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978-0-521-12109-5 - The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930
Susan Rutherford
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| THE PRIMA DONNA AND OPERA, 1815-1930

This book is concerned not so much with the ‘prima donna’ as with *prime donne*: a group of working artists (sometimes famous but more often relatively unknown and now long forgotten) and the circumstances of their professional lives. It attempts to locate these singers within a broader history, including not only the specificities of operatic stage practice but the life beyond the opera house – the social, cultural and political framing that shaped individual experience, artistic endeavour and audience reception. Rutherford addresses questions such as the multiple discourses on the image of the singer and their impact on the changing profile of the professional artist from *figlia dell’arte* at the beginning of the era to middle-class woman at the end; the aspect of the ‘stage mother’ and patronage; issues of vocal training and tuition; professional life in the operatic market-place; and performance (both vocal and dramatic) conventions and practices.

SUSAN RUTHERFORD is Lecturer in Performance Studies in Drama, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures at the University of Manchester. She is co-editor of *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914* and the author of several essays on opera and singers. In 2003, she was the recipient of the biennial *Premio Internazionale: ‘Giuseppe Verdi’*, awarded by the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, for her forthcoming monograph on Verdi’s heroines.

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PREFACE

The support of many people contributed to the development of this book. My colleagues at the University of Manchester, led by Professor Viv Gardner, generously agreed to my absence on various trips: funding was made available to me from the Department of Drama's research allocation and the Prudhoe Fund for a number of smaller visits; the University's Research Support Fund awarded me a larger grant to sustain several valuable months in Italy.

Permissions to publish documents, illustrations and material from other sources have been granted by various bodies. I am pleased to acknowledge David Mayer and the Chicago Historical Society for the inclusion of extracts from the letters of Mary Garden; the Istituzione Casa della Musica, Parma, for illustrations and letters from the Archivio Storico del Teatro Regio; the Museo del Teatro alla Scala, the Metropolitan Opera House archive, the National Portrait Gallery and the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek for the illustrations of various singers. Paul Frecker generously supplied the photograph of Pauline Viardot; Dirk Körschenhausen and Marcelo T. Galvao de Castro did likewise for the photographs of Katharina Klafsky. Michael Turnbull shared his findings on Mary Garden with me. Myles Gleeson-White gave me access to documents pertaining to the career of Cicely Gleeson-White. The book includes extracts from three of my earlier essays published elsewhere: I am grateful for the permission to reprint them here.

The staff of a number of important institutions and libraries aided my research. Cristina Trombella, the director of the Casa della Musica, Parma, has been kindness itself and made me welcome in myriad ways (even finding a home for my beloved *bicicletta*); I am grateful also to Francesca Montresor and Olivia Cantarelli, librarians Tommaso Granelli and Federica Bianchieri, and especially to Rosaria

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Ferrari, who aided my investigations into the rich archives of the Teatro Regio and provided much support and friendship. During my many visits to the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani (with its peerless library of books and other material on the history of opera), its renowned director Pierluigi Petrobelli has been an invaluable mentor; Marisa Di Gregorio Casati and Anna Zuccoli have courteously dealt with my endless requests. Staff at the Biblioteca Archiginnasio, the Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the British Library, the Henry Watson Library and the John Rylands University Library have all been instrumental in assisting me.

Writing this book has often brought to mind voices from the past: I recall particularly those of Frederic Cox, Sheila Barlow, Horst Günter and Rosemary Walton, all of whom played a vital role in developing my understanding of singing and music. I hope at least some of what is written here reflects their teaching.

Conversations (some lengthy and ruminative, others brief and perfunctory) with a number of scholars were helpful in clarifying my mind and suggesting new directions. David Mayer sparked my interest in Mary Garden by generously handing me a box of her letters to his grandmother, and supervised the development of a portion of the following material in its original form as my Ph.D. thesis; George Taylor elucidated aspects of performance and nineteenth-century theatre; the ever-supportive Viv Gardner was always ready to discuss gender issues and theatre, and provided warm sisterhood throughout the period of writing. Michael Holt's unique perspective on art and culture illuminated my knowledge of the processes of creativity and the realities of theatre-making; I miss greatly his presence at the university since his retirement. Both David Fallows and Pierluigi Petrobelli possess a similar knack of being able to enlighten my grasp of a particular topic in a few short words, and make me think again. Stephen Banfield kindly commented on early drafts of two chapters. Fabrizio Della Seta made available to me useful material on Marietta Piccolomini. Linda Hutcheon's appreciation of some of this research in its earlier forms as conference

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paper and essay was of inestimable kindness, and gave me much encouragement. Visits to various seminars in Cambridge introduced me to the work of Karen Henson; Paolo Russo eased my first visits to Bologna, taking me to the library of the Università di Bologna. Mary Ann Smart's keen eye and compassionate ear provided valuable advice when it was most needed.

Throughout the long years of writing, I have been fortunate to have the wise, stimulating and often witty advice of a special group of people. The sage comments of the late John Rosselli guided earlier drafts of this book. Marco Capra opened the door not only to the Centro Internazionale di Ricerca sui Periodici Musicali (CIRPeM) with its fascinating microfilm resources of the nineteenth-century musical press, but also to his own reserves of knowledge, patience and encouragement: what I comprehend now of Italy and her history, I owe in many ways to him. My debt to Roger Parker, who has read every word of the following pages and taught me much, is incalculable. I have benefited immeasurably from his scholarship on operatic history and his fineness of intellectual judgement; on a personal level, his generosity of spirit is quite simply extraordinary. If at times I have wilfully chosen to ignore the advice of these good friends and pursued my own path, I hope they will forgive me; all errors in this book are, of course, entirely of my own making.

My editor, Victoria Cooper, has shown exceptional patience in the development of this book; I cannot thank her enough for her counsel and support over the years. During the preparations for publication, I have had the additional guidance of her assistant, Rebecca Jones, the production editor Jackie Warren and the copy-editor Lucy Carolan, who have magically resolved so many practical difficulties. I am grateful too for the care and interest of the Cambridge University Press series editor, Art Groos.

My family, as families always do, has borne the brunt of the work of the past years. The presence of Ruth in our household during perhaps the lowest point of all, when my husband and I were beset by illness and operations, was a precious gift; unflinching support was provided by my dear parents, my sister Anne, my niece Helen, and

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my brothers Nigel and Ian. My husband James has been the incarnation of his other name, Peter: enduringly steadfast and resolute in even the most difficult hours; the one, true, good companion. This book is for him.