

Libretto for a Lost Opera (1671) The beginnings of Opera in Milano

[Libretto]. *La Felicità rinventa*. Festa di musica. Celebrata al glorioso nome dell'Eccellentissima signora D. Felice Sandovalle, Duchessa d'Uceda, e d'Osuna, Contessa di Uregna, . . . Nel Regio Ducale Palagio di Milano l'anno 1671. Il giorno 30 d'Agosto, nel quale si solennizza la memoria di Santa Felice. Milano: Lodovico Monza, (1671). Not in Sartori. Not in OCLC, KVK.



Frontis (see below)

Quarto. Contemporary orange wrappers. Leaf of folded engraving (14 1/2 x 10 5/8"). Leaf of title, verso blank; 3pp. dedication; 1p. personage and scene e machine; pp. 5-23 text. Collation: plate, [1], (12pp.). Some stains to pp. 12-13, some pages wrinkled and dog eared. Uncut. A very good copy.

La Felicità rinventa was staged on August 30, 1671. It was dedicated to Feliche de Sandoval Rojas y Enriquez de Cabrera (Note 1), wife of the Spanish Governor of Milan. She died on October 7th, less than two months after the performance, indicating that she was ill at the time and this opera may have been

staged to celebrate her life. The opera dramatizes the felicity and renewing power of music and dance. It is an opera in one act with a characters of Greek and Roman gods, along with the Renaissance figure of Petrarch. Although the setting is based on neo-classic Florentine and Venetian opera, the theme is local, indicating that **La Felicita rinventa** has musical and scenic elements specific to Milan. The libretto is anonymous although it seems to be written by a Milanese poet.

The important frontispiece is drawn by Pietro Manni the set designer for the opera; it is engraved by Cesare Laurentio (17th-century engraver, active in Milan). The scene is a forest clearing with trees on each side. On the horizon, Apollo drives his chariot. Presiding in the center, floating on a cloud is the figure of Time. In the center foreground is a rocky cliff where 12 winged genies, gods of Olympus, and allegorical figures are seated watching the singers who are below stage center. In back of the arch is a winged Pegasus. The proscenium stage is framed by vine-covered columns; below is an orchestra pit with armorial shields surrounding.

The singers in the engraving are Cibele, Saturno, Ati, Petrarca, Apollo, Erato, Talia, Coro di Muse, Perseo (Cascetta and Carpani, p. ii, using data from the Milan Biblioteca Ambrosiana). Aside from the image of the frontispiece, the scenes are described, some in detail, in “Scene, E Macchine” (p. 4), where nine scene and machine changes are identified. Also, the scenery is described as it changes, within the text.

Pietro Manni the “Boccasserna del teatro di cotri” (designer of the theatre space) and impresario for this royal performance is from Rome or Milan. He is known to have been involved in works for the theatre during the 1670s (Sartori index I, p. 478 lists 11 dramatic works where Manni is an “impresari”) and research suggests that he might have been involved in other performances where his wife Silvia (Note 2) is identified as an opera soloist (e.g. *Il Trionfo d’Augsto in Eggito*, October 23, 1672) (see Sartori 23677; Sonneck, 1095; Bianconi and Walker, 224).

Manni, who came to Milan with his wife in the 1650s, brought with him ideas for opera from Venice where he had worked as a designer. He continued his work in Milan as a court designer and an impresario, and he was possibly an organizer and fund raiser for secular theatre through the 1680s, although he worked in other Italian cities, as well. Importantly, his collaboration with Milanese artists “brought him in contact with those who worked on opera where it was freed from Venetian models and began to develop on its own” (Sadie XII, 292-3). There is presently some interest in Manni for his collaboration with local artists like Antonio Lonati in the Carnvale of 1673 and with Carlo Maria Maggi, the Milanese librettist. Cascetta and Carpani note that much data on development of opera in Milan still needs to be culled from Milano archives (348).

La Felicita rinventa, although an original Milanese invention, is an opera based on models from Venice and Florence. The opera also reflects tastes of the Spanish rulers of the Duchy of Milano (Note 3). It was staged for the nobility in the theater Regio Ducale Palagio di Milano, known as the *Salone Margherita* (built for Archduchess Margherita d’Austria, wife of Philip III of Spain) (Note 4).

Opera was late blooming in Milan, as compared to Florence, Venice, and Rome, because of Spanish rule with its emphasis on religious music. In Milan, religious music became almost totally predominant. Calvi writes, “In so austere a climate there was little opportunity for the development of opera through the mid 17th century” (265). **La Felicita rinventa**, with its timid steps toward secular music, little by little brought opera toward an art form that merged music with drama. It was not until the end of the century that the works of Paisiello, Cimarosa, and Mozart brought a flourishing of the “divine art” to Milan (Ibid). The interesting question is to find out how much of the opera is based on Venetian models for a Spanish audience and how much of **La Felicita rinventa** reflects local development.

Notes:

1. Feliche de Sandoval Rojas y Enriquez de Cabrera, duchessa di Ossuna (1633-1671) held her own inherited title of 4th Duchess of Uceda and was therefore, a Grandee of Spain on her own rights (a Spanish or Portuguese nobleperson of the first rank). She was daughter of Francisco de Sandoval Rojas, 2nd Duke of Lerma and 2nd Duke of Uceda, Duke of Cea. Her mother was a member of the powerful and old Colonna family.

Her husband (Governor of the Duchy of Milan, 1670-74) was Gaspar Téllez-Girón, 5th Duke de Osuna (1625-1694), 5th Marquess of Peñafiel, 9th Count of Ureña, and other lesser titles. He was a Spanish general and a Grandee of Spain, the title bestowed by King Philip II of Spain on February 5, 1562 when Pedro Téllez-Girón y de la Cueva, 5th Count of Ureña, a.k.a. Pedro Girón de la Cueva, Viceroy of Naples, was given the title of 1st Duke of Osuna.

The Funeral ceremony for the 38 year-old Duchess was held October 26, 1671. It was celebrated with great pomp in the church of Santa Maria della Scala in Milan. The Getty Research Institute has a print of this event, *Funeral decoration for the obsequies of Duchess Felice Gomez de Sandoval of Uceda* by Maraviglia.

2. Beth L. Glixon’s colorful, if hesitant, biography of Silvia Gailarit Manni (b. 1629) suggests that Silvia worked closely with her husband Pietro on theatrical productions during their years in Milan and later. Prior to that, by 1643, she was a celebrated opera “virtuosa” and the dedicatee to several libretti (120-5). She is known to have had a beautiful voice and was graced with physical beauty as well. Silvia’s mother Dionora or Leonida Romana Luppi known as “Luppi” probably sang in an early performance in Venice of Claudio Monteverdi’s *L’incorazion di Poppea* (1643). Silvia probably sang herself for Monteverdi in 1640-41 under the name of Silvia Donati. From the age of 10 or 12, she was onstage in opera and probably had an important if small solo in Monteverdi’s *Le Nozze d’Enea in Lavini* (1641) (112-5). By the time she married Pietro Manni in 1645, she had considerable wealth and was a major opera singer. By 1669, the Mannis had moved to Milan when the Venice theatres were closed due to war with the Turks (Sartori’s incomplete list identifies four operas in which Silvia Manni sang).

3. In 1535, Milan and other areas of Italy came directly under the rule of Charles V of Spain, initiating the era of Spanish rule which extended over 170 years. This ruler changed much of Milan, transforming it

into a province that was burdened with taxes and weighed down by poverty and ill use. When freed from Spanish rule, Milan had not only joined the world of European opera centers, but by the end of the 18th century, it became its grand diva at Teatro alla Scala (originated in 1778 as Nuovo Regio Ducale Teatro).

4. The Salone Margherita was built in the palazzo of the court. On July 16, 1594, the General Council resolved to make a wooden theater in the palace of the Court, with the design of M. Meda. On May 25, 1671, a cantata of poetry called *Congedo di Flore* was held, also for the duc di Ossuna in theatre (Calvi, 65). It was used for royal performances of opera by Paisiello and Cimarosa. It burned in 1699, was rebuilt, and burned again in 1708 (Calvi, 265).

References:

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