portamento*, or *portamento* of the voice.’<sup>48</sup> Mancini was of the same mind when discussing *cantar di sbalzo*: ‘Naturally, the low tone must vibrate and be sustained with strength according to the requirements, and the high note attacked softly, keeping always a corresponding proportion between the tones. This execution must be blended with a “Portamento di voce”’.<sup>49</sup> One can sing a line with a completely even legato, but in the moment when the singer wants to give an emphasis to a stressed syllable without breaking the line, he or she has to prepare it by swelling the preceding note, which means not only *crescendo* but also a change in the breath control and a higher measure of support on the stressed syllable within the phrase. Usually, on the succeeding syllable – mostly the last of the keyword – a decrease has to be done to return to *mezza voce*.

The technique is that of the nineteenth-century *portamento*, but with no significant vibrato; continual, blast-like sliding with equal speed through all of the microtones was certainly not involved. According to Johann Adam Hiller:

The essential feature of the so-called *portamento* or carrying of the voice lies in the fact that while progressing from one tone to the next without a gap or break, no unpleasant slur or pull through smaller intervals should be detected. In the first case one says: the singer pushes; in the latter, he howls. In the first case the fault lies in the fact that the singer attacks the tones too strongly and also pushes them forward as his

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<sup>48</sup> ‘Fermar la voce s’intende sostenerla più che sia possibile, e tener le note tutto il tempo che vagliono. Da ciò poi ne risulta la più bella maniera di cantare, che certamente consiste nel cantar legato, e portato, come si suol dire; quindi per questo motivo dicesi ancora *cantar di portamento*, o *portamento di voce*.’ Croskery, *The Bel Canto War: A Critical and Annotated Translation of Vincenzo Manfredini’s Regole Armoniche Part III (1797) with Relevant Essay*, 63 (English trans.) and 112 (Italian original).

<sup>49</sup> ‘è naturale, che in se stessa la corda grave deve esser vibrata, oppur sostenuta con forza secondo il bisogno, eppure anche l’acuto, comunque, si adopera, convien sempre trattarlo con dolcezza, purchè fra l’uno, e l’altro resti sempre conservata una proporzionata corrispondenza. Necessario anch’è, che l’esecuzione perfetta vada unita col portamento di voce.’ Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 141; *Practical Reflections*, 158.

chest is too weak to sustain the tones evenly; in the second case semitones can be heard which do not have a harmonic relationship to either one of the other tones.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, *portamento* also can be considered as a *messa di voce* executed on more than one tone, on relations of two or three. Singers who excelled in *messa di voce*, consequently had a developed support and breathing technique, which automatically meant an easier control over the proportions of *portamento*.<sup>51</sup> In fact, the same principle, i.e. that the *messa di voce* can be stretched and projected to different notes, was used for *messa di voce crescente* and *decescente*,<sup>52</sup> executed by dragging the voice imperceptibly a half or whole step in a semi-state between *portamento* and its other types with an audible glide, *scivolo* or *strascino*.<sup>53</sup> *Scivolo* ('glide', also called the slur) and *strascino* (drag) were used at slower *tempi*, especially in declamatory 'pathetic' numbers as well as arias *alla siciliana*, and had ornamental and expressive functions. Tosi asserted:

*Divisions and Shakes in a Siciliana are Faults, and Glidings and Draggs are Beauties.*

[the *scivolo*] is perform'd in such a Manner that the first Note is a Guide to all that follow, closely united, gradual, and with such Evenness of Motion, that in Singing it imitates a certain Gliding, by the Masters called a *Slur*; the Effect of which is truly agreeable when used sparingly.

The Use of the *Slur* is pretty much limited in Singing, and is confined within such few Notes ascending or descending, that it cannot go beyond a fourth without displeasing. It seems to me to be more grateful to the Ear descending, than in the contrary Motion.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation*. Trans. by Suzanne J. Beicken, 56.

<sup>51</sup> John Potter, 'Beggars at the Door: The Rise and Fall of Portamento Singing', 535.

<sup>52</sup> *Messa di voce crescente* and *decescente* as a chromatic drag was called interchangeably *strascino* from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, Tosi used the term *strascino* differently, describing the audible binding of distant notes above an octave.

<sup>53</sup> Tosi, *Opinioni*, II. §15; Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zur Singekunst* (Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1757), 57; Julianna C. Baird (ed. and transl.), *Art of Singing by Johann Friedrich Agricola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 90–91.

<sup>54</sup> 'I Passaggi, e i Trilli nelle Siciliane sono errori; E lo Scivolo, e lo Strascino delizie.'; 'Il secondo formasi in maniera, che la sua prima nota conduca tutte quelle, che gli vengono appresso così strettamente unite di grado, e con tanta uguaglianza di movimento, che cantando s'imiti un certo sdrucciolo liscio, che da' Professori è detto Scivolo, i di cui effetti sono veramente gustosissimi, allorché una Vocalista se ne serve di rado.'; 'La giurisdizione dello Scivolo è assai limitata nel Canto, Egli talmente a poche corde ascendenti, e discendenti di gradi si restringe, che se non vuol dispiacere non può passar la quarta. All'orecchio parmi più grato però quando scende, che quando cammina per moto contrario.' Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (Bologna: dalla Volpe, 1723), 31–32 and 34–35; *Observations on the Florid Song or, Sentiments on the ancient and modern Singers*. Translated by John Ernest Galliard (London: Wilcox, 1743), 53 and 57.

Johann Friedrich Agricola in his *Anleitung zur Singekunst* (1757) illustrated the latter passage by four-note *scivoli* actually arriving on a fifth tone (Ex. 5.19).

Example 5.19: Agricola's example of *scivolo*



Many singing schools paid special attention to the right measure and careful use of gliding as well as alerting against its abuse. Mancini recommended:

In a “siciliana” style, it is just as well to perform the slur and dragging, if used in the right place and with the right proportion. One of the greatest merits for a singer, is to sustain the voice at the same degree. To do this, one must be attentive that he keeps the right proportion, which means well regulated high tones given with sweetness and facility, devoid of any harshness that would offend the ear.<sup>55</sup>

*Se il Ciel mi divide* (II/8; A minor, 3/8, Larghetto; Ex. 5.20; Track 8), Cleofide's implausibly beautiful aria (a borrowing of *Vado co' miei martiri* from Francesco Antonio Pistocchi's *Narciso*, 1687) about not wanting to live without her spouse, is maybe the best example for this in Strada's repertoire. It has an obbligato solo violin part, offering an exceptional possibility for the virtuoso violinist, Pietro Castrucci, leader of Handel's opera orchestra between 1718 and 1737, to show off his skills, which he otherwise would not have had in the shadow of star singers (or at least only at some benefit concerts). Here the use of *scivolo* as an audible but soft passing on intermediate diatonic notes with blurred contours is absolutely appropriate, especially on words like ‘divide’ (‘separates’; b. 22), ‘dolor’ (‘pain’; bb. 51–52) or ‘moro’ (‘I die’; b. 88), imitating the motifs of the violin (bb. 13–14 and 53–54).

<sup>55</sup> ‘come pure in un tempo di Siciliana conviene frammischiarvi lo *scivolo*, e lo *strascino*, purchè siano posti ne' siti convenevoli, e fatti con le dovute proporzioni. Si dovrà però sempre sostenere la voce al suo grado dovuto, perché abbandonandola se le toglie il maggior pregio; E perciò devesi attentamente badare alla proporzione dovuta, con regolare insieme gli acuti con dolcezza, e facilità, spogliando li totalmente di quella proporzione di crudezza che offende l'udito.’ Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni*, 137–38; *Practical Reflections*, 164.



Example 5.20: Excerpt (violin and vocal parts) from *Se il Ciel divide*, bb. 5–54.

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a violin part and a vocal part. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto'. The violin part features trills (tr) and dynamic markings like 'tutti' and 'solo'. The vocal part includes the following lyrics:

Se il Ciel mi di-vi-de dal ca-ro mio spo-so, per-chè non m'uc-  
 ci - de pie - to - so il do - lor? se il Ciel mi di - vi - de dal ca - ro mio  
 spo - so, per - chè non m'uc - ci - de pie - to - so, pie - to - so il do - lor?  
 per - chè non m'uc - ci - de pie - to so il do - lor?

John Ernest Galliard footnoted Tosi’s description of *scivolo* in 1742 as ‘the Gliding notes are like several Notes in one Stroke of the Bow on the violin’. This might refer to playing it with different fingers, for Tosi discusses it as a manner of division. The violinist Francesco Geminiani, a pupil of Corelli declared about sliding that ‘no two notes on the same string, in shifting, should be played with the same finger’ (*The Art of Playing on the Violin* 1751), while Burney considered the same-finger-shifting technique a beautiful effect of great players, towards the end of the century (1789).<sup>56</sup> The simplicity of the melody and the triple metre are offering free space for *scivolo* as well as for *tempo rubato* (contrametric *rubato*), the rhythmic flexibility of the melody over the orchestra keeping strict time.<sup>57</sup> Tosi’s opinion is that good taste consists

in the *Cantabile*, in the putting forth the Voice agreeably, in *Appoggiatura*’s, in Art, and in the true Notion of Graces, going from one Note to another with singular and unexpected Surprizes, and stealing the Time exactly on the true *Motion* of the Bass.

<sup>56</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 643.

<sup>57</sup> Sandra P. Rosenblum, ‘The Uses of Rubato in Music, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries’, *Performance Practice Review* VII/1 (Spring 1994), 33–53.

These are the principal and indispensable Qualities which are most essential to the singing well<sup>58</sup>

*Scivolo* and *strascino*, though covering similar vocal gestures, are not identical: *scivolare* means ‘slipping through’ and refers to a fine and lighter gliding with no significant time aspect. *Strascinare*, however, stands for ‘dragging’: it is weightier and more dramatic in nature, and presumably a stronger *tempo* oscillation ought to be involved in its execution.<sup>59</sup> Though it also meant a chromatic drag and was interchangeable with *messa di voce crescente* and *decescente*,<sup>60</sup> Tosi’s definition is different: ‘on an even or regular movement of a bass, which proceeds slowly, the singer begins with a high Note, dragging it gently down to a low one, with the *Forte* and *Piano*, almost gradually, with Inequality of Motion, that is to say, stopping a little more on some Notes in the Middle, than on those that begin or end the *Strascino* or *Dragg*.’<sup>61</sup> Galliard provided musical demonstrations additionally (Ex. 5.21):

Example 5.21: Galliard’s example of *strascino*



According to Thomas Busby’s *Complete Dictionary of Music* of 1801, *strascino* ‘is only used in slow passages. It consists of unequal and descending motion, and generally includes from eight to twelve notes... is of powerful effect, especially when performed by a soprano voice’.<sup>62</sup> As late as 1815, Jousse still adopted Tosi’s definition. In another aria sung by Strada, *Al furor che ti consiglia* (Tusnelda’s Andante revenge aria in Handel’s *Arminio*; Ex. 5.22), before the final cadence of section A there is an octave fall from a” to a’, preceded by an eleventh leap from e’ to a” (bb. 40–41). The *fermata* for the strings as well as the pause for the continuo might indicate *strascino*, but in this case instead means *tempo rubato* with time rather stretched, because Andante would be too fast for a steadily continuing metre.

<sup>58</sup> Tosi, *Observations*. Trans. by Galliard, 129.

<sup>59</sup> Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music. With Special Emphasis on J. S. Bach* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 554.

<sup>60</sup> Julianne C. Baird (ed. and transl.), *Art of Singing by Johann Friedrich Agricola* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Quando sul movimento è uguale, d’un Basso che lento cammini di croma in croma un Vocalista mette la prima voce sugli acuti strascinandola dolcemente al grave col forte, e col piano quasi sempre di grado con disuguaglianza di moto, cioè fermandosi più su qualche corda di mezzo, che su quelle che principiano, o finiscono lo strascino.’ Tosi, *Opinioni*, 114; Tosi, *Observations*. Trans. by Galliard, 178–179.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Busby, *A Complete Dictionary of Music* (London: Richard Phillips, 1801).

Example 5.22: Excerpt from *Al furor, che ti consiglia*, bb. 31–47.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century vocal techniques like *port de voix*, *accento*, *cercar della nota* and *intonazione della voce* were offshoots of the *strascino*-effect, indicating its consequent use.<sup>63</sup> In contradistinction to the modern conception, audible kinds of *portamenti* were part of vocal practice since the sixteenth century, as contemporary treatises give a hint to in such an unequivocal way that Ellen T. Harris plainly concluded: ‘portamento is largely rejected in classical vocal music and opera. This so-called “pure” style of singing, however, has no basis in vocal practice of the seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries’.<sup>64</sup>

Besides its flowing lyricism, the role of Cleofide continued building the tradition of Strada’s Andante arias with various phrases and unconventional coloraturas. *Se troppo crede al ciglio* (III/4; E minor, C, Andante; Ex. 5.23) has at least three remarkable moments: (1) on the words ‘vede partir le sponde’ a sequential violin idiom can be found; then (2) in the B section there is a combination of trills, note repetitions and rapid back-and-forth fourth and fifth intervals on ‘scherza’, and (3) slow repetitions highlight the word ‘ombra’ (shadow).

<sup>63</sup> Stewart Carter, ‘Francesco Rognoni’s “Selva de varii passaggi” (1602): Fresh Details concerning Early Baroque Vocal Ornamentation’, *Performance Practice Review* II/1 (Spring 1989), 5–33: 13–14; Ellen T. Harris, ‘Cercar della nota’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 25 February 2015; Harris, ‘Portamento (i)’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 25 February 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Ellen T. Harris, ‘Portamento (i)’, in: Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, second edition (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2001).

Example 5.23: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Se troppo crede al ciglio*, bb. 9–36 and 50–57.

Andante

Se trop-po cre-de al ci-glio co - lui che v`a per l'on-de, in ve-ce del na-vi - glio ve - de par-tir le spon-de,  
 giu - ra che fug - ge il li - do, e pur co - si non`e, e pur, e pur co - si non`e; se trop-po cre-de al ci-glio co -  
 lui che v`a per l'on - de, in ve - ce del na - vi - glio ve - de par-tir le spon - de,  
 giu - ra che fug - ge il li - do, e pur co - si non`e, n`o co - si non`e, ve - de par-tir le spon -  
 de, giu - ra che fug - ge il li - do, e pur co - si non`e, e pur, co - si non`e,  
 non`e, giu - ra che fug - ge il li - do, e pur co - si non`e.  
 se trop-po al ci - glio cre - de fan - ciul - lo al fon - te ap - pres - so, scher  
 za coll' om - bra, e ve - de

*Ezio*, premi`ered on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1732, can also be considered as a transitional work in the progress of Strada's collaboration with Handel. The composer's discovery of her complete and extended vocal technical toolkit terminates here, marked by the lowest note ever written especially for her: b in *Ah! non son io che parlo* (although she sang *a* notes in the *pasticcio* *Didone*, 1737). *Bravura* elements and lyricism began to become securely balanced and undisturbedly harmonized with the embodied character and dramatic situations. From the fourth year of their collaboration, Handel's way of composing for Strada's voice expresses a deeper level: it essentially lies more in the intrinsic construction on a greater scale, in the general manner of an aria or even a whole role, which outcrops in details again and again, as it happens for example in *Quel fingere affetto* (II/7; G major, 3/4, Andante). This transformation is not about reflecting certain features of Strada's voice on the surface but her essential vocal quality. *Caro padre* (I/3; E minor, 3/4, Larghetto; Ex. 5.24), with flutes, proves the homogeneity of her voice throughout the chest as well as the head registers.

Example 5.24: Excerpt from *Caro padre*, bb. 20–32.

The image shows a musical score for an excerpt from 'Caro padre'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line with lyrics: 'Ca-ro pa-dre, ca-ro pa-dre, a me non de-i ram-men-tar che pa-dre se-i: io lo sò, mà in que-sti ac-'. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: '-cen-ti non ri-tro-vo il ge-ni-tor, in que-sti ac- cen-ti non ri-tro-vo il ge-ni-tor,'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'pp' and 'Tutti'.

Almost every bar of the voice part contains a sixth or seventh leap in both directions, including a tenth in the A2 section, and shows equally strong resonance of e' and d' notes as of g'' or a'', mainly through the continuous stretching of the melody. The first setting of the limb 'mà in questi accenti non ritrovo il genitor' with its three-time switch from e' to e'' and a tenth leap from e' to g'' re-occurred years later in *Al furor che ti consiglia* from *Arminio* in 1737, though with an eleventh leap and with a faster tempo, that of Andante, confirming that Strada's vocal power was on display throughout it.

Another essential feature of Strada's art took shape in *Finchè un zeffiro soave* (I/12; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Andante; Ex. 5.25) – which she also repeated at the performances of the revised version of *Il pastor fido* in May and November 1734 – one of the arias so painfully misunderstood by the historically informed performance practice of our days. It seems that there is confusion around the tempo indication Andante, though simply focusing on the vocal part would clarify everything. Instead, it is performed like a slower concerto movement from the late 1700s or early 1800s, with obbligato soprano voice, comfortable for the orchestra but neglecting the true nature of the piece, which causes the weakening of the vocal phrase-building and energy, and forces the singer to breathe where the score itself forbids it. Andante is a tempo which unites vocal virtuosity and lyricism in a galant way, not by compromising and giving up a bit of both but by utilising all the advantages of them: panther-like agility, energy, and rhythmic variety blended with smoothness, various shades of vocal colours and the freedom of time and serenity. Calmness is provided not by slowness but by technical flexibility and by a fresh, resounding yet soft voice production

both by the singer and the orchestra. Handel’s markings for trills are not exclusive, and in this case they have an additional meaning. Modern Baroque singers use the trill much too sparingly, mostly because they are lacking the right technique and it does not come easily to them. Even the most appreciated ones with the best period-instrument orchestras and conductors behind them are missing fundamental trills in cadential places. Trills, *appoggiaturas*, *portamenti*, etc. were not meant for the *da capo* repetitions solely, but there was a requirement of their general use. Therefore, composers did not write trills out without a special reason, because they left it for the singer. In *Finchè un zeffiro*, in the longer coloraturas of ‘soave’ (bb. 14–15) and ‘placata’ (bb. 34–35) there is but one trill marked during each, in the only place to breathe.<sup>65</sup> Trills are expected on the other similar notes as well, but without taking an additional breath.

Example 5.25: Excerpts from *Finchè un zeffiro save*, bb. 12–23 and 32–35.

The image displays three systems of musical notation. The first system shows a vocal line with lyrics 'Fia. chè un zef. fi. ro so a -' and a Violin (s. Ob.) part with trills and a *pp* dynamic. The second system features a 'Tutti' section with lyrics 've tien del mar - lì ra pla. ca. ta,' and includes Violin (s. Ob.) and Violoncello parts with various dynamics like *pp* and *f*. The third system continues the instrumental parts with lyrics 'o. gni na. ve è for. tu. na - ta,' and includes a Violoncello part.

<sup>65</sup> G. F. Handel, *Ezio* HWV 29. Autograph, *GB-Lbl* R.M.20.a.12, ff. 33v–34r.

The one trill is there exceptionally, because everything written in the Baroque era for a single syllable was meant to be sung in one breath. Treatises teach that even cadenzas should be performed without interruption (except by taking breath imperceptibly, see Burney's remark on Faustina).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, breath capacity limits the length of a cadenza – in other words, the cadenza as well as long phrases are to display breath control. Had the composer wanted otherwise, he would have written some short rests as happens in many arias, but what is written in a block should be sung without interruption, unless by stealing breath unperceived after a sustained or dotted note in the midst of unusually long passages. Necessarily, the performing speed of *Finchè un zeffiro's* (and of every other aria) is determined by the singer's capacity to bind the phrase with one breath, or, in this case, steal a little breath after the written-out trill only. Listening to some of the available recordings, this seems not to be discerned by conductors.

*La mia costanza* (II/12; A major, 3/8, Allegro; Ex. 5.26) is one of the most excellent outcomes of Strada's vocal development and Handel's understanding of it. This concerto-like movement draws out fine energy-lines, and juggles with a manifold virtuosity, containing arpeggiations, *messe di voce*, *volatine* in both directions, dotted rhythms, violin idioms, sixth-, seventh-, octave- and ninth leaps, chromatics, trills, accented *a* notes and a wide range (*c<sup>#</sup>* to *a*). The extended and by this time regular use of *e* as well as *a* reveals that Strada's head register must have sounded especially beautiful, rich, shiny and firm. The aria's main difficulty lies in the combination of the applied patterns and bespeaks a crystal-clear and refined intonation.

<sup>66</sup> Baird, *Art of Singing by Johann Friedrich Agricola*, 24, 30–31 and 211; Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zu singekunst* (Berlin: G. L. Winter, 1757), 196; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 308; Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation*. Trans. by Suzanne J. Beicken, 28; Michael F. Robinson, *Naples and Neapolitan Opera*. Oxford Monographs on Music (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 104; see Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung, die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Boß, 1752), 282–283; Quantz, *On playing the flute*, translated with notes and introduction by Edward R. Reilly (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 179–180; Martha Elliot, *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices* (New haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 75–77; Howard Mayer Brown, 'Embellishing Eighteenth-Century Arias: On Cadenzas', in: *Opera and Vivaldi*, ed. by Michael Collins and Elise K. Kirk (University of Texas Press, 1984), 258–276.

Example 5.26: Vocal part (excerpts) from *La mia costanza*, bb. 30–42 and 111–145.

**Allegro**

La mia co - stan - za non - si - sgo - men - ta, non - si - sgo - men - ta,

111 la mia co - stan - za non si sgo - men - ta, non ha spe - ran - za, ti - mor non ha,

123 non ha - spe - ran - za

135 za! la mia co - stan - za non si sgo - men - ta, non ha spe - ran - za, ti - mor non ha, no'

The lyric partner of this supremacy is found in *Ah! non son io che parlo* (III/12; B minor, 6/8, Larghetto; Ex. 5.27), introduced worthily by the *accompagnato* recitative, *Misera, dove son!*, dealing entirely with the sensation of time (i.e. with all the aspects of *tempo rubato*, reflecting Fulvia's feeling of losing contact with reality). She is abused by her father (Massimo) for his ambition to kill the emperor, due to which she has become separated from her beloved Ezio. She pushes Massimo aside as the very cause of all her unhappiness, and then is suffocated by the state of her distorted identity. *Ah! non son io che parlo* is marked by an expressive and even threatening ostinato motif in the bass: 'the voice of fate', as Strohm calls it.<sup>67</sup> Time can and should be stretched or stopped in different measures at every general pause (in bb.1, 4, 6, 19 and 31) so expressively that this swinging could be transported and transform itself to a melodic waving in the second half of the A part.

<sup>67</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Handel's *Ezio*', in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 225–231: 229.



Example 5.27: Ah! non son io che parlo

*Larghetto.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Viola.  
FULVIA.  
Bassi.

*pp* *p* *p*

Ah! non son io che parlo, è il bar-ba-ro do-lo-re, che

mi di-vi-de il co-re, che de-li-rar mi fù, è il bar-ba-ro do-

lor, che di-li-rar mi fù; ah! nò, non son io che par-lo, è il bar-ba-ro do-

lo-re, che de-li - rar mi fū, che de-li - rar, che de-li - rar mi fū, che de-li - rar mi

fū, che de-li - rar, che de-li - rar mi fū; ah! non son io che

par-lo, è il bar-ba-ro do-lo-re, che mi di-vi-de il co-re, che mi di-vi-de il

co-re, che de-li - rar, che de-li - rar mi fū, che de-li - rar mi

*Adagio.*  
fù, che de-li - rar mi fù, che de - li - rar mi fù.

*Non*  
(Fine.)

cu - rail Ciel ti - ran-no l'af - fan - no, in cui mi ve - do, un'

ful - mi - ne gli chie - do, e un ful - mi - ne non ha, un ful - mi - ne non ha,

*Adagio.*  
*Dal Segno.*  
un ful - mi - ne gli chie - do, e un ful - mi - ne non ha.

Reflecting on available recordings again, Sandrine Piau and Rinaldo Alessandrini have a fantastic insight into this aria: their performance is spasmodic, agonising, halting and ductile, though it merges into necessary heavy points; its gravity is lifted up and carried by the pulsation of the triple rhythm. Although Piau has a light lyric coloratura voice and Strada's voice production was of fuller volume and with more inner power in my opinion, Piau sings it entirely convincingly.<sup>68</sup> Others, unfortunately, are playing after the metronome with no sensitivity of this swinging of time, painfully blasting through all the general pauses and sigh-motives, and thus turning the aria into a dance-movement with rhythmic accents; singers – except for Verónica Cangemi – usually misinterpret it as a *vendetta* aria, applying ill-fitting and artificial vocal gestures, not discovering at any point the essence of this number, and thus remaining completely out of dimension.

*Ezio* was shortly followed by *Sosarme*, the eleven performances of which were held between 4<sup>th</sup> February and 21<sup>st</sup> March 1732. *Sosarme* was a great success: Viscount Percival wrote in his diary that it 'takes with the town, and that justly, for it is one of the best I ever heard', and according to Colman's Opera Register it 'was for many Nights much crowded to some peoples admiration'.<sup>69</sup> The pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* also spoke about both of the operas of early 1732: 'We have likewise had two Operas, *Etius* and *Sosarmes*, the first most Masterly, the last most pleasing, and in my mind exceeding pretty: There are two *Duetto*'s which Ravish me, and indeed the whole is vastly Genteel'.<sup>70</sup> No surprise Handel revived *Sosarme* at the height of the rivalry with the Opera of the Nobility, for three performances at the end of April 1734. Mrs Pendarves also looked upon it as 'a most delightful' work and 'a charming one'.<sup>71</sup>

Handel created a superb role for Strada. The broad spectrum of Elmira's arias is balanced by the musico-technical weight of the two duets for her and Sosarme (played by Senesino), assuring the unity of the part and portraying her as a great heroine, contradicting to her figure in the drama. Elmira is passive, and does not act but react to the chain of events: rebellion and dynastic war are hindering her happiness and future with Sosarme. She faints and falls into despair but always finds courage to persevere with pacifying the hurricane. Burney was informed that with *Rendi'l sereno al ciglio* (I/2; B major, 12/8, Largo assai e piano; Ex. 5.28) Strada 'captivated the audience extremely, by her performance of it. Few are now alive who can remember by what peculiar powers of voice

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<sup>68</sup> *Handel: Opera Arias & Duets*, Sandrine Piau, Sara Mingardo, Concerto Italiano conducted by Rinaldo Alessandrini (Naïve: 30483, 2009). Compact disc.

<sup>69</sup> Colman's Opera Register, 15 February 1732. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 495.

<sup>70</sup> From the pamphlet from the pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* (*Daily Journal*, 8 June 1732), *Ibid.*, 533–536: 535.

<sup>71</sup> Dean, *Handel's Operas, 1726-1741*, 266.

or expression she delighted the public in this song'.<sup>72</sup> The *siciliana* style and simplicity of *Rendi'l sereno* point towards the expressive use of *portamenti*, *tempo rubato* and legato as well as various vocal timbres. Beyond that, the applications of such bright keys as B major and F<sup>#</sup> major, and of regular general pauses, imply Strada's silvery ringing voice.

Example 5.28: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Rendi'l sereno al ciglio*, bb. 3–6.

Largo assai, e piano

Ren-di'l se-re - no al ci - glio, ma-dre, non pian-ger più, non pian-ger più, nò, ma-dre, non pian-ger più!

The question also arises of whether Handel's orchestration could denote Strada's strong high register. I do not think that the richness of the scoring in general should be taken as the primary indicator of an extended use of the chest. That is because in the case of castrato arias and even of nineteenth-century *bel canto* ones, the orchestral accompaniment usually has a very sparse substance under the vocal line and it leaves not only cadenzas but in many cases also coloraturas practically free. Nevertheless, a rich orchestration under divisions or going beyond the vocal line is a very good indicator of Strada's vocal power. Most of the Handelian roles created for her contain arias with a grand orchestral concerto-like accompaniment; probably the stormiest one of these and the most furious Handel ever wrote for her, is *Dite pace* (I/11; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro/Adagio; Exs 5.29–30; Tracks 9–10).<sup>73</sup> Strada's volume becomes evident through the thickness of three violin parts, playing their own material and regularly above the vocal line. In bars 26–27 and 35–36, on top of full orchestral chords the soprano contrasts with the first violins by second interval dissonances. In the second half of the *da capo* section there are two longer coloraturas (upbeat to b. 22 to b. 25, and bb. 29–33), the second of which is repeated (bb. 39–43). In both cases, as can be seen in the autograph, Handel planned one additional bar each, but he eliminated them in the end (Ex. 5.30).<sup>74</sup> The reasons may be twofold: these would have been mere repetitions of sequential patterns on the one hand; on the other hand, one more bar may have created a longer phrase than Strada was able to sing in one breath. The coloraturas in their final form are already very long; there are four of them, with exclamations and cadenzas in between, and a shorter one occurs in the A1 section.

<sup>72</sup> Charles Burney, *An account of the musical performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon, May 26th, 27th, 29th; and June the 3d and 5th, 1784. In commemoration of Handel* (London: T. Payne and Son, and C. Robinson, 1785), 51.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. *Scherza in mar* from *Lotario* (1729), furthermore *La mia costanza* from *Ezio* (1732) or *Sdegno amore* from *Arianna in Creta* (1734). Castrato-type of arias and rhythmically chiselled numbers regularly occur in first and second acts at Strada.

<sup>74</sup> G. F. Handel, *Sosarme* HWV 30. Autograph, *GB-Lbl* R.M.20.c.10, ff 34r–35r.

Example 5.29: Excerpt from the A section of *Dite pace*, bb. 20–48.

**Adagio** **Allegro**

Violini 1&2

Violino 3

Viola

Elmira

Bassi

*p*

**Allegro**

di-te pa - ce, di-te pa-ce—ful - mi - na te,

*p*

Vln. 1&2

Vln. 3

Vla.

E.

B.

cru - di Cie - li, cru - di Cie - li, or che fa - re - te, quan - do guer -

Vln. 1&2

Vln. 3

Vla.

E.

B.

ra a noi di-re - te,

Vln. 1&2

Vln. 3

Vla.

E.

B.

cru - di Cie - li, cru - di Cie - li, or che fa - re - te, quan - do guer -

39

Vln. 1&2

Vln. 3

Vla.

E.

B.

ra a noi di-re - te,

44

Vln. 1&2

Vln. 3

Vla.

E.

B.

*Adagio*

che fa - re - te, eru - di Cie - li, quan - do guer - ra g noi di - re - te.

*f*

*f*

*f*

Example 5.30: Excerpt from the autograph of *Dite pace* (from Handel's *Sosarme*)



© The British Library Board, R.M.20.c.10, ff. 35v–35r.

Longer unison between the first violins and the soprano only occurs in the highly chromatic B section (Ex. 5.31), which passes through all the twelve semitones in a whirlwind of modulations.

Example 5.31: Vocal part (B section) of *Dite pace*, bb. 56–69.

*Allegro*

Elmira

Che sa - rà se - vi - sde - gna te stel - le fie - re, fie - re stel - le, se pla - ca - te, co - si

*Adagio*

ri - gi - de voi sie - te, co - si ri - gi - de voi sie - te, se pla - ca - te co - si ri - gi - de, co - si ri - gi - de voi sie - te.

Strada must have ruled over the orchestra, as she sang this particular aria no less than seventeen times (fourteen times in *Sosarme* and on a further three occasions in Handel's self-pasticcio, *Oreste*). How strong her projection was and how great and stable her stamina is clearly shown in that the roles she most frequently repeated contain the most demanding numbers, especially of vocal power display: *Partenope* was staged eighteen times, *Arianna* twenty-one and *Alcina* twenty-three times. In Burney's opinion *Dite pace* likewise is a 'capital *bravura* air for the Strada ... in which her powers of voice execution are displayed with great abilities, in turbulent accompaniments and difficult divisions'.<sup>75</sup> He went on to reflect on Strada's twofold talent: 'The second act is opened with a charming cavatina of a truly pathetic and tender cast: *Padre, germano, e sposo*, in which the same performer had an opportunity to exhibit powers of a very different kind from those which the preceding air required'.<sup>76</sup> This aria (II/1; A minor, C, Larghetto; Ex. 5.32), with its flashes of rhythmic delicacy embedded in the simplicity of the melody, stands for her great abilities of expressiveness: it requires *portare la voce* along chromatic phrases and *tempo rubato* to enliven the sigh-motives. Besides, Strada's not only cuttingly pure but also flexibly changeable intonation comes into play, as this cavatina also lists all the twelve semitones while going through the valley of modulations (i.e. A – C – F – D – E minors before arriving back to A minor again).

Example 5.32: *Padre, germano, e sposo*

*Larghetto.*

*Pa-dre, ger-ma-no, e spo-so di voi chi vin-ce rà da-gli oc-chi mi trar.*

<sup>75</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 358.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.



-rà un pianto a - ma - ro, un pianto a - ma - ro, di voi chi vin - ce - rà da - gli oc - chi mi trar - rà un pian -

- to a - ma - ro! Pa - dre, ger - ma - no, e spo - so di voi chi vin - ce - rà da -

- gli oc - chi mi trar - rà un pianto a - ma - ro, da gli oc - chi mi trar - rà un pianto a - ma - ro, un pianto a -

- ma - ro, da gli oc - chi mi trar - rà un pianto a - ma - ro!

The regular appearance of arias in Strada's original Handelian repertoire which have a B section with all the twelve semitones are regular is unmatched in the material of any other singer who worked for the composer.<sup>77</sup> Handel in this way displayed Strada's unfailling intonation, which, according to Paolo Rolli, was better even than that of Faustina. The chromatic sequences applying augmented seconds, diminished thirds, once a

<sup>77</sup> The arias are the following: Scherza in mar (*Lotario* I/9), Quel finger affetto (*Ezio* II/7), Dite pace (*Sosarme* I/11), Padre, germano e sposo (*Sosarme* II/1, arioso), Choirs of angels (*Deborah* Act I), and Dice amor (*Berenice* I/9).

diminished seventh, and zig-zagging tritons – among which the diminished fifth was to be sung larger than the augmented fourth – must have produced an extreme or sometimes even terrifying effect, not to mention the extra vocal accomplishment of a continuous and rapid re-tuning to the instruments of no fixed tuning.<sup>78</sup> Tosi, and later Quantz in line with him, explained this phenomenon, which profoundly impacted every segment of the musico-dramatic performance, as follows:<sup>79</sup>

Everyone knows not that there is a Semitone Major and Minor, because the Difference cannot be known [ie. played] by an Organ or Harpsichord, if the Keys of the Instrument are not split. A Tone, that gradually passes to another, is divided into nine almost imperceptible Intervals, which are called Comma's, five of which constitute the Semitone Major [e.g. d–e<sup>b</sup>], and four the Minor [e.g. d–d<sup>#</sup>] ... If one were continually to sing only to those above-mention'd Instruments [the organ and harpsichord], this Knowledge might be unnecessary; but since the time that Composers introduced the Custom of crowding the Opera's with a vast Number of Songs accompanied with Bow Instruments, it becomes so necessary, that if a Soprano was to sing D-sharp, like E-flat, a nice Ear will find he is out of Tune, because this last rises.<sup>80</sup>

Jean Laurent de Béthizy described the necessary adjustment of the singer to the orchestra:

[...] how a singer adjusts to the temperament [...] of an [...] instrument: to sing the first note of an aria, the singer refers to the tonic note of the principal key as played by the instrument, and subsequently adjusts the different intervals [...] without reference to the notes played by the instrument [...] When a new key appears, the singer is obliged to conform to the new tonic as rendered by the instrument [...] If the voice and instrument play a unison or octave together, the voice is obliged to conform to the instrument.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bruce Haynes, 'Beyond temperament: non keyboard intonation in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries', *Early Music* 19/3 (Aug., 1991), 356–365+367–370+372–381: 357–359.

<sup>79</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung, die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Boß, 1752), 37–38; Quantz, *On playing the flute*. Translated with notes and introduction by Edward R. Reilly (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001), 46.

<sup>80</sup> Tosi, *Observations*. Trans. by Galliard, 19–21.

<sup>81</sup> '...comment la voix s'ajuste-t-elle au tempérament... d'un... instrument: Pour entonner la première note d'un air, elle se règle sur la note tonique du mode principal, telle qu'elle est rendue par l'instrument, & forme ensuite les différents intervalles... sans égard à l'altération des notes que l'instrument fait entendre... Lorsqu'un nouveau mode parait, la voix est obligée de se conformer à la manière dont l'instrument rend la nouvelle tonique... Si la voix & l'instrument forment ensemble une tenue à l'unisson ou à l'octave, la voix est forcée de se conformer à l'instrument...' Jean Laurent de Béthizy, *Exposition de la théorie et de la pratique de la musique* (Paris: 1754), 135.

Another impossibility becomes possible in the sweet bird-song *Vola l'augello* (II/14; A major, 6/8, Allegro; Ex. 5.33): *tempo rubato* is to be applied in Allegro, parallel to Handel's compositional method of this movement, an irregularly guided melodic line in the frame of regular periodic structure.<sup>82</sup> It is informative that this aria, maybe the softest in Strada's entire repertoire, was placed in the same role as the wildest one, *Dite pace*.

Example 5.33: Excerpt from the A section of *Vola l'augello*, bb. 1–18.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Vola l'augello'. It is marked 'Allegro' and is in A major, 6/8 time. The score includes parts for Violini unisoni, Bassi, and a vocal line for Elmira. The vocal line has the following lyrics: 'Vo - la l'au - gel - lo del ca - ro ni - do, ma sem - pre fi - do a quel ri - tor - na la ca - ra su - a per con - so - lar, la ca - ra su - a per con - so - lar'. The score features a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and includes trills (tr) and ornaments (tr) in the vocal line.

The first duet of Senesino and Strada as Sosarme and Elmira, *Per le porte del tormento* (II/8; E major, 12/8, Andante; Ex. 5.34), is written in a *concertante* style and has a gigue character, in which the vocal parts are crowned by complementary chains of *messe di voce*. In fact, the beauty of the whole movement depends on the quality of these dragged-out sustained notes and on the equality and harmonised sound of the two voices. Senesino, famous for his expressive *mesa di voce* and powerful voice production, must have been an

<sup>82</sup> Further arias among Strada's original roles which contain bird-song imitations, mainly that of the nightingale through seconds with dotted rhythms: *Se nel bosco* (*Arianna in Creta* II/14, 1734) and *Lassa! ch'io perduta* (*Atalanta* II/2, 1736).

ideal match for Strada on the stage.<sup>83</sup> Quantz wrote the following about him, corresponding with Burney's observations of his majestic voice and style, too:<sup>84</sup>

He had a powerful, clear, equal and sweet contralto voice, with a perfect intonation and an excellent shake. His manner of singing was masterly and his elocution unrivalled. Though he never loaded Adagios with too many ornaments, yet he delivered the original and essential notes with the utmost refinement. He sang Allegros with great fire, and marked rapid divisions, from the chest, in an articulate and pleasing manner. His countenance was well adapted to the stage, and his action was natural and noble. To these qualities he joined a majestic figure.<sup>85</sup>

This duet contains far more and longer sustained notes for the female singer than any other duet Senesino had sung either with Cuzzoni or with Faustina. In those cases he had more *messe di voce* than Cuzzoni; here the score is four to eight on Strada's behalf.

Example 5.34: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Per le porte del tormento*, bb. 27–46.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with two staves (E for Elmira, S for Sosarme). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 12/8. The tempo markings are 'Andante' and 'Adagio'. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes.

<sup>83</sup> Winton Dean, 'Senesino [Bernardi, Francesco]', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 24 February 2015.

<sup>84</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 270 and 355.

<sup>85</sup> Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf von ihm selbst entworfen', In: Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg: *Historisch-kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, vol. i (1754), 197–250; repr. in W. Kahl: *Selbstbiographien deutscher Musiker des XVIII. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 1948), 104–157; Eng. trans. in Paul Nettl: *Forgotten Musicians* (New York, 1951), 280–319.

The other duet is *Tu caro sei*, which, ‘aided by the performance of Senesino and Strada, became a general favourite’, as Burney asserted.<sup>86</sup> It is worth taking his statement literally, as it refers not only to Handel’s inspired ideas of fierce and joyful Allegro and a contrasting lyric B section (in D and A minor respectively), but also to Senesino and Strada’s role in making it popular. Both of them were considered to be passionate performers<sup>87</sup> and this movement has a very agreeable energy, with rhythmic agility and fine trills, underlining Strada’s high tessitura.

In the case of *Orlando* there were three circumstances which impacted on Strada’s role as Angelica and which are important to be understood, because they caused its music to be formed as it finally was. *Orlando* was Handel’s first opera with a plot based on Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (1532), which entailed a much more philosophical and allegorical dimension to the drama, even if the magical elements were omitted or reduced. Although Handel’s approach was more defined by his knowledge of diverse European theatrical traditions of the seventeenth century (such as Italian and French opera and spoken drama, *commedia dell’arte* as well as English, German and Spanish theatre practices) than by Ariosto’s play directly, yet the pastoral dimensions of the Ariostian plots opened a way towards a more direct musical-dramatic expression and irregular solutions on the level of form-structure, leading to an extension of the strict limits of *opera seria*.<sup>88</sup> To fulfil dramatic requirements Handel allowed himself not to take singers’ demands fully into account, especially in the case of protagonists like Senesino as Orlando, who felt offended by the vocal simplicity and the lack of heroism of his role – not understanding its dramatic significance, although he possessed vocal expressiveness and improved acting skills – and by the grandiosity of the lower-ranking role of Zoroastro given to the outstanding bass Antonio Montagnana.<sup>89</sup> (Senesino, a singer of the old system, left Handel after this production.)

As far as the measure of virtuoso elements is concerned, the situation of Strada’s role bears comparison with the one of Dorinda, sung by Celeste Gismondi or Celeste Resse, called La Celestina. The Neapolitan Gismondi, a former *buffo* mezzo-soprano, had spent only one season with Handel; she then left for the rival company and Margherita Durastanti came back. Shifting to *opera seria*, Gismondi naturally wanted to show off her skills –mainly her wide range and agility. Handel might have done to her as Mozart did

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<sup>86</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 359.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 268, 154, 348, 355, 358, 359 and 364.

<sup>88</sup> Reinhard Strohm, ‘Comic traditions in Handel’s *Orlando*’, In: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 249–270: 257.

<sup>89</sup> Anthony Hicks, *Handel. Orlando*. Notes for the recording L’Oiseau-Lyre 430 845–2, conducted by Christopher Hogwood (London 1991); Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel’s Operatic Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 242–243.

later to Adriana Ferrarese with the role of Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*: Patricia Lewi Gidwitz noted about Ferrarese that ‘her vocal equipment [was] impressive but incomplete and her performances less than inspiring. Mozart’s achievement was to transform a particular set of vocal skills and limitations into something of exceptional artistic value; Fiordiligi was fashioned out of the temperament, vocal style and dramatic abilities – and limitations – of his soprano.’<sup>90</sup> Handel focused on remaining on the path he had begun with Strada, and by coincidence that was exactly what Celestina lacked: the unity of the passionate and lyric, a specifically high tessitura (*Così giusta* III/4; A minor, 3/8, Andante; Ex. 5.35), extraordinary vocal quality and perhaps a noble dignity suiting to *opera seria*. Here Handel began, with *Se fedel vuoi* (I/9; G major, C, Largo) to write for Strada a series of slow, short and intimate *Falsa imagine*-type arias with sparse accompaniment (mainly continuo) and with fine rhythmic embroidery.

Example 5.35: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Così giusta*, bb. 21–40.

Andante

21 Co-sì giu-sta è que-sta spe-me, che se l'al-ma an - cor ha te-me, in-gan - na-ta -

31 è dal-ti - mor, che se l'al - ma an - cor - la - te - me, in - gan - na - ta è dal - ti - mor,

Strada especially could show a deeper lyricism through a touching *portamento* singing in *Se fedel* and *Verdi piante* (III/8; G minor, 3/8, Larghetto), the latter of which Burney described as ‘pathetic, and richly accompanied.’<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, the role contains passionate *parlante* numbers enriched with coloratura passages: *Chi possessore* (I/6; A major, 6/8, Allegro) has a playful metric aspect: accented a”-s in both word and rhythm are not missing, but accented and unaccented high notes alternate unpredictably, depicting Angelica’s lively and innocent character, and giving a greater emphasis on acting; *Non potrà dirmi ingrata* (II/6; E minor, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.36) is more rigorous initially, then it opens and becomes abandoned in large energetic passages ‘with divisions which required considerable agility, compassing a wide range’.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, *cantar di sbalzo* is a general feature, which marks the whole role.

<sup>90</sup> Patricia Lewy Gidwitz, ‘Mozart’s Fiordiligi: Adriana Ferrarese del Bene’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8/3 (November, 1996), 199–214: 199.

<sup>91</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 364.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

Example 5.36: Vocal part (A2 section) of *Non potrà dirmi ingrata*, bb. 21–40.

**Allegro**



nò, nò, nò, non po - trà, non po - trà dir-mi in-gra - to, nò, per-chè re - stai pia - ga - ta, nò, nò, non po - trà dir-mi in-gra - ta, per - chè re - stai-pia-ga - ta, per - chè re - stai pa - ga - ta da un co - si - va - go stral, d'un co - si va - go stral, nò, non po - trà dir-mi, nò, non dir-mi in-gra - ta, per - chè, per - chè re - stai pia - ga - ta da un co - si va - go stral.

Dorinda has strong comic aspects while Angelica has none. Celestina possessed vocal acrobatics but certainly less acquired *cantabile* and *messa di voce*. Reinhard Strohm has suggested a rivalry between her and Strada and not without reason (see ch. 4).<sup>93</sup> It was noted by Burney, too, that La Celestina in the role of Dorinda sang musical material requiring ‘greater abilities in the execution, than are usually found in a singer of the second or third class.’<sup>94</sup>

The symbol of the war between the Opera of the Nobility and Handel might have been *Arianna in Creta*, as an answer to the former members of his troupe who left him. Only Strada remained for Handel, who newly engaged Carestini and Carlo Scalzi, while Margherita Durastanti came back to London. The pamphlet *Harmony in an Uproar* declared this new cast’s prominence:

S[tra]da being in all respects infinitely superior, in any Excellency requir’d for a Stage; as for Singers in the under Parts, you had provided the best Sett we ever had yet; tho’ basely deserted by Mon[tagna]na’.<sup>95</sup>

Although Handel had completed the score on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1733, he withheld it for a reason: he was waiting until the rival company presented its Ariadne subject, that of Porpora’s *Arianna in Nasso* on 29<sup>th</sup> December, and came out with his own opera only on 26<sup>th</sup> January

<sup>93</sup> ‘The reference to La Strada in the pamphlet *Harmony in an Uproar* (February 1734) (Deutsch 1955, p. 355) under the name of ‘Coelste Vocale’ must be a pun on Signora Gismondi’s name’. Reinhard Strohm, ‘Comic traditions in Handel’s Orlando’, in: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 249–270: 250.

<sup>94</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 363–364.

<sup>95</sup> *Harmony in an Uproar: A Letter to F–d–k H–d–l Esq.*; [12 February] 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 737–749: 738.

1734.<sup>96</sup> Colman’s Opera Register praised the new opera as ‘very good & perform’d very often – Sigr Carestino sang surprisingly well’.<sup>97</sup> Arianna’s musical figure is sensibly dedicated to display Strada’s comprehensive skills as better than that of Maria Segatti, who initially sang Ariadne in Porpora’s production (just as it had been at the time of *Lotario*, though not in the same way).<sup>98</sup> Besides lyric arias, this ‘favourite singer’ had the jealous *Sdegno amore*, which is ‘extremely spirited, and of an original cast’, concluding the first act (I/12; A major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.37).<sup>99</sup> It is a pompous concerto-aria with a composed, written-out stretching of time – very similar to *Dite pace* (*Sosarme*, 1732) – in the form of two Adagio stops offering opportunities to introduce free cadenzas, one of them right at her entrance which must have had a double impact through its surprise. The rest of the aria is about Strada’s evenness of vocal power in the chest as well as the head range: her agility is showed by triplets and trills, and her great stamina and breath control, displayed especially by the *messa di voce* phrase (bb. 74–80) on the words ‘chi vincerà’, which, again, was surely meant to be sung in one single breath.

Example 5.37: Excerpts from *Sdegno amore*, bb. 15–42 and 62–79.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the aria 'Sdegno amore'. The first system (bb. 15-42) consists of four staves: two vocal staves (soprano and alto) with trills and a 'messa di voce' phrase, and two basso continuo staves. The second system (bb. 62-79) also consists of four staves, with the vocal line including the lyrics 'a - mo - re - fan - no guer - ra a que - sto co - re, nè sò an - cor chi vin - ce.' The tempo markings 'Adagio' and 'a tempo' are clearly visible above the vocal line.

<sup>96</sup> Besides, at the beginning of the season he intended to beat Porpora’s troupe at their own kind of music: Handel presented three Italian *pasticci*, consisting mostly of Neapolitan arias. Reinhard Strohm, ‘Handel’s Pasticci’, In: *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 164–211: 183.

<sup>97</sup> Colman’s *Opera Register*, 26 January 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 733.

<sup>98</sup> Although Cuzzoni joined the Opera of the Nobility in April 1734 only, the rumour circulated that she was meant to be engaged much earlier, from the beginning of the season.

<sup>99</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 372.



-rà; *sde-gno, a mo-re- fan-no guer-*

*-ra a que- sto co- re nè sò an-cor chi vin-ce.*

*-rà, nè sò an-cor chi vin-ce - rà, nò, non sò chi vin- ce.*

*-rà, chi vin-ce - ra.*

6

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece, likely an aria or duet, in G major and common time. The score is arranged in four systems, each with four staves (two vocal staves and two piano accompaniment staves). The lyrics are written in Italian and are distributed across the systems. The first system begins with the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The third system features a complex vocal line with many triplets and a piano accompaniment with a steady eighth-note pattern. The fourth system concludes the vocal line and piano accompaniment.

*Sde.gno,*  
a - mo - re fan - no guer -  
- ra a que - sto  
co - re, nè sò an - cor chi vin - ce - rà, sde - gno, a - mo - re, nò, non sò chi vin - ce -  
- rà,

Interestingly enough, the counterpart of *Sdegno amore*, carved from the same block of musical marble, is the Arianna–Teseo duet of Strada and Carestini at the end of the opera, *Mira adesso* (III/7; G major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.38). The grandeur of both of the singers is revealed by *messe di voce* – including a long trill – and triplet-coloraturas. This might have resulted in the intensification of each other’s vocal effect, so that they could impress the audience together more than one by one – which is the real goal of any duet, of course.

Example 5.38: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Mira adesso*, bb. 26–64.

**Allegro**

Arianna  
mi - ra ad - es - so que - sto se - no più se - re - no, e'l tor - men - to fug - gi - rà,

Teseo  
mi - ra ad - es - so que - sto co - re tut - to a - mo - re, e'l tor - men - to fug - gi - rà,

A.  
fug - gi - rà,

T.  
fug - gi - rà, mi - ra ad -

A.  
mi - ra ad - es - so que - sto se - no, tut - to a - mo - re, e'l

T.  
es - so que - sto co - re tut - to a - mo - re, tut - to a - mo - re, e'l tor - men - to fug - gi -

A.  
tor - men - to fug - gi - rà,

T.  
rà, e'l tor - men - to fug - gi - rà, e'l tor - men -

A.  
il tor - men - to fug - gi - rà,

T.  
to, il tor - men - to fug - gi - rà, fug - gi - rà, il tor - men - to fug - gi - rà,

A.  
tr tr

T.  
tr tr

## Reinventing Strada

By the mid-1730s a new quality appeared in Strada's Handelian roles: surmounting certain technical patterns like range and different *bravura* manifestations, focus was placed on the particular quality, personal sound and expressiveness of the voice. The applied vocal components were put entirely at the service of dramatic expression and the true representation of the character (from *Ariodante* onwards). Handel's method of writing for Strada's voice became relaxed, fluid and instinctively natural by 1735, applying her skills according to his artistic scopes without the pressure of vocal exhibitionism. These roles reflect Strada's full vocal and artistic maturity.

*Ariodante* seems to be similar to *Orlando* in the sense that Handel held back or reduced the vocal extension of Strada's role, that of Ginevra, for a reason. The clearest evidence of

this is that Handel cut the only forceful aria, *Orrida agli occhi miei* (I/2), before the first performance, because it was alien to Ginevra's character. Strohm notes that since Handel chose the libretto of Antonio Salvi, 'the librettist most often chosen by him – and for operas as divergent as *Rodelinda*, *Sosarme* and *Berenice* – his interest in the dramatic content and dramaturgical form of the libretto of 1708 seems assured. By deciding for Salvi, the composer opens up his version of the play to the influence of French tragedy and the so-called "regular drama"<sup>100</sup>. The plot is exceptional from several points of view: it is equally free from magic elements and from emphasis on aristocratic rank structure; its happy ending is consequential to the drama, not forced. The story is simple, dealing with universal emotions and situations. There is no subplot, only the main one with a naturally developed culmination and solution. Dean draws a parallel with Shakespearian dramas like *Much Ado About Nothing* or *Othello*, the latter on the grounds of Polinesso's resemblance to Iago's figure.<sup>101</sup> As Ginevra is quite a plain and passive character, variety must have been shown within its limitations. Most probably even these limits made the choices of Handel and Strada's collaboration unequivocally clear. By then, Handel found the essence of Strada's vocal entity in a deeper layer, the source of its roundness and powerful projection, the roots of that penetrating and ravishing sound, and built it into his compositional method. The fine quality of her voice may not have laid in pyrotechnical elements themselves but rather in the way her voice was produced. To start with, he had already written for her the highest, the lowest, the longest, the fastest etc., and to repeat these patterns over and over again would have been rather monotonous. Handel had to do it for other divas and castrati regularly, anyway. Now that he had been working with Strada for more than five successive years, he probably realised this unique possibility with his exceptional soprano. Handel might have instinctively discovered the way to put Strada's voice on its best sound, where she sings the most easily, the most magnificently, with the biggest volume, with the greatest variety of expression, with the most beautiful colour of her voice. He knew that this method would serve as a magnifying glass; it would render everything he composed for her to seem bigger, more fascinating, more grandiose; then they would enter into a new dimension. It may seem too philosophical but it is actually very practical. One can imagine that by 1734 it was a routine for Handel to compose operas for certain voices, for the same clichéd, dramatic situations on a short notice, and to use well known coloratura patterns, types of arias, keys, tempi, etc., meaning that he could focus on other issues during the compositional process. In the case of *Ariodante*, the

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<sup>100</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Handel's *Ariodante*: Scotland and Arcadia', in: *Dramma per musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century*, 255–269: 264–265.

<sup>101</sup> Dean, *Handel's Operas 1726–1741*, 289.

modern simplicity of the plotline and the driving forces of Ariosto's drama with its deeper coherency could have helped Handel to achieve a similar consistency in composing for Strada's voice, which he knew well enough to be well aware of her many other capabilities as yet unexploited.

*Volate amori* (I/6; B<sup>b</sup> major, 6/8, Allegro), with its joyful flying-motifs, is based on Strada's brilliant trill-ability, i.e. the alternation of notes next to each other, which must have resulted in a fine glimmering sound in her voice. Handel clearly set the f''-g'' area as her most sonorous one from *Vezi, lusinghe* (I/1; G major, 3/4, Andante; Ex. 5.39) onwards, which he also confirmed in the minor key and legato at slower movements like *Mi palpità il cor* (II/8; C minor, 3/4, Largo e staccato); it is a strong tendency even in the duets. *Io ti bacio* (III/4; D minor, C, Larghetto assai) is the second in the row of the *Falsa imagine*-type of numbers, this time with a slightly fuller orchestration. Nevertheless, in the last duet, that of Ginevra and Ariodante, *Bramo haver mille vite* (III/12; A major, C; Ex. 5.40), Handel let Strada and Carestini's virtuosity blow up through semiquaver triplet garlands.

Example 5.39: Vocal part (A1 section) of *Vezi, lusinghe*, bb. 13–31.

Example 5.40: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Bramo haver mille vite*, bb. 24–33.

It filled the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury with awe at the revival of the work in May 1736, when Gioacchino Conti, the young soprano castrato replacing Carestini proved to be the perfect duet-partner for Strada, even more so than Senesino:

He [Conti] has sung nothing of Handel's yet but the last duet in *Ariodante*[;] I really think between him and Strada I never was so delighted with any duet I ever heard in my life & it quite charmed the audience.<sup>102</sup>

The third Ariosto opera, *Alcina* was produced in April 1735. By that time Strada had reached the zenith of her vocal and artistic capabilities (at the age of thirty-two), together with Handel – as Mrs Pendarves thought:

Yesterday morning my sister and I went with Mrs. Donellan to Mr. Handel's house to hear the first rehearsal of the new opera *Alcina*. I think it the best he ever made, but I *have thought so of so many*, that I will not say positively *'tis the finest*, but *'tis so fine* I have not words to describe it. Strada has a whole scene of charming recitative—there are a thousand beauties. Whilst Mr. Handel was playing his part, I could not help thinking him a necromancer in the midst of his own enchantments.<sup>103</sup>

*Alcina's* music was regarded by Burney as unailing: 'Upon the whole, if any one of Handel's dramatic works should be brought on the stage, entire, without a change or mixture of airs from his other operas, it seems as if this would well sustain such a revival.'<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Handel's most complete flesh-and-blood portrayed figure was *Alcina*. The extraordinary union of lyrically framed drama and virtuosity reflects a modern way of musico-dramatic thinking, a 'Baroque realism' which seems to have been ahead of its time.

Strada's role has a build-up process through the succession of arias: the f-f<sup>#</sup>-g" spot is the main pillar, where she could permanently sojourn. Phrases during her numbers become even longer and even thicker, preparing the singer for the two principal arias: *Ah! mio cor* (II/8; C minor, 3/4, Andante larghetto; Ex. 5.41) ...

This song was always as much admired for its composition, as Strada for her manner of singing it, when the Opera of *Alcina* first appeared. Perhaps a modern composer, from the rage into which the enchantress is thrown in the Drama, by discovering the

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<sup>102</sup> Since Conti replaced Carestini, and as the rehearsal time may have been short, Handel allowed him to sing substitute arias. The only Handelian number he sang in *Ariodante* was the duet *Bramo haver mille vite*. 4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 8 May 1736. Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill, *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732–1780* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>103</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her mother, Mrs Mary Granville, 12 April 1735. Deutsch, *Handel*, 385–386.

<sup>104</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol iv., 390.

intended departure of her favourite hero, Rogero, would have given the lady less tenderness, and more passion; however that may be, the first strain of this Air, upon a continued moving base, is truly pathetic; and the constant sobs and sighs, expressed by short and broken notes in the violin and tenor parts, greatly add to this effect. Indeed, this movement contains some strokes of modulation which are extremely bold and pathetic, particularly at the words *sola in pianto*. The short second part likewise expresses much of the spirit, agitation, and fury, which the words and situation of the singer seem to require.<sup>105</sup>

... and the aria standing at the end of the extraordinary series of scenes concluding the second act, *Ombre pallide* (II/13; E minor, C, Andante; Ex. 5.43; Track 13). It is prepared by the exclamations and accented a" and g" notes as well as tenth leaps of the previous *accompagnato* recitative, *Ah! Ruggiero crudel* (B minor, C; Ex. 5.42; Track 12). The sorceress's dramatic collapse is enclosed in the form of a lyric Andante. The principal elements of the movement are of that type of long coloratura passage where the notes of broken chords simultaneously have their mostly chromatic appoggiaturas incorporated into the instrumentally- as well as contrapuntally-built vocal line. These are strong indicators of Strada's dramatic vocal weight. The loss not only of her beloved one but, at the same time, also of her magic power, the core of Alcina's identity, creates a strange mixture of emotions, a vibrating atmosphere of despair, mental strength and fragile affections of love, fitting like a glove for the rare combination of Strada's vocal skills and showing her prototypical voice of *soprano sfogato* in all its splendour.

Example 5.41: Excerpt from *Ah! mio cor*, bb. 16–47.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Ah! mio cor'. It consists of five staves: two for the vocal line (Soprano and Alto), two for the piano accompaniment (Violin and Cello/Double Bass), and one for the basso continuo. The key signature is E minor (three flats) and the time signature is common time (C). The score begins with a section marked 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'S' (Soprano). The lyrics are: 'Ah! mio cor! scher - ni - to se - i! Stel - le! Ah, mein Herz! verschmäht denn bist du! Ster - ne!'. The music features a complex, chromatic vocal line with many grace notes and appoggiaturas, particularly in the vocal line. The piano accompaniment is highly rhythmic and chromatic, with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The basso continuo line is also highly rhythmic and chromatic, providing a strong harmonic foundation for the vocal line.

<sup>105</sup> Burney, *An account of the musical performances in Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon*, 68.

De-i! Na-me da-mo-re! tra-di-to-re! t'a-mo tan-to; puoi lasciar-mi so-la in  
 Himmel! du Gott der Lie-be! ha, Fer-rä-ther! so dich lieb'ich, und du lässtest mich ein-sam

pian-to, oh De-i! puoi la-sciar-mi oh Dei! per-chè?  
 jam-mernd! o Göt-ter, ein-sam jammernd, o war-um?

t'a-mo tan-to! puoi la-sciar-mi so-la, so-la, so-la in pianto,  
 so dich lieb'ich! und du lässtest mich einsam, einsam, einsam jammernd,

3.

Example 5.42: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Ah! Ruggiero crudel*, 28–39.

Recitativo

Alcina <sup>29</sup> Vi cer-co, e vi a-scon-de-te? vi co-man-do, e ta-ce-te? ev-vi-in-gan-no?

A. <sup>34</sup> ev-vi fro-de? la mia ver-ga fa-tal non ha pos-san-za? Vin-ta, de-lu-sa Al-ci-na, e che ti a-van-za?

Example 5.43: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Ombre pallide*, bb. 5–13 and 28–37.

Andante

Alcina <sup>5</sup> Om-bre pal-li-de, lo sò mi-u-di-te; d'in-tor-no-er-ra-te, e vi ce-la-te. d'in-tor-no-er-ra-te, e vi ce-

A. <sup>9</sup> la te, e vi ce-la-te, e vi ce-la-te sor-de da me, sor-de da me: per-chè? per-chè?



A further indicator of higher vocal energy is the fact that high notes as dynamic and musical climaxes are often textually and rhythmically accented here too. Ellen T. Harris reckons this as proof that Strada possessed a strong upper register and sang high notes with the chest, and with natural loudness, whereas her fellow sopranos could only produce thin and fine head notes with a lesser dynamic in the high register – contrary to the general practice of the era and Handel’s way of composing for Cuzzoni and La Francesina, the previous and succeeding sopranos to Strada.<sup>106</sup> The phenomenon was known to Pier Francesco Tosi, who stated that ‘Among the Women, one hears sometimes a Soprano entirely di Petto’; Giambattista Mancini likewise noted: ‘there are rare examples in which one has received from nature the most unusual gift of being able to execute everything in the chest voice’.<sup>107</sup> A genuine ability of these exceptional kind of female sopranos like Strada was to sing with an instinctively good diaphragmatic support, to which treatises refer as the ‘chest’:<sup>108</sup> according to Mancini, ‘all kinds of agility must be supported by a robust chest’,<sup>109</sup> including Strada’s specialities, the *messa di voce* and the perfect trill, in line with Christoph Bernhard’s opinion (1655–60), i.e. one has to ‘strike the trillo in the chest, where the best ones originate’.<sup>110</sup> Bacilly (1668) highlights it as the key to pure intonation.<sup>111</sup>

This deep legato singing is crowned by *Mi restano le lagrime* (III/5; F# minor, 12/8, Larghetto); moreover, Alcina, although she lost the fight, dominates the *terzetto* sung with the re-united Ruggiero-Bradamante couple (*Non è amor, ne gelosia* III/7; B<sup>b</sup> major, C,

<sup>106</sup> Ellen T. Harris, ‘Das Verhältnis von Lautstärke und Stimmlage im Barockgesang’, in: *Aufführungspraxis der Händel-Oper* (Karlsruhe: 1988 and 1989), 157–171: 167–169; Harris, ‘Singing’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 3 November 2013.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Nelle Femmine, che cantano il Soprano sentesi qualche volta una voce tutta di petto’. Tosi, *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi e moderni*, 38; *Observations*, 23; ‘Caso raro; che [la natura] unisca ambidue i registri di petto in una sola persona.’ Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 88; *Practical Reflections*, 108.

<sup>108</sup> Ellen T. Harris, ‘Voices’, in: *Performance Practice after 1600*, ed. by Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: Norton, 1990), 97–116: 107.

<sup>109</sup> Mancini, *Practical Reflections*, 154. Robustezza del petto, Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 76, 77, 80, 84, 85, 93, 94, 133, and 135.

<sup>110</sup> Christoph Bernhard, *Von der Singkunst oder Manier* (c. 1655–60), trans. in English by Walter Hilse, ‘The Treatises of Christoph Bernhard, [1] Von der Singekunst’, *The Music Forum* 3 (1973), 1–29.

<sup>111</sup> Harris, ‘Voices’, 99; *Benigne de Bacilly, Remarques curieuses sur l’art de bien chanter* (Paris, 1668), 28.

Andante). At its revival in November 1736 Strada took Morgana's aria, *Tornami a vagheggiar* (I/14; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4, Allegro), presumably because sustained note of b<sup>b</sup> – which the mezzo-soprano Rosa Negri, the replacement of the soprano Cecilia Young, was not able to sing – proving she still had that height in 1736. (In addition, Strada sang Partenope, the role containing the high c<sup>'''</sup>, even in the 1737 revival.) Considering Alcina as the peak of Strada's whole repertoire comprising original roles, the various airs she took over in revivals, *serenatas*, *pasticci* and oratorios, and the singing style which is reflected in all of these, I assume that Strada's voice, and especially her sonorous high notes, had vibrato. By vibrato I mean a natural outcome of healthy singing, not an artificially generated throaty one and absolutely not a pitch vibrato, which I reckon as abuses (acoustically, the vibrato is the periodic oscillation of the pitch; I use this expression for a vibrato larger than a semitone).<sup>112</sup> An intense vibrato of less than a semitone is what marks a trained and beautiful voice.

Strada's famous colleagues – some of the greatest singer figures of the Baroque era – were reported to have vibrato, too. Burney recorded an anecdote about Cuzzoni from the time of the performances of *Admeto*, when someone in the audience could not help crying out loud: 'she has got a nest of nightingales in her belly'.<sup>113</sup> He also quoted Mancini who observed the same phenomenon, i.e. the natural and more rippling vibrato of Cuzzoni, which she utilized to render coloratura passages easier to sing: 'A native warble enabled her to execute divisions with such facility as to conceal every appearance of difficulty.'<sup>114</sup> Mancini remarked about Faustina: 'Her type of agility was so much more valuable, because [characterised by] the right degree of vibrato'.<sup>115</sup> Mancini, arguing with Manfredini in the 1777 revision of his treatise, claimed vibrato as a necessity of the cultivated voice production: 'united in brio, agility of the voice, vibrato [*vibrare*], detached notes [*distaccare*], the drawing back [*ritirare*], strength, and appropriateness of expression'.<sup>116</sup> The *Musical Grammar and Dictionary* (1770) asserted: 'There is a sort of

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<sup>112</sup> 'In it the pitch winds wave-like around a desired "correct" pitch with a spectrum of "wrong" pitches evenly distributed above and below its core. The desirable vibrato effect rests on the physio-psychological phenomenon of *sonance*, which is the fusion of the vibrato oscillation above a certain threshold of speed (c. 7 cycles per second) into an aural sensation of richer tone, while the perception of the oscillation is minimized and that of the "wrong" pitches *disappears altogether*. On strings the combined range of the oscillation above and below the focal pitch is about a quarter tone; whereas for the voice it averages a half-tone.' Frederick Neumann, 'The Vibrato Controversy', *Performance Practice Review* IV/1 (1991), 14–27: 15.

<sup>113</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 316.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>115</sup> 'Il suo genere d'agilità fu tanto più pregevole perché vibrato a quel giusto termine'. Mancini, *Riflessioni pratiche* (1774), 31–32. Cited in Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens*, 31.

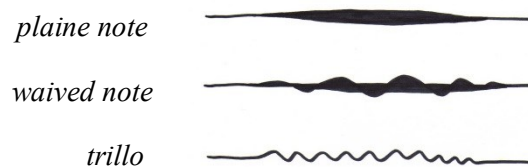
<sup>116</sup> James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 132; see Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing* (1774), translated into English by Edward Foreman. (Champaign, IL: Pro Musica Press, 1967), 121.

wavering of the voice, very agreeable to the ear.’ W.A. Mozart, in his letter of 12 June 1778 stated:

The human voice trembles naturally – but in its own way – and only to such a degree that the effect is beautiful. Such is the nature of the voice; and people imitate it not only on wind-instruments, but on stringed instruments too and even on the clavier [clavichord].<sup>117</sup>

Although the ornament tremolo was applied on sustained notes, nevertheless, during the course of the eighteenth century *messa di voce* might had more and more to do with a consciously directed yet naturally evolving vibrato. Roger North’s illustrations for example implied a connection of different execution types of a sustained note: the plain note, *messa di voce* with vibrato, and *trillo* (Fig. 5.1).<sup>118</sup> He also commented on Nicolini’s vibrato in his performance of an aria from Mancini’s opera *Hydaspos*: ‘And the swelling and dying of musicall notes, with tremolo not impeaching the tone, wonderfully represents the waiving of air, and pleasant gales moving, and sinking away’.<sup>119</sup>

Figure 5.1: Copy of Roger North’s *messa di voce* illustrations



Not only *portamento* but also the technique of vibrato is connected to *messa di voce*. This is because *messa di voce* is the quintessence of voice production as a kind of slow-motion zooming of its structure, i.e. the ‘beginning-culmination-finishing’ triangle, the sections of which are to be stretched or diminished, intensified or weakened according to the length and pitch of the note, its place in the phrase, syllable, word, etc. Vibrato is to be handled in the same way. It needs control and is controllable; it has to be directed just as *messa di voce* and *portamento*. It is a tool and has to be used as it was used by great singers over centuries. Depending on the character of the aria, of dynamics, and of the timbre fitting to the actual word it can have long or shorter waves, flat or higher ones in any combination; the performer has to be able to change somewhat its length and height during

<sup>117</sup> Letter of W. A. Mozart, 12 June 1778. *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, ed. and transl. by Emily Anderson (London: Macmillan, 1985), 552.

<sup>118</sup> Peter Millard ed., *Notes of Me: The Autobiography of Roger North* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>119</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 131; John Wilson ed., *Roger North on Music. Being a Selection of Essays Written During the Years c. 1695–1728* (London: Novello, 1959), 128.

the course of a sustained note. If a note is several bars long and the accompaniment indicates it, vibrato can be born from nothing, die, and then be born again. It has a powerful effect which ought not to be ignored.

Without the presence and variety of vibrato, arias like *Ah! mio cor* are unimaginable not only for the listener but also the performer: to produce longer or sustained notes naturally, the larynx needs a slack allowing it to move flexibly and periodically and to maintain the note in clean intonation. Without vibrato one actually forces the larynx artificially – therefore not naturally – to stick in a certain position, resulting in a rigid, harsh and in a few seconds also false tone. On the other hand, vibrato becomes an abuse and loses its purpose at the moment when the larynx moves too much and the pitch becomes uncertain, or the importance of the volume overcomes the intonation, the beauty and timbre of the sound, and thus the tone becomes static instead of its entity as a living process being emphasised. The key would be rather the use of plain and vibrated notes with balance, variability and good taste, always fitting to the dramatic situation and the text of the aria.

By the time of the première of *Atalanta* (12<sup>th</sup> May 1736), the skeleton of Handel's compositional conception for Strada was fully covered with flesh and muscles; clothes were put on it with the fine embroidery of her favourite *terzini*, chiselled gallant dotted patterns with trills and demisemiquavers. The role of Atalanta is complete and original: in the first act she is a young lady with masculine independency, a hunter who rejects crown and love for her passion: both her *arioso* (*Al varco, oh pastori!* I/7; C major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.44) and aria afterwards (*Riportai gloriosa palma* I/8; A major, C, Allegro) are triumphant and glorious with arpeggiation motifs imitating trumpet signals.

Example 5.44: Excerpt from *Al varco, oh pastori!*, bb. 8–27.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Al varco, oh pastori!' from Handel's opera *Atalanta*. The score is in C major, 3/4 time, and consists of two systems. The first system (bb. 8-15) features a vocal line with lyrics 'Al var-co, oh pa-sto-ri! vi-ci-na è la fe-ra, pa-sto-ri, al var-' and an instrumental accompaniment for Violin (s. Ob.) and Cello/Bass. The second system (bb. 16-27) features a vocal line with lyrics '-co, pa-sto-ri, al var-co, vi-ci-na è la fe-ra.' and a 'Tutti' section with a strong instrumental accompaniment. Dynamics include pp, p, and f.

However, hers is a developing character, of a very rare kind in *opera seria* and Strada's repertoire alike: apart from Atalanta, only the personalities of Alcina, Adelaide (in a sense) and later Berenice change during the course of the drama. Atalanta's figure, however, differs from those. She is a lady devoted to her so-called profession: she is a passionate huntress and therefore, despite being a princess, she lives as a nymph in the forest. Although she has a crush on the shepherd Tirsi (not knowing that he is the disguised Prince Meleagro), the prospect of a marriage seems to be impossible because of his putative lack of noble rank. After the triumphant arias in the first act, declaring Atalanta as winner of the hunt and celebrating her masculine independence through the victorious killing of the bear, a sharp shift takes place to the pathetic in act II with *Lassa! ch'io t'ho perduta* (II/2; C minor, 3/4, Larghetto; Ex. 5.45), the minor Larghetto atmosphere of which demands a deeper and thicker 'inner or virtual legato'. By 'inner legato' I mean large legato phrase-chains, which had to be developed technically as a sole musical gesture, by the control of the speed of air and the measure of support; even if the performer has slight opportunities

to steal a little breath in-between, rather imperceptibly, she is certainly not allowed to break the phrase in two.

Example 5.45: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Lassa! ch'io t'ho perduta*, bb. 21–39.

**Larghetto**

las - sa, ch'io t'ho per - du - ta, ch'io t'ho per - du - ta mia ca - ra - li - ber - tà, o bel - la, dol - ce pri - ma, mia ca - ra li - ber -  
tà, o bel - la dol - ce - pri - ma, ca - ra li - ber - tà, mia ca - ra li - ber - tà, mia ca - ra li - ber - tà.

Atalanta's duet with Meleagro, *Amarilli! Oh, Dio! Che vuoi?* (II/3; G major, C, Andante; Ex. 5.46), is likewise challenging with its large lines and *messe di voce*. *Ben ch'io non sappia ancor* (III/1; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Andante; Ex. 5.47), stands out with its uncommon, kind of jazzy and richly orchestrated rhythms.

Example 5.46: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Amarilli! Oh, Dio! Che vuoi?*, bb. 29–46.

**Andante**

o De - i! ta - ci, e la - scia al mio de - sti - no auel ri - gor ch'io ben com -  
o De - i! fer - ma, e dim - mi il tuo de - sti - no, che si fie - ro io non com - pren - do,  
pren - do, ch'io ben com - pern do, ch'io ben com -  
io non com - pren do, io non com - pren - do,  
pren - do, ch'io ben com - pren do, ch'io ben com - pren - do.  
io non com - pren do, io non com - pren - do.

**Adagio**

Example 5.47: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Ben ch'io non sappia ancor*, bb. 24–27.

**Andante**

che si con - so - la,

Additionally, an intimate, slow and short lyric aria/arioso-type with rare accompaniment deserves special attention. Its form is mostly a one-part *non-da-capo* one, hardly exceeding an octave range. The reduction of vocal technical demands put the focus entirely on the effect of expression and vocal colours. These are those *Falsa imagine*-like numbers Handel built into a tradition also with Strada in her original roles (*Porro – Spirto amato* III/12 [one-part form with full accompaniment], *Orlando – Se fedel vuoi* I/9 [*da capo*], *Ariodante – Io ti bacio* III/4 [short *da capo* with strings], *Atalanta – Custodite, o dolci sogni* III/5, *Arminio*

– *Ho veleno e ferro* III/3, and *Berenice – Avvertite, mie pupille* III/8 [*da capo* with violins]). They mostly occur in third acts and in the deepest dramatic moments: the heroine is either preparing for death or she is waiting for the execution of her beloved one, planning suicide simultaneously or else the couple’s whole life and happiness is coming to a turning point. It is noteworthy that the simplest and shortest of those cantilenas was given even to that character among Strada’s operatic roles who goes through the biggest transformation in the drama. Progressively, by Act III, all the kaleidoscopic tenderness and intimate sentiments of love awake and develop in Atalanta’s heart, culminating in the *largo* lullaby, *Custodite, o dolci sogni* (III/5; A major, C, Largo; Ex. 5.48; Track 14). When she sees her beloved asleep, crying out while battling a nightmare, compassion overwhelms her, and she evokes sweet dreams to watch over him in peace. This ten-bar-long miniature with only a solo violoncello accompaniment and with a vocal range of a mere octave is the boldest feat Handel ever served to a *prima donna*, and probably one of the most beautiful droplets of music ever written. According to Burney, it ‘would have but little effect from an ordinary singer, but is a *canvas* for a great singer that would admit of fine colouring’.<sup>120</sup> Because of its absolute simplicity, hardly anybody but Strada might have agreed to sing such a song, considering the well-known anecdotes about the fights Handel had with Cuzzoni and Carestini to get them to sing *Falsa imagine* and *Verdi prati*, and Senesino’s break up after *Orlando*. This is the ultimate proof of Strada’s beautiful vocal timbres, variety of expressiveness and her authentic and convincing art. Her final duet with Meleagro is marked by her high tessitura, culminating on b<sup>b</sup>”.

Example 5.48: Vocal part of *Custodite, o dolci sogni*

In *Arminio*, Strada had a dramatic part. Tusnelda’s own father betrays her husband and wants to give her to the Roman general, Varo, in marriage. Her first solo number, *Scaglian amore e sangue* (I/3; B major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.49) is about this conflict. It is a sharply furious aria demanding passion and a strong voice projection: f<sup>#</sup>”, g” and a” have to be attacked on a regular basis during this movement, mostly as exclamations on the word ‘sangue’ (blood).

<sup>120</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 397.

Example 5.49: A section of *Scaglian amore e sangue*, bb. 1–30.

Violini unisoni. *Allegro.*

TUSNELDA.

Bassi.

Scaglian a-mo-re e san-gue, a-mo-re e san-gue

fol-go-ri di fu-ror, sca-glia-no a-mo-re e san-gue, sca-glia-no a-mo-re e san-

-gue fol-go-ri di fu-ror, a-mo-re e san-gue, sca-glia-no a-mo-re e san-gue

fol-go-ri di fu-ror, fol-go-ri di fu-ror, sca-glia-no a-mo-re e san-gue fol-go-ri di fu-ror, a-mo-

-re e san-gue, e san-gue, sca-glia-no a-mo-re e san-gue fol-go-ri di fu-ror,

fol-go-ri di fu-ror.

(Fine.)

The next air is its equilibration: although it has a Minuet character, *È vil segno* (I/7; G minor, 3/8, Larghetto; Ex. 5.50), with its crawly, collapsing motifs and weighty legato, is a labyrinth of chromatic roaming and asymmetric coloratura. Its recurring g"-s must have made the soprano to cry out over and over again in a sonorous yet absorbed voice. The first phrase of the aria is the same as Handel used for Faustina at *Il mio core* (II/5 Elisa; 3/8, G minor, Allegro) in *Tolomeo*, but with an inverse conception, since the same pitch meant one of the highest notes for the mezzo-soprano, but not for Strada. The phrase Faustina sang is in Allegro and with dotted demisemiquaver rhythms, has a dance character and the



g''-s are free of accents, to be sung shortly and *leggero*, *quasi non legato*, while the line in *Arminio* has its centre of gravity inversely on the sharp and furious high notes and on the falls to c'', b' and a'. Tusnelda is articulating the words 'debole amore' – 'weak love' – which manifests itself in crying: here in the A section, she portrays her brother Sigismondo's complaints caused by his immature feelings in contrast with the middle section, where she states that real flames, like hers, are in defiance even of death.

Example 5.50: Vocal part (excerpt) of *È vil segno*, bb. 38–57.

**Larghetto**

è vil se-gno d'un de-bo-le-a-mo-re quel do-lo-re, quel do-lo-re, che col pian-to sfo-gan-do sen vâ, ———  
 che col pian-to sfo-gan do,

The alternation between passion and lyric enunciation goes on with *Al furor* (II/5; E minor, 3/4, Andante; see Ex. 5.17) and *Rendimi il dolce sposo* (II/10; A major, 12/8, Largo; Ex. 5.51), a Largo *siciliana* in A major moving in long legato waves and arcs.

Example 5.51: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Rendimi il dolce sposo*, bb. 5–12.

**Largo**

Ren-di-mi, ren-di-mi il dol-ce spo-so due vi-te-jo ti-do-vrò, ——— due  
 vi-te-jo ti-do-vrò, ——— ti-do-vrò, ——— due vi-te-jo ti-do-vrò;

Example 5.52: *Ho veleno, e ferro avanti*

**Largo.**

TUSNELDA.

Ho ve-le-no e fer-ro a-  
 -van-ti, e pur vi-vo, e pe-no an-cor, e pur vi-vo, e pe-no an-cor, e pe-no an-cor; nè due  
 mor-ti son ba-stan-ti a dar fi-ne al mio do-lor, a dar fi-ne al mio do-lor.  
 Ho ve-le-no e fer-ro a-van-ti, ho ve-le-no e fer-ro, e pur  
 vi-vo, e pur vi-vo, e pur vi-vo, e pe-no an-cor, e pur vi-vo, e pe-no an-cor.  
 (prende la spada per ferirsi.)

The arioso *Ho veleno, e ferro avanti* (III/3; B<sup>b</sup> minor, C, Largo; Ex. 5.52) is the partner of Atalanta's *Custodite*, and creates a tradition of Strada's last Handelian operas: Largo, likewise with continuo accompaniment and an octave range but in the extreme B<sup>b</sup> minor. Originally, it had a sixteen-bar long three part form, but it became abbreviated to only its A section (to bb. 1–6) in the première. Though the situation is also intimate and lonely, here Tuscelda prepares for the sleep of death: she wants to poison herself simultaneously with Arminio's execution. Finally, in *Và, combatti ancor da forte* (III/6; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.53) Handel lets Strada's soprano loose like one loosens a wild horse: her power and wide range explodes in vehement zig-zagging jumps through 'original passages and peculiar difficulties of execution.'<sup>121</sup> The role of Tuscelda, exceptionally, has no less than three duets, two of which (*Il fuggir, cara mia vita* I/1; A minor, C, Andante allegro; *Ritorna nel core vezzosa* III/9; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro) Strada performed with the alto castrato Domenico Annibali.

Example 5.53: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Và, combatti ancor da forte*, bb. 33–39.



In *Giustino*, the first two arias of Strada are of the *parlante* type – *Da' tuoi begl'occhi* I/3; A major, C, Allegro, and *Mio dolce amato sposo* I/12; D minor, C, Largo; Ex. 5.54) –, the second of which applies to the chromatic descending of *Se vuoi ch'io mora* (II/6, D minor, C) from Vinci's *Didone abbandonata*, catching the moment when Arianna is preparing to face death by the sea monster. *Qual torrente* (II/9; D major, C, Allegro; Ex. 5.56), which 'seems written for the display of Strada's powers of execution, with a quiet accompaniment, *alla moderna*', is a castrato-type of movement with a grandiose oboe solo which echoes the voice's nightingale-like patterns and trills, though they are ironic ones, since Arianna scorns the rebel Vitaliano's love for her.<sup>122</sup> Its range is exceeded by the previous duet, where Strada's part has a b<sup>b</sup> arrival. Interestingly, there are two places in *Da' tuoi begl'occhi* (bb. 28 and 55; Ex. 5.55) where Handel rewrote the course of the melody to keep it on a higher tessitura, as it can be seen in the autograph score.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 406.

<sup>123</sup> G. F. Handel, *Giustino* HWV 37, *GB-Lbl* R.M.20.b.4.

Example 5.54: Excerpt from *Mio dolce amato sposo* (*Giustino*), with the chromatic descending taken from *Se vuoi ch'io mora* (*Didone abbandonata*), bb. 10–18.

The image shows a musical score for Example 5.54. It consists of two systems of staves. The top system includes a Violin part (Viol.) and a vocal line. The bottom system includes a Bass line and a vocal line. The lyrics are: "mio dol.ce a.ma.to spo.so, mo.rir sa.prò con.ten.ta poi.chè mor.rò fe.del, mor.rò co.stan.te, co.stan.te, fe.de.le, con.ten.ta, o dol.ce a.ma.to". The score features various musical notations such as dynamics (p, f), articulation (tr), and a chromatic descending line in the vocal part.

Example 5.55: Correction of the vocal line in *Da' tuoi begl'occhi*: first setting and final version of b. 55.

The image shows two versions of a vocal line for Example 5.55. Both are marked "Allegro" and are in G major (one sharp). The first version shows the lyrics: "a pu - nir — l'em - pie - tà". The second version shows the lyrics: "a pu - nir — l'em - pie - tà d'un tra - di - to - re." The musical notation includes notes, rests, and a trill (tr) in the second version.

*Qual torrente* (Ex. 5.56), on the other hand, has been transposed a whole tone down, from E to D major (the autograph has it in E major) and became extended, as the conducting score shows.<sup>124</sup> Strohm has suggested that the reason for the key change was the replacement of Conti's aria, *O fiero e rio* in A major: this originally preceded *Qual torrente*, but, after it was removed, Strada's aria came after the B<sup>b</sup> major *Sull'altar di questo* and the dissonance between B<sup>b</sup> and E major called for a transposition.<sup>125</sup> *Il mio cor* (III/4; F minor, 3/4, Largo), Arianna's lament over the pains caused by her husband's unjust jealousy, has a fuller orchestration and reveals the intense ringing of her voice.

<sup>124</sup> G. F. Handel, *Giustino* HWV 37, *GB-Lbl R.M.20.b.4 & D-Hs M A/1020*.

<sup>125</sup> Reinhard Strohm, 'Vivaldi's and Handel's settings of *Giustino*', in: *Music and Theatre. Essays in honour of Winton Dean*. Ed. by Nigel Fortune (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 131–158:140.

Burney calls it of ‘such an elegant and masterly style of composition as was but little known in any part of Europe at this time.’<sup>126</sup>

Example 5.56: Vocal part (excerpt from section A) of *Qual torrente*, bb. 17–53.

Allegro

Qual tor - ren - te che s'in - nal - za sul - la spon - da, e fuor - ne bal - za la sua tom - ba ha poi nel mar,

la sua tom - ba ha poi nel mar,

e sua tom - ba ha poi nel mar;

qual tor - ren - te che s'in - nal - za, qual tor - ren - te che s'in - nal - za sul - la spon - da, e fuor - ne bal - za, e

fuor - ne bal za,

Strada’s passion, together with her unique vocal skill set, never ceased to inspire Handel to innovative and extraordinary compositional solutions. For instance, her first aria in her last original role in London, *Berenice*, was written ‘in a very uncommon style, and supported [...] with spirit and ingenuity’. *Nò, che servire altrui* (I/2; F major, 3/4, Andante; Ex. 5.57; Track 15), applies an asymmetric phrase structure (combining 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7-bar units) with unexpectedly placed accents and dispersed melodic notes. All, based on the display of Strada’s best sounding tones (the most frequently accented f<sup>♯</sup>, g<sup>♯</sup> and a<sup>♯</sup> notes) and her vocal liquidity, might have resulted in a special virtuoso effect.<sup>127</sup> The Egyptian Queen namely feels that she is being forced into an unwanted arranged marriage with the Roman general Alessandro, and resists the idea like a wild horse.

*Sempre dolci* (II/3; A major, 3/8, Andante; Ex. 5.58) adds to the Andante-aria tradition, although it operates on the energetic side of the tempo, and the melody is twisted multiple times with octave breaks, arpeggiations and rhythmic variety. Another aria in the role, *Chi t’intende* (III/4; B<sup>♭</sup> major, C, Adagio–Andante; Ex. 5.59), is an exceptional piece where the dramatic situation surmounts the form, resulting in the birth of peculiar compositional ideas. The aria occurs after Berenice has found that her beloved Demetrio never cared for her but was interested in her sister, Selene, instead. Moreover he became a traitor, planning to depose Berenice and to make Selene the Queen of Egypt, so Berenice imprisons him and orders his execution. Also, she submits herself to the wisdom of the Roman ambassador

<sup>126</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 406–407.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 408–409.

Fabio, giving him her signet to find her a worthy husband and ruler for her kingdom. Fabio names Alessandro, the Roman nobleman; Berenice, having agreed, is astonished by the seemingly illogical divine plan. *Chi t'intende*, 'a very elaborate and fine composition', besides its tempo changes, contains a strangely chromatic oboe solo, which turns into a duet with the soprano, nearly exceeding the frames of the traditional *da-capo* form.<sup>128</sup> The key and tempo alterations in the middle section deepen the dimensions of the number.

Example 5.57: Vocal part (A section) of *Nò, che servire altrui*, bb. 11–69.

**Andante**

Berenice  
Nò, nò, nò, nò, che ser-vi-re-al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni - ma non sà; nò, nò, che ser-vi - re-al - tru - i quest'

B.  
a - ni-ma non sà, non sà, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà, nò, che ser-vi-re al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà, nò, che ser-vi-re al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà, nò, che ser-vi-re al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà, nò, che ser-vi-re al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà, nò, che ser-vi-re al - tru-i, nò, quest' a - ni-ma non sà.

Example 5.58: Vocal part (excerpt from section A) of *Sempre dolci*, bb. 61–102.

**Andante**

**p** lu - cja - man - te, **f** an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, **p** sem - pre dol - ci non - vi vo - glio, **f** an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, lu - cja - ma - te, an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, **p** sem - pre, dol - ci non - vi vo - glio, **f** an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, **p** lu - cja - ma - te, an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te, an - co i - ra - te mi pia - ce - te. **Adagio**

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 411.

Example 5.59: Excerpt (vocal and oboe part) from *Chi t'intende*, bb. 18–74.

The image shows a musical score for Oboe (Ob.) and Bassoon (B.) parts from the opera *Chi t'intende*. The score is in G minor (three flats) and common time (C). It consists of seven systems of staves, each with an Oboe staff on top and a Bassoon staff on the bottom. The lyrics are written below the Bassoon staff. The tempo markings are *Adagio* and *Andante allegro*. The dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano). Trills are indicated with 'tr' above notes. The lyrics are: 'Chi t'in - ten-de? o cie-ca in-sta - bi - le! ca-pri-cio-sa, ca-pri - cio - sa... De - i - tà! chi t'in-ten-de? chi t'in-ten-de? ca-pri-cio-sa De-i - tà, chi t'in - ten - de, cai-pri - cio - sa, cie-ca in - sta - bi - le, chi t'in - ten-de? ca-pri-cio-sa, ca-pri - cio - sa... De - i - tà! chi t'in - ten-de? chi t'in - ten - de, o cie-ca in - sta-bi-le? ca-pri-cio-sa De-i - tà! chi t'in - ten - de, o cie-ca in - sta - bi - le, ca-pri-cio-sa De-i - tà, chi t'in - ten-de, ca-pri - cio - sa, chi t'in - ten - de, cie-ca in - sta - bi - le?'

Berenice's feelings, however, do not change easily. *Avvertite, mie pupille* (III/8; C<sup>#</sup> minor, C, Largo, e piano) is the final member of the *Falsa imagine*-type series, this time of a complete *da capo* form with violins, expressing her intention to commit suicide after Demetrio is beheaded. Yet, in the end she forgives and, being healed from vengefulness and pride, finds requited love by Alessandro's side.

The idea that the musical material dedicated by Handel to Strada is hallmarked by the imprint of her special vocal skills was reflected even in her lifetime by her contemporaries.

The aforementioned sarcastic pamphlet about Handel from 1734 underscores the same, although negatively: ‘Mr. Honeycomb protests, that he cannot adapt one Air of your Composition either to his Eyes or Nose; and they are such Stuff as is only fit for the Throat of a Care[sti]ni or a Stra[d]a’.<sup>129</sup>

The opportunity to work for eight years with a composer who can provide outstanding material not only suited but generated exclusively for a certain voice of a certain person, is exceptional and luxurious for a singer; such a collection of arias has the value of the best singing master. Strada’s original roles certainly helped her to develop in the right direction and to improve the profound consciousness of her vocal profile and artistic identity: to become aware of what kind of strengths her voice had, and to focus absorbedly on refining them, opened the door to liberate further technical, musical and dramatic skills. This is like wearing an individually tailored dress and looking at oneself in the mirror to realise and to learn something constructively new about one’s character through that favourable visual emphasis; it is this very self-consciousness I discover in Strada’s eyes in Verelst’s painting. Conversely, Handel’s compositional thinking in terms of the soprano voice likewise shifted because of the prospects Strada’s individual skill-set provided. She therefore, through her transformation, transformed her transformer in the process as well.

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<sup>129</sup> *Harmony in an Uproar: A Letter to F-d-k H-d-l Esq.*; [12 February] 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 737–749: 744.





## Chapter Six: The Prima Donna of Oratorios

Strada's privileged situation as Handel's *prima donna* was not limited to opera roles: she was the pioneering leading soprano during the years when English oratorio was being established by the composer. She sang in five oratorios altogether between 1732 and 1737, four of them in English (Table 6.1). This regularity, as well as the fact that in a critique of the performance of *Esther*, Senesino's and Bertolli's pronunciation was disparaged by comparing it to Welsh whereas that of Strada was not attacked, refers to her good or at least acceptable English enunciation.<sup>1</sup> Probably she had a good ear for picking up native accents. The fact that before the nineteenth century there was no standard English pronunciation (Received Pronunciation) – although a strong tendency was shown towards that in the later part of the eighteenth century – and that several regional accents were simultaneously in use, could have made this challenge a bit easier.<sup>2</sup> Oratorios in which Strada sang were often revived, and thus the numbers of performances rivalled those of the opera productions. The special features of oratorio were the choruses, the parts of which most probably were sung by the soloists, supported by additional tenors and basses, as happened in the case of the hybrid, half-oratorio half-masque *serenata*, the bilingual revival of *Acis and Galatea* in June 1732.<sup>3</sup>

### Esther and Deborah

Although during the process of Handel's turn towards the genre of English oratorio, and slowly away from Italian *opera seria* his Italian singers were gradually replaced by British ones, the vocal-technical requirement of great stamina, with which one can sing two hours of alternating chorus movements and solo numbers with relatively short breaks provided by other soloists' arias, still called for singers with an Italian manner of training. This

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<sup>1</sup> 'Senesino and Bertolli made rare work with the English Tongue you would have sworn it had been Welch; I would have wish'd it Italian, that they might have sung with more ease to themselves, since, but for the Name of *English*, it might as well have been *Hebrew*'; from the pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* (*Daily Journal*, 8 June 1732), *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2, 1725–1734* ed. by Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe and Anthony Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 535. Some fifty years later Mrs Thrale reported about the castrato Giuseppe Millico, that he, in a performance of *Esther*, 'set to sing these English Words – / come my *Queen to Chaste Delights* – He sung and pronounced them thus. / *comb my Queen to catch the lice*'. Cited in George E. Dorris, *Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London 1715–1744* (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), 101.

<sup>2</sup> However, the language used at the Court and the London area was considered superior from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Joan C. Beal, 'Prescriptivism and the suppression of variation', in: *Eighteenth-Century English: Ideology and Change*, ed. by Raymond Hickey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 21–37: 21; Beal, *English Pronunciation in the Eighteenth Century. Thomas Spence's Grand Repository of the English Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Burrows, 'Handel's oratorio performances', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*. Ed. by Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 262–281: 273.

might be the reason why Handel retained until as late as the 1740s and 1750s Élisabeth Duparc (La Francesina), Giulia Frasi and Caterina Galli in his troupe for oratorio performances,<sup>4</sup> and this same reason could justify Strada's stable presence therein. Additionally – besides the religious topic, the nature of English language, and that British singers were coming from a theatrical background with less vocal education – this explains why arias per person in oratorios were generally less in number, and sometimes even less demanding, than in opera: the soloists had to sing and lead their sections in choruses, which frequently contained sustained notes as well as coloratura passages.

Table 6.1: Strada's oratorio performances under Handel in London

Oratorios (with the numbers of performances)	Première	Revivals	Strada's role	Original cast
<i>Esther</i> (6+2+2+6+2+2=20)	2 May 1732	April 1733, July 1733, March 1735, April 1736, April 1737	Esther	Senesino, Bertolli, Montagnana, Robinson
<i>Deborah</i> (6+1+3+3=13; -1: the performance on 3 <sup>rd</sup> April 1733 went without Strada)	17 March 1733	1733 July, April 1734, March 1735	Deborah	Senesino, Bertolli, Gismondi, Montagnana, Waltz
<i>Athalia</i> (2+5=7)	10 July 1733	April 1735	Josabeth	Mrs. Wright, Powell, Rochetti, Waltz, Goodwill
<i>Alexander's Feast</i> (& <i>Cecilia, volgi</i> ) (5+4+1=10)	19 February 1736	March 1737, June 1737	Soprano	Young, Beard, Erard
<i>Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità</i> (4)	23 March 1737	—	Bellezza	Annibali, Negri, Conti

Anthony Hicks derives the birth of the Handelian English oratorio from two of the composer's independent revivals that coincided in the spring of 1732: the Cannons masques from 1718, *Esther* and *Acis and Galatea*.<sup>5</sup> Neither of them had been forgotten in the 1720s, due to printed scores and copies circulating, and to amateur performances promoted by music societies. One of these productions, a subscription concert – undoubtedly an exceptional one – gained wider publicity: the choir master of the Chapel Royal, the composer and bass Bernard Gates, prepared with his boy choristers a performance 'in action' at the Crown and Anchor Tavern for 23<sup>rd</sup> February, Handel's birthday. (The performance was repeated also on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> March.) An important contribution to the momentum of the event was, as Burney stated, that 'Mr. Handel himself was present at one of these representations, and having mentioned it to the Princess Royal, his illustrious scholar, her Royal Highness was pleased to express a desire to see it

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Donald Burrows for sharing his opinion with me.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Hicks, 'Handel and the idea of an oratorio', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, 145–163: 152.

exhibited in action at the Opera-house in the Hay-market'.<sup>6</sup> Since the Bishop of London prohibited the chorister boys to sing in a staged work in a theatre, but the choruses were too important to omit, Handel decided to perform it without action and expanded *Esther* to a full-night production, including two of his coronation anthems composed for King George II and Queen Caroline's coronation service in 1727 and further solo numbers fitting for the soloists, members of his opera company. According to Deborah W. Rooke, the Coronation Anthems' introduction into the story of Esther created an evident connection to the Royal couple as protectors of the British nation, and also promoted Queen Caroline's role as national conciliator.<sup>7</sup> The original text, based on Jean Racine's drama, was accordingly enriched by Samuel Humphreys.

The first scene was an addition, although Handel reused some of his earlier music. Throughout it, the proportions of the drama were reshaped: Esther's figure gained much more significance and elaboration than in the 1718 version, and was brought closer to Racine's character.<sup>8</sup> Rooke emphasises that the portrayal of Esther in the 1732 version focuses on Esther's role as a heroine in saving her nation on the one hand, and on her physical beauty in winning King Assuerus's heart on the other – with the suspicion that it might have been influenced by Handel himself<sup>9</sup> – which is, again, closer to Racine's drama and not least to the Biblical story too.<sup>10</sup> As there was no action and only the voices took part in the representation of the characters, Strada's putative lack of physical charms was no obstacle in rendering Esther audibly delightful with her 'ravishing voice'.<sup>11</sup> Esther praises God by a 'Hallelujah of half an hour long'<sup>12</sup> (I/1; 12/8, Allegro, a tempo giusto; Ex. 6.1) in the noble B<sup>b</sup> major which also represents cheerful love.<sup>13</sup> This number is a double borrowing: it is taken from the Latin motet, *Silete venti*, which Handel may have composed

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: Payne and Son, 1789), 360; Burney, *An Account of the Musical Performances in Westminster Abbey ... in Commemoration of Handel* (London, 1785), 100.

<sup>7</sup> Hicks, 'Handel and the idea of an oratorio', 153; Deborah W. Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30–31; Ilias Chrissochoidis, 'His Majesty's Choice: *Esther* in May 1732', *Newsletter of the American Handel Society* XXII/2 (Summer 2007), 4–6: 5.

<sup>8</sup> Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> She thinks so because in I.1 Mordecai, in his aria, praises Esther's beauty, and immediately after that the *Coronation anthem* closes the scene, containing the line 'The King shall have Pleasure in thy Beauty'. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

<sup>10</sup> According to the rabbinic tradition, along with Sarah, Rahab, and Abigail, Esther was one of the most beautiful women in the world (Babylonian Talmud *Megillah* 15a). Elsewhere they claim that God increased Esther's beauty before the king, so that he could not resist her.

<sup>11</sup> *The Weekly Medley, and Literary Journal* on 6 December 1729. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 326.

<sup>12</sup> From the pamphlet *See and Seem Blind* (1732). *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 535.

<sup>13</sup> Johann Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre* (Hamburg: 1713), 249; Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1784–85 (Wien: 1806), 377; Johann Jakob Wilhelm Heinse, *Hildegard von Hohenthal*, vol. i (Berlin: 1795), 55.

in Rome in 1729 – during his Italian journey contracting singers for the Second Academy – for Cardinal Colonna, but its *Alleluja*, as a reminder, is from *Saeviat tellus inter rigores* (HWV 240, 1707), the motet Handel wrote to Colonna some twenty years earlier.<sup>14</sup> Here Strada sang practically no text, but miles-long coloratura triplet-chains vocalised on the vowel ‘a’: it means that all of the other aspects of vocal music (i.e. the text and dramatic expression) were eliminated; only the beauty of the sound and the perfection of technique – in other words, the ‘absolute music’ – remained. Handel’s idea of describing Esther’s twofold spiritual and natural beauty through musical notes and without words became linked to Strada’s vocal characteristics, especially her voice’s individual sound. Besides *terzini*, trills and sustained notes in the head range for display of *messa di voce* highlight this air. The scene is magnificently ended by Queen Caroline’s coronation anthem *My Heart is Inditing* (1727).<sup>15</sup>

Example 6.1: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Alleluja*, bb. 81–94.

The musical score for the vocal part of 'Alleluja' (bb. 81-94) is presented in two staves. The first staff, starting at measure 81, is marked 'Presto' and contains the lyrics 'al-le-lu-ja, al-le-lu-ja, al-le-lu-ja, al-le-lu-ja'. The melody is characterized by a triplet of eighth notes on the first 'ja' and a trill on the final 'ja'. The second staff, starting at measure 88, continues the vocal line with a trill on the first 'ja' and a sustained note on the final 'ja'.

In general, the extended role of Esther still seems to have made only modest demands of Strada’s skills, especially concerning range – there are light and unaccented a” notes in the plaint *Tears, assist me* (II/2; A minor, 3/8, Larghetto), and the others go only up to g” – and virtuosity.<sup>16</sup> Since this was a revival, the original of which was sung by a boy soprano, and since the title role had to be sung by Strada, I think Handel’s possibilities were quite restricted from this point of view. Only in this way could it occur that the music of the Israelitish Woman (sung by the fine soprano, Ann Turner Robinson<sup>17</sup>) went beyond that of Esther in range (b<sup>b</sup>”), and was equal with her in divisions, similarly applying triplets in B<sup>b</sup> major as a musical code when she praises Esther’s beauty (*Heaven has lent her ev’ry charm* II/4; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4, Andante allegro). Strada could at least show her vocal strength in the vengeful air of Act III (scene 2), *Flatt’ring tongue* (B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 6.2). Nevertheless, at the 1733 revivals of *Esther* Strada took over the whole scene of Act I,

<sup>14</sup> Hans Joachim Marx, ‘Händels lateinische Motette Silete venti (HWV 242) – Ein Auftragswerk für Paris?’, in: *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 14 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 153–166: 154.

<sup>15</sup> Rooke, *Handel’s Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 27.

<sup>16</sup> The key A minor was considered as serious and stood for sorrow and lamentation. Mattheson, *Das Neueröffnete Orchestre*, 238; Johann Joachim Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung, die Flöte traversière zu spielen* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Boß, 1752), 138.

<sup>17</sup> Winton Dean, ‘Robinson (i): (2) Ann Turner Robinson [née Turner]’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 5 August 2015.

singing *Breathe soft, ye gales* and *Watchful angels* (the adopted version of *Ferma l'ali* from *La Resurrezione*, HWV 47, 1708), transposed a major third higher (from E<sup>b</sup> major to G major). In turn, her *parlante* aria in Act II, *No, no more* was given to the Israelitish Woman in *Deborah*, and as both works were performed at Oxford in July 1733 Strada may have not performed this air then. At the 1736 and 1737 revivals, *Watchful angels* went to Gioacchino Conti as *Pure menti amico ciel*.<sup>18</sup>

Example 6.2: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Flatt'ring tongue*, bb. 28–50.

Allegro

28 Flatt' - ring tongue, no more I hear— thee, no more, no more, no more I hear— thee, vain are all thy cru - el

34 wiles; bloo - dy wretch, bloo - dy wretch, no more I fear thee, vain thy— frowns, and vain— thy smiles, bloo - dy

40 wretch, no more I fear— thee, no more, no more, no more, no more I— fear thee, no, no,

47 vain thy frowns,— and— vain thy smiles, vain thy frowns,— and vain— thy smiles.

From the expressive point of view, Esther is one of the most dramatic of Strada's oratorio roles. A plot which focuses on her decisions, sacrifice and submission to the truth, and how in the process she sets aside her personal emotions and comfort, even risking her life for a greater good, is sensitively reflected in the music. The moment when she enters the king's presence after three days of complete fasting (even without water), weakened and fainting, witnessed by all the leaders of the kingdom and against the law – she, who had been chosen, now initiates, and he (Ahasuerus, i.e. Xerxes, 485–465 BC) who dismissed his former wife (Vashti) because she was disobedient when he called, now honours his beloved Esther who came uninvited – is breath-taking in its simplicity, gravity and romantic gentleness: the effect of this duet between the Queen and Ahasuerus (*Who calls my parting soul*; II/3, F minor, 3/4, Adagio e staccato; Ex. 6.3) is achieved mostly with a single, time-stopping, space-erasing gesture of a steady heartbeat-accompaniment in staccato-crochet motion. In *Flatt'ring tongue* then, Esther's relief, and simultaneously her anger deriving from sense of injustice, burst out spontaneously.

<sup>18</sup> Handel added some pencil notes and alterations to the score. See J. A. Fuller-Maitland and A. H. Mann, *Catalogue of the Music in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1893), 161 [251].

Example 6.3: Who calls my parting soul

*Adagio, e staccato.*

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
ESTHER.  
AHASVERUS.  
Bassi.

Who calls my part - ing  
Wer ruft zum Le - ben

soul - from death? who calls my part - ing soul from death?  
mich - zu rü - ck? wer ruft zum Le - ben mich zu - rü - ck?

A - wake, my soul, my life, - my breath,  
Er - wach', o Herz, mein Trost, mein Glück,

Hear my suit, or else I die, or else I  
Hör' mein Fleh'n, sonst trifft mich Tod, sonst trifft mich

a - wake, my soul, my life, my breath!  
er - wach', o Herz, mein Trost, mein Glück!

Ask, my Queen, ask, my Queen, can  
Sprich es aus, sprich es aus, mir

die, hear my suit, or else I die, hear my suit, or else I die, I die, or  
Tod, hör' mein Fleh'n, sonst trifft mich Tod, Tod, mich Tod, sonst

I de - ny, can I de - ny? ask, my Queen, can I de - ny?  
ist's Ge - bot, mir ist's Ge - bot, sprich es aus, mir ist's Ge - bot, sprich es aus, mir

else, or else - I die, hear my suit, or else I die, hear my  
trifft, sonst trifft - mich Tod, hör' mein Fleh'n, sonst trifft mich Tod, hör' mein

I de - ny, ask, my Queen, can I de - ny?  
ist's Ge - bot, sprich es aus, mir ist's Ge - bot, sprich es aus!

suit, or else - I die.  
Fleh'n, sonst trifft - mich Tod.

can I de - ny?  
mir ist's Ge - bot.

All of the six performances were given ‘By His Majesty’s Command’ and attended by members of the Royal Family – in particular because Princess Anne ‘might have attached herself enthusiastically to the virtuous heroine’ –, attracting ‘very full’ houses.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, as with nearly every new beginning, this one did not go without a hitch: the lack of action shocked some to whom a musical drama, even a sacred one, lost its meaning without the visual representation:

This being a new Thing set the whole World a Madding; Han’t you been at the *Oratorio*, says one? Oh! If you don’t see the *Oratorio* you see nothing, says t’other; so away goes I to the *Oratorio*, where I saw indeed the finest Assembly of People I ever beheld in my Life, but, to my great Surprise, found this Sacred *Drama* a mere Consort, no Scenary, Dress or Action, so necessary to a *Drama*; but *H[ande]l*, was plac’d in Pulpit, I suppose they call that (their Oratory), by him sate *Senesino Strada Bertolli*, and *Turner Robinson*, in their own Habits; before him stood sundry sweet Singers of this our *Israel*, and *Strada* gave us a *Halleluiah* of Half an Hour long [...] We have likewise had two Operas, *Etius* and *Sosarmes*, the first most Masterly, the last most pleasing, and in my mind exceeding pretty: There are two *Duetto*’s which Ravish me, and indeed the whole is vastly Genteel; (I am sorry I am so wicked) but I like one good Opera better than Twenty *Oratorio*’s: Were they indeed to make a regular *Drama* of a good Scripture Story, and perform’d it with proper Decorations, which may be done with as much Preverence in proper Habits, as in their own common Apparel; (I am sure with more Grandeur and Solemnity, and at least equal Decency) then should I change my Mind, then would the Stage appear in its full Lustre, and Musick Answer its original Design. ...<sup>20</sup>

Handel, however, after the general success supported by permanent Royal presence, went on with this enterprise of English oratorio in collaboration with the librettist Humphreys by producing two further sacred dramas in 1733, the former of which was *Deborah*, premièred at the King’s Theatre on 17<sup>th</sup> March.<sup>21</sup> As for the choice of the subject, there must have been a motive of competition in the background: in late 1732, the English composer, Maurice Greene, probably being inspired by Handel’s success with *Esther*, wrote an oratorio entitled *The Song of Deborah and Barak*, which had a well-

<sup>19</sup> Chrissochoidis, ‘His Majesty’s Choice: *Esther* in May 1732’, 4; Ilias Chrissochoidis, “‘A Fam’d *Oratorio* ... in old English sung’: *Esther* on 16 May 1732’, *HIN* 18/1 (Spring 2007), 4–7: 6; *Colman’s Opera Register*, 2 May 1732. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 524.

<sup>20</sup> From the pamphlet from the pamphlet *See and Seem Blind (Daily Journal)*, 8 June 1732), *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 535.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew Gardner, *Handel and Maurice Greene’s Circle at the Apollo Academy: The Music and Intellectual Contexts of Oratorios, Odes and Masques*. *Abhandlungen zur Musikgeschichte 15* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Unipress, 2008), 21; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 368.

received private performance at the Apollo Academy in October 1732 (and after that a public one at Whitehall Chapel on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1733). Handel might have answered this challenge with his own setting of the same subject. On the other hand, similarly to its predecessor *Esther, Deborah*, with its subject of another Biblical female hero, was likewise Handel's salute not only to the Hanoverian reign but also to female leadership, and especially to Queen Caroline, to whom the word book was dedicated.<sup>22</sup> Rooke notes that three previous Protestant English queens opposing Catholicism, namely Elizabeth I, Mary II and Anne, were regularly compared to Deborah in literature; she suggests also that in the case of the Hanoverian Queen Caroline too, the word book of Deborah could be work of allegorical propaganda suggesting that Anglican Britain is potent enough to overtake its Catholic neighbours.<sup>23</sup> Ruth Smith has warned that these parallels cannot be strictly applied to every action in the plot, since 'in the early 1730s the lack of a strong national leader to redeem the population from a tyrannical rule was a favourite theme of Patriot opposition, whereas Caroline was Walpole's most powerful supporter',<sup>24</sup> yet satirical writings and pamphlets utilised Handel and Strada's names as well as their professional relationship as a metaphor for the Queen's favour and political influence on the Prime Minister, Robert Walpole. Thus, as Strada's voice represented both symbolic characters, Esther and Deborah, her person became involved in these political allegories as a code for the Queen, even concerning her role as Deborah. (See the *Craftsman* on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1733.)<sup>25</sup> *Deborah's* text might also reflect political relations between the diplomatically gifted Queen Caroline and the military man of distinction, King George II as Barak, emphasising the prophetess counselling the heroic leader of the people. This is especially evident in their two duets.<sup>26</sup>

The music of Deborah's role radiates magnificence, authority and strength. It is a much more queenly music than that of Esther, whose purity, beauty and emotional approach to her people's enemy were highlighted, and who was depending on the favour and decision of a yet ungodly king, whereas Deborah with her authority as a prophetess – in a nation functioning according to divine structure and through its judges, directly ruled by God and without an earthly king – counsels and spiritually supports the executive power led by general Barak in order to gain victory. The splendour of the sound is permanent throughout

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<sup>22</sup> Deutsch, *Handel*, 308.

<sup>23</sup> Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 33–34.

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 285–286.

<sup>25</sup> See Deutsch, *Handel*, 310–313; *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 609–612: 612; Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 138–142.

<sup>26</sup> Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 52.



the whole role. Deborah approaches the situation of Israel from a spiritual point of view, raised above the natural; therefore her personal emotions are distanced from the faith and wisdom she represents. She is not directly involved in the battle against the Canaanites – the turning point in the nation’s history – as Esther is by entering into the throne room, a deed entailing the death penalty unless the king decides otherwise. Deborah’s first appearance at the beginning of the oratorio is a duet with Barak, *Where do thy ardours raise me* (I/1; E<sup>b</sup> major, 12/8, Larghetto). The music is in E<sup>b</sup> major, a key connecting to tenderness and love elevating the soul, and has a light tone in Minuet character. Deborah gently encourages the general to fulfil his divine calling (This is in contrast to the Biblical account, where Barak had not answered God’s calling to initiate a battle, and Deborah had to remind him and repeat the command. When Barak still hesitated and wanted Deborah to come with him, the prophetess announced the consequence of his spiritual disobedience and cowardice: it will be not he but a woman who will gain the glory instead; see Judges 4).<sup>27</sup> It has a catchy melody, just as their other duet, *Smiling freedom* (II/1; A major, 3/8, Larghetto) at the end of part II.

Strada’s first aria, *Choirs of angels* (I/2; B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Allegro; Ex. 6.4), with oboes, is an established Handelian oratorio aria, taken from the *Brockes Passion*, the sound profile of which became typical in Handel’s sacred works. Here, Deborah is rejoicing in the divine splendour and the security of her faith in victory. Although *Deborah* was likewise a *pasticcio*, recycling many numbers from earlier works of Handel (the two other Coronation Anthems which were not used for *Esther*, *Let thy hand be strengthened* and *The King shall rejoice*, the Chandos Anthems *O Praise the Lord with one consent* and *In the Lord I put my trust*, the *Brockes Passion*, *Dixit Dominus*, *Il Trionfo del Tempo*, *Aci*, *Galatea e polifemo*, etc.), in Strada’s role everything apart from *Choirs of angels* was newly composed.

Example 6.4: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Choirs of angels*, bb. 20–27.



*In Jehovah’s awful sight* (II/1; F minor, 3/2, Adagio; Ex. 6.5) can be compared to the duet in *Esther* II/3, *Who calls my parting soul*, for both share the same key – the profound, obscure, lamenting and desperate F minor – the same tempo, similar metre and

<sup>27</sup> Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung*, 203.

accompaniment, although in *Deborah* without *staccati*.<sup>28</sup> Again, its severe magnificence overshadows any drama or lamentation; she, though agreeing, is simply transmitting the heavenly truth about tyrants' vain pursuit of fame and might, as well as their temporary reign.

Example 6.5: *In Jehovah's awful sight*

*Adagio.*

Oboe solo.

Violino I.

Violino II.

Viola.

Basson I.

Basson II.

DEBORAH.

Bassi.

In Je - ho - vah's aw - ful sight, haugh - ty ty - rants are but dust, haugh - ty Ge -  
 für Je - ho - rah ist die Pracht der Ge - walt'gen nichts als Staub, der - Ge -

ty - rants are but dust. Those, who glo - ry in their might, place in va -  
 - walt'gen nichts als Staub. Her - da prahlt mit sei - ner Macht, ist des eit -

- ni - ty their trust, those, who glo - ry, who glo - ry in their might, place in  
 - len Stolz - ses Raub, wer da prak - let, wer prahlt mit sei - ner Macht, ist des

va - ni - ty their trust place in va - ni - ty their trust.  
 eit - len Stolz - ses Raub, ist des eit - len Stolz - ses Raub.

<sup>28</sup> Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, 238; Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung*, 138 and 203.

In *All your boast* (II/1; Soli & Chorus, D minor, 3/8, Andante) Strada had opportunities to let her marathon (six-bar long) *messe di voce* shine in a rising sequential way, which foreshadows the middle section of the future *Hallelujah* chorus of the *Messiah*. Her sustained notes must have been extraordinary and beautiful indeed: Bryan Robinson in his *A Treatise of the Animal Oeconomy* (1732), published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1737, refers to them in the entertaining rhymed description about the lungs: 'Or hear a Strada or Cuzzoni swell, In sweet proportion'd notes, th' *Italic air*'.<sup>29</sup> The effectiveness of *The glorious sun* (III/3; A major, 3/4, Andante; Ex. 6.6) with its two accented a" notes reached by seventh leaps, the many occasions for trills, and its rhythmic variety (syncopations, triplets, dotted rhythms, semiquavers, etc.), lies in the glimmering, silver-like quality of tone with which Strada must have executed it.<sup>30</sup>

Example 6.6: Vocal part (excerpt) of *The glorious sun*, bb. 49–80.

*Deborah's* success was ruined already before its first performance (17<sup>th</sup> March) because of the high ticket prices, raised by Handel from half a Guinea to a whole, and because he denied admission to subscribers when they did not want to pay that margin. The reasons could be that the house had to be illuminated, and that a larger number of performers than Handel ever needed for an opera performance had to be paid. For the second time it was given (27<sup>th</sup> March), the prices were 'reduced to the common standard'.<sup>31</sup>

Last week we had an Oratorio: Compos'd by Hendel out of the Story of Barak & Deborah the latter of which name it bears[,] Hendel thought[,] encourag'd by

<sup>29</sup> First published in 1734 (Dublin: George Ewing), reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine* VII. Political Essays (April 1737), 246.

<sup>30</sup> The key meant rejoicing, grandeur and was suitable for sacred songs. Mary Cyr, *Performing Baroque Music* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1992), 33; see Mattheson, *Das Neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, 250; Jean Rousseau, *Méthode claire, certaine et facile pour apprendre à chanter la Musique* (Paris: 1691); Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Traité de l'harmonie réduite à ses principes naturels* (Paris: 1722).

<sup>31</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 366.

the Princess Royal[,] it had merit enough to deserve a Guinea & the first time it was performd att that price, exclusive of subscribers tickets, there was but a 120 people in the House: the subscribers being refus'd unless they would pay a Guinea they insisting upon the right of their silver tickets forc'd into the House & carry'd their point[.]<sup>32</sup>

The situation was aggravated by the unfortunate coincidence that three days prior to the première Sir Robert Walpole introduced his idea of a Tobacco Excise Bill in Parliament (which was defeated in the end). The two scandals were paralleled by satirical political writings, representing Handel and Walpole as accomplices in greediness.<sup>33</sup>

In half they succeeded, in half they were crost; The *Tobacco* was sav'd, but poor *Deborah* lost.<sup>34</sup>

After such a prelude, not even the high level of the performance, as recounted by Viscount Percival, was able to help much with the work's reputation:

Went in the evening to see deborah an Oratorio made by Hendel. It was very magnifficent, near a hundred performers, among whom about 25 singers.<sup>35</sup>

### **From Athalia to Bellezza**

*Athalia*, although it was composed shortly after *Deborah*, and despite that it is based on a drama of Racine, like *Esther*, differs from the former two in that it portrays the demise of an ungodly female Biblical leader, and that the majority of its music was almost entirely newly composed.<sup>36</sup> The story of this anti-heroine, as Rooke calls her, became a metaphor for the Jacobite attempt to restore the Stuart monarchy. *Athalia* was created for the Public Act of the University of Oxford in 1733, and as Oxford was then a centre of High Church Tories and Jacobites, a subject for an oratorio to promote the Hanoverian house had to be chosen carefully, diplomatically and intelligently. Humphreys paraphrased Racine's concept, emphasising the purification of the land from idolatry – symbolising the

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<sup>32</sup> Viscountess Irvine to Earl of Carlisle, 31 March 1733. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 608.

<sup>33</sup> McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain*, 137–139; see Deutsch, *Handel*, 309.

<sup>34</sup> From 'A Dialogue between two Projectors', published in *The Bee*, 24 March (and in *The Country Journal: or, The Craftsman*, 7 April) 1733. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 606 (and 609–612: 611).

<sup>35</sup> From Viscount Percival's Diary, 27 March 1733. *Ibid.*, 606.

<sup>36</sup> Hicks, 'Handel and the idea of an oratorio', 154–155.

removal of Catholicism – and in so doing, he underlined the dominion of the Protestant Hanoverian monarchy.<sup>37</sup>

During the Oxford ‘Act’, the University’s annual graduation ceremony, not only *Athalia* was performed – premièred at the Sheldonian Theatre on the 10<sup>th</sup> July (postponed from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup>) and additionally given on the 11<sup>th</sup> – but *Esther*, *Deborah*, *Acis and Galatea* (Strada’s benefit), the *Utrecht Te Deum* and two of the *Coronation Anthems* also were planned (*Esther* was performed on the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup>, *Acis* on the 11<sup>th</sup> and *Deborah* on the 12<sup>th</sup>).<sup>38</sup> The University’s intention to honour Handel with a ‘Degree of Doctor of Music, at the Publick Act to be held there this summer, that Signor Senesino is expected to be present on the Occasion’, was reported in the *Applebee’s Original Weekly Journal* of 7<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>39</sup> As is well known, in the meantime all of Handel’s Italian singers except Strada left him for the Nobility’s company. From the cast of *Deborah* that spring, therefore, neither Senesino nor Bertolli, Gismondi or Montagnana were present; and the honorary D.Mus., if offered at all in the end, obviously had been turned down by the composer.<sup>40</sup> However, Handel arrived at Oxford not only with his singers but with his orchestral players as well, and *Athalia* was performed by ‘about 70 Voices and Instruments of Musick, and was the grandest [performance] ever heard at Oxford’.<sup>41</sup> Its success has been claimed to be enormous, with 2,500–2,600 or even 3,700 persons in the audience, although according to Diack Johnstone the maximum capacity of the Sheldonian Theatre could not be more than 1,250 seats.<sup>42</sup>

Strada’s role this time was markedly larger than in the two previous oratorios; as Josabeth had five arias and three duets. It is reminiscent of the case of *Poro* because of its homogenously lyric nature: it contains only one Allegro number. Although this meant a lack of coloratura fireworks, gestures of virtuosity are incorporated into and covered by the ongoing lyricism and pastoral feeling: in *Blooming virgins* (I/1; G major, 6/8, Larghetto) the first part of the *da capo* section is simple and the A2 section is where sixth and seventh leaps, stretching of range – manifesting in an octave and a fifth large phrase – and fine rhythmic embroidery occur. *Tyrants would in impious throngs* (I/1; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4,

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<sup>37</sup> Rooke, *Handel’s Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 55 and 72–73.

<sup>38</sup> H. Diack Johnstone, ‘Handel at Oxford’, *Early Music* 31/2 (May, 2003), 248–260: 253, 256 and 257.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 251.

<sup>40</sup> *The Craftsman*, 14 July 1733. Cited in Deutsch, *Handel*, 326; ‘Mr Handel has not accepted his Degree of Doctor of Musick, as was reported’. Diary of Thomas Hearne, Oxford, 18–19 July 1733. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 667. Most probably because Handel did not want to be in the same group where his rival, Maurice Greene belonged, who earned a doctorate by his performance in Cambridge in July 1730. See Johnstone, ‘Handel at Oxford’, 251.

<sup>41</sup> *Norwich Gazette*, 14 July 1733. Cited in Deutsch, *Handel*, 327.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Brett in his letter of 3/14 September 1733 to his son, Nicholas, is quoting Dr William Warren’s earlier letter to him. Cited in Johnstone, ‘Handel at Oxford’, 253; *The Bee*, 14 July 1733. Cited in Deutsch, *Handel*, 326–327; *The London Magazine* ‘reported an Audience near 4000’, 11 July 1733. *Ibid.*, 329.

Allegro), a solo number with chorus, focuses on the text; its effect is created by accents, while the range of Josabeth's part goes up to  $b^b$ ". Its counterpart is *Soothing tyrant* (III/2; B minor, 6/8, Andante; Ex. 6.7), a *non da capo* aria, the passion of which is expressed by exclamations: accented crotchets and sequential arpeggiation-waves are designed to highlight Strada's fine vocal tone. While *Faithful cares in vain extended* ( $B^b$  major, 12/8, Larghetto) is entirely *parlante*, *Through the land* (II/1; D minor, 3/8; Ex. 6.8; Track 11) bears the typical marks of Strada's style: triplets, trills, *messe di voce* and dotted rhythms with demisemiquavers. Her duet with Joas, the two-part *My spirits fail* (F minor, C, A tempo ordinario, ma un poco lento – Andante), has a Purcellian music in which plaint turns into a victorious declaration of faith. Among the two duets of Josabeth and Joad, *Cease thy anguish / All thy mercies* is a catchy Minuet ( $E^b$  major, 3/8, Larghetto); their second one, *Joys, in gentle trains / Softest joys* (A major, 3/4, Andante), after Athalia's fall, is brief, shadowless, sweet, innocent and melodious.

Example 6.7: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Soothing tyrant*, bb. 14–56.

Andante

vir-tue's foes I ne'er shall fear, vir-tue's foes I ne'er shall fear, I ne'er shall fear; flatt'r-ing sounds and looks be -  
 guil - ing, flatt'r - ing sounds and looks be - guil - ing, lose their art - ful mean - ing here!  
 Go, thou vain de - ceiv - er, go, go, thou vain de - ceiv - er, go! a-like to me a friend or foe, a  
 friend, or foe, a - like a friend or foe; go, thou vain de - ceiv - er, go, go, go! a-like to me a friend or foe,  
 go, thou vain de - ceiv - er, go!

Example 6.8: Vocal part (excerpts) of the first setting of *Through the land so lovely blooming*, bb. 47–61 and 65–96.

wakes the soul to cheer-ful praise, wakes, wakes the soul to cheer-ful praise;

65 through the land so love - ly bloo - ming, so love - ly bloo - ming, na - ture all her charms as -  
 78 su - ming, wakes the soul to cheer - ful praise, wakes, wakes the  
 88 soul to cheer - ful praise, to cheer - ful praise,

The first London performance of *Athalia*, at Covent Garden on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 1735, can be considered as a second première, for Handel applied significant revisions (although much of its music had been heard in his *fiesta teatrale*, *Il Parnasso in festa* at the King's Theatre in March 1734). First of all, it became a bilingual hybrid version, because new Italian arias had to be provided for Carestini in taking the role of Joad. Further new members of the cast were Cecilia Young as Athalia, John Beard as Mathan and William Savage as Joas. Only Strada (Josabeth) and Waltz (Abner) remained from the performers of 1733. Handel was composing *Alcina* simultaneously with the revisions of *Athalia*; it is not surprising, therefore, that the second setting of Strada's aria *Through the land so lovely blooming* (Ex. 6.9) utilised the music of Ruggiero's air *Bramo di trionfar*, which Handel eliminated before the première of *Alcina* (16<sup>th</sup> April). He also introduced his organ concertos as *intermezzi* between the parts.

Example 6.9: Vocal part (excerpt) of the second setting of *Through the land so lovely blooming*, bb. 27–50.

Andante  
 27 through the land so love - ly bloo - ming, na - ture all her charms as - su - ming, wakes the soul to cheer - ful  
 30 praise, to cheer - ful  
 34 praise, to cheer - ful praise, wakes the soul, wakes the soul, to cheer - ful, cheer - ful  
 38 praise, to cheer - ful praise, to cheer  
 43 to cheer ful praise, wakes the  
 Adagio  
 47 soul, wakes the soul to cheer - ful praise.

Strada, by singing the aria originally meant for Carestini, through its pompous, overflowing and at the same time playful *terzini*-garlands, became vocally assimilated by Handel to the castrato's Italian style during birth of the English oratorio, and thus the edge

of the sharp break between Carestini's and the others' musical material (and sung language) was taken off, or at least lessened. There was a significant difference in the lengths of the numbers: all of the other movements are approximately 3–5 minutes long, while the arias of Carestini are around 6–7. Naturally, Joad and Josabeth's duet *Cease thy anguish* was sung in Italian as *Cangia in gioia*, and *Joys, in gentle trains* was replaced by Carestini's aria *Angelico splendor*. Furthermore, the fact that Strada as an Italian singer sang from the beginning in English, whereas for the others, after the fiasco of *Esther*, Handel allowed Italian texts to be sung, strengthens the assumption that she really might have had a reasonable English pronunciation.

Not only Greene and the Apollo Academy, but also the Opera of the Nobility seems to have tried to rival Handel in the field of oratorio: Porpora's *Davide e Bersabea* with Rolli's text was produced on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1734 (and revived in Lent 1735):

I went to the Oratorio at Lincoln's-Inn, compos'd by Porpora [. . .] some of the Choruses & recitative are extremely fine & touching[,] but they say it is not equal to Mr. Handel's Oratorios of Esther or Deborah.<sup>43</sup>

For his next oratorio-type work, Handel set 'to very fine music' John Dryden's ode, *Alexander's Feast, or the Power of Music* (1697, written on the celebration of St. Cecilia's day on 22 November).<sup>44</sup> The librettist was Newburgh Hamilton this time – a minor poet and playwright, from whom the very suggestion of the use of an English text might have come to Handel.<sup>45</sup> After it was completed on 17<sup>th</sup> January 1736, the first performance took place at Covent Garden on 19<sup>th</sup> February that year. Since in the plot everything was built around the celebration of Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, led by the musician Timotheus, and as the work was too short to give a full-value evening, its turn into to a grandiose production by the addition of three concertos and the cantata, *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* – performed by Strada and the Florentine composer, lutenist, harpsichordist and tenor, Carlo Arrigoni – was reasonable.<sup>46</sup> The main soloists were Strada, the tenor John

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<sup>43</sup> Mrs Pendarves to her sister, Anne Granville, 28 March 1734. *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents Volume 2*, 766.

<sup>44</sup> From the Earl of Egmont's diary, 19 February 1736. *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>45</sup> Hicks, 'Handel and the idea of an oratorio', 155.

<sup>46</sup> The *concerti* were: (1) B<sup>b</sup> major Harp, Lute, Lyrichord and other Instruments (HWV 294) – this was played after the recitative *Timotheus, plac'd on high* (Part I); (2) Concerto grosso in C major for oboes, bassoon and strings, now known as the *Concerto in Alexander's Feast* (HWV 318) – just like *Cecilia, volgi un sguardo* (HWV89), it was performed between Parts I and II; (3) G major organ concerto (HWV 289), performed after the chorus *Let old Timotheus yield the prize* (Part II) – Arrigoni played the lute part in the first concerto as well as sang the tenor solo in the cantata. Donald Burrows, *Handel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1994), 243–244; John Walter Hill, 'Arrigoni, Carlo', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 13 August 2015.



Beard and the bass Erard; the second soprano was Cecilia Young with one air, *War, he sung, is toil and trouble*, together with the previous arioso *Softly sweet in Lydian measures*.

Strada's arias were as follows: *With ravish'd ears* (I; D major, 3/8, Allegro, *ma non presto*), *He sung Darius, great and good* (I; E<sup>b</sup> major, 6/8, Largo, *e piano*), *The prince, unable to conceal* (A major, C, A tempo giusto), *Thais led the way* (II; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4, Andante larghetto), duet *Let's imitate her notes* (II; F major, 6/8, Allegro). In *Cecilia, volgi* she had one additional air and a duet: *Sei cara* (B<sup>b</sup> major, C, Andante allegro) and *Tra amplessi innocenti* (A major, C, Andante allegro) – altogether five arias and two duets. Beard and Erard had only two each, just like Arrigoni in the cantata; Beard and Arrigoni had one duet each with Strada. Thus, Strada was given maximum priority in this project, not only by virtue of the number of arias but also by their technical demands.<sup>47</sup> One is tempted to think that Handel let her appear as his muse in this respect.

Her first aria, *With ravish'd ears* (Ex. 6.10–11), written in the glorious D major key, connects poetic metaphors with picturesque musical depictions by commenting how the power of music impresses leaders and affects even the functioning of the universe. The most extraordinary of them is the twenty-three-bar-long phrase at the word 'shake', beginning with a four-bar long *messa di voce* on e", and continuing with coloraturas of alternating seconds, seventh jumps, trills and scales, to another *messa di voce* at the end on a". This latter note is reached by an octave leap and has a tail of an octave and a fourth large scale down, with a seventh jump up attached before the cadential motif. The first sustained note on e", when the singer pronounces the word 'shake', must have been done by Strada very logically with a trill, which was at the same time a musical mannerism and a pun on the word, since shake has trill as its secondary meaning in English (it is completely ignored by recent recordings). Additionally, as the voice and the violins are complementing each other in that phrase, the first probable point where a *messa di voce* could have turned into a trill is after the first trill of the violins (g" sharp), when they have a dotted crotchet b'. I think that in the next bar, when the violins were moving in dotted rhythms and high in the second octave, the best solution would have been for the soprano to switch back to sustaining the note, and in the fourth bar of e" to trill again. In this way the play with the word and the effect of 'shake' would have been doubled and with a nice sense of beat, not to speak of the back and forth conversation with the violins. The other solution was and is to trill continually from the second bar onwards, but I would rather

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<sup>47</sup> Panja Mücke, 'Zur Entstehung und den ersten Aufführungen von Alexander's Feast', in: *Die Macht der Musik: Interdisziplinäre Studien zu Georg Friedrich Händels Alexander's Feast*. Ed. by Anja Bettenworth and Dominik Höink (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Unipress, 2010), 85–92: 89 and 91.

flatter myself with the thought that Strada did the former or some other, more creative one. The wide-ranging tail at the end of the phrase is as natural as it can be; the seventh jump after that is more surprising than the long scale itself.

Example 6.10: Excerpt from *With ravish'd ears*, bb. 25–68.

The musical score consists of six systems of staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the basso continuo line. The lyrics are in English and German. The score includes various musical ornaments such as trills (tr), grace notes (gr), and dynamic markings like *pp* and *Soli.*. The tempo is marked *sempre pp*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score ends with the lyrics "the spheres. / das All."

It sheds light on the proportions of Strada's skill set, and its difference is marked in comparison to similar motifs in some other Handelian sopranos' repertoire. Of those singers whose arias contained such reoccurring phrases explicitly stressing one particular element, which became too frequent and after a while less interesting, one can suspect that they might have lacked the variety provided by multi-coloured abilities. Features like the

beauty and sonorousness of the voice, the richness of its emission, colours and even *stamina* have priority over a wide range. For those who did not possess enough of the formers, the latter turned to be the main talent to show. Examples include Élisabeth Duparc – with a light but very agile voice, quite musical also, though Burney ranked her as a singer of a second class<sup>48</sup> – who had at least one aria in every opera and in several oratorios she sang with the same type of large ascending scale, and that repeatedly; also Maria Monza, who played Nerea in *Deidamia* and was given extremely demanding arias while her performance was considered as ‘below criticism’ – which must have been an exaggeration; nevertheless, it refers to unbalanced talents.<sup>49</sup>

In the second part of *With ravish'd ears* (it is a *non da capo* aria; Ex. 6.11) ‘shake’ has two more coloraturas, with lengths of ten and fifteen bars. The former uses the inversion of the elements of the original: the second alternations and the same dotted rhythms with trills; while the latter emphasises the semiquaver-scales and bar-long a” notes. This aria may have been one of those which Handel accompanied with organ, not with harpsichord.

Example 6.11 Vocal part (excerpt) of *With ravish'd ears*, bb. 101–136.

Allegro, ma non presto

and seems to shake the spheres, and seems to shake

the spheres, and seems to shake, and seems to shake

The lyric side of Strada’s vocal variety could make a deep impression through the beautifully pathetic *He sung Darius, great and good* (Ex. 6.13), surrounded by two *recitativi accompagnati*, the first of which is the highly chromatic, *stile antico* lament, *He chose a mournful Muse* (G minor, C, Adagio e piano; Ex. 6.12).

<sup>48</sup> Burney ranked her as a singer of the second class, but also wrote of ‘her lark-like execution’, ‘a light, airy, pleasing movement, suited to [her] active throat’ and of her ‘natural warble’. Winton Dean, ‘Duparc, Elisabeth [‘Francesina’]’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed on 17 August 2015; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 420–422 and 434.

<sup>49</sup> Duparc called La Francesina: *Deidamia* in *Deidamia – Nasconde, l’usigno’l*, the idea of this aria came from Strada’s *Se troppo crede al ciglio* from *Porò*; *Consolami se brami*; Romilda in *Serse – Chi cede al furore*; Clotilde in *Faramondo – Mi parto lieta*; Rosmene in *Imeneo – Io son quella navicella*; *Occasional Oratorio – Fly from the threatening vengeance, Prophetic visions strike my eye, When warlike ensigns, When Israel*; *Joseph and his Brethren – The silver stream, Prophetic raptures swell*; Semele in *Semele – With fond desiring*. Maria Monza: Nerea in *Deidamia* – both setting, especially the second one from both of *Di lusinghe* and *Sì, che desio*; the second setting of *Non vuol perdere l’istante* which is actually based on *Sei cara* from *Cecilia, volgi*. According to Mrs Pendarves, ‘her voice is between Cuzzoni’s and Strada’s – strong, but not harsh, her person miserably bad’. Burney claimed her as below criticism. Winton Dean, ‘Monza, Maria’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed on 17 August 2015; Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 436.

Example 6.12: *He chose a mournful muse*

Adagio e piano.

Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Viola.  
Soprano.  
Bassi.

senza Cembalo.

He chose a mourn-ful Muse, he chose a mourn-ful  
Nun flüsst ein Sang voll Schmerz, nun flüsst ein Sang voll

Muse, soft pit-y to in-fuse, soft pit-y to in-fuse; he chose a mourn-ful  
Schmerz sanft Mit-leid in sein Herz, sanft Mit-leid in sein Herz; nun flüsst ein Sang voll

Muse, soft pit-y to in-fuse, soft pit-y to in-fuse.  
Schmerz sanft Mit-leid in sein Herz, sanft Mit-leid in sein Herz.

Example 6.13: Excerpt from *He sung Darius, great and good*, bb. 13–37.

He sung Da-ri-us, great and good, by  
 Er sang Da-ri-us, gross und gut, der

too se-vere a fate, by too se-vere a fate fall'n,  
 durch des Schicksals Wuth, der durch des Schick-sals Wuth sank,

fall'n, fall'n, fall'n, fall'n from his high e- state, and  
 sank, sank, sank, von sei-ner Hö-he sank, und

Largo, e piano.

Adagio.

wel-tring in his blood. De-sert-ed at his 'ut-most need by those his form-er boun-ty  
 rang in sei-nem Blut. Ver-las-sen in der let-zen Schmachdurch sie, die heil-ge Pflicht ver-

fed, by those his form-er boun-ty fed, on the bare earth ex-pos'd he lies,  
 band, durch sie, die heil-ge Pflicht ver-band, lag er gestreck't auf nack-tem Sand,

It is assumable that in *Cecilia*, *volgi* Handel initiated a competition between her faithful soprano and Arrigoni, who was involved in the Opera of the Nobility's circle. As a faster aria for Arrigoni (E major, 3/8, Andante allegro; strings only), Handel reworked his secular Italian cantata-aria from 1711–12, *Splenda l'alba*, transforming its Lombard rhythms into triplets, which, together with the six *messe di voce* the number contains, are among the most typical elements of Strada's singing.<sup>50</sup> Handel might have done it with the motive of contrasting the vocal qualities of the two singers by giving Strada's typical patterns to Arrigoni and vice versa, to show that she was able to sing exhibitionistic virtuoso passages reflecting the Nobility's style. Her only aria, *Sei cara* (Ex. 6.14), cumulatively contains almost every kind of show-off element a qualified singer can have. Furthermore, Handel made a blow-up effect with the contrasting pathetic middle section of astonishing beauty ('Un puro ardor', G minor, 3/4, Andante larghetto) to emphasise his singer's expressive assets.

Example 6.14: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Sei cara*, bb. 33–90.

**Adagio** **A tempo (Andante allegro)**

33 sei ca - ra, sei bel - la, vir - tu - te o - gnor; scher -  
 40 zan - do al - let - ti il cor, scher - zan - do al - let - ti il cor, e se - ti u - ni - sci a un - ca - sto a - mor, il  
 44 pre - gio - tuo è mag - gior, il pre - gio - tuo è mag - gior, scher - zan  
 49 do, scher -  
 53 zan - do al - let - ti il cor e se - ti u - ni - sci a un ca - sto a - mor il per - gio - tuo è mag - gior,  
 58 è mag - gior, il pre - gio - tuo è mag - gior, è mag - gior, e se ti u - ni - sci a un  
 62 è mag - gior, il pre - gio - tuo è mag - gior, è mag - gior, e se ti u - ni - sci a un  
 69 ca - sto a - mor, il pre - gio tuo è mag - gior. **Andante larghetto** Un pu - ro ar - dor, un bel - se -  
 80 ren, un pu - ro ar - dor, un bel - se - ren, un bel se - ren a - mor, vir - tù sol  
 86 dà, a - mor sol dà, vir - tù sol - dà, e mil - le gio - je pro - va il sen per - chè?

<sup>50</sup> Fragmental cantata *Splenda l'alba in oriente* (HWV 166). Nr. 1. Splenda l'alba (B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/8, A tempo giusto e staccato), for alto voice, two flutes, oboes and strings.

First of all, in the Allegro there are two Adagio stops with *messe di voce* for longer cadenzas; then many trills, some hammered quavers, complex coloratura-motions with large scales up and down, arpeggiation patterns and sixth semiquaver leaps occur. Almost the same section is repeated in A2 a fifth lower, bringing Strada's chest register and wide range into focus. The coloratura passages are built of multiple repetitions of the same patterns on the same pitch successively – a phenomenon highly atypical of Strada's style, and stressing further the competitive nature of the work. Moreover, towards the end of part A, a *mesa di voce* on *f'* concluding in a *cantar di sbalzo* gesture on the word 'maggior' (encompassing a range from *f'* to *b<sup>b</sup>* " in within two beats) proclaims Strada as winner. *Sei cara* is more than eight minutes long; the duet *Tra amplessi innocent*, a space for another vocal race, around six minutes and a half.

The success of *Alexander's Feast* was undoubted. The *London Daily Post* reported about the première the next morning:

Never was upon the like Occasion so numerous and splendid an Audience at any Theatre in London, there being eat least 1300 Persons present; and it is judg'd that the Receipt of the House could not amount to less than 450*l*. It met with general Applause, tho attended with the Inconvenience of having the Performers placed at too great a distance from the Audience,<sup>51</sup>

The acoustical problem was solved for the next time:

For the better Reception of the Ladies, the Pit will be floor'd over, and laid into the Boxes; and the Orchestre plac'd in a Manner more commodious to the Audience.<sup>52</sup>

The Italian oratorio, *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*, premièred on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1737 in the midst of a group of oratorio and *serenata* revivals (*Il Parnasso in Festa*, *Alexander's Feast* and *Esther*), was in fact the revived and extended version of Handel's very first oratorio from 1707 (Rome), *Il trionfo del Tempo e del disinganno* (libretto by cardinal Benedetto Pamphili).<sup>53</sup> It was the Lent period, and due to a restriction operas could not be given on Wednesday and Friday nights; oratorio revivals were an ideal choice for Handel to fill this vacuum (just as he did in 1735).<sup>54</sup> According to Burrows, 'this gave him a

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<sup>51</sup> *London Daily Post*, 20 February 1736. Deutsch, *Handel*, 400.

<sup>52</sup> *London Daily Post*, 25 February 1736. *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>53</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 251.

<sup>54</sup> 'We hear, since Operas have been forbidden being performed at the Theatre in Covent Garden on the Wednesdays and Fridays in Lent, Mr. Handel is preparing Dryden's Ode of Alexander's Feast, the Oratorios of Esther and Deborah, with several new Concertos for the Organ and other Instruments; also an

competitive advantage in access to the London audience and provided his performers with continuity of employment'.<sup>55</sup> From Strada's point of view, who sang Bellezza's part, those numbers which were rewritten (*Io sperai trovar nel vero*, the quartets *Voglio tempo per risolvere* and *Se non sei più*) became shortened and/or much more simple than their original versions – among which the most painful one is undoubtedly the new *parlante* setting of the originally fantastic and passionate *bravura* aria with a ravishingly expressive B section, *Un pensiero nemico di pace* (Ex. 6.15–16); additional ensemble numbers likewise did not have any particular vocal technical demands, nor did they contain genius-sparks of the composer (*Soli e coro Viver, e non amar*, part II). Handel was in a hurry, but more importantly he was exhausted and in the midst of one of his busiest seasons ever (with eight operas and four oratorios, among which five were new in London): shortly after the fourth and last performance of *Il Trionfo* he suffered a stroke (sometime around 9–11<sup>th</sup> April).<sup>56</sup> Aside from Handel's health problems, another reason for the simplification of *Il Trionfo* is that he might have adjusted this Italian oratorio's music to the British audience's oratorio standards.

Example 6.15: Excerpt from the 1707 setting of *Un pensiero nemico di pace*, bb. 20–28.

The image shows a musical score for the aria 'Un pensiero nemico di pace'. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (soprano or alto clef) and a basso continuo line (bass clef). The lyrics are written below the vocal line. The first system contains the lyrics: 'un pensie - ro ne - mi - co di pa - ce, un pensie - ro ne - mi - co di pa - ce fece il Tem - po vo - lu - bil e -'. The second system contains the lyrics: 'da -'. The third system contains the lyrics: 'ee,'.

Entertainment of Musick called Il Trionfo del Tempo e della Verita, which Performances will be brought on the Stage and varied every Week'. *London Daily Post*, 11 March 1737. Deutsch, *Handel*, 428.

<sup>55</sup> Burrows, *Handel*, 252.

<sup>56</sup> 'Considering his advanced age (fifty-two), careless diet and financially ruinous competition with the "Nobility" opera, a health breakdown was likely.' Ilias Chrissochoidis, 'Handel recovering: Fresh light on his affairs in 1737', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 5/2 (2008), 237–244: 237–38.



Example 6.16: Excerpt from the 1737 setting of *Un pensiero nemico di pace*, bb. 1–13.

The image displays a musical score for an excerpt from the 1737 setting of *Un pensiero nemico di pace*. The score is arranged in four systems, each containing five staves. The top staff is for Violino I. II. and Oboe I. II. The second staff is for Violino III. The third staff is for Viola. The fourth and fifth staves are for the vocal parts, labeled 'PIACERE.' and 'Bassi.' respectively. The music is in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves, with some words split across lines. The lyrics include: 'Nacque un al.tro leggiadro pensie-ro, per ne-ga-re si ri-gi.do impe-ro, nac.que un al-tro, nac.que un al-tro, nac.que un al-tro leggiadro pensie-ro, leg.gia.dro pen-sie-ro, per ne-ga-re si ri-gi.do impe-ro, Un pen-sie.ro ne.mi.co di pa-ce fece il Tempo vo.lu.bil e-da-ce, un pensie-ro, un pen-sie-ro, un pen-sie-ro ne.mi.co di pa.ce, ne.mi.co di pa-ce fece il Tem-po vo-lu-bil e-da-ce, e con la-li la fal-ce gli diè, la fal.ce gli diè, e con la-li la fal-ce gli diè.

As far as Strada's vocal excellences are concerned, the original numbers of the 1707 oratorio still provided her with enough space to shine: above all in *Una schiera di piaceri* (the prototype of her *Parolette vezzi e sguardi*, see ch. 4) and in her first duet with Piacere, *Il voler nel fior* (Ex. 6.17), both containing long semiquaver *terzini*-chains and some *a* notes. *Venga il Tempo* (Ex. 6.18) gives many possibilities to trill, has two *messe di voce* at the word 'dorme' ('sleeps') in the middle section and mainly consists of quaver-triplets. Among the further arias there were two pathetic numbers: *Io vorrei due cori in seno*, with continuo accompaniment, and *Quel del ciel ministro eletto*; two *parlante* ones, *Voglio cangiar desio* and *Ricco pino*; and a shorter *a mezzo carattere*, *Fido specchio*.

Example 6.17: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Il voler nel fior*, bb. 26–35.

Bellezza  
Il vo-ler nel\_ fior degl' an - ni fra gl'af - fan - ni, fra gl'af -

Piacere  
Il vo-ler nel\_ fior\_ degl' an - ni fra gl'af-fan - ni, fra gl'af - fan - ni, fra gl'af -

B.  
fan - ni pas - sar l'o - re è va - ni - tà,

P.  
fan - ni, pas-sar l'o-re è va-vi tà, è va-ni - tà,

B.  
fra gl'af - fan - ni pas - sar l'o - re è - va - ni - tà,

P.  
fra gl'af-fan - ni pas-sar l'o - re è - va - ni - tà,

Example 6.18: *Venga il tempo*

*Allegro, ma non troppo.*

Venga il Tem - po, e con

la - li fu - nes - te. ven - ga il Tem - po, e con

la - li fu - nes - te tol - ga ques - te, tol - ga ques - te ca - re gio - ie, ca - re,

ca - re in si pla - ci - de ri - ve, ven - ga il Tem - po, ven - ga il Tem - po,

e con la - li fu - nes - te tol - ga ques - te ca - re gio - ie, ca - re, ca - re in si pla -

- ci-de, pla-ci-de ri - ve, tol-ga ques-te ca - re  
 gio - ie, ca - re, ca - re in si pla -  
 - ci-de, pla-ci-de ri - ve.  
 E - gli dor - - - me,  
*(Fine.)*  
 e - gli dor - - - me ò non ha più gl'ar-ti - gli  
 nò, nò gio - - van tan - ti consi - gli, se per vi-ve-re mai non si vi - - ve.  
 nò non gio.va - no tan-ti con - si - gli, nò non gio.va - no tan-ti con-si - gli, se per  
 vi - - ve-re mai non si vi-ve, se per vi-ve-re mai non si vi - - ve. *Da Capo.*

Probably the most important outcome of Strada's participation in Handel's oratorios 'on this curious point of musical history' was the participation itself and its quality.<sup>57</sup> It had a strategical significance that an internationally known, top-level leading soprano could accompany the composer on this path to the establishment of English oratorios. Through Strada the Italian manner of singing and the highest vocal technique met the English language. She as a role model may have opened the way for a group of English singers to be integrated into Handel's world, and some of them (like Ann Turner Robinson and Cecilia Young) into his operatic activity too.

<sup>57</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 360.



## Chapter Seven: Back to Italy

The uncertainties of London's operatic life in 1737 and 1738 cost Strada entirely missed seasons. After both the Royal Academy and the Opera of the Nobility collapsed, and Handel, recovering from his stroke of April 1737, began producing operas for singers of the former rival company, Strada remained in London, hoping that the situation around him might settle and her status as *prima donna* could be restored. As discussed earlier, the attempt to reorganise opera subscriptions by the twenty noble ladies and Heidegger meant a real possibility for that to happen. After it failed, Strada went to Holland to sing for Princess Anne of Orange, afterwards she and her husband Aurelio returned to his home town of Naples. By then, it was probably too late for her to get any appointment for the upcoming 1738/39 season, although she probably had regular private appearances in high circles (Table 7.1). Aurelio may have renewed all his contacts on her behalf to put her back in the 'market'.

That in the end Strada became engaged at Teatro San Carlo for the 1739/40 season, was also due to the fortunate coincidence that the *prima donna* already contracted, Lucia Facchinelli, was sent to Spain for the marriage celebrations of the son of King Felipe V with the daughter of King Louis XV of France, as late as mid-August.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Strada jumped in to substitute for her. This was a great relief to the *primo uomo*, Senesino, for whom it would have been displeasing to perform with Facchinelli, according to his agent, Albizzi.<sup>2</sup> The *seconda donna* was the superb contralto, the young and attractive Teresa Baratti/a. Her father, the tenor Pietro Baratti, was also a member of the S. Carlo company, together with Maria Cattaneo (soprano), Francesco Tolve (tenor), and the prodigious, nineteen year-old soprano castrato, Giovanni Manzuoli.<sup>3</sup>

Although Strada as *prima donna* was the second in rank after Senesino, she had the lowest salary of the cast, that of 600 ducats. Senesino, for instance, with his nearly 3700 ducats earned more than six times more than her (the others' wages were: Amorevoli, 1053; Cataneo, 1108; Tolve, 750; Teresa Baratti, 1004; Manzuoli, 613 ducats).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Caffarelli, Vittoria Tesi and Teresa Peruzzi also were among the elected ones. Benedetto Croce, *I teatri di Napoli: Secolo XV – XVIII* (Naples: Luigi Pierro, 1891), 344.

<sup>2</sup> Croce, *I teatri di Napoli*, 345; William C. Holmes, *Opera Observed: Views of a Florentine Impresario in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 142.

<sup>4</sup> Croce, *I teatri di Napoli*, 348.

Table 7.1: Strada's appearances in Italy, 1739–1741

Composer	Opera / Concert	Theatre / Private house	Première	Role	Cast	Sources consulted
—	private concert	Principe di Scitella, Naples	7 Sep. 1739	—	Amorevoli, Porpora	—
—	private concert	Duchesse de Balena, Naples	25 Oct. 1739	—	Amorevoli	—
Domenico Sarro	<i>Partenope</i>	S. Carlo Naples	4 Nov. 1739	Partenope, 1ma donna	Senesino, Baratti, Amorevoli, Manzuoli	<i>I-Nc</i> Rari 7.2.10
Giovanni Ristori	<i>Adriano in Siria</i>	S. Carlo Naples	19 Dec. 1739	Emirena, 1ma donna	Senesino, Baratti, Amorevoli, Manzuoli	<i>D-DI</i> Mus.2455-F-16
Leonardo Leo	<i>Achille in Sciro</i>	Teatro Regio, Turin	Carnival 1740	Deidamia, 1ma donna	Conti, Barbieri, Bertolli	<i>I-Nc</i> Rari 1.6/D.21
Baldassare Galuppi	<i>Adriano in Siria</i>	Teatro Regio, Turin	Carnival 1740	Emirena, 1ma donna	Conti, Barbieri, Bertolli	—
Giovanni Battista Lampugnani	<i>Adriano in Siria</i>	Teatro delle Grazie, Vicenza	May 1740	Emirena, 1ma donna	Gabrieli, Salimbeni, Bertolli, Amorevoli	lost
Davide Perez	<i>Siroe, rè di Persia</i>	S. Carlo Naples	4 Nov. 1740	Laodice, 2nda donna	Caffarelli, Baratti, Manzuoli	<i>I-Nc</i> XXX.4.6 (Act I only)
Niccolò Porpora	<i>Tiridate</i>	S. Carlo Naples	19 Dec. 1740	Tiridate, 1mo uomo	Caffarelli, Baratti, Manzuoli	lost
Gaetano Latilla	<i>Alceste in Ebuda</i>	S. Carlo Naples	20 Jan. 1741	Cleotilde, 2nda donna	Caffarelli, Baratti, Manzuoli, Giacomazzi	lost

Before the first public première in the autumn, Strada sang at least two private concerts at noble houses together with the tenor Angelo Amorevoli, likewise her co-singer in the forthcoming season. This was documented by a young Dutch nobleman, Jan Teding van Berkhout (1713–66), who was on his Grand Tour, accompanying one of his relatives on a diplomatic mission.<sup>5</sup> He himself was an amateur musician: after reaching Naples on 17<sup>th</sup> July 1739, he started to take violoncello lessons with the famous cellist and composer Salvatore Lanzetti three times a week, and further daily cello, harpsichord and singing tuitions with his nephew, most probably Domenico Lanzetti.<sup>6</sup> The first *festive soirée* Jan mentions concerning Strada happened on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> September 1739, when he was a guest at the palazzo of Prince Scitella:

There were many people in several rooms one playing [cards?], and in a beautiful gallery there was a fine concert, performed by the greatest virtuosi. Porpora played the harpsichord, the tenor Amorevoli sang, and there was also la Sig. Stradina.<sup>7</sup>

The second occasion took place at the home of the Duchesse de Balena in honour of the Count and Countess de Milan. This time Jan's teacher Lanzetti accompanied Strada and Amorevoli on the violoncello, together with other qualified musicians.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Kees Vlaardingerbroek, "The promised land of music": Jan Teding van Berkhout in Italy, 1739–1741', *Recercare* 24/1–2 (2012), 107–136: 107–108.

<sup>6</sup> Vlaardingerbroek, "The promised land of music", 116.

<sup>7</sup> Letter of Jan Teding van Berkhout, Naples, Monday, 7 September 1739: 'Il y avoit un gran monde dans plusieurs chambres on jouoit, et dans une belle gallere etoit un tres bau concert, composé des plus grands virtuosi. Porpora jouoit le clavessin, Amorevoli chantoit une voix de tenor, et la Sig. Stradina'. Cited and translated in Vlaardingerbroek, "The promised land of music", 120.

## The first San Carlo season

Teatro di San Carlo, the first large-scale opera house in Europe, opened its doors on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1737 (the king's name day) with Sarro's *Achille in Sciro*, based on the libretto of Metastasio. The house was erected next to the Royal palace by commission of the Bourbon King Charles III of Naples, and was a rapid construction, which began on 11<sup>th</sup> March and ended on 28<sup>th</sup> October of the same year. Designed by the military architect Giovanni Antonio Medrano and Angelo Carasale, the former director of the preceding opera house, S. Bartolomeo, the gigantic proportions of the building symbolised the monarch's power.<sup>9</sup> The theatre's vast capacity was around 3,000 persons (around 1,400 seats and a standing room), likely twice the size of the S. Bartolomeo's.<sup>10</sup>

A long and greatly detailed letter from Princess Isabella Caposele to her Venetian friend survives, which she wrote immediately after returning home from the opening night of S. Carlo. She gives an exceptionally direct insight into that experience, comparing the new theatre with its predecessor the S. Bartolomeo, in which Strada was singing between 1724 and 1726:

It is two o'clock in the morning. I come from the theatre of San Carlo, opened this evening for the first time, to the astonishment of the Neapolitans, with music and ballet, and inaugurated in the presence of His Majesty – may God keep him! The signor, my husband, Prince de Caposele, who has just now gone to bed and is sleeping, wearied by continual visits to the boxes, possessed, as you well know, a little box in the old theatre of San Bartolomeo, for which we paid at the distribution only ninety ducats. For the same box in the second tier which we have now at the San Carlo my husband gladly paid seven hundred and sixty ducats for the satisfaction of taking pleasure in the neighbourhood of the king and playing court to him. [...] between us, I admit to you I experience far greater pleasure when Scarlatti comes to us to play an allegro or a minuet downstairs. What shall I say? Sarro is perhaps a highly respectable composer, but, according to my poor judgement, he is too much given to lamentations for enjoyment in the Opera House. His Majesty – may God have him in his keeping! – slept nearly the whole evening. Serious music, my dear, very serious, and not suited to our ears. It was not agreeable for me to hear from my husband, who was informed of the fact at the auditor's office, that we could not put on our box the device of our

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<sup>8</sup> Letter of Jan Teding van Berkhout, Naples, Thursday, 25 October 1739: 'Nous fumes invité pour le soir chez la duchesse de Balena qui donnoit pour le c et c ... de Milan. Il y avoit 6 chambres rempli de monde, dans la plus grande etoit le concert. Amorevoli et la Stradina chanterent, et Lanzetti jouoit de violoncelle. Les autres musiciens etoient tous bon'. Cited and translated in Vlaardingerbroek, "The promised land of music", 122.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 97–98 and 145; Philip Hale, *Programme of the Seventh Rehearsal and Concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra*. 24 and 15 November 1911 (Boston: C. A. Ellis, 1911), 441.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Heartz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style, 1720–1780* (New York, Norton, 2003), 128.

house. The king – may God preserve him! – has ordered that no box-holder should paint or engrave on his box the coat-of-arms of his family. On the other hand, it gave me great pleasure to learn that His Majesty had prohibited smoking in the lobby, so that women should not have their stomachs upset. The old San Bartolomeo Theatre had become a barracks by reason of this annoyance, and you know how I suffer in this circumstance which does not respect the nobility. My Violante, what an illumination, what pomp, what a feast for the eye! [...] You may ask: “How have they been able to construct such an immense theatre in so little time?” What can I say in reply? My mind is still bewildered by the spectacle, and it seems as though I were deep in a dream.<sup>11</sup>

Despite all of its grandeur, the acoustics of the too large auditorium were proved far from ideal. Complaints rose from the very beginning and were heard even two seasons after the opening event. Van Berkhout, attending the performance of Sarro’s *Partenope*, Strada’s first production at the grand theatre, was embarrassed by the impressive dimensions of the hall as well as by the similarly great size of the orchestra:

The orchestra was very numerous: 45 violins, 2 harpsichords, 4 basses, 2 violoncellos, bassoons, horns, oboes and flutes. The width and the length of the theatre are so considerable that one cannot distinguish the persons who are at the opposite side. As soon as Their Majesties entered, the orchestra played, and two children dressed as angels descended from up on high and came to lift and accompany the rising theatre curtain. Two other angels emerged at the same time and brought flying from the stage the librettos of the opera to Their Majesties, for which both received a golden Spanish pistol. They then both withdrew up to the sixth tier [of boxes]. The stage decorations were all magnificent and formed a vanishing perspective. We were in the box of the Duchess Salandra.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, singers were criticised from time to time not only because their voices were not always clearly audible, due to the huge distances, but also because Italian taste

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<sup>11</sup> Letter of the Princess of Caposele to Violante Zanolin, 4 November 1737. Published in: Salvatore di Giacomo, *Napoli. Figure e paesi* (Naples: Francesco Perrella, 1909), 23–32. Translation by Philip Hale, *Programme of the Seventh Rehearsal and Concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra*, 436–440.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of Jan Teding van Berkhout, Wednesday, 4 November 1739: ‘L’orchestre etoit fort nombreux 45 violons, 2 clavessins, 4 contrabasses, 2 violoncelles, des bassons, cor des chasses, haubois flutes. La largeur et longueur du theatre est si considerablement grand, qu’on ne peut pas distinguer les personnes qui sont de l’autre cotè. Si tost que leurs majestés etoient venu, l’orchestre jouoi, deux enfans habillé en anges descenderent d’en haut, et vinrent lever et accompagner la toile du theatre jusqu’en haut. Deux autres sortirent en meme temps, et porterent en volant du theatre les livres de l’opera a leur majesté, pour qui il recurent chacun une pistolle d’or d’Espagne. ils se retirèrent ensuite en haut dans le 6e rang. Les decorations furent toutes superbes, et la longueur etoit une perte de vue. Nous etions dans la loge de la duchesse Salandra’. Cited and translated in Vlaardingerbroek, “‘The promised land of music’”, 118–119.



was in change at that time, and those who were considered modern in the 1720s started to become regarded as old-fashioned by 1739. Taste in compositional style changed similarly. Charles de Brosses noticed this tendency, likewise concerning the production of *Partenope*:

The Teatro Reale in Naples is tremendous in size. It has seven tiers of boxes, led into by corridors, and a wide and deep stage, equipped for displaying large scenery in perspective.<sup>13</sup>

It was here that we saw the first grand opera. Composed by Sarri, learned musician, but dry and dull; [the music] was not very strong, but in return it was performed perfectly. The celebrated Senesino sang the principal role; I was enchanted by the taste by his singing and his acting on stage. However, I noticed with astonishment that the local people were not all satisfied. They complained that he sang in a *stile antico*. I must tell you that a musical taste changes here at least every ten years. All of the applause was reserved for [Teresa] Baratti, a new singer, attractive and easy-going, who sang a role disguised as a male.<sup>14</sup>

Another traveller, Samuel Sharp, nuanced the picture, attributing the poor acoustic circumstances to the noisiness of the audience:

The amazing extent of the stage, with the prodigious circumference of the boxes, and height of the ceiling, produce a marvellous effect on the mind, for a few moments; but the instant the Opera opens, a spectator laments this striking sight. He immediately perceives this structure does not gratify the ear, how much soever it may the eye. The voices are drowned in this immensity of space, and even the orchestra itself, though a numerous band, lies under a disadvantage: It is true, some of the first singers may be heard, yet, upon the whole, it must be admitted, that the house is better to contrived to see, than to hear an Opera. There are some who contend, that the singers might be very well heard, if the audience were more silent; but it is so much the fashion at *Naples*, and, indeed, through all *Italy*, to consider the Opera as a place of rendezvous and visiting, that they do not seem in the least to attend to the musick, but laugh and talk through the whole performance, without any restraint; and, it may be imagined,

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<sup>13</sup> Charles de Brosses, 'Letter to M. de Malateste (1739–40)', in: Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 203.

<sup>14</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 145–146.

that an assembly of so many hundreds conversing together so loudly, must entirely cover the voices of the singers.<sup>15</sup>

The enormous space provided by the opera house proved, however, very advantageous for spectacular elements. If one could not hear the singers, if they were singing in the old style, the visual pomp of the show surpassed the inconveniences. Both Van Berkhout and De Brosses recorded the splendid battle scene in *Partenope* with live horses, sumptuous stage machines and ballet, in which Strada appeared as leader of one of the two armies. Van Berkhout wrote:

We saw two armies on the stage: that of the Queen Parthenope, and the other of the Prince of Cumae. He sat on a very beautiful horse in front of his army. They each had their band of oboes and trumpets. The fight was realised admirably well, without any disorder, man against man. Also, there were more than ten armed men. The prince was vanquished and taken prisoner. We saw the queen [Strada] arriving on stage in a chariot drawn by four horses, with the prince and other prisoners chained to it. It was a completely silver-plated machine of an immense size, and this really was a very beautiful sight. We [also] saw other decorations, such as the chariot of Venus, which changed in the blink of an eye into one of Bacchus, which was a vat for making wine with several wine barrels stacked on top of each other, on which a live Bacchus was seated. The ballets were admirable, and there were some very good dancers among the male and female dancers. This beautiful spectacle lacked, however, two very important things, which is that one enters a theatre both in order to look at the attractive ladies and to listen to the singers, of which one is deprived because of the size of the theatre. We were in the loge of the Duchess of Salandra, a beautiful German woman. I had the good fortune to sit next to her.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Sharp, 'Letters from Italy (1767)', in: Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 209.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Jan to his sister, Naples, Tuesday, 10 November 1739: 'Nous vimes deux armées sur le theatre celle de la Reine Parthenope, et l'autre du Prince de Cumes [Principe di Cuma, KV]. Il étoit sur un tres beau cheval devant son armé. Ils avoient chacun leur bande d'hautbois et de trompettes. Le combat se fit admirablement bien sans la moindre disordre, man tegen man [*sic*]. aussi il y avoit plus de dix maitres d'armes, le Prince étant battu et pris prisonnier. Nous vimes venir la Reine dans un char de triomphe tiré par quatre moreset le prince et autres prisonniers y enchainé. C'étoit une machine d'une grandeur terrible tout argenté, et donnoit veritablement un tres beau spectacle. Vimes une autre decorations [*sic*] d'un char de triomphe de Venus qui se changeoit dans un instant dans un de Bacchus, qui étoit une cuve ou on fait le vin, et plusieurs tonneau l'un sur l'autre, sur le quel étoit un Bacchus vivant assis. Les ballets furent admirables et des tres bon danseurs et danseuses parmi; il y manque pourtant a ce beau spectacle deux choses principales, qui est qu'on va dans un spectacle et pour voir les belles dames et pour entendre les acteurs, de quoy on est privé par la grandeur du theatre. [...] Nous étions dans la loge de la duchesse de Sallandra, une allemande et belle femme. J'avois le bonheur d'être assis au coté d'elle'. Cited and translated in Vlaardingerbroek, "The promised land of music", 119.

De Broses compared the scenery with the French tradition, and found it very convincing. Moreover, he remarked that it was well synchronized with the musical representation of Sarro:

The construction of the libretto in the Italian operas is different from ours. . . . The taste of the common people is carefully consulted. An opera will not please unless, with other things, there is the representation of a battle: two hundred blackguards take part in it, but care is taken to put in the first row a number of hired assassins who know well how to fight. This is amusing and is not so ridiculous as our warriors of Cadmus and Theseus, who kill each other while dancing. In this opera of ‘Parthenope’ there is an effective cavalry action which greatly pleased me. The two commanders before coming to blows sing on horseback, a duet of contradiction of a chromatic perfection capable of doubling the long harangues of the heroes in the ‘Iliad’.<sup>17</sup>

The long, contrapuntally built duet between Strada and the tenor Francesco Tolve, mentioned here by De Broses, must have been a new addition at the beginning of the battle scene (I/14), presumably replacing Emilio’s aria, *Forti schiere vicino è il cimento*, for the 1722 version does not contain it.<sup>18</sup>

Generally, there is not much to say about the music of *Partenope*. Although the score of 1722 survives, that of the 1739 production is lost. In 1722 the title role was sung by Anna Bombaciardi, (later wife of the tenor Annibale Pio Fabri). Bombaciardi was a mezzo-soprano, and the part of Partenope, although its tessitura is not inconveniently low (which would not have been a problem for Strada anyway) completely lacked virtuosity. Therefore, several arias were presumably substituted: some of them might have been taken from Handel’s *Partenope*, the title role of which Strada performed no less than eighteen times in London. The replacement of *In veder, che sò cangiarmi* with the corresponding *Io ti levo l’impero dell’armi, Voglio amare*, one of Handel’s most galant-styled arias, together with the attached arioso *Care mura* seems possible, and likewise that of *Godi e spera* with

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<sup>17</sup> ‘La construction du poëme, dans les opéra italiens, est assez différente de la nôtre. [...] On y donne beaucoup au goût du petit peuple. Un opéra ne plairoit guères s’il n’y avoit, entre autres choses, une bataille figurée: deux cents galoppins, tant de part que d’autre, en font la représentation; mais on a soin de mettre en première ligne un certain nombre de seigneurs spadassins, qui sachent très-bien faire des armes. Ceci ne laisse pas que d’être assez amusant, au moins n’est-il pas si ridicule que nos combattants de Cadmus et de Thésée qui se tuent en dansant. Dans cet opéra-ci de Parthenope, il y avoit une action de cavalerie effective qui me plut infiniment. Les deux maître-de-camp, avant que d’en venir aux mains, chantèrent à cheval duo contradictoire d’un chromatique parfait, et très-capable de faire paroli aux longues harangues des héros de l’Iliade.’ Charles de Broses, *Lettres familières écrites d’Italie en 1739 et 1740 I* (Paris: Didier, 1869), 346–347. Translation by Philip Hale, *Programme of the Seventh Rehearsal and Concert of the Boston Symphony Orchestra*, 442.

<sup>18</sup> Domenico Sarro, *La Partenope 1722*. Musical manuscript (Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica A. Pietro a Majella, I–Nc. Rari 7.2.10), ff. 54r–60v; Paologiovanni Maione, *Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli, Cronologia degli spettacoli 1737–1799* (Naples: Altrastampa, 2005), 28.

the Handelian *Spera e godi*. Baratti might have been satisfied with the coloratura role of Faustina. Senesino took the former role of Merighi, which was demanding enough, but he must have brought some of his baggage arias, too. Some of these also might have been by Handel, as Senesino replaced Bernacchi in London from 12<sup>th</sup> December 1730 onwards, for seven performances of the same production in which Strada embodied the Amazon queen. Moreover, he was given a substitution aria by Handel: *Seguaci di Cupido*, sung in the very last scene, which could have happened in Naples as well.

The next opera of the season was Giovanni Alberto Ristori's *Adriano in Siria* (19<sup>th</sup> December 1739; based on Metastasio's libretto), in which Strada played the role of Emirena. The composer was staying in Naples at that time, and thus he himself attended and directed the rehearsals as well as the performances.<sup>19</sup> Strada may have been especially convincing as Emirena, because right after this production she was borrowed for the carnival season of 1740 by the Teatro Regio of Turin, where one of the operas she participated in was Baldassare Galuppi's setting of the same subject. Additionally, she sang the same role in Lampugnani's *Adriano* in May of the same year. The Parthian princess, who is in love with and betrothed to Farnaspe (Teresa Cataneo), prince of the Parths, is imprisoned by the Sirian governor, Adriano (Senesino), who is infatuated with her despite being engaged to Sabina (Baratti). Emirena is forced to deny her beloved in order to defend him, and has to pretend to be willing to marry Adriano. The musical material shows quite a radical reduction of Strada's vocal technical palate. Both in *Prigioniera abbandonata* (I/9; C minor, C, Andante; Ex. 7.1) and *Infelice invan mi lagno* (I/16; G major, C, Andante, with *corni di caccia*; Ex. 7.2) syncopation, octave and ninth leaps as well as trills are the most significant elements, although the tessitura and coloraturas are moderate. There is an *affettuoso parlante* number, *Quell'amplesso* (II/9; G major, 3/4, Andantino), but without any great technical requirements. The last aria in the role, *Oh Dio! mancar mi sento* (III/7; A minor, C, Moderato; Ex. 7.3), goes down to c', which in Naples was equal to b of the common Baroque tuning.

Example 7.1: Vocal part (excerpt) of *Prigioniera abbandonata* from Ristori's *Adriano in Siria*, bb. 25–34.

Andante

25 Pri - gion - ie - ra ab - ban - do - na - ta pie - tà mer - to e non ri - go - re ah fai tor - to al tuo bel co - re

31 di - sprez - zan do mi co - si

<sup>19</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 144.

Example 7.2: Vocal part (A section) of *Infelice invan mi lagno* from Ristori's *Adriano in Siria*, bb. 10–38.

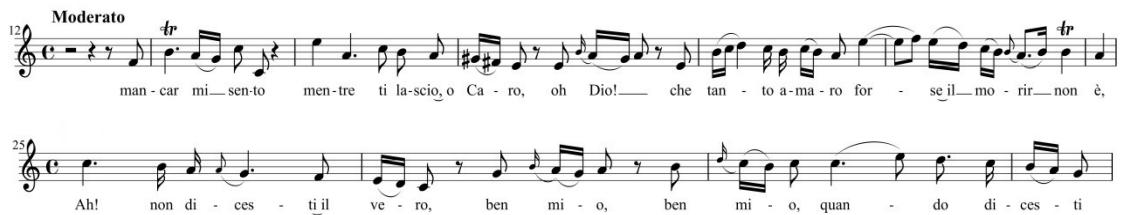
**Andante**



In - fe - li - ce in - van mi - la - gno qual do - len - te tor - to - rel - la che cer - can -  
do il suo - com - pa - gno, lo - ri - tro - va pri - gio - nier, pri - gio - nier. In - fe - li - ce in -  
van mi - la - gno qual do - len - te - tor - to - rel - la, qual do - len - te - tor - to - rel - la  
che cer - can - do il suo - com - pa - gno lo - ri - tro - va pri - gio - nier, lo - ri - tro - va pri - gio - nier,  
lo - ri - tro - va pri - gio - nier.

Example 7.3: Vocal part (excerpts) of *Oh Dio ! mi mancar il sento* from Ristori's *Adriano in Siria*, bb. 12–18 and 25–28.

**Moderato**



man - car mi - sen - to men - tre ti la - scio, o Ca - ro, oh Dio! che tan - to a - ma - ro for - se il - mo - rir - non è,  
Ah! non di - ces - ti il ve - ro, ben mi - o, ben mi - o, quan - do di - ces - ti

A natural tendency took shape in the last years of Strada's career: namely that the lower part of her range remained stable, while the very highest notes (as well as her agility) lost somewhat their flexibility and shine. Probably it was not comfortable for her to sing long coloratura passages and heights any more. However, Strada arranged her forces smartly: she seems to have known her current vocal state and new limits well, and was aware of which of her vocal features still conserved their outstanding quality. This is supported by De Brosse's note about *Partenope*, that the compensation for the overly serious music of Sarro was that it was perfectly performed. With Strada in the title role, this surely included her performance. In the case of *Adriano* in Naples, a close cooperation between Strada and Ristori, who was present in Naples, is assumable. As *prima donna*, she had enough influence to discuss her requirements with the composer.

### The last active years

Unusually, Strada did not sing in the third opera of the season, Porpora's *Il trionfo di Camilla*, premièred on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1740, because she became engaged to Turin for the carnival period. Therefore, she was not subject to the criticism of Senesino, who wrote in his letter to Albizzi of 26<sup>th</sup> January that his fellow singers were 'inferior, especially the

women [Baratti and Maria Cattaneo] who vie with each other to sing out of tune'.<sup>20</sup> In Turin, Strada (again as *prima donna*) had the opportunity to sing together with her former London colleagues, Gioacchino Conti and Francesca Bertolli. With the latter she worked together in Vicenza in May that year too.<sup>21</sup> It is very probable, that – besides Aurelio's assumable activity as her agent – Conti wanted to sing with her, and Leo must have been agreed, since he had previously written Strada the most ambitious role of her early period, back in 1725 (Aspasia in *Zenobia in Palmira*). Conti, whom Handel considered as a 'rising star' (according to Jennens),<sup>22</sup> – and the only castrato for whom he ever wrote a top C – was her last stage partner in London (from May 1736 to June 1737).<sup>23</sup> After returning to Italy in 1738, he rebuilt and polished his technique by taking lessons with Bernacchi. He and Strada must have had complimentary voices, for their duet in *Ariodante* evoked admiration in 1736; this in spite of their common unpleasant grimaces (Conti's mouth formed a square while singing).<sup>24</sup> Indeed, for the production of *Achille in Sciro*, Leo honoured them with an especially long duet (*Non temer* III/4; C major, C; Ex. 7.4), in which their voices could mix up frequently and have the benefit of longer cadenzas. Apart from that, Strada had four arias: *No, ingrato* (I/2; A major, alla breve; Ex. 7.5), demanding strong voice projection and frequently reaching a"; *Del sen gli ardori* (I/14; B<sup>b</sup> major, 2/4), a grand galant air with octave leaps, trills and chiselled demisemiquaver rhythms, occupying a range up to b<sup>b</sup>"; *Non vedi, tiranno* (II/11; G minor, C), similarly with octave leaps and *messe di voce* combined with trills; and *Chi vuol dir* (III/7; B<sup>b</sup> major, Alla breve, Allegretto; Ex. 7.6), of a high tessitura, operating from e" to b<sup>b</sup>", the latter note of which occurs often on accented places (note that the tuning was even higher than in Naples). To summarise, in Turin Strada had the opportunity to sing, apart from long coloratura passages, with the customary fullness of her voice, maybe for the last time. Besides, in an old theatre (the new Teatro Regio, with a seating capacity of about 2,500, was under construction at that time; it opened on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1740) and not in the vast S. Carlo, in a city of lesser importance than Naples, one could take more risks, especially as far as high notes were concerned. Indeed, Leo maintained his way of composing for Strada, with

<sup>20</sup> Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 146.

<sup>21</sup> In Leonardo Leo's *Achille in Sciro* she played Deidamia, coupled with Conti as Achille; Bertolli sang a trouser role again, that of Ulisse. In Baldassare Galuppi's *Adriano in Siria* Strada and Conti were Emirena and Farnaspe, Bertolli sang the *seconda donna* role, that of Sabina.

<sup>22</sup> Winton Dean, 'Conti, Gioacchino ['Egizziello', 'Gizziello']', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 3 September 2015.

<sup>23</sup> They sang together in *Atalanta*, *Arminio*, *Giustino* and *Berenice*; in the revivals of *Ariodante*, *Partenope*, *Poro*, *Il Parnasso in festa* and *Alcina*; in the *pasticcio* *Didone*; in the oratorios *Esther* (revival) and *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità*.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Gray's letter to Horace Walpole, 11 June 1736. Otto Erich Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (London: 1955; reprinted New York: 1974), 410.

reduced virtuosity – and besides appoggiaturas, now also with written-out on-beat *cercar della nota*-type of grace notes – but otherwise unchanged in comparison to that of the 1724–25 Neapolitan operas.

Example 7.4: Excerpt (vocal parts) from the duet *Non temer* from Leo's *Achille in Sciro*, bb. 31–56.

Deidamia  
 se tu par ti, ca-ro ben mi-o, ca-ro ben mi-o, io non vi-vrò, non vi-

Achille  
 mai la-sciar-ti a-ni-ma mi-a, a-ni-ma mi-a, mai la-sciar-ti io non sa-

D.  
 vrò, se tu par-ti, io non vi-vrò, nò, nò, nò, io non vi-vrò.

A.  
 prò, mai la-sciar-ti io non sa-prò, nò, io non sa-prò. Sai cor mi-o, sai-

D.  
 Sò, cor mi-o, sò che mi-bra-mi, ah! non cre-di, ah! non l'in-ten-

A.  
 quant'io-t'a-mo, ma per-chè, ma per-chè,

D.  
 di, non com-pren-di la mia pe-ne, oh Di-o, oh Di-o, se tu par-ti,

A.  
 non te-mer, sì, sì, l'in-ten-do, l'in-ten-do a-ni-ma-mi-a, mai la-sciar-ti

D.  
 io non vi-vrò, ca-ro-ben-mi-o, ca-ro,

A.  
 io non sa-prò a-ni-ma-mi-a, ca-ro,

Example 7.5: Vocal part (A section) of *Nò, ingrato* from Leo's *Achille in Sciro*, bb. 22–97.

Nò, in-gra-to, in-gra-to, a-mor-non sen-ti, e se pur sen-ti a-mor, per-der non vuoi del cor, per-

der non vuoi del cor per me la pa

ce, per-der non vuoi del cor per me la pa ce.

Nò, in-gra-to, a-mor non sen-ti e se pru sen-ti a-mor, per-der non vuoi del cor, per-der non vuoi del

cor per me la pa ce, per-

der non vuoi del cor per me la pa-ce, in-gra-to, in-gra-to, per-der non vuoi del cor per me la

pa ce, per me la pa-ce,

Example 7.6: Vocal part (end of section A) of *Chi vuol dir* from from Leo's *Achille in Sciro*, bb. 112–123.

da — quel vol - to ap - pren - de - rà del mio co - re le — scu - se da quel vol - to ap - pren - de - rà, ap - pren - de - rà.

From the 1740 performance series of Davide Perez's *Siroe*, the first production of Strada's last season (started on 4<sup>th</sup> November), only the score of Act I has been preserved. It contains two arias of her role (that of Laodice) the first of which, *O placido il mare* (I/8; B<sup>b</sup> major, 3/4, Allegro ma non tanto; Ex. 7.7), is of the same type as *Placarti dovresti* (from Leo's *Zenobia* 1725): its long sustained notes, however, are combined with trills. A grand aria demanding a strong, castrato type of vocal emission, it provides several opportunities for extended cadenzas and its range goes down to b<sup>b</sup> in the A part and up to a<sup>2</sup> in the middle section (equal to a and a<sup>b</sup> of the common Baroque tuning). Besides, its musical style is a pre-classical one, similar even to Mozart's early operatic tone. The other aria, the Pergolesi-like and passionate *L'incerto mio pensiero* (I/16; G minor, C, Spiritoso; Ex. 7.8), is also based on trills and dotted demisemi-quaver rhythms, having enough coloratura patterning to create a virtuoso effect, but it moves only in the middle, mezzo-soprano range.

Example 7.7: Vocal part (A section) of *O placido il mare* from Perez's *Siroe*, bb. 16–92.

**Allegro, ma non tano**

O pla - ci-do il ma - re, lu - sin-ghi la spon - da, lu - sin-ghi la spon - da, o por-ti con l'on-da ter-ro-re, e spa - ven-to, ter - ro-re, e spa - ven-to, spa - ven-to, e col-pa del ven - to, sua col - pa non è, nò, sua col-pa non è, sua col-pa non è; o pla - ci-do il ma - re lu - sin-ghi la spon - da, lu - sin-ghi la spon - da, o por-ti con l'on-da ter-ro-re, e spa - ven-to, ter - ro-re, e spa - ven - to, e col-pa del ven-to, sua col - pa non è, e col-pa del ven - to, e col-pa del ven - to, sua col-pa non è, nò, nò, non è.



Example 7.8: Vocal part (A1 section) of *L'incerto mio pensiero* from Perez's *Siroe*, bb. 10–26.

**Spiritoso**

10 L'in-cer-to mi-o pen-sie-ro, mi-o pen-sie-ro non è di che-te-me-re, di che spe-rar non ha,  
 15 e pur te-men-do, pur vù spe-ran-do,  
 21 do, pur vù spe-ran-do.

In this opera, Strada's character frequently appeared together with Medarse, played by the teenager Manzuoli, the later Ascanio in Mozart's *Ascanio in Alba* (Milan, 1771),<sup>25</sup> who was one of the most talented *castrati* of all times. He sang at S. Carlo from the opening night onwards, mostly playing minor roles as befitted a singer who stood at the very beginning of his career.<sup>26</sup> Singing in London in his post-heyday, in 1764–65, Burney still acclaimed him as the only worthy successor to Farinelli, even if his former rapid coloratura-ability has already vanished by that time:

Manzoli's voice was the most powerful and voluminous soprano that had been heard on our stage since the time of Farinelli; and his manner of singing was grand and full of taste and dignity. [...] His voice alone was commanding from native strength and sweetness; for it seems as if subsequent singers had possessed more art and feeling; and as to execution, he had none. However, he was a good actor, though unwieldy in figure, and not well made in person, neither was he young when he arrived in London; yet the sensations he excited seem to have been more irresistible and universal, than I have ever been witness to in any theatre.<sup>27</sup>

The cast for the new season was somewhat changed. Another famous castrato-pupil of Porpora, Caffarelli, substituted for Senesino. Thus, Strada finally could sing with him too, after the plan for a common season of 1738/39 in London had failed. Her collection of collaborations with the most prominent *castrati* – Farinelli, Bernacchi, Senesino, Carestini, Conti, Manzuoli and Caffarelli – became complete.

The Teatro San Carlo dedicated the Christmas production of 1740 (premiered on 19<sup>th</sup> December), Porpora's setting of Metastasio's *Zenobia*, not without irony, to Strada's farewell from the stage. (Presumably she would have liked to stay for a few seasons more,

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, 'Manzuoli, Giovanni', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 30 August 2015.

<sup>26</sup> In the seasons 1739/40 and 1740/41 he played Ormonte in Sarro's *Partenope*, Aquilo in Ristori's *Adriano*, Mezio in *Il trionfo di Camilla* by Porpora (carnival 1740) and Bireno in Latilla's *Alceste in Ebuda*.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: by the author, 1789), 484–485.

but at the end of this one the whole company was exchanged, the rumour of which might have reached the members much earlier. Strada probably did not want to quit Naples for an extended period of time any more.)<sup>28</sup> Thus, her retirement was marked by Porpora's music, who as director of the Opera of the Nobility caused great difficulties to Handel and his company, leading directly to the abortion of Strada's London engagement. Metastasio himself warned once his mistress, Marianna Benti-Bulgarelli detta La Romanina, of Porpora as a generator of scandals: 'In sum, where Porpora mixes in, disagreement enters by necessity. For Goodness sake keep from ever having the slightest thing to do with him'.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Strada was in Italy, in Naples now, and Porpora was a compatriot who belonged to the city as *maestro di cappella* of the Conservatorio di S Maria di Loreto (1738–42), and therefore they had to maintain a professional relationship.

For this special occasion of Strada's resignation, both she and the theatre made an exceptional gesture. Strada, who never played *travesti* in her life, now embodied Tiridate, the *primo uomo* role, while Baratti, with whom she rivalled, according to Ulisse Prota-Giurleo, played queen Zenobia. Prota-Giurleo called them 'un'aurora e un tramonto', a dawn (Baratti) and a sunset (Strada). Strada may have wanted to display her vocal powers, proving that she was still competitive with any young rising stars. The institutional gesture was the change of the opera's title from *Zenobia* to *Tiridate*, a tribute to Strada and such an extreme case that the only precedent was for Faustina, who sang the role of Rosmira (disguising herself as a man) in Sarro's *Partenope* (1722): later, in Vinci's Venetian production utilising Sarro's work, the dramatic as well as musical significance of that character was increased for Faustina's sake to such an extent that the title became altered to *La Rosmira fedele*.<sup>30</sup> The difference is, however, that Faustina benefited from the exceptional circumstance that Vinci had to set a libretto of Silvio Stampiglia within 4 or 5 days for 31<sup>st</sup> January 1725 – the carnival season in Venice – as a tribute to Stampiglia following his sudden death on 26<sup>th</sup> January 1725, and Faustina had the score of Sarro's setting, besides that she knew the role.

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<sup>28</sup> 'Proprio per contentar lei, in gara con la Baratti (un'aurora e un tramonto), il Dramma che andò in scena la sera del 19 dicembre 1740, la *Zenobia* del Metastasio con musica del Porpora, comparve sotto il titolo di *Tiridate*, giacché la Stradina sosteneva lei quella parte di uomo.' Ulisse Prota-Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del seicento* (Napoli: Faustino Fiorentino, 1953), 75; Croce, *I teatri di Napoli*, 355.

<sup>29</sup> 'In somma, dove si mischia Porpora entra per necessità disgrazia. Guardatevi per carità di non aver mai il minimo affare in sua compagnia.' Letter of 21 June 1731, in Pietro Metastasio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Bruno Brunelli, 5 vols. (Milan: 1943–44), 1:329. Cited in Hertz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style*, 99.

<sup>30</sup> Prota-Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del seicento*, 75; Reinhard Strohm's suggested it in one of his unpublished conference papers, 'Die Reisen von Rosmira'. Reinhard Strohm, *Von Neapel nach Hamburg: Die europäischen Reisen der Partenope*. International Symposium Theater an der Wien, Vienna, 23–24 February 2009.

The idea that Strada sang a male role is supported by the changes of her vocal features: the strength, projection and quality of her sound might have been still the same as earlier, together with the balance between the registers, and the *travesti* role, if acted well, made the lack of highest virtuosity pardonable. Although the libretto does not survive, the fact that Porpora inserted into Metastasio's complete story a new character, Farasmane, refers to the adjustment of the cast. Given that Strada played Tiridate and Baratti Zenobia, Caffarelli must have been Radamisto, and the other castrato, Manzuoli, needed a new role: he may have been Farasmane. Furthermore, since Zenobia forms a couple with Radamisto according to the plot, and in the end Tiridate renounces his love for her, Baratti and Caffarelli were singing together, which would correspond to the general arrangement of the company (in the same season, as *prima donna* and *primo uomo* they were the couples Emira and Siroe in *Siroe rè di Persia* by Perez as well as Olimpia and Alceste in Gaetano Latilla's *Alceste in Ebuda*).

Nevertheless, *Tiridate* was not the very last production in which Strada participated, since her contract obliged her to sing in all the new operas of the season, the last of which was *Alceste in Ebuda* by Latilla, performed in the carnival of 1741. Strada as Cleotilde was coupled with Margherita Giacomazzi,<sup>31</sup> who played Leotardo, a male role. After that, Strada and Aurelio settled in an apartment in a palazzo of Caffarelli's property in Via Carminiello. However, an intriguing fact is that Aurelio, at the age of sixty-two (in 1760), wanted to rent S. Bartolomeo once again.<sup>32</sup> He died on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1773.<sup>33</sup> Strada lived some one year and a half more and passed away on 20<sup>th</sup> July 1775.<sup>34</sup> Both are buried at the S. Anna di Palazzo church.

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<sup>31</sup> Vivaldi's soprano specialized in castrato style of singing; one of whose arias Strada performed in Handel's *pasticco Didone*, in London.

<sup>32</sup> Aurelio del Pò's petition to the King Carlo di Borbone, 12 November 1760: 'D. Aurelio del Po, figlio del qm. Andrea, supplicando espone come negli anni 1705, 1712 e 1721 prese il riferito suo Padre *in affitto* il Teatro di S. Bartolomeo dalla Casa Santa degl'Incurabili, che per concessione degli antichi serenissimi Regnanti n'era utile Padrona, e tutte e tre le volte dai Vicerè di quei tempi ne fu spogliato e fu ad altri concesso. *E perché si fatte* oppressioni danno luogo al supplicante di chiedere a tenore degli obblighi allora *fatti* con detta Casa Santa de' giusti escomputi, ecc'. Cited in Prota-Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del seicento*, 75.

<sup>33</sup> 'A di 10 *Decembre 1773* — D. Aurelio del Po, d'anni 75, fu marito di D. Anna Strada, ricevuti li SS.mi Sacr.ti morì a di detto in Com.ne di S. Chiesa, fu seppellito alla Congr.ne di S. M.a della Salvaz.ne *abitava alla strada del Carminiello*'. Parr. di S. Anna di Palazzo, *Lib. 19° Def. f. 42*. Cited in Prota-Giurleo, *Pittori napoletani del seicento*, 75.

<sup>34</sup> 'A di 20 *Luglio 1775* — La Signora Donna Anna Strada, d'anni 72. Vedova, ricevuti li SS.mi Sacram: morì a di detto in Com.ne di S. Chiesa, fu seppellita alla Congr.ne di S. Maria della Salvaz.ne *accosto S. Anna, abitava alla strada del Carminiell.*'. Parr. di S. Anna di Palazzo Napoli, *Lib. 19° Def. f. 71*. I am grateful to Alfredo Erbanì, parish priest of the S. Anna di Palazzo Church in Naples, who checked this certain church book at my request, and informed me about the dates of Strada found in the register.

The most positive aspect of Strada's retirement (at the age of thirty-eight) was that she knew how to quit with dignity while still on top.<sup>35</sup> That she did not collapse after two years wasted in false hope of a renewed London engagement, but fought her way back to sing *prima donna* roles with the best current singers in magnificent productions of the modern S. Carlo, shows an estimable attitude. Moreover, she had the opportunity to reunite with Conti and Leo in Turin. It was also symbolic to sing a *travesti* for the first time in her life even in her farewell production. Strada, just as her style of singing, was by nature an uncommon, unique and innovative artist.

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<sup>35</sup> Her fellow singer, Senesino did not get a new engagement at the rebuilt Teatro Regio in Turin, after his poor reception in Naples. Thus his career came to an end an unwanted way in 1740. See Holmes, *Opera Observed*, 147–150. Cuzzoni, who tried to sing as late as 1750, although she almost completely lost her voice by then, at the end of her life she was forced to support herself by making buttons. She died in absolute squalor and poverty in 1770. See Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali, 'Cuzzoni, Francesca', *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy. Accessed 5 September 2015.

## Postlude – A Baroque *Soprano sfogato*?

The term *soprano sfogato* stems from the nineteenth century and was used to describe voices of an extended range, strong stamina and great projection capacity, able to fill large houses on the one hand, and possessed of agility and a fine, silvery ringing vocal quality on the other. Vented,<sup>1</sup> unlimited voices like that of Matilde Kyntherland Cascelli were defined as ‘an extraordinary soprano sfogato voice, clear, supple, vibrant and extending from high D to B flat below the staff, uniting the whole soul in song, and gesture’.<sup>2</sup> This voice type flourished in the *bel canto* era of Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti, and was applied to sopranos like Giuditta Pasta, Maria Malibran and Giulia Grisi. The French writer and poet Théophile Gautier reported from Paris in February 1845, after a performance of Bellini’s *Norma* at the Théâtre-Italien with Grisi in the title role, that real Italian singing is ‘generous and expressive, always in tune, the song of a human throat and not the warbling of a flute’.<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Riggs describes the *assoluta* voice, which is a synonym of the *voce sfogata*, as a voice capable of high-level agility in singing equally high and low notes, intricate passages of divisions, trills and *messe di voce*, and also of chameleonic colour changes, whilst having the dramatic weight ‘to sing over an emotionally charged orchestra’.<sup>4</sup>

The essence of *soprano sfogato* was to sing high notes with the chest, but it did not exclude the ability to produce head notes with softness and delicacy. Moreover, the ability ‘to take the same notes in different registers to vary the color for purposes of expression’ was one of its great effects, as it was recorded about Malibran,<sup>5</sup> and Pasta before her:

The middle or mixed voice can be taken very high from the chest or very low from the head, at the pleasure of the singer. Madame Pasta, who is the most remarkable example within our recollection, could take G above the staff either in her breast or

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<sup>1</sup> ‘The literal translation of the verb *sfogare* is to give vent to, to pour forth, to flow, to let loose. *Voce sfogata* refers to timbre produced with freedom and passion.’ Richard Miller, *Solutions for Singers: Tools for Every Performer and Teacher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 92.

<sup>2</sup> ‘... la Kyntherland ad una straordinaria voce di soprano sfogato, chiara, agile, vibrata ed estesa dal re sovracuto al si bemolle sotto le righe, unisce tant’anima nel canto, e nel gesto’. ‘Spettacoli del Carnevale, *Teatri, arti e letteratura* 10 (February 5, 1829), 218. Cited and translated in Jeffrey Snider, ‘In Search of the Soprano Sfogato’, *Journal of Singing* 68/3 (January–February, 2012). <http://www.readperiodicals.com/201201/2563927711.html#ixzz2jy74XMXm> Accessed 20 March 2015.

<sup>3</sup> In both of the operas mentioned Grisi was the *prima donna*. See Elisabeth Forbes, *Mario and Grisi: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollantz, 1985), 69.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Riggs, *The Assoluta Voice in Opera 1797-1847* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 6–7.

<sup>5</sup> Howard Bushnell, *Maria Malibran: a Biography of the Singer* (University Park; London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), 9 and 44. Cited in Riggs, *The Assoluta Voice in Opera 1797-1847*, 34.

her head voice. Thus when she wanted force she employed one, when she desired facility – the other.<sup>6</sup>

Her tones of the chest are full of the deepest passion, while those of the upper voice are sparkling with brilliancy. In fact she seems to possess two distinct voices – using them at pleasure; as, upon the repetition of a passage, you might suppose it proceeded from the voice of another person.<sup>7</sup>

Jeffrey Snider, in his article about this very voice type, quotes several sources from this period, among them one of the *British Journal* from the 1830s, which described Adelaide Tosi and Giulia Grisi as *soprani sfogati*: ‘for it is a voice that can only be properly appreciated by those who are used to it. It is a refined, and consequently attenuated, treble, which approaches the voice of the musico [a euphemism for castrato], and partakes of its peculiar beauties and defects exactly in the ratio of its approximation’.<sup>8</sup> The reference to a continuation of the castrato voice production (or at least to a similar effect or aesthetic) is not by mere chance. In my opinion, the overall technique needed to reach the ideal vocal sound (a strong and masculine voice projection in the female range, and of greater volume than the ordinary), adumbrated by *castrati*, became generally available in the first half of the nineteenth century. *Castrati* flourished until the late 1700s and were the most distinguished and appreciated teachers. Their artificially transformed bodies enabled the ability of superb breath control (due to their extended lung-capacity) so that together with the support of a male body they could project a pure and feminine voice. (Castrato voice production was not the powerless, disembodied and unresonant *false alto* – i.e. a voice production without closing the vocal folds, only the edges of which vibrate by the air blasted through them – a common technique of countertenors.) Their legacy, therefore, went on unbroken. The extended range of arias during the eighteenth century and the shifting of the (coloratura) soprano voice towards a more dramatic and weightier direction confirms this (e.g. the *e*'''-s written for Blondchen and the role of Konstanze in Mozart’s *Entführung aus dem Serail*, the Queen of the Night in the *Zauberflöte* with her *f*''' notes, or such further dramatic type of soprano roles as Donna Anna or Donna Elvira in his *Don Giovanni*, just to name a few of the most popular ones).

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Madame Malibran (née Garcia)’, *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 10/39 (1828), 323–330: 324. Cited in Sarah Potter, *Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century*. PhD Thesis (The University of Leeds, School of Music, 2014), 34.

<sup>7</sup> William Gardiner, *The Music of Nature* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, and Longman, 1832), 144–145. Cited in *ibid.*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> ‘On the Opera: Italian Opera’, *Fraser’s Magazine of Town and Country* (July 1832): 727–730. Cited and translated in Jeffrey Snider, ‘In Search of the Soprano Sfogato’.

Even Manuel García, who established the technique of singing with a lowered larynx (in 1847), took musical illustrations from the long-living castrato tradition, connecting it to his personal experiences.<sup>9</sup> His father, Manuel García the elder, studied with Giovanni Ansani, possibly a pupil of Porpora,<sup>10</sup> and sang for Rossini (he was his first Almaviva). Rossini was fascinated by *castrati*,<sup>11</sup> and even wrote a role for one of them;<sup>12</sup> his wife, Isabella Colbran, was likewise trained by a castrato, Giromalo Crescentini. *Semiramide*, the title role of which he wrote for Colbran, was called by Rodolfo Celletti the last opera of the great Baroque tradition.<sup>13</sup> It was one of Grisi's favourite grand dramatic parts as well, with which she made her debut at the Théâtre-Italien de Paris in 1832, after the composer himself engaged her and offered her the part. Furthermore, she sang it at the re-opening of Covent Garden as the 'Royal Italian Opera House' in London in 1847 as well as gaining tremendous success in St Petersburg in 1848/49.

Grisi's voice approached the voice of the castrato, it has been said; it was strong, sonorous, sweet and extensive – a legitimate dramatic soprano; in its freshness and purity of intonation, her refined style approached the sublime.<sup>14</sup> The journalist Thomas Cox called her full and rich tone her 'peculiarity', while the art critic Henry Chorley claimed that her 'voice was poured forth with [...] fullness and brilliancy'.<sup>15</sup> Grisi's creative artistry allowed her to adopt and personalise the former roles of Giuditta Pasta so successfully that Norma in Paris and Anna Bolena in London became identified by her name. The Babylonian Queen's brilliant musical material is full of fast, glissando-type scales, florid coloratura roulades, *portamenti*, cadenzas, *messe di voce* and changes of tempo and dynamics, and demands dark, wighty vocal colouring. Whilst Grisi took on heavier dramatic roles originally written for Pasta – like that of Norma (in the première of which

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<sup>9</sup> James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 40; Martha Feldman, *Castrato De Luxe: Blood, Gifts and Goods in the Making of Early Modern Singing Stars*, lecture at the University of Chicago 32<sup>nd</sup> Humanities Day, 13 October 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Roger Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing: Emancipation from Modern Orthodoxy', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127/2 (2002), 226–257: 229.

<sup>11</sup> Rossini looking back to the age of *castrati* in 1858: 'I have never forgotten them. The purity, the miraculous flexibility of those voices and, above all, their profoundly penetrating accent – all that moved and fascinated me more than I can tell you'. Naomi Adele André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti and the Second Woman in Early-nineteenth-century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 26.

<sup>12</sup> That of Arsace in *Aurelio in Palmira* for Giambattista Velluti.

<sup>13</sup> Rodolfo Celletti, *A History of Bel Canto* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 210.

<sup>14</sup> Forbes, *Mario and Grisi*, 26, 40, 73, 88, 90, 123 and 132.

<sup>15</sup> 'The peculiarity of her rich and full tone, the decision of her manner, and the undoubted signs of her proficiency, disarmed all criticism, and made her at once that favourite she never ceased to be so long as she remained in the full vigour of her powers.' Cox on *La gazza ladra*. Ibid., 27; 'Mme. Grisi, with whom this part has always been her best, is now at her best in the part. She seems to have studied it anew. Her by-play has a sinister and voluptuous delicacy, and her grand scenes have a force, without her olden violence, which make it surpass any of her former efforts; and her voice was poured forth with such fullness and brilliancy as if she wished the Amina at that moment on her former throne to hear the challenge.' Chorley on *Lucrezia Borgia* (London, 1847). Ibid., 90.

Grisi sang the role of Adalgisa) and Anna Bolena – and for Malibran – that of Desdemona (Rossini), furthermore Lucrezia Borgia (Donizetti), Verdi's Lucrezia (*I due foscari*) and Donna Anna (Mozart) – she excelled in lighter roles, like Rosina, Norina, Susanna, Pamina and Ninetta (*La gazza ladra*) at the same time. A perfect and unrivalled beauty, she was a favourite singer for the young Queen Victoria, while she alternated between London and the Théâtre-Italien, singing for Rossini in Paris.

The descriptions cited above could have easily applied to Strada's voice as well. Looking at her original roles through this lens, one has to recognise that parts like that of Adelaide (Handel: *Lotario* 1729), Partenope (Handel: *Partenope* 1730), Elmira (Handel: *Sosarme* 1732), Alcina (Handel: *Alcina* 1732), Tusnelda (Handel: *Arminio* 1736), Aspasia (Leo: *Zenobia* 1725), Ermione (Vinci: *Astianatte* 1725) or Deidamia (Leo: *Achille in Sciro* 1740) correspond to the *sfogato* skill-set and way of singing, taking the differences of Baroque and Romantic musical styles, singing technique and orchestral environment into account.

Strada and Grisi (1811–1869) are similar from that point of view that they both started their careers as high sopranos, and developed to *sfogati* through the extension of their range downwards, through the enrichment of their emission and supposedly by naturally gaining a darker voice colour with maturity. Others like Malibran, Colbran and Pasta, and in the eighteenth century Faustina or Lucia Facchinelli, were originally mezzo-sopranos who stretched their vocal territory towards the high register.<sup>16</sup> I would parallel Strada's and Grisi's early singing characteristics here as similarly high, agile and lyric coloratura ones, with signs of a strong stamina. *Addio caro, tu ben sai*, from Strada's first Vivaldian role (Rosane in *La verità in cimento* II/2; see Ex. 1.8), is probably the best example of this, with its rapid-motion, sixth-, seventh-, and octave leaps, including climbing to a peak of b<sup>b</sup>". Elvira's cabaletta, *Vien diletto*, in the second Act's mad scene of Bellini's *I puritani* – one of Giulia Grisi's few original roles, likewise from her early repertoire – demonstrates fine shades of flexible tempo and various timbres. Having a high tessitura, it balances between lyric passages and both diatonic and chromatic scale-chains leading to a powerful climax, raising the tension of her inner battle with lunacy.

One of the greatest debates of historically-informed performance practice today is about the singing technique not only of the eighteenth but also of the nineteenth and even early twentieth centuries. Although it is fundamental that a large, wide and heavy continuous pitch-fluctuation vibrato is a product of modern, post-war singing, yet some have drawn

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<sup>16</sup> The Vivaldian soprano, Margherita Giacomazzi could also come under the *assoluta* category. She possessed an extraordinary range and specialised in *travesti*, singing frequently *primo uomo* roles as a worthy substitute for *castrati*.



conclusions that bring into doubt the existence of healthy vibrato even during the romantic period, referring to certain passages of memoirs and treatises from the 1800s whilst neglecting others. In my opinion, apart from the expression of simply different tastes that contemporary accounts reflect, most such passages actually condemn the abuse (the exaggerated pitch vibrato) and not the right and healthy proportioned swinging of the voice, as can be read, for instance, in Maria Malibran's own letter about the decaying voice of Henriette Méric-Lalande singing Bellini's *Il pirata* (May, 1830)<sup>17</sup>. I cannot agree with the theory that until the twentieth century singing with vibrato, with a lowered larynx and full breath combining the lowered diaphragm with the parting of the ribs, or costal breathing (called *appoggio*) was not in use, but a naturally positioned larynx with basically no audible vibrato was preferred instead. There are various reasons for my disagreement.

First of all, the music itself – not only that of the late 1800s by Verdi, Meyerbeer and Wagner, but also of the *bel canto* era, by Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini – contradicts this theory. Singing demanding arias with a natural use of the larynx cannot produce sufficiently the volume which is needed to be heard over the orchestra, and leads to an uncertain intonation, with the substance and colour of the voice becoming dull and lifeless. Without vibrato or with one artificially throttled down, one cannot sing sustained notes appropriately: instead they result in starting a glide well before the long note ends, which is not a real *portamento* but the exact *glissando* that the most prominent treatises of the 1700s and 1800s warned against. Particularly, when both the orchestra and the soloist have *forte* sustained notes, and the strings are playing tremolo repetitions, a straight vocal tone without vibrato cannot compete in any way with a renewed *forte* orchestral chord.<sup>18</sup>

Also, there is quite a great amount of ignorance concerning systematically occurring statements from people like Mozart that a natural and healthy vibrato – vibrato of intensity, but of less than a semitone – was and is an indispensable part of good singing. I agree with

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<sup>17</sup> 'Memoirs of Madame Malibran, by the Countess de Merlin and Other Intimate Friends', in: *The Monthly Review from January to April Inclusive 1840, vol. i* (London: Henderson and Bailey, 1840), 518–524: 519.

<sup>18</sup> An addition from my personal experiences: I could only embrace full understanding of the two most simple and fundamental element of singing technique, the lowered larynx and the deepest support possible, quite late, in the second half of my twenties. Until then, I was like a bird without wings: I have showed capabilities for a ringing, sonorous coloratura soprano voice with a wide range, but I could neither sustain a healthy tone above e", nor produce enough volume below c'. My throat was stuck, and I could not handle my voice flexibly (i.e. to sing *cantabile* or *legato*) and my high notes were sharp, narrow and harsh. Singing was toilsome and difficult. It was a hopeless situation, and when I finally could control my larynx so that it did not jump up, and at the same time was able to bring support as deep as possible, it was like a revelation. I experienced freedom in singing for the first time. My range was doubled within a few months (today I warm up between c and f #", and am applying a range from g to f "" in arias), and my voice obeyed my musical and technical intentions: *legato* was not a problem any more, vibrato developed naturally and I gained a remarkably richer, warmer, darker and stronger voice production. Although I am continually polishing my technique as well as my musical approach, this discovery brought satisfaction and made me, as I was told by some, among them several illustrious musicians, who heard my performance, an accomplished singer.

David Montgomery that there is a great confusion about vibrato and vibrato-effects. He says that an ornament is ‘something that stands out against the texture of the music [...] but not an ongoing, abstract aspect of sound itself’ as vibrato is.<sup>19</sup> He sees one of the reasons might be that by the end of the sixteenth century pedagogical treatises multiplied in English, French, German and Italian, using a wide diversity of terms (*Bebung*, *tremolo*, *flattement*, *battement*, *balancement*, *pincement*, *étouffement*, *vibrato*, sting, shaking, *ondeggiando*, *trillo*, *trilletto*, *mordente fresco*, etc.) which are not to be confused with one another. On the other hand, treatises themselves, especially earlier ones, used the same terms differently, or various terms to describe the same phenomenon.

Ellen T. Harris observes, for example, that the Baroque term ‘tremolo’ might refer to two kinds of vibrato: either to the diaphragmatic pitch alteration or to a rhythmic pulsation without pitch variation that originates in the throat (originally also called ‘trillo’). She goes on to suggest that Zacconi’s ‘continuous vibrato’ refers to the latter one, and that seventeenth-century German and French writings, such as that of Christoph Bernhard, do not support pitch waver at all. This also shows a difference between Italian and Western- and Northern-European aesthetics of singing. Since sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises – those of Zacconi (1596),<sup>20</sup> Giulio Caccini (1600),<sup>21</sup> Georg Quitschreiber (1598), Michael Praetorius (1619),<sup>22</sup> Johann Caspar Printz (1690)<sup>23</sup> and Martin Fuhrmann (1706)<sup>24</sup> – associate the idea of vibrato with the agility to produce trills and rapid coloraturas, most probably the expressions such as *zitternd*, *schwebend*, *Bebung*, *tremolo*, *tremoletto* or *trillo* refer to the *gorgia* technique. Later, however, in the eighteenth century, several descriptions emerged of women singers who practised pitch vibrato; Cuzzoni’s and Faustina’s are well-known examples.<sup>25</sup> Harris evaluates the correlation between vibrato and *di petto* singing, which was practiced by Strada: ‘as singers began pulling the chest voice up into the head register [during the course of the eighteenth century], pitch vibrato

<sup>19</sup> David Montgomery, *The Vibrato Thing*. (2003). Retrieved 1 December 2015.

<http://douglasniedt.com/TechTipVibratoPart3TheVibratoThingByDavidMontgomery.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Cited in Antonella Nigro (Transl. David Mitchell), *Observations on the Technique of Italian Singing from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day*, xvii-xviii. <http://www.cantorisancarlo.it/Observation1.htm> Accessed 30 September 2015. See Ludovico Zacconi, *Prattica di Musica* (Venice, Bartolomeo Carampello, 1596; anastatic reprint, Bologna, Forni, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (Florence, 1602). Modern edition by H. Wilhey Hitchcock (Madison: A-R Editions, 1970), 50.

<sup>22</sup> ‘eine schöne liebliche zitternd=bebende Stimme’. Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum* (Wolfenbüttel, 1619), 3:229–230; ‘Tremula voce optime canitur’, Georg Quitschreiber (1598). Cited in Greta Moens-Haenen, *Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock. Ein Handbuch zur Aufführungspraxis für Vokalistinnen und Instrumentalisten* (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Historische Beschreibung der edelen Sing- und Kling-Kunst* (Mieth, Dresden 1690).

<sup>24</sup> *Musikalischer Trichter* (Frankfort an der Spree: 1706).

<sup>25</sup> ‘she has got a nest of nightingales in her belly’. Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. iv, 316; ‘Il suo genere d’agilità fu tanto più pregevole perché vibrato a quel giusto termine.’ Mancini, *Riflessioni pratiche* (1774), 31-2. Cited in Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens*, 31.

would have appeared naturally. Because vibrato is most frequently associated with women's voices, it may not be coincidental that the use of chest voice throughout the range is first attributed by Tosi to female sopranos'.<sup>26</sup>

According to Montgomery, sources are often simply misinterpreted by modern musicians and scholars alike: one important example is Mozart's comment on Joseph Nikolaus Meissner, describing the *Bebung* ornament as a 'shaking' of the voice at regular intervals, not vibrato, which is defined by Mozart right after that: 'The human voice trembles without help, but in such a manner and proportion that it is beautiful, that is the nature of the voice'.<sup>27</sup> The *Bebung* as a vocal ornament – described by Johann Mattheson (*Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739) and Johann Adam Hiller (1780)<sup>28</sup> – was adapted by instrumentalists, mainly flutists: the schools of Quantz (1752) and Tromlitz (1791) give examples of this metric oscillation of a note. Scholars such as Will Crutchfield and Clive Brown consider *Bebung* as if it were the vibrato of its time and as if it would exclude the presence of natural vibrato.<sup>29</sup> In my opinion this is what causes confusion, because it defines vibrato exclusively as an occasional ornament and not as an essential vocal phenomenon.<sup>30</sup> The concept of the artificial, ornamental oscillation effect in the very metre of an aria, i.e. a waving of the voice at every crotchet or quaver, is in contradiction to the genuineness and naturalness of vocal vibrato.

James Stark denotes that although García's ideal was also a 'steadiness of sound' – that is 'a firm and continuous flow of sound, free from every sort of tremor and quavering' – yet he authorised 'tremolo' at highly emotional passages. Furthermore, Stark recognises that the fundamental elements of García's teaching, such as the firm glottal closure, lowered larynx, and elevated subglottal pressure, are the same muscular actions which tend

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<sup>26</sup> Ellen T. Harris, 'Voices', in: *Performance Practice after 1600*, ed. by Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: Norton, 1990), 97–116: 105.

<sup>27</sup> Bauer, W.A. and Deutsch, O.E., eds, W.A. Mozart: *Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* 4 (Kassel/Basel: 1963), 377–378. Cited in Greta Moens-Haenen, *Das Vibrato in der Musik des Barock* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1988), 17; 'Meissner hat wie sie wissen, die ueble gewohnheit, dass er oft mit fleiss mir der stimme zittert – ganze viertl – ja oft gar achtl in aushaltender Note marquirt – und das habe ich an ihm nie leiden koennen, das ist auch wircklich abscheulich. das ist voellig ganz wieder die Natur zu singen. die Menschenstimme zittert schon selbst – aber so – in einem solchen grade, dass es schoen ist – dass ist die Natur der stimme.' W. A. Mozart's letter to his father, 6 December 1778. Cited in Montgomery, *The Vibrato Thing*.

<sup>28</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 131; Johann Adam Hiller, *Anweisung zum musikalisch-zierlichen Gesange* (Leipzig: Johann Friedrich Junius, 1780), IV/§28; Hiller, *Treatise on Vocal Performance and Ornamentation*, trans. by Suzanne J. Beicken (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

<sup>29</sup> 'In the widely-known Norton volume, *Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (1989), Will Crutchfield mistranslates "zittert" (shakes) as "vibrates". Furthermore, he simply omits the definitive part of 7 Mozart's statement, where the composer explains that Meissner purposefully marked off his long notes in both quarter and eighth-intervals. It is no wonder, then, that Crutchfield allows his readers to come to the wrong conclusion about this quotation, confusing "vibrato" with "tremolo".' Montgomery, *The Vibrato Thing*, footnote 3.

<sup>30</sup> Clive Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance Practice 1750–1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 539–545.

to evoke vibrato as a reaction. He suggests – what is the most logical and most feasible theory in my opinion too – that García, as well as other authors, commented and warned against excessive tremulousness and did not mention normal vibrato because it was implicitly understood to be inherent in proper singing.<sup>31</sup> It is telling that the ‘descendants’ of the García school, mainly the ‘pupils of his protégé Mathilde Marchesi – Nellie Melba, Emma Eames, Emma Calvé, and Blanche Marchesi, among others – made recordings, and all sang with vibrato. In 1922, Max Schoen measured the vibrato of Nellie Melba and Emma Eames, and noted that in Melba’s voice “the vibrato is constantly present,” while with *Eames* “the *vibrato* is intermittent,” with tones often beginning without *vibrato* and ending with a *vibrato* (Schoen 1922, 252–3).<sup>32</sup> Melba’s vibrato, for example, is audible even to the naked ear. I am convinced that the key to a clearer insight into the use of vibrato is to understand that, prior to the 1920s, the focus of the teaching and aesthetic of singing was not on vibrato, whereas in our days it is to such an extent that the quantity of it defines an operatic voice. The ideal of a steady tone in treatises did not exclude vibrato, but it served as an indicator of good technique, marked by the evenness of quality, the security and sonorousness of the sound, and pure intonation; these can dominate even with vibrato present. If vibrato comes out of focus, if it is considered as a natural outcome of singing with a good technique, independently from any expressive purposes, it suddenly becomes clear why treatises of the seventeenth-eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries did not deal with it very much; meanwhile we know that even in the Baroque era some singers had more vibrato than others, but that this was not a main factor in artistic evaluation. Vibrato was and is also connected to national features: Ronald Foster observed in 1934 that it was preferred by Latin races and not by Anglo-Saxon ones.<sup>33</sup> Italians, who dominated European singing until the second half of the nineteenth century, might have always tended to have a greater amount of vibrato; the critical resistance of German and English treatises, therefore, cannot be considered as a universal aesthetic of non-vibrato singing.<sup>34</sup>

The magnificence of the castrato voice production – described by numerous period memoirs, letters and treatises – and their virtuoso, wide-ranging arias, together with the repertoire of the eighteenth-century’ leading female singers simply exclude the possibility of an adequate accomplishment without some genuine, probably not conscious, ability to lower the larynx, improved by breathing exercises – resulting in a large throat and thus

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Toft, *Bel Canto: A Performer’s Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92–96.

<sup>32</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 134.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance Practice*, 523.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 523–524.

providing freedom for the production of a rich and variable sound with great agility. Singing with a deep breath specifically enables a greater stamina and support in order to gain a bigger voice emission; not to mention that the soft palate goes automatically higher, thereby creating a larger space in the throat and helping the voice to be well-positioned. Costal or *appoggio* breathing,<sup>35</sup> which Dan Marek derives from the castrato era, might also have been much in use before García's time.<sup>36</sup> James Stark likewise refers to certain eighteenth-century authors who urged singers to 'hold back' the breath while singing, 'that is, to create a balance between inspiratory and expiratory forces. In the nineteenth century, this idea was referred to as *lutte vocale*, or "vocal struggle", leading directly to the concept of *appoggio*'.<sup>37</sup> Antonella Nigro discusses the fact that, as early as 1562, Maffei set a rule of breath-control by 'pushing the breath little by little with the voice'. Tosi also made some remarks about the guided use of the breath during singing.<sup>38</sup> Mancini, for instance, gave a description of an exercise designed specifically to strengthen the chest and vocal energy:

To make this rule easy for those whose chests are not so strong and for those who cannot hold the breath so long, the solfeggio should be written of only two notes in each measure, and they must be two 'Minime' giving to it a slow movement, so that the voice may have time to expand; the student must not take breath between the first and second note.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, he may have referred even to a relaxed larynx, by warning against a forced position of the 'fauces', i.e. of the throat, which automatically includes the larynx:

The voice cannot come out naturally and spontaneously, if it finds the fauces [throat, including the larynx] in a forced position, which impedes natural action. Therefore the

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<sup>35</sup> 'The diaphragm should be lowered without any jerk, and the chest regularly and slowly raised. This double movement enlarges the compass or circumference of the lungs; first, at their base, and subsequently throughout their whole extent, leaving them full liberty to expand, until they are completely filled with air. When the lungs have been gradually filled, without any jerking movement, they have the power of retaining the air without effort; this slow and complete inspiration is what the Italians term *Respiro*, as contrasted with that slight and hurried inspiration which gives the lungs a slight supply, merely sufficient for a moment, and technically termed the *Mezzo Respiro*.' Manuel García, *Art of Singing*, vols i–ii (1847, 1872; repr. London: Leonard & Co., 1924), 10.

<sup>36</sup> Dan H. Marek, *Singing: The First Art* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007), 67.

<sup>37</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> Nigro, *Observations on the Technique of Italian Singing from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the Present Day*, xvii; Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni, o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato* (Bologna: dalla Volpe, 1723), 36–37.

<sup>39</sup> 'Ed acciocchè questa regola tanto necessaria di non pigliar fiato, non riesca allo scolare troppo ardua, e penosa; se egli fosse di petto debole, gli si deve scrivere il solfeggio di due sole note per battuta, e saranno due minime, dovendosi dare al tempo un moto lento, acciò la voce abbia libero campo di spandersi; e lo scolare non deve pigliar fiato dalla prima alla seconda nota, ma soltanto nell'incominciamento della seconda battuta.' Giambattista Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna: Ghelen, 1774), 92–93; trans. in English by Pietro Buzzzi, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1912), 112.

student must take the trouble to accustom his chest to give the voice with naturalness, and to use the ‘fauces’ very lightly. If the harmony of these two parts, the mouth and the ‘fauces’ is perfect, then the voice will be clear and harmonious.<sup>40</sup>

Corsets are also considered as obstacles to deep breathing, preventing the lowering and extension of the diaphragm and the widening of the ribs. The daily wearing of a corset may have indeed reduced lung capacity by up to thirty percent, but also, as compensation, it produced larger rib-cages up top so that the accessory breathing muscles became stronger.<sup>41</sup> It follows that female opera singers, who were performing in specially made corsets (very wide in the shoulder and hips, to make the waist appear small) that left more room for them to allow their diaphragm to sink properly and thus to breathe deeply,<sup>42</sup> had the additional benefit of the strong upper chest as well.

Traces of what García called *timbre sombre*, the lowering of the larynx resulting in a darkened voice and vowels, appear in treatises from the seventeenth century onwards. Mancini advised a certain sweetening (*raddolcire*) of the voice when singing the vowel ‘i’, otherwise it would become sharp or harsh and the mouth and throat would get narrow.<sup>43</sup> Ottavio Durante (1608) prohibited the singing of coloraturas on ‘odious vowels, which are the “i” and “u”, the first of which resembles a whinny, the second a wail; the singer should insure that he sings *passaggi* only on the long syllables and on the other vowels, “a”, “e” and “o”’.<sup>44</sup> These instructions reflect the idea of *timbre clair* and *timbre sombre* or covering, and imply that something has to be done with the vocal apparatus which is not natural, and which belongs to the art, because the natural production of these vowels is inappropriate for singing, especially in the head register.

Just because eighteenth and early nineteenth-century treatises do not discuss the production of vocal sound in an anatomically detailed way, it does not mean that the

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<sup>40</sup> ‘la voce [...] questa non può più uscire naturale, e bella qualor ritrovi le fauci in una posizione forzata, ed impedita ad agire naturalmente. Si dia dunque ogni scolare la fatica d’avvezzare il suo petto a dare con naturalezza la voce, e di servirvi semplicemente della leggerezza delle fauci. Se l’unione di queste due parti sarà nel dovuto punto di perfezione, la voca non sarà che chiara, e melodiosa;’ Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 70–71; Mancini, *Practical reflections*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> Based on evidences of women’s skeletons from the Victorian era. See <http://lucycorsetry.com/page/4/> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=709&v=aUtIDZR129c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=709&v=aUtIDZR129c) Accessed 1 December 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Violet von Mickelsburg, *The Corset Myth II. You Can’t Breathe in a Corset* (29 March 2013) <http://www.steamingenious.com/2013/03/corset-myth-2-you-cant-breathe-in-corset.html> Accessed 20 September 2015.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Art teaches, and the experience of many years has taught me plainly, that in forwarding the mouth too much and arching it too much in pronouncing the vowel “i” in singing, gives a dull, lifeless sound and not agreeable at all; while on the contrary, by keeping the mouth in the shape of a composed smile, we have as a result gracefulness and sweetness which are so necessary to pronounce the “i”. Under these conditions, it gives delight to the hearer.’ Mancini, *Practical reflections*, 94; Julianne Baird, ‘An Eighteenth-Century Controversy About the Trill: Mancini v. Manfredini,’ *Early Music* 15/1 (Feb. 1987), 36–45: 36.

<sup>44</sup> E. V. Foreman, *A Comparison of Selected Italian Vocal Tutors of the Period circa 1550 to 1800*. DMA Dissertation (University of Illinois: 1969), 93.

conscious and intentional use of the vocal organs would have been excluded.<sup>45</sup> These treatises addressed every singing student in general, amateurs and professionals alike. Their observations, therefore, were likewise about singers and singing in general, among which the most fundamental one was that in most cases there is a register break which has to be undone. The main goal was to render the complete unification of the chest and head notes as if they were homogenous, but at least it was necessary to join the two ranges seamlessly. Nevertheless, the ideal state would have been to have a chest-quality for the whole range. John Ernest Galliard commented on a passage of Tosi's treatise, about the registers:

Voce di Petto is a full Voice, which comes from the Breast by Strength, and is the most sonorous and expressive. Voce di Testa comes more from the Throat, than from the Breast, and is capable of more Volubility. Falsetto is a feigned Voice, which is entirely formed in the Throat, has more Volubility than any, but [is] of no Substance.<sup>46</sup>

Both Tosi and Mancini recognised a rare phenomenon: the natural soprano; the singer who genuinely sings with chest-like voice production in the high range as well. Strada most likely was one of these. As has been discussed, by the time of Mancini's treatise, the blending of the registers had a much deeper definition than in Tosi's era, about eighty years earlier: by the 1770s, it was about developing a chest-voice quality for the head notes as well. This refers to a development in the method and practice of teaching singing, and in the practice of singing itself. Increasing knowledge and experience meant that those talented ones who did not possess the prodigious attribute of naturally unified registers could obtain it through education, and more easily than before. The same regards the low-larynx technique. The birth of the theory neither precludes that the practice was in use before, nor that there were singers in preceding eras who naturally applied this part of voice production without needing a method to learn it. The realisation of the break between registers and the issue of their proper joint does not necessarily indicate a neutral larynx method either. The main issue of singing studies today is the same as it was earlier, to reach and maintain seamless and homogeneous voice production between the registers – in other words, to blend them appropriately. This needs many years of work, even with the training of the low-larynx method. Once learned, it requires constant focus on the part of the singer every time to keep the transition between the registers unbroken. Still, the *passaggio* notes will always remain vulnerable and not as comfortable as other notes; their

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<sup>45</sup> Potter, *Changing Vocal Style and Technique in Britain during the Long Nineteenth Century*, 18.

<sup>46</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song, or Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, transl. by John Ernest Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743), 22.

production will always demand special attention and extra work so that they do not sound harsher, narrower and duller than other tones, and so that the larynx does not jump involuntarily. *Messa di voce* on one's *passaggio* is the most difficult to solve, because the position of the larynx has to be set especially finely and precisely.

It is accurate that the abuse of the lowering of the larynx – i.e. forcing the larynx down constantly – and the abuse of vibrato – which is a pitch oscillation greater than a semitone, resulting from extreme pressure put on the vocal apparatus – are phenomena of twentieth-century singing and, as such, are foreign to any earlier singing techniques.<sup>47</sup> But these abuses do not mean that the original technique is wrong. To sing with a lowered larynx does not connote that the organ is stuck down; even during singing with this technique, the larynx moves minimally and flexibly, and even a lowered larynx rises slightly at specifically high notes. As it is with taking medicine, the right proportion is the key: less or more could equally bring damage.

Based upon historical accounts dating from 1780 to 1820, Brown recognises a change in use of left-hand vibrato by string players;<sup>48</sup> and since they imitated singers' mannerisms, one can assume that this reaction indirectly refers to the phenomenon of a use of an increasing amount of vibrato among vocalists. Undoubtedly, the nineteenth-century orchestra was of a greater number of members, using instruments with a remarkably bigger sound than any ensemble in the eighteenth; combined with the vastness of modern opera houses, this logically created a demand for singing with a big volume in order to be heard over the orchestra. García's method of the low-larynx technique combined with that of producing high notes with *timbre sombre* was an answer to these questions.<sup>49</sup> Vibrato by nature has the ability to increase sound; moreover, it serves as a relaxation to the muscles under an increased amount of pressure:

Although the purpose of vibrato is not completely understood, most voice scientists agree that vibrato enters vocal production as a relaxant principle because the body has a need for periodic muscle relaxation during heavy-duty or intense vocal activity, such as when singing sustained notes at high pitches. It is generally assumed to result from neuromuscular excitation of the laryngeal mechanism. Vibrato is the result of a balance between muscle systems in antagonistic relation to each other during phonation. When this balance occurs, the antagonistic muscle systems develop an alternating pulse that is a reflection of the continued energy level required of them to

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<sup>47</sup> Roger Freitas, 'Towards a Verdian Ideal of Singing: Emancipation from Modern Orthodoxy', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 127/2 (2002), 226–257: 236–239.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, *Classical and Romantic Performance Practice*, 528.

<sup>49</sup> García, *Art of Singing*, vols i–ii, 3–4; Nigro, *Observations on the Technique of Italian Singing*, xxvii–xxix.



maintain equilibrium and muscular health. (Consider how muscles elsewhere in the body, such as those in our arms, begin to shake when strain or tension is prolonged. When we lift or hold a heavy object for a long period of time, we'll often experience a periodic but constant shaking of the muscles that are being used.) In other words, the muscles of the larynx begin to pulse rhythmically in response to tension and subglottic pressure, and that produces the characteristic vibrato sound. It occurs naturally in order to protect the vocal folds.<sup>50</sup>

Undoubtedly, the changing musical style of operas of late-nineteenth-century composers required a much more powerful voice production, not least because the orchestra and the capacity of its improved instruments left no other choice than the improvement of vocal technique.<sup>51</sup> Since this experimentation with a forceful voice production also resulted very frequently in an abuse of pitch vibrato (multiplying the number of detesting accounts), the discussion of compressed breath and strong glottal adduction also increased, forming a more important part of treatises like those of the Mandl-Lamperti school (Francesco Lamperti *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto* 1864 / *The Art of Singing* 1884, and his son, Giovanni Battista Lamperti's *The Technics of Bel Canto* 1905, sourcing the physiologist Dr. Louis Mandl's *L'Hygiene de la voix* 1879), than it did of García's.<sup>52</sup> The requirement of a bigger sound caused the reduction of ornamentation, and the vacuum which it created was regularly filled by an improperly large vibrato. This is the reason why there are more warrants against vibrato during the course of the 1800s than ever before: because there was a real danger that it could have become the focal point of signing technique, since it can easily and addictively turn into a habit.

One of the biggest misconceptions regarding pre-romantic singing is that singers and teachers did not want a voice to be sonorous and strong. Mancini dedicates at least a whole chapter in his treatise to how to gain a strong voice, when one is not blessed with that by nature. He contrasts his method with that of others, which makes clear that this was a fundamental question of vocal training. Mancini claimed that a 'weak voice [...] bars the singer from ever being able to make himself heard in a large place'.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, he

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<sup>50</sup> Karyn O'Connor, *Vibrato: What is it and how to develop it*, 1. <http://www.singwise.com/cgi-bin/main.pl?section=articles&doc=Vibrato> Accessed 20 September 2015.

<sup>51</sup> See Adam von Ahn Carse, *The History of Orchestration* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, reprint of the 1925 edition, 2012), 200–312; Robert Barclay, 'The development of musical instruments: national trends and musical implications', in: *The Cambridge Companion to Orchestra*, ed. by Colin Lawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22–41.

<sup>52</sup> Stark, *Bel Canto*, 43–45 and 104.

<sup>53</sup> 'Una voce, a cui manchi la robustezza chiamasi *voce debole*, e porta il grave disturbo al Cantore, che non può farsi sentire senza sua pena, e fatica, in campo vasto.' Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 76; Mancini, *Practical Reflections*, 99.

emphasises that this strong and sonorous sound must be equally developed throughout the whole range, including head notes:

It will prove to be of great help to a pupil who has & weak and limited voice, whether it be soprano or contralto. He must exercise with a solfeggio with sustained notes in his daily study. [...] to increase the volume of their voices each day little by little, directing them thus, with the aid of art and continuous exercise, until they become vigorous and sonorous. When this first step has been accomplished the solfeggio must be augmented with high tones. As these high tones belong to the head register, I shall tell in my next chapter how to blend them.<sup>54</sup>

That a greater quantity of vocal emission was well appreciated in the eighteenth century – which was one of the main reasons *castrati* were celebrated, namely that they sang louder than their female and non-castrated male colleagues – is proved by the practice of *messa di voce* and by fact that this was one of Farinelli's special abilities for which he was most admired:

Farinelli without the assistance of significant gestures or graceful attitudes, enchanted and astonished his hearers by the force, extent and mellifluous tones of the mere organ, when he had nothing to execute, articulate, or express.<sup>55</sup>

John Potter remarks that, although the lower larynx position in most cases is accompanied by a stiffness of the muscles of the vocal folds (at the cost of some agility, since the motion of the cords become slower in this way), there have been many singers, among them Jenny Lind and Maria Callas, who still possessed 'an unconscious natural facility, clearly superior to that of their rivals, which is not easily explained in general physiological terms'.<sup>56</sup> Strada's case is the same, only inversely: although she had a high and virtuoso coloratura soprano voice, and although the low-larynx technique as an educational method did not exist in her lifetime, she certainly had an instinctive and innate ability for a poured-out voice emission all over her range, which made her head notes especially powerful. Above all, that Strada's way of singing with her louder, accented and

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<sup>54</sup> 'Fra questi l'esperienza Maestra Fedele me ne ha fatto credere uno per il migliore, che qui vi propongo: riflettevi ... una voce *limitata*, e *debole*, sia di Soprano, sia di Contralto, ne proverà goivamente non mediocre, se nello studio giornale verrà coltivata con un solfeggio composto con note di valore; [...] Si deve pure consigliare lo scolare ad accrescere a poco a poco il corpo di queste voci, regolandole coll' ajuto dell' arte, e continuo esercizio; acciò arrivi a farle robuste, e sonore. [...] e siccome questa seconda porzione di voce appartiene al registro di testa, come altrove ho provato, dirò nell' Articolo seguente come unirle:' Mancini, *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche*, 80–81; Mancini, *Practical Reflections*, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. iv (London: Payne and Son, 1789), 379–380.

<sup>56</sup> John Potter, *Vocal Authority: Singing Style and Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 53.

vented high notes was praised by her contemporaries reveals that hers was an ideal way of singing. She might have been among the pioneers who united the split parts of female singing – the powerful soprano range, represented by *castrati* until the third decade of the 1700s, with variable feminine vocal expression. Her exceptional vocal features made composers like Vivaldi and Handel diverge from their general way of vocal writing including some stylistic features, which teaches us how flexible Baroque style is and how it was dominated by its performers. Since Strada as one of the best singers of her era was regarded as no less authentic than others, the conclusion presents itself that the ‘tailoring of the dress’, if made ideally, by strengthening the one who wears it, enhances its (the dress’s) own values: the composition, through a proper adjustment to the performer’s vocal personality, makes its own splendour manifest in a unique and unrepeatable way.



## List of Musical Examples From Chrysander's Complete Handel Edition

*Deutsche Händelgesellschaft, Georg Friedrich Händels Werke*, ed. by Friedrich Chrysander  
(Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1858–1894, 1902)

- HG 72, *Alessandro* (HWV 21): Exs 4.7 (*Aure, fonti*, bb. 1–9) and 4.8 (*Alla sua gabbia d'oro*, bb. 31–37)
- HG 58, *Rinaldo* (HWV 7b): Ex. 4.9 (*Parolette, vezzi e sguardi*, bb. 10–63)
- HG 71, *Scipione* (HWV 20): Exs 4.10 (*Dolci aurette*, bb. 1–8) and 4.12 (*Scoglio d'immota fronte*, bb. 13–35)
- HG 74, *Riccardo Primo, rè d'Inghilterra* (HWV 23): Ex. 4.13 (*Tutta brillanti rai*, bb. 23–37)
- HG 66, *Ottone, rè di Germania* (HWV 15): Ex. 4.17 (*Falsa imagine*, bb. 1–14)
- HG 77, *Lotario* (HWV 26): Exs 5.2–3 (*Scherza in mar la navicella*, bb. 10–57 and 76–93) and 5.4 (*Menti eterne*, bb. 15–53)
- HG 78, *Partenope* (HWV 27): Exs 5.7 (*L'amor ed il destin*, bb. 4–18) and 5.13 (*Voglio amare*, bb. 16–31)
- HG 80, *Ezio* (HWV 29): Exs 5.24 (*Caro padre*, bb. 20–32), 5.25 (*Finchè un zeffiro save*, bb. 12–23 and 32–35), and 5.27 (*Ah! non son io che parlo*)
- HG 81, *Sosarme* (HWV 30): Exs 5.32 (*Padre, germano, e sposo*) and 5.33 (*Vola l'augello*, bb. 1–18)
- HG 83, *Arianna* (HWV 32): Ex. 5.37 (*Sdegno amore*, bb. 15–42 and 62–79)
- HG 86, *Alcina* (HWV 34): Ex. 5.41 (*Ah! mio cor*, bb. 16–47)
- HG 87, *Atalanta* (HWV 35): Ex. 5.44 (*Al varco, oh pastori!*, bb. 8–27)
- HG 89, *Arminio* (HWV 36): Exs 5.22 (*Al furor, che ti consiglia*, bb. 31–47), 5.49 (*Scaglian amore e sangue*, bb. 1–30), and 5.52 (*Ho veleno, e ferro avanti*)
- HG 88, *Giustino* (HWV 37): Ex. 5.54 (*Mio dolce amato sposo*, bb. 10–18)
- HG 41, *Esther* (HWV 50b): Ex. 6.3 (*Who calls my parting soul*)
- HG 29, *Deborah* (HWV 51): Ex. 6.5 (*In Jehovah's awful sight*)
- HG 12, *Alexander's Feast* (HWV 75): Exs 6.10 (*With ravish'd ears*, bb. 25–68), 6.12 (*He chose a mournful muse*), and 6.13 (*He sung Darius, great and good*, bb. 13–37)
- HG 24, *Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità* (HWV 46): Exs 6.15 (1707 setting of *Un pensiero nemico di pace*, bb. 20–28), 6.16 (1737 setting of *Un pensiero nemico di pace*, bb. 1–13), and 6.18 (*Venga il tempo*)



## Appendix A: Recorded Portfolio Tracklisting

Online access to the recorded portfolio:

<https://soundcloud.com/user-512442604/sets/la-strada-recorded-portfolio>

1. Antonio Vivaldi: *La verità in cimento* – Solo quella guancia bella (I/3, Rosane) 2:35
2. Domenico Sarro: *Tito Sempronio Gracco* – Se veglia, se dorme (I/2, Erminia) 4:42
3. Leonardo Leo: *Zenobia in Palmira* – Placarti dovresti (I/6, Aspasia) 1:23
4. Leo: *Zenobia in Palmira* – Quando irato il Ciel s’oscura (II/11, Aspasia) 4:00
5. G. F. Handel: *Partenope* – Io ti levo l’impero dell’armi (I/11, Partenope) 5:37
6. Handel: *Partenope* – Voglio amare (II/3, Partenope) 6:57
7. Handel: *Giulio Cesare* (1730 revival) – Parolette, vezzi e sguardi (I/7, Cleopatra) 4:52
8. Handel: *Poro* – Se il Ciel mi divide (II/8, Cleofide) 5:43
9. Handel: *Sosarme* – Oh diva hecate (I/11 recitative, Elmira) 0:21
10. Handel: *Sosarme* – Dite pace (I/11, Elmira) 5:34
11. Handel: *Athalia* – Through the land (first setting; II/1, Josabeth) 7:37
12. Handel: *Alcina* – Ah! Ruggiero crudel (II/13 recitative, Alcina) 2:43
13. Handel: *Alcina* – Ombre pallide (II/13, Alcina) 6:09
14. Handel: *Atalanta* – Custodite, o dolci sogni (III/5, Atalanta) 1:21
15. Handel: *Berenice* – Nò, che servire altrui (I/2, Berenice) 4:33

Performers:

Judit Zsovár – soprano

Fanni Edőcs – harpsichord

Recorded in Budapest in 2015.





# Appendix B1

## Domenico Sarro: *Tito Sempronio Gracco* (Naples 1725)

### Se veglia, se dorme l'amante suo core (I/2 Erminia) – Full Score

Andante

Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Violas  
Erminia  
Violoncellos

8

Vlins. 1  
Vlins. 2  
Vlas.  
E.  
Vlcs.

Se ve - glia se dor - me l'a - man - te suo

*p* senza cembalo

15

Vlins. 1  
Vlins. 2  
Vlas.  
E.  
Vlcs.

co - re te - ne - re for - me lan - gui - sce d'a - mo

22

Vlins. 1  
Vlins. 2  
Vlas.  
E.  
Vlcs.

re, so - spi - ra per te.

30 *p*

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

Se ve - glia, — se dor - me, — l'a - man - te mio

Vlcs. *p*

37 *tr*

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

co - re con te - ne - re for - me — lan - gui - sce d'a - mo - re, — so - spi - ra, — lan - gui - sce, — so -

Vlcs. *p*

*più piano*

44 *f*

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

spi - ra per te, — so - spi - ra per te.

Vlcs. *f*

52 *p* *f* *p*

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

||

Vlcs. *p*

60

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

sog-no mi app-res - ta quel be - ne che spe - ro, poi l'al - ba mi des - ta e

Vlcs.

66

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

scor - go che ve - ro quel be - ne non è, poi l'al

Vlcs.

72

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

ba mi des - ta, e scor - go che ve - ro quel be - ne non

Vlcs.

78

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

E.

è, quel be - ne, quel be - ne non è.

Vlcs.

*Da capo*



## Appendix B2

### Leonardo Leo: *Zenobia in Palmira* (Naples 1725)

#### Vuoi ch'io parta (I/8 Aspasia) – Full Score

**Larghetto e cantabile**

Violins 1  
Violins 2  
Violas  
Aspasia  
Violoncello

Vuoi ch'io par - ta? par - ti -

**Presto**

Vins. 1  
Vins. 2  
Vlas.  
A.  
Vlc.

rò, vuoi ch'io re-sti? re - ste - rò, ma ven-det ta io vo da

**Largo**

Vins. 1  
Vins. 2  
Vlas.  
A.  
Vlc.

te io vo da te. Vuoi ch'io par-ta? Vuoi ch'io re-sti? Par - ti -

**Presto**

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.   
 rò, re - ste-rò, re - ste - rò, ma ven - det ta io vo da te, ven-

Vlc.

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.   
 det ta io vo da te, io vo da te.

Vlc.

**Fine**

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.   
 Vuoi tu a - mo-re, vuoi tu af-fet-to? sò che ar - dir tu chiu-di in pet - to, sò che in sen tu van-ti fè,

Vlc.

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.   
 tu van ti, in sen tu van - ti fè.

Vlc.

## Appendix B3

### Leonardo Leo: *Zenobia in Palmira* (Naples 1725)

#### Quando irato il Ciel s'oscura (II/11 Aspasia) – Full Score

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Aspasia

Violoncellos

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.

Vlcs.

6

7 6

8

*p*

*p*

*p*

Quan - do i ra

12

*p*

*p*

*p*

*sotto voce*

*arpegg.*

*sotto voce*

to il Ciel s'o - scu - ra dop - po il tuo - no ed il ba - le - no più se - re - no,

*p*

*piano assai*

19

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.

Vlcs.

6 6 6

più se - re - no, più se - re - no si fa - rà, si fa - rà.

25

Vlns. 1 *p*

Vlns. 2 *p*

Vlas. *p*

A. *p*

Quan-do i-ra to il Ciel s'o - scu - ra dop - po il

Vlcs. *p*

30

Vlns. 1 *p*

Vlns. 2 *p*

Vlas.

A.

tuo - no ed il ba - le no più se - re - no, più se - re - no si fa -

Vlcs.

35

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A. *tr* *tr*

rà, più se - re - no si fa - rà, si fa - rà.

Vlcs. 4-3

41

Vlns. 1

Vlns. 2

Vlas.

A.

E se vuol la mia sven - tu - ra che in pro - cel - le

Vlcs. 6 7 4



46

Vlins. 1

Vlins. 2

Vlas.

A.

sia quest' al - ma pre-sto in cal - ma, pre-sto in cal-ma tor-ne - rà,

Vlcs.

52

Vlins. 1

*sotto voce*

Vlins. 2

Vlas.

A.

pre-sto in cal - ma tor-ne-rà.

Vlcs.

*piano assai*



## Appendix C: Strada's London Season Schedules

<b>Work</b>	<b>1729/30 King's Theatre</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Lotario</i>	2 December 1729	10	Adelaide
<i>Giulio Cesare</i> rev.	17 January 1730	9	Cleopatra
<i>Partenope</i>	24 February 1730	7	Partenope
<i>Giulio Cesare</i> rev. Strada's benefit(s)	21 and 31 March 1730	2	Cleopatra
<i>Ormisda</i>	4 April 1730	14	Arsenice
<i>Tolomeo</i> rev.	19 May 1730	7	Seleuce

<b>Work</b>	<b>1730/31 King's Theatre</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Scipione</i> rev.	3 November 1730	6	Berenice
<i>Ormisda</i> rev.	24 November 1730	5	Arsenice
<i>Partenope</i> rev.	12 December 1730	7	Partenope
<i>Venceslao</i>	12 January 1731	4	Erenice
<i>Poro</i>	2 February 1731	16	Cleofide
<i>Rinaldo</i> rev.	6 April 1731	6/7	Almirena
<i>Rodelinda</i> rev.	4 May 1731	8	Rodelinda

<b>Work</b>	<b>1731/32 King's Theatre</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Tamerlano</i> rev.	13 November 1731	3	Asteria
<i>Poro</i> rev.	23 November 1731	4	Cleofide
<i>Admeto</i> rev.	7 December 1731	6/7	Alceste
<i>Ezio</i>	15 January 1732	5	Fulvia
<i>Giulio Cesare</i> rev.	1 February 1732	4	Cleopatra
<i>Sosarme</i>	15 February 1732	11	Elmira
<i>Ariosti: Coriolano</i> rev.	25 March 1732	5	Volunnia
<i>Flavio</i> rev.	18 April 1732	4	Emilia
<i>Esther</i>	2 May 1732	6	Esther
<i>Lucio Papirio dittatore</i>	23 May 1732	4	Papiria
<i>Acis and Galatea</i> rev.	10 June 1732	4	Galatea

<b>Work</b>	<b>1732/33 King's Theatre</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Catone</i>	4 November 1732	4/5	Marzia
<i>Alessandro</i> rev.	25 November 1732	6	Rossane
<i>Acis and Galatea</i> rev.	5 December 1732	4	Galatea
<i>Tolomeo</i> rev.	2 January 1733	4	Seleuce
<i>Orlando</i>	27 January 1733	6	Angelica
<i>Deborah</i>	17 March 1733	6 (one without Strada)	Deborah
<i>Esther</i>	17 April 1733	2	Esther
<i>Orlando</i>	21 April 1733	4	Angelica
<i>Esther</i>	5 July 1733, at Oxford	2	Esther
<i>Athalia</i>	10 July 1733, at Oxford	2	Josabeth
<i>Acis and Galatea</i> rev.	11 July 1733, at Oxford	1	Galatea
<i>Deborah</i>	12 July 1733, at Oxford	1	Deborah

<b>Work</b>	<b>1733/34 Covent Garden</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Semiramide riconosciuta</i>	30 October 1733	4	Tamiri
<i>Ottone rev.</i>	13 November 1733	4	Teofane
<i>Caio Fabricio</i>	4 December 1733	4	Sestia
<i>Arbace</i>	5 January 1734	9	Mandane
<i>Arianna in Creta</i>	26 January 1734	16	Arianna
<i>Il Parnasso in festa</i>	13 March 1734	4	Clio
<i>Deborah rev.</i>	1 April 1734	3	Deborah
<i>Sosarme rev.</i>	27 April 1734	3	Elmira
<i>Acis and Galatea rev.</i>	7 May 1734	1	Galatea
<i>Il pastor fido</i>	18 May 1734	9	Erato, Amarilli

<b>Work</b>	<b>1734/35 Covent Garden</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Il pastor fido</i>	9 November 1734	5	Erato, Amarilli
<i>Arianna in Creta</i>	27 November 1734	5	Arianna
<i>Oreste</i>	18 December 1734	3	Ermione
<i>Ariodante</i>	8 January 1735	11	Ginevra
<i>Esther</i>	5 March 1735	6	Esther
<i>Deborah</i>	16 March 1735	3	Deborah
<i>Athalia</i>	1 April 1735	5	Josabeth
<i>Alcina</i>	16 April 1735	18	Alcina

<b>Work</b>	<b>1735/36 Covent Garden</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
<i>Alexander's Feast (&amp; Cecilia volgi)</i>	19 February 1736	5	Soprano
<i>Acis and Galatea rev.</i>	24 March 1736	2	Galatea
<i>Esther</i>	7 April 1736	2	Esther
<i>Ariodante</i>	5 May 1736	2	Ginevra
<i>Atalanta</i>	12 May 1736	8	Atalanta

<b>Work</b>	<b>1736/37 Covent Garden</b>	<b>Number of performances</b>	<b>Role</b>
Private concert at the Swan Tavern	7 October 1736	1	—
<i>Alcina</i>	6 November 1736	3	Alcina
<i>Atalanta</i>	20 November 1736	2	Atalanta
<i>Poro</i>	8 December 1736	4	Cleofide
<i>Arminio</i>	12 January 1737	6	Tusnelda
<i>Partenope</i>	29 January 1737	4	Partenope
<i>Giustino</i>	16 February 1737	9	Arianna
<i>Il Parnasso in festa</i>	9 March 1737	1	Clio
<i>Alexander's Feast</i>	16 March 1737	4	Soprano
<i>Il trionfo del Tempo e della Verità</i>	23 March 1737	4	Bellezza
<i>Esther</i>	6 April 1737	2	Esther
<i>Didone abbandonata</i>	13 April 1737	4	Didone
<i>Berenice</i>	18 May 1737	4	Berenice
<i>Alcina</i>	10 June 1737	2	Alcina
<i>Alexander's Feast</i>	25 June 1737	1	Soprano

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