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*Eleanor Selfridge-Field*

“La guerra de’ comici”:  
Mantuan comedy and Venetian opera  
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1. Comedy and opera in Venice in the late seventeenth century

Nino Pirrotta called opera and comedy “the two most typical forms of the Italian theatre”. While seeking “analogies and correspondences” between them, he did not espouse their being read in parallel.<sup>1</sup> In Venetian theatrical history, opera and comedy progressed in tandem within individual theatres and in parallel among them.<sup>2</sup> This study seeks to reveal direct interactions between opera and comedy within the context of their common patronage by Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga (1652–1708), the last duke of Mantua.

The two most important Venetian comedy theatres in the late seventeenth century were San Salvatore (also called San Luca or the Teatro Vendramin) and San Samuele. Subsequent to the establishment of impresarial opera, San Samuele was the first (from 1655) and only new theatre to devote itself entirely to comedy. The Teatro di San Salvatore, founded in 1661, divided its duties, giving comedies in the autumn and operas in the winter, until the mid-1690s. It then became more active as an opera house. Despite San Salvatore’s bivalent repertory, it was a greatly respected opera house in the last two decades of the century, easily holding its own against three theatres that were entirely devoted to opera — Santi Giovanni e Paolo (1639–99), Sant’Angelo (1677–), and San Giovanni Grisostomo (1678–).

Daniela Ferrari and Paola Besutti have generously made access and understanding of these documents and their contexts possible. Ursula Kirkendale’s writings on the impact of the War of the Spanish Succession on music in the early eighteenth century have proved enormously stimulating, particularly for this topic. Anna Maria White, Ivano Zanenghi, Don Gastone Vio, and Lowell Lindgren have provided much useful help in dealing with other aspects of this study. I extend my cordial thanks to them all.

<sup>1</sup> NINO PIRROTTA: “Commedia dell’arte and opera”, in IDEM: *Music and culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1984, pp. 343–60.

<sup>2</sup> Comedy reigned supreme until 1637, when opera was introduced at the Teatro di San Cassiano. For the next seventy years, opera gradually encroached on comedy. After the initiation of opera, two theatres — San Cassiano and San Moisè — still occasionally gave comedies (and in the latter case puppet operas).

Improvised comedy is admittedly a much more difficult genre to trace than scripted opera. The published libretti of the roughly four hundred operas produced in Venice between 1637 and 1707 have left a very substantial bibliographical trail, on which the relatively few *scenari* that survive from the still longer tradition of Venetian comedy have remained relatively invisible, with a few recent exceptions.<sup>3</sup> Even when they are preserved, *scenari* give few clues about time and place of performance. Their content gives the barest sketch of the intended content. The movements of comedy troupes are faintly visible in scattered references in such archival sources as diplomatic correspondence and weekly newssheets.<sup>4</sup> Both kinds of sources complement important sources for Venetian theatrical history.<sup>5</sup>

In the precarious contractual world of the Venetian theatres, the contest between opera and comedy was unremitting. The real battle was fought when theatre owners and entrepreneurs sat down each spring to determine which personnel would be hired in the following autumn and winter months.<sup>6</sup> Singers, who were hired individually, were selected first, and on an individual basis.<sup>7</sup> The services of the instrumentalists and dancers who participated in opera productions were subcontracted through an organizer drawn from their ranks. It was the organizer with whom theatre owners and impresari negotiated.<sup>8</sup>

Performers of *commedia dell'arte* were always hired in troupes. Negotiations were held with a troupe manager. Each manager staffed the troupe as best she could (the comedy troupes which are the subject of this study all happen to have been managed by women, but in general managers were as likely to be men). Comedy troupes were itinerant. In the spring, summer, and autumn,

<sup>3</sup> One recent source of printed *scenari* is *Gli scenari Correr: la commedia dell'arte a Venezia*, ed. Carmelo Alberti, Bulzoni, Roma 1996. The repertory transcribed is preserved in Venezia, Museo Correr, MS 1040, and is believed to date from the seventeenth century.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the scattered references to comedies in ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *Pallade veneta: writings on music in Venetian society, 1650–1750*, Fondazione Levi, Venezia 1985.

<sup>5</sup> CARMELO ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, Bulzoni, Roma 1990, and FRANCO MANCINI, MARIA TERESA MURARO, and ELENA POVOLEDO: *I teatri del Veneto*, 5 vols. in 6, Regione del Veneto and Corbo e Fiore, Venezia 1995–6. Other sources of interest include CLAUDIA BURATTELLI, DOMENICA LANDOLDI, and ANNA ZINANNI: *Comici dell'arte: corrispondenze*, Le Lettere, Firenze 1993, and NICOLA MANGINI: *I teatri di Venezia*, Mursia, Milano 1974.

<sup>6</sup> All performers were supposed to be paid retrospectively for the past year on the first day of Lent. The dates on which the comedy houses were permitted to open (between 1675 and 1752) are compiled in appendix 2 of ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *The calendar of Venetian opera*, forthcoming. The dates of other moveable feasts relevant to the structure of the theatrical year are also compiled in this source.

<sup>7</sup> The works in which they were to perform were often not written until a few weeks before they opened, so singers were not “cast” in particular roles at the outset. Singers were hired for the entire autumn–winter cycle, which in the late seventeenth century often meant two operas (in later times it could mean three or four).

<sup>8</sup> Surviving opera scores so often lack complete ritornelli and dance numbers that we cannot say to what extent the instrumental numbers other than *sinfonie* were composed specially for each work, to what extent they were improvised from the sketch material that sometimes appears, and to what extent generic pieces were inserted at appropriate points in lieu of missing material.

*commedia* players frequented the circuit of annual *fiere* that were held at staggered dates in every Italian city of any consequence. This pattern of circulation may have dated from much earlier times. Italian comedy troupes had gained such a following by the middle of the sixteenth century that they had found a warm welcome in many other locales and had enduring receptions in France and Bavaria. The expulsion of the Comédie Italienne from France in 1697 brought expatriot players back to Italy, and perhaps some French players may have followed in their wake. By an accident of its geography, the Piedmont became a prime location for the intermixture of French and Italian theatrical personnel. Italian troupes, meanwhile, began to enjoy numerous invitations to Austria. Vis-à-vis all these other venues, employment by a Venetian theatre was an attractive proposition because it offered the possibility of employment from mid-October to mid-December and from just after Christmas until the start of Lent. In the sixteenth and earlier seventeenth centuries, comedies were also performed for brief periods after Easter and the feast of Ascension. An energetic troupe could piece together a full year's employment, provided it was willing to travel.

It was characteristic of Venetian theatres that their production schedules were erratic. There was no mandate that they present a specified number of works in any year. The actual number of operas per theatre ranged from zero to four. Only the new theatres, Sant'Angelo and San Giovanni, maintained steady production schedules from one year to the next. Thus any given theatre in any given year and season could be in one of three states: (1) open and presenting operas, (2) open and presenting comedies, or (3) closed. Without doubt, the comedy troupes were squeezed on all sides, and ever more so as the turn of the century approached. The contours of the long-fought battle between comedy and opera can be traced in the constantly changing boundaries of the seasons into which the Venetian theatrical year could be divided. The autumn and winter months can be parsed into several periods, each of which came to favor slightly different kinds of entertainment. These periods could be said to have begun (1) in the early autumn (from around the feast of San Luca on 18 October), (2) in the later autumn (from the feast of San Martino on 11 November), (3) in Advent (early December, with a mandated closing for the nine days preceding Christmas), (4) during the post-Christmas holidays (from the feast of Santo Stefano on 26 December), and (5) during the period which was arbitrarily declared by the government to constitute Carnival.<sup>9</sup> Between 1637 and 1675, one opera a year, given during Carnival but sometimes beginning shortly after Christmas, was the norm for those theatres which offered one.

<sup>9</sup> In Venice during the period under discussion here Carnival began on an arbitrary date selected anew each year and ended not later than Shrove Tuesday. The opening dates varied from 4 January to mid-February. In general they were later in the seventeenth century and earlier in the eighteenth.

Thus until 1675, comedians could play before an undistracted audience during the autumn. However, the opening of Sant'Angelo and San Giovanni Grisostomo in the later 1670s caused gridlock in the collective calendar of the winter: as many of six of them could be in competition for both audiences and performers. Thus the theatres began to differentiate their calendars. San Giovanni Grisostomo, asserting itself as the most august of the theatres, concentrated on the old "winter" period, while Santi Giovanni e Paolo presented an increasing number of works in early December or late November.<sup>10</sup> Sant'Angelo stayed out of the way of other theatres by retreating to a schedule that called for openings around the feast of San Martino.<sup>11</sup> San Salvatore, San Moisè, and San Cassiano changed their situations many times, offering comedies in the fall and operas in the winter of some years, while devoting themselves exclusively to one or the other genre in other years. Early autumn entertainments, whether comedies or operas, were unlikely to attract large numbers of noble Venetians because when the government was in recess, these nobles were usually at their country villas, which were scattered throughout the Veneto. While in *villeggiatura*, they might in fact attend opera productions elsewhere. For example, public operas were regularly offered in Rovigo from 1696 until 1720, from the feast of San Luca (18 October) until 5 November, the dates of its annual *fiera*.

With regard to the management of comedy venues, it appears that theatre owners made available their houses on an exclusive basis to troupes under the protection of dukes who were politically aligned with the Venetian Republic. In the waning years of the seventeenth century, these were the duke of Parma and the duke of Mantua.<sup>12</sup> The dukes were accustomed to travel to Venice at least once a year to see their troupes perform. In 1680 Francesco and Agata Calderoni (Silvio and Flaminia), who played at San Samuele, were protected by the duke of Parma, but by 1687 the players of Prince Farnese had moved into San Cassiano and a troupe protected by the duke of Mantua had moved to San Samuele.<sup>13</sup> A pivotal figure in this realignment may have been Gasparo Torelli, who worked as an impresario at San Salvatore in 1685 but in 1687 entered the service of the duke of Parma.<sup>14</sup> Thereafter, the duke of Parma was

<sup>10</sup> There was a tendency for openings around this time to coincide, more or less, with the re-opening of the Venetian government.

<sup>11</sup> The duke of Modena was also known to encourage comedy troupes, but no specific evidence of his involvement with troupes regularly resident in Venice during this period has been found.

<sup>12</sup> In the early eighteenth century Teatro Sant'Angelo moved as far back as early October for some of its openings.

<sup>13</sup> SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *Pallade veneta*, p. 146. The duchies of Parma and Piacenza were currently governed by a regent for the future Duke Ranuccio II Farnese (1630–1694). Francesco Calderoni had been on the books of the Mantuan court in 1672 (Mantova, Archivio di Stato, *Archivio Gonzaga*, Carteggio da Venezia, busta 1576, entry of 21 January 1672).

<sup>14</sup> ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 33.

a less conspicuous figure in Venice than the duke of Mantua. Meanwhile, Torelli's departure encouraged the Grimani to take a ten-year lease on San Salvatore, but the arrangement collapsed after two years.

## 2. Mantuan patronage of comedy and opera in Venice

From the perspective of the period 1680–1705, Mantuan patronage held three distinctions concurrently. The duke of the realm provided the single greatest amount of individual patronage ever to be known in Venetian opera. In his role as protector, he cultivated a courtful of able operatic singers. He also protected an increasingly larger percentage of the *comici* who performed in Venetian theatres. It could be said, however, that the Mantuan court had played a disproportionately large role in *commedia dell'arte* since the sixteenth century and that an early external locus of their patronage had been Milan.<sup>15</sup>

The Gonzaga court had traditionally hosted such miscellaneous entertainers as jugglers, acrobats, astrologers, charlatans, and miscellaneous minstrels. It was also extremely hospitable to comedy. The house of Gonzaga was riddled with intrigues, so improvised *commedia* had the inherent virtue that it avoided formal scrutiny because of its lack of a written text. The kind of censorship exercised on opera libretti was completely circumvented. *Commedia* also had practical appeal through its brevity, simplicity, and mutability.

Mantua had a *de facto* relationship with early Venetian opera. It had spawned Poliziano's pastoral play, *Orfeo* (1481), often cited as a landmark in the pre-history of Italian opera. Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607) and Gagliano's *Dafne* (1608), both brimming with innovation, were also composed for the Mantuan court. The transplantation of Monteverdi to Venice in 1613 had been the stimulus that launched opera there.<sup>16</sup>

By the final two decades of the seventeenth century, the single most conspicuous patron of Venetian opera was Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga (1652–1708), tenth duke of Mantua and eighth duke of Monferrato.<sup>17</sup> He was the designated patron of no fewer than fourteen operas staged in Venice between 1677 and 1696.<sup>18</sup> The works dedicated to him ranged from Legrenzi's well regarded

<sup>15</sup> No fewer than twenty-three Gonzagas are mentioned in BURATTELLI, LANDOLDI, and ZINANNI: *Comici dell'arte*. They were early patrons of Giovanni Battista Andreini, a celebrated troupe leader of ca. 1600. The Nobili, who figure in this narrative, had been active in the same troupe from at least 1579 (*ibidem*, pp. 13 ff and *passim*).

<sup>16</sup> It is through the accident of source survival that no operas from the period 1613 to 1637 survive.

<sup>17</sup> ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD: "The War of the Spanish Succession: consequences for music in Venice", *Austria 996–1996: music in a changing society*, ed. Walter Kreyszig, Wilhelm Braumüller Universitäts-Verlagsbuchhandlung, Vienna, forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> It was rare for more than two or three operas to be dedicated to one patron over the course of a lifetime. Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga was also the dedicatee of the first two installments of the monthly *Pallade veneta*, which was replete with reports of the kinds of events that appealed to the duke.



*Totila* (Santi Giovanni e Paolo, 1677) to Polani's *Vindice la pazzia della vendetta*, which was given at the lowly Teatro di San Fantin in 1707.<sup>19</sup> Ferdinand sometimes gave substantial gifts to performers, and this made him especially welcome in the theatres.<sup>20</sup> Destined to be the last duke of the Gonzaga-Nevers line, Ferdinando Carlo was a profligate ruler with an insatiable thirst for public spectacle. With respect to such literary refinements as subjects, plots, and dramatic genres, his taste seems to have been entirely indiscriminate. However, he was not indifferent to the quality of performance. His court carefully culled a stable of well regarded singers, and this hints that the comedians under his control were also considered very able.<sup>21</sup> Despite his early support for the cumbersome historical *dramma per musica* for which the Venetian stage was noted, Ferdinand seems personally to have preferred lighter fare. The production of Pistocchi's *Gli amori fatali*, a *commedia in musica* given with puppets at San Moisè during Carnival of 1682, is illustrative. It was sufficiently popular to have been moved to the palace of Giovanni Maria Vidari, a Mantuan agent, when Lent arrived. It was there performed with "diverse good voices".<sup>22</sup> Ferdinand's name is conspicuously absent from reports of the same period concerning the patronage of oratorios given in Venice's four *ospedali*, although oratorio flourished in Mantua under his rule.

Comedy was, of course, a more accessible genre than opera, and it should have suited Ferdinand's taste far better than opera. Among the regular *comici* active in Mantua in the 1670s one can name Carlo Palma (*in arte* Truffaldino), Francesco Allori (Valerio), Federico Beretta (Il Capitano), and Giovanni Battista Terzi.<sup>23</sup> Some regular involvement of Mantuan comedy troupes in Venice seems to have been established by the mid-1670s, thus predating the opening of San Giovanni Grisostomo and the long series of operas dedicated to Ferdinand. Abbot Vincenzo Grimani wrote to the duke in the spring of 1675 concerning his wish to receive a Finocchio in exchange for a Brighella.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Legrenzi had been recommended to the Viennese court by Ferdinand's father in 1665: ANTONINO BERTOLOTI: *Musici alla corte dei Gonzaga a Mantova dal secolo XV al XVIII: notizie e documenti raccolti negli archivi mantovani*, Ricordi, Milano (1890), reprint Forni, Bologna 1969, p. 110.

<sup>20</sup> For example, he left "very large gifts" to the singers in Legrenzi's *Totila* (Santi Giovanni e Paolo, 1677).

<sup>21</sup> On the varying terms and conditions of the employment of singers and the diverse modes of patronage which existed, see PAOLA BESUTTI: "La figura professionale del cantante d'opera: le virtuose di Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga", *Quaderni storici*, no. 95, XXII/2 August 1997, pp. 409–34.

<sup>22</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.459 (= 12103), entry of 21 February 1682.

<sup>23</sup> Mantova, Archivio di Stato, *Archivio Gonzaga*, series E.XLV.3, Carteggio degli inviati ed altri a Venezia, busta 1576, letters from Palma, 13 October 1674 and 15 March 1675, from Allori, 16, 23, and 30 March 1675; and from Terzi, 5 April 1675. Beretta, who was said to be currently in Germany, is mentioned in the letter of the 23rd as a prospective member of Valerio's troupe. All subsequent references to the Gonzaga archive will begin with the *busta* number. In general the letters in this series are addressed to the "serenissima altezza". The letters originate from Venice unless otherwise noted. Archaic spellings have been modernized in all transcriptions.

<sup>24</sup> Busta 1576, letter of 3 April 1675. See also Grimani's letter of 13 April 1675.

Giovanni Battista Terzi's letter gives the flavour of Venetian comedy at the time. Explaining the merits of a "secondo zanni" whom he proposed for Valerio's troupe, Terzi explained that this person was an "accademico molto differente dal comico, ma in compagnia de comici è buono da sostenere il posto, perché [...] è piaciuto in questa città essendo quattro carnevali che recita comedie dell'arte" and that being studious, he might "become another Marco Bon".<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the members of Valerio's troupe were said by their leader to be "morti di fame" in the weeks ahead.<sup>26</sup>

A characteristic reference to the duke's activities with regard to comedy reads as follows:

Venetia 6 marzo 1677

Il serenissimo di Mantova è pur partito doppo haver udito i musici, che han recitato nel theatro a Santi Giovanni e Paolo, ed alla Cavallarizza, dove sua altezza ben spesso si divertiva nel cavalcare; [ha] lasciato regali, e donativi grandissimi, e ben degni dell'animo generoso d'uno tal prencipe.<sup>27</sup>

A steady trickle of such references can be found in agents' weekly reports (*avvisi*) of the time.<sup>28</sup> In the following year, for example, the duke had arrived in Venice by mid-October. An agent for the duke of Modena captured the flavor of the season quite well in this report:

Venetia 29 ottobre 1678

Rinfrescatosi assai bene il tempo, ed arrivata la stagione solita recitarsi le comedie à queste però si darà principio nel theatro à San Samuele un giorno della ventura settimana, essendo qui à questo fine la compagnia de comici del serenissimo di Mantova, e s'aprirà pure anco altro teatro in breve per altra compagnia già arrivata.<sup>29</sup>

The movement of *comici* between Venice and Mantua increased in the 1680s. In particular the fortunes of the troupe involving "Gradellino et il figlio" seem to have improved.<sup>30</sup> The duke and his agents seem to have been a court of last resort for comedy troupes stymied by Venetian bureaucracy. Thus in the autumn of 1681 the papal legate in Venice reported to the Vatican that "li

<sup>25</sup> Busta 1576, letter of 5 April 1675.

<sup>26</sup> Busta 1576, letter from Francesco Allori, 20 April 1675.

<sup>27</sup> Modena, Archivio di Stato, *Avvisi*, busta 5268 (olim 113), entry by date, fol. 2r. Ferdinand's involvement with the Cavallerizza (located near Santi Giovanni e Paolo) in Venice was singular. When they were needed, he would order horses to be transported from as far away as Casale for exhibitions in the lagoon city. Equestrian activities were otherwise associated in Venice with the oldest noble families.

<sup>28</sup> Such reports are more numerous after 1680; their survival is always sporadic, and for the 1670s they provide relatively little information.

<sup>29</sup> Modena, Archivio di Stato, *Avvisi*, busta 5269 (olim 114), entry by date, fol. 2r.

<sup>30</sup> Letters of Vincenzo Grimani, busta 1576, 5 April 1675, and busta 1582, 17 April 1688. The earlier letter mentions Leporini, Flaminio, Finocchio, and "quelli di Parma". Gradellino and his son had a very good reception in Paris in 1688.



comici incontrano difficoltà per la licenza di principiare le loro recite, ed erano in pensiero *per facilitarla d'emplorare il mezzo del duca di Mantova*, come che va la sua compagnia, ma è svanito loro con tale appoggio".<sup>31</sup> The duke, for his part, was distracted by a forthcoming opera in Piazzola. The reviews of comedies given in Venice by Ferdinand's troupe were generally positive but rarely exuberant. In October of 1687 it was noted that

S'aprirono i teatri di San Casciano e San Samuele per le solite comedie d'istrioni; nel primo recita con grido e fiorita udienza una compagnia del serenissimo signore prencipe Alesandro Farnese e nel secondo con non minor applauso una dell'altezza serenissima del signore duca di Mantova, divertimenti di consolatione a questi popoli che giubilano in sono ai contenti con la facoltà di portarsi in maschera la sera a causa delle comedie che riescono come dissi di somma soddisfazione.<sup>32</sup>

An account of the following month reported that this "virtuosissima" company belonging to the duke was favoured by abundant attendance to continue its performances, since operas were still in preparation and the public did not want to be without entertainments.<sup>33</sup> "Virtuous" is not, however, a word that was commonly associated with Ferdinand's activities and particularly not with the comedies that he so much enjoyed. Some of the entertainments he gave in Mantua were described by one historian simply as "orgies".<sup>34</sup> Even comedies given in private theatres there sometimes gave cause for disapproval.<sup>35</sup> A 1688 description of an "opera a comedia" given in the afternoon ("sull'ora del pranzo") in Cà Mocenigo at San Samuele concerned "[come] si va a letto alla veneziana".<sup>36</sup> The reputation of public comedies given in Venice had, correspondingly, reached a particularly low ebb by the end of the century. When Joseph Addison attended Carnival in Venice in 1701 he described the comedies he saw as "lewd", on account of their low humour, coarse gestures, and *double entendres*.<sup>37</sup> Comedies given in private may have been less distasteful.

<sup>31</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio Segreto, *Nunziatura di Venezia*, no. 122, fol. 87ov, entry of 25 October 1681.

<sup>32</sup> SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *Pallade veneta*, p. 194.

<sup>33</sup> SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *Pallade veneta*, p. 196.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, SELWYN BRINTON: *The Gonzaga, lords of Mantua*, Brentano's, New York 1927, p. 250.

<sup>35</sup> Busta 1583, letter from Lorenzo Zanchi, 22 February 1697 (*more veneto*), for example, mentions the disapproval of comedies given in Mantuan villas in 1698.

<sup>36</sup> Busta 1581, letter with illegible signature (possibly from Count Vialardi), 18 January 1687 (*m.v.*). The rejoinder to the title is that Venetians retire at 8 or 10 (roughly eight or ten hours after sunset). The writer noted that a ridotto was also operating in the Cà Mocenigo, which is where, in 1624, Monteverdi's dramatic cantata *Combattimento di Tancredi et Clorinda* was performed.

<sup>37</sup> JOSEPH ADDISON: *Remarks on several parts of Italy &c. In the years 1701, 1702, 1703*, 3rd ed., F. Tonnson, London 1726, p. 67. For further on Addison's account of Venetian opera and comedy, see ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD: "Venetian opera, French criticism, and English letters: the case of 'Le Mercure de France' and Joseph Addison", *Revue de musicologie*, LXXXIII 1997, pp. 185–203.

### 3. Venetian theatrical ties with the Mantuan court

The most powerful family in the operation of several Venetian theatres from roughly 1675 to 1714 were the Grimani. As we have already seen, two theatres maintained by the Grimani — the opera house Santi Giovanni e Paolo and the comedy theatre San Samuele — operated in parallel during the middle decades of the seventeenth century. The owners of the new Teatro di San Giovanni Grisostomo — Giovanni Carlo (1648–1714) and Vincenzo (1652–1710) Grimani — were young men who had come of age in 1669 and 1673 respectively and represented the second generation of theatre owners in this powerful, noble family. In fact, Giovanni Carlo and Vincenzo were, within the realm of Venetian opera, specialists: Giovanni Carlo looked after opera while Vincenzo oversaw comedy. Thus Giovanni Carlo involved himself very heavily in San Giovanni Grisostomo and let the dust fall where it might at Santi Giovanni e Paolo, which gave its last opera in 1699. The affairs of San Samuele were largely the responsibility of Vincenzo until professional responsibilities and political disputes dissuaded him from living in Venice.

Vincenzo took vows in the church and in 1677 he was granted (by none other than Ferdinando Carlo) the abbey of Lucedio in Monferrato. Allying himself with the empire and the house of Savoy, Vincenzo was named a cardinal in 1697, represented the emperor in Rome during the War of the Spanish Succession (from 1700), and was appointed viceroy of Naples in 1708.<sup>38</sup> Early in his career Vincenzo befriended Eugene (1666–1732), then prince of Savoy, who was to be a celebrated defender of the empire. Vincenzo encouraged the prince's operatic activities at the court of Turin and sometimes intervened on his behalf in pursuit of the services of singers engaged at one of the Grimani theatres in Venice. After Vincenzo signed an agreement of alliance with Vittorio Amedeo II in 1690 on behalf of the emperor, Venetian authorities banished him from the city.<sup>39</sup> He never again paid more than fleeting visits to Venice.<sup>40</sup> Yet Vincenzo Grimani continued to play a role in theatrical affairs in the Grimani theatres, even after he became a viceroy in 1708. He was, for example, the author of a notable libretto for San Giovanni Grisostomo, that of Handel's *Agrippina*, which opened on 26 December 1709. He and his brother were the dedicatees of several works given at San Giovanni. Vincenzo may even have played a small

<sup>38</sup> HARRIS SAUNDERS: "The repertoire of a Venetian opera house (1678–1714): the Teatro Grimani di San Giovanni Grisostomo", Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> Much interesting material on relations between the Grimani and the theatre at Turin, particularly for the years 1667–9, 1675–6, 1687–9, and 1692–5, is given in MARCEDES VIALE FERRERO: "Repliche a Torino di alcuni melodrammi veneziani e loro caratteristiche", *Venezia e il melodramma nel Seicento*, ed. Maria Teresa Muraro, Olschki, Firenze 1976, pp. 145–72; see especially p. 154.

<sup>40</sup> From 1700 to 1702 and from 1706 to 1708 he was resident in Rome; during the intervening years he was in Vienna: SAUNDERS: "The repertoire of a Venetian opera house", p. 23.

role in the future of Handelian opera, insofar as the soprano Margherita Durastanti was one of the many singers once protected by the duke of Mantua who found her way to Venice.<sup>41</sup>

The overall degree of relationship with the Mantuan court was greater than it might seem, for the roster of singers at San Giovanni throughout the three decades beginning in 1678 (insofar as it is known) included a disproportionately large number who were associated with Mantua.<sup>42</sup> This tradition may have been established by Santi Giovanni e Paolo.<sup>43</sup> Vincenzo's influence on the staffing and repertory of San Samuele, elusive though the evidence may be, has to have been considerable. It was upon his death in 1710 that San Samuele at last caved in to the fate of its sister theatres and started to present operas. Giovanni Carlo, meanwhile, involved himself wholeheartedly in the establishment and operation of San Giovanni Grisostomo. He spared himself no inconvenience in the pursuit of the best scripts, scores, and performers for the theatre, of which he was justly proud. He lost his second wife, the Countess Ginevra Manin, prematurely from an illness she contracted while accompanying him on a trip to Florence to recruit a singer for the theatre in December 1682.<sup>44</sup> The Mantuan agents in Venice began to provide frequent and copious news of Venetian opera, often noting the role of Mantuan singers in them. Under Giovanni Carlo, San Giovanni Grisostomo tilted towards tales of valor that upheld imperial interests, often conveyed in the guise of Roman history. Although like his brother he was partial to the Austrian cause, he managed to maintain a friendship, at least in the 1690s, with the Ottobonis, whose sympathies lay with the French; it was their common interest in the authority of Rome that seems to have held the friendship together. He was the dedicatee of several libretti, including

<sup>41</sup> She made her Venetian debut one month before *Agrippina* opened, in a "melodramma pastorale" called *Ama più chi men si crede* (music by Lotti; text by Silvani).

<sup>42</sup> Among the singers linked with both Mantua and San Giovanni Grisostomo were Domenico Cecchi (Il Cortona), Ferdinando Chiaravalle, Pietro Paolo Scandalibene, Giovanni Buzzoleni; also Barbara Riccioni, Elena Garofolini, Clarice Gigli, Angiola Gheringh, Margherita Salvagnini, and Santa Stella (the eventual wife of Antonio Lotti). Standard bibliographies of Venetian opera (reflecting the contents of libretti) do not contain cast lists until roughly 1705, but much information about San Giovanni's casts is found in FRANCESCO CAFFI: "Appunti, frammenti, corrispondenza relativi alla storia della musica teatrale a Venezia", Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. iv.748 (= 10466).

<sup>43</sup> Tomaso Boni must have appeared there in the 1675–6 season, for Giovanni Carlo Grimani assured the duke in the spring of 1676 that he would return Boni immediately, with signs of his gratitude: busta 1576, letter of 12 April 1676.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. 459 (= 12103), entry of 19 December 1682. Neither Grimani's first wife, Maria Pisani (d. 1666), nor his second bore any children. His third, Marieta Foscarini (d. 1684), produced five sons and three daughters: SAUNDERS: "The repertoire of a Venetian opera house", p. 3. A mere month after the death of his second wife it was reported that "al signor Carlo Grimani a cui morì la seconda moglie [...] si dice destinato ad una dama genovese in nuova sposa con dote di m/100 genovine" (Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio Segreto, *Avvisi*, no. 46, entry of 6 February 1683), but the plan did not materialize. Grimani had married the Countess Manin, the niece of a procurator, in 1681.

that of Pollarolo's *La forza della virtù* (1692).<sup>45</sup> Giovanni Carlo also wrote one libretto for San Giovanni, that of *Sigismondo primo*, set in 1696 by Pignatta. On the surface, the alignment of a cleric with comedy and a government official with opera seems somewhat curious, since comedy of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries is remembered as ribald. However, clerics of the time regarded comedy (at least some of it) as more wholesome, or at least less outrageous, than opera. Comedy was an acceptable entertainment in many private venues, including the Roman palaces of cardinals, while public opera remained unacceptable in Rome throughout the century.<sup>46</sup>

The correspondence between the Venetian theatres and the Mantuan court surviving in Mantua indicates that opera casts were understood in somewhat the same terms as comedy troupes. They had a designated number of *donne* and *uomini* and these were often kept in balance. Abbot Grimani wrote to the court in the summer of 1689, for example, explaining that as regarded Signora Laura, there was no role for a third *donna* at San Giovanni Grisostomo, and that Santi Giovanni e Paolo would not hire singers without an audition.<sup>47</sup>

The alliance of the Grimani with the court of Mantua was not accidental. Gonzaga blood flowed in the veins of the theatre-owners. Elena Grimani, the mother of Vincenzo and Giovanni Carlo, was the daughter of Luigi Francesco Gonzaga, marquis of Palazzolo, a distant relative of the duke's. Her daughter Olimpia (b. 1665) married Pirro Maria Gonzaga, the marquis of Vescovado.<sup>48</sup> The Grimani held property in Mantua, but there is little evidence that the theatre-owners spent significant amounts of time in the duchy. It is not clear that they were particularly partial to Ferdinando Carlo, but he was completely infatuated with Venice.

Ferdinand's distant cousin and sometime rival, Don Vincenzo Grimani was the patron of the inaugural work — Pallavicino's *Il Vespasiano*<sup>49</sup> — at "the phoenix of theatres" (San Giovanni Grisostomo). Its opening, on 24 January 1678, was a stellar event in the history of Venetian opera.<sup>50</sup> Ferdinand's mother,

<sup>45</sup> It was undoubtedly through his association with San Giovanni Grisostomo in the age of Giovanni Carlo that Pollarolo came to be regarded as the composer of choice for the celebration of imperial causes in Venice.

<sup>46</sup> In Rome and Naples, Spanish comedy was very popular in the late seventeenth century. See, for example, the reports from those venues in Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.459-477 (= 12103-12121).

<sup>47</sup> Busta 1582, letter of 3 September 1689.

<sup>48</sup> A fourth sibling, Adriana (b. 1667) married the Venetian nobleman Marc'Antonio Michele, a Venetian senator: SAUNDERS: "The repertoire of a Venetian opera house", p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> The subject resonated with Gonzaga family history: a Vespasiano had been the last duke (from 1585) of the Sabbioneta branch of the family. Pallavicino's subject was the Roman emperor.

<sup>50</sup> At the final performance, on 26 February 1678, a masked gentleman in the following of the duke of Mantua was involved in a noisy altercation with a Venetian gentleman (Florentine diplomatic dispatch quoted in SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *Pallade veneta*, p. 352). In the following year Don Vincenzo married his cousin Maria Vittoria Gonzaga, the sister of Ferdinand's wife, Anna Isabella.

Isabella Clara, was the dedicatee of *Il Nerone*, also set by Pallavicino, early in 1679. Ferdinand's wife, Anna Isabella, was the dedicatee of *Messalina*, a further work by Pallavicino, which opened at San Giovanni at the end of 1679.<sup>51</sup>

As the most obstreperous and objectionable of the Gonzagas, Ferdinand's welcome in Venice outside the theatres was not always enthusiastic. Intelligence reports are filled with notes of disapproval. Already in 1673 the French ambassador to Venice had reported that "le duc de Mantoue ne s'acquiète pas ici beaucoup d'estime. Il est d'ordinaire avec des courtisanes, et à la comédie il se tient plus derrière le théâtre avec les comédiennes que dans sa loge".<sup>52</sup> On 5 November 1681 the Venetian agent Giovanni Lando wrote that "il duca è instabilissimo, et ha per sua familiare il fare tutto al oposito di quello che dice".<sup>53</sup> Ferdinand's most consequential vice was his profligate spending. He could afford very little of the entertainment with which he so regularly provided himself. In November 1682 he was stripped of his honorary Venetian nobility, ostensibly for his failure to repay debts, but this act had no bearing on either his conduct or his omnipresence. Louis XIV remained his loyal creditor, and it was on account of his monthly pension of 30,000 *scudi* that Ferdinand was obliged to side with the French during the War of the Spanish Succession.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4. The court and the theatres in the 1690s

Although Ferdinand is an easy target for historians, his vices expressed themselves in an increasingly perplexing world. Saddled with agreements which he had inherited, he was increasingly paralyzed by forces over which any ruler might have had little control. In 1681, he agreed to permit French troops to occupy Casale. He was stripped of his honorary Venetian nobility in the following year.<sup>55</sup> Political alliances with the French always made the Venetians nervous; they were themselves increasingly dependent on Austrian protection and German mercenaries to protect their political interests in the eastern Mediterranean. When Spanish troops entered Casale in 1691 and then started

<sup>51</sup> *Messalina* is often noted for its lascivious subject, but many works of the time contained lascivious scenes. Turkish baths and harems were especially popular in opening scenes at the time.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted by BESUTTI: "La figura professionale del cantante d'opera", p. 424, from H. DE BEAUCAIRE: *Recueil des instructions données aux ambass. et minis. de France*, Paris 1899, pp. 181f. The reference continues, "Toujours malade des maux qui donnent tant de sujets de plaindre les honnêtes femmes qui ont des maris débauchés".

<sup>53</sup> Venezia, Archivio di Stato, *Inquisitori di stato*, Riferte de' confidenti, busta 611, fascicolo Giovanni Lando (1681). This observation was conveyed by Count Vialardi, then the Mantuan secretary of state. Lando served as the Venetian minister in Rome in the mid-1680s.

<sup>54</sup> URSULA KIRKENDALE: "The War of the Spanish Succession reflected in the works of Antonio Caldara", *Acta musicologica*, xxxvii 1965, p. 225.

<sup>55</sup> At the time, a number of foreign dukes who were allied with the Republic in their military endeavours held honorary noble status.

moving towards Mantua, the Duchess Anna Isabella fled to Ferrara. After narrowly surviving a stabbing in May 1692, the duke effectively abandoned Mantua for more or less permanent residence in Venice.<sup>56</sup> In 1694 the Austrians started to maintain some surveillance over him.<sup>57</sup> In 1697 rumors were circulated that the duke of Mantua had sold Casale and Monferrato to the duke of Savoy.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, Ferdinand had taken possession of a small house (*casino*) at San Geremia instead of the more opulent quarters he had rented in previous years.<sup>59</sup> After the empire's highest court in 1699 favoured Duke Vincenzo's claim to Mantuan revenues for the period from 1678 to 1692, Ferdinand's assets were further diminished.

Given the indebtedness of Ferdinand to the French and the strong allegiance of the Grimani (particularly Vincenzo) to the Austrians, it is quite extraordinary that the interdependence of the theatre-owners and the duke seems to have continued with relatively little perturbation. There are two plausible explanations for this. First, the artistic reputation of the duke's stable of performers was second to none. Second, it was not the duke but a succession of thoughtful, responsible agents who controlled the negotiations for these performers. Regarding the first, Muratori recalled that around 1690 the duke and duchess of Mantua had offered protection to the most outstanding singers of the time.<sup>60</sup> The number of celebrated singers in this group has been little recognized until recently.<sup>61</sup> Of the opera composers most closely associated with Mantua — Antonio Giannettini, Marc'Antonio Ziani, and Antonio Caldara — the last two went on to stellar careers after leaving the duke's employ.<sup>62</sup>

The posture that the duke assumed in Venice lacked either signs of strain or indications that he was cognizant of his eroding power. In 1697 he presented a serenata which included the singers "Finalino, Santorino, Madalena,

<sup>56</sup> Weekly newssheets fix the duke's location quite precisely. The "permanent residence" reported by books is not entirely supported: Ferdinand travelled back and forth every few weeks, rarely staying in either place for longer than a month or six weeks.

<sup>57</sup> BRINTON: *The Gonzaga, lords of Mantua*, p. 256.

<sup>58</sup> Roma, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Archivio Segreto, *Nunziatura di Venezia*, no. 145 (1697), entry of 22 June 1697, fol. 423v.

<sup>59</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.474 (= 12118), entry of 27 July 1697, fol. 2v. However, subsequent documents speak of his "palazzo a San Lunardo sopra il Canal Grande".

<sup>60</sup> BESUTTI: "La figura professionale del cantante d'opera", p. 410, quoting LUDOVICO ANTONIO MURATORI: *Annali d'Italia dal principio dell'era volgare sino all'anno 1749*, 2nd ed., Milano 1753, p. 512.

<sup>61</sup> BESUTTI: "La figura professionale del cantante d'opera", pp. 430–3, gives a listing of twenty singers associated with the court during the difficult years of 1700–4. Several important figures of prior years are discussed in the preceding pages of Besutti's article.

<sup>62</sup> It could be argued that their association with the duke doomed them to suffer the same lack of respect as their protector. During their years of service to the duke of Mantua, these composers' works were frequently scheduled at the less prestigious theatres and produced during the less prestigious seasons. However, youth alone could explain this path of activity. Theatre-managers wanted celebrities for the center stage.



and Adriana".<sup>63</sup> It was he who insisted in the summer of 1698 that a great entertainment be prepared for the queen of Poland.<sup>64</sup> Towards the end of the year he bought a new palace near Santa Sofia for 26,000 ducats.<sup>65</sup> In April of the following year he took with him to Mantua

diversi musici per recitarvi opera famosa, e quel serenissimo farà anco goder divertimenti di regatte, guerra de pugnì, e bellissimi oratorij, e qui si vedono affissi cartelli, che invitano a goder nel teatro della città di Reggio in Lombardia altra opera famosa intitolata \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>66</sup>

These constant reversals of direction give but a faint hint of the true degree of the duke's fickleness. Nor was Ferdinand the only Gonzaga whom performers found difficult to please. Late in 1699 it was reported that "the famous musician [Domenico Cecchi detto Il] Cortona" had been imprisoned in Mantua because of an unpleasant encounter with Don Gastone Gonzaga.<sup>67</sup>

The most important Mantuan agents involved in relations with Venice between 1690 and the collapse of the duchy were Carlo Maria Vialardi, Lorenzo Zanchi, Lorenzo Versuzo Beretti, Muzio Francesco Cremona, and Francesco Galvani. Vialardi remained in Mantua. Zanchi wrote prolifically from Venice until after the turn of the century, although Beretti held the authority he often described. Cremona and Galvani slowly filled the gap left by them. It fell to the agents to give authorizations for performers to travel and to negotiate schedules that would not leave the duke without entertainers, should he wish for their services in Mantua or Casale. As the affairs of the court deteriorated, the difficulty of travel increased, so these tasks were much more complicated than they would have been at a stable court in times of peace.

<sup>63</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.474 (= 12118), entry of 7 September 1697, fol. 2v. The work in question was performed on 1 September. The singers can be identified as Giuseppe Segni da Finale detto il Finalino, Lorenzo Santorino, and perhaps Maddalena Giustiniani. Andriana remains unidentified.

<sup>64</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. IV.475 (= 12119), entry of 29 November 1698, fol. 2v. Finalino is cited as a "musico di vostra altezza" in a letter from Antonio Trenti (writing from Vicenza) on 16 August 1686 (busta 1581).

<sup>65</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. IV.475 (= 12119), entry of 13 December 1698, fol. 2r. The palace had once been leased by Prince Alessandro Farnese.

<sup>66</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. IV.476 (= 12120), entry of 11 April 1699, fol. 2r. The two operas given during the spring fair in Reggio were both set to music by C. F. Pollarolo. They were *L'enigma disciolto* and *L'Ulisse sconosciuto in Iliaca*. Their libretti (the first by G. B. Neri, the second anonymous) were dedicated on 27 aprile and 2 maggio respectively: PAOLO FABBRI and ROBERTO VERTI: *Due secoli di teatro per musica a Reggio Emilia: repertorio cronologico delle opere e dei balli, 1645-1857*, Teatro Municipale Valli, Reggio Emilia 1987, p. 49. The work may have been a recomposition of Pallavicino's *Penelope la casta* (Venice, 1685), since the lead role was that of Penelope and it was sung by Margarita Salicola; its librettist had been Matteo Noris. However, a still earlier *Penelope* was given as the "introduzione ad un torneo nel Teatro Fedeli" for the feast of Ascension in 1674: Mantova, Archivio di Stato, *Schede Davari*, busta 16, pezzo 916. The printed libretto indicates that this work was performed for the wedding of the Emperor Leopold and the Empress Claudia Felice.

<sup>67</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. IV.476 (= 12120), entry of 31 October 1699, fol. 1r.

In 1690 the comedy troupe at San Samuele was reformed. Giovanni Carlo Grimani wrote to Carlo Maria Vialardi in Mantua on 4 March to say that he thought that the comedians were now, for the most part, satisfied with their pay. Only three weeks later Grimani wrote again to enquire first whether "any of your companies of comedians would be disposed to play at my theatre of San Samuele" and also whether Vialardi could find out if "Diana comica" could join a new company in Venice that so far lacks "some principal people".<sup>68</sup> A letter of the following week suggests that San Samuele employed different companies for different seasons, for Grimani wrote to Vialardi to ask whether the company intended for Carnival might also be available for the autumn.<sup>69</sup> In the actual event, the troupe that was engaged for the autumn was that of Virginio (a *nome in arte*). Incensed when an enquiry was made about the renting of a house on their behalf, Grimani responded that he had never provided such a thing and that there was plenty of room in the theatre in which they might live.<sup>70</sup> This remark was typical of Grimani's attitude: he frequently professed ignorance of such considerations as travel expenses, living expenses, contracts in advance of performance, or any other procedure that might be beneficial to the performer. In his defense, it can only be said that such practices seem not to have been standardized at the time. Grimani also made a great effort during the spring of 1690 to improve the quality of the singers in his theatres, and here too he relied heavily on the Mantuan court. He discovered, though, that the best singers in his sights — Giovanni Buzzoleni, Dianina Testi, Anna Maria Torri Cecchi detta la Beccarina, and Domenico Cecchi (Il Cortona) — were not likely to be easily available.<sup>71</sup> La Beccarina had already been engaged by Sant'Angelo and Cortona for the Carnival in Rome.<sup>72</sup> In their places Grimani sought to engage Maria Maddalena Musi (detta la Mignata) and Ferdinando Chiaravalle but was promptly in conflict with the first over her demands for a wardrobe and with the second for wanting a stipend for his free time.<sup>73</sup> In the

<sup>68</sup> Busta 1582, letter of 25 March 1690. Vialardi's box at the Nuovo Teatro de Comici in Mantua was stated to be given to the comedians in an inventory of 1688. The adjacent boxes were leased by other members of the Vialardi and Beretti families (busta 3170, entry for 1688).

<sup>69</sup> Busta 1582, letter of 1 April 1690. Grimani wrote again to Vialardi on the 19th to thank him for sending information on the availability of the troupe for the autumn: he said that if the *comici* had been dissatisfied with his offer, he would have taken additional measures to elicit their interest.

<sup>70</sup> Busta 1582, letter of 6 May 1690.

<sup>71</sup> Busta 1582, letters of 11 February 1690 and 4 March 1690. Grimani later added "a half dozen" *doppie* to Buzzoleni's *regalo* (ibidem, letter of 19 April 1690). Grimani's February letter is especially revealing in that he was counting on Duke Ferdinand to provide employment for the rest of the year and travel visas for the opera season. Many interesting details are conveyed in Grimani's letters of 1, 8, 19, and 29 April.

<sup>72</sup> Busta 1582, letter to Grimani, 8 March 1690. The sender's signature is illegible. Cortona's agenda had been arranged by Prince Antonio Ottoboni.

<sup>73</sup> Busta 1582, letters from Grimani to Vialardi, 29 April and 6 May. No singer with the name Ferdinand took part in this production. Unless Mignata was the unnamed "sopran ferrarese", she did not participate either. See SAUNDERS: "The repertoire of a Venetian opera house", p. 454 for the list of the cast.

end, the title-role was taken from Francesco Pistocchi. In a curious letter written on 6 May 1690 Grimani informed Vialardi that while he was indebted to the count for his permission to engage the (comedy) troupe of Virginio for the following year, he wished that Signora Mignata be informed that it was not his practice to pay for musicians' wardrobes.<sup>74</sup>

The extent to which Gonzaga family members participated in Venetian theatrical affairs is suggested in a letter from Giovanni Francesco Palazzi written during the following November. In a series of impatient reports, Palazzi described many delays in the opening of Boniventi's *Il gran macedone* at San Cassiano. The first was that a "virtuosa di Milano" was foisted upon Palazzi (the apparent impresario) by the Marchese Annibale Gonzaga. The latter was acting on the advice of a friend whom he took to be an "oracolo della musica" but whose discernment of musical skill was apparently slight. The originally cast singer was replaced by Valeria Giudicelli, who was slow in reaching Venice (from Brescia) and forthwith contracted laryngitis.<sup>75</sup> Whatever deterioration occurred in the affairs of Mantua during the 1690s, they were not evident in the steadily more amazing roster of singers that the duchy maintained. In the winter of 1696 the agent Angelo Robetani commented on the successes of Francesco Ballarino and Maria Landini, who both appeared in Pollarolo's *Rosimonda* at San Giovanni Grisostomo.<sup>76</sup> Not all that glittered was gold, though. The production of *Sigismondo* (for which Giovanni Carlo Grimani had written the libretto) at Santi Giovanni e Paolo in 1696 left debts that were still unpaid in 1701.<sup>77</sup> By 1698 Giovanni Battista Pico, an administrator (*scalco*) of the duchy, seems to have been involved in the supervision of the Mantuan comedy troupes. Antonio Coppa wrote to him from Padua in July to describe his company's recent experiences there, and the manoeuvring of Ardelio, a Genovese comedian who wished to change troupes.<sup>78</sup>

## 5. Mantua adrift

The death of the Spanish King Carlos II without heirs on 1 November 1700 precipitated a chain of events that was to alter permanently the whole of Europe. Upon the succession of the duke of Anjou to the Spanish throne as

<sup>74</sup> Mantova, Archivio di Stato, *Archivio Gonzaga*, busta 1582, letter from Grimani, 6 May 1690.

<sup>75</sup> Busta 1582, letters from Palazzi, 12 and 20 November, also 2, 9, 16, and 24 December 1690.

<sup>76</sup> Busta 1583, letter of 31 December 1695.

<sup>77</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Gabriel Marcello, 16 April 1701. One of the singers, Angela Preziosi, was represented by Abbot Guidizini, who approached Giovanni Contarini, the *maestro di camera* to Cardinal Vincenzo Grimani, who was supposed to mediate the dispute with Giovanni Moles, the son of the former Spanish ambassador to Venice.

<sup>78</sup> Busta 1583, letter from Padova to Giovanni Battista Pico. The troupe would have been playing during the *fiera di Sant'Antonio*, which started on the *festa* (13 June).

Philip v, what came to be known as the War of the Spanish Succession began. Many maritime powers, including the Serenissima Repubblica and the dukes of Modena and Guastalla, would take sides with Austria. The duchy of Mantua and several German electors would side with the French.<sup>79</sup> Ferdinand would be dead for five years before the war was over. Almost immediately Mantua was sequestered.

The year 1701 was utterly bleak, not only in Mantua but also over the whole of northern Italy. Travel was unsafe. Venice was all but devoid of tourists. Opera productions dwindled there, but lack of customary access stimulated new theatrical life in many other venues now familiar to audiences of the recent past.<sup>80</sup> While the conditions of war were, in general, an important stimulus to a diaspora of theatrical activity outside Venice, Mantua was not characteristic, however, since it was encumbered with its physically divided court. The Teatro dei Comici had been presenting comedies and operas for all of Ferdinand's adult years. Some operas given in Mantua had been recycled versions of Venetian works, however. In January of 1702 it was reported that at Mantua "si continuano nella città divertimenti di comedie, et altro allegrezzi, ma però [...] c'è molta penuria".<sup>81</sup> Only days earlier the duke's company of comedians had arrived in Venice and their show had opened at the Teatro di San Samuele on 23 January, but the duke remained at home.<sup>82</sup> Prince Eugene's blockade of Mantua continued from December 1701 until July 1702. As soon as the siege was over, Ferdinand moved his court to Casale. Caldara was his composer-in-exile and provided a setting for *Gli equivoci nel sembiante*, which was produced in Casale (probably 1703). In 1704 two music-dramas — *Il trionfo d'amore* by Quintavalle and *Paride sull'Ida* by Caldara — were staged there. The enterprises of many other performers were severely disrupted by this move. Companies were splintered, since individual performers were scattered in diverse locations when the command to move was given. The expense and impracticality of travel made these problems of division difficult to remedy. The duke, however, wanted all the pleasures of home in Casale and was eager to reform the entertainments of his court. Because of the large percentage of the year during which they found work in Venice, many performers under the duke's protection were "stranded" in Venice. Radical changes took place on all related fronts in the first years of the new century. It may be the paucity of visitors and the penury of such few *personaggi* as were in town that led to the opening of the small Teatro San Fantin, near the site of the later Teatro La Fenice. By coincidence it opened just a few days before Carlos II died (1

<sup>79</sup> The deceased monarch had a half-sister who was married to Louis XIV and a younger sister who was married to the Emperor Leopold I.

<sup>80</sup> Only two new operas were produced in Venice in 1701.

<sup>81</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.478 (= 12122), entry of 4 February 1702.

<sup>82</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.478 (= 12122), entry of 28 January 1702.

November 1700). Lorenzo Zanchi, the Mantuan agent then in Venice, reported the opening of San Samuele on 23 January, that of San Salvatore on the 24th, and that of an “altra buffoneria” at the small Teatro agl’Apostoli in recent days.<sup>83</sup>

Prince Eugene of Savoy, who took charge of the imperial troops in the summer of 1702, allied himself with Austrian cultural practices. He arrived *incognito* in Venice on 29 December 1702 and eagerly attended the opera at San Giovanni Grisostomo two days later.<sup>84</sup> The work can be identified as Pollaro’s *L’odio e l’amore*, which had opened on the 27th.

In 1703 the empire occupied the duchy of Milan. Casale was left in a precarious situation. This was also the year in which Ferdinand lost his first wife, Anna Isabella, who had remained in Mantua.<sup>85</sup> Ferdinand was in Casale while her obsequies were conducted and lost little time in undertaking an extended trip to Paris, where he remained for several months in 1704. On the first anniversary of the death of his first wife Ferdinand married his second, Suzanne Henriette of Lorraine-Elbeuf.<sup>86</sup> The marriage was celebrated with the performance of Caldara’s *L’Arminio* in Genoa.<sup>87</sup> The bride was to be the dedicatee of Gasparini’s *Il principato custodito* (San Cassiano, 1705). An infusion of French entertainments followed in her wake. For example, a group of “virtuosi di ballo francese” soon appeared in Casale.<sup>88</sup> The distraction of all these events made Ferdinand an even more distant and disengaged figure within his Casale court than he had been in Mantua. After the court moved to Casale, ducal authority over matters related to performance seem to have been vested in Giovanni Battista Pico, the duke of Mirandola.

## 6. The *comici* at war

Among all the Mantuan agents who played some role in the affairs of Venetian theatres, the most important may have been Beretti. It was undoubtedly he who was the figure at the nexus of negotiations occasioned by the dislocation of the court in the first years of the eighteenth century, for it was he who had put in place so many of the standing agreements over the preceding decade.

<sup>83</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 28 January 1701 (*m.v.*).

<sup>84</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. VI.479 (= 12123), entry of 6 January 1702 (*m.v.*). This report notes, however, that he did not stay, as anticipated, with the Austrian ambassador but instead with Signor Messa, an imperial commissioner.

<sup>85</sup> Anna Isabella died on 19 November 1703. By one account Ferdinand had a successor in mind immediately. See KIRKENDALE: “The War of the Spanish Succession”, p. 227.

<sup>86</sup> BESUTTI: “La figura professionale del cantante d’opera”, p. 417.

<sup>87</sup> KIRKENDALE: “The War of the Spanish Succession”, demonstrates convincing political analogies in the cast of *L’Arminio*.

<sup>88</sup> BESUTTI: “La figura professionale del cantante d’opera”, p. 417.

But Beretti is more conspicuous by his absence after 1702 than by his presence in the preceding years. In the closing years of the seventeenth century Beretti was Ferdinand's secretary of state. From 1692, he seems to have been a conduit for communications with Annibale Gonzaga.<sup>89</sup> By 1694 he was regularly resident in Venice.<sup>90</sup> He was the dedicatee of operas at San Cassiano (1696, 1705), Santi Giovanni e Paolo (1697), and San Fantin in 1701.<sup>91</sup> Dozens of letters preserved in Gonzaga archive indicate that he was centrally involved in the procurement of comedians and sometimes of singers protected by the court. Beretti had also written the texts for at least two oratorios.<sup>92</sup> In 1702 he was knighted and given a generous pension. By 1705 he had become a papal envoy.

As many as four comedy troupes seem to have been under Mantuan protection during the period from 1701 to 1705. They were those of (1) Aurelia Colomba Coppia, (2) Teresa Costantini (*in arte* Diana), (3) Angiola Paghetti, and (4) Anna Marini.<sup>93</sup> The first three, which seem all to have been principally resident in Venice, wrote several dozen letters to the court over this short period to ask for help in filling the rosters of their companies, to beg forgiveness for not going to Casale, to complain about the precariousness of their finances, and to pass on gossip and rumours about players in other troupes. Anna Marini's troupe may have existed for the benefit of Anna Isabella during the last years of her life.

The issues that were most topical for comedy troupes at this time were (1) the degree of licentiousness to be tolerated, (2) whether recitations were to be in prose or in verse, and (3) whether the troupes should present only *commedie* or whether they should also offer *tragedie*.<sup>94</sup> These had to compete for attention with management issues: (1) were the companies (a) entitled and/or (b) obligated to perform during both the autumn and winter seasons? (2) were they to be paid, as before, only at the start of Lent or could they be paid in two installments — one at Christmas and one at Easter?

<sup>89</sup> Busta 1582, letter of 23 August 1692.

<sup>90</sup> Busta 1583, letter from Lorenzo Zanchi, 30 January 1693 (*m.v.*).

<sup>91</sup> These works were Ruggieri's *Clotilde* (1696), Pollarolo's *Circe abbandonata da Ulisse* (1697), the pastiche *Pericle in Samo* (1701), and Gasparini's *La Fredegonda* (1705).

<sup>92</sup> *La fortezza e la pietà, ossia Il Ferdinando e l'Isabella regi di Castiglia* (Mantua, 1684) and *Il Davide liberato* (Mantua, 1687): PAOLA BESUTTI: "Rapporti fra opera e oratorio in area medio-padana (secolo XVII): Mantova", *Revista de musicologia*, XVI 1993, p. 2936.

<sup>93</sup> In this account proper names are given wherever possible. In the documents themselves players and company leaders are often referred to by their names *in arte* but proper names are normally given in signatures. Names used *in arte* were pseudo-proper names (Celio, Lelio, Flaminia, Virginio, etc.). In the documents surveyed, these names are often interchanged with role names (*primo innamorato*, etc.). In Venetian documents, the term *moroso* (-a) was usually used instead of *innamorato* (-a).

<sup>94</sup> As Riccoboni later went to great lengths to demonstrate, *tragedie* had had an illustrious history in the sixteenth century. See his *Histoire du theatre italien depuis la decadence de la comedie latine; avec un catalogue des tragedies et comedies italiennes imprimées depuis l'an 1500, jusqu'à l'an 1660 et une dissertation sur la tragedie moderne*, Pierre Delorme, Paris 1728. Riccoboni gives extensive title-lists for both genres.



Aurelia's troupe, which was associated with San Samuele, was respected for its decorum, particularly in comparison with Teresa's troupe, which apparently was the more outrageous in its performances.<sup>95</sup> Aurelia (*prima morosa*) was herself a Venetian and so were several other players. Her roster included her husband Giuseppe (*primo zanne*), her son Antonio (Fulvio), Pietro Cotta (Celio), Giovanni Battista Garelli (Pantalone), Giovanna Benozzi Sassi (Fravoleta), her husband Giovanni Battista Sassi (Pasquino), Guido Richiari (Ottavio), and Isabella Servilli (Eularia).<sup>96</sup> In his *Memoires* Goldoni characterized Aurelia as "agreeable, lively, and piquant" when, at age 85, she was introduced to Girolamo Medenbach. Among the other members of Aurelia's troupe, Garelli (known as a "Pantalone eloquente") was still an active Pantalone in the 1730s. Riccoboni remembered Pietro Cotta as a gifted *innamorato*.<sup>97</sup>

Cotta was in fact not only a gifted performer. He was also the author of such prose works as the tragedy *Romolo*, which was dedicated to Abbot Vincenzo Grimani in 1679 (when Cotta was already under Ferdinando Carlo's protection), and of a *tragicommedia eroica*, *Peripezie di Alerame e Adelasia*, dedicated to Ferdinando Carlo in 1697.<sup>98</sup> The first work indicates that a moralising tone was characteristic of Cotta. This tone reached fever pitch in the spring of 1702, when Cotta, after recuperating from a long illness, decided to quit the profession. Among his letters preserved in the Gonzaga Archives, he gives many accounts of his reasons for deciding to leave the field. The following statement, from 30 December 1702, is characteristic. After recounting his efforts to persuade Beretti during the previous Lent of his intentions, he continued:

Il voler io abbandonar le scene, nel caso *presente*, non ha altro impulso che da un christiano motivo per l'impegno di mia coscienza stabilito nella mia mortale infirmità dell'anno scorso col consiglio de miei confessori: lo stato da me propostomi per vivere, sin da un anno *pretende* in queste due elezioni; o di procurarmi qui in Venezia, o pur altrove con qualche mio denaro, e con qualche favore una carica civile dal publico, come sarebbe una scuderia del doge, o altra simile. Overo di ritirarmi con quel poco, mi trovo a vivere in qualche luogo di religiosi: il caso *presente*.

Della moglie da molto tempo caduta in pericolosa infermità e da me, benché tanto separata di sostanze, e di letto, per carità sol mio denaro assistita, o morendo, o sopravvivendo può chiedere del mio caso. Questa io le giuro essere la purità delle

<sup>95</sup> The theatre with the worst reputation for offensive taste at this time seems to have been San Moisè: see busta 1586, Aurelia's letter of 18 October 1704.

<sup>96</sup> This is Alberti's listing (*La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 42), ostensibly for the 1703–4 season. A letter from Aurelia's son, Giuseppe Coppa, dated 7 April 1703, contains the signatures of seven players: Aurelia Colomba Coppa, Pietro Cotta detto Celio, Giovanna Benozzi Sassi detta Fravoleta, Giovanni Battista Sassi, Giovanni Battista Garelli, Guido Richiari detto Ottavio, and the writer, Giuseppe Coppa detto Trinella. Antonio Coppa (relationship to Aurelia not known) was involved with the house of Gonzaga in 1684; busta 1577, letter of 6 June 1694.

<sup>97</sup> Both recollections are cited in ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 43.

<sup>98</sup> ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 37.

mie intenzioni; or come posso in tale stato acquietar il mio animo in contrasto di ciò doppo un tale impegno con Dio; e doppo un'aperta dichiarazione in quest'animo fatta col mondo di questa mia mutazione di vivere!<sup>99</sup>

In a letter written several weeks later, Cotta reaffirmed the facts: it was his intention to quit the stage, because he could not otherwise quiet "the remorse of my conscience nor attend to spiritual matters". He realized that his resignation was "very inconvenient" for the troupe, but he still considered it to be essential "for a Christian soul". He still supported his wife Angela, he said, even though they had been separated for a long time, during much of which her support, he noted, came entirely from his earnings from performances.<sup>100</sup>

Aurelia's letters reveal a less elegant writer than Cotta. She reserved her remarks for urgent situations. While her troupe tried to avoid licentiousness, it was also committed to the traditional *commedia dell'arte* genre, with its stock characters and predictable situations. Cotta's withdrawal from the troupe (in which there may have been Grimani collusion) effectively caused it to collapse. Early in 1703 Aurelia noted that her troupe would never negotiate with the Teatro Grimani again but would perform exclusively at the Teatro Vendramin. Her letter said that Giovanora (Giovanna Benozzi Sassi) might not be included in any new arrangements. A letter written simultaneously by Sassi reported rumours that the troupe would soon be broken up.<sup>101</sup> A few weeks later Benozzi Sassi wrote a more cordial letter in which she thanked the duke for the opportunity to be reunited with her husband and even offered him a hug.<sup>102</sup>

The much maligned Caterina Andreucci had written to the duke on 20 January 1703 to urge some action on the settlement of debts which the Grimani owed to the troupe. She decried the "mille oltraggi" and "mille disgusti" that the troupe had suffered. It can be inferred from her remarks that some members of the troupe had gone to Casale and that those who remained could not adequately form a company.<sup>103</sup>

In the autumn of 1703 the Vendramins agreed to pay their comedy troupe 300 ducats at Christmas and 200 at Easter,<sup>104</sup> but the accounts were slow to be settled. In 1704 Carnival ended on 5 February. Alvisé Vendramin forthwith wrote a promissory note to "Urelia" for 850 ducats, representing pay due for

<sup>99</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 30 December 1702.

<sup>100</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 3 February 1703. The separation of comedians from their spouses was quite common. Often the spouse was a comedian with a different troupe, for it was rare for two openings suiting the skills of a married couple to occur at the same time.

<sup>101</sup> Busta 1584, letters from Aurelia Comica and Giovanna Benozzi Sassi detta Fravoletta Comica, both dated 13 January 1702 (*m.v.*).

<sup>102</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 27 February 1702 (*m.v.*). Giovanni Battista Sassi was also a comedian.

<sup>103</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 20 January 1703.

<sup>104</sup> Venezia, Cà Goldoni, *Archivio Vendramin*, MS 42.F.9/10 "Scritture [...] fra li nn.hh. Grimani e li nn.hh. Vendramin", no. 1 (agreement of 3 October 1703).

the recent autumn season, and 904 ducats past due.<sup>105</sup> Three days later Aurelia was able to write a letter of thanks for the receipt of 1754 ducats received for her troupe from San Salvatore.<sup>106</sup>

The same post brought a letter from Cotta. It complained of the lot of the comedians and asserted that no respectable woman would marry one. Cotta was now a widower and sought a new wife; his protestations of the moral ignominy of comedy were gone. It was now his social status alone that motivated him to distance himself from his former profession. Retirement did not silence Cotta, although his relations with the duchy became increasingly strained. In the autumn of 1704 he confessed to having received 10 *doppie* annually for the past three years for his participation in the troupe of Anna Marini, mentioned that he was also supposed to perform in Mantua with the company of Teresa, and that matrimony made it undesirable for him to travel.<sup>107</sup> On the stage he had been succeeded by Richiari.

The troupe of Teresa Costantini detta Diana was associated with San Salvatore from 1703 to 1715. This is the period during which Luigi Riccoboni (Lelio) was in the troupe, but its earlier history is murky. The Costantini, a family that had included many *comici* in the seventeenth century, came from Verona. Giovanni Battista had made a celebrated debut (as a *secondo innamorato*) at Versailles on 30 November 1688. He returned to Verona in 1697, after the expulsion of the Comédie Italienne but used his knowledge of French to serve as an army informer during the War of the Spanish Succession. In 1708 he returned to Paris.<sup>108</sup>

In historical accounts, Teresa's presence has been eclipsed entirely by that of the energetic *primo innamorato*, Luigi Riccoboni. Like Cotta, Riccoboni objected to the coarseness to which comedy in Venice had descended. His goal was reform from within — a complete recasting of the genre, a revival of the art as it had been known in the sixteenth century. This involved both the expansion of the repertory to include tragedies as well as comedies and the cultivation of the skill required to recite both in prose and in verse. Riccoboni was obviously very literate and tried also to promote the idea that a classical foundation should support the superstructure of comedy. He maintained that verse was essential to drama. Riccoboni tried to avoid contractual relationships with the house of Gonzaga. Thus when agents for the duchy of Mantua attempted to negotiate for his services, he invariably prevaricated. At the start of the century he was under the protection of the duke of Modena. When that duchy

<sup>105</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 20 February 1703 (*m.v.*).

<sup>106</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 23 February 1704. A month later (22 March 1704) she wrote again, however, to request that the agreement be honored.

<sup>107</sup> Busta 1585, letters from Aurelia Colomba Coppa and Pietro Cotta detto Lelio, 18 October 1704.

<sup>108</sup> RENZO GUARDANTI: *Le fiere del teatro: percorsi del teatro forain del primo Settecento con una scelta di commedie rappresentate alle Foires Saint-Germain e Saint-Laurent (1711–1715)*, Bulzoni, Roma 1995, pp. 72–3.

collapsed, he followed the trail to Vienna. Through marriage Riccoboni came to be related both to the composer Giovanni Bononcini and to the comedienne Giovanna Balletti Benozzi Sassi (detta Fravoletta), for his future wife, Elena Balletti, was the sister of Bononcini's wife and of Sassi's first husband, Francesco Balletti.<sup>109</sup> It does not appear that Riccoboni was very satisfied to be a member of Teresa's troupe during his first years in it, but he always gave political considerations as the reason for declining her offers: being protected by the duke of Modena (prior to the duchy's occupation in 1702), he felt ill-disposed to entertain the duke's enemies (the French). As his audience developed and he found more opportunities to redefine the art of comedy in Venice, his protests died down.

Teresa seems to have had an earlier career in Venice, but perhaps as a player in someone else's troupe. She had a small troupe, but one with which she was little satisfied at the commencement of the autumn season of 1702. In a letter written at the start of that season, she commented on how the blockade of Mantua during the previous year had deprived her of many players. She recounted how just when she thought her career had been over, she received an invitation to perform in Casale. She had been to Lucca and Genova (there is no confirmation that she had actually gone to Casale). What brought her back to Venice was an opportunity to perform at San Salvatore.<sup>110</sup> One of Teresa's preoccupations was the reputation of the Andreucci sisters — Lavinia and Diamantina. According to Teresa,

Lavinia, sorella di Diamantina, quale godendo ogni buona qualità fuori di scena, in teatro si rende in ogni città odiosissima, e la sua stella riesce più fatale in Venezia, ove sapendosi esservi tal odiato oggetto, se n'è udito un sussurro, et una universale disapprovazione, ma con tanto strepito che furia, che mi ha convenuto rinunziare ad ogni genio di parzialità che *per* esse tenevo, et ha costretto l'*eccellentissimo* Vendramin a provvedere il teatro di altro qualificato personaggio, poichè, da esse sarebbe stato levato il concorso del popolo et il credito de compagni.

La *detta signora* *per* sostenere la di lei inabilità, riconosciuta *per* tale da un popolo intero, non ha trovato più sano partito, che d'amicarsi il nostro primo innamorato. Amicizia che pur troppo è riuscita a noi pregiudiziale, avendone da essa risultato indifferenze, et inabilità, e male informazioni al *protettore* del teatro.<sup>111</sup>

Later in the same letter Teresa mentions Lavinia's "pazzi amori, e dissensioni indegne, e non conoscendosi incapace di più comparir su le scene". Of Dia-

<sup>109</sup> Elena (*in arte* Flaminia) was descended from Agata Calderoni (*in arte* also Flaminia). In the seventeenth century the Balletti were invariably active in the troupe of the duke of Parma. Their Brighella in 1687 was Domenico Bononcini: ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 31.

<sup>110</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 7 October 1702.

<sup>111</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 7 October 1702. Diamantina's proper name was Anna and Lavinia's was Catterina.

mantina, Teresa only say (in this letter) that she was an object of “*universale avversione in qualsivoglia città, e più d’ogn’altra Venezia*”. Teresa became eager to have a troupe “worthy of your [i.e., Mantuan] protection”.<sup>112</sup> Cotta’s rumoured resignation from the troupe playing at San Samuele may have encouraged her to try to benefit from the ensuing shuffle of players. Ignoring his motives, she imagined the imminent collapse of Aurelia’s troupe, and she was eager to carve it up so that she could extract several of its most able players for her own. These included a *seconda* and a *terza donna* to replace the Andreucci sisters and Giovanni Battista Garelli, the Pantalone of Aurelia’s troupe.<sup>113</sup> According to Teresa, Marchese Beretti had always indulged her whims for new players; his departure and the vacuum that it created left her pleas to fall on deaf ears, at least for the duration of the 1702–03 season. Nonetheless, she had her partisans. On 28 February 1703 Girolamo Rizon wrote of the “talento più che singolare non meno che l’applauso uniuersale” as two stimuli that should incline “vostra altezza serenissima” to reward “questa virtuosa” adequately.<sup>114</sup> In mid-November she gave reasons for not accepting Angiola Grilli in her company but now asked additionally for Guido Richiari, the Ottavio of Aurelia’s regular players.<sup>115</sup> Her interest in Richiari was as a *primo innamorato*, a role currently taken by Riccoboni. She doubted Richiari’s availability for the following year because he was unwilling to be obligated to any troupe under the protection of “nostro serenissimo padrone”.<sup>116</sup> She lamented the “infiniti disastri” which plagued her troupe, but it does not appear that its roster could have been very robust.<sup>117</sup> Teresa said the Vendramin would allow thirteen positions in her eventual troupe. She changed her mind about Grilli, consenting to take her as a *seconda donna* but would not take her husband as a *secondo zanne*. By January she had relented on Diamantina and now enquired as to her availability.<sup>118</sup>

Now a new threat presented itself: Riccoboni was trying to form a company to play in Vienna. Diamantina Lucchese (apparently Andreucci) was hoping to join it. Teresa petitioned the duke of Mantua to prevent Diamantina’s departure.<sup>119</sup> She pledged that if she were able to form a new troupe, she would bring it to Casale. She said she was currently without contracts. The current

<sup>112</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 7 October 1702.

<sup>113</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 28 October 1702.

<sup>114</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Girolamo Rizon dated the “ultimo febraro” 1702 (*m.v.*).

<sup>115</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 18 November 1702.

<sup>116</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 25 November 1702.

<sup>117</sup> A player nicknamed Spinetta (Giovanna D’Orsi) had died; another named Brunetta had retired. Teresa’s letter of 27 January 1703 suggests that Fravoletta may once have been in her troupe, but the reverse case is more likely: during her first marriage, to Francesco Balletti, Fravoletta had been in the troupe protected by the duke of Parma. In 1687 it travelled to Vienna, Munich, and Brussels (ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell’età di Goldoni*, p. 31).

<sup>118</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 11 January 1703.

<sup>119</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 27 January 1703.

season turned out better than Teresa had feared, although Pietro Rubinato (perhaps another Mantuan agent) in a letter of 28 February reported that she expected more from the Vendramin (489 ducats) than he thought they were obligated to pay, especially considering that she received a "gift" of 50 *ungheri* each year.<sup>120</sup> Given Riccoboni's departure for Vienna and Garelli's lack of availability, Teresa next pursued as a *primo innamorato* someone named Giovanni Bissoni. He, however, turned out to be already engaged as a *primo zanne* for the period during which she wished to engage him.<sup>121</sup> Teresa now admitted that she had only four players in her troupe for the following year and she would have to release them from their contracts.<sup>122</sup> By March 1704 Count Cremona had been installed as the Mantuan resident in Venice and Teresa's endless stream of personnel wishes began to be processed with dispatch. Lucchese and Riccoboni himself were sent queries accompanied by letters from the count.<sup>123</sup> This new source of assistance did nothing to sweeten Teresa's temperament. She complained bitterly about the resignation of Rosa Grilli, who "essendosi posta in capo di volere imparare la musica dice di voler continuare ad aprnderla". She held Grilli's rejection of employment in Venice to be a thinly masked excuse for preparing to appear under the auspices of Signor Magior Beltrambi in Mantua. Teresa wanted Count Carlo Maria Vialardi in Mantua to thwart this assumed plan.<sup>124</sup> One week later the tide began to turn. Word filtered through from Riccoboni that he was pursuing an offer to appear in Verona, and by late April she had contracted both with Riccoboni and with the Andreucci sisters.<sup>125</sup> Teresa urged her correspondent not to divulge any of the comments she had made earlier about these performers, for it would lead, she said, to an "inferno perpetuo".

In the autumn of 1702 Marchese Giovanni Giuseppe Orsi in Bologna had tried, according to Teresa, to recruit her to go to Casale, but her commitment to Alvise Vendramin, made the preceding spring, prevented her from considering this possibility seriously.<sup>126</sup> Orsi's overture to Teresa offended Angiola Paghetti, who was about to form a third comedy troupe under Mantuan protection. Paghetti's husband, Giovanni Battista (Il Dottore), who could not be

<sup>120</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 28 February 1703.

<sup>121</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 13 May 1703.

<sup>122</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 19 May 1703.

<sup>123</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 22 March 1704.

<sup>124</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 22 March 1704.

<sup>125</sup> Riccoboni was working through Pietro Pasqualigo, brother of the major of Verona (busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 29 March 1704). Of the Andreucci, one sister (Caterina) protested to the resident but apparently consented to perform (busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 26 April 1704).

<sup>126</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Teresa Costantini, 14 October 1702. According to ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, p. 49, Orsi was Riccoboni's first protector, but see above. According to Teresa, the Marchese also tried to recruit her for the 1704-5 season (busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 24 August 1704).



accommodated at San Salvatore, where Paghetti had been working, attempted to form his own troupe in Bologna. According to the ever malicious Teresa, it was the Bononcinis, who were currently performing for the Marquis Orsi, who had encouraged Signor Paghetti to pursue this course of action. In Teresa's view, the plan led to the "disdain" of both the marquis and the Bolognese nobility.<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, Paghetti's son, Ferdinando Carlo, had appeared with both Teresa's and his mother's troupe as a *primo zanne* in the preceding year. Paghetti actively tried to recruit other players for her husband's troupe. Angela Grilli was one such recruit. In Bologna, however, Giovanni Battista Paghetti was denied a license to perform.<sup>128</sup> His wife, claiming he had been slandered, sought the protection of the duke of Mantua for him.<sup>129</sup> Quite in contrast to the hypocritical Teresa, Angela Paghetti was accommodating to her players and efficient in managing her troupe. In February 1703 she sought help in obtaining ducal letters of incorporation.<sup>130</sup> In forming her troupe, she wished not to disturb the troupes of Aurelia or Teresa, although she hoped to line up the services of Clarice (Gigli?) and (Angela?) Grilli.<sup>131</sup> Gerolimo Pesari, one of the *comici* in her troupe, wrote in praise of her congeniality and said that she had thought of recruiting Lelio (Riccoboni), since he was now a "personaggio libero" and did not want to play in the company of Teresa.<sup>132</sup> Shortly after, Anna Andreucci (Diamantina) wrote an enthusiastic letter seeking permission for her and her sister to join Paghetti's troupe.<sup>133</sup> She complained bitterly about Teresa's injustices to her. Her letter implies that Teresa was biased against performers who had gone to "Germany". The basis of her wish to transfer to Paghetti's troupe was that in it she expected to receive better treatment.

It was one of Angela's quirks was that she was unwilling to provide any entertainment to the French, wherever they happened to be located. She seems to have had good contacts to the north, however. She rapidly lined up contracts for her troupe to perform in Udine after Easter and in Brescia during the summer. For the 1703–4 season she welcomed into her troupe the Andreucci sisters (Diamante and Lavinia) and someone name Maria.<sup>134</sup> Angela called attention to her gentleness in dealing with Andreucci sisters, to whom she had loaned a small amount of money. Her fame spread rapidly. Much to Teresa's surprise, Angela was successful in fixing a contract for Verona in 1704. The news that Riccoboni was expected to appear there with her<sup>135</sup> rubbed salt

<sup>127</sup> Busta 1584, letter of 7 October 1702. The Bononcinis were Giovanni and his wife.

<sup>128</sup> Busta 1584, letter of Pietro Cotta, 18 November 1702.

<sup>129</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Angela Paghetti, 9 December 1702.

<sup>130</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Angiola Paghetti, 8 February 1703.

<sup>131</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Angiola Paghetti, 20 January 1703.

<sup>132</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Gerolimo Pesari, 17 February 1703.

<sup>133</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Anna Andreucci, 17 February 1703.

<sup>134</sup> Busta 1584, letter from Angela Paghetti, 30 December 1703.

<sup>135</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 29 March 1704.

into Teresa's wounds. An attachment to a letter written by Giovanni Carlo Grimani in the spring of 1704 (for the 1704-5 season) gives this listing of her company:

La *signora* Angiola Paghetti *prima dona*  
 La *signora* Camilla Bissoni *2.da dona*  
 La *signora* Rosa Nobili *serva*  
 Il *signor* Leandro Pani *primo moroso*  
 Il *signor* Santo Nobili *2.do moroso*  
 Il *signor* Carlo Paghetti *3.o moroso*  
 Il *signor* Giovanni Gagi Pantalone  
 Il *dottor* Paghetti  
*Signor* Stivorio *primo zane*  
*Signor* Gradelino, e sia Carlo Busca *2.do zanne*<sup>136</sup>

The hand of this attachment, which is itself undated, appears to be that of Alvise Vendramin.

In the rivalry that then developed between the troupes of Teresa and Angela Paghetti, the most shocking development was that Teresa's own son, Antonio Costantini, sought to leave the first and join the second. The ostensible reason for this was that he did not want to continue to dance on stage. Citing "the indiscrete petulance of my son", Teresa related that he "now refuses to participate in any dances on the stage, at which he is very good" and said he should "not even make up half a part". She had hoped he would dance at least three times a week, but she planned to "give away the entire part" because he intended to join Paghetti's troupe. Thus she urged the duke once more to try strong-arm tactics to retain him. If he was unwilling to get rid of the company of Paghetti, then she urged the duke to threaten her son so that he would remain in her troupe and obey her wishes. She then mentioned that she has tried to be diligent in following the duke's orders, particularly with respect to the *ballo*.<sup>137</sup> This remark suggests that the introduction of French dancers in Casale in the entourage of Ferdinand's bride had a long reach. The respect in which other players held Paghetti made her new troupe immediately attractive to many other *comici*. The *secondo moroso* Giuseppe Monti (Odoardo), for example, was reported to be interested in joining it in 1704, but his role had already ably been taken by the Paghettis' son.<sup>138</sup> Gradelino had joined the troupe and was already on tour with it in Bergamo. Teresa sarcastically diminished the importance of these events by saying that Gradelino was useless as a performer and that the French audiences available in Bergamo had "a lot

<sup>136</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Giovanni Carlo Grimani, 3 May 1704.

<sup>137</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 3 August 1704.

<sup>138</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Teresa Costantini, 3 August 1704.

more on their minds than comedy". In September Paghetti sought Mantuan intervention to secure a position in Cremona with Marchese Ariberti.<sup>139</sup>

The crisis that emerged among the troupes in 1704 was one whose outcome had enduring consequences (most of which cannot be treated here) for the future of both opera and comedy in Venice. It seems to have stemmed from the power vacuum that had been created by the promotion and departure of Beretti. When negotiations for the 1704–5 season were in progress in the spring of 1704, both the Teatro di San Samuele, under Giovanni Carlo Grimani, and San Salvatore, under Alvisé Vendramin, wanted the services of Aurelia's troupe. They were apparently motivated by the desire for theatrical presentations emphasizing decorum and skill, but the wish to avoid dealings with the voluble Teresa could have been a hidden additional motive. It is ironic that the first sign of any response to Cotta's message — which implied that comedy devised to suit the taste of the duke of Mantua had reached such a point of disgrace that even those who earned their living from it no longer wanted to be associated with it — should have been destined to benefit the very troupe that he left. The weak administration of the Mantuan embassy in Venice undoubtedly contributed to the vicissitudes of these negotiations, for the whole crisis surfaced when Giovanni Carlo Grimani put his interests into the hands of a local agent, Nane Piccolo, who was to negotiate with a new, possibly hapless Mantuan resident, Muzio Francesco Cremona, and then went to his country villa. Ferdinand's absence from Casale may also have played a role. Pico was acting in his behalf there. Carlo Maria Vialardi was minding affairs in Mantua. The duke himself had gone off to Paris, where he was to remain for several months.

First Aurelia agreed to bring her troupe to San Samuele, then to San Salvatore, and in the end to re-establish her contract with San Samuele.<sup>140</sup> It happened in the following way. Grimani wrote to Casale on 15 March that he was "eternally grateful for your [the count's] help" and was delighted to have the troupe of Aurelia available for San Samuele "with the terms of the Teatro di San Luca [i.e., San Salvatore]". He noted that San Samuele remained under the duke's protection. However, Grimani's request seems to have been for the autumn season only, for he added that "if you want them for Carnival, then give me the company of Diana [i.e., the troupe of Teresa Costantini]".<sup>141</sup>

Nane and Giovanni Piccolo, who lived on the Giudecca,<sup>142</sup> obviously enjoyed the opportunities that were suddenly thrust upon them. A letter from Nane Piccolo dated one week after Grimani's indicates that it was he (Piccolo)

<sup>139</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 4 September 1704.

<sup>140</sup> There was one more possible scenario: a gentleman named Celini wished to produce *opere in musica* at San Salvatore (busta 1585, letter from Conte [Giacinto Andrea?] Cicognini, 22 March 1704).

<sup>141</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 15 March 1704.

<sup>142</sup> It is unclear whether the Piccolo were Jewish, but other correspondence indicates that they were in touch with Jewish (possibly Spanish-Jewish) comedy troupes. One such troupe was headed by Moysè

who made the actual agreement "according to the wishes of sua altezza serenissima [i.e., the duke]" and with the involvement of the current Mantuan resident, Marchese Cremona.<sup>143</sup>

Teresa was meanwhile putting into Count Cremona's hands her numerous requests for performers for her own troupe. Alvisé Vendramin was only too aware of the unofficial three-way division of the Mantuan court. In a letter sent on 11 Aprile to both Mantua and Paris (but apparently avoiding Casale) he revealed that because his "proposal for San Samuele" had never been accepted, he had let the contract for Aurelia's troupe expire on 11 December 1703. This explains Aurelia's numerous pleas for financial help, of which Vendramin was also fully aware. He offered in his April letter to advance her players some pay, since he had agreed to engage them for both the autumn and winter seasons of 1704-5 and since he "had always been regarded as generous" in his dealings with performers.<sup>144</sup> On 3 May Grimani wrote another letter of thanks for allowing "the company of Aurelia and Celio" to perform at San Samuele, thereby putting it on an equal footing with San Salvatore. He wished to assure the duke that there would be performances despite the current "emergencies". He noted, however, that he remained "not a little suspicious, and not a little embittered, by the encounter that has occurred".<sup>145</sup>

A letter of the same date from Francesco Antonio Bonlino discloses that while it had been agreed that "the company of Celio and Aurelia" would play in the Teatro Grimani di San Samuele, the company was diverted to the Teatro Vendramin di San Salvatore.<sup>146</sup> It now comes to light that the company is nonetheless in the service of San Samuele, and not of San Salvatore. The person holding the reins must have been Count Cremona, who on 5 April had instructed Nane Piccolo to pay Aurelia's troupe 904 ducats as a "regalo straordinario" for the autumn. Their pay for the winter was to be the more customary 850 ducats.<sup>147</sup>

de Medina and the other by Davide d'Abram (Vitafrano). Both sought work at San Samuele in 1703. Ostensibly Medina's troupe could have come from Spain, where the name Medinaceli was well known. (In fact, the Duke of Reginaceli was the viceroy of Naples from 1696 until 1704.) The former said that Nane Piccolo had tried in the past to arrange for his comedians to perform at San Samuele but that the troupe was considered not to have had adequate merit (busta 1584, letter from Moise de Medina, 20 January 1702 [*m.v.*]). The latter cited prior experience working for Count Nane Piccolo: busta 1584, letter from Davide d'Abram Vitafrano, 24 February 1702 (*m.v.*).

<sup>143</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Nane Piccolo, 22 March 1704.

<sup>144</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 11 April 1704.

<sup>145</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 3 May 1704. Grimani's disappointment may have been that Mantua held sway over Casale.

<sup>146</sup> Bonlino was one of the signatories to the agreements of 8 October 1704 and 3 March 1705 between the Vendramin and Grimani. Both are transcribed in ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, pp. 216-21.

<sup>147</sup> Unsigned document accompanying Bonlino's letter of 3 May. The matter was still not entirely settled: Rubinato wrote on 28 June 1704 (busta 1585) to report that the *comici* had rejected their contract.

A prior statement in the same letter indicates that Grimani had left Piccolo and Francesco Verri in charge of the theatre's affairs while he was in the countryside. Grimani's departure from Venice occurred on 8 April. On the 10th Giovanni Maria Brasi, another agent of the Cà Grimani, went to the home of Count Cremona to tell him that Grimani had decided that the company should remain on his account and that on the preceding Saturday he had paid them.<sup>148</sup> On the 11th Brasi returned to Count Cremona's house with Nane Piccolo to reconfirm that the money had been paid and the troupe would continue at San Samuele. When they returned a third time to Count Cremona's house, on the 12th, they were surprised to find several *comici* coming down the stairs just as they were arriving. When they themselves were leaving, they encountered Celio (Pietro Cotta) coming up the stairs. The agreement was that the special payment for Aurelia's troupe was to be given to Cotta whenever he wished to claim it. However, when he actually tried to collect it, Verri instructed the comedian to meet him near the gondola of Count Cremona at midnight. Meanwhile, the *comici* had signed a different contract with San Salvatore.<sup>149</sup> Pietro Rubinato, who seems to have been a partisan of Teresa, notified such powers as were still protecting the duchy on the 6th of the following October that Signor Bonlini was writing daily to Paris "about the affair involving the company of Aurelia, Cà Vendramin, and D. Gio. Carlo Grimani" and that Nane Piccolo was "lighting a new fire every day" to keep the negotiations in turmoil. Even Anna Isabella (now deceased) had voiced some opinions in the matter through Maria Priuli.<sup>150</sup> Teresa herself continued to write about the "scandalosi affari dei comici".<sup>151</sup>

When the comedies actually opened, on the 15th, Aurelia seemed pleased enough with her crew.<sup>152</sup> Pietro Cotta was less decidedly pleased. His letter of 18 October reported "many rumours" and pleaded for continuing protection. He asked why the troupe of Anna Marini, which had had a contract in Mantua for the past three years, had been turned out to make way for the company of Teresa and asked that the matter be set right. He also admitted that despite his absence from the Venetian stage, the troupe had paid him 10 *doppie*.<sup>153</sup> Count Cremona finally gave an account of his perception of events on 1 November. Replying to a letter of enquiry from Pico, Cremona said that Giovanni Piccolo had wanted the company of Teresa and that he was "very displeased" not to have it. He hoped that Pico would continue to protect the company currently in Venice, "despite the enormous expense of making an agreement with the

<sup>148</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 28 June 1704.

<sup>149</sup> This entire account is appended to Bonlino's letter of 3 May.

<sup>150</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Pietro Rubinato, 6 December 1704.

<sup>151</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 3 August 1704.

<sup>152</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Aurelia Colomba Coppia, 18 October 1704.

<sup>153</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 18 October 1704.

*Signori Grimani*, the *padroni* of the Teatro di S. Lucca [e.g., San Salvatore]".<sup>154</sup> This seems to have been the final official word on the matter, but it fore-shadows the twenty-five-year contract of 1 March 1705, in which the Grimani and Vendramin families agreed to a cooperative arrangement for the use of available comedians at San Salvatore and San Samuele.<sup>155</sup> Effectively, Teresa's troupe, so much strengthened by Riccoboni that it was commonly called "Lelio's troupe", resumed its appearances in the autumn of 1705.

## 7. Comedy without Ferdinand

The agreement of 1705 between the Grimani and the Vendramin did not end the *guerra de' comici*. The underlying turmoil simply moved it to a new locale — Padua. Aurelia had included with her new-year greetings in 1705 the news that Clarice no longer wanted to perform.<sup>156</sup> Her letter, though overtly polite, expresses great exasperation with the uncertainty of the times and evidences the threat of collapse of the infrastructure of comedy. It appears that she was interested in finding new work but intent on leaving the orbit she was in because of "indiposizioni". Indeed she does seem to have been disengaged from Mantuan patronage almost immediately. She thanked the court for a large number of gifts ("bichieri, 5 pettini, le gioie belli") a month later.<sup>157</sup> Two weeks after that Rubinato wrote to Count Pico in Casale asking for an explanation of the liberation of Aurelia. He protested that with licenses to travel having been granted to Lelio (Riccoboni) and Agata (Calderoni?), and with Ottavio (Richiari) being all but impotent, there was hardly a company to send to Venice. In mid-March Aurelia restated her wish no longer to perform, and Grimani agreed to lend her 200 ducats.<sup>158</sup> In late March Rubinato pointed out that while Aurelia had been placated, if the position at San Salvatore should fall to Teresa's troupe, there would be "difficoltà assolutamente insuperabili".<sup>159</sup> He protested again that her company was still active, but much of its future activity was in Padua. Aurelia, in fact, promised to remain nearby ("in Padua or Venice") during the whole of the next theatrical year.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 1 November 1704.

<sup>155</sup> A transcription of the agreement as found in the Archivio Vendramin of the Cà Goldoni is given in ALBERTI: *La scena veneziana nell'età di Goldoni*, pp. 218–23. Adjacent documents give further particulars of this evolving agreement.

<sup>156</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 3 January 1705. On 8 February it was reported that Clarice had agreed to remain for one more year, but her decision was apparently mis-represented, for by 14 March she had entered a convent in Brescia (busta 1586, letter from Muzio Francesco Cremona, 14 March 1705).

<sup>157</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 7 February 1705.

<sup>158</sup> Busta 1586, letters from Aurelia Colomba Coppa, 14 March 1705, and from Giovanni Carlo Grimani, 24 March 1705.

<sup>159</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 28 March 1705.

<sup>160</sup> Busta 1586, letters from Pietro Rubinato, 28 March 1705, and Aurelia Colomba Coppa, 7 April 1705.



In its new locale, cozily situated near the spot where Ferdinand would spend his last days, Aurelia's troupe attracted new interest and new antagonisms. Eloquent Pantalone though he may have been, Garelli's voice was newly dissonant as he explained, just as the *fiera del Santo* (the feast of St Anthony) was starting, his views on the troupes of Odoardo and Aurelia. Other comedians who voiced their opinions on the reformation of Aurelia's company were Galeazzo Savorini (*in arte* Il Dottore), Rosa Nobili (Lucinda), and Giuseppe Coppa (Trivella). The first two were very dissatisfied. The last, in a letter dated only one week after Garelli's first one, counted only four remaining members: Guido Richiari (Ottavio), Francesco Matterazzi (Il Dottore), Antonio Costantini (Cintio) and Antonio Coppa (Fulvio).<sup>161</sup> Garelli appears to have tried to enlist the support of Abbot Antonio Conti, whose summer villa was nearby, but Conti made it clear to the exiled court in two letters that he wanted no involvement in the matter whatsoever.<sup>162</sup> After this, few further protests were heard.

From the time of his marriage Riccoboni became a force to be reckoned with. His elopement with Elena Balletti was shrouded in the travel of the troupe to Vienna in the winter of 1706. Somewhat maliciously, Pietro Rubinato reported to the court that the couple pretended that "la fanciulla avesse qualche impegno come pur troppo si ha dubbio col mezzo del Bononcini". Riccoboni acknowledged that his marriage took place without the "assenza" of Elena's parents.<sup>163</sup> The plans may well have been made in Venice. Bononcini's *La regina creduta re* had opened at Sant'Angelo in early January. If Elena's status with the troupe was uncertain, it did not long remain so.

When the comedies opened in Venice in the autumn of 1706, the former troupes of Teresa and Aurelia were now known as those of Lelio and Ottavio. Alvise Vendramin petitioned the Mantuan court for another troupe, either that of Lelio or that of Ottavio, but he added wistfully that whichever it was, it would be one "che non godesse il destino felice d'esser riserbata per il servizio di vostra altezza serenissima".<sup>164</sup> Giovanni Carlo Grimani wrote in the following month, thanking the duke for permission to employ "Diana Comica, e Silvio, e per quella [permessione] ottenuta anco della signora Scaccia, ma in particolare per l'altra che riguarda alla signora Diamante Maria Scarabelli".<sup>165</sup> The last opera known to have been performed at San Salvatore was *La pace generosa*,

<sup>161</sup> Busta 1586, letters from Giovanni Battista Garelli, 13 June 1705, Galeazzo Savorini, 14 June 1705, Rosa Nobili, 19 June 1705, and Giuseppe Coppa, 20 June 1705. In the spring of 1706 Giuseppe Tortoriti (detto Pasquariello) was dispatched to find a new *dottore* to replace Matterazzo (letter of 24 March 1706). The next few years of Aurelia's life were frustrating ones. She wrote on 2 April 1707 (busta 1586) that she would not be starving if all the accounts owed her were paid up.

<sup>162</sup> Busta 1586, letters of 26 June 1705 (from Venezia) and 5 July 1705 (from Padova).

<sup>163</sup> Busta 1586, letters from Pietro Rubinato and from Luigi Riccoboni, both dated 13 February 1706.

<sup>164</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 16 October 1706.

<sup>165</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 13 November 1706.

with music by Marc'Antonio Ziani, which opened on 10 February 1700.<sup>166</sup> The production might be said to have been in the Mantuan orbit, given Ziani's link with the court of Ferdinando Carlo and the fact that the libretto was dedicated to Charles Henri of Lorraine, the prince of Vaudemont. There are two ironies related to the disappearance of opera from this theatre. One is that, contrary to theories about the unstoppable rise of opera, comedy when it was done well developed its own audience. The other irony is that Riccoboni, who was so reluctant in 1703 to be affiliated with a troupe oriented towards French taste, made his name and fulfilled his ambitious goals not in Vienna, to which he was then drawn, but in Paris. The patronage through which this change came about was that of the Duke Antonio Farnese: inadvertently he continued the work of Ranuccio II, who had left the Grimani sphere for San Cassiano and thereby created one of the holes that the sponsorship of Ferdinand had filled.

In a sense, San Salvatore and San Samuele traded places, for although the latter was devoted exclusively to comedy until the death of Vincenzo Grimani in 1710, it eventually became quite renown for its operas. At first, its operas were given on a sporadic schedule and were often of a comic or pastoral nature.<sup>167</sup> It was the establishment of the Ascension season in the 1720s that brought particular favour to the theatre, for lighter fare was appropriate for this short season.<sup>168</sup> Since comedies had originally been a staple entertainment of the period following Ascension, the establishment of spring opera enabled San Samuele to preserve a seasonal tradition and adapt to changing tastes in one stroke.

## 8. Opera without Ferdinand

At the end of 1705 Ferdinand returned to Mantua. The new duchess joined him there in March 1706. The French lost Turin in January 1707 and shortly ceded their holdings in northern Italy to the Austrians. Ferdinand took refuge in Venice. The duchess at first remained in Mantua but within the year returned to France. These last years of Ferdinand's life were not without consequences for Venetian opera, but Ferdinand's debts to the French steered his performers towards Sant'Angelo and San Cassiano rather than San Giovanni

<sup>166</sup> Date from SELFRIDGE-FIELD: *The calendar of Venetian opera*.

<sup>167</sup> During its first decade as a sometime opera house, San Samuele presented only three works: Ruggeri's *L'ingannator ingannato* and *Le gare di politica e d'amore* (both in the 1710–1 season) and Ristori's *Pallade trionfante in Arcadia* (1714).

<sup>168</sup> In contrast to the *drammi per musica* given during the autumn and winter, Ascension operas typically were pastoral in nature, were often short, and were low-budget productions which ran for approximately two weeks.

Grisostomo.<sup>169</sup> The new Mantuan resident was Francesco Ferdinando Galvani. He praised the text but condemned the production of Albinoni's *La maschera levata al vizio*, which opened at San Cassiano on 4 November 1704. Galvani noted that only three singers were justly applauded.<sup>170</sup> His attention to the singing may reflect the fact that some of the singers, including Margarita Salvagnini, were from the Mantuan court. Galvani indicated that in Giannettini's *Virginio consolo*, which opened at Sant'Angelo on the 10th, all the singers were new to the stage and that only the "tenor from Parma" had good applause.<sup>171</sup> He also liked the voices and the scenery in Pollarolo's "satirical tragedy" *Dafni*, which opened on 30 January 1705 at San Giovanni Grisostomo.<sup>172</sup> His letters give some sense of the massive reorganization of the opera stages in the wake of Ferdinand's disappearance as a patron of librettist and protector of singers and composers (as well as comedians).

Although Mantuan agents were progressively less able to plead the causes of aspiring performers,<sup>173</sup> Mantua remained an indirect force in brokering arrangements between singers and the Teatro di San Giovanni Grisostomo. A letter from the prince of Santo Buono in the Gonzaga Archive indicates that the viceroy of Naples had consented to let his virtuoso Nicola Grimaldi appear at the theatre the following October.<sup>174</sup> However, there was to be no autumn production at the theatre. Not long after his first missive, Santo Buono wrote again on behalf of "Nicolino".

The duchy also intervened on behalf of other theaters. Cremona urged the advance of 24 *lire* to Nicolino Ciccolini to enable him to come to Venice: the conductor Santorini at Sant'Angelo wished him to sing, apparently in *Paride in Ida*, which appears to have opened in mid-November 1706. Cremona was certain that the expenses would be reimbursed by the conductor, once Ciccolini arrived in Venice. Cremona urged that the *virtuose* Farnetti and Frigeri come at once to Venice.<sup>175</sup> Ever the pragmatist Giovanni Carlo Grimani was not completely opposed to accommodations with performers associated with Casale. The same trail that led Barbara Riccioni and Stefano Romani detto il Pignattino to San Salvatore also brought Diamante Maria Scarabelli and the oboist Monsieur de Noiè to San Giovanni Grisostomo to perform, with Gri-

<sup>169</sup> Santi Giovanni e Paolo and San Salvatore were by now removed from the opera scene.

<sup>170</sup> Busta 1585, letter of 8 November 1704.

<sup>171</sup> Busta 1585, letter from Aurelia Coppa, 15 November 1704.

<sup>172</sup> Busta 1586, letter from Francesco Ferdinando Galvani dated 31 January 1705.

<sup>173</sup> See, for example, the case of Margherita Prosdocima, who sought to identify performance opportunities (busta 1585, letter of 14 June 1704) but was not to appear on a Venetian stage until she made her debut as Irene in Albinoni's *Il tiranno eroe* (San Cassiano, 1710).

<sup>174</sup> Busta 1586, letter from the principe de Santo Buoni/Duque dated 12 May 1706.

<sup>175</sup> Busta 1586, letters of 14 and 15 October 1706. Margherita Farnetti and Teresa Frigeri were both hired by the Mantuan court on 12 May 1706 (BESUTTI: "La figura professionale del cantante d'opera", pp. 86 f). Ciccolini cannot be identified.

maldi, in Scarlatti's *Mitridate Eupatore* in 1707.<sup>176</sup> Scarabelli's arrival, two years after her presence was first sought, cheered Grimani, who claimed that he had never encountered so much opposition to such a request. He worried that his "great competitor" San Cassiano would upstage him with a better singer.<sup>177</sup> Meanwhile, on 16 October 1706 Alvise Vendramin applied for a troupe of comedians. He again said he would take either that of Lelio Riccoboni or the one of Ottavio Richiari.<sup>178</sup> The next month Grimani thanked the Mantuan court for permission to employ Diana (Teresa) and Silvio, as well as Signora Scaccia. Most particularly he wanted to convey his thanks for the great attention given to the case of Diamante Scarabelli.<sup>179</sup>

The winter of 1707 was a difficult one. The Venetian lagoon and its canals were frozen and many travellers were stranded. The theatres suffered in consequence. Aurelia Coppia wrote in April that she had not yet been paid for the past season and was starving.<sup>180</sup> Riccoboni insisted on being paid in Venetian currency.<sup>181</sup> Although receiving reports of chaos from his former duchy, Ferdinand blithely enjoyed performances at San Giovanni Grisostomo of two works by Caldara, *Partenope* and *Il selvaggio eroe*.<sup>182</sup> For those in Ferdinand's service, survival was another matter. After the Austrians occupied Mantua in March 1707, the musicians who remained in Ferdinand's service (including Caldara) were urged by the emperor to resign. The duke's distinguished roster of musicians and comedians was entirely dissolved. Pride lingered on. On 9 December 1707 Galvani wrote (apparently to the exiled, ailing duke), enclosing a libretto, that of Ruggieri's *Armida abbandonata*, which was in production at Sant'Angelo and which, he said, "has more acclaim than those at the other theatres [because] the previously mentioned Romanina [Anna Maria Garberini (Bentí)] has a stage presence superior even to that of the famous Margheritina Salicola of Saxony".<sup>183</sup>

<sup>176</sup> Busta 1586, letters from Giovanni Carlo Grimani, 4 and 11 September and 8 December 1706.

<sup>177</sup> The prince of Vaudemont (Charles Henri of Lorraine) in his capacity of governor of Milan was hard to persuade on the issue of permitting her to travel. Grimani indicates in September 1706 that he had contracted for her appearance two years previously and that despite the best efforts of the Venetian resident in Milan, he still awaited some decision on the matter. See busta 1586, letter from Giovanni Carlo Grimani, 4 September 1706.

<sup>178</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 16 October 1706.

<sup>179</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 13 November 1706. Grimani was to write another note of thanks for "letting Scarabelli sing for me next year" on 8 December 1706. The identities of Silvio and Signora Scaccia have not been determined.

<sup>180</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 2 April 1707.

<sup>181</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 30 July 1707.

<sup>182</sup> *Partenope* had been given in Mantua in 1701: KIRKENDALE: "The War of the Spanish Succession", p. 225.

<sup>183</sup> Busta 1586, letter of 9 November 1707: "Qui ingiunto troverà il libretto dell'opera di S. Angelo, come che questo drama, ha più grido di tutti gli altri teatri cantando la mentovatagli Romanina con una attione superiore ancora alla famosa Margheritina Salicoli di Sassonia".

The diet of Ratisbon stripped Ferdinand of all his privileges and titles on 30 June 1708, and five days later he died. Issues related to Ferdinand's estate, and the many competing claims made on it, were resolved by Venetian magistrates over the course of the next three years. Only in July 1711 was a final resolution — in favor of the Guastalla line — made.<sup>184</sup> The most important consequences of the collapse of Ferdinand's political authority are even more diffuse than the scattering of his *comici*. That great diaspora of his *cantanti*, *strumentisti*, and *compositori* that occurred between 1705 and 1710 had repercussions for years to come. It enriched the musical activities particularly of Rome, Vienna, and eventually Dresden. The Venetian opera houses all benefited in different ways. San Cassiano and Sant'Angelo enjoyed the benefit of new ideas generated by refugees from France and Casale (a subject to be explored in a separate study). The establishment of San Fantin was stimulated by the dislocations described above. San Salvatore and San Samuele traded roles: San Salvatore fell heir (through 1715) to the great successes of the *comico* Luigi Riccoboni, while San Samuele explored the possibilities of opera (from 1710), specialising in pastorales, which were quite distinct from the standard *drammi per musica*. It is San Giovanni Grisostomo which, on account of political divisions, gained the least of enduring benefit. In its efforts to monopolize the Venetian stage with its own designs and restrictions, it inadvertently cut itself off from some of the most important innovations of the time. Its flirtations with Scarlatti (1706–7) and Handel (1709–10), punctuated by the short stints of Caldara (1707–8) and Lotti (1708–9), represent some of the thrashing about that went on as Grimani tried to compensate for the loss of Mantuan and Savoyard patronage and personnel. Marcello's later complaints in *Il teatro alla moda* (1720) about the crude musical mannerisms and social habits of “bolognese” musicians may in part reflect the culture shock that Venetian theatres had experienced as they sought to accommodate the musical nomads from collapsing duchies. Although San Giovanni had accommodated many figures from Ferdinand's court while it remained intact, matters became much more confused after its collapse. Scarabelli survived on the roster of San Giovanni Grisostomo because in 1708 she was taken under the protection of Vincenzo Grimani, now viceroy of Naples. In 1709, a year in which several singers were refugees from the Mantuan court, San Giovanni discontinued the practice of identifying singers according to the *personaggi* who were their protectors, at least temporarily. Sant'Angelo continued the practice, but male Mantuan refugees,

<sup>184</sup> Venezia, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Cod. It. vi.488 (= 12132), entry of 1 August 1711. Ibidem, Cod. It. vi.486 (= 12130), entry of 1 February 1709 (*m.v.*), reports on an earlier ballot, which indicates that two votes were cast for the duke of Lorraine and the other two for the Casa Gonzaga-Guastalla. More than 1000 works of art in the court's possession were awarded to the French claimants, while all the rest of the Gonzaga estate, including any musical artefacts that may have remained, were awarded to the Austrian claimants.

such as Nicola Tricarico, appearing there were identified as singers of the imperial *cappella*.<sup>185</sup>

Because so many of the figures cut loose were not native Mantuans, the impact of their collective displacement has been little appreciated. To notice it is to reconfirm the importance that Ferdinand's patronage had for the entire apparatus of theatrical patronage in Venice between 1672 and 1708 and to recognize the long shadow that it cast over later theatrical and musical history.

## 9. Conclusions and speculations

The extreme nature Ferdinando Carlo's disposition and its collision with political and military events between 1700 and the duke's death in 1708 are valuable in helping to expose some basic practices of theatrical staffing. In the cases of both opera and comedy agents for foreign monarchs were important conduits in making actual arrangements. Singers and comedians were engaged for the coming year at similar times. Both classes of performers had some say in the negotiations. The one important difference was that singers were hired individually, while comedians were hired *en masse*.

An important question that could not be treated here is the degree to which comedians, singers, and instrumentalists from the same court were acquainted with one another. Each of the three groups had somewhat independent roles in courts but unedited documents suggest that it was not uncommon for musicians and comedians to be associated by proximity, through marriage, or quite possibly by birth. However, so little is known about the extended families of most musicians or about the family trees of comedians that tantalizing clues must remain for the moment only clues. Family ties, as we have seen in the case of the Grimani and Ferdinando Carlo, tended to create interdependencies that are quite inconspicuous when the genres of comedy and opera are treated separately.

The question is important because we are so little informed about the musical elements of comedy as it was performed around 1700. Again, the clues such as miscellaneous references to the single guitar or, in French comedy of the same period, the single oboe are tantalizing. What of the use of *balli* in comedies? By the middle of the eighteenth century some of the gestures used in *balli* were as repulsive to Venetian government officials, who condemned them, as the gestures in comedy were to Pietro Cotta at the start of the century.

<sup>185</sup> The practice of identifying singers at all (in libretti) was infrequent in the seventeenth century. Composers, set-designers, and ballet-masters were more likely to be identified by some courtly association. In a notable early instance, *Il ratto delle sabine* (1680), the luminaries thus honoured were Ranuccio Farnese, the duke of Parma (also the dedicatee of the libretto) and protector of the composer P. S. Agostini, and Giovanni Francesco Soglia, a *capitano* of the duke of Mantua and choreographer of the work.



Was there a thread of gestural expression that was common to the incidental numbers in both opera and comedy? If there were *balli* in comedies, who played the music? What kinds of *balli* were used? Even in opera, where ballet casts are regularly listed in libretti, the relevant music is rarely preserved with the score. *Balli* for the stage necessarily attached themselves to larger works but they enjoyed a certain independence from them as well. Audiences in the early eighteenth century seem to have come to the theatre more and more for a cornucopia of entertainments that were only nominally related to one another. Thus an “opera” performance, as distinct from an opera score, was expected to include either some display of physical activities, be it spectacular battle scenes or *balli* in fancy costume. It was expected to include orchestral sinfonias. Was music encroaching on comedy from within the performance in similar ways that are currently imperceptible?

The changing relationship of comic elements within opera is better understood but still not fully articulated. According to the blue-print of reform that was ostensibly in progress in the 1690s, comic scenes and stereotyped comic roles would be weeded out of libretti before the music was set. But reform meant something different to every librettist associated with Venice in the 1690s; this was a decade of great uncertainty in the direction of opera. Comic characters, liberated from opera, resurfaced in independent intermezzi given with Venetian operas in the first decade of the eighteenth century. The uncharted relationship between intermezzi and comedy from 1705 to 1730 (years precisely coincident with the Grimani’s stranglehold on comedy performances) is obviously important to a fuller understanding of the relationship of both to opera. The “analogies and correspondences” to which Pirrotta persuasively called our attention underlie all of these questions.

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SOMMARIO

**«La guerra de' comici»: commedia mantovana e opera veneziana intorno all'anno 1700**

Lo studio esamina le relazioni intercorse a Venezia fra commedia e opera negli anni che vanno all'incirca dal 1675 al 1710.

Lungo questo periodo una catena di eventi causò una crescente dipendenza dei teatri gestiti dalla famiglia Grimani (San Samuele, destinato alle commedie; Santi Giovanni e Paolo e San Giovanni Grisostomo, votati invece all'opera) da artisti protetti da Ferdinando Carlo Gonzaga, l'ultimo duca di Mantova (1652-1708). Questa relazione, dovuta in parte a legami famigliari, ebbe importanti conseguenze tanto per la commedia quanto per l'opera. In generale, sino alla fine del diciassettesimo secolo, Vincenzo Grimani sembra essersi assunto la responsabilità dell'allestimento delle commedie, mentre il fratello Giovanni Carlo si incaricava delle rappresentazioni in musica. Ferdinando Carlo fu il più notevole mecenate dell'opera veneziana nell'ultimo quarto del secolo, ma la sua attività di promozione della commedia appare persino più intensa di quella prestata all'opera.

La graduale attenuazione del potere politico di Ferdinando Carlo nei primi anni del Settecento suscitò grandi ansietà e ostacoli agli artisti che godevano della sua protezione. La guerra di successione spagnola coincise con la rovina delle sostanze personali del duca, cosicché nel 1702 la corte fu trasferita a Casale.

Le ostilità forzarono le compagnie itineranti di commedianti legate al duca a spingersi in Austria e in Francia. Le compagnie maggiormente in concorrenza fra loro al momento del collasso erano sia quelle, assai affermate, di Aurelia Colomba Coppa e Teresa Costantini sia quella capeggiata da Angiola Paghetti, istituita invece di recente nel 1702. La compagnia di Aurelia era stata lungamente attiva al teatro San Samuele e la stessa Aurelia era veneziana, ma anche la compagnia di Teresa si esibiva presso il medesimo teatro. Una quarta compagnia era infine mantenuta a Mantova da Anna Marini.

Prima dello scoppio della guerra, i proprietari dei teatri veneziani sembrano essersi procacciati musicisti e commedianti attraverso gli agenti mantovani residenti in città, ma gli eventi bellici causarono notevoli difficoltà al corpo diplomatico. Una serie di accordi intercorsi fra i Grimani e il teatro di San Salvatore tra il 1703 e il 1708 riflette le pressioni dei tempi e le incertezze del personale diplomatico e teatrale. Gli artisti sinora protetti dal duca di Mantova si trovarono a risiedere chi a Casale chi a Venezia, oppure costretti in qualche luogo intermedio. Tuttavia, proprio quando l'opera stava ormai sopraffacendo la commedia, i Grimani cercarono di monopolizzare le rappresentazioni comiche a Venezia, il che diede nuovo vigore alle compagnie.

Probabilmente a causa delle loro simpatie imperiali, i Grimani trovarono difficoltà a reclutare cantanti e strumentisti provenienti da Casale o dai vicini ducati controllati dalla Francia. Coloro che si trovavano in quelle zone durante gli anni più critici del conflitto bellico venivano assunti con maggiore facilità dai meno prestigiosi teatri di San Cassiano e di Sant'Angelo, il che suggerirebbe che vi potessero essere divisioni politiche fra i teatri veneziani di diverso rango. La consuetudine, allora recentemente manifestatasi, di identificare i cantanti nei libretti d'opera attraverso la loro filiazione a una corte fu attenuata con discrezione al teatro di San Giovanni Grisostomo dopo il 1708, poiché i cantanti un tempo legati alla corte di Mantova cercavano di crearsi una nuova identità. La diaspora dei cantanti mantovani dà la misura dell'impatto che la figura di Ferdinando Carlo ebbe con l'opera veneziana.

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