

The Teatro Sant'Angelo: Cradle of Fledgling Opera Troupes

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The profile of the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice often seems anomalous. Among Venice's six theaters it was consistently the most chaotic. Countless reminders of its seeming ineptitude surface in reports of delayed payments, disputes about professional responsibilities, rumors of singers confiscating costumes (in substitution for missing pay), and of instrumentalists and dancers who failed to appear. San Giovanni Grisostomo (founded in 1678) is considered the norm in Venetian opera production, but it was really the apex of Venice's six theaters in its pursuit of both extravagance and dignity. Its political sympathies were fixed on the Holy Roman Empire, its generals, and their military conquests. Representations of these same subjects were the components of countless opera productions. Staging featured battle scenes, chariots, chain gangs (of slaves), and lavish banquets for staged weddings and coronations. The theater promoted themes of European unity in the guise of *balli delle Nazioni*.

Sant'Angelo (founded in 1677), in contrast, was the most impoverished of the theaters. Staging often highlighted the dark arts of sorcery and magic. Grottoes, caves, stormy seas, and rocky coasts prevailed in its scenery. Operating under the aegis of the Capello and Marcello families, Sant'Angelo served illustrious but not especially affluent members of the Venetian nobility. German merchants and other sojourners were among its clientele. The theater's straitened circumstances prompted improvisation and ingenuity in staging and staffing. Sant'Angelo was the theater that most consistently offered comic intermezzi between the acts of its operas. San Cassiano and San Moisè shared this predilection (which San Giovanni Grisostomo eschewed) but did operate as regularly.

Sant'Angelo's growing economic discomfort reflected Venice's own. As a result of its contributions to numerous military campaigns sponsored by the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire, the Venetian Republic found it increasingly difficult to maintain customary obligations. Its decline was heightened by a banking crisis that began in 1717 and did not end until 1739.¹ Cash became scarce, and despite official exchange rates that valued the Venetian lira and ducat highly, Sant'Angelo started to pay foreign musicians in other currencies.² Cultural enterprises that

¹ Although extensive documentation is lost, the outlines of this crisis are evident in such series of archival records such as those of the Provveditori al Sal. Venice's complementary banking systems corresponded roughly to modern checking (current) and savings accounts. The first was suspended for more than two decades.

² Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *A New Calendar of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660-1760* (Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 339.

survived were mainly funded by growing deficits.³ In Venetian theaters composers and librettists were always paid but performers, especially at Sant'Angelo, could be kept waiting for years. While San Giovanni Grisostomo continued to list *castrati* in heroic roles, Sant'Angelo cast novice *virtuose*, many still in their teens, in many roles, male and female. Venice became a good place to get experience, but it offered no support for a long-term career. These signs of deterioration constituted the conditions for the formation of traveling opera troupes. Although the ablest singers were recruited to Milanese, Parisian, and English stages, the enormous network of performers that Venice's multiplicity of theaters had produced could not be absorbed in a few select places. Some went to provincial theaters in the Veneto, but most were not stable for more than a few years.

The Sant'Angelo as a launch-pad for troupes

The wedding of Charles Emanuel, Prince of Savoie-Carignan, to Anna Cristina, Princess of Bavaria (celebrated in 1722-23) was a magnet for Venetian musicians in search of better times.⁴ The wealthy prince commissioned a new court theater, Filippo Juvarra's celebrated Teatro Regio in Turin, for this singular series of events. It became one of the most admired of Juvarra's buildings. Andrea Stefano Fiorè's *Re di vandali* (May 1722) and Giuseppe Maria Orlandini's *Semiramide* (1723) were lavishly staged in the new theater.⁵ Margarita Gualandi took the lead role in both works, with G. B. Minelli, Rosa Cruce, Maria Laurenti, Angiola Zanucchi, and Antonio Denzio.

When in 1723 Antonio Denzio, on the instructions of his Peruzzi in-laws, was charged with finding performers who could make a summer trip to Prague (1724), he rose to the occasion. There the task was to offer simplified versions of Sant'Angelo's repertory at Kuks, the summer estate of Count Franz Anton von Sporck, a ranking member of the Bohemian aristocracy. From this beginning, Antonio Maria Peruzzi and Antonio Denzio established a pattern of summer performances there and winter ones in Venice that provided his colleagues with supplementary income. Peruzzi organized the travel, Denzio the singers. The house composer responsible for adapting recent Venetian fare was Antonio Bioni.⁶

³ Some of the effects spread across Venice's far-flung diplomatic network. Pietro Ottoboni, who maintained a respected theater and hosted countless notable concerts, died in extraordinary debt (c. 47,000 ducats).

⁴ The prince (1687-1729), who maintained a palace in Paris, funded Brussels' Accademie Royale de Musique. He was a nephew of the imperial commander Eugene of Savoy. His father was a patron of the Grimani theaters in the seventeenth century.

⁵ Fiorè was a maestro at the new theater. Orlandini was maestro di cappella of the Florentine court.

⁶ Jónášova, "I Denzio", p. 83.

Venetian theaters were always looking at ways to generate additional income (or reduce expenses). Giuseppe Maria Buini of Bologna had offered both Sant'Angelo and San Moisè the opportunity to reduce expenses by hiring his troupe in the 1719-20 season. One of the first examples was his *Gl'inganni fortunate*, for San Moisè (8 May 1720), the first spring opera to be produced in Venice.⁷ Buini's career in Venice had begun with *La caduta di Gelone*, which opened at Sant'Angelo on 11 November 1719. This first season might have been forgotten but for the vicious satire on theatrical manners and morals that it prompted Benedetto Marcello (a scion of the theater's founding families) that was called *Il teatro alla moda*. It went to press in October 1720. The title page mocked "L'orsa in peotta"⁸ (the *orsa* was the impresario Giovanni Orsato), as well as Buini's wife, the singer Cecilia Belisante, Antonio Vivaldi (depicted as a violinist in the boat with the bear), and such noted singers as Matteo Lucchini and Domenico Borghi. Buini also performed his *La pace per amore* at San Moisè (26 December 1719) and *Armida delusa* [here a satire on the First Crusade] at Sant'Angelo (24 January 1720).⁹ The composer created a bulwark against further satirical take-offs by withholding the names of his personnel in the future. Buini claimed credit for both text and music in his works. Many of his "Venetian" operas were performed at the Teatro Formigliare in Bologna, where Buini was a member of the Accademia Filarmonica. He grew in stature as a satirist himself. His *Chi no fa non falla* (Sant'Angelo, 21 May 1732) required several singers to render their arias in Bolognese dialect.

The actor Tomaso Ristori brought his Dresden troupe to Sant'Angelo in 1713-14. He and his son, Gio. Alberto, arrived at the theater in the autumn of 1713 to produce what proved to be the first of three interpretations of *Orlando furioso*. The story of Roland's madness was a staple of *commedia*. Actors were required to know such legendary tales by heart, but in opera performers followed a script. Grazio Braccioli's account, which underlay the second and third productions, was a big hit in its first airing, for which Vivaldi revised the score from the Ristori version.¹⁰ The Vivaldis also revised the cast, the scenery, and the order of elements. In the third version these details were altered once again. Gio. Alberto Ristori, whose musical style was often similar to

⁷ *New Chronology*, p. 354.

⁸ An *orsa* was a bear. A *peotta* was a small Venetian boat.

⁹ See *The New Chronology of Venetian Opera and related Genres, 1660-1760* (Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 353.

¹⁰ See Reinhard Strohm, "Zu Vivaldi's *Operschaffen*," *Venezia e il melodramma nel Settecento*, ed. Maria Teresa Muraro (Florence: Florence, Leo S. Olschki, 1978, pp. 237-248). Federico Maria Sardelli includes the work in his forthcoming Vivaldi catalogue as RV 819. The Ristori were long active at the Dresden court. Gio. Alberto composed numerous light operas for the court's summer palace at Pillnitz and other music in a style closely resembling Vivaldi's. Other interactions could have occurred between musicians at Pillnitz, which was particularly active in the early 1720s, and adjacent areas of Bohemia.

Vivaldi's, remained in Venice long enough to compose a score for *Pallade trionfante in Arcadia* (27 January 1714) at San Samuele, which was normally a comedy house.¹¹ (San Samuele's repertory was at the time otherwise anonymous, but many works were comic bordering on the ridiculous. At Venice's other prose theater, San Salvatore, Luigi Riccoboni remained the dominant figure until about 1720, when he moved to Paris. We see from printing licenses for the texts that San Salvatore's dramas were serious ones treating classical tragedies, as suited Riccoboni's literary values.

Another current intersecting the normal flow of opera in Venice is generated by the sometimes erratic history of San Cassiano. Having enjoyed twenty-five successful years, from 1693, of a repertory dominated by Francesco Gasparini and Tomaso Albinoni, the theater closed in 1718. (The reasons for this were probably tied up with changes in the Medici court, for one of the theater's most consistent constituencies was Florentine.) Gasparini had moved to Rome and Albinoni was active at Sant'Angelo. The theater's 1717-18 season began with an ambitious production of *Farnace*, featuring music by "a celebrated maestro" (Carlo Francesco Pollarolo) on Domenico Lalli's text.¹² A dedication of the Margrave of Brandenburg (Wilhelm Friedrich) marked it as a production of high aspiration. Its sequel, Orlandini's five-act *Antigona*, which was performed as a *tragedia da cantarsi*,¹³ is a less certain proposition. Although the well regarded Susanna Dentis provided the *balli* for both works, those for *Antigona* included, as a clear sign of homage to the Florentine court, a somewhat ornamental version of the *Ballo del Gran Duca*.¹⁴

In its 1724 reincarnation, San Cassiano attempted to relaunch itself as an imitator of San Giovanni Grisostomo, with big-name stars and lavish sets. This following on the heels of the death of Cosimo III de Medici (31 October 1723), whose demise left the Medici dynasty with only one remaining Grand Duke, the profligate Gian Gastone, who was Cosimo's younger brother. Cosimo's cautious policies were soon overturned by Gian Gastone. Having no direct heirs, Gian Gastone out-maneuvred rival branches of the family by appointing Francis Stephen of Lorraine (the future

¹¹ This work may have been based on his father's *Il trionfo di Pallade in Arcadia*, a pastoral that was performed the preceding summer at the Teatro Obizzi in Padua, then given at San Samuele (perhaps in prose with incidental music) in the autumn of 1713. Cf. Selfridge-Field, *New Chronology*, pp. 317 and 567.

¹² A. M. Lucchini's account came to have a better reception elsewhere in Europe.

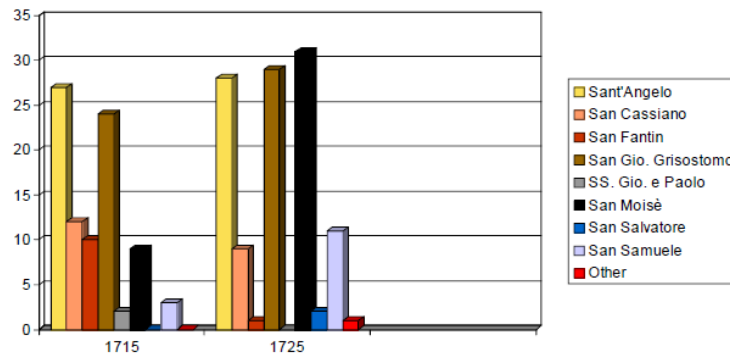
¹³ Although the music was credited to Orlandini, the text was now by Benedetto Pasqualigo, one of Venice's staunchest Arcadian dramatists. This tells us that the work was intended for a Venetian audience, not a Florentine one.

¹⁴ *A New Chronology*, p. 341. For the long history of the *ballo*, see Warren Kirkendale, *L'aria di Fiorenza, id est il ballo del Gran Duca*, Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1972. Musical allusions to the *ballo* are very numerous.

husband of Maria Therese of Austria) as his successor. San Cassiano was not entirely successful in its new iteration.

Under the ubiquitous Giovanni Orsato, who served as San Cassiano's impresario in 1724-25, an attention-grabbing production of Albinoni's *Didone abbandonata* (26 December 1724), featuring Marianna Benti Bugarelli and Nicola Grimaldi, was so chaotic that it was the point of departure for a scathing satire, *L'opera in commedia*, which was published (ostensibly) in Amsterdam without date or imprimatur.¹⁵ A stormy battle erupted over a failure to deliver the second and third installments of the heroine's promised £2,400 fee for the season. Benti Bugarelli threatened to leave the production when the second installment was not forthcoming.¹⁶ Other figures in the cast included the newcomers Lucia Lanzetti and Teresa Peruzzi (detta La Denzia).¹⁷

One beneficiary of San Cassiano's six-year hiatus was the Teatro San Moisè. Between it and Sant'Angelo there was much reciprocity of personnel. Members of the Denzio family were equally active at both up to 1724. San Moisè was the most active theater in Venice during the 1720s, but this was also a decade of great theatrical vigor (Tab. 1).

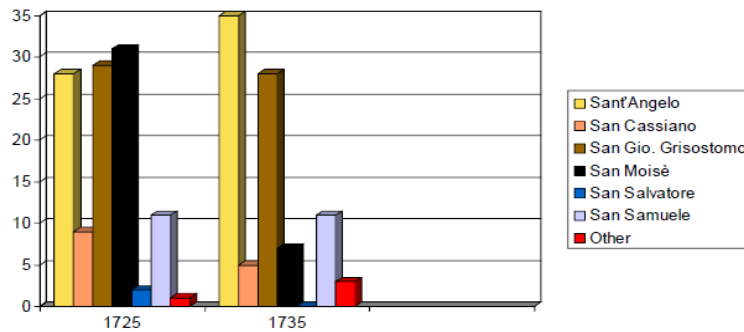


San Moisè's popularity was brief, for by the 1730s it was in rapid decline, with Sant'Angelo now assuming the lion's share of the opera trade (Tab. 2).

¹⁵ This satirical pamphlet, cast as a *dialogo comico-critico* between Don Quixote and "L'Orso in Peata" [Orsato] satirized recent Metastasian opera productions. The late Maria Giovanna Miggiani, who classified the work as "meta-theatrical," identified satires of specific scenes from recent opera productions (e.g., 1724/12, 1726/2) at San Cassiano. See her "La Romanina e L'Orso in peata. I primi drammi metastasiani a Venezia tra evidenza documentaria e invenzione metateatrale (1725-26)" in *Il canto di Metastasio: Atti del convegno di Studi* (14-16 Dicembre 1999), ed. Maria Giovanna Miggiani, Bologna: Arnaldo Forni Editore, 2004. v. II, n. 8.

¹⁶ *Le Mercure galant*, Avril 1725, p. 800.

¹⁷ Not the same as Teresa Peruzzi Denzio (Antonio's mother), she was listed in many opera libretti as *veneziana* (Jónášova, "I Denzio", p. 82. Teresa Peruzzi Denzio was born in Brussels. The *veneziana* sang from 1722 (Padua) through 1740 (Verona), with numerous appearances in Brno (1732-1734) and Graz (1736-1738) plus somewhat fewer (also in the 1730s) in Iesi, Munich, and Prague.



San Cassiano was redeemed by one spectacular work at the end of 1728. In a production managed by Sebastiano Ricci (with support from Faustina Bordoni), Geminiano Giacomelli's *Gianguir* was lavishly staged. Its text was derived from the travel diary of Niccolò Manuzzio,¹⁸ which tells us that it as another work intended to attract Venetians. Faustina's involvement may have attracted the interest of the burgeoning number of English aristocrats who were lately visiting Venice.

By the end of the 1720s all three theaters—San Cassiano, San Moisè, and Sant'Angelo—were largely dependent on young, little tested composers and singers. The stimulus to troupe formation was the hope that more fertile conditions might exist in emerging theaters to the north. Even among the highly skilled, itinerancy became common in the 1730s. By the 1740s Venetian stages were presenting few works that were entirely new. They were filled instead with pastiches and *opera buffe* (which found immediate public favor) imported from Naples.

Performing networks

The Madonises

Within the environment of Venice's theaters, Sant'Angelo contributed disproportionately the formation of traveling troupes. Some, like the Denzio troupe that remained in Prague (1724-1735), returned periodically to Venice. Others, like those led by Bioni and Antonio Galeazzi, headed off in new directions—Bioni to Breslau, Galeazzi to Iesi.¹⁹ The Madonis family, in which we count six violinists over three generations, offers an enlightening perspective on troupe vacillations and the strains they placed on family relations.

Giovanni Battista Madonis and his son Giuseppe were anchors in the customary pursuits of Venetian instrumentalists—serving in the orchestra of the ducal chapel, San Marco, and in

¹⁸ *New Chronology*, p 405.

¹⁹ Galeazzi was from Brescia.

management positions in the instrumentalists' guild; performing for the annual memorial mass for deceased performers—from 1714 or earlier until 1781. Gio. Battista, Lodovico, Antonio, and Marco all served at some time in the 1710s in the orchestra of the Teatro Sant'Angelo. Lodovico, who was a virtuoso of rare distinction, and Antonio, who was facile in his mastery of other instruments including viola *d'amore* and horn, were active most seasons into the 1730s. They were both born in 1695.²⁰ At 15 (1710) Antonio auditioned unsuccessfully for the San Marco orchestra. Gio. Battista (b. c. 1681) was engaged in the same orchestra on 9 December 1714. Lodovico never sought a position in the basilica orchestra, but in 1716-17 he headed the second violins in the orchestra of Sant'Angelo.²¹ He served as impresario for Vivaldi's *L'incoronazione di Dario* (23 January 1717), but two days after the production opened he filed a complaint with the Council of Ten concerning irregularities at the theater. The following year (1717-18) Marco Madonis (relationship undetermined) served as a third violinist at the theater. Antonio Madonis played in Albinoni's *Cleonice* (22 January 1718) and probably the other works of that season. The year after (1718-19) the painter Sebastiano Ricci was the impresario. He promptly accused Gio. Battista and Lodovico Madonis of withholding some of income collected on behalf of one Domenico Viola from box rentals.²² On 15 December 1720 Antonio was accepted into the San Marco orchestra.

Although it appears likely that Antonio remained in Venice for a time, it is less clear that Lodovico did so. Two violin sonatas by Lodovico in a French manuscript miscellany are tentatively dated 1721. In that year and the following one Vivaldi directed two serenatas at the Teatro Regio (Milan), and in the 1722-1723 time frame several Venetians went to Turin to perform operas by Orlandini and Fiorè for the festivities celebrating the wedding of Anna Cristina of Bavaria to Charles Emmanuel. (Whether Vivaldi took any violinists with him to Milan is unknown.) There is some likelihood that at least one of the Madonises was present at some or all of the Turin performances and perhaps the earlier Milanese ones as well. Sant'Angelo singers involved in the Turin festivities included Antonio Denzio and Margherita Gualandi. What is compelling about the other possibilities is that the Kuks troupe Antonio Denzio assembled in the summer of 1723 overlapped in some of its personnel.

²⁰ Details and documentation are in preparation.

²¹ Theater orchestras were small. It is not inconceivable that all the second violins were members of the same family, since addition to Antonio and Giovanni Battista there was a third (probably young) named Marco.

²² See Gianluca Stefani, *Sebastiano Ricci, impresario d'opera a Venezia nel primo Settecento* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2015), p. 187. The case was argued in the tribunal for foreigners (Giudici de Forestier) because, as a native of Belluno, Ricci was not a resident of the Venetian Republic.

At this point the paths of Antonio and Lodovico sometimes diverged. All indications are that they formed part of the original Peruzzi troupe (June 1724), but simultaneously they juggled many commitments at home. On 26 December 1724 they signed the dedication of Giovanni Zuccari's *Seleuco*.²³ Lodovico was serving as head of the second violins. The following spring (May 1725) Antonio wed the Florentine contralto Rosaura Mazzanti, who sang in *Seleuco* and several other works at both Sant'Angelo and San Cassiano. They apparently returned to Kuks with the Denzio troupe, but they parted company with Denzio in the autumn and followed Peruzzi's troupe (a splinter group of the original one) to Breslau. The tenure of Lodovico, who served as concertmaster, was brief,²⁴ but Antonio was still there in the autumn of 1726, when he sought an annulment of his marriage to Mazzanti. Antonio, therefore, was probably working with Antonio Bioni and others to mount a production of (Bioni's) *Orlando furioso* for the wedding of Wilhelm Ferdinand, Earl of Burghaus. A number of Bioni's arias and cantatas survive in Ansbach, but none of them confirms a troupe involvement. Twenty-six of Bioni's operas were performed in Breslau between 1727 and 1733. The Stadt-Theater, where they were given, closed soon after. With the discovery of more additional musical sources (especially in Kroměříž) and evidences of his trail, Bioni's last documented activity has been pushed out to March 1741.²⁵

Orlando furioso was given by Peruzzi's troupe in Brussels (Théâtre de la Monnaie) in May 1727.²⁶ By this time, the troupe's leading lady, Gerolama Valsecchi, had become Antonio's new wife. The question then becomes whether the Prince of Carignan was instrumental in evoking the invitation to Brussels. Valsecchi either had or soon acquired an appointment as a musician in the service of the Archduchess Maria Elisabetta of Bavaria, the wife of Archduke Maximilian II Emmanuel, whose court had spent the years 1715-1726 in exile in Brussels.) Anna Dotti and Giustina Eberard were among the singers in this edition of the Peruzzi troupe. The comic intermezzo specialists Rosa Ungarelli and Antonio Ristorini (the step-brother of Rosaura Mazzanti) were among the most popular performers.

²³ Zuccari was both a cellist and a composer. His nephew played the *violone* and composed. Both of them worked at the Mantuan court in the late 1710s in Vivaldi's productions (details forthcoming in E. Selfridge-Field, study of Lodovico Madonis).

²⁴ Lodovico may have made his way to France.

²⁵ See recent articles by Rashid-Sasha Pegah (2012) and Zuzana Černá (2017). We now know that Bioni composed several operas for performance at the Kärntnertor Theater in Vienna in the later 1730s and dedicated a set of cantatas to the Margravine of Brandenburg-Ansbach. Bioni's latest activities are cited in the journal of Duke Anton Ulrich of Sachsen-Meiningen-Coburg (Pegah).

²⁶ Peruzzi's mother, Teresa, was Belgian by birth.

Although it is not certain that Lodovico was involved in the Brussels production, a handful of church music by “Madonis” in Anderlecht suggests that he lingered in the Brussels area. He eventually found his way to Paris, where on 1 May 1729 he became the first Italian to perform at the Concert Spirituel. Lodovico now appears to have remained in Paris, where he was invited to join the orchestra of the Concert Spirituel. His *XII Sonates a violon seul avec la basse* were dedicated in November 1731 and published in 1732.²⁷

By Carnival 1730 Valsecchi had gone to Prague, presumably with Antonio, to appear in two forthcoming operas at the Sporck Theater. They might have stayed longer in Bohemia had Antonio Denzio not short-changed his singers in the group’s 1730 operas. Antonio Madonis’ official complaint (1730) about his wife’s missing pay led the two to return to Italy. They may well have been summoned by Vivaldi to help mount his long-awaited opera, *La fida ninfa*, for the inauguration of Verona’s spectacular new Teatro Filarmonico—on 6 January 1732. Valsecchi sang as Elpina in Vivaldi’s work and remained in town for its successor, Giacomelli’s *Gianguir*. Antonio, Lodovico, and Giovanni Battista were reunited around this time. None of them returned to Prague. Valsecchi had other engagements in Ferrara. She appeared again with the Peruzzi troupe in Munich in August 1733. She and Antonio both appeared in Augsburg, where Antonio served as orchestra leader, two months later. The troupe went on to Regensburg, where the Madonis’s participation is less clear.

Before the sojourn of Antonio and his wife in Bavaria, Lodovico had taken up an offer (March 1733) to serve in the orchestra of the Russian empress Anna Ioannovna. Antonio followed two years later. His departure preceded by a few weeks the death (late December 1735) of Gio. Maria Peruzzi (Antonio Denzio’s father). Valsecchi’s Bavarian connections also ceased in 1735. Minus that constraint, Antonio Madonis may have felt able to accept the Russian offer. It is not certain that Valsecchi accompanied him. The brothers’ invitations seem not to have included her.

By Carnival 1737 Valsecchi was in Brno, where she appeared in seven operas (through Carnival 1739) at the Teatro alla Taverna.²⁸ She enjoyed the patronage of Cardinal Hannibal von Schrattenbach, the principal patron of the theater, from 1736. Antonio Madonis visited Italy in 1738 and remained in Italy and/or Moravia until the autumn of 1740. Although he could have been

²⁷ One of Lodovico’s patrons was Henri Charles Arnauld, the Abbé de Pomponne (1669-1756), who had served as French ambassador to the Venetian Republic from 28 January 1705 to 11 January 1710. He was not the dedicatee of these *Sonates*.

²⁸ Details are forthcoming in Jana Spáčilová’s *Catalogue of Opera Libretti in Moravia*. Some information appears in “Soloists in the Opera Productions in Brno, Hološov, Kroměříž, and Vyškov: Italian Singers in Moravian Sources c. 1720-1740 (Part I) in Gesa zur Nieden and Berthold Over (eds.), *Musicians’ Mobilities and Music Migrations in Early Modern Europe: Biographical Patterns and Cultural Exchanges*, Mainz Historical Cultural Sciences, 33, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016, 255-274.

worthy successor to Carlo Tessarini (1734-36), a violinist at the bishop's court at Olomouc, there is no confirmation that he was. Schratzenbach's death in July 1738 precipitated the eventual collapse of the Teatro alla Taverna. Valsecchi's last performance there occurred during Carnival 1739. Reports of her death later that year are unconfirmed. Russian accounts holding that Antonio Madonis's death in 1746 are puzzling, because a like-named person, together with the violinist Angelo Colonna (also listed in the empress's orchestra), gave a memorable performance at a religious ceremony in Pordenone in 1747.²⁹

Meanwhile in Russia, Lodovico's life fell into largely predictable routines sustained over decades. Although his personality gradually changed and in his later years he suffered from a mental illness,³⁰ his tenure as concertmaster continued until his official retirement from the court in 1762. Although bereft of his Russian family (he married in 1742 but lost his wife in 1755), he survived, largely in social isolation, until 1777.

Other traveling musicians linked to Sant'Angelo

A particularly broad scattering of simplified versions of Venetian operas dotted smaller stages in Northern Italy, Austria, Bohemia, and Germany in the late 1720s, 1730s, and 1740s. Giovanni Porta, the *maestro di cappella* at the Ospedale de' Pietà (1726-1737), was a very able composer of opera and church music. (Like that of Gio. Antonio Ristori, Porta's musical idiom resembled that of Vivaldi.) Faint clues link his music from time to time with troupe repertoires. His *Amore e Fortuna* (San Moisè, 31 December 1727, originally given in Naples, 1725) failed to list a cast. It was subsequently performed in Padua (Teatro Obizzi, Carnival, 1734). At San Moisè Porta's work followed Giovanni Reali's *Il regno galante* (October 1727).³¹ Both *Amore e fortuna* and *Il regno galante* had revivals in Iesi's Teatro della Concordia, under Antonio Galeazzi, in 1733. The Iesi performers were all Venetians. Not long before, Galeazzi's *Il trionfo della Costanza in Statira, vedova d'Alessandro* (Sant'Angelo, c. 4 January 1731) had pitted the veteran Bolognese Maria Giovanna Gasparini (*Statira*) against the young Venetian Rosa Maddalena Cardena (*Barsane*). A few weeks after that (25 January) Galeazzi's revised version of Vivaldi's *L'Odio vinto dalla Costanza* was staged at Sant'Angelo.³² *Amore e Fortuna* had as many of more progeny than Vivaldi's opera, for it also was

²⁹ The frequency with which musicians traveled between Russia and regions south of the Alps seems remarkable, given that the trip from St. Petersburg (six weeks by coach, supplemented by ferries) could be made only between March or April and October.

³⁰ In today's parlance he would probably be termed manic-depressive.

³¹ Reali, a violinist, composed few operas. His pastoral *L'amante ravveduto* (1729) was composed for the mayor of Capodistria (1729).

³² It had been staged earlier as under the two Vivaldi titles *La Costanza trionfante degli amori e degli'odi* (San Moisè 1716) and *Artabano, re de' Parti* (same 1719).

staged under the title *Il nemico amante* (Teatro della Grazie, Vicenza, May 1728). Its well-worn text, penned by Francesco Passarini, was originally set by Lorenzo Baseggio for performance in Dolo and Rovigo in the autumn of 1715.

Porta was undoubtedly aware of affairs in Prague: he and Denzio would have crossed paths at San Moisè in 1716 when Denzio's sister Elisabetta collapsed and died during a performance of Porta's *La costanza combattuta in amore*.³³ *La Costanza combattuta* was adapted by Denzio for Prague (1728) and, as *Barsina*, by Gius. Antonio Paganelli for San Cassiano (1742). He further revised the work for a production in Munich (1747). Other operas by Porta were given in Ferrara, Florence, Milan, and Vicenza in the 1720s and 1730s. The Mingotti troupe made generous use of his works in Graz.³⁴ Their *Amor, odio, e pentimento* (Graz, 1740), for example, may have been derived from the Porta work of the same title (Mestre, 1729).

Other dimensions of mobile opera infrastructure

Clues from minor publishers

A curious detail of Sant'Angelo during the first decade of the century is that a number of its more unusual libretti came from the small printing house Gio. Battista Zuccato in Venice's Spaderia. Among the titles (1703- 1711) were these: *La regina creduta re* (1706), *Arrenione* (1708), *Arato in Sparta* (1709, long falsely attributed to Benedetto Marcello), *Edwige regina d'Ungheria* (1709), *Endimione* (1709), *Il tradimento tradito* (1709), "*Non son quella" è la difesa*,³⁵ and *Circe delusa* (1711). His libretti for other theaters included *La forza vinta dall'onore* (San Moisè, 1703), the pastoral *L'Ergisto* (Teatro Campagnella, Rovigo, 1708), and *L'Aretusa* (San Fantin, 1709). Zuccato signed the dedication for *L'Aretusa* in November.³⁶

Comic intermezzi

Comic intermezzi, which already had a substantial history in Florence, were a response in Venice to the rigors of proposed Arcadian reforms, which advocated the suppression of comic

³³ E. Selfridge-Field, *Pallade veneta: Writings on Music in Venetian Society*, Venice, Fondazione Ugo e Olga Levi, 1985, inadvertently omitted this reference, which is found in the "Pallade veneta" manuscript continuation (I-Vas) in the report for the week 28 9.bre-5 X.bre 1716, f 2r, "Terminata Giovedì della Scorsa [26 November or 3 December], la recita nel Teatro di San Moise; fù sorpresa da effetti Matricali che li causarono la convulsione interna, la Sig[no]ra Elisabetta Dencio, ch'era una delle Recitante, benche fosse nell'età di 21: anno, non hebbe rigore di resistere al male, onde la notte seguente fece la Comparsa sulle scene orribili della Morte."

³⁴ See Metoda Kokole, "Migrations of Musical Repertoire: The Attems Music Collection from around 1744" in *Musicians' Mobilities*, op. cit., pp. 341-377.

³⁵ A text known from the repertory of prose *commedia*, 1709. See the *New Chronology*, p. 300.

³⁶ *New Chronology*, p. 291f. *Aretusa* had first been staged in Milan in 1703.

elements in the *dramma per musica*. Sant'Angelo's love of darkness, magic, and sorcery may have been other responses to the same reforms. In practical terms intermezzi also served to alleviate the boredom of long discourses on ancient heroes and tyrants. Few intermezzi had published texts, but it is once more Zuccato who introduced the idea with his publication of the *Scherzi musicali* "to be sung in the Teatro Sant'Angelo in the autumn of 1709." They were paired with Giuseppe Boniventi's *Endimione*.³⁷

From 1705-06 until the 1740s Sant'Angelo provided the largest number of comic intermezzi of any theater in Venice. (San Cassiano was an equal during periods when it was operating.) By addressing present-day phenomena, intermezzi challenged certain theatrical conventions. They depicted situations that was type-cast. A common situation pitted the nouveau riche against wistful young servants, e.g. in the guise of a rich widower and a naïve maid or, as here, a rich dowager (*Ermilla*) and an unctuous young servant (*Battista*). Expanded into *opere buffe*, the same *lazzi*³⁸ found enthusiastic audiences in Venice (and elsewhere) in the 1740s.

Another Sant'Angelo figure who can be associated with change was Giovanni Zuccari, an occasional impresario at Sant'Angelo. One season when he managed the theater was 1711-12, when one offering was Gio. Maria Ruggieri's *Elisa* (Sant'Angelo, 25 November 1711). It was the first comic opera given in Venice. Ruggieri's *Arsinoe vendicata* (Sant'Angelo, 2 Feb. 1712) was notable for scenic innovations, were both staged.³⁹ Zuccari composed an opera, *Seleuco* (26 December 1724), for which the Madonises served as impresari.⁴⁰ Rosaura Mazzanti sang in it (as Stratonica) and in other works of the same season.

Permanent migrations to theaters beyond Italy

The Mingotti troupe, after returning from Austria and Moravia and appearing at San Moisè (1744-1747), found its way to Copenhagen, where research in progress by Cristine Jeanneret is showing a very full agenda. Antonio Denzio, after spending a few years wandering from place to place in northern Italy, found his way to Munich. His musical progeny (under the surname Danzi)

³⁷ *New Chronology*, p. 292.

³⁸ *Lazzi* were stock routines that could be plugged into improvised *commedie*. In most cases it fell to Arlequino to perform them, often via asides to the audience

³⁹ Other aspects of its production were also noteworthy. The receipts were audited twice by the Council of Ten. The production included several elements not indicated in the libretto—an independent battle troupe, a trumpet-and-drum corps, and a single *ballarino*. The instrumentalists were hired as a unit. This was one of the Sant'Angelo works for which Margherita Gualandi (*La Campiola*) confiscated her costume, which she claimed was "personal property," as collateral towards her eventual payment (*New Chronology*, pp. 308-309).

⁴⁰ Stefani, "Ricci", p. 186. Antonio was to collect box rents while Lodovico was head of the second violins.

spread out over the remaining decades of the eighteenth century between Baden Württemberg and Vienna to assume positions ranging from theaters in courts and summer palaces to chamber music and teaching positions.

Summary

The history of traveling troupes is skimpy but its evidences are widespread. The lack of surviving music from these travels frustrates most efforts to detail the history of troupe activities. What is instructive in tracing a family such as the Madonises — in their forays to Prague, Breslau, Brussels, Paris, Frankfurt, Augsburg, Munich, Warsaw, and St. Petersburg—is that their musical experiences were so comprehensive by the time they reached Russia that they could no longer be considered entirely Venetian. The life for itinerant musicians was dependent on the outcomes of wars, contagions, political upheavals, and palace intrigues, and the eighteenth century provided a generous supply of all of them. In most cases, we have no clue to what their adventures entailed, but at least we can develop a clear notion of the challenges they faced.

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Abstract

Many smaller theaters of the mid-eighteenth century were established in conjunction within the compass of Italian traveling troupes. Several troupes were formed by musicians active at the Teatro Sant'Angelo, Venice. Although Vivaldi was not personally involved in any of the troupes, the musical imprint of his operas was strong in the mix of pastiches that served several Central European venues. The musical evidence of these performances is almost entirely lost, but the troupes are traceable through libretti. The degree to which the Teatro Sant'Angelo contributed both troupe leaders and troupe musicians stands out among all theaters in Northern Italy. The reach of its musicians, particularly those of the Madonis family, extended to Belgium, France, Hesse, Bavaria, Saxony, Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, and Russia.

Keywords: Teatro Sant'Angelo, opera troupes, Madonis family, prose comedy, Francesco Gasparini, Antonio Vivaldi, Antonio Bioni, Giovanni Porta.

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