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978-0-521-42697-8 - Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession

John Rosselli

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John Rosselli's wide-ranging study introduces all those singers, members of the chorus as well as stars, who have sung Italian opera from 1600 to the present. Where did they come from? How were they trained? What did they earn, and what pressures shaped their careers?

Singers are shown slowly emancipating themselves from dependence on great patrons and entering the dangerous freedom of the market. The castrati who dominated eighteenth-century opera turn out to be more conscientious and professional than their previous reputation as extravagant, vain creatures has suggested. The book examines the sexist prejudices against them and against women singers – who in the early days of opera were presumed to be courtesans and sometimes were. But for women, opera provided one of the very few professional and economic opportunities.

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# SINGERS OF ITALIAN OPERA

THE HISTORY OF A PROFESSION

JOHN ROSSELLI

*Reader Emeritus in History, University of Sussex*



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*To Anne and François Duchêne*

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## PREFACE

*Singers of Italian Opera* follows on from my *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge University Press, 1984). Because I was then moving into virtually uncharted territory, I limited myself in that book to the period 1780–1880 and to a fairly well-defined group of people. With more experience, and the benefit of others' work on an area that has drawn increasing interest in recent years, I have now ventured to study a much larger, more amorphous group over nearly four centuries. The Introduction explains the scope and method of the book.

Two technical points. First, I have stated in French francs sums paid in Italy between 1800 and 1914. The lira of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, that of Piedmont from 1814, and that of the united Kingdom of Italy from 1860 were all officially at par with the franc, a currency familiar in much of the world; minor fluctuations can be ignored. After 1914, when inflation played havoc with earlier parities, sums paid in Italy are given in lire. To ensure comparability, I have also rendered in francs some amounts paid in eighteenth-century Italy; this entails reading back from exchange rates of about 1800, a procedure justified in chapter 6.

Secondly, the subject throws up in acute form the problem that discussion of groups of mixed gender always raises in English. From the start, singing has been an unusual profession in being made up of roughly equal numbers of women and men. Is one always to be saying 'his or her'? I have cut the knot by using either 'he' and 'his' or 'she' and 'her'; unless the context makes it clear that only one gender is meant, these words should be taken to include both.

A book of this kind leaves one with a large debt to many people, above all to archivists and librarians, too many to name; I am grateful to them all. Lorenzo Bianconi has all along helped me, in spite of his own busy schedule, with valuable information and advice; so have Julian Budden, Sergio Durante, Michael Henstock, Malena Kuss, Nicola Mangini, Mary Jane Phillips Matz, Giovanni Morelli, Fiamma Nicolodi, Pierluigi Petrobelli, Juan Andrés Sala, Morris Vitalis, and Thomas Walker. Kenneth A. Stern let me use

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his Ph.D. thesis on Giuditta Pasta; I have had help with documentation from Paolo Da Col, Juan Pedro Franze, Nicola Lucarelli, Sylvie Mamy, Alessandro Roccatagliati, Guido A. Tedeschi, Colin Timms, and Roberto Verti, and informative interviews with Carlo Maria Badini, then superintendent of La Scala, the singers Elena Arizmendi, Nino Meneghetti, and Luigi Vellucci, the teachers Paolo Mirko Bonomi and Luciana Piovesan-Bernardi, the conductor-manager Tony Amato, the retired trade union official Professor Umberto Bruno, and (on his recent concern with video opera rather than his earlier management of Covent Garden) Sir John Tooley. I thank them all warmly, while taking sole responsibility for what follows.

The research on which the book is based was carried out with the help of a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council, and of leave from the University of Sussex. What I owe my late wife Eleanor Timbres Rosselli cannot be stated, though it might be sung.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AcMu</i>	<i>Acta Musicologica</i>
ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome
AMZ	<i>Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung</i>
<i>AnMu</i>	<i>Analecta Musicologica</i>
AR MI	Archivio Ricordi, Milan
ASBO	Archivio di Stato, Bologna
ASCR	Archivio Storico Capitolino, Rome
ASCR FC	Archivio Storico Capitolino, Rome, Fondo Capranica
ASMO Mus	Archivio di Stato, Modena, Archivio per Materie, Musicisti
ASN	Archivio di Stato, Naples
ASR	Archivio di Stato, Rome
ASV	Archivio di Stato, Venice
ATLaF	Archivio del Teatro La Fenice, Venice
ATRP	Archivio del Teatro Regio, Parma
BARCH BO	Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna
BASCR	Biblioteca dell'Accademia di S. Cecilia, Rome
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
BCI SI	Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, Siena
BE MO	Biblioteca Estense, Modena
BLP NA	Biblioteca Lucchesi-Palli, Naples (in BN NA)
BNF CV	Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Carteggi Vari
BN NA	Biblioteca Nazionale, Naples
BTBR DC	Biblioteca Teatrale del Burcardo, Rome, Donazione Capranica
BTBR	Biblioteca Teatrale del Burcardo, Rome
BU BO	Biblioteca Universitaria, Bologna
CMBM BO	Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, Bologna
DBI	<i>Dizionario biografico degli Italiani</i>
DNB	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EaMu</i>	<i>Early Music</i>

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<b>ES</b>	<i>Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo</i>
<b>ISVP</b>	Istituto di Studi Verdiani, Parma
<b>JAMS</b>	<i>Journal of the American Musicological Society</i>
<b>LPA NY</b>	Library of Performing Arts, Lincoln Center, New York
<b>M&amp;L</b>	<i>Music and Letters</i>
<b>MCCV</b>	Museo Civico Correr, Venice
<b>MOA NY</b>	Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York
<b>MTS</b>	Museo Teatrale alla Scala/Biblioteca Livia Simoni, Milan
<b>NRMI</b>	<i>Nuova Rivista Musicale Italiana</i>
<b>Piancastelli</b>	Collezione Piancastelli, Carte Romagna, Biblioteca Comunale, Forlì
<b>Piancastelli Autog.</b>	Collezione Piancastelli, Autografi, Biblioteca Comunale, Forlì
<b>RIDM</b>	<i>Rivista Italiana di Musicologia</i>
<b>RMI</b>	<i>Rivista Musicale Italiana</i>
<b>TNG</b>	<i>The New Grove</i> , ed. S. Sadie, London, 1980