

Rare Libretti for operas in Spain under Farinelli's Directions

Farinelli, original name Carlo Broschi, (born Jan. 24, 1705, Andria, Kingdom of Naples [Italy]—died July 15, 1782, Bologna), celebrated Italian castrato singer of the 18th century and one of the greatest singers in the history of opera.



In 1737, Farinelli broke a multi-year contract in England in order to stay in Spain at the court of King Philip V. McGeary suggests that Farinelli received so many precious gifts from the court on his arrival that he could not afford to pass up this new Spanish invitation (note 40). Although Farinelli was allowed to sing only for the Royal Family and forbidden from singing before the public, he became the moving force behind the spread of Italian opera to Madrid. On August 25, 1737, Farinelli was named chamber musician to the king, and *criado familiar*, or servant to the royal family. In 1738, he arranged for an entire Italian opera company to visit Madrid, beginning a fashion for *opera serie*. The Coliseo of the royal palace of Buen Retiro was remodeled and became Madrid's only opera house.

During the reign of Ferdinand VI (1746-59), Farinelli became the artistic director of Court entertainments. Beginning in 1747, he took charge of all spectacles and court entertainments. He produced altogether 23 operas and serenatas, but also designed “other royal musical entertainments and boating parties . . .” (DeIDonna and Polzonetti, 259).

Farinelli's impact on Opera in 18th Century Spain

The importance of Farinelli's role as "impresario" in bringing serious opera to Madrid is made clear from several sources:

During the nearly 25 years Farinelli lived at the Spanish court, he produced a "long series of sumptuously staged Italian opera. Overall, the Farinelli productions in Madrid anticipated tendencies that surfaced only later elsewhere in Europe." His departure from Madrid ended "what was surely the most brilliant chapter for Italian opera in eighteenth century Spain" (DelDonna and Polzonetti, 260).

"In 1747, [Farinelli] was appointed artistic director of the theatres at Buen Retiro and Aranjuez marking the beginning of a decade of extraordinary productions and extravaganzas in which he collaborated extensively with Metastasio." Here he produced 23 operas and serenatas between 1747 and 1756. After the death of his patron Ferdinand VI in 1759, he was asked to leave Spain (Macy, 151).

"The man responsible for raising the profile of Spanish music at the courts of Philip V and Ferdinand VI was none other than Carlo Broschi (popularly known as Farinelli) perhaps the most famous castrato singer of the Baroque. . . . When Ferdinand VI succeeded to the throne, Farinelli was [made] director of the theatres at the two main royal palaces . . . in the space of 12 years Farinelli the impresario transformed Madrid from a musical backwater into one of the foremost centres of opera in Europe, attracting the finest composers, librettists and singers from Europe, whilst also encouraging the development of the home-grown, Spanish theatrical tradition" (Heighes)

Refs: DelDonna, Anthony R. and Pierpaolo Polzonetti. *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera* (2009); Heighes, Simon. Review. *International Record Review* (October 2014),

http://www.classicalacarte.net/Production/Production_10_14/Archiv4792050_IRR10_14.htm.

Macy, Laura Williams, ed.. *The Grove Book of Opera Singers* (2008); McGeary, Thomas. "Farinelli in Madrid: Opera, Politica and the War of Jenkins' Era." *The Musical Quarterly* 82, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 383-421;

Libretti Available

1.

Bancés Candamo, Francisco Antonio de; 1662-1704. **Qual es afecto mayor, lealtad, o sangre, o amor? Cambises triunfante en Menfis.** Comedia que escribió D. Francisco Bancés Candamo. Y se ha de representar a sus Magestades en el Coliseo del Buen-Retiro. A expensas de la muy Noble, y muy Leal Coronada Villa De Madrid con motivo de celebrar los Gloriosos felices Desposorios del Serenisimo Señor Don Carlos Principe de Asturias, y la Serenisima Señora Doña Luisa Princesa de Parma Madrid, (1765).

While the comedia was first created in 1699, it is here transformed into an Italian, opera-like theatrical, far from its original intent, with the addition of three musical elements suitable for the latter part of the 18th century. The three added sections are 1) Loa Heroyca. Feliz el Merito Reyna si la Dicha le Acompaña (pp. 1-17); 2) El Gallego, Intermedio primero (pp. 65-86); 3) Saynete Los Forasteros (pp. 139-158).

“From the form of the drama to that of the proper Italian opera was but a step.”

-Ticknor

Full description:

www.goldenlegend.com/pdfs/bances.pdf

2.

Metastasio, Pietro. **El Siroe: opera drammatica** para representarse en el Real Coliseo del Buen-Retiro por orden de Su Magestad Catholica . . . D. Fernando VI en este año MDCCLII.

Libretto in Italian and Castilian on facing pages: Quarto (5 1/2 x 8”). Contemporary publisher’s binding for Buen Retiro libretti of this period. Worn at corners, scuffed, spine heel and crown chipped. Internally clean and fine.

Overall the Madrid 1752 **El Siroe** is significant for several reasons, in spite of the often used dramatic devices of lovers separated then reunited after adversary, of women disguised, and of an evil ruler who must be overthrown: First, the handsome subject matter of a heroic, Persian prince was important and popular in the 18th century. While this opera fell out of favor in the 19th century, it is now being revived with recordings and performance from different settings: Secondly, if one wants to study the impact of Farinelli on Spanish opera, **El Siroe** is a good place to do it: Finally, the development of opera forms in the New World, especially in Mexico and Peru in this period, was indebted to opera from Spain, which was popular among the nobility and government officials in the Spanish colonies. In the future, as more data is found as to the actual performances, operas like **Siroe** may find their place in the transatlantic movement of Spanish music.

Full description:

www.goldenlegend.com/pdfs/siroe.pdf

3.

Migliavacca, Giannambrogio. **Armida aplacada. Armida aplacada:** composicion dramatica para representarse en el real coliseo del Bueno-Retiro, por orden de su Magestad Catholica el Rey nuestro señor D. Fernando VI. para festejar las gloriosas bodas de la real Infanta Da. Maria Antonia Fernanda con el real Duque de Saboy. Madrid: En la Imprenta de Lorenzo Francisco Mojados, (1750). Palau y Dulcet (2nd ed.) 168567; Sartori 2779 (two locations: I-Bc, GB-Lbm).

This staging of Armida placada is important because of the spectacular visual effects that illuminated the theatre, which were unequaled in other operas during the entire history of the theatre at Buen Retiro.

From the libretto and from several sources we have excellent accounts of these effects. Also, we are able to understand an important change in setting and structure of the last scene, with a “Licensa” replacing the planned ending by Migliavacca (who was called “a great booby” by the original libretti Metastasio).

Full description:

www.goldenlegend.com/pdfs/armida.pdf

4.

Mirandola, Giovanni Francesco Pico della and others. **Il vello d'oro conquistato**. Composizione drammatica para representarse en el real Coliseo del Buen-Retiro festefandose el feliz dia natalicio de su magestad Catholica ey Rey nuestro Señor D. Fernando VI. Replicado por order du su Magestad misma. El Año de MDCC.XLIX (1749)

Libretto in Italian and Spanish for a Festival Opera on the Subject of Jason and the Golden Fleece, with a strong possibility of a New World connection

Il vello d'oro conquistato/Il Vello D'Oro was a Christmas festival performance in 1748 and then again in 1749 for guests of Ferdinand VI of Spain (1713-1759). The opera is set in Colchis on the far side of the Black Sea, where Jason has sailed from Iolcus with his Argonauts to find the “vellon de oro” (Golden Fleece). The play features chorus plus seven characters, including Medéa and Jason with their love story. The actors are named, including the beloved Venetian singer Teresa Castellini (in the role of Calciope) who sang in the 1748 performance and also when the work was performed in the theatres of Madrid.

Full description:

www.goldenlegend.com/pdfs/jason.pdf

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