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Opera Pasticcio in Eighteenth-Century Opera: Work Concept, Performance Practice, Digital Humanities

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For a long time, research into the history of opera during the eighteenth century focused mainly on ground-breaking works that were entirely original, as they were assigned the greatest value in narratives of the development of the genre. The reality of opera during the *Settecento*, however, was that the genre was dominated by the practice of pasticcio (from the Italian meaning 'pie' – a dish with many different ingredients), involving a compilation of extracts from various operas by different composers. Medleys of this kind were assembled under a single title by impresarios, singers or composers. This was made possible by the convention of the 'number opera', in which arias articulated standard affects or emotions. Hence numbers could be moved from one opera to another with no detriment to the latter work's dramatic structure, so long as they still reflected the emotions expressed by the original. This convention partly explains the phenomenon of travelling singers taking copies of numerous arias with them in their *baule*, or trunks (hence the name 'aria di baule'), as they journeyed around Europe, treating them as artistic calling cards and incorporating them into the works in which they performed. The mobility of musicians thus meant that the operatic pasticcio became the most popular stage genre in European musical life of the eighteenth century.

It was precisely with the aim of identifying the ways in which pasticcio functioned – analysing the repertory and compositional output linked to it, reconstructing performance practices and understanding the mechanisms behind the presence of this genre in eighteenth-century operatic theatres (court and public) – that in 2018 the Polish-German research project 'Pasticcio: Ways of Arranging Attractive Operas' (www.pasticcio-project.eu) was initiated, led by musicologists from the Uniwersytet Warszawski and the Universität Greifswald, funded by the Narodowe Centrum Nauki (National Science Centre) of Poland and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. It was run by Aneta Markuszewska (Uniwersytet Warszawski) and Gesa zur Nieden (Universität Greifswald). Another aim of the project was to create a digital-source database of works representative of pasticcio and to make selected contemporary editions available online.

The project was summed up by the online conference 'Opera Pasticcio in Eighteenth-Century Opera: Work Concept, Performance Practice, Digital Humanities', hosted on 13 and 14 May 2021 by the Uniwersytet Warszawski. Initially planned as an *in situ* event, the Covid-19 pandemic meant that it took place online, which – despite the lack of human contact – helped boost the number of observers and the reception of the event among opera and theatre scholars. Over those two days, some twenty-two papers and two keynote addresses were presented.

An excellent introduction to both the conference as a whole and the first group of papers (under the common title 'Pasticcio and Work Concept in 18[th-]Century Italian Opera') was the keynote presentation given by Giovanni Polino (Conservatorio Carlo Gesualdo da Venosa, Potenza). Polino stressed the significance of theatrical and musical practice for defining the *dramma per musica* and

pointed to the changing spatial and temporal conditions affecting the preparation of an opera for performance, which gave rise to a 'spectacular text' that was always new. Carlo Lanfossi (Università di Milano) emphasized the particular role of musical memory in the creation of pasticcios. He proposed interpreting the operatic score as a material object recording the musical expectations of the arranger and the audience, and he defined the pasticcio genre as a 'listening inscription'. He based his reflections on three London pasticcios – *Muzio Scevola* (1721–1722), *Rossane* (1743–1748) and *Lucio Vero* (1747–1748) – and called London a 'music memory machine'. Ina Knoth (Universität Hamburg), in her presentation 'Just for the Ladies? Compilation as Knowledge Practice and Pasticcio in England around 1720', pondered – also taking *Muzio Scevola* as her example – the difference between opera and pasticcio during the initial period in the history of the Royal Academy of Music (1720–1728). Among other things, she noted that the principal audience for pasticcios in London consisted of women. Berthold Over (Universität Greifswald), in his paper 'The Art of Cooking a Pasticcio: Musical Recipes and Ingredients for Pasticcio Operas', employed culinary analogies to explain the concept of 'unity in diversity' that was typical of this genre. He also pointed to the idea of the 'noble' pasticcio, drawing on the example of *Arione* (Milan, 1694). Meanwhile, in 'Pasticcio and Pleasure: *Armida abbandonata* (Venice 1729)', Aneta Markuszewska noted that the pleasure of witnessing a pasticcio was a multi-dimensional experience, based on the concept of *varietas*, and that contemporaries especially appreciated the chance to listen again to arias they knew and liked, which made this genre particularly appealing. A paper that was crucial to further illuminating the role of singers in creating a pasticcio proved to be '"Le arie le condurrò meco": Aria Choices and Singers' Agency in Early Eighteenth-Century Italian Pasticcio', by Anne Desler (University of Edinburgh). She gave an insightful description of the practice of 'aria substitution' – concerning both text and music – which was important to the *dramma per musica*, and illustrated her analysis with signature arias from the repertories of Nicolini and Farinelli.

Two sessions entitled 'Pasticcio – *Siroe* and Digital Humanities' were devoted to the projected online edition of selected pasticcios together with the creation of an extensive database. The presentations dealing with this area combined historical, source and editorial problems with digital-humanities methodology. Raffaele Mellace (Università di Genova) showed how Hasse's compositional strategy altered over the period between the Bologna premiere of his *Siroe* (1733) and the performance of a 'self-pasticcio' under the same title in Dresden in 1763. After this, Emilia Pellicia (Universität Wien) and Sonia Rzepka (Uniwersytet Warszawski) discussed the project of an online edition of this work in their joint paper 'From "Insignificant" Bars to Significant Relations: Elisabeth Teyber and Laodice's *Accompagnato* in *Siroe* (1763)'. These two scholars showed the influence exerted by the singer Elisabeth Teyber on the musical shape of Hasse's work in the version from 1763. They also gave a sample of the ways of presenting archive sources linked to this matter in the database being prepared.

In the second of these sessions, Frédéric Döhl (Deutsche Nationalbibliothek) addressed the lack of copyright law during the eighteenth century as one of the factors making it easier to compile pasticcios. He also referred to the current legal situation within the European Union pertaining to digital musicology for online editions. Sonia Wronkowska (Biblioteka Narodowa (National Library of Poland)), in her paper 'Pasticcio Stories as an Approach to Communicate Academic Data', discussed the various types of information resulting from the 'Pasticcio' project that will be of interest to different parties, whether librarians, scholars or music lovers. Barbara Wiermann (Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden), in 'Source Studies – Authority Data – Digital Musicology', highlighted the fluid concept of the work in the pasticcio genre and also the diversity of the relevant sources, which today results in numerous problems with standardizing data. Closing the first day of the conference, Martin Albrecht-Hohmaier (Universität Greifswald), taking as his examples Handel's *Catone* and works performed by Pietro Mingotti's troupe, presented the possibilities afforded to scholars by online

editing, such as the quick comparison of sources, including individual bars, and the ability to trace the compositional process at a single moment in different sources.

The second day of the conference commenced with a keynote address by Michael Burden (University of Oxford), entitled 'A Return to the London Pasticcio: Performing with Mingotti, Failing with J. C. Bach'. His lecture focused on Regina Mingotti, the first woman to run the King's Theatre in London, and her conflict with the impresario Francesco Vanneschi, which raised another fascinating perspective on the process behind the preparation of pasticcios. The next block of papers, under the title 'Pasticcio through Europe', began with Gesa zur Nieden's 'Pasticcio, Arrangement or Adaptation? Georg Philipp Telemann's Pasticcio *Judith* based on Fortunato Chelleri's Dramma per Musica *Innocenza difesa*'. Taking Telemann's pasticcio *Judith* as an example – one of many adaptations of Chelleri's opera – she showed the significance of local traditions for the final form of the works being staged. Anna Ryszka-Komarnicka (Uniwersytet Warszawski) offered a survey of more than forty different productions of Apostolo Zeno's *dramma per musica Venceslao* on European stages during the first half of the eighteenth century. She based her considerations on extant versions of the libretto, treating them as literary pasticcios. Paologiovanni Maione (Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella, Naples; Fondazione Pietà de' Turchini – Centro di Musica Antica di Napoli), in the paper 'Pagine sparse per l'*Issipile* al San Carlo (1763)', discussed the 1763–1764 opera season in Naples, the star of which was Caterina Gabrielli (known as Cochetta). He also showed how her despotic character, capricious personality and musical choices determined the ultimate shape of the works presented, including the pasticcio *Issipile*. Steffen Voss (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) pondered the importance of the collections of arias preserved in German libraries for the process of reconstructing pasticcios, especially in such cities as Hamburg and Brunswick, where between 1730 and 1750 they were arranged with recourse to older Venetian librettos and arias from the Italian repertory. Sometimes the recitatives were performed in Italian, and sometimes in German, depending on the singers' knowledge of the former. Jana Spáčilová (Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci) discussed the phenomenon of the 'pasticcio oratorio', which was particularly popular in Bohemia. This involved the compiling of popular operatic arias that were often completely different in style. Taking the score of Joseph Umstatt's *La vittima d'amore* (Brno, 1741) as her example, she elucidated the strategies behind the construction of pasticcios of this type. In my own paper (Szymon Paczkowski, Uniwersytet Warszawski), 'Opera and Theatre at the Munich Court in the Letters of Joseph Anton Gabaleon Wackerbarth-Salomour to Jacob Heinrich Flemming 1724–27', I went beyond the subject of the pasticcio, presenting hitherto unknown sources for the history of operatic life at the Munich court.

The historical part of the conference was complemented by papers covering contemporary performances of pasticcios. Clemens Birnbaum (Stiftung Händel-Haus; Händel Festspiele Halle), in 'Handel's Pasticci between Music History and Current Music Practice at the Handel Festival in Halle', traced the history of pasticcios presented at the Halle Festival and revealed future plans in that domain. At the same time, he indicated the difficulties entailed in the production of such works, resulting from such factors as audience habits and the lack of editions. In 'The Ghostly Hand of Handel: Handel Pasticcios with Not a Note by Handel' oboist and conductor Leo Duarte (Settecento Opera; Academy of Ancient Music) presented excerpts from productions of Handel pasticcios performed under his direction. He too underlined the difficulties inherent in preparing a score for performance, particularly when we are not familiar with the original of the borrowed material or the score is incomplete (for example, *Elpidia*), and when it is not certain who had arranged a particular pasticcio. Reinhard Strohm (University of Oxford), in his paper 'Scipione impasticciato (1730): Performing and Editing the Cook's Second Thoughts', took Handel's *Scipione* (1730) as the basis for his discussion of problems linked to the contemporary editing of pasticcios, based on what he termed the 'classicist' tradition – according to which the first version of a work is always the best. This does not, however, tally with eighteenth-century practice. Bruno Forment (Orpheus Instituut, Ghent), in the paper 'Pastiching in Brussels, 1727–30 and 2006:

Artistic Agencies, Strategies, and Results', presented excerpts from two one-act pasticcios, *Ifigenia* and *Ipermestra*, in his own original arrangement, performed by students of the Royal Conservatoire of Brussels. As he explained, both 'cut and paste' operas gave him the chance to explore and understand more deeply the dramatic structure of an opera seria, showing just how much those works belong to a network of mutual relations. The session ended with a presentation by Mark Tatlow (Göteborgs Universitet): '*Georgiana*: The Making of a New Eighteenth-Century Opera Pasticcio'. Tatlow explained the process behind the writing and performance of an original pasticcio based on the story of Duchess Georgiana (née Spencer), in which he used music by such composers as Mozart, Storace, Linley, Paisiello and Martín y Soler. The success of *Georigana*, borne out by reviews and comments from the audience, showed that a pasticcio created in our day can also be a source of aesthetic satisfaction for performers and opera audiences.

The artistic conclusion of the conference was a concert featuring arias by Porpora, performed by the countertenor Valer Sabadus. He was accompanied by Capella Cracoviensis, under the baton of Jan Tomasz Adamus. The individual numbers came mostly from pasticcios in which arias by the Neapolitan composer had been used. Two of them, 'Comincio a consolarmi' and 'Quel vapor che in valle impure', were given their modern-day premieres. The concert is available on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=3GXKx4XeHuQ).

The conference itself, and indeed the entire 'Pasticcio' project (which concluded in May 2022), proved most fruitful. It showed not only how widespread and fascinating pasticcio practice was during the eighteenth century, but also how significant its consequences were for the development of opera itself, for musical life, for artists' careers and for consolidating in listeners' memories the canon of works that were most popular in those times. The range of perspectives and the broad contexts in which the pasticcio genre was shown were unprecedented. Let us hope, therefore, that the conference proceedings, currently being prepared, will confirm and reflect all the positive signals observed during the event itself.

Szymon Paczkowski is Professor at the Institute of Musicology at the Uniwersytet Warszawski. His numerous publications include *Polish Style in the Music of Johann Sebastian Bach*, first published in Polish in 2011, then translated into English and published by Rowman & Littlefield in the series *Contextual Bach Studies* in 2017. His research focuses on issues of theory and aesthetics in baroque music and on various aspects of the history of musical culture in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in particular on the musical culture of Poland and Saxony in the time of the so-called Polish–Saxon Union during the reigns of August II and August III. He is a member of the Bach Network Council.