

Introduction

Outside Vienna, no theatre company was more receptive to Mozart's music than the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen, a small commercial ensemble based in Prague which also gave summer seasons in Leipzig. Directed by Pasquale Bondini and Domenico Guardasoni, it played a significant role in the composer's later career. In 1786, its production of *Figaro* was received with such enthusiasm that Mozart was invited to visit Prague, where he reported with pride that tunes from the opera were being whistled in the street. The Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen did not make a practice of commissioning works, but because an opera was required to celebrate the imperial marriage of the Archduchess Maria Theresia an agreement was reached for a new work on the Don Juan story. Even though it was not ready in time for its festive première, *Don Giovanni* was a popular success, and Guardasoni began to consider the possibility of another commission for Mozart. In the summer of 1789, however, the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen relocated to Warsaw and nothing further was heard about this proposal. During his second season at the Court of Stanisław August Poniatowski, Guardasoni introduced a programme of *opera seria*, a new venture for his company, but a timely one, as the troupe was recalled to Prague in the summer of 1791 in order to stage *La clemenza di Tito* in honour of the Coronation of Leopold II. In the years following Mozart's death, the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen, far from abandoning his Italian operas, continued to play a pivotal role in sustaining interest in them, while elsewhere German *Singspiel* versions swept the field. An especially notable success was a Leipzig production of *Così fan tutte* in 1792, and this was followed in 1794 by a well-attended second performance run for *La clemenza* in Prague. All these events were developed by Niemetschek, the composer's early biographer, into a compelling narrative which saw the formation of a 'special relationship' between the discerning Prague audience and its favoured visitor. A powerful blend of history and myth, it remains to this day one of the central strands of Mozart historiography, but Leipzig was largely written out of the picture.

This study aims to take a fresh look at the activities of the Bondini-Guardasoni Company in both cities. My interest in this subject was set off

by a visit to examine the remarkable holdings of theatre bills in the Leipzig Stadtgeschichtliches Museum. This collection constitutes a superb documentary resource for studying German theatre in the late eighteenth century, exemplifying in particular the manner in which Italian opera was subsumed into the *Singspiel* tradition.¹ Some of the posters relate to the performances of the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen during their summer seasons in Leipzig. The bills, summarised in Appendix 1, give full details of casts and roles, and they shed much new light, not only on the activities of the troupe in Leipzig, but also by extension on their winter seasons in Prague, for which such information is sometimes lacking. Two of the posters from 1786 afford interesting contextual insights into the background of the commissioning of *Don Giovanni*, a seminal event, but one about which remarkably little firm information has ever been uncovered. More generally, theatre posters constitute a category of primary evidence that has yet to be incorporated fully into the documentary biography project.² The Leipzig collection contains some thirty pre-1800 bills advertising performances of Mozart's operas. An especially valuable feature is that from 1792 the posters start to include plot synopses. The summaries of *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte* published for the 1794 performances give us a good idea of what Mozart's impresario thought the public needed to know about the plots of these works before entering the theatre to hear them.

A complementary source of evidence about the Bondini–Guardasoni troupe is to be found in the *Indice de' teatrali spettacoli* (ITS), which from 1764 reported the activities of opera companies across Europe in the annual cycle running from the spring of one year to the end of Carnival the next.³ Typically, the listings are organised alphabetically by city, and they usually include the name of the impresario, a list of the performers and at least a

¹ The collection is in the Musik- und Theatersammlung in the Neubau, Böttchergässchen, 3. Several of the Mozart posters – those for *Die Entführung* (2 October 1784), *Don Giovanni* (15 June 1788), *Weibertreue* (1 February 1795) and *Die Zauberflöte* (1 March 1793) – are reproduced in Richter, 'Sehr gut und mit allem beifall gegeben', 63–88. The pre-1800 theatre bills are arranged chronologically in two large boxes. Eighteenth-century bills are information-rich documents. The details given in this study will always include date, company title, work, names of composer, librettist and performers, and special announcements, but subsidiary information such as full character identifications, ticket prices and the times of performances will be given only when of particular interest.

² Deutsch, *Mozart: Die Dokumente*; Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*; Eibl, *Mozart: Die Dokumente*; Eisen, *New Mozart Documents*; Eisen, *Mozart: Die Dokumente*.

³ Verti, ed., *Un almanacco drammatico: Indice de' teatrali spettacoli*. On the ITS, see Verti, 'The *Indice de' teatrali spettacoli*', 1–7. I am especially indebted to John Rice for drawing my attention to the significance of the ITS lists. Page references to the ITS will be to this facsimile edition.

selection of repertoire. The *ITS* lists have been available for some time in a facsimile edition, but they are not yet well known. In the context of the present study, they provide a framework against which documentation relating to specific performances such as theatre bills can be evaluated. The information in this valuable source clarifies questions relating to the casting of some of Mozart's operas, in particular by allowing consideration of singers active in the *Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen* who were *not* for one reason or another allocated roles.

The riches of the Stadtgeschichtliches Museum do not end with the collection of theatre bills; also to be seen there is one of the finest extant holdings of pre-1800 concert programmes and posters, advertising the regular series at the Gewandhaus, the Extra concerts, individual benefits and other special events.⁴ This remarkably rich and again surprisingly little-known resource provides a wealth of detailed evidence about Mozart reception in Leipzig over two decades from 1780 to 1800, demonstrating the interaction between dramatic productions and concert performances, one of the recurring themes of this study.⁵

Leipzig concert programmes usually printed the full texts of the vocal works, a very useful feature which allows the repertoire to be identified more exactly than is normally possible.⁶ Typically, a reference to an aria or *scena* in an eighteenth-century concert programme will not even identify its title. One particularly significant example is the booklet for a 1788 Gewandhaus concert given by Josepha Duschek, a lifelong friend of the composer. Her performance predates Mozart's own academy on 12 May 1789 by almost exactly one year, and it thus provides a new context for this still puzzling episode in the composer's biography. The programme booklet identifies one of the pieces she sang as 'Or che il ciel' (K.374), traditionally assumed to have been written for the Salzburg castrato Ceccarelli early in 1781. This opens up for discussion the possibility that this piece was the rondeau that Duschek requested from Mozart around the same time, hitherto assumed to have been lost, or that Mozart adapted Ceccarelli's piece for his friend in the late 1780s. In respect of the latter idea, it may be significant

⁴ The Leipzig concert posters are discussed in Weber, *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste*.

⁵ The two classic studies of Leipzig concert life are: Dörffel, *Geschichte der Gewandhausconcerte*; and Schering, *Johann Sebastian Bach*, vol. III.

⁶ This study makes use of documents in the following files and boxes: Benefiz- und Extra-Concerte von 1779 bis 1792; Benefiz- und Extra-Concerte von 1793 bis 1797; Benefiz- und Extra-Concerte von 1798 bis 1800; Programmezettel Gewandhaus 1782–1789; Programme Gewandhaus, Dilettanten Concert 1790–1796; Gewandhauskarton 1, 1781–1791; Gewandhauskarton 2; Gewandhauskarton 3, 1791–1800; Gewandhauskarton 25, 1777–1809.

that the autograph of K.374 contains a revision to the climax of the vocal line, strikingly similar in its figuration to Donna Elvira's 'Mi tradi'.⁷

Additional sources of information about the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen in Leipzig include the daily newspaper the *Leipziger Zeitungen* (LZ) and the weekly *Leipziger Intelligenz-blatt* (LI). In some years Guardasoni placed regular advertisements in the former, which illustrate how the troupe structured its summer visits to the city. For information on the Leipzig orchestra, the most useful sources are the early histories of the Institut für alte und kranke Musiker, which came into being as a direct result of negotiations with Bondini. These accounts have the character of an 'agreed' oral history, written long after the event, and several nineteenth-century manuscript versions are to be found in the small archive of materials relating to the Institut in the Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek.⁸ Carl August Grenser's history of Leipzig's concert and theatre orchestras is based on this account, but it also incorporates material from published almanacs, theatre journals, newspapers, posters and programmes.⁹ It gives valuable glimpses into the dealings between Bondini and Guardasoni and their players.

A rich array of published sources pertaining to German theatre has recently become much more accessible, thanks to the digitisation of Enlightenment journals in projects sponsored by Bielefeld, Göttingen, Münster and other universities. An especially impressive database is the University of Bielefeld's *Zeitschriften der Aufklärung online*.¹⁰ Musicologists have long been aware of passages in this extensive literature that refer directly to Mozart through citations selected by Deutsch and his successors, yet the compilers of these documentary reference works were understandably limited by considerations of space in what could be included, and it is evident that much background contextual information relating to organisations such as the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen had to be omitted.

The present study aims to draw upon this wide range of primary sources to give a systematic account of the Bondini–Guardasoni Company and thus of the organisational context in which Mozart's Italian operas came to be performed in Prague and Leipzig. It will show how the Italiänische Opera-Virtuosen came into being as part of Bondini's wider theatrical

⁷ The identity of Duschek's missing aria is discussed in Corneilson, 'aber nach geendigter Oper mit Vergnügen'.

⁸ Leipzig Universitätsbibliothek, Sondersammlungen, Fuchs Handschriften, S.70–1, Signatur Rep.III 15h. The two main versions are entitled 'Nachrichten über das Institut für alte und kranke Musiker 1786–1859' and 'Geheime Nachrichten über die ersten Zeiten des musicalischen Institut in Leipzig' [1831].

⁹ Grenser, *Geschichte der Musik*.

¹⁰ www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/diglib/aufklaerung/zeitschriften.htm.

empire, along the well-established cultural axis linking Bohemia with Saxony. Its themes will include the management of the troupe, its annual schedule of productions, the recruitment networks it relied upon for its singers, its choice of repertoire, and the public response to its programme of opera. No study of the Bohemian reception history of Mozart's operas can avoid an overriding question: the extent to which the narrative of the composer's professional dealings with Prague, promulgated by Niemetschek and others, represents history or myth-making. It has been suggested that Mozart's links with the city, while certainly very cordial and undeniably productive, do not quite add up to the 'special relationship' claimed by Bohemian writers.¹¹ While there may be an element of truth in this, the present study will suggest that Prague and Leipzig played a seminal role in the years immediately after the composer's death, when Guardasoni, ignoring commentators who saw Mozart's Italian operas in their original guise under threat from the universal popularity of the *Singspiel*, continued to promote them as core repertoire works. Nowhere else, as the eighteenth-century drew to a close, could an opera-goer have attended productions in Italian of five of Mozart's mature operas in a single month, as was possible in Prague in December 1794.

In the new millennium, source studies of Mozart's operas are flourishing, and two doctoral dissertations on *Don Giovanni* have provided insights of particular value. Hans Ernst Weidinger's 'Il dissoluto punito. Untersuchungen zur äußeren und inneren Entstehungsgeschichte von Lorenzo da Pontes & Wolfgang Amadeus Mozarts Don Giovanni' reconstructs the personnel and repertoire of the Bondini troupe in the early 1780s and proposes a new interpretation of the events surrounding the genesis of *Don Giovanni*.¹² Magnus Tessing Schneider's 'The Charmer and the Monument: Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in the Light of its Original Production' develops a performance history of the opera, as seen through the prism of the life of Luigi Bassi, the first interpreter of the title role.¹³ The present study was written in the aftermath of a memorable conference 'Mozart in Prague' (9–13 June 2009) organised by Kathryn Libin on behalf of the Mozart Society of America and the Society for Eighteenth-Century Music. Since then, I have had the opportunity to discuss aspects of this project at the Mozart Society of America meeting at the AMS (Philadelphia, 12–15 November 2009), the Nordic Network for Early Opera (Stockholm, 7–8 August 2010) and the Don Juan Archiv (Vienna, 5–6 November 2010). Colleagues have been most generous

¹¹ Stafford, *The Mozart Myths*, 250. ¹² Ph.D., University of Vienna, 2002.

¹³ Ph.D., University of Aarhus, 2009.

in taking the time to read and comment upon drafts, offering numerous creative and pertinent suggestions and other practical assistance. I should like to thank in particular Paul Corneilson, Pierluigi Petrobelli, John Rice, Magnus Tessing Schneider, Johannes Schweitzer, Hans Ernst Weidinger and Neal Zaslaw. Kerstin Sieblist has been most helpful during my numerous visits to the Leipzig Stadtgeschichtliches Museum. The book is dedicated to Dr Hans Ernst Weidinger and friends at the Don Juan Archiv. Regarding the hospitality I have received there, Da Ponte's words (with Mozart's emphasis) cannot be bettered: 'Ah! che piatto saporito, saporito, saporito!'

1 | Pasquale Bondini

An informative summary of the rather complicated history of opera and theatre in Dresden during the second half of the eighteenth century appeared in an article in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*AmZ*) entitled ‘Von dem italienischen Singspiel in Dresden’.¹ It provides abundant evidence of the continuing strength of the operatic connection between Saxony and Bohemia.² The author reports that Giuseppe Bustelli, who formed an opera company in Prague in 1764, was appointed as manager in Dresden in 1765, retaining control of both troupes. In the field of German theatre, the Electoral privilege went to Abel Seyler, and then in 1777 Bondini took over. For the rest of the century, the Churfürstlich Sächsische privilegirte deutsche Schauspieler enjoyed a very high profile in the theatrical firmament, and its productions were reviewed extensively in German periodicals.³

Like many an eighteenth-century impresario, Pasquale Bondini’s early experience was as a performer. The first part of his career in Italy can be followed in Sartori’s bibliography, in which his name appears regularly in librettos for performances from the 1750s: Parma and Bologna (1757), Faenza and Forlì (1758) and Bologna (1759).⁴ From 1760 onwards, he is to be found in Prague librettos, and from 1765 in both Prague and Dresden wordbooks. He was thus a singer with a significant Italian career behind him when he joined Bustelli’s troupe. In 1764, the first year in which the *ITS* was published, he was listed as one of the ‘parti buffe’ in the Prague company.⁵ When he transferred to Dresden, he featured as one of the ‘buffi’, or more specifically ‘buffi caricati’.⁶ Some time after 1771, he married Caterina

¹ *AmZ*, vol.1 (February 1799), cols.329–30.

² An international symposium on this subject was held at the Technische Universität Dresden, 7–8 November 2008: ‘Musikkulturelle Beziehungen zwischen Böhmen und Sachsen im 18. Jahrhundert: Musikmigration und Musikalientransfer’.

³ The primary history of Bondini’s various companies is to be found in Teuber, *Geschichte*, vol.II, chapters 3, 4 and 5.

⁴ Sartori, *I libretti italiani*. ⁵ *ITS*, vol.I, 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 88, 104, 123, 151, 207, 256 and 278. The term ‘buffo caricato’ (literally ‘exaggerated comic’) was used in the *ITS* lists to identify and characterise those performers who took on wholly comic roles, featuring caricature and buffoonery. The term ‘di mezzo carattere’ (literally ‘of middle character’) identified performers of roles such as Don Giovanni that blended comic and serious elements.

Saporiti, whose career in Italy left traces from 1768 to 1771. After 1773, both singers appear in the *ITS* lists. Dresden now became the Bondini couple's home, and all four of their children were baptised in the Hofkirche, which was a centre for musicians from the Catholic regions of Italy, Austria and Bohemia.⁷ In the registration document for their first son, Caterina Bondini is described as 'nata Saporiti' and Bondini himself as 'Comoedius Electoralis Cantor'.

The circumstances in which Bondini, who was well regarded as an Italian *opera buffa* singer but who had no managerial experience, came to take over the prestigious Dresden Electoral theatre troupe remain unclear. From isolated references in the correspondence of German actors around this period, it seems that there was a double coup d'état. When Seyler's contract was not renewed, the Italian party was able to gain the ascendancy over Johann Christian Brandes, the leading candidate from the German theatrical world. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, for one, was of the opinion that the 'cabals of the Italian comedians' were crowding him out.⁸ At the same time, Bustelli, who was apparently still in the running, was himself outmanoeuvred by Bondini. On 31 January 1777, Friedrich Ludwig Schröder, enquiring about the situation of Brandes, assumed that Bustelli was still in line for the appointment.⁹ For whatever reason, Bondini was awarded the contract. It is possible that Bustelli's declining reputation in his own company was a factor. Johann Friedrich Reichardt visited the small theatre where *opere buffe* were performed, but reported that the large theatre was not currently in use at all for 'große Opern'.¹⁰ The personnel of the Dresden troupe around this time are recorded in the *Theater-Kalender*, which also suggests that the company was not yet able to perform 'große Opern'.¹¹ Be that as it may, Bondini's appointment as director of the Churfürstlich Sächsische privilegirte deutsche Schauspieler was of considerable significance for the future of German theatre in Dresden. He quickly negotiated a matching contract

⁷ Pilková, 'Prager Mozartsänger', 1095–101. The dates of the baptisms were 1775, 1776, 1779 and 1783.

⁸ Rüppel, *Gustav Friedrich Wilhelm Großmann*, 135: Lessing to Hompesch: 'Seyler ... gegenwärtig durch die Cabale der Italiänischen Komödianten ... in Dresden verdrängt wurde.'

⁹ *Ibid.*, 411: 'Ist's wahr, daß Brandes in Dresden eine Art von Schauspiel errichtet? Hr. Seyler hat mir auf meine Warnung vor Bustelli, der mir vor 4 Monathen das Engagement eintragen ließ, gar nicht antwortet.'

¹⁰ Reichardt, *Briefe eines aufmerksamen Reisenden die Musik betreffend*, 119.

¹¹ *Theater-Kalender auf das Jahr 1777*, 245: 'Italiänisches Singspiel. Unternehmer. H. Bustelli. Sängern. Mesdames Bondini, Falchini, Sedains, Tibaldi. Sänger. H. H. Bondini, Tibaldi, Patrassi, Guglielmini, Mangioli, Guardasoni ... Anmerkung. Das Kurfürstliche Orchester spielt in der Operette. Es werden noch fünf Personen erwartet, und alsdann sollen auch große Opern gegeben werden.'

to perform in Leipzig.¹² The plan was that the Electoral troupe would play in Dresden during winter and early spring and then move to Leipzig for a long summer season lasting six months. For the next few years, this was how the annual calendar was arranged.

Many years later, Brandes claimed in his autobiography that Bondini had been offered the theatrical position in recompense for the closure of the Italian *opera buffa* company, an economy necessitated by the outbreak of the Bavarian War of Succession.¹³ He was aggrieved that his own position had been thereby diminished, as he had to step down from the role of *Direkteur* (which he claims to have occupied very briefly) to that of *Regisseur*.¹⁴ If Bondini had applied to manage the Italian opera company, he lost out to Bertoldi but, while it is entirely possible that he was offered the management of the Electoral troupe in compensation, the war which did indeed cause the temporary closure of the opera cannot have been the reason: it only started in July 1778. The temporary shut-down was reported in the *Deutsches Museum*, which took a degree of comfort from the fact that this 'evil war', though disastrous for the immediate prospects for *opera buffa* in Dresden, had ensured that the leading composers in the city were now at the disposal of the Electoral troupe.¹⁵ The Italian *opera buffa*, however, was soon revived. A contract dated 16 September 1779 described Bertoldi as 'Impresario delle Opere'.¹⁶ In 1780 it was confirmed that he was director of the Court Opera and not merely a private stop-gap impresario: 'during this contract, the impresario and his company remain fully at the disposal of the Court.'¹⁷

¹² Grenser, *Geschichte der Musik*, 31: [1777] 'd.11 Juli erhält Bondini das Privilegium für Leipzig auf 5 Jahre.' The full contract is given in Blümner, *Geschichte des Theaters*, 197. It was intended that it should run in parallel to the six-year agreement in Dresden. The Leipzig contract would be up for renewal after the autumn 1782 season and would effectively come into force in the spring of 1783, after the commencement of any Dresden renewal.

¹³ Brandes, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol.II, 221: 'Die Summe, welche zur Unterhaltung des deutschen Theaters ausgesetzt worden war, wurde eingezogen, die italienische Opera-*Buffa* gänzlich verabschiedet, und dem gewesenen *Direkteur* derselben, Bondini, auf des Grafen von Markolini Verwendung, zur Entschädigung, ein Privilegium über jenes ertheilt.' This explanation was widely accepted. Blümner, *Geschichte des Theaters*, 196–7, reports it without question. See also Landmann, *Über das Musikerbe der Sächsischen Staats Kapelle*, 91.

¹⁴ The implication that Brandes was at one time the theatrical candidate in line to succeed Seyler is borne out by the aforementioned letter from Schröder on 31 January 1777.

¹⁵ *Deutsches Museum*, vol.3 (1778), 382: 'so hat eben dieser böse Krieg vielleicht für Deutschlands Singspiel etwas Gutes. Da die welsche Oper ganz verabschiedet ist, so arbeiten jezt die hiesigen Tonkünstler für unser Theater allein.' Cited in Bauman, *North German Opera*, 211–12.

¹⁶ Pilková, 'Prager Mozartsänger', 1097, points out that this document, which relates to Caterini Bondini, was dated only a few weeks before the birth of her third child.

¹⁷ Engländer, 'Zur Musikgeschichte Dresdens', *ZfM*, 227: 'durante questo Contratto l'impresario e la Sua Compagnia restano alla piena disposizione della Corte.'

The crisis Bondini faced in the summer of 1778, only a year after he had taken over the Electoral troupe, had little to do with the Bavarian War, which proved to be something of a ‘phoney’ conflict, but everything to do with a feud between two of the company’s leading personalities. Commenting indirectly on this, the *Deutsches Museum* regretted the unlucky fate of the German stage. Once again, the rising hopes invested in Dresden were being wrecked by internal discord amongst the actors, poor choices of piece, and unfortunate role allocations.¹⁸ An extraordinarily partisan account of this febrile period was published many years later by Brandes. Gossipy in tone, his autobiography recalls the struggle for supremacy between Reinecke and himself. His rival quickly established a position as the undisputed darling of the Dresden public. Brandes wisely makes no such claim for himself but instead focuses on the growing reputation of his daughter Charlotte (Minna).¹⁹ Bondini, whom Brandes did not appear to dislike personally, allowed her into the company, but the result was dissension over the casting of the women’s roles, Reinecke supporting his wife and Brandes his daughter. A long passage in the autobiography is devoted to the ensuing struggle.²⁰ As Brandes would have it, Bondini eventually decided to split the company, simply in order to keep the peace: for the winter season in 1779–80 he asked Reinecke to remain in Dresden with the main theatrical troupe, but gave Brandes the task of forming a subsidiary *Singspiel* company to perform in Leipzig.²¹ At this point, his account becomes paranoid in tone, as he detects a conspiracy on the part of Reinecke. Having come to the view that a whole winter season in Leipzig consisting only of musical works would fail, he set about forming the nucleus of a new theatrical group featuring his wife and daughter, for which he recruited two promising beginners and some singers who were willing to try acting roles. By selecting plays that were not too demanding and which had not been given recently, he made, by his own account, quite a success, to the extent that after nine weeks he was able to send Bondini a large sum of money. It is interesting that Brandes had felt able to take such a radical initiative, though Bondini, legally the recipient of the box office, was hardly likely to complain. However, a letter arrived unexpectedly from

¹⁸ *Deutsches Museum*, vol.2 (1778), 382.

¹⁹ Head, ‘Cultural Meaning for Women Composers’, 231–84.

²⁰ Brandes, *Meine Lebensgeschichte*, vol.II, 241–5.

²¹ In his calendar of events, Blümner, *Geschichte des Theaters*, 313–36, describes this offshoot as the ‘zweite Bondin’sche Gesellschaft’, but this term is more usually reserved for the failed Prague venture of 1784. However, the experiment with Brandes was clearly a forerunner of this larger debacle.