

5-1-2017

# A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni

Lisabeth M. Kettledon

*University of Connecticut - Storrs*, [Lisabeth.miller@gmail.com](mailto:Lisabeth.miller@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/dissertations>

---

## Recommended Citation

Kettledon, Lisabeth M., "A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni" (2017). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 1468.

<https://opencommons.uconn.edu/dissertations/1468>

# A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni

By Lisabeth Miller Kettledon

University of Connecticut, 2017

Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778) was part of Handel's brilliant cadre of Italian opera singers at the Royal Academy of Music in London between 1723 and 1728. Already one of the most famous singers in Europe, her arrival in London was highly anticipated, and the press followed her performances, personal life, and social activities closely. She was renowned for her superior portrayal of pathos, her rendering of laments and *cantabile* arias, and for the sheer beauty of her voice.

Handel wrote eleven opera roles for Cuzzoni during her tenure at the Royal Academy, most notably Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* and the title role in *Rodelinda*. This dissertation offers a vocal profile of the singer through a statistical analysis of the aria types, keys, tessituras, phrase constructions, meters, and tempi of the seventy-three arias. This analysis is combined with close readings of the descriptions of her singing by contemporaneous writers, and a comparison of Cuzzoni's roles with canonical roles from subsequent operatic repertoire for the soprano voice. Lastly, this study serves to organize known information and establish a chronology of the singer's life, travels, significant performances, and other events.

A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni

Lisabeth Miller Kettledon

B.A., Brandeis University, 2002

M.M. The Hartt School of Music, 2005

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

at the

University of Connecticut

2017

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Musical Arts Dissertation

A Lyric Soprano in Handel's London: A Vocal Portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni

Presented by  
Lisabeth Miller Kettledon, B.A., M.M.

Co-Major Advisor

---

Eric Rice

Co-Major Advisor

---

Constance Rock

Associate Advisor

---

Glenn Stanley

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am eternally grateful for all the help, encouragement, and support I have received from so many people throughout the writing of this dissertation. First and foremost, I thank my wonderful co-major advisors for their guidance throughout my time at UConn and their unending kindness toward me. To Dr. Eric Rice, thank you for being a fantastic teacher, and for always challenging me to work harder and dig deeper. Thank you for your confidence in me, this project, and your patience with my writing. To Dr. Connie Rock, thank you for teaching me to sing, to listen critically, for always being wastefully generous with your knowledge, and for being a superior mentor and friend; you are a model of the type of voice teacher I want to be. I am also indebted to the other members of my committee; to Dr. Glenn Stanley, thank you for being my confidante, cheerleader, and friend throughout this process, and for your thoughtful comments on this dissertation. To Dr. Kenneth Nott, my favorite professor from my master's degree program at the Hartt School of Music: I so appreciate your time and interest in this project, your expertise, and your benevolence; I look forward to working with you more in the future. Thank you also to Dr. Jamie Spillane for your support and smiles during my time at UConn.

I thank Dr. Paola Lunetta Franco for granting me permission to read and cite her dissertation. Without her generosity, and her thorough research, it would not have been possible for me to write comprehensively about Cuzzoni's early years in Italy. Thank you to Michael Young for helping me with Italian translations and for assisting me in acquiring Dr. Franco's dissertation from the University of Pavia. Thank you to my

friend Dr. Miguel Campinho for assisting me with proofreading, foot-note editing, and engraving the musical examples in this dissertation, and to my friend and colleague Frank Viola for all your help with the technological aspects of this project.

I would be unforgivably remiss if I did not thank my friends for the emotional support they provided to me throughout this journey. To Penny Brandt and Sacha Peiser, both brilliant scholars and awesome women: thank you for standing with me in the trenches and for pushing me forward when I needed it most. Thank you to my DMA voice buddies Josh May and Jan Zimmerman, for making my time here at UConn so much fun, and to my colleagues on the Hartford Opera Theater staff for your humor and encouragement. To my besties, Stephanie, Marissa, and my sister Jessica, for being the greatest friends I could ever ask for. Thank you to my amazing choir and community from Old St. Andrew's Church, who have been so proud of me all through this seven-year endeavor.

And finally, thank you to my loving, marvelous, and extremely patient family. To my husband Matthew, who has cheerfully endured having a graduate student for a wife for the entire length of our marriage – thank you for taking this leap of faith and believing in me, even when I didn't. To my beautiful little girls, Alexa and Sydney, who certainly did nothing to speed the process of writing my dissertation along, but who have made life infinitely sweeter and more meaningful. However, my biggest debt of gratitude goes to my incredible parents, Drs. Gabriel and Katharine Miller, who gave me everything, who taught me to love reading, learning, and stories, who encouraged (and financed) all of my passions, and who have been cheering for me my whole life. This dissertation is for you.

## CONTENTS

	Introduction	vi
1	Early Life and Career in Italy, 1696-1722	1
2	The Prima Donna of the Royal Academy, 1723-1725	10
3	Cuzzoni's Changing Role at the Academy, 1726-1728	32
4	An Examination of Contemporary Sources	52
5	Handel's Arias for Cuzzoni	69
	Epilogue	114
	Appendix 1	120
	Appendix 2	123
	Bibliography	125

## Introduction

What did Handel's singers sound like? Throughout the writings in contemporary newspaper articles, magazine items, and private correspondence, descriptions and metaphors abound: "she has a nest of nightingales in her belly," "a native warble," a "perfect portamento," and "a voice of little note," to name a few. The prevalence of antiquated vocabulary such as a soprano's "volubility" or her "exquisite shake" create the need for additional research to determine conclusions regarding vocal quality. Without the evidence of recordings, it is impossible to know exactly how the voices of the great singers of the Royal Academy — Francesca Cuzzoni, Faustina Bordoni, and Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino — actually sounded. The Baroque era predates both the use of the *Fach* system (which categorizes opera roles by voice type) and modern vocal pedagogy as a formal discipline; Manuel Garcia, often recognized as the father of modern vocal pedagogy, was not born until 1805.

What is helpful is the knowledge that Handel wrote nearly all of his opera roles for specific singers. Noted Handel scholar C. Steven LaRue wrote that "it is clear that the cast influenced every important decision in the creation of Handel's Royal Academy operas." Both audiences and singers expected that operas were created as vehicles to highlight individual singers' virtuosity, and it is reasonable to conclude that composers wrote specifically to show them to their best advantage in performance.<sup>1</sup> Vocal pedagogy authority Barbara Doscher puts it succinctly: "for an eighteenth-century

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Steven LaRue, *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 137.



composer-producer such as Handel, operatic roles were composed for individual artists....”<sup>2</sup>

Francesca Cuzzoni was one member of Handel’s “dream team” of Italian singers at the Royal Academy during the 1720s. Handel first heard her in Dresden in 1719, when she was only twenty-four years old, and by that time she had already achieved international recognition as one of the best opera singers in continental Europe. The eleven roles that Handel wrote for her include two of the most famous and widely praised musical characterizations in his oeuvre: Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* and the eponymous heroine of *Rodelinda*. She was renowned for her superior portrayal of pathos, her rendering of laments and *cantabile* arias, and for the sheer beauty of her voice. During her years at the Royal Academy, her social activities, fashion choices, temperament, and personal life were documented in the London press with great interest.

Cuzzoni left no writings — no first-hand accounts of the events of her life, no pontifications on singing, and no illuminating details regarding her relationship with Handel. We know nothing of how she felt while singing Cleopatra or how involved she was in shaping her roles from a musical standpoint, or even what kind of relationship she actually had with Faustina Bordoni, her supposed rival singer. What we can do, however, is study the arias that Handel wrote for her and accept their essential elements as evidence of Cuzzoni’s vocal strengths and, by extension, the musical features they do not include as suggestions of her vocal weaknesses. Through a statistical analysis of the keys, tessituras, phrase constructions, meters, tempi, and types of the seventy-three

---

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Doscher, “He Wrote for Specific Voices,” *Journal of Singing* (September/October 1995): 33-4.

arias, we can create a vocal portrait of Francesca Cuzzoni. Furthermore, through analysis and careful interpretation of the actual observations of contemporary writers who described her singing, we can refine that portrait, comparing it to soprano roles from the later repertoire. Lastly, because there is no biography of Cuzzoni in English, this study serves to organize known information and establish a chronology of her life, travels, and significant performances and other events.<sup>3</sup>

The first three chapters of this dissertation are focused on biographical details: what is known about her early life and the details of her tenure at the Royal Academy. In Chapter Four, I discuss the first-hand accounts by eighteenth-century writers who heard her sing, including writings by Johann Joachim Quantz, Pier Francesco Tosi, Giambattista Mancini, and Charles Burney, as well as shorter excerpts from other writers. In Chapter Five, I use musical examples from the body of arias to help draw specific conclusions about Cuzzoni's voice. The appendices consist of tables and lists of Cuzzoni's arias with pertinent details of range, tessitura, tempo, etc.

The resurgence of interest in Handel's operas over the last half-century has demonstrated that they are among the most beautiful and dramatically compelling operas in the operatic repertoire. Handel's gift for melody and his ability to compose them within the popular and expected forms of his day are enough to cement his reputation as one of the greatest opera composers of all time, yet his ability to tailor vocal lines perfectly to specific singers seems to have set him apart from his contemporaries. Handel's interest in the individual vocal capabilities and dramatic

---

<sup>3</sup> Cuzzoni is only mentioned in English-language scholarship in conjunction with other singers from the Royal Academy. The only full length study on her is Paola Lunetta Franco's "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778): Lo Stile antico nella musica moderna" (doctoral dissertation University of Pavia, 2001).

strengths of his singers and his expertise in writing for the voice led him to create musical and dramatic characterizations that emphasized the best features of each singer. It is because of Handel's superior skills in these areas that we can draw conclusions about Francesca Cuzzoni's voice without the benefit of recorded sound. I hope that this study will be the first step towards a holistic view of Handel's compositions for the soprano voice and that it will open the door even wider to this wonderful, largely underperformed body of work.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Early Life and Career in Italy, 1696-1722**

When Francesca Cuzzoni arrived in London in late 1722, she was an instant success. Negotiations between Cuzzoni and the Royal Academy began in 1720, but due to prior commitments and discord over a financial arrangement, she did not make her debut at the Academy until January of 1723. Her arrival in London was highly anticipated, but perhaps even Cuzzoni herself could not have predicted the level of celebrity she would enjoy in London or the musical status she would attain at the Academy. Her performances in London are well documented, and it is possible to construct a comprehensive chronology of her movements between 1722 and 1728. Her performances at the Academy and elsewhere received a great deal of attention in London's press, and the opera was so much at the center of the London's culture that reports of her off-stage activities could be read in the press and also in contemporary letters. However, much less is known about Cuzzoni's life prior to her first performances in London.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will outline the known facts of Cuzzoni's biography from her birth to her arrival in London and identify areas of disagreement in the chronology.

The first area of disagreement concerns the date of Cuzzoni's birth. It is certain that she was born in Parma: there are several sources from Cuzzoni's lifetime that label her as a "Parmeggiana." The date of her birth, however, varies

---

<sup>1</sup> Paola Lunetta Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778): Lo stile antico nella musica moderna" (Ph.D dissertation, Pavia, 2001), 7 "Si conosce poco dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza di Francesca Cuzzoni a Parma." ["There is little known about the childhood and adolescence of Francesca Cuzzoni in Parma.] Translation by Lisabeth Miller Kettledon.

from source to source by as much as nine years. The entry on Cuzzoni in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* reports that most sources date her birth in 1700, but that a letter from the estate of the Duke of Luynes declared that Cuzzoni was fifty-nine years old in 1750, which would place her birth in 1691.<sup>2</sup> Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali set Cuzzoni's birth date as 2 April 1696, but do not cite any sources in support of this assertion.<sup>3</sup>

The 1696 birthdate is corroborated, however, by what is most likely the most comprehensive and trustworthy source: "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778): Lo Stile Antico Nella Musica Moderna" by Paola Lunetta Franco.<sup>4</sup> The first chapter of Franco's dissertation includes thorough documentation of Cuzzoni's early life, including her baptism certificate. The certificate is dated April 1696, but indicates that Francesca was two months old at the time of her baptism. This suggests that her correct date of birth is in late January or early February of 1696.<sup>5</sup> Cuzzoni's full name as given on the certificate is Paula Francisca Geltruda Antonia, and her parents are cited as Angelo Cuzzoni and Marina Castilli.

---

<sup>2</sup> Bianca Maria Antolini, "Cuzzoni, Francesca," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 31, accessed October 26, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesca-cuzzoni\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesca-cuzzoni_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

<sup>3</sup> Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali, "Francesca Cuzzoni," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06995>.

<sup>4</sup> This work is Franco's musicology thesis from the University of Pavia, which was submitted in 2001. It is worth noting that the Grove article was last updated in 2009, and cites only the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* as a source for the section on Cuzzoni's early life and career.

<sup>5</sup> In presenting this documentation, Franco explains the discrepancy between the sources. "Musicisti in Parma," a periodical from the 1930s edited by Nestore Pelicelli, is inexplicably missing an entry on Cuzzoni among biographies of

Apart from the date of Cuzzoni's birth, the broad outlines of Cuzzoni's early life and training are clear. Her father, Angelo, was born in 1671 in Parma and served as a violinist and music teacher at the Ducal court there. According to Franco, he began that position in 1696 and held it until 1718.<sup>6</sup> Another point of agreement among the sources is that Cuzzoni was a pupil of Francesco Lanzi, a prominent singing teacher from Naples.<sup>7</sup> Lanzi is mentioned in Mancini's treatise *Riflessioni pratiche sul canto figurato* in connection with Cuzzoni, and Franco notes that he held a position as a church organist in Parma between 1696 and 1709 and as an organist and trumpet player in the cathedral in Parma from 1706

---

contemporaneous musicians from Parma. According to Franco, the state archive in Parma lacks a copy of a later edition of the magazine that includes a note in an appendix mentioning the correct year of Cuzzoni's birth. The most likely culprit for the continued incorrect year is the entry on Cuzzoni in the MGG (*Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*), in which Cuzzoni's birth year is incorrect. That article is authored by Carlo Vitali, who also co-wrote the article on Cuzzoni in Grove Music Online with Winton Dean. Franco notes that she herself has informed Vitali of the correct date, but Vitali gives Cuzzoni's birthdate as 2 April 1696, which is date of her baptism. It is not possible to know whether this is a result of a misunderstanding between Vitali and Franco, since Vitali does not cite Franco as a source on the Grove article, but the sources he does cite do not mention this date at all. As Franco writes on page 7 in her study, the misinformation regarding Cuzzoni's birthdate is "un curioso caso editoriale" (7n).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 7–8.

<sup>7</sup> Very little is known about Lanzi. There is a small amount of biographical information included in one of the appendices to Giambattista Mancini's treatise *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (1774). His birth date is uncertain, and he died sometime after 1812. In 1812 he became the singing-master at San Pietro in Naples. He was also the father of the London-based singing teacher, Gesualdo Lanza.

to 1712. She believes that Cuzzoni most likely began studying with Lanzi in 1714, when the singer would have been eighteen years old.<sup>8</sup>

The date of Cuzzoni's first performance is unclear. The article in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* reports that Cuzzoni's operatic debut came in 1716 during the carnival season in Parma; she reportedly sang the role of Galatea in Astorga's *Dafni* at the court theater. Dean and Vitali cite a different year and composition for her debut: in 1714 in the anonymous opera *La virtù coronate, o sia Il Fernando* in Parma. Franco provides more detailed information, noting that Cuzzoni first sang during in a serenata in the Ducal Giardino di Colorno, the summer home of the Farnese family. Franco concurs with Dean and Vitali, citing her operatic debut as September 1714 in *La virtù coronate o sia Il Fernando* at the Piccolo Teatro di Corte in Parma. 1716 brought the aforementioned performance of Emanuele Astorga's *Dafni* as well as Brunechilde in Giovanni Battista Bassani's *Alarico re dei Goti* and Erminia in *Armida Abbandonata* by Giuseppe Maria Buini during the summer.<sup>9</sup>

Cuzzoni traveled to Bologna in October of 1716 to sing in *Merope* by Francesco Gasparini and Giuseppe Orlandini at the Teatro Formagliari. She would return to Bologna several times throughout her career. 1717 was full of engagements: Cuzzoni sang in Mantova, Genoa, Tuscany, Siena, and Florence in operas by many different composers, including Carlo Francesco Pollaro. In April of 1718, Cuzzoni sang the role of Doneca in Vivaldi's *Scanderburg* at the

---

<sup>8</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778)," 8. "Di Francesco Lanzi, a parte il positivo giudizio del Mancini, ci è noto quasi nulla."

<sup>9</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778)," 9.

Reggio Emilia near Parma; this was Cuzzoni's only performance of a Vivaldi opera.<sup>10</sup>

The fall of 1718 included a major milestone for Cuzzoni: she debuted at her first major theater: San Giovanni Grisostomo in Venice.<sup>11</sup> The role was Dalinda in Pollaro's *Ariodante*. She sang at San Giovanni Grisostomo many times during her career, but this occasion was also notable because it was the first time that Cuzzoni shared the stage with Faustina Bordoni.<sup>12</sup>

After a successful debut in Venice, Cuzzoni began to schedule performances outside of Italy. Her first such performance was at the imperial court in Vienna. A letter dated 12 February 1718 from Giovanni Bartolomeo Lorengo, an agent for the Borghese family, recounts that the "virtuosa" Cuzzoni had sung for the court and she had been generously rewarded financially for her performance. After these performances, Cuzzoni returned to Italy to sing at San

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>11</sup> The Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo opened in Venice in 1678 and was one of the most important, largest, and opulent theaters of the early eighteenth century. It is currently known as the Teatro Malibran. By 1751, San Giovanni Grisostomo (so named for the nearby church of the same name) ceased to present operas, and by the end of the century had fallen into disrepair, was acquired by the city of Venice, and was renamed the Teatro Civico. The famous soprano Maria Malibran came to the theater in 1835 to sing a production of Bellini's *La Sonnambula*; she donated her fee to the impresario to be put toward the evidently much needed repairs. The theater was renamed Teatro Malibran in her honor that same year. Karyl Lynn Zietz, "Teatro La Fenice and Teatro Malibran, Venice", *Italian Opera Houses and Festivals*. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005) 101.

<sup>12</sup> Faustina Bordoni (1697–1781) made her own debut at San Giovanni Grisostomo in 1716, coincidentally in the same opera. Bordoni sang the role of Ginevra, and repeated it in 1718 when she first sang with Cuzzoni. Winton Dean, "Bordoni, Faustina," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 29, 2016, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03574>>.



Giovanni Grisostomo for the Carnival season. She sang roles in *Il Lamano* by Gasparini and *Ifigenia in Tauride* by Orlandini; Bordoni also sang in these performances.<sup>13</sup>

During the summer of 1719, Cuzzoni sang at the Pergola in Florence and the Regio Ducal Teatro in Milan. Her debut in Turin came on 26 December in *Il carceriere di se stesso* by Orlandini. Franco writes that the program booklet from the performances calls Cuzzoni “la virtuosa della gran principessa di Toscana.”<sup>14</sup> The grand princes of Tuscany were members of the Medici dynasty and great patrons of music; the designation thus suggests that the princess was Cuzzoni’s patron.<sup>15</sup>

In September of 1719, Cuzzoni traveled to Dresden to sing in two productions of operas by Antonio Lotti, *Giove in Argo*, and *Teofane* respectively. These performances are significant not only because they took place outside of Italy, but also because it is most likely the first time that Handel heard Cuzzoni

---

<sup>13</sup> Franco, “Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778),” 14.

<sup>14</sup> The “gran principessa di Toscana” at this time was Violante Beatrice of Bavaria (1673–1731). She was married to Ferdinando de’Medici, the prince of Tuscany. Francesco Martelli, “Medici, Ferdinando de’,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 73, accessed October 26, 2016, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ferdinando-de-medici\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ferdinando-de-medici_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

<sup>15</sup> The Grove article on Cuzzoni corroborates this, but gives the title as “virtuosa di camera.”

sing. The casts of the Lotti operas were made up of some of the most famous Italian opera singers of the time, including Senesino, and Cuzzoni.<sup>16</sup>

The singer returned to Turin for the 1720 Carnival season, where she sang the role of Emilia in an opera called *Lucio Papirio* by an unknown composer. The summer of 1720 found Cuzzoni again at the Pergola in Florence, singing another opera (an adaptation of *Lucio Vero*) whose composer and librettist are currently unknown. The fall of 1720 was spent in Bologna, where she sang Zenobia in *Farasmane* by Orlandini.<sup>17</sup>

Cuzzoni spent the remainder of 1720 in Venice preparing for the 1721 Carnival performances at San Giovanni Grisostomo; these included the role of Rutilia in Pollarolo's *Lucio Papirio Dittatore* and Poppea in *Nerone* by Orlandini; both of these performances also featured Faustina Bordoni. She traveled to Padua to sing at the Teatro Obizzi in *Temistocle* by Apostolo Zeno (libretto) and Fortunato Chelleri (composer). Cuzzoni's last performances in 1721 were in Venice at San Giovanni Grisostomo, where she performed the title role in Pollarolo's *Plautilla*. She remained in Venice for the 1722 Carnival season and sang the role of Arsimene in *Giulio Flavio Crispo* by Giovanni Maria Capelli, and Erenice in a pasticcio called *Venceslao*. *Venceslao*'s libretto was by Apostolo Zeno and featured arias by Capelli, Giovanni, and Pollarolo. According to Franco,

---

<sup>16</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, eds., *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 1609–1725 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778)," 14.

these were Cuzzoni's last performances before her tenure at the Royal Academy in London.<sup>18</sup>

Franco quotes a letter from Paolo Rolli that details how the Academy finally convinced Cuzzoni to come to London. The Academy began wooing Cuzzoni in 1720, but she was already engaged in other theaters for that entire season. Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino, made his debut at the Royal Academy in September of 1720, and when Cuzzoni was made aware of this, she declared that she would not come to London unless she was paid the same amount as Senesino. Evidently, the management of the Academy considered Cuzzoni to be just as valuable, because they acquiesced and offered her the same 1,500 guineas.<sup>19</sup>

After the Venetian Carnival performances in 1722, there are no other records of performances by Cuzzoni before her departure for London. She arrived there in December 1722 in advance of her debut in Handel's *Ottone* at the Royal Academy on 12 January 1723. She would not return to Italy until 1729. By the time she reached London, she had married the composer and harpsichordist Pier Giuseppe Sandoni, who probably joined her in London.

A detailed chronology of Cuzzoni's performances in London from 1723-1725 is offered in Chapter Two. Chapter Three details Cuzzoni's career at the

---

<sup>18</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778)," 15.

<sup>19</sup> Paolo Rolli (1687-1765) was an Italian librettist and poet who worked in London between 1716 and 1744. He provided many libretti for operas by Handel, Bononcini and other composers as well. Lowell Lindgren and Carlo Caruso, "Rolli, Paolo Antonio," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 29, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46200>.

Royal Academy from 1726-1728; these were pivotal years due to the dual engagement at the Academy of Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni followed by the subsequent closing of the Academy. Although Cuzzoni's career in Italy up to 1723 would already have been considered remarkable by most standards, in London she achieved a level of fame and notoriety that was unprecedented, especially for a female singer. In addition to singing leading roles in operas by all of the leading Italian opera composers of her day, she embarked on a musical journey that would have Handel, one of the greatest opera composers of all time, writing specifically for her voice. She became, in Franco's words, the "queen of the Royal Academy of Music, and Handel's muse."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778)," 17.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Prima Donna of the Royal Academy, 1723–1725**

By 1723, Francesca Cuzzoni was the undisputed *prima donna* of the Royal Academy of Music and, by extension, all of London and much of continental Europe (where Italian *opera seria* was the fashion). Although her first role for the London stage, *Ottone*, was not specifically composed for her, her technical prowess and stage presence quickly inspired Handel to write some of his most beloved and performed arias. This chapter will chronicle Cuzzoni's performances at the Academy and elsewhere, her interactions with Handel, and the affects of her association with the Royal Academy between 1723 and 1725. Newspaper items, letters, and other historical documents allow for the construction of a complete account of Cuzzoni's career from her arrival in London in late 1722 to the first appearance of her rival soprano, Faustina Bordoni, in 1726. During these years, Cuzzoni achieved some of the crowning vocal and dramatic accomplishments of her career and flourished as both the onstage and offstage darling of the European opera scene.

Although Cuzzoni could be heard singing on the opera stages of Italy and Germany as early as 1716, she did not come to London until 1723. When the Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1719, Handel was appointed "master of musick" and was tasked by the Academy's directors with traveling to continental Europe to "procure singers for the English stage."<sup>1</sup> The directors were clearly most interested in engaging

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, eds., *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 1609–1725 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 430.

Francesco Bernardi, better known as Senesino, who was the greatest castrato of the time, for the Academy.

Table 1: Overview of Handel's operas for Cuzzoni

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Premiere</b>	<b>Cuzzoni Role</b>	<b>Number of Arias</b>
<i>Ottone</i>	1723	Teofane	7
<i>Flavio</i>	1723	Emilia	5
<i>Giulio Cesare</i>	1724	Cleopatra	8
<i>Tamerlano</i>	1724	Asteria	6
<i>Rodelinda</i>	1725	Rodelinda	8
<i>Scipione</i>	1726	Berenice	6
<i>Alessandro</i>	1726	Lisaura	6
<i>Admeto</i>	1726	Antigona	8
<i>Riccardo Primo</i>	1727	Costanza	6
<i>Siroe</i>	1728	Laodice	5
<i>Tolomeo</i>	1728	Seleuce	5

However, in their “Instructions to Mr. Hendel,” the directors added that “in case Mr. Hendel meet with an excellent voice of the first rate he is to acquaint the Governor and company forthwith of it and upon what terms he or she may be had.”<sup>2</sup> This warrant was posted on 14 May 1719 after a two-year hiatus in the performing of Italian *opera seria* in London.

The Royal Academy was founded in order to produce *opera seria* in London on a regular basis.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Italian opera had been performed in London prior to the founding of the Academy, as early as 1705, but had met with financial difficulties. Some of Handel’s early operas (*Rinaldo*, *Teseo*, and *Amadigi di Gaula*) were first performed

---

<sup>2</sup> C. Steven LaRue, *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Gibson, *The Royal Academy of Music 1719–1728, The Institution and its Directors* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 6.

in London during this pre-Academy era (in 1711, 1713 and 1715, respectively). In the early eighteenth century, the phenomenon of publicly-funded opera houses was still relatively new; the only houses at this time were in Venice, Rome, Hamburg, and London.<sup>4</sup> Opera was simply too expensive, since the difference between the costs of mounting the productions and the revenue brought in by patrons was just too large. As a result, there were no Italian operas produced in London between 1716 and 1720. Rather than rely on public funding, the Royal Academy of Music was established as joint-stock company supported by regular subscribers and local entrepreneurs, all of whom committed to invest a specified and constant amount over the course of several years.<sup>5</sup> It was under these circumstances that the group, headed by one Holles Newcastle, charged Handel, at that time undisputedly the most popular and successful composer of Italian-style opera in London, with the most important task of engaging the best Italian opera singers in Europe for the Academy.

It is not clear from Handel's few remaining letters or from surviving documents when the composer first met Cuzzoni or heard her sing. Handel traveled to Dresden in 1719 during his recruiting trip, and the court at Dresden employed many of the most famous Italian opera singers of the time. He attended performances there of Antonio Lotti's *Giove in Argo* (3 September) and *Teofane* (13 September). The casts of these operas included many of the singers whom Handel would try to recruit for the Royal Academy, among them Senesino, Margherita Durastanti, and Cuzzoni herself.<sup>6</sup> Although she had been engaged in 1719, her arrival in London was delayed until 1722 due to

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 444.

previously arranged engagements in Italy. In 1720 she sang in Turin, Bologna and Florence, followed by appearances in Padua and Venice in 1721 and 1722. Before she arrived in London toward the end of 1722, the singer married the composer Giuseppe Sandoni.<sup>7</sup>

Cuzzoni's arrival in London was highly anticipated. As early as the beginning of October, *The London Journal*, *The Daily Journal* and *The Daily Courant* began writing of her anticipated arrival, concluding with a formal announcement of her impending arrival in the *London Journal* on 27 October 1722. Italian opera had been the entertainment of choice in London since the founding of the Academy in 1719, and public's interest in the operatic scene in continental Europe was so substantial that the best Italian singers were known by reputation. Cuzzoni's fate as the Academy's prima donna and the greatest attraction of the London stage was thus sealed well before her physical arrival. The *London Journal's* announcement featured a description of Cuzzoni that stated that she possessed a "much finer Voice and more accurate Judgment, than any of her Country Women who have performed on the English Stage."<sup>8</sup>

Her first appearance with the Royal Academy was in Handel's *Ottone*, which was premiered on 12 January 1723. Her debut performance was well attended and overwhelmingly praised in the newspapers. Her role in *Ottone* was that of Teofane, and her first aria was "Falsa immagine." Unlike the rest of the Handel roles that Cuzzoni sang at the Royal Academy, this one had not been written specifically for her.

---

<sup>7</sup> Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali, "Cuzzoni, Francesca," *Grove Music Online*, Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06995>.

<sup>8</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 600–601.



Presumably Handel did not have enough advance notice of her arrival to rewrite the part, and she had to be content with music that was most likely written for Margherita Durastanti, the Royal Academy's reigning prima donna before her arrival.<sup>9</sup>

Of course Cuzzoni was not content to sing music that had not been written specifically for her; and felt that she should not be expected arias that had been written for an inferior singer. This opinion may sound ridiculous to the twenty-first-century reader, but some context on the practice of opera composition during the eighteenth century may provide justification. The opera singer was unquestionably the dominant figure of the musical scene in eighteenth-century continental Europe, and the process of creating an opera was quite different from current practice. The cast was assembled, a libretto was chosen to suit the cast, and only then was a composer engaged to write the music. In 1720, the composer Benedetto Marcello described the process. While his tone is somewhat facetious, his description nevertheless makes clear that the singers were at the top of the pecking order, while the composers were significantly lower: "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 [in the opera]."<sup>10</sup> This idea of catering to singers was a purely practical consideration. Handel scholars Winton Dean and J. Merrill Knapp point out that "*opera seria* was geared to the solo voice; audience and singers alike expected and appreciated this."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Handel scholar Jens Peter Larsen notes that "A singer's right to insist that an aria

---

<sup>9</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

should be made to fit his special voice was then so accepted that it was a quite natural thing to transpose or re-write arias when a work was performed again with other singers.”<sup>12</sup>

When Handel traveled to Italy to recruit singers in 1719, he was unable to convince any of the first choices to come to London immediately; Cuzzoni did not appear at the Royal Academy until 1723. Many of the finest opera singers of the day were already employed at the court opera in Dresden and were unwilling to break off their engagements there to come to London. Durastanti had already worked with Handel when they were both in Italy between 1706 and 1708, and in fact, Handel wrote the title role in *Agrippina* for her. However, C. Steven LaRue has noted in his excellent book on the Royal Academy that there are not many first-hand accounts of Durastanti’s voice. We do know that she was not among the top choices of the Academy directors, but that because neither Senesino, Cuzzoni, nor Bordoni could be coaxed to London immediately, Handel had to resort to a second string of singers.<sup>13</sup> Cuzzoni was undoubtedly aware of Durastanti’s abilities, since she had sung with her on several occasions.<sup>14</sup> In this context, it is clear why Cuzzoni was evidently displeased to be presented — for her London debut — singing music that was composed for a colleague who was commonly acknowledged to be inferior.

---

<sup>12</sup> Jens Peter Larsen, *Handel’s Messiah* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1957) 25.

<sup>13</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 81.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Rogers, "Handel and Five Prima Donnas," *The Musical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1943): 214–224, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/stable/739522>. In the article “Handel and Five Prima Donnas”, author Francis Rogers asserts that “very likely she [Durastanti] was no better than a reliable routine singer, but for twenty years she seems to have been a welcome and familiar figure on the London operatic stage.”

Perhaps the most famous anecdote about Cuzzoni — one that gives us significant insight into Handel’s personality as well as hers — personalities, is the story of her reaction to the first aria in *Ottone*, the very first aria she was to perform in London, Teofane’s “Falsa immagine.” Cuzzoni refused to sing it. Handel finally threatened to throw her out of a window if she did not. As Keates explains it,

Cuzzoni was understandably disappointed with “Falsa immagine” and refused point blank to sing it in rehearsal. She did not know her man. Handel, unaccustomed to dictation from his singers on points of art, took hold of the factious diva, shouting (in French, which he seems to have spoken more readily than Italian): “Madame, je sais que vous êtes une véritable diablesse, mais je vous ferai savoir, moi, que je suis Beelzebub, le chef des diables,” and threatened to throw her out the window. The “little siren of the stage” was no match for “the charming brute.”<sup>15</sup>

In the end, Cuzzoni relented and sang “Falsa Immagine.” Luckily for both singer and composer, her London debut was a resounding success, and she sang the role in several subsequent revivals of *Ottone*.

A recently published volume of Handel documents contains many reviews of Cuzzoni’s first performance. In a letter to a Count von Flemming of Warsaw, Friedrich Ernst von Fabrice reported that Cuzzoni had finally arrived and proclaimed her performance in *Ottone* to be a great success that resulted in “a very great applause.” He also noted that the house was full and that tickets to the second performance had dramatically increased in price from that of only the day before: “there is such a demand that tickets are already being sold at 2 or 3 guineas which are normally half a

---

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Keates, *Handel: the Man and His Music* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 102. [“Madame, I see that you are a true she-devil, but I will have you know that I, myself, am Beelzebub, the chief devil!”]

guinea....”<sup>16</sup> On 19 January, the *British Journal* also reported Cuzzoni’s debut, saying that she had received “the greatest applause imaginable.”<sup>17</sup>

Stephen LaRue writes that although neither of Teofane’s most well-known arias in *Ottone*, “Falsa immagine” and “Affanni del pensier,” were written specifically for Cuzzoni,<sup>18</sup> they did help to establish her reputation as a “pathetic heroine,” which in turn ultimately led to many of her most successful performances. LaRue also notes that these arias were written to suit Cuzzoni’s ability to express pathos and melancholy. The arias feature dissonances on strong beats — the first instances of this feature in Handel’s output — and frequent suspensions in the vocal lines. The pathetic heroine became one of Cuzzoni’s most frequent dramatic and musical characterizations, particularly after 1726 in the Cuzzoni/Bordoni operas, and as LaRue has put it, was her “stock-in-trade” within the Royal Academy company.”<sup>19</sup> The next two chapters in this dissertation explore the differences in dramatic character types for Cuzzoni in periods before and after Faustina Bordoni’s debut at the Royal Academy.

The two months following Cuzzoni’s first performances as Teofane were filled with even more success. She was invited to perform a private concert for the Prince and Princess of Wales in their residence at Leicester House, and on 18 January, she sang at the Earl of Burlington’s house in Piccadilly. Donald Burrows conjectures that Handel

---

<sup>16</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 616.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 617.

<sup>18</sup> [LaRue](#), *Handel and His Singers*, 139. Although LaRue points out later in the chapter that there is no conclusive proof that Handel wrote them specifically with Durastanti in mind either.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 137.

himself may have accompanied Cuzzoni at this performance.<sup>20</sup> At the end of March, *Ottone* was revived, this time with three new arias (two for Cuzzoni) as well as a new scene (also for Cuzzoni). The performance on 28 March was given “as a benefit” for Cuzzoni, meaning that she kept a percentage of the ticket fees. The house was reportedly very crowded, and the singer earned over seven hundred pounds. This is especially remarkable given that her contract for the entire season at the Academy was for two thousand pounds.<sup>21</sup> Things did not remain easy for Cuzzoni, however; she had not even been in London for three months when the *London Journal* began to forecast an event that would eventually lead to her demise as the darling of the London social scene. On 30 March, a news item in the *Journal* noted that Cuzzoni’s time would “soon be out,” as the highly anticipated arrival of Faustina Bordoni drew near. As it happened, Bordoni would not actually arrive in London until 1726.<sup>22</sup>

The spring season of 1723 concluded with the first performances of Handel’s *Flavio*. In addition to the aforementioned *Ottone*, the season included operas by Ariosti and Bononcini. However, the grand finale productions of the season (which also coincided with the King’s birthday) were the performances of *Flavio* and repeat performances of *Ottone*. The singers in *Flavio* were the same for *Ottone*, with Cuzzoni and Senesino in the leading roles.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 618. Burrows posits this in his commentary on the news item featuring the concert in *The Daily Journal* on January 22.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 632.

<sup>22</sup> Otto Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 151.

<sup>23</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 642–644.

The fall of 1723 found Cuzzoni singing in Bath. The letters and newspaper reports from this time offer details of Cuzzoni's personality and habits. Letters from fellow Royal Academy singers Anastasia Robinson and Gaetano Berenstadt describe Cuzzoni's gambling and pre-marital relations with Giuseppe Sandoni. (The status of their relationship and possible marriage was never clear from her arrival in London in late 1722 until at least 1725, when their daughter was born.)<sup>24</sup> Robinson's remarks about Cuzzoni insinuate that her motivations for coming to Bath were either to see Sandoni or to shop for new clothes, and that it was not clear which of these aims was "more dear to her." Robinson also pointed out that Cuzzoni earned a lot of money in Bath. Berenstadt was more direct: "If Cuzzoni's behaviour were as good as her singing, she would be a divine thing." He went on to say that, in addition to being "mad and unpredictable," and in spite of her well-publicized salary, she was constantly broke. In addition, most assumed that Sandoni and Cuzzoni were not married; Berenstadt specifically says that Sandoni has "established himself in her house," and that this cost Cuzzoni her reputation among society women. Berenstadt's letter concludes with a litany of the reasons that Sandoni was also not well respected among his peers: "lavishness, finery, jewelry, eating, drinking, bastards, debts, [and] love affairs are the

---

<sup>24</sup> In fact, the major documentary sources, both the recently released volume of Handel documents edited by Donald Burrows et al. and Otto Deutsch's documentary biography disagree completely about the specific date of Cuzzoni and Sandoni's marriage. Accounts vary widely over a span of 3 years. Some scholars have written (including Winton Dean in his Grove article) that Cuzzoni married Sandoni "on her way to London" in late 1722, while other documents seem to prove that the marriage did not take place until January of 1725. Streatfeild writes that Sandoni "brought Cuzzoni to England as his wife." It is only certain that Cuzzoni and Sandoni's first child was born in August of 1725 and that they were married by that point.

delights of this wretched madman.”<sup>25</sup> In a letter to Giuseppe Riva, Giacomo Zamboni plainly states that the season in Bath, although financially lucrative, “did not do much good for Cuzzoni,” since she spent and gambled away all of her earnings.<sup>26</sup>

It seems that Cuzzoni was either predisposed to these indulgences or that she was already completely under Sandoni’s spell. On 19 October, the *London Journal* reported that she made a substantial sum performing in Bath (a fact corroborated by Anastasia Robinson’s aforementioned letter). According to the Journal, she had six hundred tickets at her disposal for each of her performances, so that she kept the earnings from those tickets each time she sang in public, “which was never less than once a week.”<sup>27</sup> The wording of this report suggests two things: that Cuzzoni controlled the number of performances that she gave during this time, and that she elected to sing often because she needed the money. The letters from Robinson and Sandoni certainly support the notion that, despite these generous earnings, she lived lavishly and always spent all that she earned.

Cuzzoni returned to London by February of 1724 for perhaps the greatest theatrical triumph of her career: *Giulio Cesare*. The first performance was on 20 February 1724, and the press release indicates that fewer single tickets were available due to an increase in the number of subscribers (which presumably occurred because of the overwhelming successes of the previous season). The same singers from *Ottone* and *Flavio*, including Robinson, Durastanti, and Berenstadt, joined Cuzzoni and Senesino for *Giulio Cesare*. The *Daily Journal* reported on 21 February that the Prince and

---

<sup>25</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 661–662.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 664.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 662.

Princess of Wales and many other members of the English aristocracy were in attendance at the opening night performance. Both the performance and the presence of the aristocracy were even covered by the French newspaper *Le Mercure de France*, which noted that “in London this work is considered to be a musical masterpiece, even by the Italians.”<sup>28</sup>

In a letter dated 10 March 1724, Friedrich von Fabrice wrote again to Count von Flemming in Warsaw and reported on the first performances of *Giulio Cesare*. Fabrice wrote that opera had “been going extremely well [for the Academy] since the new one by Hendell,” contrasting these performances with those in January and February of operas by Bononcini and Ariosti. These performances had not gone well due to an argument between Robinson and Senesino about an onstage incident. As a result, the *Weekly Journal* predicted that such discord among star singers would cause the ultimate demise of opera in London, and in an editorial comment, Donald Burrows notes that the incident may have motivated Robinson’s decision to retire at the end of the season. However, Fabrice labeled *Giulio Cesare* a triumph “in which Senesino and Cozzuna shine beyond all description.”<sup>29</sup>

The remainder of the spring season of 1724 saw Cuzzoni in performances of Bononcini’s *Calphurnia* and Ariosti’s *Aquilio Consolo*. Ariosti’s opera was the last new work presented by the Academy that season and included the same performers that had been featured throughout the season (Senesino, Durastanti, Robinson, Berenstadt and Boschi). In the previous season (1722–1723), Handel had the honor of premiering two newly-composed operas at the Academy, while Bononcini and Ariosti had only

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 675.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 670, 678.



contributed one each. During the 1723–1724 season, Bononcini and Ariosti each had the opportunity to premiere two new operas, while Handel only had one new work performed (*Giulio Cesare*). Due to the disappointing reviews of the operas by Bononcini and Ariosti, it is not surprising that the *Weekly Journal* reported on 23 May 1724 that Bononcini would not be retained by the Academy for the following season and would return to Italy. However, he was saved at the last moment by his patron, Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, who offered to sponsor him at five hundred pounds per year to stay and compose in London. It is worth remembering Cuzzoni's salary at this point, two thousand pounds per year, to illustrate the difference in perceived value by the Academy (and by extension the public) between star singers and composers.<sup>30</sup> R.A. Streatfeild attributes Handel's success and Bononcini's failure in London to Cuzzoni alone: "The combination of Handel's music and Cuzzoni's voice dealt a severe blow to the Bononcini faction. Now that Handel had his command a singer capable of doing justice to his music, his superiority was indisputable."<sup>31</sup>

By the spring of 1724, Cuzzoni was at the height of her popularity. She was not only the most highly-regarded female singer of her time, but was also the center of attention in high society. Cuzzoni enjoyed the attention, and she "took good care that the public should be kept *au fait* with all her movements."<sup>32</sup> The public followed her appearance, choice of dress, and leisure activities with much interest. In a time and society in which opera was one of the few sources of entertainment, she not only created

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 684, 695.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Streatfeild, *Handel* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1964), 93.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

interest in herself as a sort of matinee idol, but increased the public's interest in singing and opera as art forms. People belonged to individual singer's and/or composer's factions and fiercely debated the musical merits of their favorites as well as the shortcomings of their favorites' rivals. In 1723, John Gay (the composer of *The Beggar's Opera*) wrote to Jonathan Swift:

As for the reigning amusement of the town, it is entirely music, real fiddles, bass viols and hautboys, not poetical harps, lyres and reeds. There's nobody allowed to say I sing, but an eunuch or an Italian woman. Everybody is grown now as great a judge of music as they were in your time of poetry, and folks that could not distinguish one tune from another, now daily dispute about the different styles of Handel, Bononcini and Attilio.”<sup>33</sup>

On 6 June 1724, an Ambrose Phillips published an “Ode” to Cuzzoni in the *London Journal*. The poem is satirical, but the fact that it was published at all underscores Cuzzoni's popularity. The ode is short and characterizes Cuzzoni as the “little siren of the stage...empty warbler, breathing lyre” (the “empty” presumably referred to her widely acknowledged lackluster acting ability). The ode goes on to bid her to leave London: “hence, to Southern Climes again...to this Island bid farewell; leave us as we ought to be, leave the Britons rough and free.”<sup>34</sup> As if the ode itself were not enough, the text was set to music by Henry Holcombe and published in song collections throughout the 1730s. Furthermore, on 27 June, a response was published in *The Universal Journal*. The anonymous author praises Phillips's ode as “the most beautiful

---

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>34</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 696–697.

piece of its kind I have ever read,” but takes the opposite position on Cuzzoni’s leaving England. “Cease in such a tuneful strain, to command her home again.”<sup>35</sup>

In fact, Cuzzoni did leave London at the end of the spring season in 1724, but only temporarily. She traveled to Paris to sing in performances of *Ottone* and *Giulio Cesare* that were sponsored by King Louis XV and were part of Pierre Crozat’s private concert series. Crozat was a French financier, art collector, and music connoisseur. The summer season of 1724 was the second time that Crozat had invited a cadre of opera singers from London to perform in Paris. Apparently, Cuzzoni was considered the biggest draw for these concerts and was deemed indispensable. A letter quoted by Elizabeth Gibson in *The Royal Academy of Music* states that Parisian society was particularly looking forward to hearing her, and that if she would not come to Paris, “it will be better for the affair to miscarry.”<sup>36</sup> Cuzzoni did go to Paris that summer, but lost her voice and was unable to sing for the King in the first of the series concerts.<sup>37</sup> She remained in Paris for the rest of August and September, singing in more performances of both *Ottone* and *Giulio Cesare* and also appearing at court to sing an “Italian composition” at a mass for the King. Of this performance, the *Daily Courant* reported that Cuzzoni “distinguish’d herself amongst all the other voices...but the King did not shew any great liking to the Italian Musick.”<sup>38</sup> Cuzzoni returned to London in October,

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 700.

<sup>36</sup> Gibson, *The Royal Academy of Music 1719-1728*, 206.

<sup>37</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 709.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 715.

and on 31 October sang the role of Asteria in the premiere of Handel's *Tamerlano* at the Academy.

The beginning of 1725 was eventful for Cuzzoni. Speculation regarding her relationship with Giuseppe Sandoni had been rampant for years, and on 11 January 1725, the *Daily Journal* reported that Cuzzoni and Sandoni (characterized in the news item as “a very rich Italian”) were to be married in the Chapel of Count Staremborg, the Imperial Ambassador.<sup>39</sup> Cuzzoni's Academy colleague Gaetano Berenstadt expressed negative feelings about the pair in a letter to Giacomo Zamboni in February of 1725: “I am glad that Cuzzoni has married Sandoni, because they deserve each other.”<sup>40</sup> Burrows's commentary on Berenstadt's letter offers that the latter's tone again suggests that Cuzzoni and Sandoni had been living together for some time, and that their “deserving [of] each other” suggests that they were well matched in a moral sense, although the marriage had not been made official until that January. The timing of the wedding does seem curious: Cuzzoni gave birth to a daughter on 22 August 1725, not quite eight months after the wedding.

At the Academy, 1725 began with performances of *Giulio Cesare*. Her next triumph would come in Handel's *Rodelinda*. The draft score of this work was completed on 20 January 1725 (according to a note on the autograph); there were considerable revisions made between 20 January and premiere at the Academy on 13 February.<sup>41</sup> The first performance was announced in *The Daily Courant*, and the instructions

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 739.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 748.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 742.

included that no more than three hundred and forty tickets would be given out to subscribers, that there would be no tickets available at the door, and that no one “whatsoever [would be] admitted for money.”<sup>42</sup> The last sentence most likely means that tickets were only available to season subscribers who had purchased and procured their tickets in advance of the performances, and that no one who had not subscribed would be able to arrive at the theater for the performance and purchase a ticket.

Although *Giulio Cesare* is likely the most famous of Handel’s operas, *Rodelinda* is significant when considering Cuzzoni’s roles, particularly because it is the only opera in which she sang the title role. This suggests that Handel and librettist Nicola Haym had great confidence in Cuzzoni and that she was capable of both the musical assignment and the dramatic responsibility of sustaining an opera. LaRue writes that her portrayal of a title character suggests that Cuzzoni’s status as the *prima donna* of the company “was by that time on the same level as Senesino’s as *primo uomo*.”<sup>43</sup>

The premiere of *Rodelinda* is also noteworthy because it is the source of another famous comment about Cuzzoni. Horace Walpole, a British art historian, wrote that Cuzzoni was “short and squat with a doughy cross face, but fine complexion; she was not even a good actress, dressed ill and was silly and fantastical.”<sup>44</sup> Walpole points out that onstage Cuzzoni wore a brown silk gown trimmed with silver so scandalous and vulgar

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 749.

<sup>43</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 752.

that it simultaneously repulsed the older generation and attracted the younger audience members — so much so that young ladies adopted it as a fashion statement.<sup>45</sup>

The spring of 1725 saw Cuzzoni in two more productions: *Dario* by Ariosti and *Elpidia*, which was the first *pasticcio* — an opera comprised of previously-composed music by several different composers — the Academy produced. The libretto was based on *I rivali generosi* by Apostolo Ziani, and the arias came from several different operas written for the Carnival season in Venice that year. It is possible that Handel wrote the recitatives for *Elpidia*, but it is surmised that the recitatives were written by Leonardo Vinci, who wrote many of the arias.<sup>46</sup>

On 22 August 1725, Cuzzoni gave birth to a daughter. In a letter from Mary Pendarves,<sup>47</sup> several details about the birth are given. First, that it is “a mighty mortification it was not a son,” and that it was a pity that the family name of Sandoni would die out with the father. It was rumored that when Cuzzoni went into labor, she “was brought to bed, [and] she sung ‘La Speranza’” (an aria from *Ottone*).<sup>48</sup> Pendarves also reported that Sandoni was an attentive spouse and new father: “...amongst other

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 752.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 772.

<sup>47</sup> Simon Dewes, *Mrs. Delany* (London: Rich & Cowan, Ltd, 1989), 20. Mary Pendarves (1700–1788)—née Granville, and then Delany after her second marriage in 1743)—was an artist, a member of the Bluestocking society, a fixture in the London social scene during the 1720s, and a close personal friend of Handel’s.

<sup>48</sup> The only reference to the child that I was able to find came from the Wikipedia entry on Francesca Cuzzoni: Of the two children she seems to have had by Sandoni, nothing is known - they may have died in infancy.

superfluous charges, he has bought a very fine looking-glass for the child, and a black laced hood for his wife to see company in.”<sup>49</sup>

The fall of 1725 consisted of revivals for Cuzzoni. Both *Tamerlano* and *Giulio Cesare* were presented in Hamburg; *Tamerlano* on 16 and 27 September, and *Cesare* on 10 and 21 November. The occasion for the performances of *Tamerlano* was for the marriage of King Louis XV of France to Maria Leszcynska, and the performance included a new prologue composed by Telemann. For these performances, it seems that the recitatives, which Telemann had set in German, were in fact sung in German, but that the arias remained in Italian.<sup>50</sup> The entries for these events in Otto Deutsch’s biography of Handel do not include cast lists for the Hamburg performances, but it is likely that the Academy singers made up the cast. The fact that that arias were sung in Italian, that the 1725-1726 season at the Academy did not begin in London until 30 November, and that this same complement of singers had traveled in recent years all underscore the possibility that Cuzzoni was among the company in Hamburg.

The 1725–1726 season at the Academy (its seventh season) began on 30 November with a revival of *Elpidia* and continued with performances of *Rodelinda* on 18, 21, 23 December and 1, 4, 8 and 11 January of 1726. *Ottone* was revived on 5 February, and Handel’s *Scipione*, the first new work of the season was premiered on 12 March.<sup>51</sup> Cuzzoni sang the role of Berenice opposite the Lucejo of Senesino.

---

<sup>49</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 783.

<sup>50</sup> Otto Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 151, 187.

<sup>51</sup> Deutsch points out that the score of *Scipione* was complete, according to the autograph on March 2, only 10 days before the first performance.

*Scipione* is a significant work in that it is the last opera that Handel wrote for the Academy while Cuzzoni was the undisputed *prima donna*. Handel's musical and dramatic characterization of Cuzzoni changed considerably in the operas he wrote for the Academy after Faustina Bordoni's arrival. The cast of *Scipione* included two other female singers who were both new to the Academy: Costantini, a mezzo-soprano, and Dotti, a contralto; they replaced Robinson and Durastanti, who had retired at the end of the previous season. Cuzzoni's next performance at the Academy was opposite Faustina Bordoni in Handel's *Alessandro*.

Cuzzoni's career at the Academy between 1723 and 1725 was remarkable for a number of reasons. Her popularity allowed her to become one of the most sought-after singers of the time and ensured huge personal financial successes — though the Academy struggled to keep itself in good financial standing. She established herself as a specialist in pathetic heroine characters, but Handel also allowed her room to stretch dramatically with parts like *Giulio Cesare's* Cleopatra, a major dramatic force in the action of the opera, and in the title role of *Rodelinda*, whose strength and fidelity are the engine that prevail over the villainy of the other characters and allow for the opera's triumphant and happy ending. In the next chapter, we shall see that the arrival of Faustina Bordoni necessitated Handel's limiting of both women's dramatic personalities — onstage at least — as well as their musical characterizations.

Two of the operas that remain Handel's best known and most often produced works (*Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*) were both written for Cuzzoni and were composed after Handel had had a long acquaintance with her both personally and musically. (Over a year had passed between the singer's first performances in *Ottone* and the premiere of *Giulio Cesare*). Furthermore, her vocal technique was evidently so superior to any of



the female singers who had sung at the Academy before her, that the pre-Cuzzoni operas had to be written in such a way to hide their limitations. Chapter Four will present the observations of contemporary critics who heard Cuzzoni perform. Streatfeild asserted that Cuzzoni was the first singer who was technically capable of singing Handel's music; perhaps her vocal and dramatic skills were even responsible for helping Handel develop his music and realize his full potential in writing for the soprano voice.

### Chapter 3

#### Cuzzoni's Changing Role at the Royal Academy, 1726–1728

From 1723 to 1725, Francesca Cuzzoni and her colleague Francesco Bernardi, known as Senesino, were the principal singers in virtually every opera production mounted at the Royal Academy and were thus two of the biggest celebrities in London. Although Cuzzoni's arrival in London had been highly anticipated and her performances had been unanimously praised, it did not take long before the Academy sought to procure its next star singer. On 30 March 1723, *The London Journal* published an item that forecast Faustina Bordoni's engagement at the Academy:

As we delight so much in Italian Songs, we are likely to have enough of them, for as soon as Cuzzoni's Time is out, we are to have another over; for we are well assured *Faustina*, the fine Songstress at Venice, is invited, whose Voice, they say, exceeds that we have already here...<sup>1</sup>

In the reviews from their first London performances together, in Handel's *Alessandro*, the two singers were compared on every conceivable point of evaluation and referred to as "The Rival Queens." Because neither Cuzzoni, Bordoni, nor Handel left any written accounts from this period, the degree to which this rivalry originated from the two singers themselves or from London society at large is not known. What can be more objectively traced, however, is how the music that Handel wrote for his principal singers changed once Bordoni arrived and Cuzzoni was no longer the sole prima donna of the company. Specific examples of this evolving style will be offered in Chapter Five; this chapter will establish a chronology of Cuzzoni's activities during the period between Bordoni's arrival in London in 1726 and the closing of the Royal Academy in 1728. These

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 1609–1725 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 633. Bordoni would not sing at the Royal Academy until 1726.

activities are essential to understanding the musical changes that Handel undertook to accommodate his two famous sopranos during this period.

The seventh season at the Royal Academy officially began on 30 November 1725 with a revival of the previous season's *pasticcio*, *Elpidia*. Cuzzoni and Senesino reprised their roles from the original production and sang additional music composed for this revival.<sup>2</sup> The remainder of 1725 was taken up with subsequent performances of *Elpidia* and a revival of *Rodelinda*. After the success of *Elpidia*, the Academy followed it with another *pasticcio*, *Eliza*, which premiered on 15 January 1726. It is interesting to note the frequency with which Cuzzoni performed at the Academy: during this two-month period, she starred in revivals of two operas (one of which, *Rodelinda*, contains eight arias for the title character), and then went on to sing in *Eliza*, a brand-new piece with arias composed by Nicola Porpora. Unfortunately, *Eliza* did not prove to be nearly as popular with audiences as *Elpidia* had been, and the Academy decided to cancel the remaining performances. A revival of *Ottone*, with some new music by Handel, replaced the rest of the run of *Eliza*; the first performance of the revival was advertised for 5 February but was postponed until 8 February because Cuzzoni was ill.<sup>3</sup>

The letters and news items from March of 1726 through the beginning of May are full of anticipatory details and predictions about Bordoni and the first opera in which she would appear at the Academy, Handel's *Alessandro*. A letter from Owen Swiny to

---

<sup>2</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 14. The arias in this revival of *Elpidia* were composed by Geminiano Giacomelli, Antonio Lotti, Giuseppe Maria Orlandini, Domenico Natale Sarro, and Leonardo Vinci.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 1725–1734 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 27–28.

the Duke of Richmond dated 11 March confirms that Bordoni was en route to London.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps more interestingly, Swiny writes to argue that, in his opinion, *Alessandro* would not be the best vehicle for Bordoni's first performance with the Academy.

Instead, he encouraged the duke to advocate for *Il Venceslao* by Antonio Caldara.

Swiny's reasons for promoting *Il Venceslao* were many, but first was that the arias for Cuzzoni, Senesino, and Bordoni were "prodigiously fine...[and] adapted to each of their

talents."<sup>5</sup> All three singers had performed the Caldara opera before, in Venice, and

Swiny felt that for Bordoni's debut in London, it would be better to repeat a piece that all three singers already knew than to take a chance on a premiere.

This anecdote further serves to illustrate the ranking of priorities of eighteenth-century impresarios: that the singers be presented to the best possible advantage, that they be pleased with their assignments, and that the libretto be appealing to the audience. Swiny gives some insight into his perception of the risk involved:

Shou'd the opera of Alexander not answer expectations, or answer 'em but indifferently: is not the Season, & the crop of it lost? Shou'd there be any failure in the book of Alexander: or in the composition of the Musick: or in the performance of it, in any of its parts – is not the Faustina sacrificed? If any such Miscarriage shou'd happen, 'twill give (it may be) an irrecoverable wound to the academy.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Gibson, "Swiny, Owen," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed 2 August 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/43874>. Swiny was an Irish impresario based in London from 1703 to 1713. After this period, he relocated to Venice, where he acted as an agent for the Royal Academy beginning in 1721. There are many letters from him (collected in *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents, 1725-1734*) wherein he recommends particular singers, libretti, and scores for the Academy's consideration. He was ultimately responsible for bringing Bordoni to London to sing for the Academy.

<sup>5</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 36-37

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Swiny goes further later in the letter: he knows that the singers liked *Il Venceslao* very much, that Cuzzoni sang “the first part” (meaning that she had a larger role than Bordoni), and that her arias were met with “universal applause.”

Swiny also noted that he had also sent the five songs that Cuzzoni had sung in the Venice production in case she would prefer to sing those again rather the ones he chose for the proposed London production. Thus, this letter indicates that her happiness with the repertoire was of the utmost concern to impresarios and producers. The practice of switching arias in and out of operas to please singers was relatively common during the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

On 12 March 1726, Cuzzoni gave her last performance at the Academy as the undisputed prima donna of the company. Because it featured only one starring female role (unlike *Alessandro*, which Handel wrote specifically for Cuzzoni and Bordoni), this opera, *Scipione*, seems to have been composed hastily in order to fill a slot in the Academy’s schedule before Bordoni arrived. No reviews of *Scipione* are known to exist, and it does not seem to have been revived until 1730. This is significant, since all of the other operas Handel wrote for Cuzzoni were revived at least once during her tenure at the Academy. Moreover, by 1730, the Royal Academy had dissolved, and Cuzzoni had left London.

The effect that Bordoni would have on Cuzzoni’s career cannot be overstated: her presence as Cuzzoni’s counterpart at the Royal Academy affected Handel’s writing for Cuzzoni as well as the latter’s legacy as a singer and actress and the solvency of the Royal Academy itself. The two singers were painted as diametrically opposed rivals,

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 37.

both in voice type and dramatic persona. Accounts from the period suggest that much of London was divided into factions favoring one singer over the other, and their supposed feud was so notorious that it became the subject of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. In addition to changing the social dynamics of opera audiences in London, Bordoni's presence had an undeniable effect on the operas themselves. In *Handel and His Singers*, C. Steven LaRue writes that the "addition of Faustina Bordoni to the Royal Academy placed a constraint" on Handel, because he (as well as Bononcini, Ariosti, et al.) was now required to compose in such a way to feature two equally important sopranos.<sup>8</sup>

There is however, some disagreement among scholars about whether the rivalry actually originated with Cuzzoni and Bordoni themselves or was created and perpetuated by London audiences. It is true that the two sopranos had sung in productions together many times in Italy before coming to the English capital, and that it was the fashion of Italian operas to feature star singers in pairs. In *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage*, Suzanne Aspden remarks that "whatever opportunity for rivalry their six joint appearances in Venice and Milan might have presented, none seems to have been taken."<sup>9</sup> Due to the lack of first-hand written accounts from either singer, we will likely never know how the rivalry came to be, but it is clear that much of London was preoccupied with them and their activities both on and off stage.

---

<sup>8</sup> Steven LaRue, *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 144.

<sup>9</sup> Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens, Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

An early and perhaps first mention of “The Rival Queens” occurs in a letter dated 30 April 1726 from Samuel Milles of London to Mary Warner. In it, Milles writes that “a new opera of Handle’s called Alexander is to be performed and she and Cutzoni are to be the Rivall Queens.” Milles concludes that this casting is apt, because the two women hate each other “like two Corn Cutters.”<sup>10</sup> Milles’s use of the phrase “rival queens” not only pertains to the alleged feud between the two singers, but is a specific reference to the characters they were to portray in *Alessandro*. In this opera, Lisaura (performed by Cuzzoni) and Rossane (performed by Bordoni) are in fact rival princesses vying for the affections of Alexander the Great (performed by Senesino). Suzana Ograjenšek notes that the term “rival queens” comes from Nathaniel Lee’s 1677 play, *The Rival Queens or the Death of Alexander the Great*.<sup>11</sup> While London audiences were generally familiar with the historical plots of the operas produced at the Royal Academy and may have known that the story included rival princesses, Ograjenšek asserts that the plot of Lee’s play would not have been well known. The libretto of Handel’s *Alessandro* is based on an entirely different episode in the life of Alexander’s life, however, and Ograjenšek believes that Handel most likely chose it because the story afforded him an opportunity to compose two soprano roles that were completely equal in size and scope.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Aspden conjectures that the directors of the Academy may have welcomed the idea of a rivalry, because it created more interest in the opera. In fact, Aspden explains

---

<sup>10</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Suzana Ograjenšek, “Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni: The Rival Queens?,” in *Handel and the Divas* (London: Handel House Museum, 2012), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 48. The libretto for the opera is by Paolo Rolli, and based on Ortensio Mauro’s *La superbia d’Alessandro*.

that it would have been safer and in keeping with common theatrical practice simply to revive an older opera — perhaps even one in which the two singers had performed together in one of their Venice appearances. That the Academy directors purposefully chose to premiere a new opera for the singers' first performance together in London underscores the directors' desire to "heighten the appetite for rivalry."<sup>13</sup>

*Alessandro* was premiered at the Academy on 5 May 1726. King George I, the Prince and Princess of Wales, and "great numbers of the Nobility and Quality" were in attendance to hear Bordoni's first performance. *The Daily Journal* reported on 7 May that the opera was met with "great applause."<sup>14</sup> An editorial in *The Country Gentleman* dated 9 May 1726 gives us some insight into the climate of excitement and anticipation in the audience at the first performance of *Alessandro*. The anonymous author recounts that a large crowd of people gathered to hear the performances, and he characterizes Cuzzoni and Bordoni as two of the most famous singers in Europe. He then goes on to describe how "a Murmur spread itself all over the House, and every Body seemed to be engag'd for one or other of these two great Rivals in Harmony."<sup>15</sup> He observes that there seemed to be more "advocates of Faustina" in the audience, but since Bordoni's appearance was no doubt the primary attraction of this performance, it seems reasonable that there would be a large number of Bordoni enthusiasts in the audience.

---

<sup>13</sup> Aspden, *The Rival Sirens*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 49.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.



The next part of the editorial describes a conversation he overheard in the audience before the beginning of the opera, but then goes on to describe their actual performances:

...the Curtain was drawn up, and discover'd to us these female Potentates, in all the Rivalship of Glory. They beheld one another with such an Air of Respect and Caution, as shew'd they were conscious of each others Merit, and doubtful of the Event; ...I shall not pretend to decide which of these Ladies has the most Merit, they being Beauties of a different Sort, and both animated in their Way; but if *Cuzzoni* exceeds in the Sweetness of Voice, and the irresistible Insinuation of her Manner, *Faustina* is as excellent in the Modulation of her Notes, and a distinguish'd Warble in her Throat, which is peculiar to herself, and is what the Italians express in an elegant Manner, *Dono del Dio* [gift of God]. These two Rival Queens have divided the whole Town; and there's all the Reason in the World to believe, that in a little Time the whole Nation will be listed under their several Banners...<sup>16</sup>

The writer's chosen adjectives to describe Cuzzoni's performance — "Sweetness of Voice," and "Insinuation" (understated acting on stage) — are in line with other first-hand accounts of Cuzzoni's voice (which are discussed in Chapter Four). This editorial is also interesting because of its description of the singers' deportment on stage in their early performances. They had sung together many times in Europe before coming to London and had often been positioned as rival characters in those operas.

Ograjenšek has noted that, although history has treated the singers' dual engagement at the Royal Academy as a unique phenomenon, in fact it was the tradition in Italy for those theaters that could afford it to book two countertenors and two sopranos. According to her, the theater of San Giovanni Grisostomo — the gold standard of opera in Italy in the early eighteenth century — always booked star singers

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 50–51.

in pairs, and this was one of the theaters that the patrons of the Royal Academy looked to as a model when formulating their plans.<sup>17</sup>

Ograjenšek takes the position that the rivalry was solely a product of “the factionalism of London society” and did not originate with the singers themselves. In fact, as Aspden reminds us, Cuzzoni’s arrival in London had been treated similarly by the press; on 27 October 1722, *The Daily Journal* reported the arrival of “an extraordinary Italian Lady [who]...has a much finer Voice and more accurate Judgment, than any of her Country Women who have performed on the English Stage.”<sup>18</sup> Aspden conjectures that this comment would have been an insult directed at Margherita Durastanti, who had been the prima donna of the Royal Academy before Cuzzoni and who had even sung the heroic roles in operas such as Handel’s *Radamisto* before Senesino was engaged.<sup>19</sup>

Although Cuzzoni and Bordoni had sung together many times, Ograjenšek speculates that even the singers themselves must have been shocked by the level of vitriol and partisanship that occurred in London. This opportunity to align themselves with one of the two star singers provided an irresistible opportunity for the London audience who were “in the habit of dividing themselves into various camps...Whig or Tory? The King or the Prince of Wales? Handel or Bononcini?”<sup>20</sup> This factionalism was

---

<sup>17</sup> Ograjenšek, “Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 1, 600.

<sup>19</sup> Aspden, *The Rival Sirens*, 61.

<sup>20</sup> Ograjenšek, “Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni,” 4.

attractive even to non-native Londoners: an entry from the diary of the noted Italian physicist Antonio Cocchi records his opinion that Cuzzoni was the superior singer.<sup>21</sup>

Another view — that the rivalry was actually perpetuated by the singers themselves — is offered in an article dated 14 May 1726 in *Mist's Weekly Journal*:

...for the rival Queens *Faustina* and *Cuzzoni*, whose Jealousy of each other's Power might have divided us into Party and Confusion, have been prevail'd upon to speak to each other, and, some Advices say, even sup together, without Suspicion of Poison of either Side...<sup>22</sup>

Although worthy of consideration, *Mist's Weekly Journal* was the eighteenth-century equivalent of a sensationalist tabloid. The journal's publisher, Nathaniel Mist, was often sued for libel.<sup>23</sup> Since it is only the origin of the rivalry and not its existence that is in question, the item from *Mist's* is an interesting reflection of the immense public interest in Cuzzoni and Bordoni during the period, though it should be viewed with caution.

Following the last performance of *Alessandro* and the close of the 1726 spring season, Senesino left London for Italy; due to his poor health, he did not return for the remainder of the year.<sup>24</sup> The new season at the Academy begin in January of 1727.

---

<sup>21</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 53. "Andai la seconda volta all'Opera. Mi confermai nell'istesso sentiment che Faustina è inferior alla Cuzzoni."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Chapman, "Mist, Nathaniel (d. 1737)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. David Cannadine, September 2014, accessed October 22, 2016, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18822>.

<sup>24</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 65. On 24 June 1726, *The Daily Journal* reported that "Yesterday Signior Senesino, the famous Italian Eunuch, set out on his Return to Venice; having agreed to return hither again in the Spring of next Year, if his Health permits."

During the intervening fall of 1726, a group of Italian singers came to London and performed Bononcini's *Camilla* at the Haymarket Theater.

With the hiatus in the Academy's activities, Cuzzoni traveled to Bath, England, in September to give concerts. By November, however, she had returned to London. A letter dated 27 November from Mary Pendarves recounts a performance by Cuzzoni on 25 November:

...[T]hat morning I was entertain'd with Cuzzoni, oh how Sweet, how Charming, how did I wish for all I love and like to be with me at that instant of time my senses were ravishd with harmony, they say we shall have Opera's in a fortnight...

Pendarves reveals excitement at the opening of the Royal Academy, but speculates that the season might be delayed because "Madam Sandoni (Cuzzoni) and the Faustina are not perfectly agreed about their Parts."<sup>25</sup>

In fact, *Mist's Weekly Journal* — the same publication that reported on the rivalry and reconciliation of May 1726 — published an item on 10 December asserting that there had been a "second Reconcilement" between the two singers after an incident wherein one was "making mouths" at the other while she was singing. The article does not specify which singer was the instigator, but it does report that the reconciliation was mediated by the Royal Academy and that it took three months to negotiate. Certainly the producers had a vested interest in removing any obstacles to restarting the opera season as soon as Senesino returned from his sabbatical in Italy.<sup>26</sup>

The 1727 season opened on 7 January, presenting Ariosti's *Lucio Vero* with Cuzzoni, Bordoni, and Senesino in the leading roles. On 24 January, Cuzzoni performed

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 90.

a private concert, accompanied by Handel, for the princesses.<sup>27</sup> The first performance of Handel's next opera for the Academy, *Admeto*, occurred on 31 January 1727. Johann Joachim Quantz, who was in London during the spring of 1727, attended Royal Academy performances of *Admeto* and possibly *Ottone* as well as Bononcini's *Astianatte*.<sup>28</sup> Quantz wrote extensively in his autobiography of the profound impressions that these performances made on him, and he also commented on the spirit of rivalry and divisiveness that he encountered in London:

...During this opera two factions became apparent, one for Faustina, the other for Cuzzoni. These parties became so enraged with one another that the one whistled while the other was applauding, and vice versa, until eventually, because of this, the operas had for a time to be discontinued...<sup>29</sup>

A letter written by Giuseppe Riva dated 16 March corroborates the extremity of the rivalry, remarking that "the two famous competitors, Cuzzoni and Faustina, divide the sentiments of England."<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>28</sup> Quantz was a prominent German oboist and flautist who held court positions throughout Europe. He is most well known today for his treatise on flute playing entitled *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (the common English title is "On Playing the Flute"). He heard a performance of Handel's *Admeto* while he was in London, and recorded his observations of Cuzzoni, Bordoni, and other Royal Academy singers in his autobiography *Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf, von ihm selbst entworfen*, first published in 1755. See Chapter Four for a discussion of Quantz's account of Cuzzoni's singing and an analysis of his pedagogical terminology.

<sup>29</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 109.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 112. "Le due famose competitrici, Cuzzoni e Faustina, dividono I sentimenti dell'Inghilterra."

April continued to be difficult for Cuzzoni. The Academy produced a revival of *Admeto* beginning at the end of March, and Princess Amelia was in attendance at the performance on 4 April. The Cuzzoni and Bordoni factions were then near the height of their misbehavior during performances, and there was apparently so much booing, hissing, and cat-calling from the audience that the princess was offended.<sup>31</sup>

Mary, Countess of Pembroke, who was Cuzzoni's patron, then wrote a letter to Mrs. Charlotte Clayton, a lady-in-waiting to Princess Caroline, the mother of Princess Amelia. This letter was an apology to the princess written on behalf of Cuzzoni, who was reportedly also mortified by the audience's behavior at the opera. In the letter, the countess wrote that Cuzzoni had been warned that she would be booed during the performance, but that the countess herself had convinced the singer to go on anyway:

...Cuzzoni had been publicly told, to complete her disgrace, she was to be hissed off the stage on Tuesday; she was in such concern at this, that she a great mind not to sing, but I, without knowing anything that the Princess Amelia would honour the Opera with her presence, positively ordered her not to quit the stage, but let them do what they would...<sup>32</sup>

The countess then asked for the princess's forgiveness for the behavior of the audience members who booed and hissed at Bordoni; she claims that these were not "the aggressors" of the situation, and that no one in the Cuzzoni faction ought to be blamed for the unfortunate behavior of the audience.

On 22 April, *The Daily Courant* reported that that evening's performance of *Astianatte* would be canceled because Cuzzoni was sick. It was fairly commonplace for

---

<sup>31</sup> Ograjenšek, "Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni," 5. Princess Amelia was the daughter of King George II, who was a supporter of Cuzzoni.

<sup>32</sup> Otto Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), 207.

performances to be canceled and rescheduled due to a performer's illness, but this particular instance is significant for two reasons. First, this illness of Cuzzoni's compromised her voice; second, it is the only time a notice of Cuzzoni's sickness was followed up by a third-party report on the condition of her voice. On 10 May, after hearing Cuzzoni perform in *Astianatte*, Robert Hassell wrote:

There were some very good Songs in Cuzzoni's Part, but most miserably murdered; for Cuzzoni's Voice was so prodigiously out of Order, and Faustina's Partisans say very confidently that she will never recover it. Some say it is a great cold, others the Pox, and some that she is breeding. Whatever it be, the Connoisseurs are at their Wit's Ends about it.<sup>33</sup>

The condition of Cuzzoni's voice may have played a significant role in what happened next.

On 6 June, according to *The Whitehall Evening-Post*, "a great Disturbance happen'd at the Opera."<sup>34</sup> During a performance of Bononcini's *Astianatte*, the disruptive noises produced by the opposing factions in support of Cuzzoni and Bordoni became so loud and obstreperous that the performance had to be stopped. At first, the noises had been only hissing, clapping, catcalls, etc., of the same type described by Countess Mary of Pembroke; but then they escalated to "other great indecencies," and these were, according to a letter from Giacomo Zamboni, performed by "several ladies and gentlemen of the first quality."<sup>35</sup> Some accounts claim that the evening culminated in an onstage fight between the two singers, and that they pulled one another's hair. None of the authoritative sources corroborate this direct engagement, and Ograjenšek

---

<sup>33</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 134.

definitively states “...the reports that the outrage at the performance culminated with the stage fight between the two sopranos are mistaken...,”<sup>36</sup> and that after 6 June, there are no reports of any further disruptive behavior by the Academy audiences.<sup>37</sup>

The aftermath of the 6 June fracas was a series of disastrous results. The evening’s events not only caused the premature conclusion of that particular performance, but also brought an abrupt end to the entire Academy season. Coincidentally, King George I died five days later, on 11 June, and his death would have meant a mandatory closing of all the theaters in any case. However, as an indication of how far-reaching the scandal at the opera was, one of the King’s final correspondences was a letter sent to the directors of the Royal Academy threatening that if they did not mollify Cuzzoni, he would never again attend a performance at the theater or pay his pledge to the company.<sup>38</sup>

London was indignant. A letter dated 13 June from Lord Hervey describes the mood there this way:

...in short the whole World is gone mad upon this Dispute; no Cuzzonist will goe to a Tavern with a Faustinian, & the Ladys of one party have scratch’d those of the other out of their List of Visits; I was t’other Night upon the water & heard nothing ‘till three a Clock in the Morning but invocations of the one & execrations upon the other, the next Night I went

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 138. That Cuzzoni and Bordoni participated in an onstage fight most likely originated in the essay *The Devil to pay at St. James’s: or, a Full and true Account of a most horrid and bloody Battle between Madam Faustina and Madam Cuzzoni*, which was published in *The Daily Journal* on 27 June and included that the two singers “pulled each others Coiffs.”

<sup>37</sup> Ograjenšek, “Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni,” 5.

<sup>38</sup> Winton Dean, *Handel’s Operas: 1726-1741* (Suffolk, UK; The Boydell Press, 2006), 5.



again & heard the same ceremony perform'd by another Company with the Names reversed...<sup>39</sup>

The feud also inspired satirical commentary. On 27 June, *The Daily Journal* published an essay entitled *The Devil to pay at St. James's: or, a Full and true Account of a most horrid and bloody Battle between Madam Faustina and Madam Cuzzoni*. This essay, of unknown authorship, compares Cuzzoni and Bordoni to the competing mackerel sellers near London Bridge and to the “nymphs that vend Live Mutton about Fleet-Street” in an attempt to make their feud seem especially low-class. The author categorizes their behavior as hot-headed, even for Italians, and suggests that the Academy’s financial problems might be solved if they sold tickets to watch the two women fight in public.<sup>40</sup> On 10 July, *The Daily Journal* published *The Contre Temps; or, Rival Queans: A Small Farce*, which was a mock opera libretto depicting the feud. Perhaps most notable among these “post-war” writings was John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* — a satirical rendition of the goings-on of the Royal Academy, in which Cuzzoni and Bordoni are characters — that was first performed in January of 1728 and was hugely successful.<sup>41</sup>

\* \* \*

The Royal Academy’s ninth season began on 30 September 1727 with a revival of *Admeto*. The first new production of the season was Ariosti’s *Teuzzone*, which premiered on 21 October; Cuzzoni sang the role of Zelinda, with Senesino in the title role. *Teuzzone* was not well received, however, and only had three performances. In a letter from Lady

---

<sup>39</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 132–133.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>41</sup> Dean, *Handel’s Operas*, 6.

Elizabeth Hill, the sister of the Earl of Chesterfield, she calls the opera “so extreme bad, that it scarce outliv’d the third night.”<sup>42</sup> This failure must have been a severe blow to the Academy, because the opera was produced around the same time as the coronation of King George II; in fact, it has been suggested Lady Elizabeth Hill was probably only in London to attend the coronation. Performances of *Admeto* were given instead of the remainder of the run of *Teuzzone*.<sup>43</sup>

*Riccardo Primo* premiered at the Academy on 11 November, with Cuzzoni in the role of Costanza. This opera was written specifically to honor King George II on the occasion of his coronation. The subject of the opera, Richard the Lionheart, was chosen especially for this reason by librettist Paolo Rolli; that the hero was a British monarch, and that at the end of the opera he is reunited with his virtuous bride (Cuzzoni’s role, Costanza, represented Queen Caroline) would certainly have been recognized by the London audiences as a special tribute to the king.

On 22 November, Cuzzoni, Bordoni, and Senesino performed a concert at the Crown Tavern in London in honor of St. Cecelia’s Day. This occasion is recounted in a letter from Mary Pendarves, who, although she was not in attendance at the concert, wrote that the trio of singers “sung there some of the best Songs out of Several Operas, and the whole performance was farr beyond any Opera....” Despite this triumph, she also predicted that the Academy operas would not continue past the current season because no patrons wanted to renew their subscriptions as a result of the squabbling and divisiveness between

---

<sup>42</sup> Burrows et al., *Collected Documents*, vol. 2, 169.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 169, n. 2.

the Academy's directors and the singers.<sup>44</sup> The 1727 season ended with a revival of Handel's *Alessandro*.

January of 1728 was filled with performances of *Radamisto*, the only opera other than *Ottone* that Cuzzoni sang at the Academy that had not been originally composed for her; she sang the role of Polissena. This opera must have undergone several revisions in order to accommodate Cuzzoni, Bordoni, and Senesino, none of whom were in the original cast for the opera's premiere in 1720. On 30 January, *The St. James Evening Post* reported that Cuzzoni was "dangerously indisposed," and that the evening's opera performance would be canceled. She seems to have recovered quickly, however, for the premiere of Handel's next opera, *Siroe*, took place on 17 February.<sup>45</sup>

On 6 April, Cuzzoni performed, along with Senesino and Bordoni, at the double marriage of the heirs to the thrones of both Spain and Portugal; the celebration took place at the Chapel of the Portugal Envoy in Golden-Square, London. Giovanni Rolli composed the music for the service on a libretto by his brother, Paolo. The end of April brought the premiere of Handel's last opera for the Academy, *Tolomeo*, and a revival of *Admeto*.<sup>46</sup>

The final performance of the Royal Academy of Music was *Admeto* on 1 June 1728. The public disgust surrounding the singers' rivalry, combined with the growing ennui toward Italian opera on the part of the London audiences, necessitated the closing of the Academy. The letters and articles from the 1727-28 season contain frequent calls on the subscribers to the opera to increase their pledges, but by the end of the season, the

---

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 187, 196.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 209

company was simply no longer viable. Senesino and Bordoni departed for Italy around the same time, which may be an indication of their alliance.

Cuzzoni remained in London until the end of August, when she was to travel to Vienna to sing. On 2 August, Giacomo Zamboni again wrote to Jacques Le Coq in Paris: “Madame Cuzzoni, illustrious residue of the harmonious company, will leave us in two or three weeks. Behold, the opera in flames.”<sup>47</sup> Cuzzoni left London by the end of the month and arrived in Vienna by November; she would not return to London until 1734. In *Memoirs of the life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (published in 1760), John Mainwaring describes the animosity between Cuzzoni and Bordoni, and between Handel and Senesino, attributing the closing of the Academy to these feuds: “And thus the Academy, after it had continued in the most flourishing state for upwards of nine years, was at once dissolved.”<sup>48</sup>

It is difficult to imagine an opera singer being so famous, at once beloved and controversial, and so ubiquitous in society as Cuzzoni had been in London during the 1720s. She enjoyed the kind of lifestyle and notoriety that we might associate with film and television stars in the twenty-first century. Her stature and talent made it possible for Handel, the greatest opera composer of the time, to be compelled to write music specifically for her. Cuzzoni herself left few letters (and none that discuss music), and in Handel’s minimal correspondence, nothing survives in which he discusses singing, composing for his singers, or his relationship with Cuzzoni. As we shall see, however, it

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 238. “Madame Cuzzoni illustre residue de la Compagnie harmonieuse va nous quitter dans deux ou trois Semaines. Voila l’Opera flambé.”

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 254.

is clear that he had significant and specific ideas about the attributes of her voice and how to compose music that used them to best effect.

## Chapter 4

### An Examination of Contemporary Sources

Attempting to establish a profile of Francesca Cuzzoni's voice is difficult. First, she left no letters or writings that provide evidence about her voice and her ideas about singing.<sup>1</sup> Second, the idea of standard vocal categories, or *Fächer*, simply did not exist during the eighteenth century. If it had, it might help modern scholars make plausible arguments about her voice's timbre, weight, agility, and tessitura. Third, and perhaps most surprising of all, is the fact that Handel also left few writings, and certainly none that shed any light on his thoughts on writing for singers. Fortunately, a few detailed descriptions of Cuzzoni's dramatic portrayals and voice by contemporary musicians have come down to us. This chapter will focus on these accounts and interpret the descriptions of Cuzzoni's voice so that they correspond with a modern understanding of vocal terminology.

Johann Joachim Quantz is principally known today as the writer of the canonical flute manual *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* (the common English title is "On Playing the Flute"), published simultaneously in French and German in 1752.<sup>2</sup> He was a shrewd and ambitious man whose carefully-made career decisions eventually led to noble patronage and a fine reputation in Dresden as

---

<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

<sup>2</sup> Edward R. Reilly and Andreas Giger, "Quantz, Johann Joachim," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/22633>.

a performer on several instruments. He also traveled to Italy, France, and England at the expense of his patrons to study compositional trends in those countries.<sup>3</sup>

In 1719, Quantz was working and studying composition in Dresden. He was the apprentice to Johann Georg Pisendel, the concertmaster of the court orchestra. He noted in his autobiography that because there were not many compositions for flute at the time, and that he refined his technique by playing pieces written for violin and oboe.<sup>4</sup> He credits Pisendel with introducing him to a musical style that he described as a “mixture of the Italian and French schools.”<sup>5</sup> Of this mixture of influences, Quantz wrote: “His example took root within me so deeply that I later always preferred the mixed style to the national style. I can also thank the attention which I have always paid to good singers, particularly in matters of style.”<sup>6</sup> Quantz’s reference to his attention to singers is especially noteworthy, since many scholars rely on him to understand high Baroque style in both the instrumental and vocal realms.

During the same year, Quantz had the opportunity to hear Italian opera for the first time: a group of Italian singers had come to Dresden to perform as part of the celebration of the Prince’s marriage. In the company were Senesino, Margherita Durastanti, and Faustina Bordoni. The operas, *Gli odi delusi dal Sangue* and *Teofane*, were both by Antonio Lotti, who was the Kapellmeister in the Dresden court at the

---

<sup>3</sup> The principal source for all facts concerning Quantz’s life is his own autobiographical sketch, which is translated and reprinted in Paul Nettl’s anthology *Forgotten Musicians* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), pp. 280 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Nettl, *Forgotten Musicians*, 290.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 291.

time.<sup>7</sup> Quantz's remarks about the singers include descriptions of the timbres, ranges, vocal ornamentations, and stage deportment of Senesino, Matteo Berselli, and Stella Lotti (the wife of the composer).

Eight years later, in 1727, Quantz had been studying the French compositional style in Paris, but received orders from his patron to return to Dresden. He had been hoping to obtain permission to continue his study of national styles and travel to England, but felt that he could not ask for permission. Yet he did travel to London without permission in March of that year, and it was at this time that he had the opportunity to hear Cuzzoni sing at the Royal Academy. He attended a performance of Handel's *Admeto*, which featured Cuzzoni, Bordoni, and Senesino. Of Cuzzoni's performance, Quantz wrote:

Cuzzoni had a very agreeable and clear soprano voice, a pure intonation and a beautiful trillo. Her range extended from middle C to the C above the staff. Her style of singing was innocent and calming. Her ornamentation did not seem to be artificial due to her nice, pleasant, and light style of delivery, and with its tenderness she won the hearts of her listeners. The *passagien* in the allegros were not done with the greatest facility, but she sang them very fully and pleasantly. Her acting was somewhat cold, and her figure was not too favorable for the theatre.<sup>8</sup>

Quantz's systematic description of Cuzzoni on stage follows the same formula as his other descriptions of singers in his autobiography. First he comments on timbre: he

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 312. "Die Cuzzoni hatte eine sehr angenehme und helle Sopranstimme, eine reine Intonation und schönen Trillo. Der Umfang ihrer Stimme erstreckte sich vom eingestrichenen C bis ins dreigestrichene C. Ihre Art zu singen war unschuldig und ruhrend. Ihre Auszierungen schienen wegen ihres netten, angenehmen und leichten Vortrags nicht künstlich zu seyn: indessen nahm sie durch die Zärtlichkeit desselben doch all Zuhörer ein. Im Allegro, hatte sie bey den Passagien, eben nicht die grösser Fertigkeit; doch sang sie solche sehr rund, net, und gefällig. In der Action war sie etwas kaltsinnig; und ihre Figur war für das Theater nicht allzuvortheilhaft."



characterizes Cuzzoni's timbre as "agreeable and clear," which we can deduce means that her voice had an overall sweet, bright sound. I propose that his use of the word "clear" is actually an evaluation of her technique. In order to be clear, the sound needs to be produced in the front half of the mouth, utilize resonating space in the "mask" area of the face, and also requires a relaxed tongue and jaw. A clear sound also presupposes a lack of tongue and jaw tension, which would muddy and darken the sound. The trill is one of the most often used ornaments in Handel's vocal music, and Quantz observed Cuzzoni's to be beautiful. Her range, according to Quantz, seems consistent with what would normally be associated with a lyric soprano.

Quantz, who favored minimal, "tasteful" decorations, remarks that the singers of the Royal Academy whom he first heard in Dresden in 1719 gave him "some idea of the then pure, but sensible, Italian style, from which the Italians have since strayed too far, in my opinion."<sup>9</sup> About Senesino, for example, Quantz observes that he did not use "arbitrary" ornaments, but instead incorporated "essential ornaments with the greatest finesse."<sup>10</sup> He noted that Cuzzoni's allegro passages "were not done with the greatest facility." I believe this means that she was not comfortable with arias that contained complicated coloratura passages to be performed in fast tempi.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, he describes Faustina Bordoni as "unquestionably the first who has used these

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>10</sup> In "The Basic Essential Ornaments in High Baroque Music," Julianne Baird identifies the essential ornaments as follows: trills, mordent, double cadence, *port de voix*, *tierce de coulée*, *Schleifer* (more common in Bach), turn, and accent. Julianne Baird, "The Basic Essential Ornaments in High Baroque Music," (handout for workshop at National Association of Teachers of Singing Conference, February 2008).

<sup>11</sup> That Cuzzoni preferred slower tempi and relatively few coloratura passages in her arias will be discussed further and proven by statistics in chapter 5.

*passagien* consisting of many notes on one tone in singing, and with the best possible success.”<sup>12</sup> Quantz concludes all of his descriptions of singers with an assessment of their appearance, and it is here we find his only entirely uncomplimentary opinion of her (one that is corroborated by other contemporaries).

Giambattista Mancini’s treatise *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato*,<sup>13</sup> first published in 1774, presents the author’s thoughts on vocal technique and on many eighteenth-century Italian singers, including Cuzzoni. Mancini was born in Piacenza in 1716, but there is little known information about his life prior to 1760, when he became the royal singing master to the Imperial Court in Vienna.<sup>14</sup> Edward Foreman conjectures that in order to secure that position, his reputation as an authority on singing must already have been well established. Mancini had several notable private students, among them the Princess of Parma and the Archduchess Elisabeth; both were noted for their trills, *portamenti*, and vocal agility.<sup>15</sup>

Cuzzoni is mentioned in Mancini’s second chapter, intriguingly entitled “Of the Different Schools, and the Worthy Men and Women, Who Have Flourished in the Art of Singing at the End of the Century Just Past, and Still Flourish Today.” This chapter also includes detailed descriptions of Senesino and Faustina Bordoni. It is not clear from Mancini’s text when he actually heard any of these singers perform. Unlike

---

<sup>12</sup> Nettl, *Forgotten Musicians*, 313.

<sup>13</sup> Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, trans. and ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign, IL: Pro Musica Press, 1967). This edition is a compilation of both of Mancini’s 1774 and 1777 versions. The treatise was also published in French in 1776 under the title *L’Art du chant figuré*, and was translated by M. Defaugiers.

<sup>14</sup> Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, v.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Quantz, Mancini includes biographical information about each of the singers. His remarks about Cuzzoni are extensive and revealing:

Francesca Cuzzoni, born in Parma, was a disciple of the distinguished Professor Francesco Lanzi, under whose direction she became a most highly regarded singer, because she was gifted with a voice angelic in its clarity and sweetness, and because of the excellence of her style. She sang with a smooth legato; she acquired such a perfect portamento of the voice, united to an equality of the registers, that she not only carried away those who heard her, but also captured their esteem and veneration in the same moment.

This excellent lady lacked nothing which seems important to us, for she possessed sufficient agility; the art of leading the voice, of sustaining it, clarifying it, and drawing it back, all with such attention to perfection that she was given the valued name of “Mistress.” If she sang a cantabile aria, she did not fail in fitting places to vitalize the singing with rubato, mixing proportionately with mordents, *gruppetti*, *volatinas* and perfect trills; all of this together produced admiration and delight. Her voice was so given to exact execution that she never found any obstacle which she did not easily overcome; she used the highest notes with unequalled precision. She was the mistress of perfect intonation; she had the gift of a creative mind, and accurate discernment in making choices; by reason of these her singing was sublime and rare...”<sup>16</sup>

Mancini’s initial observation of Cuzzoni’s timbre concurs with that of Quantz; both use the concept of clarity to describe her voice. Mancini goes into much more

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 11. “Francesca Cuzzoni nata in Parma fù discepola di Francesco Lanzi Professore di merito, sotto la direzione del quale riuscì una Cantante riguardevolissima, perchè dotata er di una voce angelica, sì per la chiarezza, e soavità, che per loscelto suo stile. Questa cantava spiantato, e legato nel medesimo tempo; aveva acquistato un sì perfetto portamento di voce, e questo unito ad una eguaglianza di registro, che non solo raiva chiunque l’ascoltava, ma conciliavasi nel momento stesso venerazione, e stima. Questa sì eccellente Donna non mancava in ogni altro, che ci sembra necessario, perchè possedeva sufficiente agilità; l’arte di condur la voce, di sostenerla, chiarirla, e ritirarla con quei gradi dovuti ad una perfezzione tale, che la dava il meritato nome di Maestra. Se contava un aria cantabile, non trascurava ne’siti convenevoli di ravvivare la cantilena con un cantar rubato, frammischiandovi proporzionati mordent, gruppetti, volantie, e perfetti Trilli; che il tutto unito produceva ammirazione, e diletto. La sua voce era talmenta avezza ad una esatta esecuzione, che non trovava mai ostacolo, che felicemente non superasse; L’intonazione perfetta risedeva in lei; aveva il dono di una mente creative, ed un retto discernimento in saper scegliere; e perciò il suo cantare era sublime, e raro. Questa sublimità, e rarità di canto la rese famosa i migliori Teatri per averla.

detail than Quantz, and describes her legato as “smooth,” her intonation as “perfect” (which Quantz described as “pure”), and perhaps most interestingly, he seems to say that she had no discernible break between the chest and head registers: “united to an equality of registers.”<sup>17</sup> Also like Quantz, Mancini makes several references to ornamentation, mentioning that she used *rubato*, mordents, *gruppetti* (turns), *volatinas* (rapid passages), and trills. He also praises Cuzzoni’s “accurate discernment in making choices,” which is most likely also in reference to ornamentation. He characterizes her agility as “sufficient,” which also concurs with Quantz, who pointed out that Cuzzoni’s coloratura was not strong.

Mancini’s characterization of her *portamento* of the voice does not refer to the *portamento* that modern singers associate with nineteenth-century Italian opera. Because Mancini uses this particular turn of phrase in conjunction with his comment about Cuzzoni’s perfect marriage of head and chest registers, the *portamento* of which he speaks refers to Cuzzoni’s superior vocal technique, which allowed her “carry” (*portare*) — or in more modern vocal parlance, to support — her voice smoothly throughout her range.<sup>18</sup> Mancini praises Cuzzoni for her ability to lead the voice, sustain it, clarify it, and then draw it back; this most likely pertains to Cuzzoni’s

---

<sup>17</sup> In the article on singing in the Grove dictionary, authors Ellen T. Harris and Owen Jander point out that this “joining of the head and chest registers over the break” was particularly important to Tosi and Mancini. Harris and Jander go on to write that this technique was more prevalent among Italian singers than French and German singers, who tended to sing completely in either the chest or head registers, and simply transpose arias to suit their preferred register.

<sup>18</sup> Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*, 40. “By this portamento of the voice is meant nothing but a passing, tying the voice, from one note to the next with perfect proportion and union.”

mastery of the *messa di voce* effect.<sup>19</sup> In *messa di voce*, a singer begins a long note at a soft dynamic level, effects a crescendo, and then follows it with a diminuendo before the conclusion of the note. Mancini's words "to lead and sustain" correspond to the first half of the *messa di voce*, in which Cuzzoni would lead, or support, her voice into the crescendo, and then sustain that support and beautiful tone to the climax of the crescendo. It is likely that Cuzzoni employed vibrato as an ornament at the higher dynamic level, and then removed the vibrato, thereby "clarifying" the voice and "drawing it back."<sup>20</sup>

A less straightforward account of Cuzzoni's singing is Pier Francesco Tosi's 1723 *Opinioni de'cantori antichi, e moderni o sieno osservazioni sopra il canto figurato*<sup>21</sup>, in which he describes the singing of two women (quite probably Cuzzoni and Bordoni. Tosi was born in Cesena (near Bologna) in about 1654. His father was a prominent organist, music director, and composer in Bologna who oversaw his son's early education as a singer. The younger Tosi was a well-known castrato during his lifetime, although he was not famous for opera. Contemporary accounts indicate that, rather than the sheer beauty of his voice, it was his excellent technique and instinct for style that explain his importance and relevance as a judge of vocal technique. Since its

---

<sup>19</sup> *Messa di voce*: Practice in *bel canto* of singing a crescendo then a diminuendo on a held note. Ellen T. Harris, "Messa di voce," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/18491>.

<sup>20</sup> Vibrato was not considered part of a consistent, healthy vocal technique until the nineteenth century, but was used as an ornament during the eighteenth century. The employment of a lower laryngeal position, and use of vibrato is generally associated with the pedagogue Manuel Garcia.

<sup>21</sup> The commonly used English title for Tosi's famous treatise is *Observations of Singers Ancient and Modern, or Observations on Figured Singing*.

original publication, the work has been translated into German twice (most notably by Johann Friedrich Agricola in 1757), French once, and English twice.<sup>22</sup>

In his introduction to the most recent translation of Tosi's treatise, Edward Foreman acknowledges that although Tosi was far from the first to write about singing, his essay is one of the most important texts because of his status as a professional teacher and performer rather than a theorist.<sup>23</sup> Foreman identifies the writings of Tosi and Mancini (whose work he has also translated) as the backbone of our modern perceptions of singing in the eighteenth century. Tosi's treatise was celebrated during his lifetime (which accounts for the many translations in subsequent years), and the composer Giovanni Battista Martini wrote that Tosi was "the first to write about real matters of importance to singers."<sup>24</sup>

It is not clear from Tosi's account when — or even if — he actually heard Francesca Cuzzoni sing, though there are strong indications that he did. He does not actually refer to her by name in the treatise. According to Foreman, Tosi was in Dresden in the summer of 1719 to attend the wedding of Crown Prince Friedrich August of Saxony and the Imperial Archduchess Maria Josepha.<sup>25</sup> We know that many

---

<sup>22</sup> See Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinions of Singers Ancient and Modern, OR Observations on Figured Singing*, trans. Edward Foreman (Champaign, IL: Pro Musica Press, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., xxi.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>25</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, *George Frideric Handel: Collected Documents, vol. 1, 1609–1725* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 443. Handel was also present at this wedding, and it was there, during performances of Antonio Lotti's *Giove in Argo* and *Teofane*, that Tosi would have heard Cuzzoni. Handel also performed as part of the wedding festivities and presumably

of the Royal Academy singers were employed at the Dresden court in 1719 and that Handel was also there to recruit singers for the Academy.<sup>26</sup> A letter from Cuzzoni's Royal Academy colleague Gaetano Berenstadt dated 1724 states that he had seen Tosi in London that year. However, because Tosi's treatise was published in 1723, it is most likely that his opinions of Cuzzoni were formed during his 1719 visit to Dresden. In his chapter entitled "Observations for One Who Sings," Tosi mentions "two ladies of merit superior to every praise, who each help to sustain today with equal strength and with different style, the vacillating profession, so that through decadence it does not fall suddenly into ruin."<sup>27</sup> Here is his description of the singer who is believed to be Cuzzoni (the description is apparently intertwined with one of Bordoni):

One [singer] is inimitable through the privileged gift of singing and enchanting the world with a prodigious felicity in execution, and with a sure singular brilliance, is as tasteful as she is inventive (I do not know if from nature or by art), and she pleases to excess. The nobility of the amorous cantabile of the other is united to the sweetness of a most beautiful voice, to a perfect intonation, to strictness in tempo, and to the exotic production of genius, which are merits as particular as they are difficult to imitate. The pathetic of the latter and the allegro of the former are the most admirable qualities in the one and the other. What a beautiful mixture it would be, if the best of these two angelic creatures could unite in one single object!<sup>28</sup>

---

recruited many of the Italian singers - then employed by the Dresden court - for the Royal Academy of Music at that time.

<sup>26</sup> For a description of Handel's efforts, please see Chapter Two.

<sup>27</sup> Tosi, *Opinions of Singers Ancient, and Modern*, 109.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. "Una è inimitabile per privilegiato dono di cantare, e d'incantar il Mondo con una prodigiosa felicità di eseguire, e con un certo brillante singolare, e gustoso che inventato (no sò se dalla natura, o dall'arte) piace in eccesso. La nobiltà del cantabile amoroso dell'altra unita alla dolcezza d'una bellissima voce, ad una perfetta intonazione, al rigor di Tempo, & alle produzioni pellegrine dell'ingegno sono doti così particolari quanto difficili ad imitarsi. Il patetico di questa, e l'allegro di quella sono le qualità più mirabili sì nell'una che nell'altra. Che bel misto si sarebbe, se l'ottimo di queste due angeliche Creature potesse unirvi in un'oggetto solo!"

Foreman explains that in the 1742 English translation by Johann Ernst Galliard, it is Galliard who claims that the two ladies to whom Tosi refers are Cuzzoni and Bordoni. Foreman calls this assumption “problematic” and writes that Galliard may have named them simply because of their fame during this time in London. However, the fact that two female singers are compared and that their particular skills are juxtaposed using descriptors common in other accounts in which they are clearly identified is an indication that Galliard was correct: the first singer is very likely Bordoni, and the second is Cuzzoni.

Tosi refers to the second singer’s “amorous cantabile,” which is telling, because the cantabile or “pathetic” style performed in slow to moderate tempi was held to be among Cuzzoni’s skills. Tosi echoes Mancini’s use of the descriptor “sweet” in characterizing the timbre of her voice, and he also took note of her “perfect intonation.” The “exotic productions of genius” is a nod to Cuzzoni’s exceptional ability to choose appropriate ornaments for her arias and execute them perfectly. At the end of the description, Tosi juxtaposes Bordoni and Cuzzoni by referring to the “pathetic of the latter and the allegro of the former,” and this is in line with how the two singers are characterized in many other sources. A comparison of this passage with others about Bordoni and Cuzzoni presents a compelling case that Tosi’s “two ladies” are Bordoni and Cuzzoni.

Charles Burney was not born until well into Cuzzoni’s tenure at the Royal Academy, and he thus heard her sing at a late stage of her career. His remarks about her singing are found in his massive, four-volume *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, published between 1776 and 1789. The fourth



and final volume includes a detailed review of all of Handel's Royal Academy operas as well as observations of various individual performers, including Cuzzoni. The remarks, which address the singer's work during the 1720s, are mostly drawn from Mancini's treatise, as Burney notes in a citation: "the chief part of this character is recorded by an excellent professor and judge, who not only conversed with her contemporaries in Italy, but frequently heard her himself, before her decline."<sup>29</sup> Burney does not cite this source for the rest of his description of her singing, but goes on to embellish Mancini's remarks, and it is interesting to note some differences in terminology. Burney's *General History* includes the following description:

[She had] ... been endowed by nature with a voice that was equally clear, sweet and flexible. It was difficult for the hearer to determine whether she most excelled in slow or rapid airs. A native warble enabled her to execute divisions with such facility as to conceal every appearance of difficulty; and so graceful and touching was the natural tone of her voice, that she rendered pathetic whatever she sung, in which she had leisure to unfold its whole volume. The art of conducting, sustaining, increasing, and diminishing her tones by minute degrees, acquired her, among professors, the title of complete mistress of her art. In a cantabile air, though the notes she added were few, she never lost a favorable opportunity of enriching the cantilena with all the refinements and embellishments of the time. Her shake was perfect, she had a creative fancy, and the power of occasionally accelerating and retarding the measure in the most artificial and able manner, by what the Italians call *tempo rubato*. Her high notes were unrivalled in clearness and sweetness; and her intonations were so just and fixed, that it seemed as if it was not in her power to sing out of tune.<sup>30</sup>

It is easy to discern which passages Burney paraphrases from Mancini's treatise, and even if the Englishman mixes the opinions and remembrances of others with Mancini's in this passage, it is clear that all of the main descriptive points are

---

<sup>29</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, vol. 4 (London: Payne and Son, Robson and Clark, and G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789), 307n.

<sup>30</sup> Burney, *A General History of Music*, 307.

consistent between both authors. The adjectives “sweet” and “clear” appear in Burney’s account, as does the assessment of Cuzzoni’s perfect intonation. Burney also makes a point of describing Cuzzoni’s command of ornamentation: he refers to her “shake,” a synonym for trill (which Mancini also characterized as “perfect”); and her creative fancy (Mancini praised her ability to make decisions about appropriate ornaments, and Tosi called this element her “genius”). Lastly, Burney’s comment about “accelerating and retarding the measure” refers to Cuzzoni’s use of *rubato* as an ornamentation technique.

It is noteworthy that Burney found it difficult to determine whether Cuzzoni was more skilled in slow or fast tempi; Quantz, Mancini, and Tosi certainly seem to have agreed that Cuzzoni was most comfortable and gave her most effective performances in slow arias, whereas Bordoni was held to be more skilled at fast arias. The use of the titles “professors” and “mistress of her art” come from Mancini, who consistently characterizes those musicians for whom he had the utmost respect as professors (male musicians) or mistresses (females). Also notable is Burney’s use of the term “pathetic”; although this particular adjective is prevalent in modern writings about Cuzzoni, it does not appear in Mancini’s treatise. Tosi, however, does use the word “pathetic” when comparing the talents of Cuzzoni and Bordoni at representing different affects in their singing, but because Burney does not mention Tosi, we cannot assume that he was familiar with the latter’s work. The term “pathetic” described melancholy, longing, and/or sad arias in the eighteenth century, and it appeared often in writings from that time.

Although Burney did not hear Cuzzoni in her prime, he did have the opportunity to hear her sing in 1749. This was during Cuzzoni’s third trip to London,

well after the Royal Academy had dissolved, and as Burney tells us, her voice had declined substantially:

I was at this concert myself and found her voice reduced to a mere thread; indeed, her throat was so nearly ossified by age, that all the soft and mellifluous qualities, which had before rendered it so enchanting, were nearly annihilated, in her public performance; though I have been assured by a very good judge, who frequently accompanied her in private, that in a room[,] fine remains of her former grace and sweetness in singing Handel's most celebrated songs, by which she had acquired the greatest reputation, were still discoverable.<sup>31</sup>

Burney reports that this concert was a benefit for Cuzzoni, who sadly had become more of a curiosity than a real musical attraction at this point in her career. She continued to sing anywhere that would have her until her death in 1770.

The four firsthand accounts discussed above are relatively extensive and certainly helpful in beginning to form a description of Cuzzoni's voice. All four writers use many of the same adjectives, praise the same strengths, and identify the same weaknesses, depicting her as a confident singer who possessed a thorough understanding of her art and of the expectations of her audience. Her voice was by all accounts clear, sweet, and pleasant, and she always sang in tune. She seems to have been comfortable singing throughout her range and able to move between registers without any discernible color change. All four accounts praise her strength in slow, cantabile arias, while noting that she had less facility in fast tempi (although one wonders if this would have even been pointed out if not for the presence of Bordoni). Quantz mentions that her stage presence was lacking and that her appearance was less than appealing, while Mancini, Tosi and Burney do not mention this aspect of her performance.

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 308.

In addition to the writings of Quantz, Mancini, Tosi, and Burney, there are also several other contemporary accounts from the period that mention Cuzzoni and specifically describe her singing. None are as thorough as the four discussed above, but they are nevertheless worth a mention here in the interest of demonstrating Cuzzoni's influence during the Royal Academy years.

Sir John Hawkins provides descriptions – or as he terms them “portraits” – of many Royal Academy singers in his multi-volume work *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*.<sup>32</sup> Although he does not describe her voice specifically, he does make the assertion that the arias composed by Handel were written “with the utmost solicitude to display her talents to advantage,” and that the evidence of that claim is in the arias themselves, specifically in “Affani del pensier,” and “Da tanti affanni oppressa,” both of which are *siciliana* arias.<sup>33</sup> Hawkins's specific affirmation of Handel's intention to compose arias specifically suited to Cuzzoni's talents is further proof that we may use the arias themselves in our pursuit of a vocal portrait of the singer.

---

<sup>32</sup> Sir John Hawkins (1719–1789) was an English music historian and the author of *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, first published in 1776, which along with Charles Burney's *General History* are considered to be the earliest books written on the history of music in England. Hawkins culled his account from extensive research and study of documents in the British Museum and his own personal collection. Like Burney, he was too young to have heard Cuzzoni sing in her prime. Percy A. Scholes, "Hawkins, Sir John (i)," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed January 6, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/12604>.

<sup>33</sup> John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, vol. 2 (London: J. Alfred Novello 1853), 873.

Vincenzo Martinelli mentions Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni in his *Lettere familiari e critiche* of 1758.<sup>34</sup> He describes Cuzzoni's voice as of "little note, but sweet sounding throughout."<sup>35</sup> This evaluation by Martinelli also describes Cuzzoni's perfect alignment between different registers. His assessment of her voice being "of little note" is a comparison to the voice of Bordoni, whom he describes as "brilliant in every way." It is clear from his comparison that he preferred Bordoni. In this case, I believe that Martinelli's use of the phrase "of little note" most likely refers to the size of her voice in comparison with Bordoni's.

A similar comparison between the voices of Cuzzoni and Bordoni is given by Pierre Jacques Fougereux in *Voyage d'Angleterre d'Hollande et de Flandre fait en l'année 1728 par Mr. Fougereux Pierre Jacques*.<sup>36</sup> Fougereux characterizes Cuzzoni's

---

<sup>34</sup> Vincenzo Martinelli (1702–1785) was an Italian writer who lived in London beginning in 1748, and through the rest of his life. His *Lettere familiari e critiche* from 1758 is a series of essays on opera. Although Martinelli concentrates on this history of opera as a genre, he also writes about principles (such as his endorsement of *Affektenlehre*, or the ability of music to represent specific emotions), and reviews famous singers. According to scholar Andrea Luppi, Cuzzoni was a favorite of Martinelli's (along with Bordoni and Senesio), although it is not clear when he actually heard her sing. Andrea Luppi, "Music and Poetry in Vincenzo Martinelli's 'Lettere Familiari e critiche,'" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 19, no. 2 (December 1988): 149–160.

<sup>35</sup> Vincenzo Martinelli, *Lettere familiari e critiche* (1758), 359. "La prima [Cuzzoni] con una voce di poche note, ma tutte dolci egualmente e sonore..."

<sup>36</sup> Pierre Jacques Fougereux was a French writer on art and music who traveled to London with two friends in 1728 with the express purpose of observing art and music in the city. His birth and death dates seem to be unknown, although it is known that he had a son, Auguste-Denis, who lived from 1732–1789. Fougereux's diary from his year abroad is recorded in the form of six letters, and each concentrates on a different aspect of his observations about art, society, and music in London in 1728. The fifth letter in the collection is the one that deals with the Royal Academy, and mentions Cuzzoni specifically. See Winton Dean, "A French Traveller's View of Handel's Operas," *Music and Letters* 55, no. 2 (April 1974): 172–178.

voice as weaker than that of Bordoni, whose voice he describes as “assez grande,” but says she had a “sweetness that enchants with divine passages.”<sup>37</sup> Fougereux’s use of the adjective “sweet” is consistent with the first hand accounts of both Mancini and Tosi. During the particular dates of his London stay, he would have been able to hear Cuzzoni in performances of *Siroe*, *Tolomeo*, and *Admeto*.<sup>38</sup>

The final chapter of this dissertation will build on the characterization formed in this chapter and offer musical examples and statistical evidence to support the idea that Handel repeatedly used certain musical devices to use Cuzzoni’s particular vocal and dramatic talents to greatest effect and to minimize her shortcomings.

---

<sup>37</sup> The entire text of Fougereux’s fifth letter is included in Winton Dean, “A French Traveller’s View of Handel’s Operas.” At the beginning of the article, Dean thanks Gerald Coke, in whose collection of Handelian the manuscript resides.

<sup>38</sup> Dean, “A French Traveller’s View of Handel’s Operas,” 174.

## Chapter 5

### Handel's Arias for Cuzzoni

Between 1722 and 1728, Handel wrote eleven operas and a total of seventy-three arias for Cuzzoni, and this chapter discusses the particular characteristics within these works that are associated with the singer.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of such discussion is to develop a vocal profile of the *maestra* that will help categorize arias written for her. For the student or teacher of voice, the hundreds of arias in Handel's output do not correspond at all well to the *Fach* system used by music institutions and are not traditionally categorized that way. It is hoped that developing a system of categorization for the solo vocal music in Handel's *oeuvre* will contribute to an increase in performances of this repertoire; classifying arias written for Cuzzoni is but a first step in this effort.

In the article "He Wrote for Specific Voices," prominent vocal pedagogue Barbara Doscher writes that it was a common practice for eighteenth century composers, and Handel in particular, to compose operatic roles for specific singers. Principal singers were engaged for the whole season with the Royal Academy before operas had even been written, and so Handel was able to begin his writing process knowing exactly who would sing each role in every opera.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Jens Peter Larsen elaborates on this theme: "a singer's right to insist that an aria should be made to fit his special voice was then so accepted that it was a quite natural thing to transpose or re-write arias when a work was

---

<sup>1</sup> In chronological order of composition, the eleven operas are *Ottone*, *Flavio*, *Giulio Cesare*, *Tamerlano*, *Rodelinda*, *Scipione*, *Alessandro*, *Admeto*, *Riccardo Primo*, *Siroe*, and *Tolomeo*. As discussed in Chapter 2, the first opera, *Ottone*, was not actually written for Cuzzoni, but because it ultimately became the opera of her Royal Academy debut (and its arias proved to be monumental successes for her), it will be included here.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Doscher, "He Wrote for Specific Voices," *Journal of Singing* 52, no. 1 (September/October 1995): 33–34.

performed again with other singers.”<sup>3</sup> As we saw in Chapter 2, in one of the most famous anecdotes about Cuzzoni, she refused to sing the aria “Falsa Immagine” because it had not been written for her. Although many historical accounts agree that Cuzzoni was a difficult personality, the fact that she was willing to argue with Handel — who had engaged her, after all — over an aria immediately upon her arrival in London supports the assertion that singers expected that arias would be composed specifically for their voices.

Appendix I is a list of the seventy-three arias Handel wrote for Cuzzoni. They are listed in chronological order, and within each opera, they are listed in the sequence in which they appear. The appendix also indicates alternate arias composed for subsequent singers, and, if known, which aria the alternate work might have been meant to replace. It is on the basis of this collection of pieces that it is possible to make the following specific observations about Cuzzoni’s vocal characteristics.

## **Pitch**

Before any discussion of the key, range and tessitura of the arias, it must be pointed out that Handel’s operas were not performed at modern concert pitch (A=440 Herz or cycles per second). Before the nineteenth century, pitch levels fluctuated greatly depending on geographical location and sometimes musical style. The necessity of agreeing on a standard or common pitch did not become an issue until two or more instruments began playing together regularly.<sup>4</sup> Even during the sixteenth century,

---

<sup>3</sup> Doscher, “He Wrote for Specific Voices,” 34.



consorts of instruments would tune to each other for individual performances, but there still was not universal agreement about pitch levels. Organs, for example, could be found tuned to very different frequencies throughout Europe well into the nineteenth century. However, it is most probable that Handel's operas were performed at A-1, or A=415 Herz, sometimes referred to as "Baroque pitch." Handel probably used A-1, the standard opera pitch on the Continent, by the early 1720s.<sup>5</sup> That Handel would follow the conventions of Continental opera reflects his thorough understanding of Italian operatic style and his knowledge of Italian singers' expectations. This information is key to our understanding of Cuzzoni's voice when studying the arias that were written for her, considering her key and tessitura preferences, and generalizing about the ranges of the arias. We must keep in mind that the arias sounded a half-step lower than modern pitch.

## **Key**

Of the seventy-three arias, the two most common keys are B-flat major (eleven arias) and A major (ten arias). These twenty-one arias represent nearly thirty percent of the total number of arias that Handel wrote for Cuzzoni. G major and C minor are tied for second place with eight arias each, and the third-most common key is G minor, with seven arias. The table below shows the distribution of keys across all of Handel's arias for Cuzzoni.

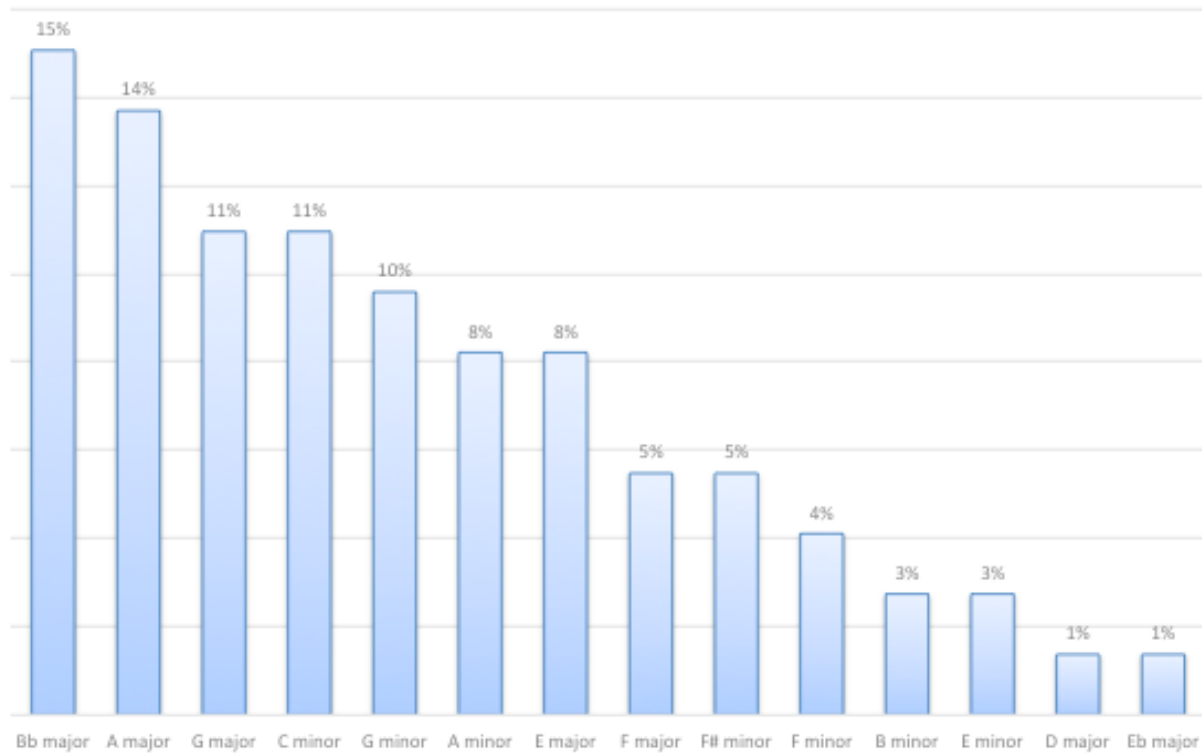
---

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Haynes and Peter Cooke, "Pitch," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed June 28, 2016, <http://libill.hartford.edu:2132/subscriber/article/grove/music/40883>.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Haynes and Peter Cooke, "Pitch," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*.

Claudia Wier has noted that Handel's assignment of keys to the arias of his star singers not only had to do with their preferences, but also was meant to adhere to the

Table 2: Distribution of keys of the Cuzzoni arias



tenets of the Doctrine of the Affections.<sup>6</sup> Wier concludes that Handel had to reconcile his choice of keys (as well as tempo and mode) with expectations based on gender: “The

<sup>6</sup> Claudia Wier, “A Nest of Nightingales: Cuzzoni and Senesino at Handel’s Royal Academy of Music,” *Theater Survey* 51, no. 2 (November, 2010): 247–273. The Doctrine of the Affections was a theoretical document from the Baroque era. It espoused the belief that music is capable of arousing specific emotional responses from listeners if composed using certain musical techniques. Among the theorists who are most associated with the doctrine is Johann Mattheson, who wrote extensively on these techniques in his book *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, which was published in 1739. He notes that “joy is elicited by large intervals, sadness by small intervals; fury may be aroused by a roughness of harmony coupled with a rapid melody; obstinacy is evoked by the contrapuntal combination of highly independent (obstinate) melodies.” See [www.britannica.com/art/doctrine-of-the-affections](http://www.britannica.com/art/doctrine-of-the-affections).

female element is regularly aligned with the (perceived) weak, slow, minor, dissonant, and lyrical qualities, while the male element is aligned with the strong, fast, major, consonant and forthright qualities.”<sup>7</sup> She reveals, however, that fifty-five percent of Cuzzoni’s arias are in major keys, a fact that seems to weaken her argument that Handel was concerned with the Doctrine of the Affections and/or societal expectations. Although it is well documented in historical sources that the Doctrine of the Affections was important to Baroque composers, I believe that an analysis of the statistical breakdown of Handel’s compositional choices for Cuzzoni shows that his primary concern was to present a singer’s vocal strengths. That twenty-one of Cuzzoni’s arias are in two keys only separated by a half-step (A major and B-flat major) shows a significant preference for the range and tessitura benefits of those keys.

### **Range and Tessitura**

Of the four primary sources discussed in Chapter 4 (Quantz, Tosi, Mancini, and Burney), only Quantz ventures a specific assessment of Cuzzoni’s range. Quantz wrote that “her range extended from middle C to the C above the staff.”<sup>8</sup> The highest pitch that Handel wrote for Cuzzoni in any of the seventy-three arias is B-flat 5; if we are to take Quantz at his word that Cuzzoni could sing a C6, then it must be assumed that she used that note in ornamentations. C4, or middle C, appears in only two arias (one of which, coincidentally, is “Io son qual Fenice” from *Admeto*, the opera that Quantz heard

---

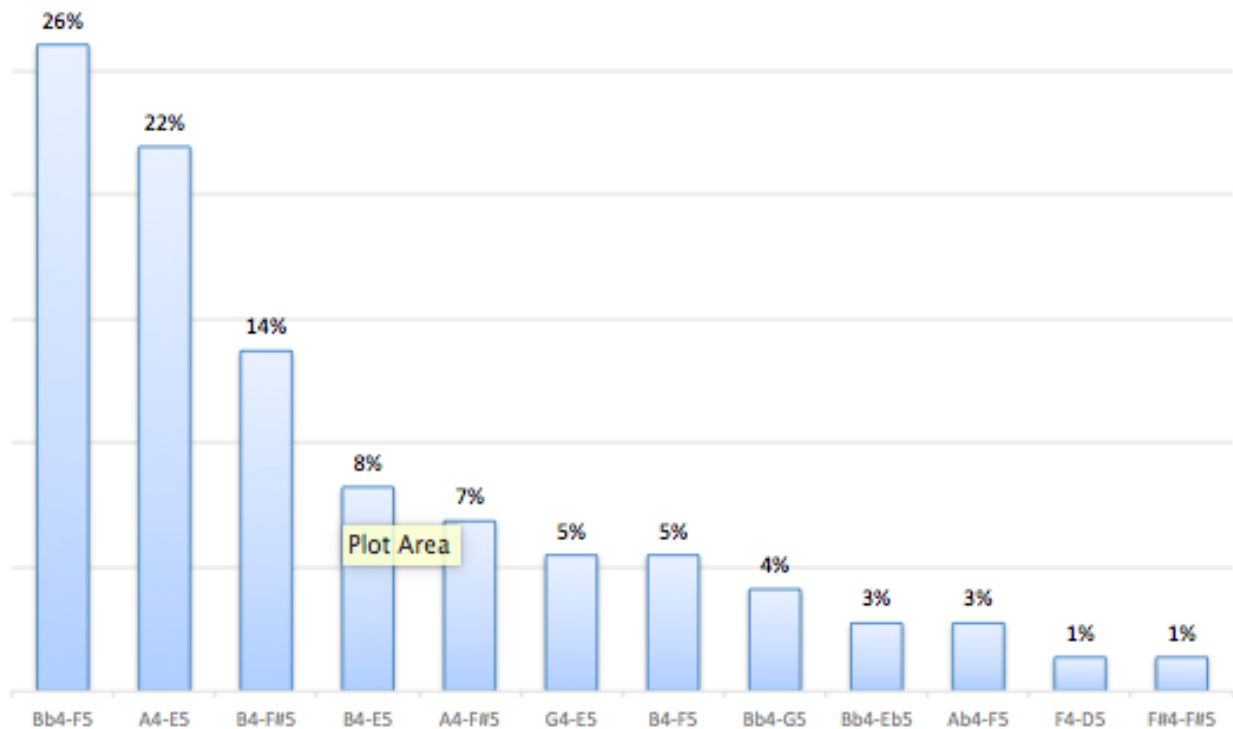
<sup>7</sup> Wier, “A Nest of Nightingales,” 17.

<sup>8</sup> The principle source for all facts concerning Quantz’s life is his own autobiographical “sketch.” This is translated and reprinted in Paul Nettl’s anthology *Forgotten Musicians*, beginning on page 280. Paul Nettl, *Forgotten Musicians* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 312.

Cuzzoni sing). Thus, although Handel never wrote a C6 for Cuzzoni, Quantz's measurement of her range seems accurate, since Handel did write from C4 to B-flat 5 for her. The lowest pitch that occurs most often throughout the arias is E4, and the highest pitch is A5; the key most often used throughout Cuzzoni's arias is A major.

Although measuring Cuzzoni's preferred tessitura is more subjective than measuring her range, it may give an accurate account of the register in which her voice was most pleasant sounding, resonant, and comfortable. Twenty-two arias rest principally between A4 and E5 (or F#5), another twenty sit between B4 and E5 or F#5, and another twenty-four sit between B-flat 4 and E-flat 5 or F5. Sixty-six of the seventy-three arias share a common tessitura (differing by only a whole step in either direction). Table 3 shows the percentage of arias in each of the tessitura groupings.

Table 3: Tessitura groupings of the Cuzzoni arias



During the eighteenth century, Cuzzoni would have been categorized simply as a soprano. as further subdivisions of the soprano category used by modern singers were not yet in place. Writing in 1668, Benigne de Bacilly commented on the various vocal categorizations that were then in place:

Considering the voice according to its musical range, using the musical terminology of Soprano, Contralto, Tenor, Bass, etc., we find that the higher voice ranges are more successful in effective performance even though all of the vocal ranges ought to be equally suitable for training. This is due to the fact that a greater number of the emotions or passions will appear to good advantage in the higher voice ranges than in the lower ones.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bacilly's list, terms such as mezzo-soprano or baritone were not in use during the early stages of the Baroque period. Indeed, when looking at Handel's operas, Bacilly's preference for higher voices is still in force: leading roles are performed by female sopranos and/or castrati. Ellen Harris has noted that the authors of Baroque-era vocal treatises were in agreement that female sopranos and castrati were best qualified to sing rapid coloratura passages and to convey a range of emotions.<sup>10</sup> Secondary roles were performed by castrati, female contraltos, and occasionally male tenors. There was often a tertiary role assigned to a bass. Other than the exceptional case of *Tamerlano*, however, in which the leading role of Bajazet was originally composed for tenor, the other voice parts — contraltos, tenors, and basses — do not figure prominently Handel's operas.

It is clear, then, that these voice categorizations were primarily range distinctions and did not refer to timbre distinctions. However, composers were

---

<sup>9</sup> Quoted and translated in Ellen T. Harris, "Voices," in *Performance Practice: Music after 1600*, ed. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989), 111.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 112.

certainly concerned with the different dramatic capabilities of each voice type. Harris notes that “range was therefore very important to Baroque authors and composers. Each range has its known quality.”<sup>11</sup> She quotes Tosi in this connection:

A Soprano has generally most Volubility, and becomes it best; and also equally the Pathetick. The Contr’Alto more of the Pathetick than the Volubility; the Tenor less of the Pathetick, but more of the Volubility than the Contr’Alto, though not so much as the Soprano. The Bass, in general more pompous than any, but should not be so boisterous as now too often practised.<sup>12</sup>

The term “volubility” comes from Galliard’s translation of Tosi’s treatise and refers to “something turning round,” or more simply, a singer capable of rapid passagework.<sup>13</sup> Presumably, Handel either agreed with this assessment or it was such a firmly established musical truth by the early 1700s that sopranos had become the leading figures in Baroque opera.

Claudia Wier has a different opinion on the question of voice classification, setting forth the view that Handel was actually responsible for breaking down established gender barriers and changing the public’s perception of voices and operatic characterization through his promotion of Cuzzoni. In the early eighteenth century, castrati were formally educated in Italian conservatories, whereas female singers were not permitted to attend.<sup>14</sup> If girls received any

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Tosi as quoted in Harris, “Voices,” 112.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Ravens, *The Supernatural Voice: A History of High Male Singing* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 106.

<sup>14</sup> Wier, “A Nest of Nightingales,” 5.

musical education at all, it was at home from a relative or family friend. It was not considered advantageous to educate girls, since they were not expected to be able to work professionally. Cuzzoni's father (and presumably her first music teacher) was a professional violinist, and she took lessons from a family friend, Francesco Lanzi, who was a composer. Wier postulates that this fortuitous early musical education, coupled with the British public's increasingly conflicted feeling about castrati, allowed Handel to push through the established gender roles in the theater and bring major changes to the stage by promoting Cuzzoni. Again, although Wier sheds light on some important historical facts, and these factors may have been part of the engine that propelled Cuzzoni's success, her argument ignores the fact that Cuzzoni was already a major star in Italy (as were several other Italian female singers), and that it was more likely her celebrity and notoriety on the continent that prompted the Academy to pursue her engagement in London.

Handel's arias for Cuzzoni are concentrated between A4 and F#5 (and sounded at A=415); this suggests that the upper middle voice and the upper *passaggio* was Cuzzoni's most comfortable and attractive range, and not her upper register.<sup>15</sup> It is for this reason that I believe she would be classified as a lyric soprano, but not a light lyric soprano, according to the *Fach* system. Richard Boldrey defines a lyric as "a soprano whose main characteristic is beauty, rather

---

<sup>15</sup> Richard Miller, *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1986), 134. In his explanation of "Registration Events of Female Voices," Miller divides the soprano voice into chest, lower and upper middle, and upper, with both a lower (primo) and upper (secondo) *passaggio*. It is this upper *passaggio* — occurring at or around F#5 according to Miller — that I will refer to simply as the *passaggio* throughout this chapter. Miller recognizes that the exact location of the *passaggi* may vary according to the size and weight of the individual voice.

than agility or power. The lyric's vocal range is normally the two octaves from c to c."<sup>16</sup> Both the specific range and the emphasis on beauty of tone over vocal acrobatics seem consistent with the accounts of Quantz, Tosi, and Mancini. Boldrey goes on to say that one of the quintessential full lyric soprano roles in the operatic repertoire is the Countess in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*; both of the Countess's arias, "Porgi amor" and "Dove sono," are set in the tessitura we have already identified as Cuzzoni's comfortable range. Given what we know from first-hand accounts and from the representative ranges and tessituras of her Handel roles, it is reasonable to assume that the cantabile lines, pathos, and tessitura of Mozart's Countess would have been a good fit for Cuzzoni.

### **Time Signature and Tempo**

Of the seventy-three arias under consideration, the division between those in duple and triple meter is nearly equal. Thirty-nine arias are in duple meter, notated in 4/4, thirty-one are triple, either 3/4 or 3/8 time, and two are in 6/8. Nine arias are in 12/8 time, and all of these are *siciliana* arias, which was a widely acknowledged specialty of Cuzzoni's. It is clear that she was expected to sing this type of aria, because Handel wrote at least one *siciliana* aria in the majority of the operas for Cuzzoni.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Richard Boldrey, *Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias* (Redmond, WA: Caldwell Publishing, 1994), 22.

<sup>17</sup> Three of Handel's operas for Cuzzoni do not include *siciliana* arias. They are: *Giulio Cesare*, *Riccardo Primo*, and *Siroe*.



Example 5.1: Standard siciliana rhythm.



The *siciliana* was a commonly-used aria type and instrumental movement in the eighteenth century; it utilizes a slow tempo and a compound meter, either 6/8 or 12/8. It features succinct one- or two-measure phrases and often makes use of an eighth-note anacrusis (see Example 5.1). As was common in other operas of the time, the *siciliana* was preferred for pastoral scenes and to express melancholy, and sometimes features flute or oboe in that connection.<sup>18</sup> “Mi volgo ad ogni fronda” Cuzzoni’s first aria in *Tolomeo*, is a *siciliana*.<sup>19</sup> Cuzzoni’s character, Seleuce, enters searching for her husband, Tolomeo, who has been lost at sea. The depiction of a wife in a lamentable situation beyond her control — such as searching for her lost husband — is a typical Cuzzoni characterization. Seleuce’s circumstance at the beginning of the opera is the perfect context for a melancholic *siciliana*. “Mi volgo ad ogni fronda” is marked *andante*, notated in

---

<sup>18</sup> Meredith Ellis Little, “*Siciliana*,” *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25698>.

<sup>19</sup> *Tolomeo, Re di Egitto* (HWV 25), was Handel’s thirteenth and final opera for the Royal Academy, was first performed on April 30, 1728, with revivals in 1730 and 1733. The libretto is by Nicola Francesco Haym. The story takes place in Cyprus in 108 B.C., and the Tolomeo in question is based on Ptolemy IX (the Tolomeo in *Giulio Cesare* is based on Ptolemy XII). It is worth noting that in both libretti, Haym takes significant liberties with the historical facts. As in many other Handel opera plots, this one begins with a shipwreck and mistaken identity: Tolomeo meets his shipwrecked brother Alessandro on the beach in Cyprus, and soon finds out that their mother, Cleopatra, has sent Alessandro to kill his him. Tolomeo, however, can’t bring himself to kill Alessandro, even in self-defense, so he disguises himself as “Osmin.” Tolomeo is searching for his wife, Seleuce. Seleuce is also looking for Tolomeo, believing him to be lost, and has also disguised herself as the maid Delia.

12/8 time, and employs an eighth-note anacrusis at the beginning of nearly every phrase. The first few lines of the aria's text show the trademark *siciliana* rhythmic pattern, of short-long-short-long:

Mi volgo ad ogni fronda M'arresto al suon dell'onda, Né trovo il sposo mai, Se non dentro il mio sen.	I turn at every branch, I stop at the sound of the sea, but never find my husband, except within my heart.
Amor, tu che lo sai, Dimmi, dov'è il mio ben?	Cupid, you who know, Tell me, where is my beloved?

Handel renders this rhythm exactly in the opening of the vocal line (see Example 5.2).

There are several theories about the origin of the *siciliana* as an aria type. Many scholars believe that the type developed from the gigue, along with the pavane and the galliard, as part of the common seventeenth-century repertoire of dances. However, Meredith Ellis Little explains that there is little historical evidence to support this, and that no written choreography for a *siciliana* survives in the sources in which there is documented choreography for other dances. She believes that it is more likely that the *siciliana*'s origins are in popular Venetian dance. An early example of a *siciliana* in opera is "Oblivion soave," sung by the nurse, Arnalta, in *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* of 1642. From there, it became a popular compositional device used by many composers of Italian opera in the eighteenth century and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Meredith Ellis Little, "Siciliana." Some other well-known uses of the Siciliana rhythm after include "He Shall Feed His Flock" from *Messiah*, and "Deh vieni non tardar" from *Le nozze di Figaro* by Mozart. However, in her article, Little states that the first instance of a *siciliana* in an opera is found in Monteverdi's *Orfeo*. Although she does not

Example 5.2: Handel, "Mi volgo ad ogni fronda," from *Tolomeo*, mm 1- 9

**Andante**

**SELEUCE**

Mi

vol - go ad o - gni fron - da m'ar - re - sto al suon del- l'on - da, né

tro - vo il spo - so mai, se non\_ den-tro il mio sen,

identify the specific excerpt, most likely Little is referring to the *Moresca* in the last scene of the opera, however, this is not an example of a siciliana.

The general popularity of the *siciliana* as an aria type, combined with Cuzzoni's acknowledged skill as a pathetic heroine, made it an obvious choice for Handel when he wrote for the singer. In fact, the aria that was arguably most responsible for Cuzzoni's success in London, establishing her as the superior pathetic heroine of the Royal Academy, was the *siciliana* "Affanni del pensier" from *Ottone*.<sup>21</sup> Although both "Affanni del pensier" and "Falsa immagine" were most likely written for Margherita Durastanti prior to Cuzzoni's engagement, the role instantly made Cuzzoni a star. As LaRue has noted,

"Affanni del pensier" in particular was well suited to the new virtuoso's talent for the expression of pathos and melancholy...just as pathetic heroine roles such as Teofane ultimately became her stock-in-trade within the Royal Academy Company.<sup>22</sup>

"Affanni del pensier" features many of the same musical characteristics as "Mi volgo ad ogni fronda" (see Example 5.3). The eighth-note anacrusis leading to a quarter note on the downbeat is introduced in the instrumental introduction and is present in the first two measures of the voice part, and this rhythmic figure occurs throughout the piece. Two elements that differ from "Mi volgo" are that "Affanni del pensier" is in the minor mode and is marked *larghetto*, both of which

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ottone, Rè di Germania* (HWV 15) was first performed at the Royal Academy on January 12, 1723. The libretto is by Nicola Francesco Haym. Winton Dean terms the plot of the opera "confused", and indeed, it is difficult to follow all the threads within the story, and the libretto contains an "argument" which explains the events leading up to the those depicted in the opera. Teofane, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor, has traveled to Rome to marry Ottone, the German king, who has also come to reclaim the Italian territories for Germany (they had been usurped by the late husband of Queen Gismonda, and father of Prince Adalbert). In order to maintain control over the throne, Gismonda convinces her son Adalbert to pose as Ottone, and trick Teofane into marrying him instead.

<sup>22</sup> C. Steven LaRue, *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 137.

are more in character with the pathos and melancholy associated with a *siciliana* than “Mi volgo.” Example 5.3 below contains the characteristic *siciliana* rhythm in both the opening ritornello and vocal entrance.

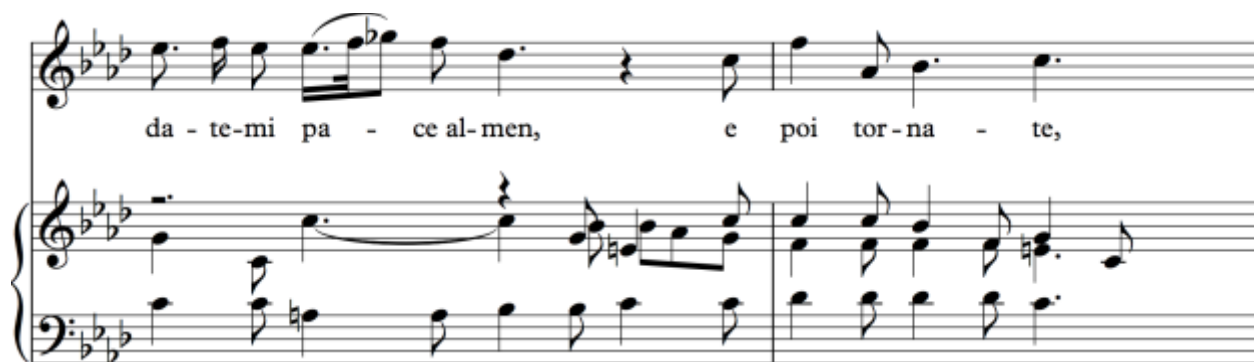
Example 5.3. Handel: “Affanni del pensier” from *Ottone*, mm. 1-12

**Larghetto**

TEOFANE

Af - fan - ni del pen - sier, un

sol mo-men - to da - te-mi pa - ce al-men



The situation for Teofane by the time she sings “Affanni del pensier” is more desperate than Seulece’s at the beginning of *Tolomeo*. Teofane, who has been looking forward to marrying Ottone, has been kidnapped by Gismonda and Adalberto, whom (she has been told) she will be forced to marry. “Affanni del pensier” is her reaction to this seemingly impossible situation.

Affanni del pensier,  
un sol momento  
datemi pace almen,  
e poi tornate!

Torments of my mind  
one single moment  
give me peace at least  
and then come back!

Ah! Che nel mesto sen  
Io già vi sento  
Che ostinato la pace  
A me turbate.

Ah! For in my sad breast  
I already feel you  
obstinately disturbing  
my peace of mind.<sup>23</sup>

It is difficult to make a definitive argument about Cuzzoni’s preference for certain tempi or Handel’s inclination to write for her in those tempi because there are an approximately equal number of fast and slow arias. Moreover, of the seventy-three arias, only sixty actually have tempo markings. Appendix 1 of this study shows that of the sixty, twenty-five are slow (marked *largo* or *larghetto*), twelve are medium (marked *andante*), and twenty-three are fast (marked *allegro*). Finally, because composers did

---

<sup>23</sup> Nico Castel, *Handel Opera Libretti*, vol. 1 (Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 2005), 437.

not begin using exact metronome markings until the nineteenth century, there is some room for interpretation as to the intended tempo.

A specific issue for which a discussion of tempo preference becomes especially important is the use and prevalence of coloratura passages in Handel's arias. By examining how often Handel wrote complex coloratura passages for Cuzzoni, we are able to draw conclusions about the agility or — to use Galliard's word — “volubility” of her voice. To produce the statistics below, I imposed the following criteria: first, I only considered arias with the tempo marking of *allegro*; second, to be included, the coloratura passage in question had to be at least two measures long (and all note values had to be shorter than a quarter note). In addition, I excluded *Ottone* from this particular discussion, since it is clear that the role was neither conceived nor specifically composed for Cuzzoni. Lastly, since none of Cuzzoni's arias in *Riccardo Primo* or *Tolomeo* are marked *allegro*, they are also not discussed here. The table below shows the operas in chronological order of composition, and I indicate at what point the operas begin to feature Faustina Bordoni as Cuzzoni's co-star.<sup>24</sup>

Most writings concerning Cuzzoni's general vocal abilities and coloratura prowess in particular make the broad conclusion that her strengths lay in long legato lines rather than in rapid passage work. If we believe that one of Handel's primary concerns was to show Cuzzoni's voice to its best advantage as often as possible, then the data above shows that Cuzzoni was not an eager coloratura. Of the eight operas examined in the table below, six have less than half of the total arias in fast tempi.

---

<sup>24</sup> There are melismatic passages in some of Cuzzoni's “andante” arias, but since they do not qualify as “rapid passage-work,” I have also excluded them from this data set.

Table 4. Coloratura passages in Cuzzoni's arias

Opera	# of Allegro arias/of total arias	2-4 measures	4+ measures
<b><i>Flavio</i></b>	1/5	1	0
<b><i>Giulio Cesare</i></b>	5/8	8	8
<b><i>Tamerlano</i></b>	2/6	3	1
<b><i>Rodelinda</i></b>	3/8	6	2
<b><i>Scipione</i></b>	3/8	8	0
<b><i>Alessandro</i><sup>25</sup></b>	3/6	10	0
<b><i>Admeto</i></b>	3/7	7	0
<b><i>Siroe</i></b>	4/5	7	0

Of the remaining two, *Giulio Cesare* has five out of eight of the arias marked “allegro,” and *Siroe* seems to be the statistical outlier, with four out of five of Cuzzoni's arias (or eighty percent) marked “allegro.” Perhaps the case of *Siroe* can be explained by both the story and the character Laodice's (i.e., Cuzzoni's) role within it. *Siroe* (sung by Senesino) is the heir to the throne of Persia. Laodice is in love with *Siroe*, but *Siroe* is in love with Emira (sung by Faustina Bordoni). Laodice is responsible for nearly ruining *Siroe*'s chance at becoming king by accusing him of sexual assault and conspiring with the king (*Siroe*'s father) to have Emira banished. In the end, through an unlikely series of events, Emira and *Siroe* marry, and Laodice is left on her own. Due to the calculating and aggressive nature of Laodice's role, it seems appropriate that she would sing raging, fast-paced arias.

The data show the overall decrease in coloratura passages and fast arias for Cuzzoni beginning with *Alessandro* and the arrival of Faustina Bordoni. In fact, the two operas that feature no allegro arias at all for Cuzzoni fall into the Bordoni period. It is

---

<sup>25</sup> *Alessandro* was the first opera that also featured Faustina Bordoni. Neither *Riccardo Primo* nor *Tolomeo* feature any allegro arias for Cuzzoni, but both also featured Faustina Bordoni opposite Cuzzoni.



understandable that in composing for the two singers, Handel would have wanted to not only highlight their specific vocal strengths, but to stockpile their individual parts with the types of arias that London audiences expected and wanted to hear. Burney wrote that Cuzzoni was an “expressive and pathetic singer,” whereas Bordoni excelled in arias featuring rapid passage work.<sup>26</sup> Before Bordoni’s arrival in London, it seems that Handel’s musical characterizations for Cuzzoni were holistic in terms of variety of tempo and inclusion of coloratura passages; once Bordoni came onto the scene, it was easier to shift the fast tempo responsibilities to her, presumably because Cuzzoni was not as skilled in this area, and perhaps also because Cuzzoni did not prefer this type of singing.

### **Aria Types and Dramatic Characterization**

It is not clear whether Handel set out to compose certain types of arias when writing his operas for the Royal Academy. The da capo aria was the reigning aria form during the eighteenth century, and the overwhelming majority of the arias in Handel’s operas and oratorios are in this form. Throughout both eighteenth-century and contemporary writings, Cuzzoni is referred to as a “pathetic heroine” — that is, a heroine filled with pathos or melancholy emotion. What, if any, effect does this characterization have on musical type, and are Cuzzoni’s arias all of a certain type? And were arias labeled by type during Handel’s time?

Five aria types are defined by John Brown in his 1789 *Letters Upon the Poetry and Music of the Italian Opera*. These types are the *aria cantabile*, the *aria di portamento*, the *aria di mezzo carattere*, the *aria parlante*, and the *aria di bravura*. The *aria cantabile* was associated with love and tenderness, the *portamento* with

---

<sup>26</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 150.

dignity, the *mezzo carattere* with seriousness, the *parlante* with agitation and rage (and often featuring fast, descending coloratura passages), and the *bravura* aria with any affect requiring dazzling display — and usually nobility in general.<sup>27</sup> In his 1991 book about the operas of Handel's contemporary Antonio Vivaldi, Karl Heller mentions aria types that nearly correspond with those of John Brown, with the notable exception of the *aria parlante*, which Brown equates with rage, while Heller defines it as "loquacious." Instead, Heller indicates that the *aria di bravura* encompassed both triumph and rage during the eighteenth century, and he also invokes a specific type, the *aria patetica*:

This led to the common aria types, the names of which were already known during the eighteenth century – the *aria patetica*: an expressive, slow song usually of lament; the *aria di bravura*: an allegro or presto aria expressing an effect such as jealousy, rage, revenge or triumph; the lyrical *aria cantabile*; the *aria parlante* with its loquacious patter; the *aria di mezzo carattere*: a moderate andante type of aria; and several others.<sup>28</sup>

Both Brown and Heller's explanation of aria types that were in use during the early eighteenth century makes it likely that these types were known to Handel. Dr. Charles Burney also praises specific aria types in his writings about opera in his *Cyclopedia*:<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: a Poetics of Entertainment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999) 95–96. The explanation of Brown's aria types is found in this book. Although Hunter's essay is about Mozart and the writings of Brown and his contemporaries date from the late eighteenth century and are thus outside the scope of this study, Hunter's explanation of type is one of the clearest. Furthermore, one can trace some of Brown's aria types to the arias of the early to mid-eighteenth century.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Heller, *Antonio Vivaldi: the Red Priest of Venice*, trans. David Marinelli (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1991), 123–124.

<sup>29</sup> Burney's *Cyclopedia* is quoted in Kerry S. Grant, *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983), 255. Dr. Charles Burney (1726–1814) was an English music historian who not only wrote extensively about opera — in

To be able to play or sing an aria di cantabile, is the highest praise that can be bestowed on a musician. Execution surprises, and for a certain time amuses; but goes no further than the ear; but to sing a cantabile with tenderness and expression, is conveying sounds to the heart.<sup>30</sup>

Kerry S. Grant, in comments on Burney's writing about different aria types in the *Cyclopedia*, notes that "one might conclude that Burney favors the *bravura aria* over all other types."<sup>31</sup> Although the above citation also clearly shows his admiration for the *aria di cantabile*, both it and the anecdote from Kerry S. Grant are further evidence that conventions and nomenclature surrounding aria types were pervasive during Handel's career.

Burney also refers to "pathetic" arias with the term *canevas*, while Heller refers directly to the *aria patetico*. "Pathetic" refers to the affect of "pathos" within an aria, and singers who excelled at these types of arias (such Cuzzoni) were said to be able to imbue their arias with a sense of pathos. Of these *canevas* arias, Burney says that only "a great singer can colour, and souls susceptible of pleasure from the most select and sentimental sounds can truly enjoy."

It seems to be unanimous among those who heard Cuzzoni that she excelled in singing *cantabile* arias. But, in the two operas that might be considered her greatest triumphs, *Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*, she had the opportunity to sing wonderful

---

particular the operas that Handel wrote for the Royal Academy in London — but also actually heard Cuzzoni sing toward the end of her career. Burney and his account of Cuzzoni's performance are discussed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

*bravura* and *parlante* arias as well.<sup>32</sup> Her final aria in *Rodelinda*, “Mio caro bene,” is an example of a *bravura* aria; it is in a major key, duple meter, and a fast tempo. The music is heroic, with ascending leaps in the vocal part and coloratura passages in both the A and B sections. Mary Hunter defines the *aria di bravura* as a *seria* statement of pride, nobility and/or rank, and “Mio caro bene” marks Rodelinda’s return to noble status at the end of the opera. The translation of the aria is as follows:

Mio caro bene, non ho più affani e pene, non ho più pene al cor.	My beloved! I no longer know suffering and pain, I no longer have grief in my heart.
Vedendo ti content nel seno mio già sento, che solvi alberga amor.	Seeing you happy, I feel now in my heart, That only love abides in it.

Example 5.5 shows the introduction (played by the full ensemble) that concludes with a descending sixteenth note figure in measures seven and eight. When Rodelinda enters in measure nine, her first interval is a leap of a fifth, and then the second phrase (measure eleven) imitates, but this time with an octave leap. The vocal phrase beginning in measure thirteen is declamatory and features syllabic text setting; this is followed by the first coloratura passage in measure sixteen. The characteristic, large

---

<sup>32</sup> *Rodelinda* (HWV 19) was first performed on 13 February 1725, and has a libretto by Francesco Nicola Haym; it was repeated that same year and again in 1731. Rodelinda is the queen of Lombardy and the wife of King Bertarido, who has just been defeated in battle by Grimoaldo, the Duke of Benevento. Bertarido has been forced into exile, and is presumed dead. His wife, Rodelinda, and son, Flavio, are under the control of Grimoaldo at the palace. Although Grimoaldo is in love with Bertarido’s sister, Eduige, he decides to marry Rodelinda to seal himself as King. At the end of the opera, when it is revealed to Grimoaldo that Bertarido is still alive, he relents and restores Bertarido to the throne and reunites him with Rodelinda.

Example 5.4. Handel: "Mio caro bene" from *Rodelinda*, mm. 1-20.

**Allegro**

6 6 6 6

tr *pp* 6 6

6 5/3 6 6 6 6 6 5/3 *pp* 6 6

**RODELINDA**

Mio ca - ro be-ne, ca-ro,

6 6 6 6

ca-ro, mio ca - ro be-ne, non ho più af-fan- ni e pe ne, non ho più pe-ne al

6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

cor\_ , non ho più pe-ne al cor, non ho\_ più. af - fan - - -

- - - ni, no, non ho\_ , non ho più pe-ne al cor.

In *Giulio Cesare*, Handel combines two seemingly distinct aria types in the famous “Piangerò la sorte mia” (see Examples 5.5 and 5.6).<sup>33</sup> The A section is a *cantabile* aria and filled with pathos. The key is E major, and the instrumentation is violins, viola, and flute. The vocal line features long note values and chromaticism that suggests weeping (measures eleven, fourteen, and eighteen). The B section abruptly

---

<sup>33</sup> *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (HWV 17) is on a libretto by Nicola Francesco Haym. The opera was first performed in London on 20 February 1724 and was an immediate triumph. The original cast featured Senesino as Cesare, Cuzzoni as Cleopatra, and Margherita Durastante as Sestoo. The plot is set in Egypt in 48 BC and covers the entire period of the Alexandrine War. Having defeated Pompey’s army in Greece, Caesar and his troops have followed him to Egypt. In a show of loyalty, Tolomeo sends Caesar the severed head of Pompey as a trophy, but Caesar, the just ruler, is repulsed by the gesture. The aftermath of this episode involves the grief of Pompey’s widow, Cornelia, and son, Sesto, who swears vengeance against Tolomeo. Cleopatra, the sister of Tolomeo and queen of Egypt, uses the situation to try to overthrow her brother and seal her authority as queen. She aligns herself with Caesar by seducing him, and battles between Cleopatra and Tolomeo’s armies for control of Egypt ensue.

changes affect and becomes a *parlante* aria. Through the use of the contrasting minor key, the rapid playing by the continuo, and fast coloratura passages, Handel shows the truly conflicted nature of Cleopatra's character. "Piangerò la sorte mia" begins Act III. Cleopatra finds herself captured by Tolomeo's army and is told that Cesare is dead. Her grief at the death of her beloved is juxtaposed with her anger at her brother. The translation of the aria is as follows:

Piangerò la sorte mia,  
sì crudele e tanto ria,  
finché vita in petto avrò

I will weep for my fate,  
so cruel and so unjust,  
for as long as I have life in my breast.

Ma poi morta! D'ogn'intorno,  
il tiranno e notte e giorno,  
fatta spettro agiterò.

But when I die and become a ghost,  
night and day, I will haunt the tyrant  
from every side.

Example 5.5. Handel, "Piangero la sorte mia" from *Giulio Cesare*, mm. 1-15

**Largo**

CLEOPATRA

Pian-ge - rò, pian-ge - rò la sor - te mi - a,

sì cru - de - le e tan - to ri - a fin - ché vi - ta in pet - to a - vrò;

Example 5.6. Handel, “Piangerò la sorte mia” (B section) from *Giulio Cesare*, mm. 48-56

**Allegro**

CLEOPATRA

Ma poi mor-ta d'o-gn'in tor - no il ti - ran - no

e not-te e gior - no fat-ta spet - tro a - gi - te - rò



In his construction of “Piangerò la sorte mia, Handel creates an A and B section that utilize completely contrasting musical elements. One section is minor, the other major, one is fast, and the other slow. The A section features no coloratura, while the B section includes several complex coloratura passages. The combination of these two distinct aria types not only perfectly illustrates the complex emotional state of Cleopatra, but also Handel’s confidence in Cuzzoni to portray the full spectrum of musical and dramatic characteristics in one aria.

### **Dramatic characterization**

It is impossible to discuss Handel’s musical characterization of Cuzzoni without also examining the way in which her characters functioned dramatically in the operas. The idea that specific singers consistently portrayed particular types of characters was prevalent during Handel’s time. LaRue notes that even before accommodating Cuzzoni and Bordoni became a necessary consideration for Handel’s compositional process, he was already considering dramatic capability as key component of writing operas. In writing about Senesino and Margherita Durastanti (who sang most of the leading roles before Senesino and some *compramario* and leading lady roles after Senesino’s arrival in London), LaRue comments that Handel wrote music for them that fit their dramatic character types rather than prioritizing their vocal strengths.<sup>34</sup> In fact, singers could be as concerned about their dramatic type as they were about their music. Another of Cuzzoni’s colleagues at the Royal Academy, British contralto Anastasia Robinson, wrote two letters to Giuseppe Riva, an Italian diplomat, imploring him to intercede on her behalf and ask Handel to change the music he wrote for her in *Ottone*:

---

<sup>34</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 125.

Not knowing how to ask you to give your self the trouble of coming here, and the necessity obliging me to beg a favour of you, I must do it by writing. I am very sensible the Musick of my Part is exstreamly [sic] fine, but am as sure the Character causes it to be of that kind, which no way suits my Capacity; those Songs that require fury and passion to express them, can never be performed by me according to the intention of the Composer, and consequently must loose [sic] their Beauty. Nature design'd me a peacable Creature, and it is as true as strange, that I am a Woman and cannot Scold.<sup>35</sup>

This letter is interesting because singers normally determine whether or not they can sing a given opera role based on the role's specific vocal demands rather than the type of character required. In this case, however, Robinson acknowledges that the music matches the character type (fury and passion presumably suggesting fast tempi, coloratura, et cetera), but only objects because the personality required to execute the music does not match her own; she makes no mention of any musical or vocal concern.

Once Cuzzoni arrived at the Academy, however, Handel shifted his focus to tailoring the arias to her specific strengths. Cuzzoni was widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest singers of her time, and Handel undoubtedly wanted to show her in the best possible light. From her first performances in *Ottone*, her reputation as a specialist in melancholy, pathos-filled arias was solidified, along with her dramatic character type. LaRue notes that all of her roles at the Academy between 1723 and 1725 were ingénue characters who consistently found themselves in lamentable situations that were beyond their control. By regularly casting Cuzzoni in this type of dramatic characterization, it

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 126.

was always possible to have her sing the type of aria that was consistent with her abilities and talents.<sup>36</sup>

A notable exception to Cuzzoni's usual characterization is Cleopatra, for which LaRue acknowledges that Handel broke with his own tradition and composed in a way that "was to become characteristic of the singer."<sup>37</sup> In *Giulio Cesare*, Handel uses Cuzzoni's lyricism in unexpected ways. Rather than mostly slow, melancholy arias (recall that 5 out of 8 of her arias in this opera are in fast tempi), Cleopatra's singing covers a wide range of emotions: she insults her brother in the fast-paced, coloratura showpiece "Non disperar" and seduces Cesare in the slow and lovely "V'adoro pupille." Perhaps the multi-faceted role of Cleopatra was both a reflection of Cuzzoni's popularity with the public and also Handel's test of her as an actress.

The next opera, *Tamerlano*, finds Cuzzoni in her "ideal role" according to LaRue. Her character, Asteria, is severely compromised at the beginning of the opera, both a victim of betrayal and enmeshed in a plot to force her to marry Tamerlano. Her first aria, "Se non mi vuol amar," is a *siciliana* over a simple, homophonic accompaniment that, as LaRue notes, was "clearly designed to emphasize certain aspects of Cuzzoni's vocal abilities."<sup>38</sup> In "Se non mi vuol amar," Handel wrote in a way to show off the sound of her voice by using a repeated pitch in the *siciliana* rhythm. This repeated-pitch figure allows the singer to concentrate on vocal color and dynamics. Example 5.7 shows both

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 138-139. LaRue also adds the following footnote here in his book: "This (that Cuzzoni's heroines are all the mercy of forces beyond their control) is true even of Cleopatra, perhaps Cuzzoni's strongest character, who becomes so hopelessly enamoured of Cesare that his destiny becomes inextricably linked with her own."

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 142.

the opening phrases of the aria and the second setting of the opening text “se non mi vuol amar.” In both instances, Handel sets the phrase with a large leap (first an octave in measure eight, and then a fifth in measures twelve and thirteen), and then five repeated pitches over changing harmonies that include diminished and minor chords. The large opening interval depicts weeping, while the minor and diminished harmonies embody a melancholy sound. This is an effective device when considering the meaning of the text, particularly the first line:

S'ei non mi vuol amar Almeno il traditor, Perfido ingannator, Il cor mi renda.	If he does not wish to love me, At least that traitor, That wicked deceiver, Can give me back my heart.
Se poi lo serba ancor, Che non lo sprezzì almen, O nell'amarlo il sen Poi non l'offenda.	If he still keeps it, May he at least not despise it, Or if he loves it May he cease to wound it. <sup>39</sup>

The repeated-pitch figure technique is used to varying degrees by Handel in other arias, but is perhaps most effective in “Se non mi vuol amar” (Example 5.7 below) because Handel uses it three times during the A section of the aria.

If Handel's writing for Cuzzoni in *Giulio Cesare* was a test of her dramatic capabilities, it seems that she passed; in *Rodelinda*, Cuzzoni assumed the title role, the only time in her Academy career that she did so. All of the other title role characters were portrayed by Senesino, both before and after the arrival of Faustina Bordoni. The action of the opera takes place in one day. Bertarido, the king of Lombardy, is defeated in battle by Grimoaldo.

---

<sup>39</sup> Marcello Simonetta, “Georg Frederic Handel: *Tamerlano*,” program book for *Tamerlano*, HWV 18, 1731 version (Vicenza, Italy/Parnassus Arts Productions), CD.

Example 5.7. Handel: “Se non mi vuol amar” from *Tamerlano*, mm. 8-16

**Larghetto**

ASTERIA

S'ei non mi vuol a-mar, al - me - no il tra - di - tor, per -

- fi-do in-gan - na - tor\_\_\_\_\_, il cor\_\_ mi ren - da;

s'ei non mi vuol a - mar, al - me - no il tra - di -

6 6 6 # 6

6 6 4 3 6 7 7

6 6 6



Although Bertarido is presumed dead, he merely hides near the castle.

Grimoaldo is in love with Bertarido's wife, Rodelinda, and threatens to murder her son if she does not marry him. Although Rodelinda is repulsed, she agrees, but through several plot complications and alliances with other characters, she is able to prove her fidelity to her husband, save her son, and witness the killing of Grimoaldo. Certainly the plot of *Rodelinda* gave Cuzzoni myriad opportunities for her signature pathetic arias, but she also sang a rage aria, "L'empio rigor del fato," at the beginning of the opera, and a *bravura* aria, "Mio caro bene," at the end.

While Cuzzoni may have proven herself competent to sing coloratura passages, it is unanimous among the historical accounts that Bordoni far exceeded her colleague in fast tempi and coloratura. Quantz's observations on Cuzzoni are cited above in Chapter Four. The theorist heard Bordoni sing in the same performance of *Admeto* in which he heard Cuzzoni. He also described her in his autobiography:

Faustina had a not very clear, but well-carrying mezzo-soprano voice which at the time did not range much more than from the "b flat" below middle "c" to the "g" above the staff, but in time increased several tones in depth. Her way of singing was expressive and brilliant (*un cantar granito*), and she had a light tongue, being able to pronounce words rapidly but plainly in succession. She had a facile throat and a beautiful and very polished *trillo* which she could apply with the greatest of ease wherever and whenever she pleased. The *passagien* could be either running or leaping, or could consist of many fast notes in succession on

one tone. She knew how to thrust these out skillfully, with the greatest possible rapidity, as they can be performed only on an instrument. She is unquestionably the first who has used these *passagien* consisting of many notes on one tone in singing, and with the best possible success.<sup>40</sup>

Quantz's accounts of Cuzzoni and Bordoni certainly support the opposition of their vocal abilities and dramatic personalities that has been consistently described ever since. In addition to these comments, Quantz also compares the two ladies' acting talents: Cuzzoni's acting was "somewhat cold," while Bordoni was "born for singing and acting."<sup>41</sup>

Cuzzoni's status as the reigning pathetic heroine was further strengthened by Bordoni and her opposite skill set; indeed, the next five Academy operas composed by Handel perpetuate their respective positions. In *Alessandro* and *Admeto*, Cuzzoni sings fewer than half of her arias in fast tempi and in direct contrast to her pre-Bordoni roles; she sings no extended coloratura passages (i.e., more than four measures). In *Tolomeo* and *Riccardo Primo*, none of Cuzzoni's arias is in a fast tempo, and so she sings no rapid passages at all (although there certainly are extended melismatic phrases in her andante and largo arias). LaRue writes that in these last five operas for the Academy, Handel's (and librettist Paolo Rolli's) writing for Cuzzoni and Bordoni is purposefully consistent: in all five, Cuzzoni is the pathetic heroine.

Whether the source of Cuzzoni's pathos be unrequited love or forced separation, her characters always express their frustration and sadness in laments. However, Bordoni's characters are more optimistic and active, both dramatically and musically, than Cuzzoni's. For example, in *Alessandro*, Rossane (portrayed by Bordoni) doubts

---

<sup>40</sup> Nettl, *Forgotten Musicians*, 312–313.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

Alessandro's fidelity. Instead of despairing (as Cuzzoni's character might), Rossane sings that she will optimistically hope for his love even though she feels that she cannot trust him.<sup>42</sup>

LaRue uses both Cuzzoni's and Bordoni's opening arias in *Alessandro* to illustrate the point that Handel deliberately tried to characterize the women differently, both musically and dramatically. The plot of *Alessandro* centers around one of the battles fought by Alexander the Great and the feud for Alexander's affections between the princesses Lisaura and Rossane. Cuzzoni's aria "Quanto dolce" is a simple, andante, lyrical piece in triple meter that explores a somewhat complex emotion: love has the potential to be very sweet, but only in the absence of jealousy. Bordoni's aria "Lusinghe più care," on the other hand, is less complex emotionally, but much more so vocally, with coloratura passages depicting Cupid's darts. *Alessandro* was the first opera in which Cuzzoni and Bordoni appeared together at the Royal Academy, and Handel must have been determined to create opportunities for the two divas to exhibit their talents. In addition, LaRue writes that the stylistically definitive entrance arias that Handel composed for them were specifically conceived to "demonstrate what he could do with the two greatest female singers of the age."<sup>43</sup>

In *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage*, Suzanne Aspden postulates that the desire to pigeon-hole Cuzzoni and Bordoni as specific musico-dramatic types has been so desirable in much of the Handel scholarship that "the diversity of Cuzzoni's earlier London roles has consistently been underplayed." Aspden cites Rodelinda, the strong, dignified queen, as the primary example: she not

---

<sup>42</sup> LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 158–159.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 150–151.



only stays on the moral high ground throughout the opera by remaining faithful to her exiled husband (when for much of the opera she does not even know if he is still alive), but saves the life of her son. Asteria in *Tamerlano*, while not heroic like Rodelinda, is a complex character who vacillates between emotions such as love and pride, the desire for revenge, and jealousy.<sup>44</sup> Aspden also cites examples of Cuzzoni's characterization in operas by composers other than Handel, a fact that, although not the subject of this study, does support the notion that the Royal Academy as a whole viewed Cuzzoni as a well-rounded actress and singer before Bordoni's debut in 1726. According to Aspden, the "delimitation of Cuzzoni's opportunities for characterization really seems to have begun only with Faustina's arrival in London."<sup>45</sup>

Although much of Handel scholarship has focused on the differences between the two singers, Aspden hypothesizes that perhaps Cuzzoni's typical characterization in the late Academy operas is only half of a female aggregate.

What may have occurred in some of Cuzzoni's earlier London operas was not simply an allowance for character (and musical) versatility, but also an exploration of the boundaries of female behaviour within her roles that was later to be played out instead between the two women.<sup>46</sup>

Aspden chooses *Riccardo Primo*, in which more than half of Cuzzoni's arias are in minor keys and slow tempi, as an illustration. Her argument is that Cuzzoni's character, Costanza, could only have been written in such a monochromatic fashion if she were being balanced by another character whose arias were written in mostly major

---

<sup>44</sup> Suzanne Aspden, *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 53–55.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 73.

keys and fast tempi. Handel needed to provide two leading roles that were both equal in terms of stage time and yet dramatically distinct; the idea that perhaps he viewed Cuzzoni and Bordoni as the two halves of an overall feminine whole is compelling.

### **Other Vocal/Technical Trends in Cuzzoni's Arias**

Handel's arias for Cuzzoni constitute a considerable body of work, and this makes an attempt to sketch a vocal profile feasible. On the other hand, there is a way in which this examination is made more difficult due to the surfeit of material. Cuzzoni herself left no correspondence, diaries, or other autobiographical material, and there are also no known writings by Handel that illuminate his thoughts on composition, vocal pedagogy, or his relationship with the singer.<sup>47</sup> It would be impossible to take into account how issues such as Cuzzoni's health at various times during her tenure at the Academy, the inevitable changes taking place within her voice over the eight-year period under consideration here, or her own demands on Handel might have affected the composition of her arias. With seventy-three arias to consider, we have to imagine that Handel (and presumably also Cuzzoni) would have wanted to introduce some variety of melodic structures and contours throughout. However, it is possible to identify certain types of phrases and melodic contours that recur throughout the arias. Phrases containing downward-moving scalar patterns, descending syllabic phrases that begin in the *passaggio* or above, and phrases that begin in the *passaggio* and then leap upward are some recurring trends, and these seem to have been purposeful efforts on Handel's parts to highlight the singer's strengths.

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 28.

When looking at the coloratura phrases in Cuzzoni's arias, a majority of the passages feature downward moving scalar patterns. The reason for these descending passages, coupled with the knowledge that Cuzzoni's most comfortable tessitura seems to have been between A4 and F#5, is that the passages could start higher (within her established comfortable tessitura) and go down through her middle voice. Example 5.8 shows measures fifty-eight through sixty-four of "Caro vieni a me" from *Riccardo Primo*.<sup>48</sup> Every other measure in the example has a melodic figure that starts in the *passaggio* and then descends into the middle voice.

The middle voice is often a problematic area for sopranos because of the temptation to force the chest voice up, which causes vocal strain and pitch problems. By beginning vocal phrases above the middle voice and coming down, the singer is allowed to carry the lighter quality of the upper middle voice or *passaggio* area down into the middle voice and eliminate the temptation to push the sound. In "The Application of Vocal Literature in the Correction of Vocal Faults," Constance Rock notes that teachers

---

<sup>48</sup> *Riccardo Primo* (HWV 23) was premiered at the King's Theater in London on November 11, 1727, and had 11 performances; the libretto is by Paolo Antonio Rolli after Francesco Briani's *Isacio tiranno*. Interestingly, the opera was also performed in Hamburg in 1729, conducted by Telemann. The opera was revived again in London in 1728 and then was never heard again until 1964 when the Handel Opera Society at Sadler's Wells Opera rediscovered and mounted a performance of it. The action of the opera takes place in 1191, when Riccardo (Richard the Lion Heart) was on his way to the Third Crusade. The setting the court of Limissus, on the coast of Cyprus. Cuzzoni sang the role of Costanza, which is thought to be based on Berengaria of Navarre. The story of the opera centers on Richard I, and his marriage to the Spanish princess Costanza. On her journey to be married to Riccardo (Richard), Costanza and her cousin Berardo are shipwrecked near Cyprus and are taken in by Isacio, the local governor. Almost immediately, Isacio falls in love with Costanza and hatches a plot to send his daughter Pulcheria to Riccardo disguised as Costanza. Because Costanza and Riccardo have never met, Isacio figures that he can marry Costanza himself, and still send Riccardo a bride. When Riccardo learns of the plot, he offers Isacio a choice between peace and war; Isacio chooses war, with Costanza as the prize to the victor.

of voice often choose to approach working on a soprano's middle voice by descending into it from the upper register. The utilization of descending scalar patterns and phrases that

Example 5.6. Handel: "Caro vieni a me" from *Riccardo Primo*, mm. 58-65.

**Andante**

COSTANZA

fi - do\_ vie - ni, puoi\_ tu\_ ca - ro,

ad - dol - ci - re il duo - lo a - ma - ro

begin in the passaggio or above, and coming down into the middle voice are best for achieving a balanced and united registration.<sup>49</sup>

Whether Handel noticed these traits and made the appropriate adjustments or Cuzzoni advocated for them herself is unknown. There are certainly examples of

---

<sup>49</sup> Constance Rock, "The Application of Vocal Literature in the Correction of Vocal Faults" (DMA dissertation, University of Connecticut, 2005), 14. In her dissertation, Rock brings together the teachings of many prominent vocal pedagogues in explaining the prevalent technical issues facing sopranos.

ascending patterns in the arias, but descending patterns dominate. There are many examples of descending patterns similar to the example above; Table Two in the Appendices lists other arias in which this occurs.

Corresponding with the idea that descending scalar coloratura passages were among Cuzzoni's preferred gestures, many of her melodic motives also feature phrases that start in the *passaggio* area or above and descend syllabically. Example 5.9, "Tutto può donna vezzosa" from *Giulio Cesare*, shows the first three phrases (beginning in measures twenty-one, twenty-six, and thirty-one respectively) featuring E5 as the starting note followed by a descending scalar passage, with the text set syllabically.

Example 5.7. Handel: "Tutto puo donna vezzosa" from *Giulio Cesare*, mm. 21-34

**Allegro**

CLEOPATRA

Tut - to può don-na vez - zo - sa, tut - to, tut - to, tut-to può

don-na vez - zo-sa, s'a - mo - ro - sa scio-glie il lab - bro, o gi-ra il guar-do;

Example 5.9 features three phrases that begin in the *passaggio* and descend syllabically, rather than melodically as in the previous examples. Like the melismatic setting in Example 5.8, the syllabic setting here in *Tutto può donna vezzosa* allows the

singer to initiate phonation using the lighter quality and narrower vowel shapes necessary in the *passaggio* and bring that sound down into the middle voice.

As before, many of these descending phrases specifically begin in the *passaggio* and move down from there. If we again remind ourselves of what seems to have been Cuzzoni's preferred tessitura, A4-F#5, it seems reasonable from the perspective of vocal technique that she would have liked to begin a phrase anchored on a note that she felt was in the best part of her voice and then continue from there. The aria "Aure, portate al caro bene" from *Tolomeo* (Example 5.10) shows descending, syllabic passages that begin both in and above the *passaggio*. The first phrase begins on E5 and descends; after a ritornello, the voice reenters on A5 in measure fifteen and descends. "Aure, portate al caro bene" is a particularly good example because it juxtaposes phrases that begin in the *passaggio* AND phrases that begin above the *passaggio* rather than just one or the other.

Another oft-used compositional device is beginning a phrase in the *passaggio*, and then immediately jumping up to the head voice register (G5 or above). Again, Cuzzoni seems to have favored beginning a phrase in her preferred register and then letting this comfortable placement serve as a springboard into the higher range. Maintaining good intonation through the *passaggio* requires good breath support, a lifted soft palate, and modified, elongated vowel shapes; this would be exactly the feeling a soprano would want to have when preparing to sing in the highest part of her voice. The opening phrase of "Da tanti affanni oppressa" from *Admeto* is Example 5.11. The voice enters on E5 and then leaps up to repeated G5s. In this particular case, Cuzzoni would have been able to anchor her voice in the *passaggio* and then securely center herself for the repeated Gs (see Example 5.11).

Another example of this same phenomenon is found in “Il volo così fido” from *Riccardo Primo* (Example 5.12). The voice begins on D5, slightly below the passaggio, but then leaps up to G5. This first occurs in measure twenty-one, but then happens again immediately in measure twenty-two. Coincidentally, this aria also features a descending scalar passage beginning above the passaggio. The phrases in measures twenty-nine and thirty-one both start on A5 and come down syllabically into the middle voice, similar to the examples cited above. Additionally, the fast tempo of “Il volo così fido” adds to the benefit of using D5 as a secure technique springboard into upper register; this melodic structure definitely makes the higher notes easier to navigate.

In his discussion of *Tamerlano*, LaRue asserts that the role of Asteria was ideal for Cuzzoni. He cites the use of a repeated pitch melody in the aria “S’ei non mi vuol amar.” It seems that this was a good melodic technique for Cuzzoni, because Handel used it at least three more times in the operas composed after *Tamerlano*.

Example 5.8. Handel: "Aure portate al caro bene" from *Tolomeo*, mm. 9-23

SELEUCE

Au - re , por - ta - te al ca - ro - be - ne le tan - te pe - ne che

pro - vo - al - cor;

au - re , por - ta - te al ca - ro - be - ne le tan - te - pe - ne che



tr  
pro - vo al cor, por - ta - - - te al ca-ro be-ne le

tan - te pe-ne le\_ tan - te pe-ne che pro - vo al cor, le

Example 5.9. Handel: "Da tanti affanni oppressa" from *Admeto*, mm. 1-2.

**Larghetto**

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

ANTIGONA

Bass

Da tan-ti af-fan-ni op- pres-sa tal - or\_ di-co a me stes-sa:

6 6 6 8

A list of other arias where repeated pitch melodies occur can be found in Appendix 2.

## Conclusion

Handel's engagement of Cuzzoni was a triumph for the Royal Academy; when she arrived in London in 1722, she was considered to be the greatest female singer in Italy. Between 1723 and 1728, Handel composed ten operas with leading roles written specifically for her. She was widely acknowledged to be more talented than any of the female singers who had previously sung principal roles in Royal Academy operas, and Handel must have been both delighted to compose for her and anxious to show her voice in the best possible light.

In *Queens of Song*, Ellen Creathorne Clayton wrote, "delighted with her powers, Handel took the utmost pains to compose airs adapted to display her exquisite voice to advantage."<sup>50</sup> Although Handel left no letters that document his thoughts on vocal technique, or composing for any of his singers specifically, it is clear that in writing for Cuzzoni, that he favored particular melodic devices and dramatic characterizations. The statistical evidence shows a clear prevalence of certain keys, common tessituras across the body of arias, a dearth of complex coloratura passages in fast tempi, and the use of descending melodic patterns in many arias.

---

<sup>50</sup> Ellen Creathorne Clayton, *Queens of Song: Being Memoirs of Some of the Most Celebrated Female Vocalists Who Have Performed on the Lyric Stage from the Earliest Days of Opera to the Present Time* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865), 52.

Example 10. Handel: "Il volo così fido" from *Riccardo Primo*, mm. 20-32.

**Andante**

COSTANZA

Il vo - lo co-sì fi - do\_ al dol- ce a-ma-to ni - do quel

l'au-ge-lin non ha, no, no,

il vo - lo co - sì fi - do al dol-ce a-ma - to ni - do quel-

Because Handel's operas pre-date the current *Fach* system of role and aria categorization, what type of soprano Cuzzoni would be within the *Fach* system is debatable. Her documented excellence in slow, *cantabile* arias and penchant for portraying damsels in distress place her firmly in the territory of a full lyric soprano. It is possible to find many of the attributes of Cuzzoni's arias by Handel in the arias of the canonical lyric soprano roles such as Mozart's Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, his Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Puccini's Mimi in *La Boheme*, Bizet's Micaela in *Carmen*, and Dvorak's Rusalka. It is my hope that this analysis of the arias provides a vocal portrait of Cuzzoni that opens the door to this amazing body of work to historians, singers, and teachers of voice.

## Epilogue

Francesca Cuzzoni left London in August of 1728 and traveled to Vienna to give concerts for the British Prime Minister.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Handel sought to reinvent opera at the King's Theater in London by engaging new singers. The prima donna during this time was Anna Maria Strada del Pò, for whom he wrote many roles, perhaps most notably *Alcina*. However, the general enthusiasm for opera in London never matched the height reached during the Royal Academy years (1720–1728). Cuzzoni returned to London in 1734 to sing with the Opera Company of the Nobility, which was formed to oppose Handel's new company in 1733.<sup>2</sup> The leaders of the Opera Company of the Nobility approached Senesino and Cuzzoni to be its principal singers; Cuzzoni was otherwise engaged in the winter of 1733, but arrived in London by April of 1734. Senesino and Cuzzoni were reunited on stage on 20 April in Nicolas Porpora's *Arianna in Naxos*.<sup>3</sup> However, the Opera Company of the Nobility (or as it is sometimes referred to The Nobility Opera) went bankrupt in 1737, and Cuzzoni returned to Italy.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Burrows, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, Anthony Hicks, Burrows, Donald, Coffey, Helen, Greenacombe, John, Hicks, Anthony. *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents, Volume 2, 1725-1734* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015) 236, 261.

<sup>2</sup> Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali. "Cuzzoni, Francesca." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/06995>.

<sup>3</sup> Burrows et al. *Collected Documents, Volume 2*, 775.

<sup>4</sup> Paola Lunetta Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778): Lo Stile Antico Nella Musica Moderna" (Tesi di Laurea in Musicologia, Universta' Degli Studi di Pavia, 2001).

Cuzzoni then sang in Florence, Turin, Vienna, and Paris between 1737 and 1750. During this time, her activities were chronicled in the London newspapers. Paola Franco reports that, despite several successful operatic and concert appearances in the aforementioned cities, this second phase of Cuzzoni's career marked the beginning of her decline. In 1741 she was accused of poisoning her husband and imprisoned for gambling debts.<sup>5</sup>

In 1750, financially destitute, Cuzzoni returned to London in an attempt to earn money by giving concerts. She gave a benefit concert in the Little Theater in the Haymarket on 23 May 1750. It was at this time that the celebrated British music historian Dr. Charles Burney heard her sing.<sup>6</sup> Although Burney charitably noted that "fine remains of her former grace and swiftness....were still discoverable," it was clear that Cuzzoni's voice had deserted her. Burney's account continued:

...this was her third arrival in this country, and she was grown old, poor, and almost deprived of voice, by age and infirmities...Poor Cuzzoni returned to the Continent after this unprofitable concert, more miserable than she came.<sup>7</sup>

Exactly one year later, Cuzzoni performed in London for the last time. Cuzzoni herself appealed to the public for support in the "General Advertiser":

I am so extremely sensible of the many Obligations I have already received from the Nobility and Gentry of this Kingdom (for which I sincerely return my most humble Thanks) that nothing but extreme

---

<sup>5</sup> Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778)", p. 94

<sup>6</sup> Please see chapter 4 of this dissertation for a detailed discussion of Burney's writing on Cuzzoni.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, second edition (London: printed for the author: and sold by Payne and Son; Robson and Clark; and G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789)849-850.

Necessity, and a Desire of doing Justice, could induce me to trouble them again, but being unhappily involved in a few Debts, am extremely desirous of attempting every Thing in my Power to pay them, before I quit England; therefore take the Liberty, most humbly to intreat them, once more to repeat their well-known Generosity and Goodness, and to honour me with their Presence at this Benefit, which shall be the last I will ever trouble them with, and is made solely to pay my Creditors; and to convince the World of my Sincerity herein, I have prevailed on Mr. Hickford to receive the money, and to pay it to them.

*I am, Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Yours very much obliged, and most devoted humble Servant*  
F. Cuzzoni<sup>8</sup>

Apart from a letter reproduced in Paola Franco's dissertation, the above is Cuzzoni's only appearance in print as a writer. I believe that her decision to appeal directly to the London public at this time is significant, serving as evidence of both the severity and desperation of her situation. She died poor and alone on 19 June 1778 in Bologna.<sup>9</sup> Still more disheartening is Winton Dean's anecdote that at the end of her life, she is said to have worked in a button factory.<sup>10</sup>

\*

At her prime, Francesca Cuzzoni was renowned throughout Europe. In an age when Italian opera was Europe's most popular musical genre, she established her reputation as the reigning diva of many leading opera houses in Italy, the

---

<sup>8</sup> Otto Deutsch, *Handel: A Documentary Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974) 709.

<sup>9</sup> Franco writes: "Gli ultimi anni di vita della Cuzzoni dovettero essere poveri e, forse, solitari." Translation: Cuzzoni's final years were lived in poverty and most likely, solitude. Franco, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778)", p. 101

<sup>10</sup> Winton Dean and Carlo Vitali, "Cuzzoni, Francesca," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed April 21, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06995>.

aristocratic courts of Germany, and the Royal Academy in London. Her association with Handel cemented her status as a specialist in “pathetic” roles and arias, and the music he wrote for her is still considered to be among his best work.

In the essay *Handel and the Aria*, C. Steven LaRue writes about a two-fold compositional approach employed by Handel. First, he utilized many different types of arias in order to conform to specific dramatic situations. Second, he suited the style of a given aria to specific singers based on their vocal and dramatic strengths.<sup>11</sup> Throughout the eleven opera roles and seventy-three arias that Handel wrote for Cuzzoni between 1723 and 1728, these musical and stylistic accommodations are consistently present.

That Handel recognized the assets of Cuzzoni’s voice is born out through statistical analysis of several key data points. Over half of the total arias are composed in either A major or B-flat major, and my own analysis of the tessituras of those arias shows that sixty-six, or ninety percent, of the arias lie between A4 and F#5. However, even if the key and tessitura remain constant throughout most of the arias, Handel also showed that Cuzzoni could sing equally well in a variety of tempi and aria types. To be certain, she excelled at arias requiring a portrayal of pathos (pathetic arias), and the *siciliana* aria was another specialty of hers, but approximately half of her arias are written in fast tempi, and selected characterizations (Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* and the title role in *Rodelinda*) span a large range of emotions and aria types.

---

<sup>11</sup> C. Steven LaRue, “Handel and the Aria,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117.



So what did Cuzzoni actually sound like? Obviously we will never know exactly. In “Handel’s Divas: What Did They Sound Like?,” Nicholas Clapton writes that even “informed guesses” are problematic because the very process of describing sound is inherently subjective. Clapton does conclusively say that Handel’s female singers did not have smaller voices (in terms of ability to project) than modern female singers, but otherwise does not give any other insight.<sup>12</sup> What can, on the other hand, be somewhat objectively studied are the musical elements (key, tessitura, tempi, melodic structures), dramatic characterizations, and aria types Handel used when writing for Cuzzoni. Luckily, there is a large body of work on which to impose a statistical study and to use as evidence in the painting of a vocal portrait.

In addition, while acknowledging that Handel was writing (and Cuzzoni was singing) before the implementation and use of the operatic *fach* system, it is also possible to compare our vocal portrait of Cuzzoni to other canonical soprano roles that fit into widely agreed upon *fächer*. If we assume that Handel deliberately composed for Cuzzoni so as to show her voice in the best possible light, acknowledge the statistical analysis in Chapter Five of this dissertation, and also accept the descriptions of Cuzzoni’s voice by Quantz, Mancini, and Tosi, then I believe it is fair to categorize Cuzzoni as a lyric soprano. The tessitura, melodic structures, and dramatic type Cuzzoni was most celebrated for line up well with

---

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Clapton, “Handel’s Divas: What Did They Sound Like?” in *Handel and the Divas* (London: Handel House Museum, 2012).

Mozart's Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, which noted vocal authority Richard Boldrey defines as “the quintessential lyric soprano role.”<sup>13</sup>

Also important to our understanding of this important singer is the establishment of a chronology of Cuzzoni's notable performances, social interactions, and appearances in reviews and other contemporaneous printed accounts. Although Cuzzoni is certainly a well-known name to Handel scholars, and is always mentioned in discussions of Handel's cadre of singers during the Royal Academy years, there is no biography of her in English, nor are there any journal articles devoted solely to her. Paola Lunetta Franco's excellent dissertation “Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778): Lo Stile antico nella musica moderna” is the only full-length study devoted to Cuzzoni and contains the most up-to-date biographical information on the singer. It is my hope that this dissertation helps to fill in some gaps in the English-language scholarship concerning Cuzzoni.

Because neither Handel nor Cuzzoni left any writings documenting their relationship or their thoughts about singing, the music itself must speak for them. Through this multi-faceted analysis of the seventy-three arias Handel wrote for Cuzzoni, we are provided with the materials to paint a vocal portrait of this superb artist.

---

<sup>13</sup> Richard Boldrey, *Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias* (Redmond, WA: Caldwell Publishing, 1994), 22

The Cuzzoni Arias

Opera	Aria	Key	Tempo	Time Signature	Range	Tessitura	Instrumentation
<i>Ottone</i>	<i>Falsa imagine</i>	A major	Largo	C	F#4-A5	A4-F#5	Continuo only with strings added in ritornello
	<i>Affanni del pensier</i> +	F minor	Larghetto	12/8	F4-A $\flat$ 5	A $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Alla fama</i>	B $\flat$ major	Allegro ma non troppo	3/8	F4-B $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-G5	Unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>S'or mi dai pene</i> <sup>1</sup>	C minor	A tempo giusto	C	F4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Not in full score
	<i>S'io dir potessi</i>	G minor	Largo	3/8	F#4-G5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Benché mi sia crudele</i>	A minor	None given	3/8	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Gode l'alma consolata</i>	A major	None given	3/8	E4-A5	G4-E5	Unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Spera si</i> *	A minor	Andante	C	E4-A5	B4-F5	Tutti + continuo
	<i>Trà queste care</i> *	G minor	Larghetto	3/8	D4-A5	B4-F5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Quanto dolci</i>	G major	Larghetto	3/4	F#4-G5	A4-E5	Strings + traversa + continuo
<i>Flavio</i>	<i>Amante stravagante</i>	A major	Allegro	C	E4-A5	F#4-F#5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
	<i>Parto, si</i>	E major	Largo	C	E4-G#5	G4-E5	2 violins + traversa + continuo
	<i>Ma chi punir desio?</i> +	F# minor	Largo	12/8	E4-A5	B4-F#5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Da te parto</i>	A minor	None given	3/8	G4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Non disperar</i>	E major	Allegro ma non troppo	C	E4-A5	B4-F5	Unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Tutto può donna</i>	A major	Allegro	3/8	E4-A5	B4-F5	Unison violins, viola, oboe + continuo
	<i>vezzosa</i>						
	<i>Tu la mia stella sei</i>	B $\flat$ major	Allegro ma non troppo	6/8	E4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>V'adoro pupille</i>	B $\flat$ major	Largo	3/4	F4-G5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + oboe, viola da gamba, theorbo, harp, bassoon and continuo

<sup>1</sup> Used for a benefit performance in 1723  
+ denotes *siciliana* aria

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Aria</b>	<b>Key</b>	<b>Tempo</b>	<b>Time Signature</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Tessitura</b>	<b>Instrumentation</b>
<b>Tamerlano</b>	<i>Venere bella</i>	A major	Allegro	3/8	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Se pietà di me non senti</i>	F # minor	Largo	C	E4-A5	A4-F#5	Strings + bassons + continuo
	<i>Piangereò la sorte mia</i>	E major	Largo/Allegro gro	3/8/C	E4-A5	B4-E5	Violins + traversa + continuo
	<i>Da tempeste</i>	E major	Allegro	C	D4-A5	B4-F#5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>S'ei non mi vuol amar</i>	E minor	Larghetto	12/8	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins and oboes, viola + continuo
	<i>+ Deh, lasciatemi il nemico</i>	B minor	Larghetto	3/4	E#4-G5	B4-F#5	Unison violins and traversa + continuo
	<i>Non è più tempo</i>	A major	Allegro	C	E4-A5	G4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Se potessi un dì placare</i>	Bb major	Allegro	3/8	E4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Cor di padre</i>	G minor	Largo e staccato	C	D4-A5	G4-E5	2 violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Padre amato</i>	F # minor	Larghetto/Allegro	3/4/C	E#4-G5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
<b>Rodelinda</b>	<i>Ho perduto il caro sposo</i>	C minor	Largo	3/4	F4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Strings + continuo
	<i>L'empio rigor del fato</i>	G minor	Allegro	3/8	F#4-Bb5	Bb4-G5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Ombre, piante</i>	B minor	Largo	3/8	F#4-A5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	2 violins, viola, traversa + continuo
	<i>Morraì, sì</i>	E major	Allegro	C	E#4-G5	B4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Spietati, io vi giurai</i>	Bb major	Allegro	C	F4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Unison violins and oboes, viola + continuo
	<i>Ritorna, o caro +</i>	G major	Andante	12/8	G4-G5	B4-E5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Se l' mio duol non è sì forte</i>	F minor	Largo	C	F4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Flutes, unison violins, viola, bassoons + continuo
	<i>Mio caro bene</i>	G major	Allegro	C	G4-A5	B4-F#5	Violins, oboes, viola, bassoons + continuo
	<i>Un caro amante +</i>	F major	Andante	12/8	D4-A5	A4-E5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Dolci aurette che spirate</i>	Eb major	Largo	C	E <sup>b</sup> 4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Continuo only
<b>Scipione</b>	<i>Tutta raccolta ancor</i>	C minor	Largo	C	F4-A <sup>b</sup> 5	B <sup>b</sup> 4-F5	Strings + continuo

Opera	Aria	Key	Tempo	Time Signature	Range	Tessitura	Instrumentation
<b>Alessandro</b>	<i>Com'onda in calza alt'onda + Scoglio d'innotta fron te</i>	C minor	Larghetto	12/8	G4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-E $\flat$ 5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Già cessata è la procella</i>	A major	Allegro	C	D4-A5	A4-F $\sharp$ 5	Strings + 2 oboe and bassoon
	<i>Il fulgido seren (alt for above)</i>	G major	Allegro	3/8	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Bella notte senza stelle</i>	F major	Allegro	3/8	F $\sharp$ 4-A5	B4-F $\sharp$ 5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Quanto dolci amor saria</i>	B $\flat$ major	Andante	3/8	F4-A5	B $\flat$ 4-G5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Nò, più soffrir non voglio</i>	G minor	Allegro	C	D4-G5	A4-E5	Unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Che tirannia d'Amor +</i>	C minor	Larghetto	12/8	C4-B $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Unison violins, viola, bassoons + continuo
	<i>La cervetta nei lacci avvolta</i>	A minor	Andante	3/8	E $\flat$ 4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Si, m'è caro imitar L'amore, che per te sen to</i>	F major	Allegro	C	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Spera allor, che in marturbato</i>	C minor	Allegro	6/8	F4-B $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
<b>Admeto</b>	<i>E per monti e per piano</i>	B $\flat$ major	Allegro	C	F4-B $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
	<i>Da tanti affanni oppressa +</i>	E minor	Larghetto	12/8	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>La sorte mia vacilla</i>	G major	Allegro	3/8	D4-A5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
	<i>E che ci posso far</i>	Bb major	Allegro	3/8	F $\sharp$ 4-A5	A4-F $\sharp$ 5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
	<i>Io son qual Fenice **</i>	F major	Andante	C	E4-G5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + 2 oboe + continuo
	<i>Se perì l'amato bene</i>	C minor	Larghetto	3/4	E4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Lascia la pace all'alma</i>	G minor	None given	3/8	F $\sharp$ 4-G5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Di notte il pellegrino</i>	F $\sharp$	Andante	C	E $\sharp$ 4-A5	B4-F $\sharp$ 5	Unison violins + continuo
<b>Riccardo Primo</b>							

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Aria</b>	<b>Key</b>	<b>Tempo</b>	<b>Time Signature</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Tessitura</b>	<b>Instrumentation</b>
<b>Siroe</b>	<i>Caro, vieni a me</i>	minor A major	Andante	3/8	F#4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Bacia per me la mano</i>	F minor	Largo	C	F4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-F5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Il volo così fido</i>	G major	Andante	3/4	F#4-A5	B4-F#5	Piccolo, unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>O placido il mare</i>	G major	None given	C	F#4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Or mi perdo di speranza</i>	A minor	Allegro	C	G4-A5	B4-F#5	Unison violins + continuo
<b>Tolomeo</b>	<i>L'aura non sempre spira</i>	B $\flat$ major	Allegro	C	F4-A5	A4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Se il caro figlio</i>	A major	Allegro	3/8	E4-A5	A4-F#5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Torrente cresciuto</i>	E major	Allegro	C	E4-G#5	B4-E5	Strings + continuo
	<i>Mi volgo ad ogni fionda +</i>	G major	Andante	12/8	G4-G5	B4-E5	2 violins, viola, traversa + continuo
	<i>Fonti amiche</i>	G minor	Larghetto	C	G4-A5	B4-F#5	2 flutes, 2 violins, viola + continuo
	<i>Aure portate</i>	A minor	None given	C	E4-A5	B4-E5	Unison violins + continuo
	<i>Senza il suo bene</i>	C minor	None given	3/8	G4-A $\flat$ 5	B $\flat$ 4-E $\flat$ 5	Tutti + continuo
	<i>Torni omai la pace all'anima</i>	B $\flat$ major	Andante	3/8	G4-G5	A4-E5	Tutti + continuo

## Selected Instances of Vocal/Technical Trends in the Cuzzoni Arias

### Descending Scalar/Coloratura Patterns

Opera	Aria	Measures
Ottone	"Gode l'alma consolata"	20-26
Tamerlano	"Se potessi un di placare"	66-75, 86-90
Giulio Cesare	"Non disperar"	38-40
Giulio Cesare	"Da tempeste"	18-22
Flavio	"Quanto dolce"	42-46
Rodelinda	"Morrai, sì"	24-26
Rodelinda	"Mio caro bene"	27-31
Scipione	"Gia cassata"	66-79
Riccardo Primo	"Di note il pellegrino"	21-23
Riccardo Primo	"Caro vieni a me"	58-65
Siroe	"Or me perdo di"	25-27, 43-44
Alessandro	"L'amor, che per te sento"	23-25, 42-48
Admeto	"Spera allor"	101-106

### Descending Melodic/Syllabic Phrases

Opera	Aria	Measures
Ottone	"Benché mi sia crudele"	15-17, 24-26
Flavio	"Quanto dolce"	13-17
Giulio Cesare	"Tutto puo donna"	21-24
Giulio Cesare	"Venere bella"	25-27
Tamerlano	"Deh lasciatemi il nemico"	24-25, 32-33
Riccardo Primo	"Lascia la pace all'alma"	62-69
Riccardo Primo	"Caro vieni a me"	117-122
Tolomeo	"Fonti amiche"	7-12
Admeto	"Da tanti affanni oppressa"	15-16, 20-21
Alessandro	"Che tirannia d'amor!"	4-5, 7-11, many more
Tolomeo	"Aure portate"	9-18

### Phrases Beginning in or slightly below the *Passaggio* and Leaping Up

Opera	Aria	Measures
Flavio	"Amante stravagante"	10-11, 27-28
Rodelinda	"L'empio rigor"	21-30
Rodelinda	"Mio caro bene"	25-27
Siroe	"Se il caro figlio"	68-70
Scipione	"Il fulgido seren"	23-26
Riccardo Primo	"Lascia la pace all'alma"	15-16
Riccardo Primo	"Di notte il pellegrino"	6-7
Riccardo Primo	"Il volo così fido"	21-24
Admeto	"E per monti"	32-33, 42-43
Admeto	"Da tanti affanni"	6-7

## Phrases Beginning Above *Passaggio* and Descending

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Aria</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Ottone	"S'or mi dai pene"	9-10, 20-24, 28-29
Ottone	"Benché mi sia crudele"	52-54
Giulio Cesare	"Venere bella"	33-34, 54-56
Flavio	"Amante stravagante"	29-30
Tamerlano	"Non è più tempo"	6-7, 15-16, 23-25
Tamerlano	"S'ei potessi un di placare"	66-68
Rodelinda	"Ho perduto"	16-17, 34-35
Rodelinda	"L'empio rigor"	32-34
Rodelinda	"Morrai, sì"	18-19, 31-32
Scipione	"Già cessata è la procella"	21-24, 45-46
Scipione	"Il fulgido seren"	56-60
Riccardo Primo	"Se peri"	13-14, 34-36
Riccardo Primo	"Caro vieni a me"	B Section, 113-122
Riccardo Primo	"Bacia per me la mano"	12-13, 18-19
Riccardo Primo	"Il volo così fido"	107-109
Tolomeo	"Mi volgo ad ogni fronda"	6-12
Tolomeo	"Aure portate"	15-18
Tolomeo	"Fonti amiche"	7-12
Tolomeo	"Senza il suo bene"	37-52

## Repeated Note Phrases

<b>Opera</b>	<b>Aria</b>	<b>Measures</b>
Tamerlano	"S'ei non mi vuol amar"	8-9, 12-13, 20-21
Giulio Cesare	"Tutto può donna"	68-70
Flavio	"Ma chi punir desio?"	7-8
Rodelinda	"Ritorna, o caro" <sup>1</sup>	7-8
Scipione	"Un caro amante"	8-11
Admeto	"Da tanti affanni oppressa"	6-7, 11
Riccardo Primo	"Di note il pellegrino"	6-8
Tolomeo	"Mi volgo ad ogni fronda"	6-8

---

<sup>1</sup> This example features a variation on the repeated note melody in that the notes repeat in groups of two.



## **Works Cited**

Agricola, Johann Frederich. *Introduction to the Art of Singing*. Trans. Julianne Baird. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Antolini, Bianca Maria. "Francesca Cuzzoni." In *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Vol. 31. Accessed May 19, 2015. [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesca-cuzzoni\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/francesca-cuzzoni_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

Aspden, Suzanne. *The Rival Sirens: Performance and Identity on Handel's Operatic Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Boldrey, Richard. *Guide to Operatic Roles and Arias*. Redmond, WA: Caldwell Publishing, 1994.

Burney, Charles. *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, second edition. London: Payne and Son; Robson and Clark; and G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1789.

Burrows, Donald, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks, eds. *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents, Volume 1, 1609-1725*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

—. *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents*. Vol. 2, 1725-1734. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Castel, Nico. *Handel Opera Libretti*. Vol. 1. Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 2005.

Chapman, Paul. "Mist, Nathaniel (d. 1737)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison. Oxford: OUP, 2004. Online ed., ed. David Cannadine, September 2014. Accessed October 22, 2016 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18822>.

Clayton, Ellen Creathorne. *Queens of Song: Being Memoirs of Some of the Most Celebrated Female Vocalists Who Have Performed on the Lyric Stage from the Earliest Days of Opera to the Present Time*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886. Ebook.

Cotton, Sandra. *Voice Classification and Fach: Recent, Historical and Conflicting Systems of Voice Categorization*. Diss. University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2007. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2007.

Dean, Winton. "Bordoni, Faustina." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 21, 2013. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03574>.

- . "Durastanti, Margherita." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 20, 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08380>.
- . *Handel's Operas: 1726–1741*. Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006.
- . "Senesino." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 20, 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25406>.
- Dean, Winton, and Carlo Vitali. "Borosini." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 21, 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45135pg2>.
- . "Cuzzoni, Francesca." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed April 21, 2013.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06995>.
- Deutsch, Otto Erich. *Handel: A Documentary Biography*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1974.
- Dewes, Simon. *Mrs. Delany*. London: Rich & Cowan, Ltd, 1989.
- Doscher, Barbara. "He Wrote for Specific Voices." *Journal of Singing* 55, no. 1 (September/October 1995): 33–36.
- Franco, Paola Lunetta, "Francesca Cuzzoni (1696-1778): Lo Stile Antico Nella Musica Moderna." Doctoral thesis, Pavia, 2001.
- Fubini, Enrico. *Music and Culture in Eighteenth Century Europe, a Source Book*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Gibson, Elizabeth. *The Royal Academy of Music 1719–1728: The Institution and Its Directors*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989.
- . "Swiney, Owen." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed August 2, 2016.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43874>.
- Grant, Kerry S. *Dr. Burney as Critic and Historian of Music*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983.
- Grout, Donald Jay. *Alessandro Scarlatti: an Introduction to His Operas*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979.
- Händel, Georg Frideric. *Flavio, Re de' Longobardi* (HWV 16). Ed. Hermann Fuchs. Basel: Bärenreiter, 2000.
- . *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (HWV 17). Ed. Karl-Heinz Müller. Basel: Bärenreiter,

2005.

—. *Riccardo primo, Re d'Inghilterra* (HWV 23). Ed. Andreas Köhs. Basel: Bärenreiter, 2007.

—. *Tamerlano* (HWV 18). Ed. Michael Rot. Basel: Bärenreiter, 2001.

—. *Tolomeo Re d'Egitto* (HWV 25). Ed. Michael Pacholke. Basel: Bärenreiter, 2007.

Harris, Ellen T. "Messa di voce." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed January 7, 2017.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/18491>.

—. "Voices." In *Performance Practice, Music after 1600*. Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie, eds. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1989.

Haynes, Bruce, and Peter Cooke,. "Pitch." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed June 28 2016.  
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40883>>.

Heller, Karl. *Antonio Vivaldi: The Red Priest of Venice*. Trans. David Marinelli. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1991.

Hunter, Mary. *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna: a Poetics of Entertainment*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. Print.

Keates, Jonathan. *Handel: the Man and his Music*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985.

LaRue, C. Steven. *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal Academy Operas, 1720–1728*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Lindgren, Lowell, and Carlo Caruso. "Rolli, Paolo Antonio." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed October 30, 2016.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46200>.

Little, Meredith Ellis. "Siciliana." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed June 29, 2016.  
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25698>.

Luppi, Andrea. "Music and Poetry in Vincenzo Martinelli's 'Lettere Familiari e critiche.'" *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 19, no. 2 (December 1988): 149–160.

Mancini, Giambattista, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing*. Ed. and trans. Edward Foreman. Champaign, IL: Pro Musica Press, 1967.

- Miller, Richard. *The Structure of Singing: System and Art in Vocal Technique*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1986.
- Nettl, Paul. *Forgotten Musicians*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951.
- Ograjenšek, Suzana. "Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni: The Rival Queens?" In *Handel and the Divas*. London: Handel House Museum, 2012.
- Ravens, Simon. *The Supernatural Voice: A History of High Male Singing*. Boydell and Brewer Group LTD, 2014. Ebook.
- Reilly, Edward P., and Andreas Giger. "Quantz, Johann Joachim." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed January 7, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/22633>.
- Rock, Constance. "The Application of Vocal Literature in the Correction of Vocal Faults." Diss. University of Connecticut, 2005.
- Rogers, Francis. "Handel and Five Prima Donnas." *The Musical Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1943): 214–224. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/stable/739522>.
- Scholes, Percy A. "Hawkins, Sir John (i)." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Accessed January 6, 2017. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezproxy.lib.uconn.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/12604>.
- Streatfeild, Richard Alexander. *Handel*. New York: Da Capo Press, 1964.
- Strohm, Reinhard. *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Taruskin, Richard. *The Oxford History of Western Music*. Vol. 2, *Music in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Tosi, Pierfrancesco. *Opinions of Singers Ancient, and Modern, or, Observations on Figured Singing*. Trans. Edward Foreman. Pro Musica Press, 1986.
- Zietz, Karyl Lynn. *Italian Opera Houses and Festivals*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005.