OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Il Teatro Alla Moda--Part I
Author(s): Benedetto Marcello
Source: *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Jul., 1948), pp. 371-403
Published by: Oxford University Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/739550
Accessed: 20-01-2019 15:35 UTC

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IL TEATRO ALLA MODA—PART I

By BENEDETTO MARCELLO

Following Reinhard G. Pauly's introductory essay on Il Teatro alla Moda, *which appeared in our April 1948 issue, we present the first of two instalments which will comprise Marcello's complete work, translated and annotated by Mr. Pauly.*—Editor.

IL TEATRO ALLA MODA

OR

A sure and easy method to compose well and to produce Italian operas in the modern fashion. Containing useful and necessary instructions for librettists, composers, for singers of either sex, for impresarios, orchestra musicians, theatrical engineers, and painters of scenery, for those playing comic parts, for theater tailors, pages, extras, prompters, copyists, for patrons and mothers of female singers [*virtuose*], and for other persons connected with the theater.

Dedicated by the book's author to the writer of the same.

[Picture]

Printed in the Belisania district by Aldiviva Licante, at the sign of the bear in the bark. Sold in Coral Street at the entrance to Orlando's mansion. To be reprinted yearly with up-to-date additions.

Munus et officium, nil scribens ipse, docebo:
Unde parentur opes
Horace, *Lib. de Arte Poetica*[306f]

* *
*

The Book's Author to the Writer of the Same

To you, dearest writer of this little book, do I dedicate the same. For I have written this amusing work to please you and to take your mind off the annoying happenings that every new day brings. The language employed may be somewhat plain or coarse, but this is only to facilitate understanding. It is only proper for me to dedicate the work to you, for it belonged to you even before it was published by me. Still, I like to flatter myself by believing that this little essay will be welcomed by all who have some connection with the theater, that it will even be of use to them, for in it one can find a discussion of

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many subjects which are important to those who want to succeed on the stage of our time. If perchance some malicious slanderers should attack me I shall trust in you alone, hoping that you will know just how to answer and pacify them. To tell you the truth, I am quite aware that there are many people who would just as soon leave things concerning the theater in their present deplorable state. They will assure everyone that my work is but a waste of time, done for vanity alone. Others will no doubt call me a snob who does not appreciate modern art. But we two shall be mutually amused [*un piacere scambievole*] by the fury of certain people who think that I wrote for their benefit exclusively, while in reality they are only victims of their surroundings and of their time. At them you must laugh especially heartily. Meanwhile I beg you to accept this gift, oh my inseparable friend, for it is offered to you by one who cannot live without you. And remain in good health unless you desire to see me ill. *Addio.*

* *
*

Instructions for Librettists

A writer of operatic librettos, if he wants to be modern, must never have read the Greek and Latin classic authors, nor should he do so in the future. After all, the old Greeks and Romans never read the modern writers.

Nor should he have the slightest knowledge of Italian meter and verse. All he might possibly admit is that he "had heard somewhere" that verses should consist of seven or eleven syllables. This will suffice, and now he can suit his fancy by making verses having three, five, nine, thirteen, or even fifteen syllables.

He should brag, however, that he has had thorough schooling in mathematics, painting, chemistry, medicine, law, etc., and then he should confess that his genius compelled him with such force that he just *had* to become a poet. Yet he need not have the slightest acquaintance with the various rules concerning correct accentuation or the making of good rhymes. He need not have any command of poetical language, and mythology and history [from which all opera subjects are drawn] can be closed books to him. To make up for this he will employ in his works as frequently as possible technical terms from the above-named sciences, or from some others, though they may have no relation whatsoever to the world of Poetry. He should

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call Dante, Petrarch, and Ariosto obscure, clumsy, and dull poets whose works, for that reason, should never, or only very seldom, be used as examples. Instead the modern librettist should acquire a large collection of contemporary writings; from these he should borrow sentiments, thoughts, and entire verses. This sort of theft he should refer to as "laudable imitation".

Before the librettist begins writing he should ask the impresario for a detailed list giving the number and kind of stage sets and decorations he wishes to see employed. He will then incorporate all these into his drama. He should always be on the lookout for elaborate scenes such as sacrifices, sumptuous banquets, apparitions, or other spectacles. When those are to occur in the opera the librettist will consult with the theater engineer [machinist] in order to find out how many dialogues, monologues, and arias will be needed to stretch each scene of that type, so that all technical problems can be worked out without hurrying. The disintegration of the drama as an entity and the intense boredom of the audience are of no importance in connection with all this.[1]

He should write the whole opera without any preconceived plan but rather proceed verse by verse. For if the audience never understands the plot their attentiveness to the very end of the opera will be insured.[2] One thing any able modern librettist must strive for is frequently to have all characters of the piece on the stage at the same time, though nobody knows why. They then may leave the stage, one by one, singing the usual canzonetta.[3]

The librettist should not worry about the ability of the performers, but so much more about whether the impresario has at his disposal a good bear or lion, an able nightingale, genuine-looking bolts of lightning, earthquakes, storms, etc.

[1] Muratori, *op.cit.*, III, 58: "To comply with the wishes of the theater's managers it will sometimes be necessary to change the plot or the text in order to adapt them to some machine or scene which at any price must be included and shown off to the audience."

[2] A summary of the plot was included in most printed librettos. It is an amusing reflection on the unintelligibility of some of these plots to see the *argomento* for Bisaccioni's *Veremonda* (music by Cavalli) printed on the very last page of the libretto with the caption "Summary of the opera for those who cannot understand it after having heard and read the same". (Quoted by Malamani, *Il settecento a Venezia*, Turin, 1891, I, 77.)

[3] The aria at the end of a scene, the "exit aria", had become a standard device by this time. It was similarly criticized by Villeneuve: "An actor will never leave the stage without bowing to the audience with all musical support, no matter how necessary it might be for him to walk off." *Op.cit.*, p. 194.

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For the finale of his opera he should write a magnificent scene with most elaborate effects, so that the audience won't run off before the work is half over. He should finish the opera with the customary chorus in praise of the sun, moon, or impresario.

If he decides to dedicate his work to some personage of high position he should be sure that that gentleman has money rather than culture. One-third of the money or other presents the dedication might bring him will go to some influential middle-man who might be the cook or major-domo of His Highness. This person will also supply information about the number and kinds of titles that should adorn the sponsor's name as it appears on the title page. To these titles must be added a long and imposing string of *etc., etc., etc.* He should sing hymns of praise to the glory of that person's family and ancestors, and he should not fail to use as frequently as possible terms such as *magnanimity* and *generosity*. If he should find nothing in the illustrious personage that is worth praising—which frequently happens—he should declare that he remained "silent in order not to embarrass his modesty, but that Fame with her hundred resounding trumpets will proclaim the glory of his immortal name from one pole to the other". He should close with a phrase of utmost reverence, saying, for instance, that he "kisses the leaps of the fleas on the legs of the dogs of His Excellency".

It is extremely useful for the modern librettist to include a note to the reader in which he points out that he wrote this opera back in the days of his earliest youth. He might add that it took him only a few days to write the opera—though actually he labored over it for years—for in that way he will prove that he is truly modern and no longer following the ancient maxim *Nonumque prematur in annum* [Horace, *Ars Poetica,* v. 388]. At this point he might well add that he writes "only for his own amusement", as a relief from more serious work. He never dreamed of having his work published: only the urging of his friends and the wishes of his superiors caused him to do so—certainly not any desire for praise, or any financial considerations. Moreover, "the renowned talent of the composer and the skill of the extras and the theater bear will cover up the libretto's deficiencies".

When he sets down the outline of his work in a preface the librettist should embark on a lengthy discourse on the rules of tragedy and the art of poetry, quoting heavily from Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle, and Horace. He should not fail to add that any

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truly modern poet is constrained to abandon all the salient rules in order to please the taste of a decadent century, the licentiousness of the theater, the extravagance of the conductors, the presumption of the singers, and the whims of the trained bear[4] and the extras.

Still, he must not neglect the customary explanation of the three most important aspects of any drama, namely unity of place, time, and action. Thus he might give the place as THIS OR THAT THEATER, the time as FROM SEVEN TO ELEVEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT [*dalle due di notte alle sei*],[5] and the action as THE RUIN OF THE IMPRESARIO.

The libretto's subject matter need not be historically true. As a matter of fact, since all the Greek and Roman subjects have been treated by the writers of those nations as well as by the choicest writers of the Golden Age of Italian literature, the modern librettist is faced with the task of inventing a fable and adding to it all kinds of oracles, realistic shipwreck scenes, ominous prophecies gathered by examining the flesh of a roasted animal, etc.[6] All that is needed is to have an historical name or two on the public announcement of the work, the rest can then be freely invented and the only further thing that matters is that the number of verses must not exceed twelve hundred, arias included. To increase the opera's popularity, the modern librettist will describe in the title one of the work's principal scenes, instead of using the name of one of the characters. For instance, instead of calling it *Amadis, Bovo,* or *Berta al Campo,* he will name it *The Generous Ingratitude, The Funerals out of Revenge, The Bear in the Bark,* and the like.

Real life is imparted to the opera by the use of prisons, daggers, poison, the writing of letters on stage, bear and wild bull hunts, earthquakes, storms, sacrifices, the settling of accounts, and mad scenes. The audience will be deeply moved by unexpected events of

[4] The figure of the theater bear is used by Marcello symbolically, throughout his work, to represent the exaggerated importance ascribed to all matters of equipment. The bear is constantly represented as being more important than the opera's text or music.

[5] "In Italy they keep time in such a way that the first of twenty-four hours is struck about one and a half hours after sundown." Villeneuve, *op.cit.,* p. 148.

[6] "They like battles and other fights especially. Every opera, if it wants to please the *parterre,* must have one of them. . . . These fights are well executed and also amuse me. I have seen captains arrive leading their troops, seated on beautiful and real horses." De Brosses, *op.cit.,* II, 390.

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that kind.[7] If it should furthermore be possible to introduce a scene in which some actors sit down and doze off[8] while an attempt on their lives is being made (which they conveniently thwart by waking up in time), then one would have created something so extremely admirable as has never before been viewed on the Italian stage.

The modern librettist need not worry about his literary style. He must keep in mind that his work is to be heard and understood by the crowd of common people. To render it more easily intelligible he should omit the usual articles [in front of nouns], but employ instead unusual and long phrases, and he should include an abundance of flowery language in any recitative or canzonetta.

The librettist then must have at hand a good supply of old operas (by some other writer) from which he will borrow the plot as well as the stage sets. All he has to change is the meter and the names of some of the characters. He can achieve similar results by translating dramas from the French, by changing prose to verse or tragedies into comedies, adding or omitting characters according to the requirements of the impresario.

Once he has decided to write an opera he should let nothing stand in his way. If his ingenuity deserts him completely he will enlist the help of some other writer and borrow a plot from him. He will then put it into verse, and both will sign a pact that they will share equally the income derived from the dedication and from the sale of the printed libretto.

One rule of prime importance is never to let a character make his exit before he has sung the usual canzonetta. This is especially appropriate if it immediately precedes that person's execution, suicide, or taking of poison.

The poet must never read the entire work to the impresario.

[7] That violent and unexpected events on the operatic stage were popular is expressed, somewhat before Marcello's date of writing, by Pier Jacopo Martello: "The librettist should arrange with the composer, who will gladly agree, to have one of these *scene di forza* in every act. It might consist either of some violent or unusual clash of passions or of some event that comes as a surprise to the audience. This arrangement will insure the success of the opera." *Della tragedia antica e moderna,* 1715. (Quotation from the Bologna edition of 1735, p. 136.)

[8] Such "falling-asleep scenes" occur in numerous works of the time, usually under very unconvincing circumstances. "It must seem ridiculous to anyone to stare at someone up on the stage who, being in some garden or prison, says that he desires to slumber a while. He has hardly sat down when sleep obligingly overcomes him. Then one hears this sleeping and sweetly dreaming person sing to us about his troubles and in his sleep call out the name of his loved one—whom the poet with courtesy and great speed brings on the stage." Muratori, *op.cit.,* III, 72.

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Instead he should only show him fragments of a few scenes, but he should recite over and over again the scenes containing the poisoning, the sacrifices, the divans [*delle Sedie*], the bear, the dozing off in the garden, and the reckoning scene, and he should swear that if *those* did not bring the house down he would never write another line.

A good, modern librettist should be careful not to acquire any knowledge about music even though the poets of antiquity were well acquainted with it, as is related by Strabo, Pliny, and Plutarch. They make no distinction between a poet and a musician but mention a good many artists—such as Amphion, Philemon, and Terpander—who were masters in both fields.

The aria must in no way be related to the preceding recitative but it should be full of such things as sweet little butterflies, bouquets, nightingales, quails, little boats, little huts, jasmine, violets, copper basins [?], little pots [*cavo rame*], tigers, lions, whales, crabs, turkeys, cold capon, etc. Thus the poet will demonstrate to the world his proficiency as a natural scientist who, by his well-chosen similes, shows off his knowledge of animals, plants, flowers, etc.[9]

Before the opera is staged the librettist should praise the music and the singers, the impresario, the orchestra, and the extras. Then, if the work should turn out to be a failure, he should start a tirade against the singers whose performance did not at all do justice to his intentions and who thought of nothing but their notes. He should censure the composer for failing to understand the dramatic force of the scenes since he paid attention to nothing but his arias, the impresario for being a miser who spent nothing on beautiful scenery and props, and the orchestra players and extras for being continually drunk. He should furthermore protest that his dramatic intentions

[9] Here Marcello refers to a form particularly disliked by him though universally found in settecento opera: the "comparison aria", in which abstract thoughts are expressed in flowery language and similes. Gasparini's opera *Il Bajazet* (Venice, 1719, text by Conte Agostino Piovene) contains an abundance of such arias, often in close succession. In scene 12, act 1, violets and roses are compared—in a hardly original manner—with human modesty and pride. In the following scene a little butterfly (*farfalletta*) is compared with an unsuccessful lover. This aria is somewhat longer than the preceding one, perhaps because of the considerable stretch of imagination necessary for such a comparison. Similar arias occur in the second act and involve the customary *rondinella* (little swallow), and *usignuolo* (nightingale). The fashion of writing comparison arias proved extremely tenacious: its great vogue began after Zeno had written his first librettos. When these were revived later they were "corrected" by cutting some of the original scenes and substituting comparison arias. (Max Fehr, *A. Zeno und seine Reform des Operntextes,* Zürich, 1912, p. 99.)

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were disregarded altogether, and that he was given direct orders by the management, the ever-dissatisfied prima donna, and the theater bear to cut out some passages and to add others. He should announce that he will insist on publication of the original version, not of that altogether disfigured present one which he can hardly recognize as his own. If anyone should have any doubts about this [mutilation], let him ask the chambermaid or washwoman at his house: they were the first ones to read the work and to give a critical evaluation of the same.

During the rehearsals he must not reveal any of his dramatic intentions to the actors since he rightly assumes that they will do as they please anyway.

If the work should be such that certain characters have little to do or to sing he should immediately comply with the requests of these singers (or of their rich patrons) to add to their parts. He should always keep at hand a supply of a few hundred arias, in case alterations or additions should be wanted. He should not fail to insert many verses which can be omitted, indicating those by quotation marks.[10]

If the plot should require husband and wife to be put into prison together, and if one of them should have to die, it is absolutely necessary to have the other one stay alive so that he or she can sing an aria of a merry character. This will cheer up everyone in the audience as it will make them realize that, after all, it is all only make-believe.

If two persons should be engaged in love-making, plotting, or conspiring, the presence of pages and extras is always required.

If a letter is to be written, a change of scenery seems called for. A writing table and a chair should be carried on the stage and after the letter has been written should be removed immediately, so that the belief cannot arise that the table might be standing in its usual place. The same applies to thrones, armchairs, canopies, and grass-covered, "natural" seats.

In royal palaces he should provide for a ballet of the gardeners and in the countryside for a dance of the courtiers. The *ballo di Piroo* [? should perhaps be *Pirro;* according to d'Angeli it refers

10 As the singers acquired increasingly dictatorial positions in the opera they would frequently omit long passages which afforded no opportunities for vocal display. These —the so-called *versi oziosi*—appeared in the printed libretto surrounded by quotation marks, to facilitate following during the performance.

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either to Zeno's opera by that name or to the *Pirrica,* a military kind of outdoor dance of ancient Greece] can take place in a hall, a courtyard, in Persia, Egypt, or anywhere else.

The librettist might notice that the singers pronounce their words indistinctly, in which case he must not correct them. If the virtuosos should see their mistake and enunciate clearly the sale of the libretto might be seriously impaired.

If some of the actors should ask him from where they are to go on the stage and in which direction they should make their exit, or if they have questions about acting or costumes he will tell them to do all of these things in any way they have a mind to.

The composer might express a dislike for the meter in some of the arias, in which case the librettist must change it at once. To suit the composer's fancy he might also add a breeze, storms, fog, southern, eastern, and northern winds.

A good number of the arias should be so long that it will be impossible to remember the opening bars by the time the middle has been reached.

There should be no more than six roles in the opera, and two or three of the six ought to be so unimportant that they can be left out if necessary, without any harm to the plot.

The parts of the father and of the tyrant—assuming that they are principal parts—must be given to *castrati,* and the bass and tenor parts should be left to such characters as captains of the guard, friends of the king, shepherds, messengers, etc.

Librettists who do not enjoy great fame or credit will make a living during the rest of the year, when the opera season is over, by taking care of legal matters, administrative affairs, by supervising other people's businesses, by copying parts and proofreading, and by trying to ruin each other's reputations.

The librettist should ask the manager for a box and sublet half of its seats many months before the season begins, but especially for all first performances. The remaining half of the box he should fill with his friends whom he will smuggle in somehow, without their having to pay the customary fee at the door.

The librettist should pay frequent social calls to the prima donna, since the success of the opera generally depends on her. He should change his drama as her artistic genius may order him to do, making additions or cuts in her part or that of the bear or other persons. But he must be on his guard not to reveal to her anything about the

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opera's plot—the modern virtuosa is not supposed to know anything about that. He might possibly inform her most gracious mother, her father, brother, or patron, but the greatest secrecy must be used.

He should also visit the *maestro di cappella,* read him the libretto several times and point out to him where the recitative has to go slowly and where rapidly or *appassionato,* since the modern composer must not be bothered with such decisions. He will then urge him to include in the arias short *ritornelli* and embellishments (and, above all, many word repetitions) since all these add so much to the enjoyment of his work. Finally, he must pay his respects to the orchestra, to the tailors, to the theater bear, the errand boys, and to the extras, recommending his opera to their kindness.[11]

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Instructions for Composers

The modern composer should not know any rules about composition except some vague generalities. He need not understand the numerical proportions in their relation to music, the advantages of contrary motion or the disadvantages of tritones or hexachords with the b-natural. He need not know how many modes there are or how to distinguish them, or how they are divided, or what their characteristics are. Instead he might declare on this subject that there are only two modes, namely major and minor; the former with the major third and the latter with the minor third. He need not take the trouble to point out what the ancients understood by a major [i.e., large] and minor [small] tone.

He will not see any difference between diatonic, chromatic, and enharmonic genera, but he must jumble up all three within a single

[11] The position of the librettist as everybody's servant was deplored by many settecento writers on opera. "Dependent on the mercy of the impresario, the orders of the composer, and subjected to the caprices of the singers, they are authors only in name." Arteaga, *Les révolutions du théâtre musical en Italie,* London, 1802, p. 92 (first publ. in Italian, 1783). Metastasio, in a letter addressed to Farinelli (1752), describes his difficulties in Vienna. The empress desires a new libretto but "Greek and Roman subjects are excluded from my jurisdiction because these nymphs [the female singers] are not to exhibit their chaste limbs, so that I must have recourse to oriental history . . . The contrast of vice and virtue is impracticable in these dramas because no one of the troupe will act an odious part. Nor can I avail myself of more than five personages . . . The time of representation, the changes of scene, the airs, and almost the number of verses are limited: now pray tell me, if all these embarrassments would not make a patient man mad?" Quoted by Burney, *Memoirs of the life and writings of the Abate Metastasio,* London, 1796, II, 16.

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canzonetta. With such a modernistic confusion he can distinguish himself over the composers of antiquity.

He will employ the accidentals which indicate large or small half tones completely arbitrarily. In the same spirit of generosity he will use the enharmonic sign when the chromatic sign is called for, saying that both mean the same thing, raising a note a small half tone. Thus he will show himself to be completely ignorant, for the chromatic sign should be employed to divide whole tones and the enharmonic sign to divide half tones, it being the special function of the enharmonic sign to divide the large semitones, and no others. But the modern *maestro di cappella* (as said above) must not have the slightest knowledge of this matter and of related ones.

To insure his arriving and staying at such a state of ignorance he should not be able to read fluently, or to write a single sentence. Needless to say he should not know any Latin at all, though he will compose pieces for the Church. In these he can write sarabandes, gigues, and courantes which he will call fugues, canons, or double counterpoints.[12]

As to the theater, the modern composer should know nothing about it; he should have no understanding of poetry or diction, of long and short syllables, or of the general possibilities of the stage.

If the composer plays the cembalo he should be quite ignorant of the properties of string or wind instruments. Should he be a string player, however, he must not take the trouble to find out a few things about the cembalo. Instead he should be convinced that one does not need such knowledge or facility in order to compose well in the modern style.

On the other hand, it might be quite useful for a composer to have spent many years playing the violin or viola, or copying music for some famous composer. From the latter he might have appropriated some manuscripts of operas or serenades, and he can steal from these and other compositions themes for use in *ritornelli*, overtures, arias, recitatives, variations on *La Follia,* and choruses.

Before accepting a libretto he should tell its writer that he wants this or that meter used in it, and that there should be so and so many verses to each aria. He should also demand that the manuscript be carefully written, with much attention given to correct punctuation.

[12] "It cannot be denied that the style in vogue at the present time was invented to conceal with the label *modern* the lack of training in the difficult subject of counterpoint." Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni,* Bologna, 1723, p. 77.

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Of course, when he starts to compose he must disregard such things as periods, commas, or question marks.[13]

Before he actually starts to write the music, the composer should pay calls to all the female singers in the company and offer to include anything they would care to have, such as arias without a bass in the accompaniment, *furlanette,* rigadoons, etc., all with the violins, the bear, and the extras accompanying in unison.[14]

He must not allow himself to read the entire libretto, as that might confuse him. Rather he should compose it verse by verse and insist immediately that all arias be written over [by the librettist]. This is the only way in which he will be able to utilize all the melodies that had come into his head during the summer. But if the words to these arias should again fail to fit the notes properly—and that happens most commonly—he will continue to harass the librettist until the latter satisfies him completely.

All arias should have an instrumental accompaniment and care should be taken to have every part move in exactly the same note values, whether they are eighths, sixteenths, or thirty-seconds. Noise is what counts in modern music, not harmonious sound which would consist mainly of diverse note values, of the interchanging of tied and accented notes. To avoid this true kind of harmony the modern composer should not employ anything more daring than a four-three suspension, and that only in the cadence. If that seems a bit old-fashioned to him he can make up for it by finishing the piece with all instruments playing in unison.

He must not forget that happy and sad arias should alternate

[13] "Composers ought to follow and study whatever falls into their hands [to be set to music]. It seems foolish, however, to hope in our time that they would acquaint themselves thoroughly with the text so that they can write their notes in accordance with it. For they are after one thing only, and that is to exhibit themselves." Quadrio, *Della storia e della ragione d'ogni poesia,* Bologna and Milan, 1739, Lib. III, Dist. IV, Capo III.

[14] Accompaniments in which one or more orchestral instruments played in unison or in octaves with the voice part were quite common and fashionable around the turn of the century. They seemed especially despicable to Marcello, the student and master of harmony, when no bass instrument supported the melody parts. Giovanni Porta's *Argippo* (Venice, 1717) is a typical work of this kind. In this score practically every aria bears the notation *primi violini colla parte,* and the flutes are often similarly employed. This is carried to the extreme in the second act (scene 6, *aria di Mesio*) where instrumental bass and voice are in octaves throughout. Under the first measure the words *tutti con il basso* appear, so that the entire orchestra plays in unison with the voice.

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throughout the opera, from beginning to end, regardless of any meaning of text, music, or stage action.

If nouns such as "father", "empire", "love", "arena", "kingdom", "beauty", "courage", "heart", should appear in the aria the modern composer should write long coloraturas over them. This applies also to "no", "without", and "already" and other adverbs. It will serve to bring about a little change from the old custom of using coloratura passages only over words expressing an emotion or some movement, for instance, "torment", "sorrow", "song", "fly", "fall".[15]

In the recitatives the modulations should not follow any law or order and the bass should move as frequently as possible.

As soon as he has completed a scene the composer, if he is married to a Virtuosa, will read it to her, or else to his servant, copyist, or anyone else.

Ritornelli should serve as introductions to all arias; they should be quite lengthy,[16] with violins playing in unison, usually in sixteenth or thirty-second notes. They should be performed *mezzo piano,* which would be novel and less tiring. There should be no connection between the *ritornello* and the following aria.

There must be no bass in the accompaniment to an aria. To keep the singer from straying he should be accompanied by violins in unison; in such a case a few bass notes might be given to the violas but this is *ad libitum.* When the Singer has reached the cadenza the conductor will stop the entire orchestra and give completely free rein to virtuoso or virtuosa.

The composer should not wear himself out writing duets or

[15] "Even when the sense of an aria breathes a roused and furious tendency, yet if the words 'father' or 'son' be in the text the composer never fails to slacken his notes . . . In our opinion he has entirely spoiled all with such a dissonance of expression . . . The duty of the composer is to express the sense not of this or that particular word but the comprehensible meaning of all the words in the text." Algarotti, *A reprint of his "Essay on Opera",* R. Northcott, ed., London 1917, p. 30.

[16] "How tediously prolix are these *ritornelli* which precede [the arias], nay, and often how superfluous. For can anything be more improbable than that, in an expressive air of wrath, an actor should calmly wait with his hand stuck in his sword-belt until the *ritornello* be over, to give vent to a passion that is supposed to be boiling in his breast!" Algarotti, *op.cit.,* p. 29. Villeneuve points out that if two persons are present on the stage at such a time at least they can gesticulate or engage in a "silent conversation", but if there is only one "that unfortunate person can do nothing but promenade around the stage and inspect every piece of scenery, one after another, arriving [with his eyes] back at the orchestra precisely at the moment his aria begins". (Quoted by Haas, *Josse de Villeneuve's Brief über den Mechanismus der italienischen Oper von 1756,* in *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft,* VII [1924], 140.)

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choruses; those he might write will be left out of the opera anyway [*Quali ancora procurerà si levino dall'Opera*].[17]

Every modern composer should drop an occasional remark that he writes in a rather popular style and violates the rules frequently only in order to satisfy his audience. He will thus blame the taste of the listeners who, it is true, sometimes like bad music because that is what is performed and because they are not given a taste of better compositions.

He should lend his services to the impresario for very little and consider the thousands of *scudi* that have to be paid to the famous singers. For that reason he should be satisfied with less pay than the least of them, though he should not stand for the injustice of receiving less than the theater bear or the extras.[18]

Whenever the composer walks in the company of virtuosos, and especially of *castrati,* he should let them walk on the right side; he should carry his hat in his hand and stay one pace behind, remembering that the lowest of them, in the opera, represents at least a general or captain in the king's or queen's guard.

He should speed up or slow down the tempo of the arias according to every whim of the singer and he should swallow all their impertinences, remembering that his own honor, esteem, and future are at their mercy. For that reason he will change, if desired, their arias, recitatives, sharps, flats, naturals, etc.

All canzonettas should consist of the same ingredients, namely long embellishments, syncopation, chromatic progressions, distorted syllables, repetitions of insignificant words, e.g., *Amore Amore, Impero Impero, Europa Europa, fuori fuori, orgoglio orgoglio.* The modern composer, when he writes an opera, must always keep before his eyes a list of all the above-named things, and no aria is complete unless it contains a few of them. This will enable the composer to stay away from variety, a quality that is no longer fashionable.

[17] Choruses at the time of Marcello usually came at the end of each act, especially the last act, though there are many operas without any choruses. De Brosses expressed astonishment at the lack of ensemble scenes in Italian opera: "Almost all their arias are for one voice only. There are hardly two or three duets in an entire opera, and almost never any trios." *Op.cit.,* II, 381.

[18] "These composers are poorly paid: the manager gives them thirty or forty *pistoles* and that is all they receive except for what the first printing of the arias brings them. They sell these at a high price while they are new, for once they have been made public and are copied the composer can draw no further gain from them." De Brosses, *op.cit.,* II, 361.

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Whenever a recitative ends in a flat key he must quickly add to it an aria in a key with three or four sharps; then a recitative in the first key will follow—all this for the sake of novelty. The maestro will distort similarly the significance and feelings found in the words. This applies particularly to the arias in which he will allow the Virtuoso to sing the first verse (meaningless as that may be all by itself), after which he will place a long *ritornello* played by violins and violas.

Should the modern composer be the teacher of some opera Virtuosa he must urge her to pronounce everything indistinctly. For this purpose he must teach her a great many flashy ornaments and rapid passages. Thus no one will understand a single word, the music will stand out better and consequently be more fully understood.

The violins may accompany the singing without cembalos or other instruments furnishing a bass. This so-called accompaniment may cover up the voice part, but this is of no importance and happens frequently in arias for alto, tenor, or bass.

The modern composer must also write canzonettas for alto or mezzo soprano in which the bass instruments [i.e., double bass, 'cello, and cembalo] play the melody exactly as rendered by the singer, only that they transpose it down several octaves. The violins, on the other hand, will double it in the higher octave. In the score the composer will write out all these voices and he will call his aria a three-part composition though, of course, it actually consists of but one part, doubled in various registers.

In any four-part compositions the modern composer absolutely must have two parts play in unison or octaves. He might vary the speed with which these parts move, i.e., if one of them moves in quarter or eighth notes the other will move in sixteenths or thirty-seconds.

A bass part that moves in eighth notes [*chrome*] should be called a chromatic bass by the modern composer, for he does not know the true meaning of the term "chromatic". This is only natural in view of his ignorance of poetry which has been mentioned above. Knowledge of this kind was necessary for the musicians of antiquity such as Pindar, Arion, Orpheus, Hesiod, and others who, according to Pausanias, excelled in poetry as well as in music. Every modern composer should try his best to be different from them.

He should cheer up his audience with ariettas containing pizzi-

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cato and muted passages in the orchestra, as well as *trombe marine* and cymbals [? *piombè*].

He might demand from the impresario (aside from his salary) that he be given a librettist, as a present, whom he could use in any way he sees fit. As soon as the opera is composed in its entirety he will play it for his friends who will understand none of it. On the basis of their suggestions he will then change *ritornelli,* embellishments, appoggiaturas, enharmonic sharps and chromatic flats [*diesis enarmonici, b molli cromatici*].

The modern composer should not fail to write the customary recitative over a bass moving in chromatic progressions, with orchestral accompaniment. For this purpose he will order from the librettist a scene containing a sacrifice, or a mad scene, or a dungeon scene.

He should never write an aria with a bass [cembalo] accompaniment only, for he should realize that they are no longer in vogue and that in the time spent on one of them he might write a dozen arias with an orchestral accompaniment.

If he should actually decide to write an aria *con bassi* the latter should consist of no more than two or three repeated notes, or of tied notes in the manner of an organ point. And he should be sure to include middle sections in each aria which he stole from some other composer.

If the impresario complains about the music the composer should protest against such grave injustice and point out that the work contains one-third more notes than usual and that he spent almost fifty hours on its composition.[19]

If some aria should not please the Virtuosa or her protectors he should tell her that with the proper stage effects, with orchestra, lighting, and extras it will sound altogether different, and that one should listen to it in that setting.

At the end of each *ritornello* the conductor (at the cembalo) will cue the singers in by nodding his head; they will never come in at the proper moment otherwise, considering the length and complexity of the modern *ritornello.*

[19] What feats of rapid production were brought about then can be gathered from the preface to a libretto printed in 1692 (Giovanni Matteo Giannini's *Onorio in Roma,* music by Pollarolo) in which the reader is notified that it had been "outlined in a few moments, put into verse in less than a day, composed by Signor C. Polarolo in little less than a week. This is no fairy tale, believe it or not, but it is the real truth." Sonneck, *Catalogue of opera librettos printed before 1800,* Washington, 1914, I, 823.

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Some arias should be composed in the style of a bass aria though they will be sung by altos and sopranos.

The modern composer must insist that the impresario hire a large orchestra for him, with violins, oboes, horns, and other instruments. He might save him the expense of double bass players, however, since he has no use for them except for tuning up before the opera starts.

The overture consists of a movement in French style, or prestissimo passages in sixteenth notes, in major. This must ordinarily be followed by a [contrasting] section, *piano,* in the parallel minor key, following which the overture will be brought to a close with a minuet, gavotte, or gigue, again in major. Thus one can get around writing fugues, suspensions, or clear-cut themes—which are ancient and outmoded anyway.

The composer-conductor must see to it that the best arias are always given to the *prima donna.* In the event that some cuts in the opera become necessary these must never be made in the arias or *ritornelli.* It would be better to omit entire scenes with recitatives, the bear, and the earthquake.

The *seconda donna* might complain that her part contains fewer notes than that of the *prima donna.*[20] The conductor then must console her and make up this shortcoming by adding all kinds of coloratura passages to her arias, as well as embellishments and artful frills [*passi di buon gusto*].

The modern composer will utilize old arias written by foreign composers. He will also be extremely courteous towards protectors, musical amateurs, concessionaires of boxes, extras, and stage hands, and he will pay his respects to all of them.

If a canzonetta should need some changes he should never substitute anything that might be considered an improvement. Any aria that does not meet with success and popularity he will call a masterpiece which has been "murdered" by the singers and which is "way beyond the audience". During arias without a cembalo accompaniment he will blow out the candles, allowing his head to cool off

[20] Such counting of lines and notes was actually resorted to. Kretzschmar describes a situation of this kind in which the prima donna was not satisfied that her part in the next opera was really going to be the leading one until the impresario sent her the libretto, pointing out to her that her part was forty-one lines longer than that of the *seconda donna. Beiträge zur Geschichte der venezianischen Oper,* in his *Gesammelte Aufsätze,* II (1911), 348.

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somewhat. He will light the candles again in time for the next recitative.

The modern composer should show himself extremely attentive towards all female opera stars. He should regale them with presents —some old cantatas which he transposed to suit their range—and he should assure every one of them that *she* was the one with whom the opera would stand or fall. This he should also say to all the other singers, to everyone in the orchestra, to the supers, the bear, and to the earthquake.

He should smuggle some masked friends[21] past the ticket control every night and offer them seats near him in the orchestra pit. If there is not enough room for them to be comfortable some 'cellist or bass player may be given the evening off.

All modern conductors should see to it that the following notice appears on the printed program, below the *dramatis personae:* "The music is by the eternally famous Signor Soandso, *maestro di cappella,* director of concerts, chamber music, dances, fencing matches, etc., etc."

Instructions for Male Singers

The modern Virtuoso should never have practised solfeggio during his student days or later on in his career; there would be too much danger that he might finish his notes properly, or that he might sing in tune and in time. And this would be entirely out of keeping with modern practice.

To become a virtuoso a singer need not be able to read or write, or to pronounce correctly vowels and diphthongs, nor does he have to understand the text. He must be an expert, however, at disregarding sense and at mixing up letters and syllables in order to show off flashy passages, trills, appoggiaturas, endless cadenzas, etc.

He should accept nothing but leading parts, and as to his fee, he should have the impresario put a figure into his contract that amounts to one-third more than what he will actually receive. This will have to be done for the sake of the singer's reputation.[22]

[21] The wearing of masks at all public entertainments was prescribed by the Venetian government for many years. Minute regulations about dress in public places and about the hours when the performance had to be finished were also issued. Wiel, *I teatri musicali veneziani,* Venice, 1897, p. lviii.

[22] In Goldoni's *l'Impresario delle Smirne* (Venice, 1761) the *castrato* Carluccio insists on such a "fake" contract. He first unsuccessfully negotiates for a salary of three hundred *zecchini* but finally agrees to a mere fifty. "However, for the sake of my reputation, I demand a *scrittura simulata* stipulating five hundred, as well as the guarantee of a banker."

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Masked audience in the foyer of a Venetian theater (early 18th century)

Contemporary drawing by Guardi

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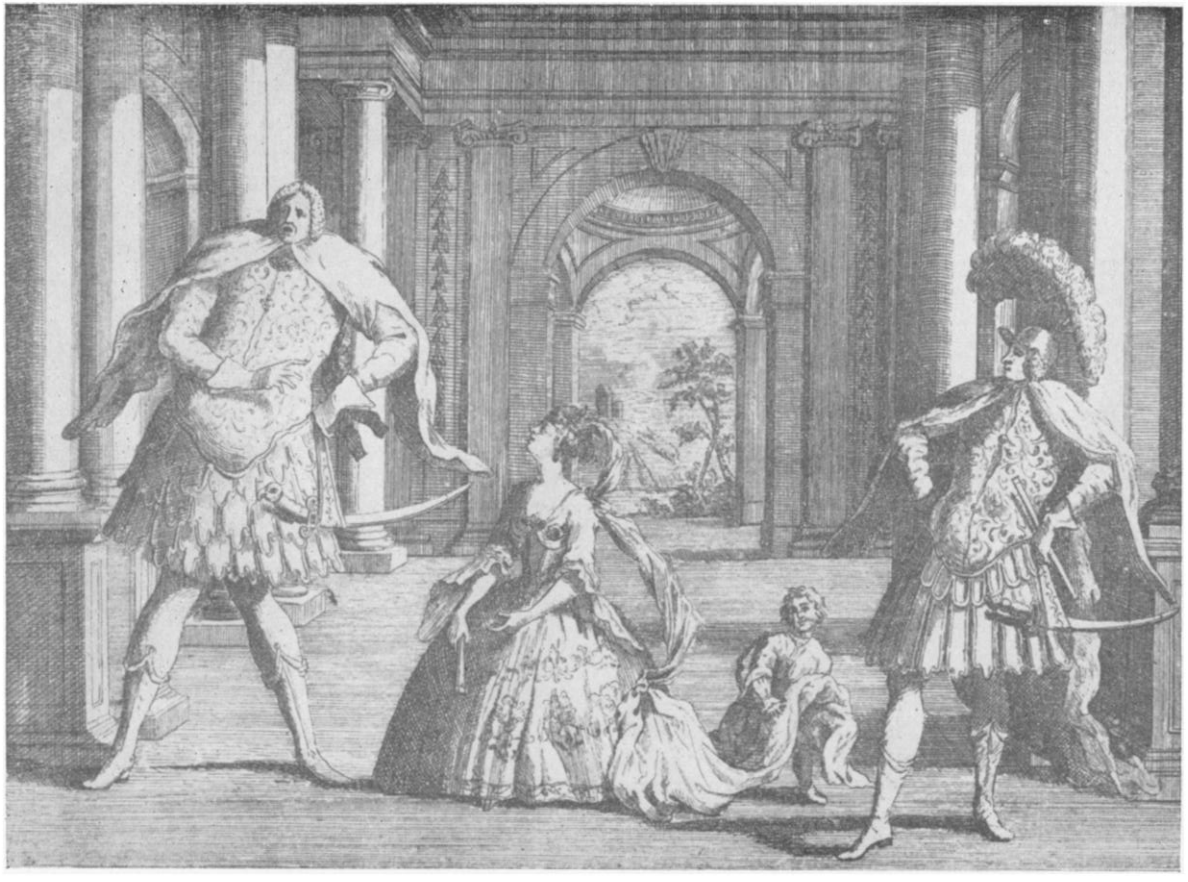

The castrato Senesino singing a duet with Francesca Cuzzoni

Anonymous satirical print, possibly by Hogarth, *c.* 1725

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If he can acquire the habit of complaining that he is in bad voice, that he hasn't sung a note in ages, that he is half-dead with a terrible cold, headache, toothache, and stomach-ache, he will have proved that he is a real modern virtuoso.

He should always find fault with his part: its character does not fit his personality at all and the arias present no challenge to his ability. In such a case he will simply substitute some little number by another composer, assuring everyone that at this or that court where a certain very famous personality resided (making sure not to disclose the name) it had been a "terrific hit" and that he had been forced to give seventeen encores at every performance.

At the rehearsals he should sing everything *mezza voce* and in the arias he should follow whatever tempo seems to suit *him* at the moment. During stage rehearsals his favorite position should be with one hand holding on to his vest while the other one is firmly anchored in his trouser pocket. His main concern should be that during the *messa di voce* no one can understand a syllable of what he is singing.

He should always keep his hat on, even if some illustrious person should address him, for otherwise he might catch cold. Even when greeting someone he should never lift his hat, always keeping in mind that he impersonates a prince, king, or emperor.

At the performance he should sing with his mouth half-closed and with his teeth firmly pressed together—in short, he should do everything to prevent the understanding of a single word,[23] and in the recitatives he should be sure to disregard periods and commas.

In an ensemble scene, when addressed by another character or while the latter might have to sing an arietta, he should wave greetings to some masked lady-friend in one of the boxes, or smile sweetly to someone in the orchestra or to one of the supers. In that way it will be made quite clear to the audience that he is Alipio Forconi, the famous singer, and not the Prince Zoroastro whose part he is playing.[24]

[23] "Because of the singers' ignorance one can hardly ever understand the sense (to say nothing of the words) of their parts, for they alter and distort all the vowels . . . If one does not keep the libretto handy where all they sing has been printed I am sure that no one in the audience would understand the action or even the general subject of what is being represented on the stage." Muratori, *op.cit.*, III, 59.

[24] Tosi similarly objects to "the malicious practice of established singers who, by talking or laughing with their companions on the stage, want to indicate to the public that they do not fear or envy the applause of this or that singer who is making his début". *Op.cit.*, p. 106.

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While the orchestra plays the introduction to his aria he should take a stroll backstage, take some snuff, inform his friends that he is not in good voice tonight, and that he has a bad cold. When he gets around to singing his aria he should think of one thing only, and that is to take all the time he wants for the cadenza, filling it with passage work and with fashionable ornaments as he sees fit. The conductor, during all this, will rest his hands by taking them off the keyboard; he will also take some snuff and wait patiently until the singer has decided to come to an end. Before embarking on the final trill the singer should take several good, deep breaths. He should then execute the trill *fortissimo* from the very beginning rather than employing the *messa di voce,* and he should seek out for this trill the highest note he can reach.

He may be as capricious as he wants to in his acting, for the modern Virtuoso must not understand the meaning of the words he is singing. Thus it is not necessary for him to plan any of his gestures or steps, and he will always enter from the same direction as the prima donna does, or else from [the wing nearest to] the singers' box.

When he reaches the repeat in the *da capo* aria he should change it completely in any way he pleases, regardless of whether or not these changes will go with the accompaniment of bass or violins, and whether they will distort the tempo entirely. This is of no importance for, as was already said, the composer has become resigned to such things.

When the Virtuoso impersonates a prisoner or slave he should appear on the stage wearing a well-powdered wig, a costume richly adorned with jewels, an imposing crest on his helmet, a sword, and long, shiny chains. The latter he should rattle noisily and frequently in order to arouse feelings of compassion in the audience.[25]

He should try to obtain the protection of some famous personality, so that he can sign himself as his Court Virtuoso, Chamber Virtuoso, Backwoods Virtuoso, etc.

[25] The singer's vanity and lack of education were frequently apparent in his choice of costume. Contrary to modern custom, this choice was left up to him, for in most cases the singer had to furnish his own wardrobe with the sole exception of exotic costumes which included only a few types, such as Chinese or Turkish dress. "Fedra or Ippolito would appear on the stage in costumes that were entirely out of character; they looked so much like two gentlemen who had just arrived from Paris that the spectators could not refrain from wishing them a hearty welcome." Planelli, *Dell'opera in musica,* Naples, 1772, p. 180.

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Whenever the impresario's financial reliability is questionable the singer will demand that someone post a bond for him [*pieggiaria*]. Also he will ask for an advance payment to cover travelling and other expenses. Should he be unsuccessful with these demands he will sing just the same and accept tickets, boxes for the season, and compliments and bows instead.

The modern virtuoso should not agree too readily to sing at some social gathering. When he finally does consent he should first post himself in front of a mirror, adjust his wig, straighten his cuffs, and casually lift up his scarf [*fazoletto da collo*] so that the inevitable diamond collar button will show. Then he should reluctantly bang out a few notes on the cembalo, sing from memory and start over a few times as if he just *couldn't* sing today. When the piece with which he has favored his audience is over he should ostentatiously sit down and talk to some lady, all the while hoping for some applause, and then tell her about his travel adventures, and his literary and political affairs. He might then discuss the subject of genius, or, with many sighs and soulful looks, talk about one of his former love affairs, all the time shaking some stray curl from his wig back over his shoulder. Every other minute he should offer her some snuff, each time out of a different box showing his portrait. He might let her inspect some large diamond on which coloratura passages, cadenzas, and trills have been artistically engraved, along with some especially striking scene [*scena di forza*], some sonnets, and some bears killed in a hunt. This, he will say, was cut for him on the orders of one of his extremely well-known protectors; only respect for the same held him [the virtuoso] back from offering it to her as a gift.

Walking in the company of some great literary person the modern virtuoso should never allow him to take the right side, for it stands to reason that most people consider any Singer a Virtuoso but any literary man just an ordinary human being. With this in mind he will urge this educated person to consider the possibility of becoming a Singer himself, one of the more weighty reasons being that Singers (aside from being held in great esteem by all) always have lots of money, while learned people usually die of starvation.

Whenever the Virtuoso has to play a woman's part he should carry on his person a little box [? *bustino*] with a supply of artificial moles, rouge, and a pocket mirror. He should also shave twice daily.

The modern Virtuoso should demand a sizable salary since he has to live all year long as a captain or general with an army, or as a

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prince, king, or emperor with his court, ministers, and counselors. He should show his generosity by presenting his old gloves, shoes, and socks to his servant, especially if the latter should be somewhat related to him. While the singer tries to come to terms with the impresario this servant will take some prompter or orchestra musician to a quiet corner and tell him all kinds of tall stories about his master, Signor Alipio. He will hint that it would be greatly to the impresario's advantage to hire this singer on the spot, sight unseen, for he has never been known to make a single mistake no matter where he has sung, nor does he ever tire or catch cold, and to top it all, he knows all the latest trills, cadenzas, and so on.

All the above instructions apply [not only to the *castrati* but] also if the singer should be a tenor or bass. It must be added that a bass should endeavor to sing in the highest tenor range whereas the tenor should descend as far as he can into the bass range. The tenor, however, should also climb up into the region of the altos by singing falsetto. He will disregard the throaty or nasal tone qualities that will result in the respective cases.

Since Tenors and Basses know everything about composition they should substitute their own arias in all but the very newest operas. During the performance they should beat time with their hands and feet.

If the virtuoso is a soprano or alto he should have some good friend who will spread favorable publicity about him; who will tell people ("let the truth be known") that the singer comes from a distinguished and honored family and that a most dangerous disease had forced him to undergo that certain operation. Also, that one of his brothers is a lecturer in philosophy, another one a doctor; that he has a sister who is a nun [*monaca da Officio*] and another one who is married to one of the town's leading citizens.

If the libretto calls for a duel and if the virtuoso is supposed to receive an arm wound he should nevertheless continue to gesticulate with that arm as if nothing had happened. If he is to take poison he should first sing his aria holding the cup in his hand and waving it around to show that it is empty. He should have a few stock gestures for hands, knees, and feet; these he should alternate from the beginning to the final curtain of the opera.

If he should make mistakes in the same aria several times, or if it does not bring any applause, he should say that it was not written for the stage, or that it is impossible to sing it and that another one

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should be substituted. He might add that on the stage the singer should shine, and not the *maestro di cappella.*

He should always court the *virtuose* and their protectors, and he should never give up hope of obtaining (through his proverbial "virtue" and "exemplary modesty") the titles of count, marquis, *cavaliere,* etc.

Instructions for the Cantatrice

It is of prime importance that the modern prima donna start her career before she has reached the age of thirteen. At that time she need not know much about reading; just as the [adult] stars of the present day do not. All that is really necessary for her is to memorize thoroughly a few old operatic arias, along with some minuets and cantatas which she will render at every possible occasion. The study of solfeggio should not be one of her past or present endeavors: this would be as dangerous for her as it was—as has been mentioned—for the modern Virtuoso.

If an impresario should write to her and offer her a role she should not answer too promptly. When she does reply she should advise him that she cannot make a decision in such haste since she has to consider other offers—whether she has any or not. If and when she finally does accept she should insist on getting the leading part.

If she does not succeed in getting that she should sign the contract anyway, accepting a secondary, or third, or even fourth role. Like the male singer, she should insist on a fake contract that looks more advantageous than it actually is.[26] If she has an uncle, brother, father, or husband who is an instrumentalist, singer, dancer, or composer she will stipulate that he be employed, too.

[26] The prima donna's habit of inserting—or trying to insert—exorbitant stipulations in her contract is thus ridiculed by Metastasio in his *La cantante e l'impresario*:

Dorina (singer): Ci porrò che io non recito
Se non da prima donna, e non voglio
Che la parte sia corta.
Nibbio (impres.): Signora, non importa.
Dorina: Che l'autor de' libretti
Sia sempre amico mio, voglio ancora.
Nibbio: Non importa, Signora.
Dorina: E che oltre l'onorario ella mi debbe
Dar sorbetti e caffè,
Zucchero ed erba tè,
Ottima cioccolata con vaniglia,
Tabacco di Siviglia,
Di Brasile e d'Avana,
E due regali almen' la settimana.

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She must demand that her part be sent to her as soon as possible; Maestro Crica will have to teach it to her, complete with variations, passage work, and other embellishments. Under no circumstances must she try to understand the meaning of any of the words—not by herself, nor with the help of someone else's explanations.

She should be sure to have among her acquaintances some lawyer or doctor who can give her lessons in how to move her arms, stamp her feet, turn her head, blow her nose, etc., but he should not give her any reason for executing any of these motions, for that would confuse her completely. She must ask Maestro Crica to write for her all embellishments in a book especially provided for that purpose, and she will carry that book with her no matter where she goes.

When the impresario visits her for the first time she must not yet allow him to hear her sing but she must say to him (with her mother, as always, at her side): "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to sing for you tonight; I just didn't sleep a wink all last night. Everyone on that boat made such a terrible noise; they acted as if possessed. Two or three of those rascals smoked a pipe; one couldn't see through all that smoke, and I still have a headache from it." And the Mother will chime in: "Ah, my dear Signor Impresario, the inconveniences one has to put up with on these blessed journeys!"

When the impresario then comes back the second time to hear her, bringing the conductor with him, she will fuss around for hours, make a thousand excuses, and then finally oblige with an old war-horse such as the cantata *Impara a non dar Fede*. Then, when she gets stuck in the middle because she forgot how one of the embellishments goes, she will turn to her mother, and out of the suitcase comes that book with the embellishments which she never manages to sing correctly. She will hasten to explain that she is sorry, "but I haven't sung this piece in ages, and furthermore this instrument is tuned somewhat higher than my own, and the recitative is too melancholy, and the aria just isn't in my style". She will go on in this fashion for a while, though of course the real reason for her failure is that Maestro Crica is not there as usual to accompany her.

(D.: Put down that I shall not have to sing unless I am given the leading part, and it must not be a short one either.

N.: Anything, Signora.

D.: I also demand that only friends of mine be employed to write the librettos.

N.: Certainly, Signora.

D.: And that I shall receive from you, aside from my salary, the following: sherbet and coffee, sugar and tea, the very best chocolate made with vanilla, tobacco from Seville, Brazil, and Havana, and at least two presents every week.)

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In the middle of the aria the Virtuosa might suffer a coughing spell, and Her Excellency, the Mother, will intervene: "To tell the truth, this piece didn't arrive until practically yesterday, and she is actually sightreading it now. But you should hear her do the arias from *Giustino* and *Faramondo* which are better than this one anyway. And then there is that aria with the 'cold winter' and 'burning passion', and the one that goes 'così, così, così' and the one with the 'non si può', to say nothing of that wonderful scene with the handkerchief and dagger, and the mad scene. Why, when that girl finishes any one of these everyone is at her feet."

The *cantatrice* should procure letters of recommendation to ladies of the nobility, to gentlemen of distinction, and to nuns. These letters she will present when paying courtesy calls to these people. If these visits do not result in frequent presents she must refrain from further ones, giving her "great respect" as the reason.

It might also be most useful to her to make the acquaintance of some rich and generous businessman, as she might charm him into providing wine, wood, and coal for her, along with other necessities. He might even invite her frequently to have dinner at his house, or he might escort her to some dinner party.

If her rent should become more than she can pay she might move into a small apartment—"because it's nice and close to the theater". When some important or wealthy person calls on her there she will say: "I'm terribly sorry, gentlemen, to have you come to such a miserable little hole—it does look pretty much like one of the cattle pens down by the market, doesn't it? Well, one just has to do the best one can in order to be close to the theater. Back home, of course, I have a nice little house—modest, to be sure, but frequented by very refined people exclusively."

She should endeavor to find her special and most industrious protector whose name will be Signor Procolo. She should also follow the example of the virtuoso mentioned above and suffer from perpetual coughs, headcolds, influenza, headaches, throataches, and hipaches, and lament: "Heavens, what kind of town is this, anyway? My head is heavy as a brick from the terrible air, and the local bread and wine make me so sick that I am half dead."

The librettist together with the impresario may call on her and read to her from the opera. In that case she will pay little if any attention to her own part, yet she will demand just the same that it be changed to suit her individuality, that some lines of the recitative

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be skipped and others added. She will make similar demands for the lamentation scenes, the mad scenes, and the despairing scenes [*scene di Disperazioni*].

She should always be late for rehearsals. When she does show up, escorted by [her zealous protector] Signor Procolo, she should greet everyone with smiling and winking. If her escort should reproach her for this she will snap at him: "What's all this nonsense? Are you jealous, you idiot? I am sick and tired of arguing with you!"

During the ordinary, first rehearsals she should not bother with arias, or with the coloraturas and cadenzas taught her by Maestro Crica. Only during the dress rehearsal should she condescend to sing them.

She should stop the orchestra again and again and have them go back to the beginning, demanding a slower or faster tempo for her aria, depending on the abovementioned embellishments.

She should be absent altogether from many rehearsals and send her mother to excuse her; her mother will say in the customary manner: "Please understand, gentlemen; my poor little darling didn't get a full minute's sleep last night because of all the commotion on the street below her window. All the big carts in Bologna together couldn't have made any more noise! And the house is just full of mice, and as soon as she started to doze off these creatures would simply pounce on her like so many devils, and then towards dawn she lost her night cap and couldn't find it again, and she caught such a terrible cold that I don't think she will be able to stir out of bed all day long."

Her costume will always give her reason to complain: it is shabby, or old-fashioned, or it has already been worn by someone else. She will keep Signor Procolo busy running from tailor to shoemaker and wigmaker, insisting on all kinds of costume alterations.

As soon as the opera is over she must sit down and write to her friends that she received more applause than any of the other singers; that they forced her to repeat every single aria and recitative, that they shouted *encore* even when she blew her nose.[27] That Soandso woman, however, about whom so much fuss had been made — why, they hardly even listened to her, for she sang out of tune, her trills

[27] It was an unwritten law that no actress could appear on the stage without carrying something in her hand. Usually this meant either a handkerchief or a fan. Fairies or sorceresses might carry a magic wand. When a *cantatrice* playing the part of Medea appeared on the stage with empty hands (in 1702), this caused violent objection. Boehn, *Das Bühnenkostüm in Altertum, Mittelalter und Neuzeit,* Berlin, 1921, p. 349.

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were no good, her voice weak, and her acting rotten. But [though she may write this to her friends] she should watch jealously over any applause that the others may receive.

When she sings during a performance she should beat time with her fan or stamp her foot instead. If hers is the leading role she must demand that her mother be given the best seat in the singers' box, and she will instruct her to bring along every night useful objects such as white silk scarves, heavy shoes [? *mulette*], bottles with a gargling solution, needles, artificial beauty spots or moles, rouge, a hot water bottle, gloves, powder, a pocket mirror, and the book with the embellishments.

The Virtuosa should make it an iron rule to hold out all the last syllables as long as possible, for instance, *dolceeee, favellaaaa, quellaaaa, orgoglioooo, sposoooo.* If she should miss the right note several times or if she should change the tempo [unintentionally] she should say: "These damned cembali are tuned higher than ever tonight! Of course, it's nobody's fault but those fine actors' from the intermezzi who think that they alone keep the company from folding up. And have a look at these players in the orchestra — worse than any street-corner fiddler. Not once did they start an aria at the right tempo."

Just before her cue she will always take snuff, be it from her protector or from some friends or extra who will offer it to her and curtsy because of the honor. When the opera is over and she leaves the theater she will ask for scarves to protect her from the fresh air. She will instruct her mother — with good reason — to "be careful, for I'll leave it up to you to get them all back to their owners!"

On the stage she should throw up her arms as frequently as possible and constantly change her fan back and forth from one hand to the other. She should spit whenever a rest in the aria provides an opportunity, and she should make contortions with her head, mouth, and neck. She will be most convincing in a male role if she continually takes off and puts on again her gloves, if she pastes several beauty spots on her face, and if she often forgets to put on a sword, helmet, or wig before she goes on the stage. If some other singer performs a duet with her or has to sing an aria [while she is on stage], the modern Virtuosa — as has already been mentioned of the Virtuoso — will wave greetings to her friends in the boxes and joke with the conductor, players, extras, and prompters. She also might peek out from behind her fan in a most coquettish manner, so that everyone

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will know that she is the Signora Giandussa Pelatutti, and not the empress Filastrocca whose part she is playing. But outside of the theater she will act that part all the more arrogantly.[28]

She will inevitably spread rumors that as soon as the season is over she intends to marry, that she is already engaged to a very distinguished gentleman. If anyone should ask her about her salary she will reply that it is a mere nothing but that money does not mean anything to her as she accepted this engagement only because she wanted to be heard and appreciated. But just the same she should never refuse the aid of any protector or friend no matter what his social position, nationality, profession, or financial status might be.

The *cantatrice* should act as stage director for the company.[29] If hers is a secondary part she must order the librettist at least to have her be the first to come on stage.

As soon as she receives her part she will carefully count both notes and words. If there should be fewer of either than in the prima donna's part she will insist that librettist and composer change this by making both roles equally long. She will be particularly insistent about the length of her train, the ballet, the beauty spots, trills, embellishments, cadenzas, protectors, little owls, and other equally important paraphernalia.

She will pay occasional calls to friends in the boxes and tell them about all her troubles: "The role they gave me this time is absolutely impossible and unsuitable for me, and I'm in terribly bad voice tonight; somehow I don't seem to be able to open my mouth at all. Never in my entire stage career has anything like it

28 Villeneuve devotes some especially sarcastic remarks to the young, uneducated, and arrogant virtuosa. "Between nobility and bourgeoisie there is a kind of mixed estate . . . of the female musicians . . . As soon as a girl decides that she has been destined to follow the career which leads to happiness and prosperity . . . she begins to study music, manages to sing something on the stage or, if she has no voice, she trains herself to the point where she is able to execute a few steps in a ballet. She will immediately assume the title of *virtuosa* . . . ; this will protect her from difficulties with the authorities and from defamations by the public. With this title she . . . acquires the right to give free rein to her taste and her passions. By installing a cembalo in her apartment she is in a position to receive and entertain any person whatsoever . . . and to lead a scandalous life without causing a scandal . . . Those who have a natural talent for singing or dancing . . . will find generous persons who will look after them and who will assume the title of *protector*." Villeneuve, *op.cit.*, p. 160f.

29 Carluccio in Goldoni's *l'Impresario delle Smirne*: "I know everything about the art of music; I choose my costume with the best taste; I correct and coach those singers who do not know all this; and if necessary, I can double as librettist and composer." (Act 3, scene 3.)

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happened to me. And how can they expect anybody to sing and act at the same time a part as boring and stupid as this one. It's so dead that one can't do a thing with it! If the impresario or conductor don't like it why don't they sing it themselves? I am sick and tired of it! And if they won't leave me alone I'll be glad to tell them where they all can go [*son Mustazziba d'fari al Bal dal Pianton*]; don't think that *I* am afraid of their bad temper; I know well where to turn for protection!"

The modern Virtuosa should sing cadenzas that last for an hour each, and stop frequently to take a breath. She should always try to sing the highest notes, which are beyond her range, and during every trill she must turn and twist her neck. Asked about her range by the conductor she will invariably claim that it is two or three notes wider in either direction than is actually the case.

To insure success and a large audience for the opera she should appear every night accompanied by ten or twelve masked friends, all to be given free tickets, to say nothing of her protector Signor Procolo, along with a few sub-Procolos and her dramatic coach.

The impresario might wish to give an audition to the Virtuosa, in which case she will sing [a quiet, contemplative aria] and act and gesticulate violently at the same time. A [dramatic] duet scene, however, she will render sitting down, and she will entrust the second part to her Mother, the protector, or her chambermaid.

She will make it a habit to attend dress rehearsals at other opera houses. During these she should start applauding the singers when everyone else is quiet, so that no one can fail to notice her presence. Then she should turn to whoever happens to be sitting next to her and say: "Why is it that they never give such an aria with such a recitative to *me,* or that scene with the dagger, or the poison, or with the kneeling-down and lamenting? Just listen how that wonderful virtuosa, whom they pay 5555 Lire, manages to muffle every single effective note! But of course they would never give *me* such a chance. It's always the same old impossible roles, the same endless soliloquies full of all kinds of nonsense where one never can show off what little ability one has!"

As soon as she receives her part for the next opera she should send the arias to her voice teacher, Maestro Crica, so that he can add for her the usual coloraturas, variations, and embellishments. She should do this right away and not waste any time on having the accompaniment copied. Then Maestro Crica can write underneath

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the voice part, where the accompaniment should have been copied, any embellishments he happens to think of at the moment; the more the merrier, though he does not have the faintest idea about the composer's intentions regarding the tempo of the arias, or the accompaniment by cembalo or orchestra. Thus the *cantatrice* will be able to sing something different at every performance.

If someone should compliment the Virtuosa she must always answer that she really is in bad voice, that she does not know how to sing, or that she is entirely out of practice.

Before leaving home [for the opera season] she should ask the impresario for half of her salary. She will need this money to pay for the trip, to buy stuffing cotton for the improvement of her figure in the necessary places, to buy trills, appoggiaturas, etc. She should bring along a parrot, an owl, a tomcat, two puppies, and one dog about to have puppies, as well as other assorted animals. During the trip Signor Procolo will be in charge of food and drink for them.

Someone might ask her for some information about another Virtuosa, and she will say: "Well, I just know her very casually and have never had the opportunity of singing in the same production with her." But if she did appear with her she will say: "I'd rather be silent than say anything bad about a colleague. Of course, she had only a very insignificant part that time, with no more than three arias, and [she sang them so badly that] after the second performance they cut out two of them. And, to be honest, she has the appearance of a dressed-up flour bag, and her rhythm becomes shaky as soon as she has to look up to someone on the stage with her [instead of at the conductor]. But you should see how she behaves backstage, or when she is in a box with someone! And then, she is terribly jealous and becomes simply furious every time someone else receives any applause. And, of course, she isn't exactly young any more, in spite of the stories her protector and her mother want people to believe, about her being a mere child. And, of course, the way she carried on during her last engagement didn't help her reputation much either."

The *prima donna* should not pay the least bit of attention to the *seconda donna,* nor should the *seconda* to the *terza,* and so forth. If they are on the stage together they must never listen to one another, and while one sings an aria the other should retire to the wings, accept some snuff from her protector, blow her nose, or examine herself in the mirror.

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If the Virtuosa should have an especially good role but not have any success with it she will say that she'd rather be dead than again be in a scene together with this or that singer who always spoils her best lines. If, on the other hand, her part should not be an outstanding one, she will protest that the librettist and composer have ruined her career once and for all, [that they gave her such an insignificant part] in spite of the fact that Signor Procolo had told them how good she was and implored them and bribed them.

She will never comply with the impresario's wishes, on top of her eternal complaints about her role, her being late for rehearsals, and her leaving out many arias.

If she is the happy owner of some sonnets written in her honor she should display these conspicuously on the walls of her studio.[30] Those printed on silk she should give to her mother to sew together —though the colors may clash—making tablecloths or scarves out of them. She must send her librettos, arias, sonnets, epigrams, and some little pieces of cloth from her costumes to her protector, if the latter did not come to the city with her for the season. At the beginning of an aria she will keep a close eye on the conductor or the concertmaster, hoping that one of them will give her a sign at the precise moment she is to come in.

The modern Virtuosa will endeavor to sing her arias differently every night, though her variations may result in harsh dissonances with the bass or the violins, whether the latter double her part or have an independent accompaniment. If she should start singing in the wrong key this will be of no importance either as all modern conductors are deaf and dumb. Whenever the Virtuosa has exhausted her supply of variations she might try to insert embellishments even in the trills. That is about the only thing which the Virtuose of the present time have not tried yet.

When she sings duets she should never get together with her partner, and especially during the cadenza she should take all the time *she* wants, taking pride in the exhibition of long trills. She should make it clear that she does not want any arias that have a soft, dying-away kind of ending, for she just loves a flashy finale and exit, to the shouts of *evviva* and *buon viaggio* from the audience.

[30] This practice seems to have been particularly widespread in Venice: Burney still reports that at a performance he attended "the crowd and applause were prodigious. Printed sonnets, in praise of singers and dancers, were thrown from the slips, and seen flying about in great numbers, for which the audience scrambled with much eagerness." *Dr. Burney's continental travels* 1770-1772, C. H. Glover, ed., London, 1927, p. 47.

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She must never read the libretto, for, as already pointed out, the modern Virtuosa must never understand its meaning. When the finale is reached, with the solution of all the plot's difficulties, she will do well not to show much interest, to start laughing, etc.

In arias and recitatives of action she will do well to employ the same stock gestures every night, to move her head and fan in exactly the same way, and to blow her nose always at the same moment, displaying a beautiful handkerchief which usually — especially at a very dramatic moment — is brought on the stage by a page.

If the part of the *cantatrice* requires her to have some other character put in chains while she is singing an aria addressed to him expressing disdain or fury, she should use the preceding *ritornello* to chat with her victim, to giggle, and to point out to him some friends in one of the boxes. Whenever in an aria the words "cruel", "traitor", "tyrant", etc., occur she will smile at her protector who sits in one of the boxes or stands in the wings. For the words "dearest", "my own", or "my life", she will turn towards the prompter, the bear, or some extra.

She will make it her business to introduce into every aria, be it presto, *patetico,* or allegro, a new kind of embellishment executed in rapid sextuplets. This will help her to avoid the danger of showing variety in her singing, which is no longer fashionable. The higher the notes she can sing the easier it will be for her to obtain a leading role.

She will shed torrents of tears (because of professional jealousy) whenever there is applause for some other singer, for the bear, or for the earthquake. She will expect Signor Procolo to show proper enthusiasm at the end of each aria by providing the customary sonnets [in her praise].

If the Virtuosa has to play the part of a man her mother will say of her: "Really, it's true that no one else does that sort of thing as well as my little darling. I suppose it isn't for me to say, but in such parts she has earned everlasting fame. She may be a little hunchbacked and plump, but she certainly does not show it on the stage, where she stands up straight as a spindle and looks pretty as a gem. She is so slender, and her legs are so well-constructed, like two pillars, and her walk is ever so graceful. Anyone who wants to can find out how well she did with that important part of the 'tyrant' last year at Lugo,[31] where they give all those grand operas. Why, just everyone in the audience was crazy about her."

[31] Lugo: an insignificant village between Bologna and Ravenna.

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She should know from memory everyone else's part, better than her own, and should sing it along during the performance. She should not fail to disturb everyone else as much as possible, while they are singing, at which time she can also amuse herself with the bear or with some extra, making much noise all the time. If Signor Procolo should greet, talk with, or applaud some young girl singer she will scold him violently and say to him: "Will you stop this business right away, or shall I box your ears or hit your sad face with my fists until you have had enough, you decrepit old idiot? Don't you have your hands full enough with one of us that you should play the dandy and ladies' man, making a miserable fool of yourself? And that person over there—I know well what *she* ought to do, the old gossip: she'd better look after her own affairs or I might hit her over the head with her role until there's nothing left but shreds!"

(*To be concluded*)

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