



music' (156), a view that is contradicted by the several musical compositions that have been attributed to her – there is no doubt that music was an integral part of her conception of comic opera. The examples of Catherine's writings, as well as the running historical context the author provides, usefully illustrate the empress's contributions to the development of Russian opera. Although there needs to be a further study that integrates both text and music of these works, O'Malley at least provides a stepping-stone towards the placement and contextualization of Catherine the Great's contributions to eighteenth-century theatre and music.

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ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD

A NEW CHRONOLOGY OF VENETIAN OPERA AND RELATED GENRES, 1660–1760

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The scholar of Venetian opera of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries faces three major obstacles to research: the dearth of musical sources, the fragmented and scattered state of archival documentation pertaining to theatres that no longer exist, and the lack of secure dates on which to build a reliable chronology of performed operas. Eleanor Selfridge-Field's most welcome *New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres* addresses the last of these three problems, providing secure ordering for about 800 operas and 650 related works performed in what was arguably the most important European operatic centre between 1660 and 1760.

Ambiguities of year are caused by the coexistence of two timekeeping systems throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (until the collapse of the Republic in 1797): government documents usually conformed to the Venetian year, which started on 1 March, while church documents conformed to the papal year, which began on 1 January. Theatrical documents relied on either one of these systems indiscriminately. Selfridge-Field resolves these ambiguities not by drawing on printed librettos, which relied on fluid notions of theatrical seasons, but rather on thousands of unpublished weekly news-sheets and other manuscript material from Venetian and other European archives that provide exact opening dates for most operas performed in Venice. On the way, she digs out a wealth of exciting additional information concerning singers, patrons, opera management and related events.

The main chronology, consisting of about 800 entries, provides factual information about the operas, including titles, names of composers, librettists and theatres, genre and the presence of incidental items, such as *balli* or *intermezzi*, and, of course, date of first performance (or 'sorting date'). It also provides background information and documentation, comments on the subject, cast and sources for dating, first-hand reports of the performances (when they exist), not to mention bibliographic citations for surviving music and catalogues. A variety of icons is used to convey further information and cross-references. The primary objective of providing more accurate dating for most operas performed in Venice between 1660 and 1760 is achieved successfully. Selfridge-Field's identification of 'theatrical periods' brings a new perspective to opera productions and finally dispels confusion about operas performed during winter (after Christmas, or the St Stephen's period) and during Carnival. Her numerous figures and tables present data in different formats and allow the reader to form new perspectives on theatres, repertory and genre distribution.

Scholars of Venetian opera will be grateful to Selfridge-Field for finally resolving centuries-old ambiguities, and most should find the chronology easy to navigate. However, one needs to be aware of the almost inevitable errors that such a monumental enterprise can carry. Secondary and corollary information is not



always correct. For example, there is lack of clarity about authorship for a good number of Pietro Pariati's and Apostolo Zeno's librettos. As Giovanna Gronda, for instance, has convincingly demonstrated (in *La carriera di un librettista: Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 113–281), several librettos traditionally attributed to the collaboration of Zeno and Pariati are actually the work of Pariati alone (*Artaserse, Ciro, Costantino, Sesostris re d'Egitto*). Others are written in collaboration between the two; they are never texts 'adapted from Apostolo Zeno by Pietro Pariati'. References to existing librettos are unclear, and information about their reissue during one run of performances is lacking. Although librettos are not the basis on which this chronology is built – and therefore one does not expect to find information already available in Sartori's printed catalogue – reissues provide more definitive information about text, cast and staging. In the case of *Armida abbandonata* (1707), for example, reference to the second issue of the libretto would have avoided misleading information about the cast (Senesino did not perform in the double role of Rinaldo/Tancredi, as Selfridge-Field indicates, but Rinaldo alone). Information on adaptations and reuse of older librettos is another slippery topic. Apart from information provided by contemporary catalogues, which the author considers with great attention, one would need to compare texts side by side in order to ascertain filiations and elaborations – a complex study that would go beyond the scope of this project. Errors, therefore, are inevitable. For example, we read that the libretto for Vivaldi's *Armida al campo d'Egitto* (1718) 'had been set twice previously' (341). In fact, not only was Palazzi's first libretto for Vivaldi entirely new, but this was the first time that the episode of Armida's visit to the Egyptian camp from *Gerusalemme liberata* had been used for an operatic adaptation.

The chronology is preceded by an introductory section divided into three chapters: 'Interpreting the Calendar of Venetian Opera', 'Perspectives on the Repertory' and 'User Guide'. Selfridge-Field explains the impact that ambiguities of seasonal nomenclature have had on our understanding of opera and spectacle in Venice and describes the intricacies of the way time was reckoned in La Serenissima. She also shows how the liturgical, civic, accounting and governmental years unfolded, how they intertwined with theatrical time and how they affected legislation and theatre attendance. This fascinating aspect of theatrical life is explored at length in her related book *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), which serves as the basis for the present chronology. By the author's own admission, 'the over-arching question of what an opera really was became increasingly dominant' (14) as her research into the 'when' of opera progressed, encouraging her to widen the scope of her already ambitious plan and to include lists of theatrical works belonging to the numerous genres related to opera in nine supplements at the end of the volume. There is no doubt that these lists of comedies, tragedies and musical satires, tracts on music drama, *intermezzi*, serenatas, operas performed with puppets, works for private entertainments and sacred dramas invite a new perspective on opera in Venice; but literary traditions too played an important role in defining the genre of opera, as did *commedia dell'arte*. Both, however, defy ordering in this chronology: the first category because it did not translate into (datable) theatrical performances, and the latter (one of the most ephemeral theatrical traditions) because it left few tangible and datable traces in its wake. Scenarios such as those gathered in the Correr collection go a long way towards illuminating for us the repertory and dramaturgical structures that characterized the activity of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *comici* (comic actors) in Venice, but they never point to specific and datable performances. Indeed, as the author makes clear, while weekly news-sheets abound in precise references to operas, they hardly go beyond mentioning the granting of licences to *comici* to stage their plays and the opening of their theatres in the autumn, proffering little information about what was performed on the stage. Despite these limitations, Selfridge-Field's effort remains important, as the information presented here asks new questions and reinforces the need for a more holistic approach to the study of opera in Venice than has so far been the case.

Another circumstance that is illuminated through her exploration of Venetian operatic performances is patronage. Newly discovered information about the dedicatees of opera librettos allows Selfridge-Field to uncover new relations between patronage and the choice of opera subjects, the selection of singers and other personnel, and the development of operatic trends, and suggests that tracing dedicatees of opera librettos can



also be used as a reliable source for reconstructing the composition of opera audiences in Venice, in addition to box-holder accounts. Prominent personages were often present in Venice to attend performances of operas dedicated to them (she assures us that they were there ninety per cent of the time), but although she rightly points to the fact that these personalities ‘traveled in the company of large entourages who could fill significant numbers of available seats’ (51), we are still left with a certain amount of guesswork (especially in the case of Venetian dedicatees). Studying dedicatees and their entourages – together with information on important visitors to Venice provided in the same news-sheets that form the foundation for the chronology and also the abundant references to the ‘guerra dei palchi’ in the vast legal documentation examined by Selfridge-Field – should allow a more complete picture of box-holders and their guests than just a survey of dedicatees alone. True, box-holders often owned boxes in more than one theatre, and they lent, sublet and exchanged boxes with each other; but singers, who often received the use of a box in part-exchange for their fees, could obviously not use it during their own performances. Still, all these data provide us with information on the identities of the day-by-day patrons of opera in Venice.

The complexity of reconstructing the fluid composition of Venetian audiences highlights some underlying problems when engaging in a comparative study of theatres, patrons, repertory and cast. Selfridge-Field’s attention to single theatres in the attempt to find characterizing trends through comparative study of the repertory, personnel and patronage is a legitimate tool to use in order to present a vast amount of data in workable categories (and tables, figures and appendices organized by theatre are helpful and revealing); disappointingly, however, she underplays the complexity and variety of the impresario system in Venice. I say ‘disappointingly’ because the wealth of legal documentation to which she refers in this volume has clearly brought to light new evidence about the identity of these impresarios, their intents and alliances; and in my opinion this evidence should be taken into consideration in our quest to identify trends in repertory, cast and personnel, among others. While it is perhaps unfair to charge the author with not having incorporated systematically into this chronology new information on impresarios (this is not the scope of her study), one wonders why such a determining aspect of opera in Venice receives relatively little attention here.

Besides the main contents of the book, a wealth of additional information is offered in the series of supplements (‘Opera’s Margins’), including thirty-two figures, twelve appendices that give the figureheads of Venetian life (lists of doges, patriarchs, popes), movable feasts and dates of civic rituals that influenced theatrical life, and values for Venetian currency. These supplements are followed by sequential listings that allow a bird’s-eye view of operatic productions for each theatre and theatrical period, a table of ‘Concordances and Reference Statistics’, a list of ‘Cited Sources’ and three indices. All in all, Selfridge-Field’s monumental chronology is an essential reference tool for specialists and non-specialists alike who wish to engage with the history of opera, drama and spectacle in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Venice.

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ELEANOR SELFRIDGE-FIELD

SONG AND SEASON: SCIENCE, CULTURE, AND THEATRICAL TIME IN EARLY MODERN VENICE

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Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time in Early Modern Venice is one of a recent duo of publications by Eleanor Selfridge-Field, but it is possible to engage with it as a single volume in its own right. Its sister compendium, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), can likewise be used independently of its twin, since a summary of *Song and*