

Production of Opera Pasticcios in Venice in the Early 18th Century

The Impresario's Role

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The impresario¹ played an important role within the complex circuitry of Venetian commercial operatic theaters between the late 17th and early 18th centuries.² Since the impresario's main objective was to earn with the business of music, he, more than anyone else, was sensitive to all the practical requirements in turning an opera into a successful, marketable product. So, he acted as an intermediary between the various professionals involved in the operatic production machine. To investigate the impresario's workshop, we have to get our hands dirty and descend from the heights of art into an underworld made of concrete needs and individual or collective private interests. First of all, to be an impresario means to exercise the art of compromise, an art especially exploited in the theater.

In this respect, the operatic pasticcio could be considered the impresario's product *par excellence*.³ Firstly, the staging of an opera entirely made of pre-existing material was the result of a complex network of agreements among all the agents involved:⁴ a real compromise between those who produced the work, those who realized it, and those

1 About the impresario's 'trade', see in particular, ROSSELLI, 1984; PIPERNO, 1987; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006; STEFANI, 2015.

2 See IVANOVICH, 1681; GIAZOTTO, 1967a; GIAZOTTO, 1967b; GIAZOTTO, 1969; MANGINI, 1974; ZORZI, 1977; MANCINI et al., 1995-1996; TALBOT, 2002; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007; ROSAND, 2013; ANNIBALDI, 2017. The Venetian theatrical model, over and above the individual peculiarities, is highly representative of the opera system not only in Italy but also in Europe, also considering that many theatrical agents active abroad had gained significant experience in Venice.

3 The denomination "pasticcio" for this peculiar operatic genre initially had a negative connotation; see PAGANO, 2011, p. 1.

4 See BURAN, 2011, p. 153.

who performed it on the stage. Secondly, the pasticcio is based on the practice of reuse,⁵ one of the basic realities of theatrical life, and not only a commercial one, since ancient times. Everything in the theater is based on the idea of reuse: the daily realities of theatrical life consists of achieving the maximum results with minimum effort, in spite of the principle of originality so close to our modern sensitivity. Think of scenography.⁶ Each opera theater's warehouse was equipped with scenes, effects, and machines *di dotazione*⁷ regularly reused with just a few modifications, or even with no adjustments at all. This was permitted by the serial nature of subjects: codified scenic typologies were replicated from one opera to another.⁸ Something similar also applies to arias. The recurrence of similar feelings and dramaturgical situations determined the standardization of textual and musical themes and forms, paving the way for the codification of multivalent arias. Consequently, these arias, superimposable in literary, musical, and rhetorical terms, were interchangeable and more or less easy to substitute.⁹

The pasticcio's practice was functional to those, such as the impresario, who had to run a very expensive enterprise made of an abundance of resources and a company of numerous and various professionals. From this perspective, the production of pasticcios or more generally patched-up operas¹⁰ was 'vital' since it allowed significant energy savings. It benefitted everybody: the impresario could face the pressing rhythms of the opera business by quickly offering 'novelties' capable of mortgaging the success,¹¹ and the singers who did not have to constantly learn and refine new pieces (time allocated for rehearsals was often very short), and who were also provided the opportunity to push themselves forward by displaying all the strong pieces of their repertoire. Librettists

5 See, in particular CROSS, 1978; BURAN, 2011; SARDELLI, 2011.

6 See PIPERNO, 1987, p. 27; VIALE FERRERO, 1988, p. 9; BAKER, 2013, p. 27; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006, pp. 271f.; ROSAND, 2013, pp. 169f.

7 About the definition of *dotazione*, see POVOLEDO, 1975a.

8 See POVOLEDO, 1975b, pp. 440f.; ROSAND, 2013, pp. 168-170. See also the article by DIANA BLICHMANN in the present volume, p. 128.

9 See STROHM, 1982, p. 41; BURAN, 2011, pp. 154, 161f. So satirized Pier Jacopo Martello: "But tell me, which remedy could you find if, in place of an aria of scorn previously located in the opera, you must overlay another one that was previously an aria of love, and now it is going to be arranged with scornful words? The original composer, if he is not a slob, must have made the notes suitable to the first expression, so that they cannot be adaptable to the second one." ("Ma dimmi, e qual ripiego troverai tu se in luogo di un'aria di sdegno, che vi era già collocata, un'altra vi si dee porre che era d'amore e che di sdegnose parole vuol rivestirsi? Se non è stato un gaglioffo il compositore di quella musica, avrà adattate le note a quella prima espressione tal che non riusciran poi adattabili alla seconda.") MARTELLO, 1714, p. 291.

10 About the concepts of 'pasticcio' and 'patched-up opera', see the remarks by POLIN, 2011, pp. 336-339.

11 "The pasticcio was an obvious answer to the demand for novelty in the opera house." CROSS, 1978, p. 429. And see BURAN, 2011, p. 154.

and composers also saved time¹² and money. We know that the fee of a professional poet assigned the task of patching together a libretto, or the honorarium of a composer called to connect old arias with new recitatives by creating appropriate musical passages¹³ was relatively modest. For example, a set of documents discovered by Micky White and Michael Talbot has shown that the Venetian musician Giuseppe Boniventi who was charged with refining the pasticcio *La ninfa infelice e fortunata* (1723) earned 10 sequins,¹⁴ whereas Vivaldi, as we well know, expected 100 sequins for a new opera at the Teatro San Cassiano.¹⁵

Surely, in this productive context the singers played an important role.¹⁶ It was they who often demanded the integration of their bravura arias into operas.¹⁷ Usually, the more famous they were, the more exorbitant their demands. Frequently, it is not simply

12 In the preface (“Autore a chi legge”) introducing his play *La donna bizzarra*, Carlo Goldoni writes: “Sometimes, authors have to use their suitcase, in a similar manner as composers, especially when they are pressured and overburdened with work”. (“Qualche volta gli autori sono costretti a valersi del loro *baule*, come fanno i Maestri di Musica, specialmente quando sono eglino pressati e affollati.”) GOLDONI, 1763, p. 1159.

13 See PITARRESI, 2011, p. 169; SARDELLI, 2012, p. L.

14 I-Vas, “Giudici del Mobile”, “Domande per fermar, per chiedere sequestro cautelativo e sentenza contro il debitore”, “Domande”, b. 75, no. 2, cit. in TALBOT/WHITE, 2014, pp. 45f. This opera, a patched-up version of *La ninfa riconosciuta* by Francesco Silvani (1709), was staged at the Teatro Dolfìn in Treviso in autumn 1723.

15 See the famous letter from Antonio Vivaldi to Guido Bentivoglio, dated 3 November 1736, in WHITE 2013, p. 220.

16 See DURANTE/PIPERNO, 1988; BURAN, 2011, pp. 143, 155-158. For a profile of opera singers, I refer to two fundamental essays: DURANTE, 1987; ROSSELLI, 1992.

17 The attitude sometimes capricious of certain opera singers laid itself open to lampoon. So argued Pier Jacopo Martello: “Cheer up and substitute passable arias for bad ones: who cares if male or female singers want that your *recitativo* is followed by an aria related to their previous successes in Milan, Venice, Genoa or elsewhere, which still is far from the feeling that was expected to be expressed? Let them put it inside, or else you see everyone reproaching you by their deafening soprano and alto voices. The best that can ever happen to you is making them accept notes less distant from your feeling, that is a very hard job.” (“Fatti ben animo a cangiar l’arie non cattive in cattive: se un musico o se una musica vorranno al piè di un tuo recitativo conficcarne una che abbia guadagnato loro l’applauso in Milano, in Vinegia, in Genova o altrove, e sia pur lontana dal sentimento, lo quale dovrebbe ivi esprimersi, che importa? Lasciala lor metter dentro, altrimenti te li vedrai tutti addosso trafiggerti le tempie con soprani e contralti rimproveri. Il meglio che ti possa accadere sarà il ridurli a capitolar che ti si permetta lo stirare su quelle note parole men discordanti dal tuo sentimento, nel qual caso t’intralcerai in un impegno spinoso.”) MARTELLO, 1714, pp. 290f.

a matter of caprice: in many cases, they introduced an original and intelligent proposal which added value to the opera.¹⁸

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to absolutize or overemphasize the role of singers in the pasticcio workshop. If it is true that they were principally responsible for the acquisition of pre-existing arias, it can be assumed that it was usually up to impresarios and theatrical managers more generally to choose to produce a pasticcio (and anyway, this matter must be assessed on a case-by-case basis).¹⁹

After all, the extent of the singer's role needs to be considered in a more articulated system of relations ultimately linked to the expectation of the public.²⁰ The protectors of the singers,²¹ for example, belonged to this network. They operated behind the scenes and often maneuvered their *protégés* as pawns in the context of diplomatic strategies from above.²² In the business of Venetian operatic theaters, the singers were part of a complex system of production composed not only just of impresarios, but also of the owners of the opera houses (in Venice, they often coincided with the impresarios themselves),²³ the protectors of the theaters,²⁴ and even the *carattadori*. The latter, almost completely ignored by the bibliography, were external investors who exerted a decisive influence in the circuit of the commercial theaters, since they contributed with one share (one *caratto*) to the financing of the operatic season of each opera house.²⁵ Their economic support offered a little more assurance about enterprises often destined for bankruptcy, or who at best achieved a balanced budget.²⁶ Numerous sources attested

18 See DURANTE/PIPERNO, 1988, pp. 555-558.

19 See STROHM, 2010.

20 See DURANTE/PIPERNO, 1988, p. 558.

21 These figures were ridiculed by lampoon; in the famous *Il teatro alla moda* (1720), the Venetian nobleman and musician Benedetto Marcello devoted a separate section of his pamphlet to the female singers' protectors: MARCELLO, 1720, pp. 59f.

22 See ROSSELLI, 1992, chapter "Musicians attending".

23 See MANCINI et al., 1995-1996; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006, pp. 3-8.

24 The protectors of the theaters were ridiculed by Benedetto Marcello in the *Il teatro alla moda* (MARCELLO, 1720, p. 46), distinguishing between them and the female singers' protectors (see n. 21). As regards this kind of figures of uncertain identity as well as various types of external finance of opera business: MANCINI et al., 1995-1996, II, p. X; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006, pp. 4, 11f.; STEFANI, 2015, pp. 163f.; ANNIBALDI, 2017, pp. 232-234.

25 The function of the *carattadori* often has been misconstrued by critical literature (according to Remo Giazotto, the *carattadore* is synonymous with *impresario*: GIAZOTTO, 1967a, p. 286). They moved in the background of the opera management; since they were out of sight, their profile is not clear even today (see TALBOT, 1990, pp. 195f.; GLIXON/GLIXON, 2006, pp. 4f., 11, 359). Anyway, the system of the *carattadori* was not exclusive to Venice (see PASTURA RUGGIERO, 1989, pp. 474-476).

26 See PIPERNO, 1987, pp. 24f. As stated concisely by Ivanovich: "The expenses of theater are certain; but the income, since it depends on the whims of fortune, is uncertain." ("Le spese

that the *carattadori* took an active part in the management and artistic decisions used by theaters, sticking up for their financial interests.²⁷

Impresarios often had to start a confrontation with singers and their protectors. The *cliché* of the submissive impresario ready to please singers' caprices, handed down from much satirical literature,²⁸ is only partly true and should be considered on a case-by-case basis. In an unpublished document dated 27 November 1717, the Vicentine Giovanni Orsatto, impresario at the Teatro Sant'Angelo, declared himself "in spite of any contrary agreements, to be the absolute master, since I have the complete freedom to lead my singers and decide for them, both male and female, their roles according to my own concern and the interest of the opera house".²⁹ His despotic claim was triggered by the insubordination of his singers, who threatened not to show up to the theater because of defaulted payments and broken promises by the impresario. That season ended badly for Orsatto: his theater was put under a commissioner by order of the Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci, a magistracy who exercised the power to maintain public order by ensuring the continuation of the opera calendar.³⁰

The document just quoted is very interesting for our purpose since *Il vinto trionfante del vincitore* (RV Anh 58) was staged at the Teatro Sant'Angelo at that time,³¹ previously considered by scholars a probable pasticcio with music partly composed by Antonio Vivaldi.³² So, Orsatto's outpourings were clearly part of the sensitive context of nerve-racking negotiations with the singers, with all their associated claims, favoritisms, permissions or refusals.

Just as there is nothing to prove that *Il vinto trionfante del vincitore* was a pasticcio, we do not know whether or not many other similar operas produced in Venice in

del Teatro sono più che certe; ma gli utili derivando, come s'è detto, dagli scherzi di fortuna sono incerti.") IVANOVICH, 1681, p. 411.

27 See STEFANI, 2015, *passim*.

28 I would draw attention once again, for the sake of brevity, to *Il teatro alla moda*, in which the impresario is very deferent towards *primedonne* and castratos. "Receiving complaints from the singers about their roles, he will satisfy them by expressly ordering the poet and the composer to spoil the drama." ("Ricevendo doglianze da' personaggi intorno alla parte darà un ordine espresso al poeta e al compositor della musica di guastare il dramma a sodisfazione de' sopradetti.") MARCELLO, 1720, p. 47.

29 "Non ostante qualunque pato in contrario d'esser assoluto Patrone, et haver l'intiera libertà di poter disponer et assegnar à Cantanti ogni et qualunque parte tanto alle Donne quanto alli huomini secondo competirà al mio proprio interesse et del Teatro". This is an extrajudicial document recorded in the acts by the Venetian public notary Francesco Maria Bonaldi: I-Vas, "Notarile. Atti", b. 1917, ff. n.n.

30 See I-Vas, "Capi del Consiglio di Dieci", "Notatorio. Filze", b. 42, ff. n.n., by dates 22-25 January 1717 *more veneto* (= 1718).

31 The opening night of the opera was on 22 November 1717; see SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 335f.

32 See RYOM, 1974, p. 148; BELLINA et al., 1982, pp. 118f.; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 335f.

the early 18th century were pasticcios too.³³ The scores of most of them have been lost. The librettos, for their part, often do not give us much information. It is not rare to find librettos in which operas created by multiple hands are attributed to just one author. Conversely, it is not easy to discover which composers were hidden behind the wording “music by different authors” (“musica di vari autori”), and the like.

In the absence of musical sources or more precise information from the librettos, we might, with luck, find sources of another type. In this respect, an emblematic episode was documented by the scholars Beth Glixon and Micky White.³⁴

Venice, Teatro Sant’Angelo, autumn 1705. Girolamo Polani was commissioned by the impresarios Giovanni Orsatto and Sebastiano Ricci to compose *Creso tolto alle fiamme*, which was to be the first production of the forthcoming season.³⁵ Generally, if an opera had to be staged in the autumn, its music was supposed to be ready by the end of the summer. Polani was severely behind schedule. At some point, the composer asked Vivaldi for a hand. The Red Priest was then a mere violin teacher at the Ospedale della Pietà. He was unknown in the Venetian operatic system.³⁶ Vivaldi not only composed all the recitatives for Polani but also many arias and ensembles: 41, to be exact.³⁷ So, thanks to the help of Vivaldi the opera was finished and eventually put on stage on 5 December 1705.³⁸ Better late than never. It was probably the impresarios Orsatto and Ricci who engaged Vivaldi as a ghost writer to help Polani. But if we did not possess this set of judicial acts found by Glixon and White, we could not have known that the Red Priest had composed most of the music for *Creso*. In Venetian catalogues this opera has been attributed to Polani.³⁹ Who knows how many operatic scores for Venetian theaters were by Vivaldi before his official debut as composer in 1713; and who knows how much music not registered in catalogues was composed by other authors? In short, who knows how many collaborative compositions were produced in Venice in this time frame?

For now, we have to content ourselves with a few known collaborative compositions. Some of the basic processes employed in this kind of production were similar to

33 After all, it was only later that the pasticcio acquired its own precise definition as an independent genre and earned a degree of artistic respectability, and not only in Venice.

34 See GLIXON/WHITE, 2008. And see STEFANI, 2015, pp. 139-143.

35 See SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 269.

36 As we all know, his official debut as an opera composer took place much later, in 1713, when he staged *Ottone in villa* (RV 729), on a libretto by Domenico Lalli, in Vicenza at the Teatro di Piazza or delle Garzerie. He produced his first Venetian opera in the autumn of the same year, when he set *Orlando furioso* (RV Anh. 84) at the Teatro di Sant’Angelo.

37 I-Vas, “Giudici del mobile”, “Domande per fermar, per chiedere sequestro cautelativo e sentenza contro il debitore”, “Domande”, b. 68, fasc. 56, no. 350, 26 February 1705 *more veneto* (= 1706), in GLIXON/WHITE, 2008, p. 11.

38 See TALBOT, 2008, p. 21, n. 2.

39 See BONLINI, 1730, p. 147; GROppo, 1745, no. 401; WIEL, 1897, p. 10; SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 6917.

those of pasticcios. Although it is not a pasticcio, *Creso* falls into the category of the so-called ‘collaborative compositions’.⁴⁰ So, its case study can serve our purpose.

In fact, the diverse authorship could be the trace of the presence of a pasticcio. It is significant, in this respect, that the majority of the operas set by *vari autori* is related to the minor Venetian theaters. If the operas produced by the prestigious Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo are attributed to few authors (such as the dominant figure of Carlo Francesco Pollarolo), a great number of hybrid operas resulting from the cooperation of multiple anonymous composers were ascribed to the low-budget Teatro San Fantin.

This is a very small opera house endowed with only a few boxes.⁴¹ Making money out of opera was difficult even for the bigger Venetian opera houses, let alone for a tiny theater able to sell no more than a handful or two of tickets. In the early 18th century, the San Fantin was managed by a company of shareholders who helped each other to recoup the expenses.⁴² Producing an opera was very expensive. Singers were especially expensive, but at the same time they were indispensable for the success of operatic productions. The only strategy available to economize on the costs of the librettist and composer was to produce hybrid operas based on recycled librettos and scores arranged with the singers’ suitcase arias or ensembles borrowed from here and there (in a market not yet regulated by any copyright). It was also a way to economize on singers: since they didn’t have to learn new arias, they certainly took lower fees. Even if the scores of *Il Pericle in Samo* (1701),⁴³ *La Fillirosa* (1706),⁴⁴ *Il trionfo dell’innocenza* (1707)⁴⁵ and *L’Erginia imascherata* (1710)⁴⁶ are unknown, we can imagine that they must, by necessity, have been patched-up operas, the result of an intelligent mix-and-match process for the sake of economy. In the foreword “Al lettore” of the libretto of one of these operas, *Il Pericle in Samo*, the impresarios recommended that the audience not make comparisons with the productions of the Venetian major theaters, since there were not the same elaborate texts, magnificent scenography or the best singers.⁴⁷ It’s a rhetorical device

40 For the definition of ‘collaborative compositions’: BOYD, 2001-2002.

41 This theater was defined a *teatro domestico* (SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 244). Regarding the San Fantin: MANCINI et al., 1995-1996, II, p. 130.

42 See SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 250, n. 49. The dedication of the libretto related to one of the first operas staged at this theater, *Il Pericle in Samo* (1701), was signed by “The shareholders of the San Fantin opera” (“Gl’interessati nell’Opera di S. Fantino”).

43 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 18540; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 248.

44 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 10311; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 271f.

45 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 23738; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 275.

46 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 9084; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 298f.

47 “Your eye, used to seeing eminent scenes and *décor*, your ear imbued with the singing of the best *virtuosi*, and your mind nurtured by elaborate poems, will not be satisfied in comparison with so different models”. (“Il tuo occhio avezzo à vedere Scene, & comparse, riguardevoli, la tua orecchia imbevuta de canti de primi Cigni, & la tua mente pasciuta de Poemi laborati, non potrà in paragoni sì differenti rimaner sodisfatta.”) *Il Pericle in Samo*, p. 5.

like many you can read in other operatic librettos, of course; but I doubt that *Il Pericle in Samo* was one of the best operas in Venice. We know, for example, that the traveler Joseph Addison criticized the acting of the singers in that opera, whereas he did not refer to music⁴⁸ (maybe because it was recycled music that it was not worth speaking about).

Another theater producing a good number of operas by multiple hands was the Teatro Sant'Angelo.⁴⁹ This was a peculiar theater in terms of its organizational structure. It was the property of several patrician families. These different families gave the management of their theater to impresarios on an annual contract. They were often aided by patrons or companies of shareholders. It was a flexible and dynamic management style which made the Sant'Angelo an interesting laboratory of ideas catering for the contemporary market. Whereas the Grimani had the dignity and the prestige of their own theaters at heart, the *pro tempore* impresarios at the Sant'Angelo aimed simply to make money. Besides, they used to experiment to counter the lack of resources. On the one hand they had to economize on the productions, and on the other they had to produce a tempting item which would sell tickets (the Teatro Sant'Angelo was not as small as the San Fantin, but it had far fewer boxes than the San Giovanni Grisostomo or San Cassiano).⁵⁰ Early 18th-century productions like *L'oracolo in sogno*⁵¹ and *Rosane, imperatrice degli Assirii*⁵² were revivals of operas already staged.⁵³ Impresarios produced them because these kinds of operas provided not only an economic advantage (since they allowed them to cut back on the expenses of the librettist, composer, and sometimes singers too); but also because they provided a sufficient safety margin for their success. In fact, since they were revivals of operas which had earned applause before,⁵⁴ one hoped that they would be successful again.

In particular, the case of *L'oracolo in sogno* is very interesting since it provides an opportunity to reflect on some working hypotheses about the impresario's strategy behind multiple authorship. The *Oracolo* was the revival of a three-party opera composed by Antonio Caldara, Antonio Quintavalle and Carlo Francesco Pollarolo (Mantua, 1699).⁵⁵ The impresarios of the Sant'Angelo at this time, Tomaso Malipiero and Giulio

48 See SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 1997, pp. 191-194, 198f.; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 248.

49 As regards this theater: GIAZOTTO, 1967b, pp. 476-491; ZORZI et al., 1971, *passim*; MANGINI, 1974, pp. 73-76 and 132-139; MANCINI et al., 1995-1996, pp. 3-62; TALBOT, 2002; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, *passim*; STEFANI, 2015, *passim*.

50 The Teatro Sant'Angelo had about 30 boxes for five tiers (see MANCINI, 1995-1996, II, pp. 14-16), against 33 larger boxes per tier at the San Giovanni Grisostomo (IBID., p. 63) and 31 also large boxes per tier at the San Cassiano (IBID., I, p. 97).

51 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 17127; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 241f.

52 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 20149; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 244f.

53 The first one is the revival of the homonymous opera staged in Mantua on 6 June 1699, with an almost identical cast (see SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 17126), whereas the second was set in the Sant'Angelo during the previous season (IBID., no. 20148).

54 It is useful to re-read the testimony by Martello, n. 17.

55 See SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 241.

Franchini,⁵⁶ had judiciously ordered a collaborative composition midway between tradition and novelty. On the one hand, they had engaged two composers who were known and well-loved in Venice: Caldara, who composed the first act, and Pollarolo senior, author of the third and last act (also the most important).⁵⁷ On the other hand, they had gambled on a novice in Venice like Quintavalle for the second act. Probably, this opera didn't have the success that was expected (I have found a considerable number of judicial documents related to the financial troubles of Malipiero-Franchini's management of the theater in that season).⁵⁸ In fact, Antonio Quintavalle would never again appear on the stage in Venice, an indication that his music failed to please the audience sufficiently. We can assume that *L'oracolo in sogno* was a sort of popularity test for Quintavalle. Among the collaborative compositions' functions, such as the pasticcios' ones, was to carefully launch unknown composers. The debut of a new composer was a risk that the prudent Venetian market could ill afford. Provincial theaters⁵⁹ were often a testing-ground for librettists, composers, singers, and even impresarios.

In general, at that time pasticcios were also related to the secondary theaters or to the opera houses whose availability of capital was lower.⁶⁰ It is not by chance that the 'pasticcio practice', often assigned to an obscure and unskilled musical craftsman,⁶¹ was cautiously anonymous.⁶² An exception to this is *Nerone fatto Cesare* (RV 724), a production at the Sant'Angelo in 1715.⁶³ Significantly, it was produced by the impresario Antonio Vivaldi. As is well known, he had the characteristics of both the professional musician and the unscrupulous businessman. It is not by chance perhaps that the producer of that pasticcio was Vivaldi. The Red Priest had rented the Teatro Sant'Angelo in partnership with his father Giovan Battista for two years since the autumn of 1713.⁶⁴ During his management he acted more like an impresario than a composer: in fact, he put his desire for operatic success before his own musical ideas.⁶⁵ After all, he worked

56 See STEFANI, 2015, pp. 132f.

57 See STROHM, 1982, p. 37.

58 I will account for these sources in another context.

59 See CATTIN et al., 1985.

60 See TALBOT/WHITE, 2014, pp. 51f.

61 See PIPERNO, 1987, p. 31.

62 See STROHM, 2010, p. 66.

63 See BELLINA et al., 1982, pp. 79f.; STROHM, 1982, p. 41; SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 16429; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 321f.; STROHM, 2008, I, pp. 154-159.

64 In the foreword "Al lettore" of the libretto of *Lucio Papirio* (p. 7), produced at the Sant'Angelo for carnival 1715, Vivaldi declared: "For two years now, I have been at the service of your entertainment at this Theater" ("Due anni finalmente hò servito al tuo divertimento nel Teatro"). For a documented reconstruction of Vivaldi's activity as impresario of the Sant'Angelo during the seasons 1713-1714 and 1714-1715 see WHITE, 2013, pp. 95-130.

65 See DURANTE/PIPERNO, 1988, pp. 554f. and STROHM, 1982, p. 13. The fact that Vivaldi cared a lot about the response of the audience is attested by his writing at the top of the manuscript of the third aria composed by him for the seventh scene of the third act of

to earn money. Since he had to follow the complex production processes of his theater, he often preferred not to compose, and rather entrusted someone else with the task of composing the operas of the season. Sometimes he partially composed the operas, or decided to recycle old works, his own or those of others, thanks to an obscure, handcrafted process of adaptation.⁶⁶

In autumn of the 1714-1715 season,⁶⁷ Vivaldi composed *Orlando finto pazzo* (RV 727)⁶⁸ on a text by Grazio Bracciolini, while simultaneously reworking *Orlando furioso* (RV Anh. 84),⁶⁹ a revival of the opera by Bracciolini himself with music by Giovanni Alberto Ristori which had been staged at the Sant'Angelo the previous year, and to which Vivaldi now, at least in part, recomposed with his own music.⁷⁰ For the following carnival, Vivaldi produced *Lucio Papirio* with music by Luca Antonio Predieri and a text by Antonio Salvi,⁷¹ as well as *Nerone fatto Cesare*, the last opera of that season. Four operas in all: a remarkable number, since Venetian theaters generally staged only two or three productions in one season.⁷² We should not imagine that the success of a theater depended on the number of operas produced. It was quite the reverse.⁷³ When an opera worked, the impresarios generally let it run on stage for the whole season; but in cases of failure, they substituted the opera with an alternative. And so, it was probably under Vivaldi's management.

After Christmas, *Orlando furioso* was staged:⁷⁴ this revival was soon replaced by *Lucio Papirio*.⁷⁵ A positive judgment on the latter was expressed by the traveler Johann

Orlando finto pazzo (1714): "If the audience does not like this opera, I do not want to compose music anymore." ("Se questa non piace non voglio più scrivere di Musica.") I-Tn, Giordano 38, fol. 174r, cit. in RYOM, 1994, p. 5.

- 66 See STROHM, 1982. Regarding modalities and techniques of self-borrowing by Vivaldi, see SARDELLI, 2012. See also KROPPINGER, 1984; RYOM, 1994; BURAN, 2011; VIVIANI, 2018.
- 67 To know more about opera production during the second season managed by Vivaldi: STROHM, 2008, I, pp. 122-159.
- 68 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 17486; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 317f.
- 69 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 17488; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 318; STROHM, 2008, I, pp. 122-141.
- 70 To know more about *Orlando*: BRIZI, 1982.
- 71 See SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 14440; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 320.
- 72 So wrote Ivanovich: "There is entertainment, lasting a few hours, every night, at several theaters with a range of operas, two for each theater, in order to entertain more." ("Ogni sera v'è trattenimento di più ore, in più Teatri con varietà di Opere, che per allettar maggiormente, sogliono comparire due per Teatro.") IVANOVICH, 1681, p. 378.
- 73 TALBOT, 2002, p. 25.
- 74 The opening night of the opera was on 26 December 1714; see SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 318.
- 75 The opera premiered on 12 January 1715; see IBID., p. 320.

Friedrich Armand von Uffenbach.⁷⁶ He judged the music pleasant and praised the violin performance by Vivaldi. Nevertheless, the opera did not achieve the expected success.⁷⁷ It is likely that the faults indirectly highlighted by Uffenbach in his description of the performance counted for a lot: in short, the somewhat impoverished means at the theater's disposal (stage machinery, orchestra) in comparison with the major rival theaters.⁷⁸ Besides that, we know that the Bolognese Predieri, a novice in Venice, would not appear on the Venetian stages again until 1731.⁷⁹ Finally, we know that the text of the heroic-tragic drama bored the audience to death: in fact, in the foreword to the libretto written for the subsequent opera staged at the theater, the producers assured the audience that in the new drama there was nothing tediously historical.⁸⁰

In short, *Lucio Papirio* must also have been short-winded. When Vivaldi realized that he was not able to carry out the season because of the under-performance of that opera, he immediately reacted and patched together *Nerone fatto Cesare* as quickly as possible, a pasticcio made of pre-existing arias and maybe of new pieces of his own on the basis of an old libretto by Matteo Noris “adapted to the modern stage by a famous pen” (“ridotto all’uso delle Scene Moderne da penna famosa.”).⁸¹ This pasticcio was not programmed: in fact, the written libretto of *Nerone* was printed in great haste and then published in two different editions without Vivaldi’s signature.⁸² The first edition, which we will call A),⁸³ is characterized by the presence of quite alarming typographical errors,⁸⁴ and offers on the facing title-page a list of thirty-two arias and their respective

76 This famous testimony is quoted (in English translation) in WEISS/TARUSKIN, 2008, p. 200: “I [...] went with several acquaintances to the St. Angelo theater, which is smaller and not so elegant as the one I described earlier [Santi Giovanni e Paolo]. The manager of this theater is the famous Vivaldi, who was also the composer of the opera, which was very good indeed and a fine spectacle too; the machines, however, were not as sumptuous as those at the other theaters, and the orchestra was not as large, but well worth hearing nevertheless.”

77 See STROHM, 1982, p. 41.

78 Cf. n. 76.

79 With *Scipione il giovane*, which premiered on 19 November 1731 at the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo; see SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 426.

80 “There is nothing historical that may bore you” (“Nulla vi hà da annojarti di Storico”): this can be read in the foreword “Al lettore” of the libretto *Nerone fatto Cesare*, p. 3.

81 This is stated in the title page of libretto. “*Nerone fatto Cesare* was a pasticcio-arrangement of the opera by Perti of the same title (of 1693, and then given in many theatres throughout Italy)”, STROHM, 1982, p. 41. To be exact, the original opera premiered at Teatro San Salvador on 27 December 1692, see SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 204.

82 See STROHM, 2008, I, p. 156. By contrast, the libretto *Lucio Papirio* was signed by Vivaldi.

83 A copy of this edition is preserved in I-Vcg, S. ANGELO 119.4.

84 See e.g., on p. 21 of the libretto, “atto terzo” is incorrectly written instead of “atto primo” in the page headings; and besides, the numbering of the thirteenth scene of the second act is repeated twice (pp. 42, 45), etc.

composers.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, there are inconsistencies with the text in the libretto. The list did not include Nerone's aria "Doppio affetto", which is present in the libretto (I,10); on the contrary, there is no evidence in the text of the aria "Cor mio" by Vivaldi which is instead listed on the facing title-page.⁸⁶ Moreover, a second aria by Vivaldi for the eponymous character, indexed in the opening list under the title "Se lascio d'adorare", is registered in the libretto with the morphological variant "Se lascio mai d'amare" (II,16).⁸⁷

Regarding the second edition of the libretto, B),⁸⁸ it is identical to A) except for two variants: it does not include the list of the arias, but there is an extra, unnumbered page at the end of the little volume which lists eight substituted arias and one added piece ("Un altro in Ciel baleni").⁸⁹ Therefore, we can deduce that the publication of B) is subsequent to A): the success of the spectacle was maybe so great, and so many changes occurred during the working process between printing and staging, that it was necessary to print a second edition of the libretto, which is the same but with the addition of an *errata corrigé* (saving time and money in this way).

This turn of events is very meaningful: while waiting on the completion of a new production for the upcoming carnival, Vivaldi produces a revival of a previously successful opera. Unfortunately, the former was more or less a flop. Then, the impresario-musician himself (who, apparently, does not have a plan B) puts in place the one and only solution: to enlist a reviser (maybe the faithful Braccioli)⁹⁰ and let him adapt an old libretto with texts of pre-existing arias,⁹¹ possibly those which have earned applause before and are not known in Venice (either because they were staged elsewhere or because they were produced in the city, but several years earlier and thus being already forgotten at the time of the revival).⁹² Vivaldi himself most likely sets the recitatives to music in order to hold together the hybrid material, as well as composing ensembles by his own hand (twelve arias by him are registered on the facing title-page). The singers do their part: probably, they are mainly responsible for introducing nine new pieces into the libretto B), substituting the arias initially envisaged or being additional to them when the opera was already running. And the result is *Nerone*.

Among its composers there were a few known successes like Antonio Pollarolo, Francesco Gasparini, and Giacomo Antonio Perti; and there was a gamble, Giuseppe Maria Orlandini. And here the pasticcio was once again employed as a trial run, which in this case passed with flying colors: Orlandini would be a regular at the Venetian theaters for many years.

85 On p. 2 of the libretto.

86 See BELLINA et al., 1982, p. 80.

87 See STROHM, 2008, I, p. 158, n. 95.

88 A copy of this edition is preserved at the I-Mb, Racc.dramm.2979.

89 See STROHM, 2008, I, p. 156.

90 See IBID.

91 "Few of the original aria texts of 1693 were retained", IBID.

92 For example, we can find the same process of self-borrowing in the serenatas by Vivaldi; see VIVIANI, 2018, p. 276.

Besides the pieces by the known composers, *Nerone* also includes a few anonymous arias (indicated by the abbreviations N.N. and P.P.),⁹³ and one aria surely brought in by a singer. Concerning this latter point, let me correct a small error. It has been claimed that the bass Antonio Francesco Carli composed an aria, “È la corte un vivo inferno”, for himself as Seneca.⁹⁴ But, as we can read on the facing title-page of libretto A), the composer of that aria was the *quondam* Antonio Carli: *quondam* meaning dead. This problem can be easily explained taking into account that, as Winton Dean informs us,⁹⁵ there were two people named Antonio (Francesco) Carli, a tenor and a bass, probably father and son. This clarifies that “È la corte un vivo inferno” was a suitcase aria which Carli junior had inherited from Carli senior, who was evidently a composer as well as a singer.

About ten years later, in the season of 1725-1726, Vivaldi was working at the Sant’Angelo once again.⁹⁶ He was no longer the impresario, but, nevertheless, he had a great influence on the management of that theater, a situation similar to that of the season of 1720-1721, when he was the musical director of the Sant’Angelo. On that occasion, as is well known, Vivaldi was sarcastically portrayed on the title-page of the pamphlet *Il teatro alla moda*⁹⁷ as a small angel playing a violin, giving time to the oarsman in the boat. The man rowing the boat is Antonio Moretti, the so-called Modotto, the impresario of the theater, a boatman by trade.⁹⁸ The lampoon tells us that Vivaldi had much influence over the impresario Modotto. In the season of 1725-1726 the impresario of Sant’Angelo was no longer Modotto, but a certain Antonio Bisson, or Biscione.⁹⁹ I have not been able to find out what his profession was: in fact, there were a lot of people of this name at that time in Venice, one of whom managed a casino.¹⁰⁰ Whether or not he was a casino owner, Bisson was presumably a professional who did not belong to the operatic environment, just like Modotto. It is therefore only logical that, like Modotto, Bisson trusted in Vivaldi to manage the artistic relationships and the theatrical machine.

Vivaldi’s ‘brand identity’ is clear. The pattern is similar to that of the season of 1714-1715: the theater produced four operas, one for the autumn and three for carnival.¹⁰¹

93 These acronyms stand for *nomen nescio* and maybe (STROHM, 2008, I, p. 158) *persona privata*.

94 See *IBID*, p. 158.

95 See the entry *Carli, Antonio Francesco*, in MACY, 2008, p. 76.

96 See STROHM, 2008, II, pp. 347-363.

97 See MARCELLO, 1720.

98 See MALIPIERO, 1930; STEFANI, 2015, pp. 175f.

99 He signed the dedications of the librettos of two operas staged at the Sant’Angelo during that season: *L’inganno trionfante in amore* (autumn) and *La fede tradita e vendicata* (the third carnival opera).

100 See I-Vas, “Capi del Consiglio di dieci”, b. 43, ff. n.n., by dates 23 December 1719 and 24 December 1721.

101 *L’inganno trionfante in amore* (RV 721), *Turia Lucrezia* (by Antonio Pollarolo/Domenico Lalli), *Cunegonda* (RV 707), *La fede tradita e vendicata* (RV 712).

Among them, *Cunegonda* (RV 707) was certainly an operatic pasticcio:¹⁰² we know that the latter, attributed to Vivaldi,¹⁰³ contained pre-existing pieces by multiple composers,¹⁰⁴ including arias already performed by the rising star Farinelli.¹⁰⁵ In the foreword “Al lettore” to the libretto of that opera we can read these eloquent words: “The scarcity of time and circumstances did not allow for the expurgation of a few arias, so, even though they are unsuited to the scenes, we left them in place in order to satisfy the conveniences of singers.”¹⁰⁶ So, for lack of time and other eventualities correlated to the theatrical routine, the old libretto could not be adjusted to the new dramaturgical context by reconciling the staging exigencies with the singers’ needs: “a rare acknowledgement of the pitfalls of the pasticcio practice”.¹⁰⁷ Once again, the pasticcio was prepared in a great hurry: in that carnival *Cunegonda* was staged between two other productions, *Turia Lucrezia* by Antonio Pollarolo and *La fede tradita e vendicata* by Vivaldi himself. The pattern was the same: *Turia Lucrezia* didn’t please the audience enough (the connoisseur Owen Swiney tells us that the *prima donna*, Costanza Pusterla, had “a small voice”).¹⁰⁸ So, Bisson and Vivaldi put into production a buffer-opera (the pasticcio *Cunegonda*) which would then be substituted for the second opera of carnival (*La fede tradita e vendicata*, currently not yet ready).¹⁰⁹

102 See STROHM, 2008, II, pp. 354-358; SARTORI, 1990-1994, no. 6965; SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 384. This is a revival of *La principessa fedele* with music attributed to Francesco Gasparini and the original libretto by Agostino Piovene (1709): *IBID.*

103 See BONLINI, 1730, p. 200.

104 Among them there was Francesco Gasparini, the author of the music of the original opera: see STROHM, 2008, II, p. 357.

105 “Porpora’s aria ‘Pieno il core’ (II,05) had been sung by Carlo Broschi *detto* Farinelli in the serenata *Imeneo* (Naples, 1723) and in the pasticcio *Turno Aricino* (Naples, 1724). Vinci’s ‘Le belle che s’accendono’ (II,07) in *Eraclea* (1724) had likewise been composed for Farinelli, and was presumably the only available setting of that text by 1725”, *IBID.*

106 “La ristrettezza del tempo, e delle congiunture non ha permesso purgar alcune Canzoni, che si sono dovute lasciar correre non del tutto confacenti alle Scene per uniformarsi al comodo de’ cantanti”. Those are the words of an anonymous reviser of the original libretto by Piovene. *Cunegonda*, p. 5.

107 STROHM, 2008, II, p. 357.

108 “Nothing good can be expected from The Theatres of St. Angelo and Cassano: In the former is one *Signora Costanza Pusterla*: Her person & action, very, passable, but with a small voice” (letter to the Duke of Richmond, Venice, 28 December 1725, in LLEWELLYN, 2009, p. 196).

109 *Turia Lucrezia*, *Cunegonda* and *La fede tradita e vendicata* premiered, respectively, on 27 December 1725, 29 January and 16 February 1726; see SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, pp. 383-386.

These were typical production processes behind pasticcios.¹¹⁰ Pretty soon, the operatic pasticcio would acquire its own precise definition as an independent genre and acquire a degree of artistic respectability.¹¹¹

Finally, we can say that in early 18th-century Venice the pasticcio was mostly, from a business perspective, a strategy undertaken by impresarios to cope with the exigencies of the theatrical routine. These productions for the most part were not the result of a standardized strategy, but instead arose from fortuitous events, as well as the frenetic rhythms of Venetian consumer theater (and partly from the *desiderata* of singers who aimed to capitalize on the success of their suitcase arias). This gives rise to further thought. Since at that time pasticcios were quickly prepared in an emergency situation, we can assume the existence of a long-standing practice of the quick assemblage of pre-existing material for changed dramaturgical and performative contexts. This is an established professional practice and the result of a centuries-old tradition. Let us look at the *Commedia dell'Arte*.¹¹² The so-called 'improvisation' is nothing but patching

110 And we could cite other cases. Consider, e.g., the previously mentioned opera *Il vinto trionfante del vincitore*, in the libretto of which the poet Antonio Marchi writes: "I have been forced to set my Drama in just few days. This is the same subject with which you commiserated many years ago at the Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo; but now it has been adapted to the modern fashion, so that it is going to sound completely different." ("Nel ristretto termine di pochi giorni sono stato obbligato ad alestire il presente mio Drama. Questo è lo stesso soggetto, che hai compatito molti anni sono nel Teatro di Santi Giovanni e Paolo; mà però ora ridotto più uniforme al tuo genio, ed al gusto moderno, in guisa tale, che ti sembrerà al tutto diverso.") *Il vinto trionfante del vincitore*, "Generosissimo lettore", p. 5.

111 In fact, as early as 1729, at the San Giovanni Grisostomo, which was a shrine for opera in Venice and Europe, on the occasion of the last night of carnival *L'abbandono di Armida* was staged, defined in the "Argomento" of the libretto by the poet Giovanni Bonlini as a "small composition" ("picciola Composizione") that "serves only to connect with scenic harmony and regulated reason those arias composed and performed in other times, places and circumstances, now restored only in order to renew the pleasure and restrict, as far as possible, perfection to the greater audience satisfaction." ("serve solamente a connettere con qualche Scenica Armonia, e regolata ragione quell'Arie, che in altri tempi, luochi, e circostanze diverse si sono concepite ed eseguite, e che ora sono nuovamente introdotte a solo fine di rinovare il piacere, e restringere a commune maggior aggradimento, quanto è possibile, la perfezione.") *L'abbandono di Armida*, p. 5. Regarding the term "pasticcio", it came into use (initially with a negative connotation) only in the 1730s, acquiring its own degree of artistic respectability in the second half of the 18th century; see PRICE, 2001-2002. See the case studies considered in ROMAGNOLI, 2011, and, staying with Vivaldi's case, see TÀMMARO, 1988; and lastly, regarding the Venetian pasticcios of comic operas between 1740s and 1750s, see POLIN, 2011.

112 About this important phenomenon of spectacle in Italy and Europe, see, for a complete overview, FERRONE, 2014.

together old memorized sketches onto new plots. It is conceivable that the processes behind the pasticcio are very similar. The processes involved in the pasticcio were the result of an accumulated experience shared by all the Italian theaters or the theater *all'italiana*. And this is a point on which, perhaps, we should reflect more deeply.

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