

MASTRER'S DISSERTATION

This essay will consist of two main parts: the first section will investigate the baroque “superstar” castrato Farinelli and analyse a modern-day singers’ ability and limitations to accurately execute the music which was written for the castrato voice phenomenon which no longer exists within our society. This analysis will focus, particularly upon two singers who have released commercial albums under the title name of “Farinelli”, Philippe Jaroussky and Cecilia Bartoli. A thorough assessment/analysis of the singers’ technical execution of melismatic phrases and consistency of tonal and sound production, through the full range of their voices, will be made and compared with treaties on Farinelli’s vocal abilities from expert contemporaries of Farinelli himself. The analysis of the two contemporary opera singers Jaroussky and Bartoli will specifically focus on their execution of live performances of Handel’s aria “Lascia Ch’io Pianga” (Bartoli performs the earlier version titled “Lascia La Spina”) and consider the difficulties faced in attempting to sing music which was written specifically for the Castrati voice. The difficulty of such live performance is highlighted in the production of the 1994 biographical film, also titled “Farinelli”, which this essay will consider. The film, with considerable artistic license, detailed the Castrati’s performance career. The film’s producer went to extraordinary lengths in order to create what was considered to be an accurate and realistic recreation of the sound and voice of Farinelli; the film includes the titular character performing some notable arias including “Lascia la Spina”.

The second half of the essay will take the form of a proposed concert from the music of a chosen artist where musical context, background, composer, text and technical demands of the arias and songs will be taken into consideration.

THE CASTRATO

For millennia, before the birth of Farinelli, the Christian church played a pivotal role in the evolution of European music which was used as an integral part of worship; and although the influence of the Church was diminishing by the period of Farinelli's fame it was still undoubtedly present. The human voice was the dominant 'instrument' of the early Christian church which encountered a problem when early plain song evolved into increasingly elaborate music used for the Latin Mass of the Renaissance period; the need for high male voices. Prepubescent boys whose 'unbroken' voices are used to this day in church choirs have a limited lifespan of ability to sing high notes and the solution to this was to lead to a dark episode in the history of song, the creation of Castrato on an almost industrial scale.¹

Castrato is a term used to describe the male voice-type which occurs when a prepubescent male is castrated; the voice phenomenon of the eighteenth century which now, when used, is widely associated the characteristics of vocal perfection with incredible vocal range, flexibility and power. The practice of castration to preserve a high male voice began in the sixteenth century when women were not allowed to sing within church choirs, as ordained by Paul in Corinthians that women should be silent in church, or on the stage. The use of Castrato voices in opera reached its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The act of castration meant that as the young boys developed into maturity their bodies transformed in a dramatically different fashion to that of un-castrated males growing usually tall for the time with long spindly legs and barrel chests. The lack of testosterone and the resultant adjustment and growth of the larynx, which

¹ <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43208/43208-h/43208-h.htm>

resulted from this inhumane practice, meant the boys were gifted with a unique quality of tone and immense lung capacity; and, when coupled with dedicated training, were able to execute the most difficult melismatic and florid passages in music ever written.²

These ‘unbroken’ castrati voices had the potential to make those in possession of them the “pop stars” of their day. The most famous composers would write music for them earning both performer and composer great wealth and fame. The large families of southern most Italy, who frequently lived in great poverty with eight to ten children, would often sacrifice one of their sons to be castrated in the hope that they would emancipate the family from their situation and bring wealth to the family with their voice. Some three to four thousand boys annually in Italy alone were castrated. However due to their appearance, and inability to reproduce, off the stage the castrato was seen as something of a “freak”. They were forbidden from marriage and rejected from society. This great sacrifice, coupled with the obvious emotional strain of societal rejection, meant many of the castrati were flooded with physical and emotional turmoil, and both emotional and physical scars which most other humans and performers would not have. This in turn gave them, at great cost, extreme emotion which poured through in their portrayal of the most exquisite music which was written for them and would sing the roles of men and women depending on the production that day.³

Carlo Broschi was born on the 24th of January 1705 in Andria, in Southern Italy and would go on to become celebrated throughout Europe and recognised as possibly one of the greatest singers in the history of opera, becoming eternally famous for his vocal prowess and unrivalled ability: the castrato ‘Farinelli.’ His birthdate falls within the

² <https://www.britannica.com/art/castrato>

³ Cecilia Bartoli Interview: <https://www.npr.org/2009/10/30/114326896/cecilia-bartoli-on-the-story-of-sacrificium?t=1580070988786>

Baroque period of music which saw the birth of opera as an art form and the movement of music away from monopoly of the Church and towards the Royal Courts of Europe.

THE BAROQUE PERIOD IN MUSIC

Prevailing during the period roughly between 1600 and to about 1750 the Baroque era of music is a style of music known for lively, energetic and virtuosic music with elaborate “bravura” style singing. This meant, essentially, showing off as much as a singer possibly could with the development of opera, oratorio and cantata music left its earlier position within society, predominantly the church, and blossomed and paved the way for all manner of music which we hear today.⁴

Farinelli was always different in some ways from the castrated sons of impoverished Italian families, who most likely would not even have been sure of their date of birth. Carlos Broschi came from minor nobility and at his Baptism was held by the Duke of Andria, Fabrizio Carafa. His father Salvatore was a composer and maestro di cappella of Andria's city cathedral and his mother, Caterina Barrese, was a citizen of Naples; which may have influenced the decision made for the family to move to the capital city in 1711 when Carlos would have been almost 7 years old. His elder brother Riccardo was almost immediately enrolled at the Conservatory of S. Maria di Loreto, where he specialised in composition. Carlos had already shown some promise as a singer and was introduced to the most famous singing teacher of that time in Naples, Nicola Porpora, who had already taught a number of famous Castrati singers. It is not inconceivable the Carlos started to receive instruction from Porpora at this time; Porpora would indeed become the teacher

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/art/Baroque-music>

of Farinelli and Farinelli would become the singer for whose voice Porpora would compose. The early death of his father who was 36 when he died in 1701 perhaps though was the impetus for the decision to castrate Carlos to secure his singing career. Although Carlos was twelve by that time, late for castration, the onset of puberty also occurred later in both boys and girls during this time. But it is also possible that it had already been done before his father died. Always an illegal procedure the excuse was made that it had been necessitated by a fall from a horse.⁵

Whatever the exact date that castration was carried out the death of his father meant a period of intense tutelage under Porpora would commence. At this time there was little concept of childhood being thought of as a special period of life and children were very much viewed as mini adults and expected to work as hard. Just as peasant sons who had 'escaped' castration would have been expected to put in exhausting hours of labour in the fields with their parents so those fortunate enough to be serving any type of 'apprenticeship' would likewise have been expected to be learning over the course of what would now be considered a very extended day. Carlos would have sung for hours each day; mirrors were used to ensure the eradication of grimaces or excessive movement. When not singing he would have been expected to learn composition and practice playing a musical instrument. It is not therefore surprising that he was ready to make his professional debut just a few years after his father's death.

Carlos made his debut at the age of sixteen in Rome at the Teatro Aliberti in the carnival season of 1722, performing the title role in Silvani-Predieri's *Sofonisba* and Placida in Zeno/Pariati-Porpora's *Flavio Anicio Olibrioin*.⁶ It is likely that he already had started to

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farinelli>.

⁶ Anne Desler, "Il novello Orfeo" Farinelli: Vocal Profile, Aesthetics, Rhetoric (published by author), 36. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5743/>

build his reputation by singing for nobility in their homes as his debut roles in Rome were significant ones. In 1723, Carlo Broschi became 'il Farinello'.⁷ His stage name was fashioned, as was the custom of the time, from the surname of his benefactors, the brothers Farina. The reputation of Farinelli spread throughout Italy and across Europe to Vienna and on to London where his pure and powerful voice, technical proficiency, musical expression and his "skill of florid embellishment" would see him gain employment from leading composers. In London he worked again with his teacher Porpora and sang in Johanne Hasse's opera "Artaserse"; he also performed alongside the castrato Senesino. After some fifteen years of appearing in an exhaustive programme of performances Farinelli effectively disappeared from public stages at the height of his fame and spent the final years of his singing career in Spain singing exclusively for the King of Spain Philip V where he elevated the King's 'melancholy' by singing the same arias every evening in the first instance. After Philip V's death Farinelli remained in service of the court of Philip's successor, Ferdinand VI achieving distinction as an impresario and taking an active role within public affairs, he gained great wealth before eventually returning to live out the remainder of his life in his native Italy.⁸

Was Farinelli truly worthy of the adulation that surrounded him in the fifteen years that he gave public performances for and the reputation that has meant that even though his performance were carried out centuries ago his is the name that remains synonymous with the special beauty of the castrati voice now lost to us?

First-hand accounts from three individuals do indeed give justification to the idea that Farinelli was worthy of his transcendent title of one of the greatest opera singers in history. The name, Farinelli, which has become forever identified with vocal power, control, beauty, agility and the unrivalled ability to affect audiences, and a level of

⁷ Desler, 38.

⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Farinelli>

competence to which modern-day singers aspire to achieve.⁹ As noted in detail by Desler, Quantz, Mancini and Burney were three people who, although they wrote regarding Farinelli and his voice retrospectively, had either heard and had seen him.¹⁰

Mancini, born in 1714, who not only sang a long slide Farinelli in Lucca in 1733 but studied in the cities where Farinelli performed, gives first hand evidence that Farinelli was in fact the incredible singer that he is noted to be.¹¹ Another contemporary who heard Farinelli sing in 1770, in Bologna was Burney.¹²

Burney: "No vocal performer of the present century has been more unanimously allowed by professional critics, as well as general celebrity, to have been gifted with a voice of such uncommon power, sweetness ... Farinelli ... enchanted and astonished his hearers by the force ... and mellifluous tones of the mere organ ... He was so judicious in proportioning the force of his voice to the space it was to pass to the ears of his audience, that in a small theatre at Venice, though it was then most powerful, one of the managers of the opera complained that he did not sufficiently exert himself- "let me then," says Farinelli, "have a larger theatre, or I shall lose my reputation, without your being a gainer by it."¹³

As legendary and as incredible as Farinelli's voice was, considering the fact that centuries later his vocal prowess and technique are not only part of academic scholarship and vocal pedagogy but also his stylistic interpretations still to this day serve as a model for historical performance practice, his stage career as previously mentioned only lasted

⁹ Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen,' *Historisch- kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik*, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (Berlin: Johann Jacob Schützen's selige Wittwe, 1754), 233-234. Giambattista Mancini, *Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato*, facsimile print of the 3rd revised, corrected and enlarged edition, Milan 1777 (Bologna: Forni, 1996), 152-154. Burney, *General History*, 378-81.

¹⁰ Desler, 25- 33.

¹¹ John Rosselli, 'Mancini, Giovanni Battista,' *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed August 27, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O007306>.

¹² Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (London: Beckett and Strand, 1773), 204- 205, 210-225, 229-230.

¹³ Desler, 28.

fifteen years. It was a very intensive schedule and leaves much speculation regarding why his career ended so soon followed his 'retirement' into a more political, public figure until his death.

Today we do not know exactly what the voice of a castrated boy would sound like; we can only make assumptions through written text and historical accounts which are hundreds of years old. This being one of the many complications faced by modern-day historical performers. The movie which was based on the life of Farinelli was no exception.

FARINELLI MOVIE

In the nineteenth-century the act of castration of young males, never a legal practice, was more forcibly banned and with it we lost the unique castrati voice; somewhat a double edged sword. The castration of these boys would result in a lack of testosterone in their developing bodies which would have great effect upon their physical development and the sound which they would produce vocally. The disappearance of the Castrato voice at this time means that there is virtually no recorded evidence of the castrato voice, however, the last surviving castrato in the Western World, Alessandro Moreschi, did make around one hour's worth of recordings. Although these recordings are a great insight into the sound or the general aesthetic qualities of the voice such recording methods do not enable researchers to obtain acoustic data from them due to poor technical recording quality.

As previously mentioned, due to the lack of testosterone in young castrated males the developing child to adult body would transform in quite a different and distinct manner. For example the size of the thoracic cage was much bigger which meant that their lung

capacity, their physical strength and stamina were usually greater than that of most men.

This meant, as a consequence, some were able to sing and hold notes for more than a minute and with incredible vocal power. Again, due to the absence of testosterone the larynx remained small with relatively shorter vocal folds which enabled vocalisation up to three and a half octaves; singing long melismatic passages with great agility, control over wide disjunct intervals and the ability to trill easily. These attributes enabled the young castrated males access to intensive training from the best teachers of the time. Owing to these drastic physical differences it is clear that the difficulties faced in reproducing the sound which, not only the castrati voice produced, but the way that the differences in the development of the body would also drastically affect the way the sound was produced, and ultimately the resultant sound created unique challenges for the film makers..

However, after much analysis of written text, coupled with the Moreschi recordings and the scientific facts which the research team supporting the production of the movie were in possession of, two voices were chosen which would be merged through advanced computer technology to enable an accurate representation of what was believed to be an accurate realisation of sound. Due to the very wide range required the counter tenor Derek Lee Ragin and coloratura soprano Ewa Godlewska, who both used similar vocal technique with respect to vibrato and articulation, were chosen to be used.¹⁴

This hugely complex and time consuming method of, essentially, guessing what the sound Farinelli produced, shines a light on the complexities which countertenors and male sopranists face in recreating the music, authentically and in an historically informed manner, as it would have been in the Baroque period.

¹⁴ <http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/misc/farinelli.htm>

The soundtrack to the film, in my opinion was achieved with great success and the blending of the two voices, unless previously known, would not be noticed. Aspects such as vibrato and vowels are very closely matched between the two voices and the do, indeed, blend well together. Regardless of how well or otherwise audiences felt the Farinelli voice was created no modern day performer would be able to exactly reproduce it – so what type of voices will then now sing the arias that he made famous? Female singers and countertenors.

PHILIPPE JAROUSSKY - Countertenor

Philippe Jaroussky was born on the 13th of February, 1978 and grew up in Maisons-Laffitte, which is situated in the suburbs of Paris, France. Having studied violin, piano and harmony and counterpoint at the Versailles Music Conservatoire he went on to gain a diploma in violin from the Early Music Faculty of the Paris Conservatoire. It was not until 1996 that he began his vocal studies with Professor of Voice Nicole Fallien, continuing his studies with Michel Laplénie, Kenneth Weiss and Sophie Boulín.¹⁵ Although, compared to the career trajectory of Farinelli, it might be considered unusual that a successful performing classical artist did not commence formal vocal training until the age of 18 it is clear that Jaroussky was very musical from his initial violin and piano instruction which would have taught him to read music very well and given him a thorough grounding as to the level of discipline and time that has to be given to practice to be successful as a musician; all of which would have given him a significant starting point when he shifted his musical performance focus to singing. It is also evident, through video footage in the

¹⁵ <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Jaroussky-Philippe.htm>

documentary Philippe Jaroussky, a High Pitched Portrait,¹⁶ that he was actually singing on stage from an early age, although he was singing French pop music and it was clearly before his voice had broken.

Jaroussky's musical career path immediately shows the difference in the modern-day approach to how young singers are trained; Jaroussky had not started vocal training until two or three years after Farinelli had made his grand opera debut. The year 1999, when Jaroussky was twenty-one, presented the first classical vocal performance opportunity for him when he sang Scarlatti's oratorio *Sedecia* as part of the Royamount Festival. He also sang in the same oratorio with Il Seminario Musicale and Gérard Lesne at the Ambronay Festival.¹⁷

The way he describes how he started performing vocally does potentially explain, perhaps, a lot about what he seems to find difficult – that is he came to singing late with his early music career being about the violin – so he did not do what many other students of opera have done and Farinelli did; there was no real singing apprenticeship so to speak. He certainly would not have to have worried about his diction and skill in languages as a Violinist and there is nothing to suggest he would have had the chance to appear in smaller scale opera productions which are the benefits afforded to other students of opera who undergo a typical training programme of musical bachelor followed by an operatic masters, interspersed with short courses in the summer and small scale, semi-professional operatic productions. It would seem he has had to learn as he has gone along and weaknesses have become apparent. His work schedule is frantic if one looks at the

¹⁶Philippe Jaroussky, a High Pitched Portrait ([https:// www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/philippe-jaroussky-high-pitched-portrait/](https://www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/philippe-jaroussky-high-pitched-portrait/))

¹⁷ <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Jaroussky-Philippe.htm>

number of concerts he is appearing in this year – if he has always worked at this pace - the amount of time/space he will have had to address weaknesses will probably have been limited.

In the following quotation Jaroussky discusses his own sound and the pressure of many commitments:

“That same week,” he recalled, “Jean-Claude Malgoire” — a French conductor specialising in Baroque music — “asked me to do a Monteverdi cycle. Two engagements in my first week — it was a bit crazy! Now when I hear recordings from that period, my voice sounds so tight and childish, and yet there was something touching about it too.”¹⁸

Jaroussky is of particular interest to me and for the purpose of this essay as he and I might be classed as having the same voice type. My voice type is that of a countertenor, but mine sitting more in the soprano register. This has given me great opportunity to compare my vocal technique and technical goals with those of Jaroussky. One thing that I found of particular interest is the fact that Jaroussky has a relatively low modal (speaking) voice which resonates with my own bass baritone modal voice. I have also found interesting, in observing video footage of his performances, it is possible to see there is a lot of physical head movement which can be an indication of underlying tension. There is often a clear distinction between his use of voices; speaking voice, head/countertenor voice or Flageolet voice which not only is an indication of a less advanced technique but contrary to what Desler, in her section regarding Farinelli’s “technique, range, volume and ornamentation, and specifically her section regarding “Agility and Passaggi” suggests was the style of the great castrato.¹⁹ When analysing Jaroussky’s live performance of Handel’s aria *Lascia ch’io pianga*, it is possible from the first phrase, through the melodic line of “sospiri” to hear the technical failings of Jaroussky. The vocal line is missing and the sound

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/magazine/21soprano-t.html>

¹⁹ Desler, 59.

is almost stopped between each melodic note. Through my own personal studies under the tutorage of Janice Chapman²⁰ and her colleagues, I understand that this is through vocal tract tension and inconsistency of support and breath supply and gives me a great insight into analysing the technique of other singers. The resultant effect of this technical flaw is that the voice sounds tight, hard sounding and the pitches are not always exact.

Additionally, through physical observation one also sees how Jaroussky, at this point in the aria, moves and looks visibly tense and uncomfortable.²¹ Of personal interest to me is that when one listens to Jaroussky speaking he shares similarities in speaking pitch; he speaks in a bass baritone voice, similar to mine. This draws similarity and the ability for me to learn aurally from his sound production and to analyse what he may or may not be doing differently to me. He uses this speaking voice in certain arias to produce the lower notes which his range does not encompass in his countertenor voice. These lower notes, A's and G's below middle C, stand out quite obviously when he is singing which again is in contrast to what is discussed by Desler, regarding Farinelli's technical achievements. Although my countertenor voice does encompass these lower, mezzo-soprano, notes I have paid particular attention to the technical development of my bass/baritone voice which has helped me greatly to balance airflow, legato line, connection through the multiple passaggi and overall legato line; I have found this most beneficial when singing the more technically demanding arias by Mozart, specifically "Parto, parto, ma tu ben mio" which has slower sections with a typical Mozartian legato line, disjunction intervals into the lower "chest notes" and very fast coloratura triplets up to a soprano (above the stave) modern B flat, in the final section. This being a semitone higher than that of Farinelli's, to my knowledge, singing note; in modern pitch at the height of his vocal prowess Farinelli's range was F

²⁰ Chapman, Janice, *Singing and Teaching Singing: A Holistic Approach to Classical Voice*

²¹ <https://youtu.be/KxnBjAaJWCc>

below middle C to B above the stave, modern pitch.²² Another sopranoist who uses his modal voice to reach the lower notes is Arno Argos Raunig. One hears in the following video (around 1:07) the clear break in *passaggio* into this lower register. Raunig sings the aria “Al dolor che vo sfogando” which was composed by Farinelli himself, which tells us very clearly which lower notes were in the singing vocabulary of Farinelli.²³

It has been somewhat of a complex comparison to make of my technique compared to that of Farinelli, due to there being no actual sound recordings, however, another artist who has become a great exponent of the music of Farinelli and brought much light to the art of the castrati is Cecilia Bartoli.

CECILIA BARTOLI - mezzo-soprano

Born on the fourth of June, to a musical family, Bartoli jokes that her babysitters were Rossini and Verdi due to her parents being members of the Rome Opera chorus. With her captivating stage presence and unrivalled vocal virtuosity she has become a global operatic superstar. Working with the world’s leading conductors, the Grammy Award winning singer really is the celebrated modern-day equivalent of Farinelli. In contrast to Jaroussky it would seem that Bartoli was born to live a life of opera and has received training from a very young age, in not only regarding vocal technique but to the aural development of listening to and being surrounded by opera daily, owing to her parents’ work in the opera chorus. This in itself shows much more symmetry with the early musical experiences of Farinelli.²⁴

²² Desler, 84.

²³ <https://youtu.be/mN41Bzj1esg>

²⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cecilia-Bartoli>

Not only is she celebrated for her voice and singing of the music of the Baroque era but she is also regarded highly for the research and recording of music which was, prior to her work in the area, hidden away in the corners of music libraries; Bartoli is a true pioneer for the resurgence of the music of the Castrati.²⁵

On the 29th of November 2019 Cecilia Bartoli released her album titled “Farinelli,” which includes arias by Farinelli’s older brother Riccardo Broschi, and his teacher and mentor Nicola Porpora which displayed Farinelli’s unique capacity to sing long musical phrases and extraordinary high notes. When listening to Bartoli’s live performance of Handel’s earlier version of the aria which was differently titled we hear her singing “Lascia la Spina”²⁶ one hears some stark differences to the technical control of her voice in comparison to that of Jaroussky. One hears much more vocal freedom in the production of sound from Bartoli, when compared to that of Jaroussky, which affords her much more freedom when making musical and artistic choices. For example, in the opening phrase Bartoli affords the audience with a wider palate of sound colour and volume control. The ascending scale, where previously noted Jaroussky sang disjointed with inconsistency of vocal line with a hard timbre, Bartoli moves through the upper passaggio and into the higher notes with much more freedom and produces much more quality of tone. It could be argued that this is a result of her being female and not having a speaking voice so far removed from her singing voice, unlike the countertenor. However, when one also listens to the live recording of Franco Fagioli, it is possible to hear, in the same opening phrase of

²⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2009/10/30/114326896/cecilia-bartoli-on-the-story-of-sacrificium?t=1580070988786>

²⁶ <https://youtu.be/VhNRWduBPmY>

Handel's "Lascia ch'io pianga,"²⁷ that he has much greater technical skill with consistency of tone and mastery of the passaggi into the higher notes which he glides on a legato line, in stark contrast to Jaroussky.

There is much one can learn through the many treatises, historical accounts and analyses of Farinelli the legend but we are not afforded the luxury of hearing that sound. Fortunately, owing to the legendary story and career of Farinelli a film, in his name, was made in 1994. The internationally co-produced biographical drama film directed by Gérard Corbiau and starring Stefano Dionisi, Enrico Lo Verso, Elsa Zylberstein and Jeroen Krabbé. Focussing more on the life of the eighteenth-century Italian opera singer Carlo Broschi, known as Farinelli, and the relationship with his brother, composer Riccardo Broschi. It seems likely that, even though we can never truly know exactly how he sounded, it seems his supreme status will continue to inspire modern day performers in perpetuity.

²⁷ <https://youtu.be/wseOj1unXco>

Section two: Recital programme based on the music sung by Cecilia Bartoli

Although I have primarily focused Part A of my essay on the baroque artist Farinelli I have chosen to use the repertoire of Cecilia Bartoli whose vocal prowess I also critiqued due to the suitability of her wider range of repertoire which I feel better reflects the stage of my technical proficiency.

Ombra Mai Fu - George Frederic Handel

Based on the story of Xerxes I of Persia the opening aria *Ombra Mai Fu* was originally composed by G.F. Handel for a castrato Caffarelli (Gaetano Majorano) who performed the title role for the opera premiere titled *Serse*, in 1738. The opera was a commercial failure and after its premier there were only five performances during the 19th century. Later rediscovered the aria is now one of the most famous and well known arias written by Handel and is often used out of context of the opera as a “stand alone” concert aria.

Also known as the “Largo from Xerxes” the character Serse sings the aria to a Plane tree (*Platanus orientalis*). Declaring his admiration Serse states how no other tree’s leaves or shade can compare. He declares literally “never was there shade or leaves so beautiful as yours.” In the preceding recitative Serse addresses the tree by declaring his love for the tender and beautiful “fonds” and that may it be safe from the scorns of wind and the natural elements. Thought to be, by some, rather an unhealthy obsession with a tree. The aria is unusual in form due to it not adhering to the usual A-B-A structure; the aria is simply sung once through without ornamentation. Stylistically the aria is sung without much more than sparing passing notes and trills which is unusual for the “bravura” period where the castrato would more commonly sing each note and every other one around it;

within its related notes of the harmonic family. Clearly a very large and bold statement from Handel.

Lascia Ch'io Pianga - George Frederic Handel

This soprano aria is also composed by G.F. Handel. Like *Ombra Mai Fu* the libretto is written in the Italian language and it could be considered as an essential aria for the mezzo-sopranos' and countertenors' repertoire. At the time, in some places, women were still not permitted to sing on stage or within church choirs meaning that castrati, including Farinelli, would have sung the female roles, dressed as women. Thus, it is historically accurate and plausible for male countertenors and sopranists alike to sing these "soprano" roles. Interestingly, in many present day opera productions written during the Baroque era the mezzo-sopranos of today, quite unauthentically, sing the castrati, or "breeches" roles as they are known today, as males.

Originally a saraband that was first found in act three of Handel's 1705 opera *Almira* it was then transformed into the aria "Lascia la spina, cogli la rosa" - literally "leave the thorn, take the rose" - for the character Piacere in his 1707 oratorio *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, which was further revised much later. In 1711, however, Handel used the melody for his London opera *Rinaldo* in act two. This time as, what we today, more commonly know the aria as "Lascia ch'io pianga" meaning "let me weep." Sung by the character Almirena the opera was a triumph for Handel and continues to be performed frequently in opera houses around the world today. The libretto for *Rinaldo* was written by Giacomo Rossi and a scenario written by Aaron Hill where Almirena is addressing Argante, the Saracen King of Jerusalem, who is holding her prisoner and has just disclosed his passion at first sight for her.

Voi Che Sapete - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Possibly one of the most well-known arias written by Mozart the aria is performed in act II of *Le nozze di Figaro* where the young character, Cherubino, sings about the complexities of love. Having written a song for his adolescent crush, the countess - who, in the common twists and turns of operatic plots, happens to be his godmother. Cherubino is persuaded by the Countess to sing it as she is touched and amused, nonetheless, by this act of heart-felt kindness.

Those of you who know what love is,
look into my heart and see what's there
because I don't understand my own feelings.

Sometimes pleasurable,
sometimes painful,
they either burn like fire
or freeze like ice.

I long for something but I don't know what it is,
and the search gives me no peace.

Day or night.

The sentiments expressed this aria really tell us much about the age and the naivety of the character, Cherubino, to whom these heart-felt, sincere feelings of love, emotion and desire are all very new and previously not known to him. This too expressed in the sound-world of the aria which is upbeat and major in its sound, jumpy and ascending in a positive, child-like manner. That said the aria is very technically difficult for a mature adult

voice to sing owing to the melody being written on the upper passaggio. This is actually quite a typical area of the voice for Mozart to write these long, flowing “bel canto” melodic lines for which demand a lot of technical ability from the singer.

Vedrò Con Mio Diletto - Antonis Vivaldi

The opera *Giustino*, which is also referred to as *Anastasio* (RV 717) is an opera composed for the 1724 carnival season in Rome which premiered in the Teatro Capranica. It was written by Vivaldi and the libretto by Bertoni. The aria *Vedrò Con mio diletto* has become a regular concert piece for countertenors and mezzo-sopranos alike. The year of 2018 presented a very successful year for the opera. A concert performance was given, in July at the Festival International d’Opera Baroque de Beaune, conducted by Ottavio Dantone with the Accademia Bizantina; and in the August a full costume version of *Il Giustino* was performed and directed by Deda Cristina Colonna and conducted by Peter Spissky and the Camerata Øresund. This featured as one of the central pieces for the Næstved Early Music Festival.

This aria sounds more simplistic in nature than that of the bravura arias from earlier composers such as Porpora. However, the melismatic lines which descend into the lower registers of the voice and which proceed long sustained notes are where the technical challenge presents itself for the adult, developed voice. Keeping the balance between the amount of vocal weight in the lower notes and to then return to the soaring higher notes makes this aria very technically demanding for those with larger or heavier voices. As a general fact singers tend to get heavier on longer notes and begin to push the voice which is something one must constantly be aware of when performing this aria; the fast

descending scalar feature also encourages the singer to collect a lot of vocal weight as they produce those lower tones.

I will see with joy,
the soul of my soul
heart of my heart full of content.
And if from my dear object
I be far away
I'll be sighing, suffering every moment

The rather touching and melancholic text lends itself to the equally plaintive like melody which gives a sense of foreboding and deep sadness, not only to the audience but the singer alike. It is often my personal thought that one can take one's interpretation of the mood of the character, which the composer has intended, from the tonal sound-world of the piece. Here in this aria I feel that my point is completely justified.

Agnus Dei - B Minor Mass Johan Sebastian Bach

Left nameless the Mass in B minor (BWV 232) is the musical setting of the complete Ordinary of the Latin Mass by Johann Sebastian Bach. The mass was one of Bach's final compositions and was not completed until the year before his death in 1749. Notably the work was never performed in its entirety during his lifetime with the first documented performance of the work as a whole took place in 1859, four years after Bach's death. The work was archived as the Great Catholic Mass by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Regarded widely as one of the supreme achievements in classical music history and is performed throughout the world with great regularity.

Summarised by Alberto Basso as the consecration of a whole life: started in 1733 for "diplomatic" reasons, it was finished in the very last years of Bach's life, when he had already gone blind. This monumental work is a synthesis of every stylistic and technical contribution the Cantor of Leipzig made to music. But it is also the most astounding spiritual encounter between the worlds of Catholic glorification and the Lutheran cult of the cross.

Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world,

Have mercy on us

Comparatively the text is short, when comparing with an operatic text which brings challenges to the singer for reasons of repetition and giving emotional meaning and direction to the, ie giving each repeated phrase a new direction and emotional meaning and not just the same text sung to a different melodic pattern.

The B minor Mass displays many of the characteristics musicologists, and performing practitioners alike, associate with Bach's style in general. In the first instance Bach uses two different genres in setting the text of the Agnus Dei; the first section is essentially a trio sonata - a genre which combines two melodic lines and a continuo accompaniment. One melody line is the alto solo voice, the second are the unison violins - and the second Bach employs "stile nuovo" and "stile antico" (new and old style, respectively).

Noted for its extreme melodic and technical difficulty the Agnus Dei is regarded amongst singers as one of the most difficult pieces to sing. Owing to the disjunct nature,

chromaticism, rate of harmonic progression and the continuous imitative responses which are notoriously complex is one is not completely focused and thoroughly rehearsed.

Although Bartoli has not officially recorded the Agnus Dei from the B minor Mass she has recorded the *Que Sedes ad dexteram patris* which implies she sings and has sung the proceeding aria from the mass.

Parto, Parto, ma tu Ben Mio - Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

From the opera *La Clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*), K. 621, is an opera seria composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in two acts and set to an Italian libretto by Caterino Mazzolà, after Pietro Metastasio. The work premiered on the 6th of September 1791, the last year of his life, at the Estates Theatre in Prague. Already advanced in the writing of *Die Zauberflöte* by the time he was asked to compose an opera seria to celebrate the coronation of Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor, as King of Bohemia.

In a contract dated the 8th of July, Guardasoni stated that he would engage a Castrato of "leading quality," which seemed to have been more important than who wrote the operas. Already set by nearly 40 composers, Metastasio's libretto of *La Clemenza di Tito*, the story is based on the life of Roman Emperor Titus. The libretto was edited by Mazzolà into a two act opera and in Mozart's own words it was "reworked into a true opera." Ironically, Mozart was not the first choice of Guardasoni's to write the opera; it was the hope that Antonio Salieri, the most distinguished composer of Italian opera in Vienna at the time, would accept the commission however he declined. Niemetschek, Mozart's earliest biographer stated that the opera was complete within 18 days with the secco recitatives completed by another composer, most likely Franz Xaver Süssmayr, who was believed to

have been Mozart's pupil. Thought by other scholars of Mozart that he had actually already worked on the opera, possibly since 1789, which have since been rebuked and although eighteen days may be an exaggeration, the opera is one of the operas written in the shortest amount of time that is still frequently performed today. The opera premiered on the 6th of September 1791 and conducted by Mozart himself, the castrato who performed the role of Sesto, and ultimately sang the aria, which is collectively referred to as "Parto" was Domenico Bedini.

Regarded as one of the most difficult arias to sing, the piece is often taken out of the context of the opera and performed as a stand alone concert aria. The piece is also used frequently by mezzo-sopranos for auditions owing to the nature of the aria. Showcasing the voice due to the clear sections within the aria a singer must not only have the technical ability to sing the most complex of Mozartian legato vocal lines in the first section, but then a much quicker allegro section with very technically demanding disjunct intervals of a fifth and sixth to the text of "e a vendicatio volo." Singing such intervals at speed is technically demanding and for the singer to ensure the correct intonation on the lower notes is particularly difficult and requires much flexibility of the larynx. The aria is not ornamented although in certain places, such as the repeated text "Guardami, guardami!" It is thought that owing to the fermata signs and absence of accompaniment, the singer would have taken liberty to include some ornamentation. This was not, as a rule, Mozart's style - he generally writes what he intends for the singer to sing - however when historical facts such as the fact that the aria was composed for a Castrato, who we know were expected to sing arias which required ornamentation and would be expected to improvise and embellish the music that they would sing, we can assume this is a point in the music where Mozart would have given the singer a certain amount of interpretive freedom.

Caro Mio ben - Giuseppe Giordani

Taken from the 18th century *Arie Antiche*, *Caro Mio Ben* is a song written by Giuseppe Giordani although its authorship has been questioned with the possibility of his older brother Tommaso having composed the arietta, and is a favourite concert aria for opera singers past and present. This piece is of particular use to me, from a technical aspect, due to the notes and vocal range. Beginning on the note E flat the descending scalar-like pattern requires much control from the upper-middle passaggio into the lower passaggio and sees much work through my middle passaggio which sits around the notes A, G and down to middle C. This is a current point of technical work for me and the evening out of traditions between my passaggi. Also the ascending scale on “sospira ogno. Cesa” is a very technically demanding element of the area where the vocal line sits on the passaggio and requires and relaxing of the jaw and a different vocal “space” which is a current technical element that I am working too improve to ensure that the sound remains open and free leading up to the highest note in the song F.

Amarilli mia bella- Giulio Caccini

Amarilli Mia Bella is the best known solo madrigal which Giulio Caccini wrote and is included as part of a set published in his 1602 *Le nuove musiche*. Incredible that this music has stood the test of time and still recorded and performed by the most famous of modern-day singers. The aria is used by many students and professionals alike and requires specific early ornamentation like the trillo, an early form of single note trill, which is technically demanding if executed correctly and usually sung at the end of a phrase, on the penultimate note, where a cadence clearly marks the end of a larger section in a musical piece. The final two bars of this song would be a typical place to use this ornamentation however the song would not, stylistically, require more than sparingly used passing notes; if too much were added the simple, plaintive-like quality of the song would

be lost The plaintive melody coupled with a melancholic key sends the listener into a dream state and left with a sense if foreboding. The text, written by Alessandro Guarini, tells to the listener the feelings and passions of a person singing and declaring their love to Amarilli to which the extent knows no bounds; open my breast as you shall see that your name is written within my chest, Amarilli, Amarilli, Amarilli is my love. Aprimi il petto e vedrai scritto in core:

Amarilli, Amarilli, Amarilli è il mio amore (my own personal translation).

Reference list:

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/43208/43208-h/43208-h.htm>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/castrato>

Cecilia Bartoli Interview: <https://www.npr.org/2009/10/30/114326896/cecilia-bartoli-on-the-story-of-sacrificium?t=1580070988786>

<https://www.britannica.com/art/Baroque-music>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farinelli>

Anne Desler, "Il novello Orfeo" Farinelli: Vocal Profile, Aesthetics, Rhetoric (published by author), 36. <http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5743/>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Farinelli>

Johann Joachim Quantz, 'Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen,' Historisch- kritische Beyträge zur Aufnahme der Musik, ed. Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg (Berlin: Johann Jacob Schützen's selige Wittwe, 1754).

Giambattista Mancini, Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato, facsimile print of the 3rd revised, corrected and enlarged edition, Milan 1777 (Bologna: Forni, 1996).

Charles Burney, A General History of Music From the Earliest to the Present Period, Vol. 4 (London: Burney, 1789).

<http://www.medieval.org/emfaq/misc/farinelli.htm>

<https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/Jaroussky-Philippe.htm>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/21/magazine/21soprano-t.html>

Chapman, Janice, Singing and Teaching Singing: A Holistic Approach to Classical Voice

<https://youtu.be/KxnBjAaJWCc> (Jaroussky, Lascia)

<https://youtu.be/mN41Bzj1esg> (Arno Raunig)

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cecilia-Bartoli>

<https://www.npr.org/2009/10/30/114326896/cecilia-bartoli-on-the-story-of-sacrificium?t=1580070988786>

<https://youtu.be/wseOj1unXco> (Franco Fagioli)

<https://youtu.be/VhNRWduBPmY> (Bartoli)