

A Voice of Two Cities

Francesco Borosini between the Habsburg Court and the Royal Academy

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Throughout opera history singers have had a decisive impact on the circulation of music, a fact which is particularly evident if we think about the most prominent phenomenon of 18th-century opera, the *aria di baule*. It is also a well-known fact that composers often ‘tailored’ their music around the individual strengths and needs of their performers.¹ This fact is by no means new to musicological research on singers, as there are numerous cases of (mostly) castratos and female sopranos who imposed a distinctive vocal style on ‘their’ composers.² As many of those singers traveled frequently – only a few of them were lucky enough to stay in just one court for their whole lives – this music inevitably traveled with them, a subject that is considered by other contributors to the present volume.

For the most part, research on baroque singers has always pictured them in a quite active and decisive role, a perspective often based on anecdotes about the affectations of the most famous singers.³ They were the force that compelled composers to write in a certain way, to avoid certain notes or technicalities and to assign distinctive role types in order to accommodate the performers. This article will also underline the significance of the singer for the creation of operas, but from a slightly different perspective. Through

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- 1 A concept recapped by the title of Thomas Seedorf and Daniel Brandenburg’s volume “*Per ben vestir la virtuosa*”: *Die Oper im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern* (BRANDENBURG/SEEDORF, 2011).
 - 2 *Giovanni Carestini und “seine” Komponisten, Die Karriere eines Kastraten in der ersten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (KORSMEIER, 2000).
 - 3 On the subject of the various ‘special requests’ of 18th-century singers, see e.g. BUCCIARELLI, 2015. The author sheds light on the case of the castrato Senesino, whose negotiations with the Royal Academy ultimately secured him important roles, not only on the operatic stage but also in London’s cultural circles. The struggle for artistic influence was common also for other singers, especially castratos.

an examination of the vocal profile of the tenor Francesco Borosini (c. 1690-1755), developed from my study of the characteristic arias written for him in Vienna and London, I would like to illustrate how his collaboration with George Frideric Handel for the Royal Academy resulted in the creation of special roles which introduced a new way of utilizing Borosini's voice for dramatic purposes. In contrast to his Viennese parts, the singer was assigned far less excessively virtuosic elements in his arias, a fact that corresponds perfectly with the exceptional roles of Bajazet in *Tamerlano* (1724)⁴ and Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda, regina de' Longobardi* (1725). Those two characters will be key roles for the present article and will be discussed in detail. Apart from these broad modifications to Borosini's profile in general, a closer examination reveals that the ambitus of his London arias were changed in an odd manner. As I will illustrate, his parts written for the London stage stand out in comparison with the majority of music written for the tenor in the years before and after his appearance there.

There are two elements of Handel's arias for Borosini which triggered my interest in this particular aspect of the latter's career. Firstly, there are clear modifications to his parts subsequent to his arrival in London in 1724. Those are of a more 'technical' nature and mainly concern the transposition of high notes to facilitate Borosini's baritone vocal range from *A* to *e'*. Secondly and more importantly, the role types and vocal style he assumed at the Academy emphasize a completely different side of the singer, which other composers in other operatic centers never chose to highlight. With respect to the issue of 'local tastes', I would like to address the following questions: are there any determinable changes in musical writing for Borosini that exceed the obvious motives for modification, such as different tuning?⁵ If so, could those modifications be linked to the 'local tastes' of composers or audiences, or could we explain them in other ways?

As already mentioned, the key figure of my research is the Modenese tenor Francesco Borosini (c. 1690-after 1756).⁶ Following his father Antonio Borosini, also a successful tenor who most probably paved the way for Francesco's employment, he became a permanent member of the Viennese *Hofkapelle* of Emperor Charles VI in 1712. Between 1712 and 1731 the *Hofkapelle* secured him financial stability and a considerable career, which stands out from most of his tenor colleagues of the early 18th century.⁷ Borosini rose to fame, having obtained major roles in operas by the court *Kapellmeister* Johann Joseph Fux, Antonio Caldara, Francesco Bartolomeo Conti, and other composers active at that time.

Information regarding his origins and his exact whereabouts outside Vienna remain uncertain. Nevertheless, I was able to provide an updated list of documented perfor-

4 For more information regarding the genesis of *Tamerlano* see KNAPP, 1970.

5 More on the subject of tuning will be discussed below.

6 His biography has been examined closely, see MICHELS, 2012. Michels conducted detailed archival research on his activity in Vienna, including the time after his official retirement from the *Hofkapelle* in 1731. Borosini was also object of my master's thesis *Francesco Borosini: vita e carriera di un tenore nel Settecento* (Università degli studi di Pavia 2017), in which I focussed my attention on his vocal profile.

7 He became the highest paid tenor of the *Hofkapelle*, see MICHELS, 2012, p. 115.

mances – both in and outside Vienna – in which he certainly appeared.⁸ Said catalogue consists of roughly 70 works, including several different operatic genres, like *drammi per musica*, *tragicommedie*, serenatas and oratorios. My research did not focus on archival investigation of his biography, though, but rather on the study of Borosini’s vocal profile, that is, the kinds of roles he normally assumed, or was associated with and the recurring technical elements. My aim is to profile most of the ‘parameters’ of his voice which we can derive from the analysis of the arias he sang, including ambitus, tessitura and various other technical elements. If observed chronologically and geographically, all those elements can help us to highlight certain changes over time.

As for Borosini, I could narrow down his appearances to three macro-areas within Europe: the Habsburg lands (including Vienna, Prague and Graz), Northern Italy (different operatic centers, such as Parma, Reggio Emilia and Venice) and, of course, the Royal Academy in London. In order to illustrate the differences between the latter area and the main *corpus* of Viennese operas, I will first proceed to highlight some of the Viennese features.

A closer look at the Viennese operas reveals a clear recurrence of certain role-types. Especially during his youth, the tenor was often assigned the roles of villain or antagonist which were portrayed musically through virtuoso rage arias. Those arias included a wide range of technical elements, which Borosini apparently excelled at, including for example coloratura passages and wide leaps. His ability to reach exceptionally low notes – at least comparing to our modern conception of the tenor as a high voice – was often used by composers as a musical illustration of inner turmoil or explosiveness of the character, as I will demonstrate. One of his earliest roles in Vienna was the satyr Damone in Francesco Conti’s *I Satiri in Arcadia* (1714).⁹ The following table illustrates the distribution of the arias and ensemble numbers of all seven characters. Young Francesco Borosini – being at the very beginning of his career – had only three arias, but those arias already anticipate his vocal peculiarities.

Roles	Arias
Mirtilla	9, 1 duet
Tirsi	4
Elpina	5
Laurindo	4, 1 duet
Ergasto	4
Damone	3
Nigella	4

8 See PELLICCIA, 2017, pp. 262-268.

9 Score: A-Wn, Mus.Hs.17190.

This role encapsulates a lot of his peculiar vocal elements. The opera was performed in Vienna in August 1714 in honor of the birthday of Empress Elisabeth Christine. The designation *favola pastorale* indicates that this piece does not reflect the strict Metastasian features of a *dramma per musica*: it includes comic situations and characters in disguise, as, for example, the shepherd Tirsi, who pretends to be the nymph Nicea. He fears that once Damone discovers his real identity, the satyr will vindicate his previous banishment from the lands of Arcadia.

Borosini was assigned three arias, the first two being typical rage arias which one could expect from a villain. The first aria highlights that, besides his ruthlessness, the character shows an incessant interest in all females, regardless of his marriage to Nigella. His new love interest, the *prima donna* Mirtilla, pretends to be mad to escape his unseemly offers. Damone suspects her lie and engages in a rage aria: he threatens to destroy Arcadia if he finds out Mirtilla was making a fool of him.

The aria “Con un guardo mio sdegnato” depicts Borosini’s best qualities and certainly served as a showpiece for the newly arrived singer. The incipit displays his ability for quick changes in register:

Example 1: Damone, “Con un guardo mio sdegnato”, bars 5-9.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Damone (vocal) and Bassi (bass). Both parts are in bass clef and common time (C). The vocal line starts with a rest, then moves from a low note (G2) to a high note (G4) in a series of leaps. The lyrics are: "Con un guar-do mio sde-gna-to la cam-pa-gna il col-le il mon-te". The bass line consists of a series of quarter notes, mostly on a single pitch (G2), with some rests.

The vocal line moves from the low, almost ‘baritone’ register up to high *f*’ and includes a succession of leaps. They alternate with coloraturas that underline the satyr’s anger and uncontrollable temper. The vocal line thus gives us a sense of interruption and irritation, perfectly in line with the character. Interestingly, the entire aria is notated in bass clef in the manuscript preserved in the *Musiksammlung* of the Austrian National Library, a recurring fact in a few of Borosini’s earliest Viennese operas. For the purpose of this paper, I carried out a faithful transcription of all the notational features of the manuscripts I consulted. However, the notation does not in any way reflect the ambitus or the tessitura of the pieces.¹⁰

10 In fact, taking a look at Damone’s arias reveals that writing them in the bass clef does not make any sense from a graphical point of view: the mostly tenor-like tessitura (*b flat-f*’) results in the use of ledger lines not particularly comfortable to read or to write. In addition to that, the ledger lines compromise the legibility of the text, squeezed between the singer’s line and the one of the viola. It could be a simple notational feature applied by the copyist, though an interesting one (for a detailed examination of the Viennese copyists of the 18th century, see EYBL, 1996). However, I would not dismiss the supposition that there was more to it than just an individual notational preference: in the broader context of the

Damone's second aria, "Io m'abbrucio", exceeds the level of difficulty of the first one, even though in the beginning it seems to be simpler. The characteristic descending semiquaver-motive is alternated with octave leaps, again probably taking advantage of Borosini's vocal flexibility. In the B section, however, the vocal line descends to a low *F* on the word "lampo" (flash), clearly evocating a lightning strike. Although the concept of the tenor voice in the 18th century differs vastly from our modern image, a note this low can rarely be found in baroque tenor parts. The execution of those notes, however, became something of a Francesco Borosini specialty. At bar 32, the tenor even carried out a descending two-octave-leap, reaching the same note. The fact that it recurs various times within one aria makes me suppose that the singer was comfortable with the lower register.

Example 2: Damone, "Io mi abbrucio", bars 23-24.

Damone

Bassi

lam - - - - - po.

Example 3: Damone, "Io mi abbrucio", bars 29-32.

Damone

Bassi

quell a - mor ch'il mio com - bat - - - - - te.

Many other composers active at the Viennese court other than Francesco Bartolomeo Conti – like Antonio Caldara, Johann Georg Reinhardt and Johann Joseph Fux – began to notice Borosini's capacities and took advantage of them. The operatic genre had little to no influence on the vocal style written for him, as we can also find it in oratorios and serenatas. For example, Johann Georg Reinhardt's serenata *La più bella*,¹¹ first performed in Vienna in 1715, contains a role of similar difficulty. Although the dramaturgical context is completely different from that of a *favola pastorale*, Borosini's role of Marte, the God of war, displays traits quite similar to Damone. Being that he is the god who does not recognize the true virtues of the female protagonist Venere, but

typologies of the operatic genre, the notation could reflect the fact that the role contains some features associated with that of a bass rather than a tenor role (as, for example, a *buffo* part). As for Damone, his third and final aria (III,7) clearly reflects the comic dimension of his character: it is completely different than the first two virtuoso rage arias and presents an almost syllabic, *buffo*-like vocal style.

11 Score: A-Wn, Mus.Hs.17969.

who merely adores her physical attributes, he can be classified as an antagonist. His two arias are technically demanding as they incorporate similar alternations between wide leaps and coloraturas. The vocal line is so scattered across, that it is actually difficult to determine the tessitura, and requires a quick adaptation to changes in register to reflect Marte's main affect.

As one can imagine, the features described in the aforementioned works do recur in Borosini's parts, especially between the years 1713 and 1719. Furthermore, from 1716 onwards, he became a shoe-in for the main parts of Conti's *tragicommedie per musica*.¹² There, his roles displayed comic traits perhaps already anticipated in the role of Damone. Conti, being the composer who knew best how to draw attention to the singer's acting and vocal qualities, clearly recognized the potential of the young Borosini. In his most famous carnival opera, *Don Chisciotte in Sierra Morena*,¹³ he incorporates the comic anti-hero, who turns mad recalling scenes from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* during his journey through the Sierra Morena. His musical parts display elements already seen in prior operas, as illustrated in the following example from his first aria "Corro incontro a le squadre de' Mori".¹⁴

Example 4: Don Chisciotte, "Corro incontro a le squadre de' Mori", bars 12-15.

The image shows a musical score for Example 4, consisting of five staves. The top two staves are for Violins I and II (Vln. I and Vln. II), both in treble clef. The third staff is for Viola (Vla) in alto clef. The fourth staff is for the vocal part, Grimoaldo, in bass clef, with the lyrics "che ca - - - la dal mon - te." written below the notes. The fifth staff is for Basses (Bassi) in bass clef. The music is in G major (one sharp) and common time (C). The score shows four measures of music, with the vocal line starting in the second measure.

12 For more information on the topic of Viennese carnival opera, see MICHELS, 2019. She dedicates considerable attention to Borosini's important role in the creation of the main characters, see *IBID.*, pp. 106-112.

13 Score: A-Wn, Mus.Hs.17207. It is the only *tragicommedia* by Conti performed and recorded in 2005. The first modern performance was directed by René Jacobs at the *Innsbrucker Festwochen der Alten Musik* with the baritone Nicolas Reveq in the protagonist role of Don Chisciotte.

14 In *Don Chisciotte*'s other arias we find a lot of poetic textual elements that suggest a certain kind of musical realization. The second aria "Sono un fulmine di guerra" ("I am a lightning bolt of war") revokes the reference to the lightning and is connected to a melismatic passage. Conti also does not hesitate to underline textual references to "descending", which he could use to display Borosini's low register.

The excerpts I provided can only allow a glimpse of the vast amount of material preserved in Vienna today. Of course, not all of the arias ever written for Borosini correspond to the aforementioned criteria, as some of his roles are more traditional and less virtuosic than those examples. Nevertheless, even when not in an antagonist role, the arias provided for him often feature the characteristic leaps and the steep descent into his low register. However, a mere comparison of numbers shows that the antagonist and paternal roles are the most numerous category of his career. Because the musical style of an aria is closely connected to the specific role type, I assume composers and librettists ‘typecast’ him in very similar roles.

As pointed out in the introduction, there was one specific period of Borosini’s career which broke the aforementioned tendencies. In 1724, after a few years of negotiations, he arrived in London in early autumn. There, he appeared in the following operas.

Operas	Roles
<i>Tamerlano</i> (1724, Handel/Haym)	Bajazet
<i>Artaserse</i> (1724, Ariosti/Haym)	Artaserse
<i>Giulio Cesare</i> (1725, Handel/Haym) [revival]	Sesto
<i>Rodelinda, regina de’ Longobardi</i> (1725, Handel/Haym)	Grimoaldo
<i>Il Dario</i> (1725, Ariosti/Silvani)	Siderme
<i>L’Elpidia, ovvero Li rivali generosi</i> (1725, Handel – Vinci – Orlandini/Zeno)	Vitige

Although I will focus on what might seem to be a small excerpt of his career – the season of 1724/25, for which Borosini was invited to the Royal Academy – this excerpt will prove to be rather significant. Borosini appeared in Handel’s *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda*, the two operas that make him most known to posterity. As opposed to the Viennese repertoire, both operas are nowadays part of standard repertoire of Italian Baroque opera and have been investigated from different points of view.¹⁵

In particular, the origins of *Tamerlano* and Borosini’s role of Bajazet have been discussed multiple times by musicologists.¹⁶ It is known that the singer assumed the role of Bajazet twice during his career: the first in 1719, performing in Reggio Emilia in a homonymous setting by Francesco Gasparini.¹⁷ Borosini then almost certainly brought

15 DEAN/KNAPP, 1995, pp. 577-587.

16 JONES, 2008.

17 The role of Bajazet was performed by another exceptional tenor, Marc’Antonio Mareschi. He was chosen to participate in Antonio Vivaldi’s setting of this topic, after he had sung the part of Clistene in Vivaldi’s *L’Olimpiade* one year earlier. The pasticcio *Tamerlano*

a copy of Gasparini's work to London in 1724 and notably contributed to the creation of the same role for the Royal Academy.¹⁸ This is an often cited and exemplary case of a singer's involvement in dramaturgical and musical aspects of the opera, as Handel was compelled to rewrite the entire finale of his *Tamerlano* after Borosini's arrival. Thus, one of the most peculiar roles of 18th-century opera was created. Many scholars define it as one of the first protagonist tenor roles, anticipating the complete inversion of the hierarchy of voice categories towards the end of the *Settecento*.¹⁹

With a total of ten numbers – including his three *accompagnato* recitatives and the trio with Asteria and Tamerlano at the end of the second act – Bajazet is the absolute protagonist of the opera, numerically 'outshining' the *primo uomo* role of Andronico. Being the proud and belligerent character that he is, one could immediately find parallels with the Viennese antagonist roles of the sultan.²⁰ However, the musical realization is quite unrelated to it. Many of his arias actually accentuate his struggle to save his beloved daughter, which ultimately results in his suicide. One key moment is his second act aria "A suoi piedi",²¹ which is, instead of a rage aria, a true revelation of Bajazet's inner turmoil and sadness after finding out about the presumed betrayal by his daughter Asteria. The slow 3/8 tempo, the minor mode and the recurrent pauses of the basses and the vocal line indicating the sighs of the character, evoke mourning rather than rage, as we can see in Example 5. The mere technical challenges are reduced to a minimum in order to accentuate the dramaturgical intensity.²² Apart from the obvious stylistic choic-

was first performed in Verona in 1735 (see Cross, 1995). Interestingly, Mareschi's arias indicate a quite similar voice type to Borosini. He too must have possessed more baritonal vocal qualities (after all, in modern recordings Bajazet is often sung by baritones). One could reflect about whether this is a coincidence or if there were specific roles associated with a particular voice type.

18 STROHM, 1981.

19 John Potter (among others) claims Bajazet to be the first actual protagonist role for a tenor: "[Bajazet] is considered to be the first substantial true tenor role to exploit the potential of the voice." POTTER, 2009, p. 25.

20 In fact, his first aria "Forte e lieto a morte andrei", a solemn C-major, march-like *andamento*, underlines exactly those qualities. The semi-syllabic vocal style is partially interrupted by melismatic passages, which insist on his middle register *e-d'*. However, they are far from the fast coloraturas and leaps of Damone's arias.

21 This aria substitutes „Dalla fronte orgogliosa“ in Gasparini's *Bajazet*. It goes without saying that Handel and his librettist Nicola Haym aimed to underline a completely different facet of the role, while Gasparini reverted to Borosini's 'typical' set of skills.

22 Winton Dean and J. Merrill Knapp see this aria as a clear contrast to Handel's style and a clear underlining of Bajazet's inner conflict: "The news that Asteria has capitulated to Tamerlano wrings from Bajazet the most anguished of his arias, 'A suoi piedi'. This astonishing piece sounds more like Bach than Handel; indeed its content and technique so strongly anticipate the bass aria 'Gerne will ich mich bequemen' in the St. Matthew Passion as to suggest the unlikely (but not inconceivable) possibility that Bach had come across it.

es present in Bajazet's death scene at the end of the third act, this particular aria presents other curiosities, such as the striking modification of the written ambitus. All of the high notes exceeding *g'* and sometimes *f'* were altered once Handel had a chance to hear Borosini's baritone voice. Already at bar 29, the first quarter note was transposed down an octave, in order to avoid high *a'*. This procedure was repeated several times in the course of this aria, often compromising the descending direction of the vocal line. The adaptation to Borosini's voice must have been an absolute necessity, considering that even lower notes were transposed down: the cadence at bar 37 was supposed to end on *b* for the singer and was modified to *e*. The 'modified' version of "A suoi piedi" has an ambitus of *A-f'*, which results rather restricted, for Borosini's standards.

Example 5: Bajazet, "A suoi piedi", bars 25-37.

The musical score for Example 5 consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Violin (Vln.), the middle for Bajazet (Bassinet), and the bottom for Bass (Bassi). The time signature is 3/8. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: "Al] suoi pie - di pa - dre e - san - gue la su - per - ba mi - ve - drà, la su - per - ba mi ve - drà;". The score shows a descending vocal line with several transpositions and a final cadence on a lower note than originally written.

On the other hand, there is the supposed villain Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda, regina de' Longobardi*, first performed in February 1725. The distribution of the arias does not come close to the one in *Tamerlano*, yet Borosini still obtained six arias and one *accompagnato*-recitative. Besides the bass role Garibaldo, the real antagonist who operates without remorse, Grimoaldo is quarrelling with his feeling of guilt regarding his actions. He is, by any account, a "wolf in a sheep's clothing"²³ and as the plot goes on, his arias get more and more focused on his interior conflict. Similar to the case of Bajazet, Handel underlined his character with emotionally rich arias. The culmination is without a doubt the *siciliano* "Pastorello d'un povero armento", his final aria, in which he somewhat admits his complete loss of control over the situation.

The resemblance, striking throughout but almost literal towards the end of the A section, extends far beyond the 3/8 rhythm with occasional syncopation and the linear three-part texture.", DEAN/KNAPP, 1995, p. 539.

23 *IBID.*, p. 577.

Apart from this very unusual aria for an antagonist, the part of Grimoaldo does highlight some of Borosini’s specialties. His final second act aria “Tuo drudo è mio rivale”, a jealous reaction to Rodelinda reuniting with her former husband Bertarido. Grimoaldo’s part displays coloratura passages.

Example 6: Grimoaldo, “Tuo drudo è mio rivale”, bars 13-16.

Example 6 shows a musical score for bars 13-16. The score includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Grimoaldo (soprano), and Basses. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The Grimoaldo part features a coloratura passage with the lyrics "e mor-te a- vrà, e mor-te a- vrà,". The Basses part includes fingerings 6, 6, #, #.

Within the same piece, there is also a short section of *canto di sbalzo*, a succession of leaps, that illustrates the restlessness of the character. Such techniques are to be found throughout Borosini’s career. One can note, however, that the tenor’s low register is avoided completely.

Example 7: Grimoaldo, “Tuo drudo è mio rivale”, bars 26-28.

Example 7 shows a musical score for bars 26-28. The score includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Grimoaldo (soprano), and Basses. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The Grimoaldo part features a coloratura passage with the lyrics "[avrà] tuo dru - do è mio ri - va - le, tuo spo - so è mio ne - mi - co,". The Basses part includes fingerings 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6.

It is evident from comparing the roles of Bajazet in *Tamerlano* and of Grimoaldo in *Rodelinda* to other roles of Borosini that there is a huge difference in the handling of his voice. Although the role categories to which Bajazet and Grimoaldo adhere could promote quite virtuosic musical writing, Handel chose not to overload Borosini’s char-

acters.²⁴ Having briefly illustrated the Viennese ‘style’, the emphasis on the emotional expressiveness of both roles is mirrored in the musical writing and stands in sharp contrast to the roles of Conti, Caldara, and others.²⁵ It was not predominantly his technical ability, that Handel wanted to underline, but more his seemingly great expressive qualities. This resulted in a clear reduction of virtuoso elements like excessive coloratura and *canto di sbalzo*. Although both roles display technically challenging arias within both works, comparing them to Borosini’s parts at the *Hofkapelle* makes it clear that they were geared towards another direction. The extent of said contrast does not stop at vocality, however.

The presence of critical editions for both *Tamerlano* and *Rodelinda* allowed me to enter into detail about the specific adaptations the composer undertook to make Borosini comfortable. As I already mentioned, the alterations to the arias mainly concerned Borosini’s top notes. On many occasions, notes that exceeded top *g*’ were transposed. Within the aforementioned London operas there is only one piece that contains a written *a*’, which is Bajazet’s aria “Empio per farti guerra”. As for the role of Grimoaldo, Handel avoided the high *a*’ completely. This fact is interesting if we consider that once he returned to Vienna in 1725, this note started to reappear in several scores, as it is evident in the following table:

Opera	Role	Ambitus
<i>Spartaco</i> (1726, Porsile/Pasquini)	Spartaco	<i>A-a</i> ’
<i>La corona d’Arianna</i> (1726, Fux/Pariati)	Asterio	<i>c-a</i> ’
<i>I Disingannati</i> (1729, Caldara/Pasquini)	Alceste	<i>c-a</i> ’

On the other hand, Handel decided not to make use of the tenor’s abilities to descend into his low, almost ‘bass-like’ register, as many of the Viennese composers before and *after* him did. None of the arias written by Handel descends lower than *A*, which – considering the fact that low *F* appeared quite often in the Viennese scores – had to be an intentional decision by the composer.²⁶

24 At this point it is rather interesting to compare Gasparini’s and Handel’s conception of the role of Bajazet. As I already mentioned, there is a quite remarkable difference in the portrayal of this role and therefore of the vocal style for Borosini.

25 It would defeat the purpose of this paper to illustrate the quantity of so-called “rage arias” written for the tenor in Vienna. Even when not in an antagonist or villain role, as is the case with Damone, many composers chose the vocal style illustrated above. Examples would be the role of Ruggiero in Fux’ *Angelica vincitrice di Alcina*, Orazio in Fux’s *Costanza e fortezza*, Leone in Antonio Lotti’s *Costantino* and many others. Even in oratorios, his parts tended to be exceptionally loaded with vocal challenges, as his role of Saul in Conti’s *David* shows.

26 Naturally, when speaking about ambitus in this particular context, one can never make absolute assumptions. Many elements of the performance were (purposely) not written down

A possible explanation for the ‘restriction’ of Borosini’s ambitus, especially regarding the transposed top notes, could be the performing pitch. Assuming that at the London opera, the instruments played at a slightly higher pitch, an intervention to accommodate the singer could seem justifiable. One of the most extensive researches regarding performance pitch was conducted by Bruce Haynes.²⁷ He states that in the 1720’s the London opera orchestra indeed played at approximately 423 Hz, but during the last decades of the century the pitch increasingly rose. The author supposes that this phenomenon had to do with more and more singers coming from Venice to London, where performing pitch was notably higher than in the rest of Europe.²⁸ However, the Habsburg lands were also strongly influenced by musicians from Northern Italy, who brought their instruments with them. Regarding Vienna, however, Haynes does not provide a clear date as to when the pitch moved up to the Venetian standard. It might be reasonable to think that in the 1720s – when Borosini came to London – there would have been a perceivable difference in tuning. While this could explain why higher notes were less comfortable for the singer, it does not, however, justify the absence of low notes. This shows that the reasons for the modifications to the written ambitus of the arias went far beyond the question of accommodation for technical reasons: the omission of the low notes and impressive leaps reflects a clear stylistic dissociation (be it deliberate or unintentional). Reducing these obvious changes to tuning would be short-sighted.

Having observed Borosini’s career as a whole and in the different geographical areas he worked, at least those known to me up to this point, I can conclude that the London operas depict him in rather ‘atypical roles’. During his long-lasting career in Imperial Vienna, Borosini’s special talents – musical and acting abilities – had made sure that he was assigned recurring roles. Although they did not all belong to a single ‘category’ (as far as such a classification exists), most of them had one thing in common: they were prone to explosiveness, be it in a good or in a bad way. His most impressive characters all gave reason to depict inner turmoil through highly virtuosic, technically challenging arias. Most of those roles featured very similar singing styles and technical elements, such as *canto di sbalzo*, the engagement of his complete ambitus, and virtuoso coloraturas.

The recurrence of such virtuoso elements seems to be present in Borosini’s whole career, regardless of the geographical location or the composer. For instance, his part in Geminiano Giacomelli’s *Lucio Papirio Dittatore*, performed in Parma in 1729, displays a musical style very similar to the Viennese operas. The characteristics of musical writing for Borosini therefore also applies to regions other than Vienna.²⁹ His collaboration with Handel at the Royal Academy seems to be the only exception.

and were left to the invention of the singer. He or she obviously could modify the ambitus, e.g. when ornamenting during the repetition of the A section in a *da capo* aria.

27 HAYNES, 2002.

28 See IBID., 2002, pp. 149-155.

29 Unfortunately, it is not possible to conduct extensive research about Borosini’s performances outside Vienna and London as most of the music is lost. The only two exceptions are Gasparini’s *Bajazet* and Giacomelli’s *Lucio Papirio*.

The roles of Bajazet and of Grimoaldo do not display the abilities he was most known for. Considering that in 1724 he was already a well-established singer who had performed in several European operatic centers, it would have made sense to showcase those abilities which set him apart from his colleagues. His introduction to the London audience, however, aimed at something different: Borosini obtained antagonist roles with exceptional dramaturgical depth, far away from the more superficial, raging villains he so often impersonated at the Vienna court theater. Those two roles accentuate his seemingly great acting abilities, rather than his vocal capacities. How much of this contrast between London and the other areas is due to external conditions such as tuning, cannot be determined. Nevertheless, I suppose that this element played only a secondary role in the modification of Borosini's part. Having illustrated two examples of Viennese court opera with a quite distinctive comic connotation, one could ask if the stylistic differences could be due to the distinction of *tragicommedia* and *opera seria*. While this aspect cannot be denied, I would like to underline that the Viennese roles of Borosini also included more conventional *seria* roles. Many of those characters displayed exactly the same vocal elements as those of Damone and Don Chisciotte, and therefore those elements are not specifically linked to the comic genre.

Regarding the adaptation of the musical style to the psychological depth of the role, it is beyond doubt that Borosini himself exerted influence over the musical realization. After all, it was the singer himself who compelled Handel to alter the ending of *Tamerlano*.³⁰ He certainly had a special instinct for theater, as is evident from his post-London biography: shortly before applying for his retirement as court musician, he became the impresario for Vienna's Kärntertortheater.³¹

We could suppose that at the height of his career, the tenor – conscious about his abilities – wanted to create something special for the London audience, revealing not only the 'fireworks' of his voice, but its beauty and its drama as well. In contrast with numerous other cases of traveling music, be it *arie di baule* or other practices, Borosini did something quite different once with Handel. He took advantage of the presence of one of the most gifted dramatic composers of his time and elaborated one of the most dramaturgically intense characters of Baroque opera.

The open question is whether other singers of the same period present similar cases once at the Royal Academy, and if this could actually be linked to 'local tastes'. Surely, there were cases of singers who had major influence on the creation of single operas,³² yet how many of them actually portrayed themselves in a less technically challenging

30 See n. 18.

31 See MICHELS, 2012, pp. 123-125. He was also in permanent contact with Viennese and Bohemian aristocracy, for which he served as procurator of librettos (see on that behalf PERUTKOVÁ, 2015).

32 A similar case to that of Bajazet emerges in the contribution of BRANDT, 2008. The author cites the cases of two castratos, Giovanni Carestini and Nicola Grimaldi, who collaborated with Handel and Porpora respectively. They both played a major role in inserting whole scenes which showcased their acting and singing abilities.

way when exposed to one of the most prestigious audiences of Europe? If there are, the case of Borosini could be seen as an emblem for his time rather than as an isolated event.

However, this case ultimately reflects something far more important, namely that opera production as a whole – regardless of the designation *dramma per musica* or *pasticcio* – was a combined effort, to which singers could contribute in a very enriching way. To which extent they had the ability (or the possibility) to do so surely depends on the individual case. Even Francesco Borosini, being a tenor and therefore lower on the hierarchy to his castrato colleagues, managed to have influence on the genesis of several different genres. Within the series of Baroque tenors who managed to have a career comparable to celebrated singers and female sopranos, he, by all accounts, stands out.

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