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**The Italian Opera between Prague and Dresden
in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century**

(For Ortrun Landmann)

One of the most interesting chapters in the musical relations between Saxony and Bohemia consists in the history of opera in their respective capitals. Falling on the turn of the century, the very beginnings of public opera in Prague bear certain Dresden-like connotations: in 1698, Count Heřman Jakub Czernin consulted with the former Saxon *Kapellmeister* Nicolaus Adam Strungk the idea of founding an operatic scene in Prague. Around the same time, Strungk was attempting to produce operas in Leipzig in collaboration with Girolamo Sartorio who – undoubtedly not by mere chance – was responsible for the first public operatic productions in Prague between 1702 and 1704.¹ Yet, opera in Prague did not fledge fully until the year following the coronation festivities which included, among others, the spectacular, open-air performances of *Costanza e Fortezza* by Johann Joseph Fux in 1723. It is worth mentioning that the singers in the Italian operatic company, which Antonio Maria Peruzzi and Antonio Denzio brought to Bohemia in 1724, were contracted to engage also in productions outside Prague, namely in Dresden and Leipzig.² While it is not likely that any tours of Denzio's company to Saxony took place in the end, conducting business within the broader Central-European context and achieving a stable income ranked high among the priorities of all the other Prague impresarios. This is well apparent in the case of the Mingotti brothers, who divided their time equally between Prague and Dresden in the period between 1744 and 1747, or in that of Giovanni Battista Locatelli who chose Prague as his base in 1748, leaving there only in 1757, after the Seven Year War (which broke out in Saxony in 1756) started to affected Bohemia.³

The closest interconnection between the opera in Prague and Dresden took place in the course of the period when the Italian merchant Giuseppe Bustelli was active in Prague; in the summer of 1764 he got a hereditary lease for the Kotzen Theatre and the following year he also accepted an offer from the Dresden court. Until 1777 (1778 in Dresden) Bustelli managed the two scenes, partially using identical repertoire. Regular contacts contributed to a greater flow of music material (handwritten scores as well as printed librettos), but also to the interchange of artists on a larger scale. Some aspects of the link established by Bustelli carried over even to the 1780s when it was Antonio Bertoldi (and

¹ František Černý and others, *Dějiny českého divadla*, I, Praha 1968, p. 256; Angela Romagnoli, From the Hapsburgs to the Hanswursts, up to the Advent of Count Sporck: the Slow Progress of Italian Opera on the Bohemian Scene, in: *Italian Opera in Central Europe* (ed. M. Bucciarelli, N. Dubowy, R. Strohm), Berlin 2006, pp. 83 f.; Alena Jakubcová a kolektiv, *Starší divadlo v českých zemích*, Praha 2007, p. 125.

² Daniel E. Freeman, *The Opera Theater of Count von Sporck in Prague*, Stuyvesant 1992, p. 28 and 282.

³ Oscar Teuber, *Geschichte des Prager Theaters. Von den Anfängen des Schauspielwesens bis auf die neueste Zeit*, I, Prag 1883, pp. 194–219, 223–241, 28 f.; FÜRSTENAU 1862, Bd. 2, pp. 249–254, 280–285; Robert Proelß, *Geschichte des Hoftheaters in Dresden*, Dresden 1878, pp. 164–166, Jakubcová, pp. 350–354.

later his son Andrea) who was responsible for the performances in Dresden, and Pasquale Bondini (and later Domenico Guardasoni) who produced operas in Prague.⁴

The links between the opera in Dresden and Prague were well known to scholars such as Oscar Teuber, Moritz Fürstenau or Robert Proelß whose research has been a valuable source of knowledge and information for musicologists until today. An important shift, however, occurred in the latter half of the 20th century owing to the thoroughgoing research of many years carried out by Ortrun Landmann whose work has significantly broadened the knowledge of the opera repertoire in Dresden. This, however, contributed also to the study of opera in Prague. As early on as in 1976, Landmann referred to the Prague provenience of some of the music deposited in the Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden (SLUB), which holds a considerable amount of scores connected with Prague opera as well.⁵ In some respects, the present study follows up the previous research: indeed it is the comparative approach which enables us to broaden the scope of questions and to check effectively some of the traditionally accepted opinions which have frequently been quoted in the accounts of the opera in Prague or Dresden.

My aim in this article is to outline the operatic repertoire in the two cities from the period between 1765 and 1785; to point out its common as well as dissimilar aspects, and – through probes into several selected works – to interpret demonstrable differences in the general offer, as well as the period performance practice. Even though such task is clearly made more difficult by the limited amount of sources – the Prague performances being documented predominantly in librettos but only exceptionally through musical sources – the comparison, limited as it needs be, is made possible by the presence of several scores in the SLUB (and some other libraries) that demonstrably are related to Prague or suggest arrangements identical to those that were carried out in Dresden. The period covering the twenty years between 1765 and 1785 has intentionally been chosen to cover not only the time when Bustelli was active in Prague and Dresden, but also to allow us to look at the strategies and achievements of some of the other impresarios.

Comparison of Repertoire – Basic Data

Let us start with some general points. By simply adding up the individual titles (disregarding the later repeated performances and alterations), we get the following sums: Dresden – 144; Prague – 129.⁶ The relatively balanced numbers show to a long-term, similar performance practice in the two cities, although this may seem surprising considering the supposed differences in the character of the audiences and the number of inhabitants which was, after 1765, higher in Prague (by 10 to 20

⁴ Jakubcová, pp. 67–71, 92–95.

⁵ LANDMANN 1976 and LANDMANN 2002.

⁶ LANDMANN 1976 and Pravoslav Kneidl, *Libreta italské opery v Praze 18. století, III. Opera v Divadle v Kotcích*, in: Strahovská knihovna, 2 (1967), pp. 115–187, and Pravoslav Kneidl, *Libreta italské opery v Praze 18. století, IV. Opera v Thunovském paláci na Malé Straně*, in: Strahovská knihovna, 3 (1968), pp. 190–201.

thousand).⁷ More important are, of course, the structure of the audience and the attendance of the performances, even though these are factors almost entirely unknown to us (see also below).

A certain idea is to be gained through a comparison of the seating capacity of the theatres. Moretti's theatre built in 1755 seated around 350 people. After an extension in 1783 it was even 814 spectators. The Kotzen Theatre was, at the latest till the mid 1750s, of a comparable size (the original 15 boxes were extended to 41), although the disposition might have been different (there were three tiers of boxes in Dresden whereas in Prague only two). Similarly, the theatre of Count Thun, used in Prague for public opera performances from 1781 to 1784, had some 300 seats. It is also interesting to note that the reconstruction of Moretti's theatre coincided with the opening of the large Nostitz theatre in 1783.⁸

As far as Prague productions are concerned, the total numbers do not have the same weight as in the case of Dresden where the preserved documentation of opera productions is far more precise.⁹ The sum of Prague productions is nowadays reconstructed almost entirely on the basis of the librettos, still only a part of these have come down to us. It is thus presumable that the proportion of the titles performed in the two cities might have been even more balanced than we are entitled to presume on the basis of the preserved material.

Yet, it should be pointed out that the operation of opera houses in the examined period was not quite continuous. Especially in Prague several gaps occurred that were occasioned by various external circumstances. Bustelli opened his opera in Prague in the autumn of 1764 and performed there until the summer of the following year. The death of Emperor Francis Stephen, the husband of Maria Theresa, on 18 August 1765 was followed by a court mourning which virtually did for the following theatre season in all the Habsburg Monarchy. Bustelli was lucky to have had negotiated in March with the Dresden court where a substantial reorganization of the theatrical scene had just taken place: he transferred to Dresden at the latest by September 1765, staying there until the middle of July of the following year.¹⁰ The Prague productions, however, resumed again another year later in the summer of 1766. As Bustelli had managed to assemble another company in the meantime, there were now two coexisting companies operating in Prague, initially even playing different repertoire. As the Prague ensemble staged only opera seria at first, the Dresden company travelled to Prague in the summer months to supply performances of opera buffa.¹¹

However, for two successive seasons (1769/70 a 1770/71), Bustelli did not perform at all in Prague – for the carnival of 1769 he was in Ljubljana, and in 1770 he was in Hamburg and

⁷ After the Seven Years' War, Dresden had 44.760 inhabitants while Prague's population was almost 55.000. In the following years the Prague population grew faster and by 1784 the number was already more than 76.000, whereas Dresden reached only some 64.000 by 1831. – Reiner Gross + Uwe John (ed.), *Geschichte der Stadt Dresden*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 2006, p. 502; Jan Vlk and others, *Dějiny Prahy*, Praha–Litomyšl 2007, vol. I, pp. 463–465.

⁸ Milada Vilímková: *Kotce*, in: *Divadlo v Kotcích* (ed. F. Černý), Praha 1992, pp. 16–32 and XXXIV; FÜRSTENAU 1875, Heft 25, 1875, pp. 46 f.; Winfried Höntsch, *Opernmetropole Dresden*, Dresden 1996, pp. 72 f.

⁹ See LANDMANN 1976.

¹⁰ Proelß, pp. 211–217, Jakubcová, p. 92.

¹¹ This is obvious from detailed comparison of the librettos where the cast is also given.

Braunschweig, yielding his position in the Kotzen Theatre (where he had been alternating with the drama ensemble) temporarily to French actors.¹² Another interruption, which took place towards the end of the 1770s, was common to both cities. In Prague, performances stopped in the spring of 1777. By the summer, most of the singers were trying their fortune at the Viennese *Kärntnertortheater* in which Bustelli got to produce the performances of Italian opera, starting at the latest in 1779. The preface to the libretto of the Prague production of *Zenobia* suggests¹³ that the termination of Prague performances in 1777 was a tactical move which seems to have been related to the deregulation by Emperor Joseph II of the theatre business in Vienna in 1776.¹⁴ We cannot know for sure what plans Bustelli had for Dresden, but he provably left his post there in 1778, having been driven out by the war of the Bavarian Succession in 1778–1779.¹⁵ While productions in Dresden resumed soon after the war in 1780, in Prague opera most probably remained silent until the autumn of 1781.¹⁶

Quite understandably, the suggested events influenced also the number of new productions staged during individual seasons. Within one year, Dresden usually saw 6 to 7 new titles, this trend continuing well into the 1780s. In Prague, however, the statistics are much less stable. While in the years when the Dresden ensemble performed in Prague, the number was naturally higher; in the beginning of the 1770s Prague produced fewer new operas per year (4–5). Between 1774 and 1776 the number increases again, but the productions include also some works which had been staged in Prague in the 1760s. The situation in Prague reached greater stability in the 1780s when the operatic scene was taken over by Bondini who staged at least 10 new works per year (i. e. during the season proper, from the autumn till the spring), while in Dresden the number varied from 5 to 9 during this period.

As regards the average number of performances of the individual titles, in the case of Prague the necessary information is missing. But taking into account the fact that the Italian opera usually split the performing days of the week with the German ensemble (performing dramas and singspiels in German (or exceptionally in Czech)), we can estimate that each title could have had around 8 performances. (The rule was 3 operatic performances in week, in Prague as well as in Dresden)¹⁷. The more successful productions probably reached the same number of performances as the most popular pieces in Dresden where Gassmann's *L'amore artigiano*, for instance, had 16 performances in 1770 (8 in the spring and 8 in the autumn), while Piccinni's *La buona figliuola* was played 7 times in 1765, and 11 times the next year.¹⁸ Yet, it is possible to observe opposite cases when an opera was performed only two or three times (e. g. *Il viaggiatore ridicolo* by Gasmann in 1766 or Cimarosas's *I*

¹² Teuber I, pp. 297–302; Jakubcová, p. 94.

¹³ *Zenobia*, CZ-Pu, 65 E 4140, fol. A2r-v.

¹⁴ Jakubcová, p. 94; Marc Niubo: *Italská opera v Thunovském divadle a její osvícenské motivy*, in: *Post tenebras spero lucem. Duchovní tvář českého a moravského osvícenství* (ed. D. Tinková a J. Lormann), Praha 2008, p. 346.

¹⁵ Proelß, p. 225; LANDMANN 2002, p. 18.

¹⁶ Niubo 2008, p. 346.

¹⁷ Proelß, p. 217.

¹⁸ LANDMANN 1976, pp. 20 and 34.

tre amanti in 1781).¹⁹ An exact comparison with Prague is difficult. For the examined period, there is only a single, incomplete “theatre-calendar” for the 1771/72 season when 4 opere serie were staged: Paisiello’s *Demetrio* (14 performances at the most) and Sacchini’s *Adriano in Siria* (11 performances at the most) in autumn, and *Demofonte* by the local composer J. A. Koželuh and *Cajo Mario* by Jommelli during the carnival season (both together 18 performances at the most). These data, however, cannot be applied too generally as they concern only one and rather specific season: Bustelli had just resumed his operatic productions in Prague after a two years’ gap, employing an entirely new ensemble.²⁰

Differences in Repertoire – Opera Buffa versus Opera Seria

Although the data concerning the Prague performances in this period are not available, the comparison of the titles alone that were staged in the two cities leads to some very interesting findings. The number of identical works consists about half of the repertoire – 73 (or 78 if we are to consider the titles that had been staged in the other city prior to or following the stated period).²¹ Theoretically, we could expect even a greater unity. Yet, such a thing would undoubtedly have marred Bustelli’s good reputation, eliciting displeasure from the Dresden court which subsidized Bustelli’s productions.²² It could also have diminished the number of potential spectators for the performances in the “neighbouring city”: the fact that opera in Dresden was occasionally visited by spectators from Prague is documented also in the presence of Dresden prints of librettos in former aristocratic libraries. Trips in the opposite direction can – although on a smaller scale – also have taken place.

The differences in repertoire, however, have also reflected variations in the character of the two cities and in their opera followers. This is fully confirmed in the titles which were not common to the two cities. While half of these, more precisely the 29 works which were staged only in Prague, belong to the genre of opera seria, the common repertoire consists only in various types of opera buffa. At first sight, this might appear to propose a striking difference: opera seria to have been lacking from the court opera in Dresden, while it was staged on the municipal scene in Prague? Yet, let us not be misled by the usual labels and simplifying views: the main reason for the transformation of the repertoire in Dresden was quite certainly a financial one. The Seven Years’ War had drained Saxony’s treasury and was followed by necessary reforms and restrictions, affecting also the functioning of the court opera.²³ It was Bustelli who was to be appointed as head of the newly introduced system of *impresa*.

¹⁹ LANDMANN 1976, pp. 120 f.

²⁰ Teuber, pp. 374 f., Kneidl: Pražské činoherní a operní texty z doby působení Divadla v Kotcích, in: *Divadlo v Kotcích* (ed F. Černý), Praha 1992, p. 275; Jakubcová, p. 94.

²¹ The bases for the comparison purvey Kneidl 1966–1969 and LANDMANN 1976.

²² Proelß, pp. 217 f., LANDMANN 2002, p. 17.

²³ Proelß, pp. 211–217.

Still, this only answers the question in part: theoretically, Bustelli in Dresden could have offered identical or similar performances of the *opere serie* that he was to stage in Prague in the following years. As it seems, however, the Saxon court showed little interest in such performances. Even though the performances were open to public (a fact often disregarded by Czech musicology) and the members of the court only reserved for themselves „eine bestimmte Anzahl von Logen und Plätzen“,²⁴ it was indeed the ruling family and the *Directeur des Plaisirs*, designated by the monarch, who dictated the basic direction of the repertoire, if not much more. There is little doubt that in the eyes of the musically gifted Maria Antonia Walpurgis, her brother in law, Prince Xaver, as well as to other members of the House of Wettin, opera seria meant top artistic performance by some of the best Italian singers, regular supply of new magnificent stage sets and other luxuries, which the court – in the midst of the destroyed Dresden – simply could not afford. To lower the standard achieved during the era of Augustus III and his *Kapellmeister* Hasse, however, was quite unacceptable for the ruling circles, out of political as well as personal reasons. Thus preference was given to opera buffa with its distinct artistic requirements, social connotations and functions to be staged in the smaller, already mentioned Moretti-Theatre, whereas opera seria was produced only exceptionally and on special occasions.²⁵ We have no way to ascertain what the reaction to this transformation was on the part of the public; according to the assertions of historians, however, many of the members of the court recalled opera seria for a long time afterwards and wished for its return.²⁶

In Prague, Bustelli was working in a different situation which was formed to a certain degree by the needs of a broader and more varied public. Even though the theatre was run by the city, the final say in the repertoire certainly belonged to the Prague aristocracy (that had its representatives at the top of the city administration too). The idea of aristocratic audience was surely related to Bustelli's repeated, and failed, attempts between 1766 and 1773 to base the repertoire above all on opera seria, perhaps also considering the repertoire of the German theatre-company of J. J. Brunian who staged both dramas and singspiels.²⁷ The quality of opera seria performances (especially in the season 1771/72) did not meet with the expectations of part of the public (nor the singspiels however), although the harsh criticism published in local journal could be motivated also by national preconceptions favouring the modern German theatre.²⁸

The prevalence of opera buffa thus can no longer be primarily explained by the composition of the audiences (although it can explain its early coming to Prague in 1750s). It should be viewed in the special context of the Prague theatre-events of the 1770s as well as reflecting the general changes

²⁴ Proelß, p. 217; LANDMANN 2002, p. 14. – From 1770 it concerns 18 loges, see Teuber I, p. 331 and FÜRSTENAU 1875, p. 52.

²⁵ One such occasion was for example the marriage of Frederick Augustus III to Palatine countess Maria Amalie Auguste (1769) on which J. G. Naumann staged his *La clemenza di Tito*, the last “true” opera seria in Dresden. – Proelß, p. 224, Engländer: Das Ende der opera seria in Dresden, in: *Neues Archiv für sächsische Geschichte und Altertumskunde*, 39 (1918), pp. 311–324.

²⁶ Proelß, p. 229; Richard Engländer, Domenico Fischietti als Opernkomponist, in: *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, II (1920), p. 21.

²⁷ Kneidl 1992, p. 266–285.

²⁸ Teuber I, pp. 302 f., 331–333.

within the genre in Italy: while opera seria was going through a crisis, and was looking for new forms of expression, opera buffa was developing and gaining an increasing social credit. For Bustelli, in the given economical circumstances, it was virtually impossible to reach the first-class quality in both genres. That is why during the last stay of Bustelli in Prague (1774–1776), opera buffa took over and opera seria remained mostly as an elegant complement of the repertoire. The same thing occurred when Pasquale Bondini renewed opera performances in the palace theatre of Count Thun in the autumn of 1781.²⁹

The significance of aristocracy for the successful theatre enterprise in the Czech capital is also documented in frequent dedications to members of nobility and the typical florid reverential tone of the prefaces in printed librettos. Yet, these dedications and indeed the performances themselves also contributed to the representation of nobility, this being one of the reasons why the Italian opera and especially opera seria, where those dedications are most frequently to be encountered, had its secure position in the cultural life of the city. It needs be pointed out, though, that these representational functions of the Prague opera did not reach the same level and extent as in a court opera and we can therefore assume that the relations between the individual protectors or patrons and the “Operisten” have also been more liberal, thus producing less pressure on the particular cast and the character of the repertoire, and relatively more “freedom” for the impresario.

This freedom, however, had its own limits and difficulties. Perhaps the most illustrative example is to be found in the fate of the German theatre in the 1770s when the threat of the bankruptcy of the company of Johann Brunian (who leased his space from Giuseppe Bustelli) led first to imposed management, to be resolved in the end through a generous intervention of Count Prokop Czernin who covered Brunian’s debts and, together with a group of other nobles and scholars, worked with Brunian on the future development of the company including a careful choice of repertoire and casting.³⁰ While this is no doubt a specific case with indisputable economic connotations, considered in the wider context of the Enlightened Europe, and of the efforts at the implementation of modern German theatre that reached Prague around the same time, such strong personal concern among nobility no longer seems so much exceptional.

A more common phenomenon, pertaining mostly to opera, was the favouring of popular artists, as well as works. This practice has most commonly been observed – even though with few details as yet – in relation to Dresden: “The singers who were not liked at the court had to be dismissed immediately and operas that had not been appreciated had to leave the court just as fast, sometimes to be offered to the ‘civic’ audiences.”³¹ The frequency of such interventions is yet to be ascertained. It is for sure, however, that it occurred as well in Prague, as suggested in a famous episode

²⁹ Niubo2008, pp. 346–351 and Marc Niubo, *Pasquale Anfossi a italská opera v Praze*, (dissertation thesis), Praha 2009, pp. 127–154.

³⁰ Alena Jakubcová, *Kancelář divadelního ředitele hraběti Černínovi*, in: *Divadelní revue*, 22 (2011), No. 1, pp. 37 f.

³¹ LANDMANN 2002, p. 15. One of such details, leasing the soprano Anna Zannini in 1769 because of the wish of the elector, has been mentioned in: LANDMANN 1987, p. 407.

from much later on. In October 1787, a certain Prague lady strove to thwart the production of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (which was to be staged in place of the yet unrehearsed performance of *Don Giovanni*) on the occasion of the visit of Archduchess Maria Theresa and her brother, Archduke Francis. Following the lady's initiative, *Figaro* was banned by someone in the higher ranks, the ban being immediately taken back on the instruction of Emperor Joseph II and the performance of *Figaro* could have taken place in the end.³² Even though it was a rather special occasion (an exceptional "state" visit in connection with an opera based on a banned drama by Beaumarchais), it illustrates the differences of opinion within the Prague audience, as well as the power and influence residing within some of its strata.

Composers and Their Works. Between Dramaturgy and Performance Practice

As is conveniently demonstrated in the following table, a great part of the repertoire in Prague as well as in Dresden consisted of the most famous works of Italian authors. With the exception of works by Salieri, whose relative popularity testifies to the attention paid to the goings on in Vienna, the impresarios modelled their repertoire concerning the situation in Italy. In this respect, the most important difference between the two scenes consists in the works by Piccinni who was more profusely staged in Dresden than in Prague.

The most performed composers between 1765-1785

Composer	common titles	different titles	
		Dresden	Prague
Niccolo Piccinni	9	9	1
Baldassare Galuppi	8	1	1
Pasquale Anfossi	7	2	3
Domenico Cimarosa	7	2	0
Pietro Guglielmi	5	5	3
Giovanni Paisiello	5	3	4
Antonio Salieri	5	3	1

The basic offer was supplemented in varied degree with operas by other Italians like Giuseppe Gazzaniga, Antonio Sacchini, Giuseppe Sarti a Tommaso Traetta, but also by Florian Leopold Gassmann who could have been attractive in the eyes of the Prague audiences as a "Czech" author and

³² An account of the whole event (quoted also by Teuber II, p. 228 and others) is to be found in a letter which Mozart wrote from Prague during the preparations for the performance of *Don Giovanni* to his friend Gottfried Jacquin in Vienna. – Mozart-Briefe, vol. 4, Kassel 1963, pp. 54–56, see p. 55.

a Viennese court composer rolled into one. Among the authors who lived in Prague or Dresden for a period of time, but were staged in both places, count Antonio Boroni, Domenico Fischietti, Bernardo Ottani, Giovanni Marco Rutini, Joseph Schuster, and Johann Gottlieb Naumann. It is worth mentioning here that Boroni was much more frequently produced in Prague than in Dresden since his opere serie were also staged in the former, this being well documented in the number of operatic arias preserved in the organ lofts of Prague churches.³³ For a similar reason not one work by Josef Mysliveček, not to say by Jan Antonín Koželuh, was staged in Dresden: within the dramatic genre both composers dedicated themselves exclusively to opera seria.³⁴

It is also interesting to note the case of the tenor Vincenzo Righini who commenced his career as an opera composer in Prague and ended up holding the kapellmeister position at the Berlin court. His Goldonian comic operas, not to mention his don-juan opera *Il convitato di pietra* (1776),³⁵ however, were not considered suitable for Dresden by Bustelli. Among the Dresden authors, the ones most popular in Prague were Johann Gottlieb Naumann, certainly the most important opera composer at the Court of Saxony at the time.³⁶ It was, nevertheless, almost only his buffe that were staged (with the exception of *Armida*), among which we can newly count the comic opera *Ipocondriaco*. The unique libretto for the Prague production from 1784, which has so far evaded the attention of historians, is deposited in the collection of the Warsaw university library.³⁷ Among the composers most “neglected” by Prague impresarios we should name Franz Seydelmann whose dramatic works were probably never produced in Prague.

Another typical common feature is the absence of the so-called “reform” works by Jommelli, Traetta, or Gluck from the two scenes. As regards Dresden we can look for an explanation in the already mentioned intentional specialization in opera buffa; in both cases financial matters played their important role. These works called not only for first-class singers, but also special sets, choir and ballet, not to speak of the convenience of the presence of authors or at least protagonists instructed in the correct manner of acting, all quite important factors on which the success of the production depended. It was for these reasons that those works, just as the opere serie from the 1770s and 80s inspired by the “reform”, did not become part of the repertoire of the Italian companies and were staged neither in Prague nor in Dresden. The situation changed, to some extent, during the 1780s as new dramatic types of opera semiseria came to the fore, this change being reflected gradually in both cities.³⁸

³³ Otakar Kamper, *Hudební Praha XVIII. věku*, Praha 1936, pp. 118–135.

³⁴ Tomislav Volek, Italská opera a další druhy zpívaného divadla, in: *Divadlo v Kotcích*, (ed. F. Černý), Praha 1992, p. 55.

³⁵ David Buch, The Don Juan Tradition, Eighteenth-Century Supernatural Musical Theater and Vincenzo Righini's 'Il convitato di pietra', in: *Hudební věda*, XLI (2004), pp. 295–307.

³⁶ Marc Niubo: Johann Gottlieb Naumann and Bohemia, in: *Johann Gottlieb Naumann und die europäische Musikkultur des ausgehenden 18. Jahrhunderts*, Hildesheim, Curych, New York 2006, pp. 309–351.

³⁷ PL-Wu, sign. 28.20.4.5383.

³⁸ *Le nozze di Figaro* were first staged in Dresden in the singspiel adaptation by the company of Joseph Seconda in 1795 in Theater a. d. Linckeschen Bad. In Italian the opera was given in 1815, see Proelß, p. 357,

One of the features, typical of the Prague operatic scene, is the reception of the works of W. A. Mozart which is an issue, however, which belongs to the period after 1785. The singular reception of Mozart and the following great cult of the composer, was brought about not only by the well-established tradition of Italian opera, but also by those moments which differentiate Prague from Dresden: variously articulated rivalry with Vienna (in contrast to Dresden), greater (in comparison to Dresden) support of the “German” theatre (of which Mozart was, at least in the eyes of some strata of the audiences, a celebrated exponent), and, not least, Mozart’s rich personal relations in the artistic and aristocratic circles of Prague society.³⁹

An isolated, but telling indicator consists in the productions of the two 18th-century opere buffe most endowed with elements of social criticism: *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* by G. Paisiello and the already mentioned *Le nozze di Figaro* by W. A. Mozart. Both had performances in Prague not more than a few months after their opening nights in Vienna. In Dresden, on the other hand, *Il re Teodoro* was produced in 1791 at the earliest (and with a significantly altered text and under a different title – *Gli avventurieri* – at that), while *Figaro* had to wait until 1796, resp. 1815.⁴⁰ It would be very interesting indeed to know if Bertoldi even dared to propose *Il re Teodoro* in the original version, or which factors led to the adaptation. If we are to follow the socially-critical line of the text, the principal alteration made by Catterino Mazzola is the change of the escaped king Teodoro into the adventurer Verdipoggio who passes himself as a nobleman. Among the several text-modifications, typical are the discarded verses showing the questionable manners of the hero’s sister Cedalisa (originally Belisa). Still, the theme of affectation and hypocrisy is even intensified in certain passages – the criticism of manners in common characters was obviously considered acceptable.⁴¹

The whole issue of interventions and censorship from the side of the court-officials or even the sovereign has been studied very incompletely so far and would deserve a special study. The situation in Prague was undoubtedly more liberal (at least in 1780s), some forms of censorship, however, were practised as well. According the printed libretto, *Il re Teodoro* was not performed exactly in the original wording, but with few cuts and modifications in the most critical verses.⁴²

Discussing Paisiello’s opera we have touched upon another important theme concerning the form of the staged works or, in other words, the differences between the productions of the same works in the two cities. Such a comparison can of course be carried out only in rough outlines. Yet, some probes into the material are possible and their results rather telling. For the purpose of the present study, 11 titles staged between 1765 and 1785 have been selected for further analysis.⁴³ The

LANDMANN 1976, p. 11; Michael Hochmuth, *Chronik der Dresdner Oper*, Hamburg 1998, vol. I, p. 79; Winfried Höntsch, *Opernmetropole Dresden*, Dresden 1996, pp. 86–90.

³⁹ For a recent outline of this topic see Marc Niubo, *Italská opera v Praze a W. A. Mozart*, in: *Praha Mozartova. Kulturní a společenský život v Praze 1780–1800*, Praha 2006, pp. 118 f.

⁴⁰ LANDMANN 1976, pp. 29, 91.

⁴¹ The changes have been examined in the printed libretto (D-Dlb, MT 1421) and two scores (D-Dlb, Mus. 3481-F-39 a Mus. 3481-F-506).

⁴² Niubo 2008, pp. 351–356.

⁴³ Niubo 2008, pp. 351–356.

consulted material includes mainly librettos, but also scores. The analysis encompasses not only some of the famous works, but also some of the less-well-known ones so that the examined sample is as varied as possible. The survey includes, for instance, Cimarosa's opera *Amor costante*, not staged in Dresden until 1790. These chronological overlaps in the case of one of the cities, however, are not entirely unusual and it is not to be ruled out altogether that sometimes a later production in Prague or Dresden could have been part of a conscious strategy on the part of the impresario.

The following survey captures the more prominent changes in the structure, such as substitution, i.e. inserted and excerpted arias or ensembles in the individual operas.

Composer	Title	Year (Dresden/Prague)	Number of changes (Dresden/Prague)
Galuppi	<i>Le nozze</i>	1766 / 1764 (1766)	0 / 1 (0) ⁴⁴
Galuppi	<i>Il re alla caccia</i>	1767 / 1768	0
Piccinni	<i>La buona figliuola</i>	1765 / 1775	0 / 1
Paisiello	<i>La frascatana</i>	1776 / 1776 (1784)	5 / 1 (4)
Paisiello	<i>Le due contesse</i>	1777 / 1783	1
Valentini	<i>Le nozze in contrasto</i>	1782 / 1781	1 / 7
Gazzaniga	<i>La vendemmia</i>	1783 / 1782	5
Anfossi	<i>Gli amanti canuti</i>	1783 / 1782	1 / 1
Cimarosa	<i>Il convito</i>	1783 / 1782	2 / 4
Anfossi	<i>Isabella e Rodrigo</i>	1785 / 1783	11 / 6
Cimarosa	<i>L'amor costante</i>	1790 / 1782	6 / 3

The listed numbers are supposed, above all, to provide a basic orientation and their significance is not to be overestimated. Nevertheless, the smaller number of changes in the 1760s and the almost identical shapes of the works performed in Prague and Dresden point to an identical or almost identical vocal cast. Yet, similar situations recurred also later, such as in 1783 when the staging of Gazzaniga's *Vendemmia* in Dresden followed the Prague version (staged at the theatre of count Thun in 1782). Still, the supposedly higher density of alterations later on can be related to the transformation of the repertoire and to the increasingly frequent changes in the composition of the operatic ensemble. Undoubtedly, the individual alterations were brought about by a set of complex, not easily decipherable factors, not to mention the possibility of other changes which the examined sources do not reflect at all. A thoroughgoing study of librettos and scores will nevertheless provide us with some interesting common features and tendencies which we shall try to demonstrate on the case of *La Frascatana* by Giovanni Paisiello and *Isabella e Rodrigo* by Pasquale Anfossi.

⁴⁴ In case of Galuppi's *Le nozze*, the libretti from both Prague and Dresden represent the virtually same adaptation which reflects, however, the original production from Bologna 1755 as well as some of the changes made in Venice 1757.

Paisiello's opera was premiered in Venice in autumn 1774.⁴⁵ Already in the spring of 1775 it was staged in Vienna and one year later it appeared in Dresden as well as in Prague. The Dresden production in January most probably preceded that of Prague, although the latter could theoretically have been staged already during the carnival season. The production in Dresden comprised four significant changes: two new arias for Lisetta and two for Donna Stella, later further supplemented with a fifth one (Naumann's version of the aria *Belle luci vezzosette* for the part of Cavaliere).⁴⁶ Interestingly, the core of the changes reflects the Viennese production from 1775 and came to Dresden together with the score.⁴⁷

Concerning Donna Stella, the character of her original arias correspond with the *parte buffa* type, albeit with naturally accented lyrical elements that shift the role closer to the *mezzo carattere* type and endow it with some of the necessary noblesse. The new arias, however, steer the part towards the reign of *parte seria*, using linguistic as well as musical means. These changes did not always comply with the dramatic situation into which the aria was embedded, this being exactly the case of *So che fido a me tu sei* (II/4). Although the basic purpose is similar as D. Stella confirms her love of Cavaliere Giacinto, her sentiments are not reciprocated and Cavaliere would rather get rid of D. Stella. In this way the contrast between the characters is sharpened to the point that D. Stella may even appear as awkward, which would not occur in the original, more comic tone and setting. Nevertheless, the new music, its *parte seria*-character and corresponding emotional impact seem to be of decisive role in the whole process of changes made already in Vienna and adopted in Dresden.

The modifications in the part of the maid Lisetta are more startling. Strictly speaking, the original arias of Lisetta are the less impressive from the whole Paisiello's score. The new music used in Vienna, however, is that of the original (and now replaced) Donna Stella numbers!⁴⁸ The re-texting is fairly accomplished: all verses seem to be carefully chosen (or even especially written for the occasion) in order to match both the structure of the original text and the dramatic situation. The only jarring exception is the first aria (I/5) where the combination of the introductory lyrical passages of *D'unasposa meschinella* with the straightforward buffo-text of *Semplicetto troppo sei* produces a slightly ambivalent, almost ironic impression.

In all these cases we can surmise that the primary reasons for modifications were the musical ones, but it would be too easy (and unfounded) to ascribe them all merely to the will of the singers who wished for a different, more impressive aria. In the case of D. Stella it is appropriate to consider the intentions of the producers to alter the character of the role, be it with a view to the different

⁴⁵ Michael F. Robinson, *Giovanni Paisiello. A thematic catalogue of his works*, Pendragon 1991, vol. I, p. 177.

⁴⁶ The comparison is based mainly on these sources: libretto Venice 1774 (I-Vcg), the autograph score (I-Nc, 16.7.22-23), libretto Dresden 1776 (D-Dl [formerly D-Dlb], MT 1424) and score (D-Dl [formerly D-Dlb], 3481-F-6). As the Dresden libretto testifies, the original aria of Donna Stella "Quel bel nome di sposino" was first replaced by "So che fido a me tu sei" and later by "Saro sempre a te fedele".

⁴⁷ Landmann 1976, p. 65, Robinson, p. 184. The whole subject of the *Frascatana* arrangements between Vienna, Prague and Dresden are treated more in detail in Marc Niubo, *Giovinette semplicette, aneb k pražské podobě Paisiellovy opery La frascata v Praze 18. století*, in: *Divadelní revue*, 23 (2012), no. 1 (forthcoming).

⁴⁸ Robinson 1991, p. 184.

aesthetic criteria or to the given composition of the vocal ensemble and the need to use a singer who specialized in *parti serie*. The original reasons for this arrangement of the Lisetta arias should be viewed in connection with the situation of the Italian opera buffa troupe in Vienna in 1770's, where it repeatedly faced economical problems and Paisiello's operas belonged to the most successful.⁴⁹ When replacing the original arias of Donna Stella with new arias, impresario and singers apparently decided to keep this appealing music in the score and to use it for the arias of Lisetta. More importantly, this dramaturgical reconfiguration was found convincing and suitable to the situation in Dresden and other destinations too.

In Prague, *La frascatana* was played twice: first in 1776 and then in 1784, in the production of Bondini.⁵⁰ Judging by the print of the libretto, the first production was rather faithful to the premiere in Venice. The only alteration regards the third act which was cut by scenes 5 and 6, including the duet of the heroine Violante with Narda (*Questa tua gentil manina*). This change could have accompanied an attempt to achieve a greater flow of the plot and a faster finale of the third act (which would correspond with the general trend in Italian opera). Yet, it could not have been a decisive motif since no later than at the close of the opening scene of the third act, another duet (that of Violante and Cavaliere, "Ah ch'amor Violante mia") had been inserted. As the text proves, the new number was arranged from Sacchini's duet *Ah che amor d'Eurilla mia* from *Il finto pazzo per amore*. With few changes in the verses, the traditional love duet was converted into duet for the heroine and her rejected lover. This highly unusual arrangement was motivated possibly by the ambitions of the tenor who sang Cavaliere and wished a more spectacular number in the higher style which the characters otherwise do not have.

The libretto to the first production in Prague was printed in Dresden, similar to several others in the course of 1776. Bustelli probably had economic reasons for this practice. Even though we do not know the prices of the printers in Prague and Dresden, if we carefully compare the print of *Frascatanta* for Prague, it is to find out that we are not actually dealing with a new edition, but that the print is in fact the same one issued for Dresden (with a different title page, of course). To this print a further changes (the interpolation of the aforementioned duet and cuts in the third act and restitutions of the original arias) were made in Prague, a fact discernible only in the slightly different print-types and errors in pagination. Most probably these modifications were carried out in the last minute. This is further testified by remnants of German translations of the Dresden substituting arias for Lisetta and Donna Stella present in the Prague libretto, which could have occurred due to hurried preparations of the print or out of technical reasons.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Christiane Villinger, *Mi vuoi tu corbellar. Mi vuoi tu corbellar. Die Opere buffe von Giovanni Paisiello*. Tutzing 2000, p. 97.

⁵⁰ Examined libretti: *La Frascatana*[...]da rappresentarsi nel reggio teatro di Praga 1776 sotto l'impresa e direzione di Giuseppe Bustelli. Dresda, L'Anno 1776. (CZ-Pu, 65 E 4013), and *La Frascatana* [...] da rappresentarsi nel Teatro Nazionale di Praga. [s. l.], 1784 (CZ-Pu, 65 E 3089).

⁵¹ CZ-Pu, 65 E 4013, pp. 38 f., 42 f., pp. [82]–83 and pp. 88 f.

Bustelli applied this method more than once and it was later adopted by Pasquale Bondini: when he staged *La frascatana* at the Count Nostitz's Theatre in 1784, he as well turned to the original libretto used by Bustelli, having only the title page printed new in Prague.⁵² Thus if we are to rely on the printed libretto, we can conclude that Bondini took over all the Dresden (Viennese) alterations (substitution arias) noted above. The reasons for this procedure are hardly to be ascertained today, but we can surmise that they may have been related to the personal experience of Bondini and that of his wife Caterina, while being employed in the Dresden ensemble.⁵³

Similar strategies of adaptation are to be noted also in the case of the opera *Isabella e Rodrigo* which Pasquale Anfossi composed in Venice in 1776 to the libretto of G. Bertati. It was staged in Prague in 1783, and in Dresden between 1785 and 87. Let us start by looking at the Dresden alterations which are more numerous and striking:⁵⁴ the two title roles which had been conceived by the authors as *mezzo carattere*, were modified through the addition of new arias and through several other changes into *parti serie*. In this case the motivation was even stronger, some of the arias by D. Isabella having been problematic in the original itself and, what is more, the tenor role of Don Rodrigo having been cast in Dresden by a soprano-castrato! The other changes in the text and score also confirm an attempt at a certain purification of the overall shape. Eliminated were for instance the erotic innuendos in the arias of the eunuch Adibar who consoles Donna Isabella in the second act (*Se perdesete un amoroso*, II/1) or in the aria by the manservant Pasquale (*Questa cosa mi frastorna*, II/7). Some of the changes in the score were undoubtedly beneficial, others – such as the new virtuosic aria for the slave Scerifa or the substitution of the entire finale of the second act – are quite questionable.⁵⁵

The Prague production of *Isabella e Rodrigo* had its opening as early as in 1783 and Bondini's company brought it also to Leipzig.⁵⁶ The preserved sources point to similar kind of changes as in the case of the Dresden performance and it cannot be ruled out that the Dresden producers let themselves to be inspired to a certain extent by the Prague (or Leipzig) production. The substituted arias, however, are different and the changes tend to be generally less radical. Don Rodrigo stays a tenor *mezzo-carattere* in Prague, Donna Isabella is “elevated” to a *parte seria* by the employment of some softer

⁵² The sources of Paisiello operas related to Prague performances has been studied also by Milada Jonášová, who in spite of thoroughgoing evidence, reflects only the changes in 1784 and mistakenly considers the 1776 Prague production to be identical with that of 1784. – Milada Jonášová, Paisiellovy opery v Praze, in: *Hudební věda*, XXXIX/2002, pp. 200 f.

⁵³ Catarina Bondini, née Saporiti, known today mostly as the first Mozart's Zerlina, was active in Dresden between 1773–77 and 1779–85. Both singers could participate on the Dresden performances of *La frascatana* in 1776. – *Un almanacco drammatico. L'indice de' teatrali spettacoli 1764-1823* (reprint, ed. R. Verti), I, Pesaro 1996, p. 151; Jakubcová, p. 70.

⁵⁴ The principal sources for the comparison have been: the score and parts at D-DI (formerly D-DIb) (Mus. Hs. 2428-F-503 and 503a, and Mus. Hs. 2428-F-8), I-Fc and D-Rtt and printed libretti for Venice 1776 (in I-Bc), Dresden 1784 (in D-DI [formerly DIb], MT 1285)

⁵⁵ More on the Dresden production of this opera see Marc Niubo, *Isabella e Rodrigo: Towards the Late 18th Century Performance Practice at the Dresden Court Opera Theatre*, in: *Partita. Siebenundzwanzig Sätze zur Dresdner Musikgeschichte. Festschrift Hans-Günther Ottenberg*, hrsg. Wolfgang Mende, Dresden 2012, pp. 389–404.

⁵⁶ Probably in summer 1783 as well as in 1784, as testified by Leipzig-libretto issued in 1783, see: Niubo 2009, pp. 132–136.

means. Even though neither the Prague alterations can all be considered as entirely fortunate, they seem to be more respectful of the original character of the opera, including the more “risqué” passages of the libretto. In both cases however, the logic of the changes points to the tendency towards a more traditional and contrasting conception of roles.

Each alteration, each intervention into a score or a libretto, suggests a mixture of various motivations. It is only exceptionally, however, that this mixture can be deciphered from nowadays point of view. Still, a number of these changes are associated with some recurrent phenomena which I would like to point out in conclusion. Besides the usual cases, which comprise the cutting of recitatives or transpositions of arias into other tonalities, we most often come across three kinds of interventions.

The first concerns the kind of substitutions which were mostly motivated by the sharpening of the distinctions between the individual types of characters, such as the implementation of the *parte seria* type, or the introduction of musical numbers in a higher style into operas which had lacked them originally. Here we probably deal with the interconnection between the artistic ambitions of some of the singers and the striving for a more distinct, but sometimes also more traditional dramaturgy, and an effort to comply with some (older) conventions and dramatic skills or dispositions of the protagonists. A similar logic can also be read into the strengthening of certain expressive features in the arias for *mezzo-carattere*.⁵⁷ In both cases this tendency has been more frequently observed in the female roles, which, however, may follow from the particular sample of the examined works. Quite specific in this respect was the situation in Dresden where castrati were obviously cast in opera buffa as well (even though we do not know how common this was).⁵⁸

Another type of interventions concerns the comical roles – the female as well as male *parti buffe* were fitted with new and/or more spectacular arias. At a glance it might seem to have consisted in an identical process. The key motivation, nevertheless, was not the differentiation of roles, but rather the creation of more space for the (usually) main comical character of the opera, eventually an attempt to get “more value” out of a comic actor-singer’s qualities.

Finally, we should mention the attempts at some kind of a “purification” of the text, occurring in recitatives as well as in arias. Especially in the case of some of the later productions from Dresden, the language of the librettos seems to be smoother and more refined. On some rare occasions, we can even discern a greater dramatic credibility, this last fact being without any doubt related to the person of the dramatic poet Caterino Mazzola who sojourned in Dresden between 1780 and 1796.⁵⁹ In Prague,

⁵⁷ Similar findings (related to the growing popularity of the *mezzo-carattere* type in opera buffa in the 1770s) have also been noted for instance by Daniel Brandenburg, see: Daniel Brandenburg, *Dramaturgie und „Aggiustamenti“ am Beispiel ausgewählter Librettodrucke zu Pasquale Anfossi Opera buffa I viaggiatori felici*, in: *Bearbeitungspraxis in der Oper des späten 18. Jahrhunderts*, Tutzing 2007, pp. 233–243.

⁵⁸ Viz Proelß, pp. 231 f. In Prague the practice is last documented – and as a rare exception at that – in the 1781/82 season when Bondini’s company was joined by Pietro Gherardi. – see Verti, p. 421.

⁵⁹ For the previous period (starting with 1765 when the new system was implemented in Dresden), there is no name of a dramatic poet given. In contrast to the pre-war period, however, Caterino Mazzola was not really a court poet, but was a member of the theatre staff hired by the impresario. – I wish to thank to Ortrun

a similar function was fulfilled by Nunziato Porta between 1774 and 1776; for the rest of the period we can assume interventions on the part of singers and the impresario. Another, specific issue are the erotic allusions: while it is as yet impossible to ascertain that Prague was more liberal in this respect, some of the findings up to date seem to suggest that.⁶⁰

Yet, the two cities had a lot in common in this period: even more than has been reflected up until now. Undoubtedly, the situation was greatly influenced by the decision of the Saxon rulers in 1765 for a systemic change in the running of the opera. As a consequence, the connection between the two scenes was enhanced due to the activities of the impresario Giuseppe Bustelli. Apart from the migration of repertoire and artists, we come across the same kind of adaptations, the latter having been motivated most probably by practical reasons (accessibility of material, previous experience with the production, occasionally even the same singers). Moreover, closer relations between the two scenes helped to maintain the stability of the operatic enterprise and contributed to the generally high production which bears comparison with the Italian centres. However, even some of the differences are also worth mentioning. Owing to the different tradition of serious opera, it was Prague which offered its audiences a slightly more varied repertoire, almost up until the end of the 1770s. The quality of performance, however, probably did not always reach the same standard as that which Bustelli, backed up with subventions from the court, was able to secure in Dresden. Different political and cultural conditions in Prague during the reign of Joseph II were undoubtedly reflected in the enthusiastic acceptance of the two above-mentioned “revolutionary” titles and the following reception of Mozart. In order to avoid adhering to any simplified schemes, however, it will be essential to consider the issues of the traditions and quality of interpretation, as well as those of artistic freedom or dependence (and above all their true impact and importance), on the basis of a more numerous and varied source material. It is to be hoped that the future research in Dresden and Prague will be able to achieve the task.

Landmann for this clarification. See also Ortrun Landmann, *Italienische Opernpraxis in Dresden*, in: *Il melodramma italiano in Italia e in Germania nell'età barocca. Atti del V Convegno internazionale sulla musica italiana nel secolo VII* (ed. A. Colzani, N. Dubowy, A. Luppi, M. Padoan), Como 1995, p. 29.

⁶⁰ See the above-cited examples of the operas *Il re Teodoro in Venezia* and *Isabella e Rodrigo*.