



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*

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007

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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*



*Season*, 'Interpreting the Calendar of Venetian Opera', is included as part of its Introduction. These two volumes aim to identify, explain and rectify the many mistakes and inconsistencies that have arisen, accumulated and been perpetuated during the compilation of Venetian opera catalogues over the years.

In the Preface to *Song and Season*, Selfridge-Field describes the difficulties she has experienced first-hand in her attempts to establish accurate dates for Venetian operas and to create a chronology of works for the period 1660–1760. She first defines the concept of 'cultural time' as lying 'somewhere between the absolutes of astronomers and the abstract constructs of philosophers' (15). Proposing to offer an account of how cultural time developed in the Republic of Venice as a product of the peculiarities of state and society, she then describes the various temporal modes in operation and details the factors that make the dating of operas such a complex task.

The first factor concerns the problems posed by the coexistence of two main calendar systems: the papal year (January–December) and the *more veneto* (March–February). The conflict between these two systems is usually the principal source of the dating confusion, but the existence of other 'virtual years' at this time, such as the liturgical (which began on 30 November) and the accounting years (which began at the start of Lent), adds a further layer of complication. In Part One ('Marking Time'), Selfridge-Field follows ancient time-keeping systems through to calendar reform and its impact, also describing cultural traditions in order to explain how this situation of parallel calendars arose. The second factor relates to the various theatrical seasons, which tended to differ in number, length and time of year during the centuries in question; these are discussed in Part Two, 'Using Time'. The third factor is the inconsistent use of 'temporal vocabulary' by those who documented theatrical activity, thereby creating confusion for modern scholars who attempt to date theatrical works on the basis of information in these sources, as the author shows in Part Three, 'Telling Time'. In her mission to explain these complexities, Selfridge-Field draws on a wide range of material collected over a long period from Venetian and other Italian archives.

In the latter stages of the book, Selfridge-Field examines the human impulse to collect, categorize and organize data, and the consequences of this activity. The 'tellers' of time she describes here include Venetian opera cataloguers such as Ivanovich (seventeenth century), Bonlini and Groppo (eighteenth), and Rossi, Galvani and Wiel (nineteenth). Their main sources of information were the librettos (published for the audience to browse) rather than the musical scores, as the survival rate of scores has been extremely poor. But in their quest to collate comprehensive lists, these cataloguers were less concerned with the dating of works than with 'core' details such as title, librettist, performance location and so on. Despite the evidence of 'arbitrary and inconsistent' dating systems, such unreliable secondary sources have often been used as the basis for opera catalogues in the past and the present, or for the dating of a particular work. Selfridge-Field draws attention to the 'vaguely defined seasonal language' in the librettos, where, in some cases, as many as three conflicting years may be given, these denoting performance, publication of libretto and dedication. In order to establish more accurate entries for the *Chronology*, Selfridge-Field has therefore ventured beyond existing work in the field by using additional sources such as news and diplomatic reports, government records and even information gathered by spies. In each instance she describes the purpose and cultural context of the source and assesses the accuracy of the timekeeping system employed.

A network of circumstances contributed to the fluctuations in theatrical seasons over the years. The constraints imposed on Venetian theatres through a variety of temporal and financial regulations and through censorship of texts present a striking example of the republic's overriding desire to control all aspects of the life of its populace. Large public gatherings, for example, were considered a threat to 'standards of sanitation'; and since the tradition of masquerading 'facilitated street crime and other clandestine activities', or so it was believed, this act became subject to rigorous temporal governance. Theatres operated as rival institutions, even though each one was individual in terms of its theatrical life; they would sometimes seize the opportunity of 'colonizing a new time slot' or adopting a new theatrical genre, which enabled them to compete for audiences. In this way the pattern of theatrical seasons evolved. Changes in society led to corresponding changes in taste, and theatres were obliged to acknowledge these in their choice of repertory. The demise of the *dramma per musica* was a probable consequence of lack of public interest in the genre. A



further important dimension was the existence of various deep-seated traditions permeating Venetian life. A full calendar of feast days, many dating back to medieval times, was handed down through the generations, and the traditions associated with these special days could influence the choice of seasonal subject matter, resulting in productions containing references to Venetian history and customs.

The descriptions of cataloguing Venetian opera over the centuries highlight a number of more general issues typically encountered in other branches of musicology. These include, for instance, acknowledgment of the danger of accepting all information as accurate, of taking it at face value. However, even information that is incorrect, once established as such, can prompt us to question the systems or thought processes operating at the time. After all, what might be regarded as a vital piece of information by a modern researcher may have been of lesser importance to a writer of earlier times, and this original dismissal of its value would account for the lack of interest in its documentation. It is also evident from this study that when we attempt to pigeonhole information neatly, miscellaneous or 'troublesome' material has a tendency to be sidelined or erroneously classified. Yet such material could still offer a vital clue or link that might broaden our knowledge and understanding of the subject. Thus classification, while it has its merits, has the potential to prevent us from seeing the 'bigger picture'.

In the case of *Song and Season*, the changes in society over a period of time that affected theatrical life were an important key to establishing a greater understanding. We should bear in mind, however, the underlying danger inherent in any classification process, that of creating artificial systems: for instance, the Doctrine of Affections, which was declared to have been codified in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was in reality largely formulated and contrived during the early twentieth as a supposedly universal characteristic of all baroque music. Similarly, the modern, commonly accepted method of dating Venetian opera in terms of the 'period' (Autumn–Carnival–Spring) is also open to question: the true picture is far more complex. Selfridge-Field has found it necessary to remould the accepted model of the theatrical year. The template that she has established, while still acknowledged as artificial, has allowed her to accommodate the fluctuations in the number of performances that occurred from season to season and over a long period of time (Autumn–Advent–Winter–Spring, with further subdivisions). This is an example of a modern critical system (describing an environment not recognized by the originator of the object under inspection) that is sympathetic to the empirical material and its idiosyncracies.

This book is a fascinating study of temporal organization, its management and its consequences, with great relevance for our own time-obsessed culture. For any scholar undertaking archival research in Venice it is, of course, an invaluable source of information. The high quality of the publication as a whole is only very slightly marred by the presentation style of some of the illustrative material: the contents of many of the bar charts relating to theatrical season are difficult to distinguish because of the use of varying (and somewhat too subtle) shades of grey. This graphic anomaly proved frustrating for me as a reader, because the information conveyed by these charts was something I was keen to examine in detail. Yet this volume, without doubt, is a major achievement. Together with the *Chronology*, it is a highly significant contribution to the fields of Venetian musicological and historical research.

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