



Centro Italo-Tedesco per l'Eccellenza Europea
Deutsch-Italienisches Zentrum für Europäische Exzellenz

Castrato Singers in Opera

The Current State of Research

International Conference, 24–27 November 2020

Organizers: Valentina Anzani (Bologna), Arnold Jacobshagen (Cologne)

There is currently no separate scholarly discipline called “castratology”, but the number of historians, musicologists and sociologists who are dedicating their research to the pre-modern European phenomenon of castrato opera singers has increased significantly in recent decades. It therefore appears to be time to develop a transnational and interdisciplinary network of discussion and exchange on this field of research. With this aim in mind, we will bring together internationally renowned German, Italian, English, French, Austrian and American scholars from various disciplines and with different approaches to research on castrato singers in Villa Vigoni in November 2020. Villa Vigoni, the Italian-German Center for European Excellence, is the ideal environment in which to enable exchange about the current research projects of the participants and to promote valuable interdisciplinary results in the areas of music history, cultural history, social history, musical performance practice, gender studies and queer studies.

Castrato singers dominated European transnational cultural life from the 17th to the early 19th centuries as the most desired vocal performers. From Lisbon to St. Petersburg, from Stockholm to Corfu, they were the protagonists of theatre music and, in Catholic countries, church music.

Because of their mutilated physical condition, castrati occupied a liminal space in their society, but central in the development of the history of music. Their progressive disappearance during the 19th century coincided with a *damnatio memoriae* in musical studies that lasted almost a century. Only in recent decades has interest in the ancient castrato singers been rekindled, not only among musicologists, but also among historians of society and culture, in relation to modern interest in non-binary gender issues. Therefore, points of view on this phenomenon are currently multiplying, focusing on the artistic biographies of these singers, their vocal qualities, the music written for them, but also their private lives, their subjectivity, their position in society, medical and phoniatic aspects, philosophical and satirical perspectives as well as religious and sexual issues.

The aim of the project is to get a comprehensive overview of what it means to study in the present day a complex and interdisciplinary phenomenon such as that of the castrato singers. The

participants will present the results of their recent research, the questions behind their projects and the methodology used.

Invited Participants: Valentina Anzani (Bologna), Stefano Aresi (Amsterdam), Marco Beghelli (Bologna), Helen Berry (Newcastle), Bruce Alan Brown (Los Angeles), Melania Bucciarelli (Oslo), Anne Desler (Edinburgh), Heidrun Eberl (Wolffenbüttel), Martha Feldman (Chicago), Franco Fussi (Bologna), Alfonso Gianluca Gucciardo (Agrigento), Corinna Herr (Bochum), Arnold Jacobshagen (Cologne), Kordula Knaus (Bayreuth), Davide Mingozzi (Bologna), Thomas Seedorf (Karlsruhe), Saskia Maria Woyke (Bayreuth)

Programme

24 November: arrival, welcome from the organizers and introductions

25 November: individual presentations and general discussion: the voice of the castrati

26 November: individual presentations and general discussion: gender and queer studies

27 November: planning of the publication and of future meetings; afternoon: departure