

Foreign Musicians at the Polish Court in the Eighteenth Century

The Case of Pietro Mira

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1. Foreign musicians at the Polish court

Let me begin with a clarification: the term “Polish court” refers to the royal court of Poland, and “musicians” denotes, according to the premise of our project (*Music Migrations*), all professions connected to music, with special regard to people commonly referred to as musicians: instrumentalists, composers and singers.

In the course of the eighteenth century three monarchs occupied the Polish throne, each ruling for roughly 30 years. They were two Saxon electors: Friedrich August I, who reigned over Poland as August II (1697-1704, 1709-33), and Friedrich August II, king of Poland under the name of August III (1734-63), as well as the Pole Stanisław August Poniatowski (reigned 1764-95). The organization of musical and theatrical personnel was similar for the two Saxon kings and consisted of concentrating the leading ensembles in Dresden: the *Königliche Capelle*, *la Danse*, *Hof-Trompeter und Pauker* and *Bockpfeifer*. In Warsaw the Saxon kings used ensembles selected *al fresco* from the Dresden ones, supplementing them with various Polish forces, predominantly the royal *Pohlnische Capelle* but also members of ensembles in the service of various churches and grandees, as well as the *comici italiani* and janissary

band (in the case of August II) financed by the Polish exchequer.¹ Unlike the Saxon kings, Stanisław August Poniatowski had no need to share his artists with Saxony, but introduced in the 1770s a formal division of his personnel into ensembles financed by the royal treasury – orchestra and ballet – and those hired by impresarios in charge of the public theater, although the king remained a major sponsor of the latter.²

The musical patronage of each of those three monarchs was of course different – a fact linked to the significant political, economic and social upheavals in Europe at that time, as well as to major changes in the style of eighteenth-century music. The patronage of August II and August III was limited to courtly milieus, although the second king did in fact open his theater to citizens of the Commonwealth. Stanisław August Poniatowski, on the other hand, introduced a state patronage that encompassed the entire country. The reign of August II coincided with the twilight of the Baroque, and remained under the influence of the dominant French culture, whereas August III was fascinated by *opera seria* and by Italian music, which was witnessing an intense development of the *galant* style. Finally, Stanisław August Poniatowski's reign was contemporary with the emergence and maturity of the classical style, which originated in Vienna. Consequently, the choice of artists for the Polish court evolved over time, although it was consistently reliant on foreigners; it was only during the period of Stanisław August Poniatowski that Polish and “polonized” musicians also came into prominence.

August II

August II began his reign by directing his highest ambitions as a patron towards the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Hence his first Polish *Kapelle* was designed as an ensemble shared by Dresden and Warsaw, even though it primarily served the needs of the Polish court (1697-1703/04). At the height of its development it numbered over forty musicians of different nationalities and provenances, and was constituted after the French model. The dominant nationality was German, represented by instrumentalists from the former electoral *Kapelle* in Dresden; a dozen or so musicians, mostly Italian and Polish singers, had belonged to the *Ka-*

1 ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 1997; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2011b; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2012b.

2 ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 1995b.

pelle of the previous king of Poland, Jan III Sobieski; oboists came from Vienna, while several musicians migrated from the Wawel cathedral *Kapelle* in Cracow. August II's first *Pohlnische Kapelle* was headed by two kapellmeisters: the Pole Jacek Różycki and the German Johann Christoph Schmidt. In Warsaw it played during performances of French opera with an ensemble of sixty musicians assembled in Paris and led by Louis Deseschaliers (1700-03), as well as accompanying performances of French comedy given by the ensembles of Denis Nanteuil (1699) and Jean de Fonpré (1700-03) and by the *comici italiani* of Gennaro Sacco (1699). August II's second Polish *Kapelle*, active between 1716 and 1733, consisted of a mere 12-15 instrumentalists recruited from Germany. Its members later won great renown, examples being the flautist Johann Joachim Quantz and the violinists František (Franz) Benda and Jiří Čert. Depending on what repertoire was presented at any given time in Warsaw by the royal and electoral theatrical ensembles – i.e., either by Tommaso Ristori's *comici italiani* (1716-33) or by the French comedy and ballet (1715-33) – the *Kapelle* was directed alternately by two composers: Giovanni Alberto Ristori and Louis André. Through the activity of those artists Warsaw became one of the first centers outside Italy to cultivate the genre of comic intermezzi as early as 1716, as well as presenting *tragédies lyriques*, French cantatas and forward-looking ballets anticipating the genre known as the *ballet d'action*: these were performed in 1724-26 by leading dancers such as Jean Favier, Louis Dupré and Louise de Vaurenville under the musical direction of the Dresden *Kapellmeister* Jean-Baptiste Woulmier.

August II's *comici italiani* also left their mark on the court culture of Empress Anna Ivanovna in Moscow, where they were on loan for the year 1731. During that time they gave a number of *commedia dell'arte* performances, as well as staging the first-ever Italian opera in Russia: a *commedia in musica* entitled *Calandro*, which was on a libretto by Stefano Benedetto Pallavicini and with music by G.A. Ristori.

The Polish court of August II also retained a German-staffed ensemble of *Hoftrumpeter und Paucker* and *Bockpfeiffer*, plus a janissary band modelled on Turkish ensembles, which was composed of musicians with Polish-sounding names, though these could well have included “polonized” (and converted) Turks.

In sum, my research to date has linked around 310 instrumentalists, singers, actors and dancers, originating primarily from Germany, France and Italy, to the Polish court of August II.

August III

This monarch's reign brought with it a major change of musical influence in the direction of the *opera seria*, which was dominant practically all over Europe. The one remaining area of French influence at the court of August III was the ballet, which for nearly twenty years was directed by the outstanding dancer and choreographer Antoine Pitrot. But even this dance company included an increasing number of Italian and German artists. Germans (mostly Saxons) continued to dominate the new *Pohlnische Capelle*, enlarged to around 30 musicians, which also at last included some actual Polish artists: the singers Stefan Jaroszewicz and Józef Sękowski (who did not perform in the theater), the organist Józef Czanczik, the oboist Dominik Jaziomski and the violinist Antoni Kosołowski or Kozłowski. On various occasions, members of the Dresden *Hofkapelle*, especially singers, helped out – Domenico Annibali, Ventura Rochetti, Pasquale Bruscolini, Bartolomeo Puttini, Teresa Albuzzi-Todeschini, and Caterina Pilaja – and, more rarely, also instrumentalists including the violinist Johann Georg Pisendel.³

In the years 1735-54 the presence in Warsaw of Italian singers and their far less numerous German colleagues was linked primarily to the performance at court of many “occasional” serenatas composed by Giovanni Alberto Ristori and Johann Michael Breunich, musicians who belonged to the Dresden-based *Königliche Capell- und Cammer-Musique*. Between 1754 and 1763 the royal and electoral singers, reinforced during the Seven Years' War by additional singers such as Elizabeth Teuber and Giuseppe Gallieni, gave a total of 124 operatic performances at the Warsaw theater, presenting eleven *drammi per musica* with music composed by the court's *Oberkapellmeister*, Johann Adolf Hasse. In order to prepare the Warsaw premieres of his works Hasse came to Poland at least five times from Dresden, Naples or Vienna.⁴

Until 1754 the *comici italiani* played a major role at the Warsaw theater, presenting the newest Venetian repertoire, mostly based on literary comedies, including plays by Carlo Goldoni. This ensemble boasted several talented vocalists, including Giovanna Casanova, who

3 Concerning the travels of musicians between Dresden and Warsaw, see also ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2009.

4 See ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 1995a; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2012a.

contributed to the performance in Warsaw of two works in a rare genre: *opera seria* parody.⁵

The *Pohlnische Capelle* of August III was closely linked to the *Kapelle* of his prime minister Heinrich von Brühl, which included German musicians, some of them outstanding: the *Kapellmeister* Gottlob Harrer and Georg Gebel, the violinist Christian Friedrich Horn, the harpsichordist Johann Gottlieb Goldberg and the oboist Johann Christian Fischer.⁶

The sojourns of August III in Warsaw continued to be accompanied by the royal-electoral ensembles of *Hof-Trompeter und Pauker* and *Bockpfeifer*.

In total, I have documented the presence at the Polish court of August III of around 320 artists active in music and the theater, the vast majority being foreigners.

Stanisław August Poniatowski

This monarch differed significantly from his Saxon predecessors. A leading exponent of the Enlightenment, he chose to exercise his cultural and social influence in the Commonwealth, a backward country in many aspects, through the Warsaw theater, which he made fully public, albeit, as already mentioned, heavily subsidized by the royal exchequer. Many important social reforms planned by Stanisław August were propagated from the stage, notably in the libretti of Polish operas (1778-94). Moreover, the theater also presented a wide spectrum of European operatic repertoire, hosting Italian, French, German and Polish ensembles. In the years of its operation, 1765-67 and 1774-94, it presented a number of Polish and international premieres of works that remain historically important. Italian singers active in Warsaw included such leading virtuosos as Caterina Ristorini, Caterina Bonafini, Anna Davia de Bernucci, Giovanni Battista Brocchi, Luigi Marchesi, Brigida Banti and Adriana Ferraresi Del Bene, as well as the first performers of the principal roles in Mozart's *Il dissoluto punito, ossia Il Don Giovanni* (Warsaw 1789): Antonio Baglioni, Luigi Bassi, Felice Ponziani and Caterina Micelli.⁷ French singers included Victoire Clavareau and Antoinette Saint-Huber-

5 ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2007c.

6 KOLLMAR, 2006; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2012b.

7 ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2011a.

ty, for whom Christoph Willibald Gluck created several operatic roles in *Orfeo ed Euridice* (Vienna 1762) and *Armide* (Paris 1787). Particular prominent was the presence in Warsaw of German singers, who, while lacking such stellar performers as those mentioned above, certainly presented a worthwhile repertoire that included the major singspiels of Mozart: *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Warsaw 1783) and *Die Zauberflöte* (Warsaw 1793).

Stanisław August Poniatowski was particularly fond of ballet, hence the staging at the Warsaw theater of numerous works of this kind, which were performed by over 90 foreign dancers, who included such leading virtuosi as Charles Picque (or Le Picq), Anna Binetti, Apollino Baldassare Vestris, Domenico Ricciardi and François Gabriel Le Doux. Significantly, these artists passed on their skills to around 30 native-born dancers active at the theater.

In the years 1765-94 (with an interruption between spring 1767 and spring 1774, when the theater was not in action for political reasons) the Warsaw theater presented around 260 Italian, French, German and Polish operas, the vast majority belonging to comic genres (*opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *Singspiel*, Polish opera). Additionally, well over 200 ballets (mostly *ballets d'action*) were staged. The operas were predominantly Italian, performed by singers who usually originated from Venice. The second musical center that inspired Stanisław August's patronage was Vienna. Founding his royal orchestra in 1765, he based it on German musicians inherited from the *Pohlnische Capelle* of August III, but later, in 1779, he enlisted a group of Czech musicians coming from Vienna, which was the city of origin of many other singers and dancers active in Warsaw. It was likewise in Vienna that the founders of Polish national opera, the Slovak Maciej Kamieński and the Czech Jan Stefani, developed their careers.⁸

In Stanisław August's Warsaw public concerts were regularly held, with the participation of outstanding virtuosi such as the violinists Antonio Lolli, Ivan Jarnović (Giovanni Giornovich), Gaetano Pugnani and Giovanni Battista Viotti, the bassist Joseph Kämpfer, the flautist Jan Křtitel Vaňhal, the oboist Carlo Besozzi, the clarinetist Anton Stadler and the pianists Jan Ladislav Dussek (Dusík) and Joseph Wölfl. Warsaw's royal court was also a favourite port of call for leading composers during their concert tours, as shown by Giovanni Paisiello (1784), Do-

8 ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2007b.

menico Cimarosa (1787 and 1791) and Vicente Martín y Soler (1788). Further artists, such as the German Johann David Holland and the Italian Gioacchino Albertini, were active in the city and made significant contributions to Polish culture; both men were associated in addition with the court of the *Voivode* of Vilnius, prince Karol Radziwiłł, in Nesivizh (Nieśwież, in present-day Belarus).

In total, the court of Stanisław August and the public theater in Warsaw witnessed the participation of around 570 Italian, German, French, Czech and Polish artists.

On the basis of the above-quoted numbers, it may be assumed that around a thousand foreign composers, instrumentalists, singers, dancers, copyists, impresarios and so forth were active at the Polish court in the course of the eighteenth century. Their migrations resulted not only from the inherent international mobility of artists, which increased in the second half of the century, but also from the court's alternation between Saxony and Poland and the consequent transit of personnel between Dresden and Warsaw. During the period of the Seven Years' War, which August III was forced to spend in Warsaw, many of his Dresden-based artists were granted leave of absence and spent that time developing their skills and careers in Venice, Naples, Vienna and Paris, except when summoned to Warsaw to serve the king. In contrast, during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski decisions made by artists increasingly became subject to the capitalist laws of the market. The presence of so many musicians, singers, dancers and composers in Warsaw suggests that the local court remained attractive with regard to both financial gain and prestige.

The above-quoted numbers place Warsaw amongst the leading eighteenth-century musical centers in Europe, a fact that has hitherto not been sufficiently emphasized in international musicology. Those statistics also produce an embarrassment of riches, bringing about a need to select for our projects those particular artists who merit inclusion in the developing database. The main criteria for such selection are the following: (1) the European significance of an artist: it will often prove possible to – at least partly – fill in the gaps in their biographies (gaps that persist even in the latest editions of the leading musical encyclopaedias); (2) the importance for Polish culture, in the case of “polonized” foreigners whose activity and art have contributed to the heritage of Polish music. Nonetheless, it may also prove worthwhile to include at least some artists known ex-

clusively from their activity at the Polish court in the hope that the developing web of relationships will eventually allow us to augment their biographies with new facts. Of course, each name potentially harbors a more or less interesting biography that is today worth recounting to a varying extent (though sometimes perhaps not worth recounting at all).

For the time being, I have chosen Pietro Mira as the object of a case study, since he is a “special” character: certainly not the most prominent one, but one who is eminently interesting, possessing a number of musical and extra-musical talents – a person who functioned successfully in several countries and milieus, a fact that makes him a highly suitable artist to be featured in our *Music Migrations* project.

2. Pietro Mira, known as Petrillo (Pedrillo)

Pietro Mira was active in several areas of music: as a violinist, composer, singer, actor and impresario; but he was also successful outside the musical sphere as a jester, moneylender and innkeeper. Moreover, he appears to have undertaken various “special tasks”, as suggested by the extraordinary favors granted to him by Central and Eastern European monarchs as well as by his intimacy with the leading artists of music and theater in Western Europe at that time.

Pietro Mira is hardly unknown to historians, but his life has been documented only partially and with many gaps. He has been particularly well regarded by students of Russian music, since it was in Russia that this “ruthless braggart” had a “stunning and particularly eventful career”, according to Robert-Aloys Mooser.⁹ It was Mooser who painted the most vivid pen-portrait of Mira – although one limited to the Russian court – rightly pointing out that his life would make an attractive biographical novel.¹⁰ Also Leonid Mironovich Butir and Anna Leonidovna Porfireva devoted much attention to Mira, overestimating his role as a leading Italian violinist of his time,¹¹ although Jacob von Stählin, too, viewed him as an outstanding violinist during his Russian period.¹² Mira is also mentioned – to a limited extent and not always

9 MOOSER, 1948, pp. 105-109.

10 MOOSER, 1942, pp. 273-293; MOOSER, 1948.

11 BUTIR/PORFIREVA, 1998, pp. 210-213.

12 STÄHLIN, 1770, p. 84: “Petro [sic] Mira, Petrillo genannt, der [...] sich

with factual accuracy – by some other authors, who include Ernst Ludwig Gerber, Moritz Fürstenau, Robert Eitner, Nikolai Findeizen, Ortrun Landmann, Marina Ritzarev and Anna Porfireva,¹³ as well as some untrustworthy websites.¹⁴ The Polish strands in Mira's career have been discussed in the writings of Karyna Wierzbicka-Michalska and myself.¹⁵ The intention of the present case study is to assemble existing knowledge about Mira's career, paying special attention to facts that have not been presented before in an international context.

Pietro Mira is said to have been born the son of a poor sculptor in Monte Scaglioso near Naples at the turn of the 1710s and 1720s, and named Pietro or Adamo or Pietro Adamo Pedrillo. We do not know the circumstances in which he adopted his later surname, Mira. From December 1725 he was a member of the *Cappella palatina* in Lucca, from which he was dismissed in 1733, apparently on the grounds of promiscuity. Yet the Russian imperial court recorded his arrival from Italy in St Petersburg as early as summer 1732. Either Mira went to Russia without waiting for his official dismissal from Lucca in order to avoid the consequences of his immoral behavior, or he realized that Italy offered him no opportunity to rise above the many other talented musicians in that country. Whatever the circumstances, he took his chances and sought his fortune in a distant, exotic country in which Italian music was only just starting to gain ground. At that very time the young Empress Anna Ivanovna wished to deepen her links with Italian culture after playing host to the Polish King August II's *comici italiani* at the Moscow court in 1731. She was assisted significantly in that endeavor by Mira, who between 1733 and 1740 worked at the imperial court as a violinist, with an annual salary of 700 roubles. He additionally appeared as a singer in comic intermezzi and as an actor in the performances given in 1734 by

durch die erste Hofnarren-Stelle bekannter gemacht hat, als durch die erste Violin, die er sonst ungemein wol [sic] gespielt hatte.”

- 13 GERBER, 1813 (Pedrillo); FÜRSTENAU, 1862, p. 246; EITNER, 1902; FINDEIZEN, 2008, pp. 16ff.; LANDMANN, 1972; RITZAREV/PORFIREVA, 2001, pp. 214-216; RITZAREV, 2006, p. 39.
- 14 <http://aarticles.net/culture-art-history/12286-kak-italyanskij-komik->, 19.11.2015.
- 15 WIERZBICKA-MICHALSKA, 1975, pp. 119-121; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2012b, pp. 330-337; other publications by ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA listed below.

an Italian *commedia dell'arte* troupe. The empress soon recognized the extra-musical talents of Mira, sending him at the turn of 1734 and 1735 to Italy with the task of recruiting an Italian operatic ensemble, a company of *comici italiani* and an instrumental ensemble.

In performing that task Mira gave proof of his great understanding of the Italian musical market. He managed to engage over 30 outstanding singers, actors (including Giovanna Casanova, Antonio Costantini, Francesco Ermano, Antonio Piva and Bernardo and Isabella Vulcani, who later served August III), dancers, stage designers, technicians and musicians, led by their *maestro di cappella* Francesco Araja. The artists assembled in Venice before leaving for St Petersburg, where they arrived in summer 1735. From that moment the city emerged as one of Europe's leading musical centers, as Russian music historians emphasize. Mira earned Anna Ivanovna's particular recognition and in 1736 received the title of court jester (apparently, a promotion from his former position as a violinist); in that role he may have become the prototype for Petrushka, the Russian theatrical puppet. The empress, who enjoyed earthy humour, even established the mock order of San Benedetto, of which Mira was made a "knight". Jests attributed to Mira were published in Moscow in 1836, and in St Petersburg in 1871.¹⁶

Mira's talent for the violin is attested primarily by a manuscript collection of his violin compositions, *Zabavnaya shtuky dlya skripochki ssotchinyenye issvestnovo shouta/Pedrillo* [Amusing pieces for violin composed by the famous jester Pedrillo], brought to light by Mooser. This is a series of brief, humorous variations full of technical intricacies such as double and triple stopping, abrupt shifts of position, left-hand pizzicato and so forth. Mira played such compositions in order to lighten the mood of the empress, embellishing them with comic visual effects.¹⁷

In the Russian documentation analyzed by Mooser Mira appears not only as a talented artist but also as a canny, enterprising, cynical, almost impertinent individual, resourceful in finding profit and greedy for both legal and illegal gains (via bribery, usury or pimping). As a favorite of Empress Anna Ivanovna of Russia and her fellow grandees, Mira is said to have amassed more than 20,000 roubles during the nine years of his activity at the imperial court! No wonder that after Anna Ivanovna's death on 28 October 1740 the universally loathed Mira asked to be re-

16 MOOSER, 1948, p. 110.

17 MOOSER, 1948, p. 106.

leased from imperial service on 28 December; his request was granted. He then went to Italy, where he lived for some time in Venice, appearing during the winter of 1745/46 at the Teatro San Moisè in comic intermezzi with music by Johann Adolf Hasse, the *Kapellmeister* of August III, king of Poland and elector of Saxony.¹⁸

Still in 1746, Mira found employment at August's court, perhaps thanks to a recommendation from Hasse or through his earlier links to the court of Anna Ivanovna, who had given military support to the Saxon Elector Friedrich August II in his claim to the Polish crown. At all events, at the Polish-Saxon court Mira served primarily as a jester, receiving the title – most likely facetious – of *Hof Commisario*.¹⁹ He also appeared occasionally, as he had done earlier at the Russian court, as a singer and actor attached to the royal company of *comici italiani*. In 1746 and 1747 he appeared in Dresden in the performance of Johann Adolf Hasse's comic intermezzo *Don Tabarano*.²⁰ On 7 October 1746 he sang in Warsaw, probably in the serenata *La liberalità di Numa Pompilio*, with music by Giovanni Alberto Ristori;²¹ on 3 August 1748 he played in the *commedia dell'arte* piece *Gli torti imaginari*, which inaugurated the Warsaw opera house.²² Later, on 4 November of that year, he could also be heard in the *dramma per musica* entitled *Le contese di Mestre e Malghera per il trono*, an *opera seria* parody staged by the *comici italiani* and based on a libretto by Antonio Gori adapted for the Polish court by Giovanna Casanova, with music by Salvatore Apollini.²³ The role of Bottenigo, which Mira took, is notated in the score in the tenor clef. By December 1748 Mira was back in Dresden.²⁴

18 SELFRIDGE-FIELD, 2007, p. 592.

19 D-Dla, Geheimnis Cabinet, Loc. 907, vol. 3, 19 July 1747 notes that *Hof Commisario* Mira received a fee of 172 thalers.

20 FÜRSTENAU, 1862; SARTORI, 1990-94, nos. 8187, 8188.

21 D-Dla, OHMA I 114, k. 50, 103; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2007a.

22 D-Dla, Nachlass Maria Antonia Nr. 16, letter of August III to Maria Antonia, Warsaw 7 August 1748.

23 D-Dla, OHMA I Nr. 120, k. 57, 90, Nachlass Maria Antonia Nr. 70a, letter of Heinrich von Brühl to Maria Antonia, Warsaw 30 October 1748; ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2007c.

24 D-Dla, Nachlass Friedrich Christian, Nr. 4c, letters of Maria Josepha to Friedrich Christian, Warsaw 28 December 1748 and Warsaw 15 January 1749.

In 1750 as well as in 1758-62 (i.e., during the Seven Years' War) Pietro Mira accompanied August III to Poland.²⁵ He took part in the king's hunts, and on the occasion of the monarch's name-day festivities (3 August 1758, 1759, 1760, 1761 and 1762) he performed comic scenes, reciting humorous poems and accompanying himself on the violin. A beautiful color illustration representing Mira during one of those shows (1759) has survived. The subject sits on a wooden donkey and plays a violin solo from a score held in front of him by Death depicted as a skeleton, while Mira also recites a satirical German-Italian poem.²⁶ Presumably, that performance and similar ones in Warsaw were inspired by Mira's jokes so warmly received at the Russian court.

In 1759, Mira was joined in Warsaw by his son, a top-tier physician in the Russian army.²⁷

In mid-December 1762, thus just before the anticipated end of the Seven Years' War, Pietro Mira left Warsaw for Italy, where he attended to matters concerning inheritance arising from his wife's death and – as the prime minister of the Saxon court, Heinrich von Brühl, joked – looked for a new spouse.²⁸ In three letters sent at that time from Bologna, probably to Brühl, Mira reported on the preparations for the opening of the Nuovo Teatro Pubblico and the staging of Christoph Willibald Gluck's specially composed *opera seria* entitled *Il trionfo di Clelia*. On 17 April Mira wrote that Gluck “is fine, he studies, but he drinks like a devil, he stays with me, I had brought some boxes of wine from Florence, and he has drunken all of them”.²⁹ Mira also reported that Farinelli, embarrassed by Brühl's benevolence, would continue to serve him (but we do

25 D-Dla: OHMA I Nr. 128, k. 32, 94, OHMA I Nr. 152, k. 212, 227, 232, OHMA I Nr. 163, k. nlb, OHMA II Nr. 1, *passim*, OHMA T III Nr. 35, k. 35, 60; Nachlass Maria Antonia Nr. 17, letter of queen Maria Josepha to Maria Antonia, Warsaw 8 July 1750.

26 D-Dla, OHMA I Nr. 152, fol. 226, reproduced in ŻÓRAWSKA-WITKOWSKA, 2012b, pp. 331f, see there also for other depictions that are probably of Mira (OHMA I Nr. 152, fol. 175, 279, OHMA I Nr. 163).

27 D-Dla, Nachlass Friedrich Christian Nr. 240, Joseph Anton Gabaleon von Wackerbarth-Salmour to Friedrich Christian, Warsaw 14 April 1759.

28 D-Dla, Nachlass Maria Antonia Nr. 70 n, Heinrich von Brühl to Maria Antonia, Warsaw 15 December 1762.

29 “sta bene, studia, ma beve da diavolo, sta con me, ho fatto venire delle casse di vino da Firenze, e lui tutte mi le beve”. D-Dla, Geheimnis Cabinet, Loc. 380, Mira à Bologna 1763.

not know in what capacity).³⁰ On 27 April, with reference to the premiere of the Gluck opera being prepared in Bologna, Mira assured the letter's recipient (probably expressing a generally held expectation): "you will see a spectacle that has never been seen in the whole world and that will leave the audience slack-jawed for its marvel".³¹ On 12 June 1763 Mira not only sent Brühl the poster for the opera's premiere, but also informed him that the work had met with disfavor in Bologna – even the replacement of Gluck's original arias with ones by composers better liked in Italy had not helped. He concluded: "here we do not want opere serie, but buffe", although he diplomatically added: "the Dresden opera will be at its peak".³² Mira also announced his imminent arrival in the Saxon capital, but after a short stay in Vienna, where he met Metastasio and handed him some messages from Farinelli,³³ he returned to Bologna.

Mira met Metastasio again in Vienna in January 1764, while *en route* for Dresden, where, following the end of the Seven Years' War and the deaths of August III and his all-powerful minister von Brühl, a substantial reorganization of the electoral court was underway. Metastasio reported on Mira's presence in Dresden to Farinelli: "After having been more than a spectator of the crowdy and tragic vicissitudes of poor Saxony, our amiable Pedrillo is passing our realms like a flash. He comes for breathing the air of bella Italia and for spending calmly the rest of his hitherto agitated days."³⁴ In February 1764 Mira was once more in Dresden (or perhaps he had never left the city?), following which he acted as an intermediary to deliver to Padre Martini, resident in Bologna, presents from the Saxon elector's widow, Maria Antonia Walpurgis: a china coffee and chocolate set plus a china inkwell.³⁵

30 IBID.

31 "si vedrà uno spettacolo mai più veduto al mondo, che farà restare a bocca aperta per meraviglia." IBID.

32 "non ci vogliamo qui opere serie, ma buffe [...] l'opera di Dresda sarà al non plus ultra." IBID.

33 METASTASIO, 1954, p. 296, Pietro Metastasio to Farinelli, Vienna 11 June 1763.

34 "Passa come un lampo per queste nostre contrade il nostro amabile Petrillo dopo essere stato più che spettatore delle affollate, tragiche peripezie della povera Sassonia. Ei viene a respirar l'aria della bella Italia, e a passar tranquillamente il resto de' sinora agitati suoi giorni". IBID., pp. 338f., Pietro Metastasio to Farinelli, Vienna 1 February 1764.

35 I-Bc, *Carteggio Giovanni Battista Martini*, I. 019.21.058, letter of Giovanni Lorenzo Bianconi to Giovanni Battista Martini, Dresden 13 February 1764.

Nonetheless, Mira did not lose his influence in Warsaw despite the anticipated change of occupant of the Polish throne. In early August 1764 – i.e., before his pending election as king of Poland (with military support from Empress Catherine II) – Stanisław August Poniatowski contacted Mira in Bologna. Initially when acting as secretary of the British ambassador, and subsequently as August III's ambassador in Russia (1755-58) and afterwards the lover of the future Empress Catherine, Poniatowski was well aware of the bygone meritorious services of Mira at the Russian court. Consequently, via the mediation of Gaetano Ghigiotti (who in 1760-62 was secretary of the Polish nuncio Antonio Eugenio Visconti, and from autumn 1764, royal secretary and head of the Italian chancellery), the future king entrusted Mira with the task of organizing, in view of his forthcoming coronation (which duly took place on 25 November 1764), an *opera buffa* company in Italy, the singer being earmarked as its director. Correspondence related to that project carried on from early August to late October 1764.³⁶ The company was eventually not formed, most likely because Mira's financial expectations and Stanisław August's limited resources at that time did not coincide, or perhaps there was simply not enough time to complete the task.

In May 1765 Mira and his young, newly wed wife passed again through Vienna (on their way to Dresden?), where he again met Metastasio. The latter wrote to Farinelli: "I saw passing like a flash our aged Petrillo with his juvenile wife and I admired this union."³⁷ On his return journey (from Dresden?), Mira once more profited from his presence in Vienna to meet Metastasio, who reported the fact to Farinelli on 31 October 1765.³⁸

Another man named Pietro Mira, perhaps a child from Mira senior's second marriage, worked as a bass singer at the Teatro de' Fiorentini in Naples in the 1793-94 season.³⁹

36 Pl-Wagad, Archivio Ghigiotti, 451, four letters of Pietro Mira to Gaetano Ghigiotti, Bologna 1764; see WIERZBICKA-MICHALSKA, 1975, pp. 119-121.

37 "Vidi come un lampo passeggero il nostro annoso Petrillo con la sua giovanetta consorte ed ammirai l'innesto." METASTASIO, 1954, p. 392, letter of Pietro Metastasio to Farinelli, Vienna 31 May 1765.

38 *IBID.*, p. 425, letter of Pietro Metastasio to Farinelli, Vienna, Vienna 31 October 1765.

39 YAMADA, 2012, p. 161.

Pietro Mira's last two, or maybe even three, decades were spent in Venice, where he was the proprietor of the "tavern at the Ponte dei Dai" ("locanda al Ponte dei Dai"). On 20 September 1775 a diplomatic dispatch to the imperial court mentioned "the tavern of Petrillo, small, but very clean" ("l'auberge de Petrillo, petite, mais très propre").⁴⁰ Mira lived in Venice and worked there as an innkeeper for what seems to have been another 30 years. In 1782 the fact was noted with surprise by the librarian of the Russian Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich (the later Tsar Paul I) who undertook a Grand Tour of Europe with his wife Maria Fyodorovna.⁴¹ Mira was still running the locanda in 1788, as indicated by a brief report in the press: "Since the inn of Signor Petrillo at San Giovanni Grisostomo was not sufficient for the accomodation of the foreigners who came to him, he placed some in private houses."⁴² Moreover, a press announcement in 1794 of the loss of a thoroughbred dog asked the founder to bring the pet "to the inn of Mr Petrillo and he will receive two sequins as a gratuity".⁴³ In the last-mentioned case, however, the expression "locanda di M. Petrillo" could perhaps have been used after the owner's death, which is not documented.

At all events, Mira's vitality is breathtaking, as are his readiness to undertake travel to distant locations (Lucca; St Petersburg; Venice; Warsaw to Dresden and back several times; Bologna; Dresden via Vienna; Bologna via Vienna; Dresden via Vienna; Venice via Vienna) and his ability to display different talents in different circumstances. He was an artist (violinist, singer and actor), impresario and *éminence grise* of the Russian and Saxon courts, whose expertise within the Italian operatic market was trusted by Stanisław August Poniatowski – a globe-trotter who maintained close ties with Gluck, Farinelli, Metastasio and perhaps also Padre Martini.

Nonetheless, Pietro Mira remains a mysterious and intriguing character. We must hope that new information emerges from the researches of

40 MOOSER, 1942, p. 290.

41 MOOSER, 1948, p. 109.

42 "Non essendo stata sufficiente la Locanda del signor Petrillo a S. Giovanni Grisostomo all'alloggio de' forastieri, che giunti sono da lui, egli ne dispone alcuni in abitazioni particolari". *Gazzetta urbana veneta*, 1788 no. 36, 3 May, 288.

43 "alla Locanda di M. Petrillo che gli saranno dati due zecchini di cortesia". *Gazzetta urbana veneta*, 1794 no. 47, 11 June, 376.

historians in their various sub-disciplines who are currently exploring a wealth of European archives with renewed zeal. Will their findings possibly change our general view of Mira as a person? Not necessarily.

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