

Revisiting Eighteenth-Century Operatic Reform:
A Historiographical Study of the Figures and
Polemics that Influenced Evolutionary Trends in
the Operatic Industry

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The sole reason that induced me to publish my music for *Alceste* was the hope of finding imitators who, spurred on by the full support of an enlightened public, would follow the new trail and would summon the courage to eliminate the abuses which have crept into the Italian theatre and bring it as near perfection as possible.¹

Christoph Willibald Gluck's sentiments in his dedication of *Paride ed Elena* (1770), written three years after his preface to *Alceste* (1767), depicts his enthusiasm in preaching the 'new trail' that he had sought to pave with the ideals that would 'eliminate the abuses which have crept into Italian theatre.' The 'new trail' that Gluck spoke of referred to the reform movement that has thus far been infamously associated with his operas, beginning with *Orfeo ed Euridice* in 1762. Gluck's quote above proudly advocates the need for 'imitators', self-proclaiming that his publication of *Alceste* would be the guiding hand in perfecting the model of Italian opera. But how many 'imitators' did Gluck succeed in influencing? And regarding the 'abuses' of Italian opera, was Gluck the first to notice them? In a sense, opera was always changing to comply with the standards and trends in fashion at any period of time, and hence reform was an ongoing process considered integral to the history of opera. Especially during the Enlightenment, where reforms in society sprang from more than a generation of attempts, these efforts at change were not fully realised until the 1750s when Enlightened ideals began to take hold.² It is thus highly unlikely that Gluck was the only person to push for operatic reform, and that his success at influencing other composers to do the same is questionable. This thesis seeks to reevaluate the factors that influenced operatic reform during the eighteenth century through the historiographical study of both primary and secondary sources to outline the developments that contributed towards the initiative to effect reform in operatic history. Niccolò Jommelli's position as an operatic reformer will also be evaluated, and an analysis to locate hints of progressiveness in his music will be undertaken.

Based on a multitude of evidence, eighteenth-century operatic reform was not a catalytic event brought on by any singular individual in opera's long history – the reform

¹ Christoph Willibald Gluck, eds., Hedwig Mueller von Asow, E. H. Mueller von Asow, trans. Stewart Thomson, 'Letter to Duke Don Giovanni di Braganza', *The Collected Correspondence and Papers of Christoph Willibald Gluck* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1962), p. 27; in Audrey Lyn Toltoff, *The Stuttgart Operas of Niccolò Jommelli*, Ph.D Dissertation (Yale University, 1974), p. 13

² M. S. Anderson, 'The Italian Reformers', *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990), p. 60

movement was a gradual process that spanned several decades. However, the movement was attributed most prominently to the operas of Gluck and Ranieri Calzabigi during the 1760s, owing to the published preface of *Alceste* (1767) in which they laid out a series of principles that has been interpreted as a sign of their commitment towards reformulating a new type of opera.³ Prior to the reform, in 1690 the Academy of Arcadia initiated a literary reform of librettos by seeking to purge comedic elements and reverting to antiquity, encouraging the inclusion of historical figures, and abiding by the precepts of Aristotelian tragedy.⁴ Following the same literary vein, Pietro Metastasio, whose mentor was a founding member of the Academy, rose to become the most prominent librettist of his time. Metastasio's success was due to the simple and expressive quality of his poetry to attain formal sobriety – he opted for linguistic clarity and metrical simplicity in place of the complexity of Baroque poetry, but also chose to draw upon the passionate styles of Tasso, Marino and French tragedians.⁵ The popularity of the Metastasian libretto attracted countless settings by innumerable composers, a trend which one could argue contributed to the increased criticism of the genre through its rigid segregation into scenes of recitative and aria, and strict adherence to a single affect throughout a given aria. By the mid-eighteenth century, there was growing discontent with the alleged abuse of the Metastasian libretto, as some of the operas performed were 'apparently tragic but in truth merely ridiculous.'⁶ In addition to criticisms of the formal arrangements of scenes, the opera had allegedly suffered from the overuse of extravagant but inferior *bel canto* from the singers. Case in point, Bianchi's critical observation of the performances at the theatre tells us that:

³ The original author to the preface of *Alceste* is thought to be Calzabigi although it bears Gluck's signature. Calzabigi claimed authorship of the preface in a letter to Antonio Greppi dated 12 December 1768. See Patricia Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-century Portrait in Letters and Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 84-5

⁴ Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker, eds., *A History of Opera: The Last Four Hundred Years* (Allen Lane, 2012); Tim Carter, 'Arcadian Academy', *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40443> (accessed 22/9/2020)

⁵ Metastasio's mentor was the scholar Gian Vincenzo Gravina, who intended to prepare the young Metastasio for a career in law so that he would become a member of the *ceto civile*; Francesco Cotticelli, Paologiovanni Maione, eds. Anthony DelDonna, Pierpaolo Polzonetti, 'Metastasio: The Dramaturgy of Eighteenth-Century Heroic Opera', *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 70

⁶ Raymond Monelle, 'The Rehabilitation of Metastasio', *Music & Letters*, 57/3 (Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 268

... one hears nothing in the theatres but a continual ringing of instruments, a continual shouting of the high-pitched voices of people who come and go without being able to understand what they want and what news they bring us.⁷

At the time, Gluck's operas were taken as the best realisation of the reform movement's principles – but the legitimacy of his efforts is only justified when studied in conjunction with the preface to *Alceste* and Francesco Algarotti's *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (1755).⁸ Despite being published more than a decade apart, the two documents were similar in many aspects in terms of the ideas proposed by either author. The difference in publication years may have also been a contributing factor towards persuading musicologists of the legitimacy of Gluck's position as a true operatic reformer, since Algarotti's essay would have ample time to circulate amongst European society by the time Gluck began his career as an opera composer. As a short summary, the main propositions set forth by both Algarotti and Gluck are:

1. Music should be subservient to the poetry – the dramatic expression of the text is to be prioritised; music should function to represent the situations of the plot.
2. Reducing the frequency of melismatic vocal passages that are aimed at showcasing the virtuosity and improvisatory abilities of the singers.
3. The ABA structure of the *da capo* aria should no longer be upheld since the repetition of the verses made for senseless improvisation and diminished the meaning of the texts.
4. A return to natural simplicity – avoiding the composition of complex music at the expense of clarity in the pursuit of verisimilitude.
5. The inclusion of elements from French *tragédie* such as the *chœur dansé*, creating an amalgamated genre of Italian music and French spectacle.

It has been noted that musicology, up until the late twentieth century, pinpointed Gluck as the pivotal figure of operatic reform. Evidently, the availability of Gluck's manifesto and Algarotti's *Saggio* in print conveniently provided a keystone in locating the origins of operatic reform. In short, Gluck's principles and his rationale for amending certain elements

⁷ '[...] che altro non s'ode ne' Teatri, se non che un continuo strepito di strumenti, un continuo gridar di acute voci di persone, che vanno, e vengono senza poter intendere che cosa vogliono, e che novella ci rechino.' Giovanni Antonio Bianchi, *De i vizi e de' difetti del modemo teatro* (Rome: di Pallade, 1753), p. 93

⁸ Francesco Algarotti, *An Essay on the Opera* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1768)

of opera was recognised as a well-founded effort for reform because of the explicit affirmation of his aims, ‘to strip [Italian opera] completely of all those abuses.’⁹ To summarise, it is convenient to champion Gluck as having shaped and determined the course of the reform movement because there is substantial evidence to show that he was successful in his work. However, doing so presents a risk of perpetrating previous musicological trends of relying on historiographical positivism in research and formalism when considering theory and criticism.¹⁰

Gluck’s reputation as a reformer of opera has been largely attributed to his perceived success at reforming the genre, and the general consensus was that Gluck’s operas were held as the standard to which all operas of the period should be judged by. In her discussion of the criticisms of Italian serious opera, Howard decisively states that ‘[with the preface to *Alceste*,] the reform had been accomplished. The style is authoritative, and Gluck is obviously aware of his unique position.’¹¹ Howard’s declaration that Gluck’s tone was ‘authoritative’ and that his position as a reformer was ‘unique’ poses a risk to fallacy as it is based upon only the study of Gluck’s manifesto: a single document that focuses on the aims of a single individual. Nonetheless, Howard’s writings also corroborate the view that Gluck’s reputation in past scholarship has been inflated. Audette goes as far as to say that Gluck had ‘saw, as no one had seen before,’ that the overemphasis on music’s potential to overwhelm a long work needed to be shifted to accommodate the dramatic framework as a whole.¹² Placing Gluck and his operatic manifesto on a pedestal raises the assumption that Gluck (and by extension, Algarotti) was the true genius of operatic reform, but it fails to account for the developments throughout the European musical sphere that preceded Gluck’s rise to fame. Some scholars have also questioned Gluck’s espousal of Algarotti’s suggested reform principles. In between *Orfeo* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767), Gluck had produced another opera titled *Telemaco, ossia L’isola di Circe* (1765) to unfavourable reviews: the libretto by Marco Coltellini was weak and the musical mixture of forward-looking elements and the *soi-disant*

⁹ Patricia Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-century Portrait in Letters and Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 84

¹⁰ Richard Leppert, Susan McClary, eds., *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. xii

¹¹ Patricia Howard, *Gluck and the Birth of Modern Opera* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1963), p. 19

¹² Audette reasons that before Gluck, music had not evolved to possess sufficient control of rhythm and harmonic space to match the corners and elaborations of a live stage drama. See Greg Audette, ‘*Iphigénie en Tauride*: the Reform of Opera, and the Classic Vision’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 14/4 (The Massachusetts Review, Inc., 1973), p. 772

“traditional” *opera seria* caused the opera to be ‘strange.’¹³ Focusing on *Alceste* as a singular event in Gluck’s compositional history also has the potential disadvantage of disregarding the fact that Gluck was also a composer who was a part of the long line of composers whose styles gradually evolved with the times.

Additionally, the extent of Gluck’s contribution towards advancing the reform, and in turn its influence on later composers, is questionable since his position as an operatic reformer was also accentuated by the fallout of the war between Gluck and Niccolò Piccini during the 1770s. The rivalry was another polemical divide much like the *Querelle des Bouffons* of the mid-century, orchestrated by supporters on both sides in an attempt to boost publicity and the reputation of either composer. Also, much like the *Querelle*, the discourse that arose from the rivalry became another popular topic for literary and social discussions – it is likely that it was publicised to this effect to generate a topic of conversation in a society where public opinion was thriving. Landon attributes the beginnings of the studies of Gluckian reform to the literature that arose in response to the Gluck-Piccini war, which has resulted in what he claims to be ‘one of the most gigantic red herrings in the history of music.’ The influence that Gluck’s reform principles exerted on the next generation of composers – namely Berlioz and Wagner – was an influence that stemmed from theoretical sources rather than practical ones, seeing as it was the literature that gained traction and not actually Gluck’s operas themselves.¹⁴ In saying so, Landon is trying to posit that the literary debate was the catalyst for the interest in Gluck’s reform operas, and that Gluck’s credibility as a reformer does not rest entirely on the practical elements of his works. However, the social climate surrounding the debate (and also the *Querelle*) is worth studying because it provides an indication of the environment and the factors that allowed the operatic genre to mature. In order to gain a more holistic view it is necessary to consider prevalent aesthetic rhetoric and literary idealism in operatic discourse during this “reform” period, and how these ideals may have affected the incentive on how opera needed to change. Additionally, these divisive debates show that much of the discussion is focused on the establishment of

¹³ Max Loppert, eds. David Rosen, Claire Brook, “‘An island entire of itself:’ Gluck’s *Telemaco*’, *Words on Music: Essays in Honour of Andrew Porter on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2003), pp. 200-1; in Patricia Howard, ed., *Gluck* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 196-7

¹⁴ Howard Chandler Robbins Landon, ‘Some Thoughts on Gluck and the Reform of the Opera: A Lecture Given at Darlington Hall, August 1967’, *Essays on the Viennese Classical style: Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1970), pp. 22, 37-8

institutions and their polemical differences: French opera versus Italian Opera, the *ancien* regime versus the *moderne*, the reformist versus the non-reformist. Although this approach provides a clear-cut view of the multiple camps on the debate of operatic reform, the rigidity in the opinions offered rarely account for the wider political and cultural influences at play. The positivist approach of taking facts as truth cautions taking these facts at face-value and acquiring a tunnel-vision approach to reading the historiography of developments in opera.

Thus far we have discussed Gluck's reform and have attempted to question his credibility as a true reformer – but what about his contemporaries? Did none of them think that some elements of opera needed improvement? Actually, there were several. Preceding Gluck's Viennese operas, composers such as Niccolò Jommelli and Tommaso Traetta have been linked to the reform movement – but studies have compared their contributions to *opera seria* to the ideals set by Gluck rather than examine their works based on their individual merits. Butler's book on court music at Parma circa 1759 is a major inspiration behind this current thesis. Butler proves that Traetta was not solely influenced by the emerging trends in *opera seria* at the time, but that political and cultural forces were also responsible for the artistic decisions that were demanded of Traetta in Parma.¹⁵ Parma's efflorescence started in 1748, where the Bourbon administration had plans to transform the Italian city into a sophisticated and modern European capital. The administrator of the Bourbon house, Guillaume-Léon Du Tillot, would proceed to employ Traetta as the court composer, and in 1759 the court produced their first French-inspired work – *Ippolito ed Aricia*. The circumstances surrounding the conception of these French-inspired operas until the perceived end of Parma's efforts at reform ('The plan for our operas on a new format has been abandoned,'¹⁶ wrote Du Tillot to Algarotti) become the focus of Butler's book. Of particular interest is the correspondences between Algarotti, Du Tillot, and the court poet Carlo Frugoni. The letters between these men highlight the advice and considerations that are accounted for during the artistic decision-making process, of which Traetta seems to be largely absent from. For instance, the suggestion to combine Italian opera and French dances was suggested to Frugoni by Algarotti in a letter in 1752,¹⁷ which shows that innovative ideas had already begun circulating preceding Traetta's employment. In a letter to Algarotti,

¹⁵ Margaret R. Butler, *Musical Theater in Eighteenth-Century Parma: Entertainment, Sovereignty, Reform* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2019)

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 3

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 17

Frugoni emphasises the need to cultivate a sense of awareness and familiarity in an Italian audience if foreign elements are to be introduced ('a foreign taste cannot be introduced all at once'),¹⁸ signifying that for a novel genre to be successful it is important to not alienate the listeners at the first introduction. Based on her findings, Butler argues that courts around Europe played a significant role in promoting opera's blending of French and Italian elements,¹⁹ seeing as the administration possessed the means of production and influence to exert upon its creative personnel, including the court composers. Hence, this thesis will feature another court composer as its case study – Jommelli at the court of Stuttgart.

Early attempts to link Jommelli to the reform movement have focused on his output at Stuttgart, where it has been thought that his heroic operas possessed a number of musical and dramatic procedures associated with Gluck's reform operas. This observation is flawed since Jommelli's most progressive period can be charted from his employment at the Stuttgart court in 1753, almost a decade before *Orfeo ed Euridice*, which is presumed to be Gluck's first reform opera, premiered in 1762. Tolkoff was one of the first scholars to point out that this assumption was falsely based on a reliance and misinterpretation of Gluck's position as the leading opera reformer, a citation which she traces back to Abert's biography of Jommelli's life and works, which for Jommellian studies remains the most informative and relevant source up till the present day.²⁰ However, Tolkoff states that Abert's writings warrant thorough revision. According to Abert, Jommelli was one step closer to Gluck's reform ideals due to his exposure at Stuttgart, where 'It was as if a new world had been revealed to him at the Württemberg court.'²¹ Whilst it may be that Jommelli's exposure in a new environment encouraged his creativity, it is also entirely plausible that Jommelli's evolving style was a result of his maturing as a composer, and that he needed to meet the demands expected of his as a court composer at Stuttgart. Many of the elements that would pervade Gluck's operas, such as the accompanied recitative and the use of choruses and ballets, appeared in Jommelli's operas as early as the year 1740, but would later go on to be frequently implemented in his operas of the 1750s and 1760s. In Tolkoff's dissertation, we

¹⁸ Ibid. 108

¹⁹ Ibid. 2

²⁰ Audrey Lyn Tolkoff, *The Stuttgart Operas of Niccolò Jommelli*, Ph.D Dissertation (Yale University, 1974), p. 2

²¹ 'Es ist, al sib sich ihm am württembergischen Hofe eine neue Welt erschlossen hätte.' Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 349; in Ibid. 3

are also able to perceive the first indications of the legitimacy of Gluck's status being questioned during the late twentieth century.

There is a common belief that Jommelli's compositional style underwent some stylistic changes that reflected each stage of his career. After attending a performance of Jommelli's *Demofonte* in 1770 Naples, Burney wrote that:

... Jommelli had three styles of composition. Before he went to Germany, the easy and graceful flow of Vinci and Pergolesi pervaded all his productions; but when he was in the service of the Duke of Württemberg, finding the Germans were fond of learning and complication, he changed his style in compliance with the taste and expectations of his audience; and on his return to Italy, he tried to thin and simplify his dramatic Music, which, however, was still so much too operose for Italian ears ...²²

Burney's observation indicates that Jommelli's style did undergo some form of development, but it also tells us that Jommelli's stylistic changes were not wholly for his own personal development – it seems that consumer tastes were also a factor in his artistic decisions. To make a living, Jommelli had to produce works that would earn him the approval of his target audience to generate income, be it the Duke at Stuttgart or at the public theatres in Italy. The business aspect of opera, considered extra-artistic, is often neglected in scholarship of Jommelli's works, instead the focus is on the general musical climate that might have influenced practical elements of Jommelli's opera. In Jommelli's defense, his friend and biographer Saverio Mattei claimed that 'it is being spread abroad that [Jommelli] abused and corrupted his style in Germany, taking on a German harshness and forgetting the Italian fluidity.'²³ The 'German harshness' that Mattei spoke of might be in reference to Jommelli's increased use of chromaticism and dense harmony, as will be discussed in a later chapter. McClymonds makes the point that in examining the operas of Jommelli from the 1740s and the 1750s, Jommelli's style did not appear 'corrupted,' nor did his style feature a drastic

²² Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, Volume 4 (London, 1789), p. 553

²³ 'Va spargendo ch'egli ne avea fatto abuso, e che aveasi corrotto lo stile in Germania, affettando un'asprezza Tedesca, e dimenticandosi della fluidità Italiana.' Saverio Mattei, *Elogio del Jommelli o sia Il progresso della poesia, e musica teatrale* (Napoli, 1785), p. 120; The *Elogio* is reproduced in Marita McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years*, Ph.D Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1978), pp. 895-972

change from previous years; McClymonds attributes the noticeable innovations in his music to the natural evolutionary process that writers experience alongside the changing times, that ‘every age has its virtues and defects.’²⁴ This argument may be used to explain why Jommelli was not considered as radical a reformer as Gluck was, as he retained elements of the traditional style that fell short of the more forward-looking elements of Gluck’s reform operas. Although the two composers shared some similar ideals in their operas, there is a preconception that Jommelli’s exclusion of certain progressive elements alluded that he lacked the talent to make a lasting impact with his artistic objectives, and therefore was a less successful reformer than Gluck.²⁵

A comparative analysis will be undertaken to see how the musico-dramatic elements in Jommelli’s opera changed over the course of his career, to locate the position and efficacy of Jommelli’s works in forming reform history. Excerpts from two versions of Metastasio’s *Didone Abbandonata* will be analysed to compare and contrast the ways in which Jommelli manipulated the elements in his composition to progress his mature style and will be discussed alongside the reception of his music by his contemporaries. A number of methods will be used to analyse the case study, one of them being topic theory. Topics are formulaic patterns of musical clichés that are speculated to have originated from operatic music, each topic possessing cultural connotations and bearing a specific reference.²⁶ Gjerdingen’s schemata theory will also be used to isolate and identify stock *galant* patterns, which are prototypes unique primarily to eighteenth-century music. Gjerdingen’s schemata theory is based on the knowledge that stock patterns were integral to the music vocabulary of the standard eighteenth-century musician, where various forms of patterns could be applied to conjure up ‘the wittiest, most charming, most sophisticated and fashionable music that money could buy.’²⁷ Schema prototypes are denoted by their scale-degree pairings in the melody and the bass. One such example is the Prinner: a schema that possesses a cadential function and is often used as a riposte to the opening gambit or as a closing gesture in a phrase.

²⁴ Marita P. McClymonds, ‘The Evolution of Jommelli’s Operatic Style’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 33/2 (University of California Press, 1980), p. 327

²⁵ Audrey Lyn Tolkoff, *The Stuttgart Operas of Niccolò Jommelli*, Ph.D Dissertation (Yale University, 1974), p. 3

²⁶ Mary Hunter, ed. Danuta Mirka, ‘Topics and Opera Buffa’, *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 63, 65, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199841578.013.0011 (accessed 28/1/2021)

²⁷ Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 5

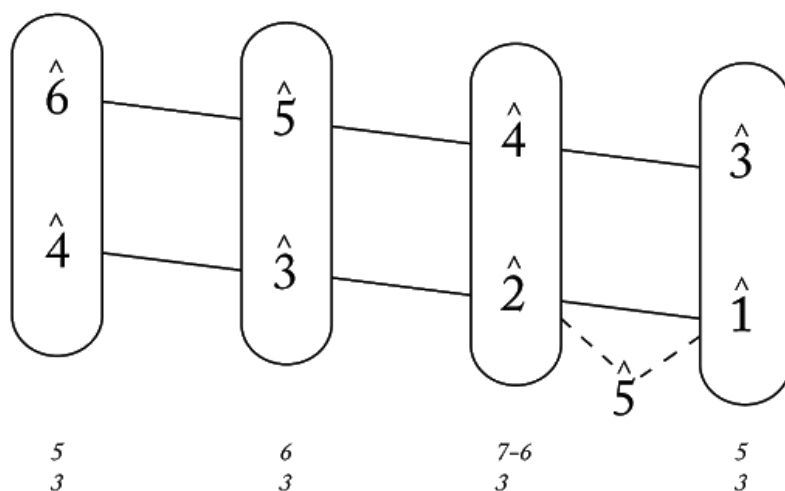


Figure 1.1: A Prinner schema, denoted by 6-5-4-3 in the melody and 4-3-2-1 in the bass.

The other theory to be used is Nicholas Baragwanath’s novel research of *solfeggio* principles.²⁸ *Solfeggio* referred to a melodic pattern constructed from the arrangement of sol-fa syllables and their corresponding pitches, which would form the basis of melodic composition. The practice of *solfeggio* (and *partimento*) was exclusive to the Neapolitan conservatoires, and lessons were transmitted orally thus making it a private affair between teacher and student. *Solfeggio* made use of the hexachord, to the modern musician this would be the first six notes of any given key, with syllables attached to each note beginning with *do* and ending with *la* (*do-re-mi-fa-so-la*).

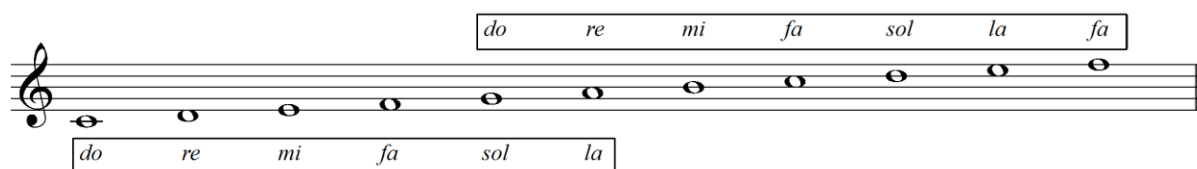


Figure 1.2: An example of a hexachord on C and G combined, with sol-fa syllables below the notes that correspond to the pitches on the staff

²⁸ Nicholas Baragwanath, *The Solfeggio Tradition: A Forgotten Art of Melody in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

While the entire history and theories of the *solfeggio* method are too extensive to include in this chapter, using *solfeggio* as a means of analysis can reveal several clues behind compositional styles. By reducing a melody to its *solfeggio* “skeleton,” we are able to see the underlying structural pattern and how the composer arrives at various key points in the music. Additionally, *solfeggio* is complementary to Gjerdingen’s schemata theory, seeing as the sol-fa syllables denote scale-degrees (albeit sometimes the starting point of the hexachord may not be the tonic of the key), which allows us to see how composers might have manipulated melodic devices to suit their compositional needs.

To summarise, the aims of this thesis are motivated by the query of whether there were additional sociocultural factors at play in cultivating the climate for reform opera, coupled with the inquiry as to what musico-dramatic factors had influenced the trajectory of any sort of reform. The next chapter will attempt to answer these questions, starting with Algarotti’s reputation as a writer of operatic matters and moving on to discussing the polemics that divided opinion on opera as an art form and also the operatic industry. Chapter 3 will deal with Jommelli’s life and works, his stylistic developments and his stance on operatic reform. The final chapter will cross-examine excerpts from two versions of *Didone abbandonata* that Jommelli had produced, in order to see if the reception of and developments in Jommelli’s music were comparable to those of the reform.

Chapter 2: Algarotti, the Enlightenment, and the Polemics

[T]he performance of an opera of a new taste, where French entertainment and Italian music are united.²⁹

This was Algarotti's experience at Parma, written in a letter to Voltaire dated the 31 May 1759. In the letter, Algarotti spoke of the opera he had witnessed at the Bourbon court, which was likely Traetta's premier of *Ippolito ed Aricia* at the Teatro Ducale on 9 May 1759. The letter does not mention the superiority of one musical tradition over the other; Algarotti's opinion that a union of French and Italian elements was novel is emphasised when he proceeds in the same letter to refer to the opera performed to him as an 'Italian tragedy' (*una tragedia italiana*), which is an indication of his desire that a combination of the elements of French *tragédie lyrique* and Italian music as a novel art form should be considered above all. However, despite Algarotti's opinions on theatrical matters, his place in this current discussion of operatic reform of the mid-eighteenth century is debatable. As an intellectual, Algarotti was not an opera specialist per se – he was also a polymath, poet, philosopher, critic, and essayist, with an ambition to become one of the most influential writers in his cultural sphere. Although Algarotti has been cast as one of the figures who was at the forefront of operatic reform and had influenced many other composers to follow the principles expounded in his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (1755), reform did not truly begin with Algarotti's intention to encourage the adoption of a new genre of opera. However, his writings did reflect the general trends of the Enlightenment circulating amongst the French and Italians, coupled with a burgeoning reputation that was supported by extensive publicity and the spread of his ideas in print. Up till the latter half of the eighteenth century, various criticisms of the dramaturgical relationship between poetry and music had prompted gradual changes to take place within the industry, most significantly beginning with the Arcadian Academy's attempt to revitalise classical poetry to a more natural and simple state.

The reforms of opera were not limited to the stages of Italy and France, as multiple courts across Europe had strived to create their own operatic tradition. Since reform ideals had been circulating since the start of the century, travelling musicians and visitors at these European courts contributed towards the evolution of the court theatre. One prime example of

²⁹ '[U]n opera di un gusto nuovo dove sono riuniti lo spettacolo francese e la musica italiana.'; Francesco Algarotti, 'Letter to Voltaire [François Marie Arouet]', *Digital correspondence of Voltaire* (Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.13051/ee:doc/voltfrVF1040193a1c> (accessed 12/12/2020)

this, considered to be one of the most musical courts of the age, was the court of Frederick the Great. Hertz has proposed that Algarotti's decision to publish the *Saggio* was a reaction to the operatic decadence he observed upon returning to Venice from a long stay (1740-1753) at the Berlin court.³⁰ Whilst it may seem likely that Algarotti had penned his reform ideas as a reaction towards the state of opera upon his return to Italy, and that he was appalled at what he witnessed in his homeland, there is new evidence to suggest that he was aiming to report the observations and suggestions that he was exposed to in Berlin. McClymonds, in an unpublished paper, has shed light on new evidence that indicates that the operatic traditions of the Frederician court did undergo some degree of "reform" in the first fifteen years since its conception, which Algarotti had acknowledged in a dedication to Baron Svertz.³¹ As the Enlightenment unfolded across European lands, the evolution of operatic conventions (and by extension, the criterion for the reform movement) was inevitably affected by the various developments in European culture and thought as determined by the spirit of the times. This chapter will discuss the origins of the operatic reform of the mid-eighteenth century, first by contending Algarotti's stance in influencing the reform, how the Enlightenment in Italy and France contributed towards evolving trends in the cultural sphere, and the conditions in the operatic industry that effected the opinion that reform was a necessity.

³⁰ Daniel Hertz, ed. John A. Rice, 'Traetta in Parma: *Ippolito ed Aricia*', *From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2004), p. 277

³¹ McClymonds' is the first to uncover this evidence in her conference paper, and according to Polzonetti is the 'best recent account of the role of the Berlin's court as a forge of reformed opera; Marita Petzoldt McClymonds, 'Frederick the Great, Algarotti, Graun, and the Origins of the 18th-Century Operatic Innovations', read at the 17th International Congress of the International Musicological Society (Leuven, 5 August 2002) in Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *Italian Opera in the Age of the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 110-1; Bruno Forment, 'Frederick's Athens: crushing superstition and resuscitating the marvellous at the K nigliches Opernhaus, Berlin', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 24/1 (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5



Figure 2.1: Portrait of Algarotti³²

Francesco Algarotti was considered one of the most renowned intellectuals of the eighteenth century. Algarotti's reputation in musicology is commonly associated with mentions of his contribution towards formulating the principles of reform in his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica*, first published in 1755 and translated into English as *An Essay on the Opera* in 1767. Although scholarship has focused on pinpointing Algarotti as the man who authored a treatise on opera, Algarotti was not an individual who dedicated himself to writing solely on artistic matters – the Venetian polymath was learned and wrote extensively on subjects such as Newtonian science, poetry, linguistics, politics, philosophy, and even military strategy. Although his knowledge on certain matters was limited, his travels and his interactions with the greatest minds of his time refined his rhetoric and education, enabling him to speak about multiple subjects with such eloquence that any gaps in his knowledge was dismissed.³³ That being said, the events leading up to Algarotti's career as a successful writer

³² Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Portrait of Francesco Algarotti*, 1745, pastel on parchment, from *Friederisiko. Friedrich der Große. Die Ausstellung*, ed. Generaldirektion der Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), p. 339

³³ Egon Wellesz, 'Francesco Algarotti und seine Stellung zur Musik', *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* (Franz Steiner Verlag, 1914), pp. 427-8

of the eighteenth century will ultimately help shape our perception of the extent of Algarotti's influence and his prerogative to justify his standing on operatic culture. The son of a Venetian merchant, as a youth Algarotti studied in Rome and Bologna, and deciding that the life of a merchant nor matrimony was for him, he aspired to pursue a literary or diplomatic career. Eventually, he left Bologna in 1732, travelling across Europe in a bid to increase his knowledge of classical poetry and making a name for himself by frequenting salons in major Italian cities and Paris. Thus, Algarotti allowed himself to be assimilated into the scholarly circles under two distinct cultural conditions, and as a young scholar this would influence his literary style and equip him with an adequate degree of awareness of cultural and artistic matters.

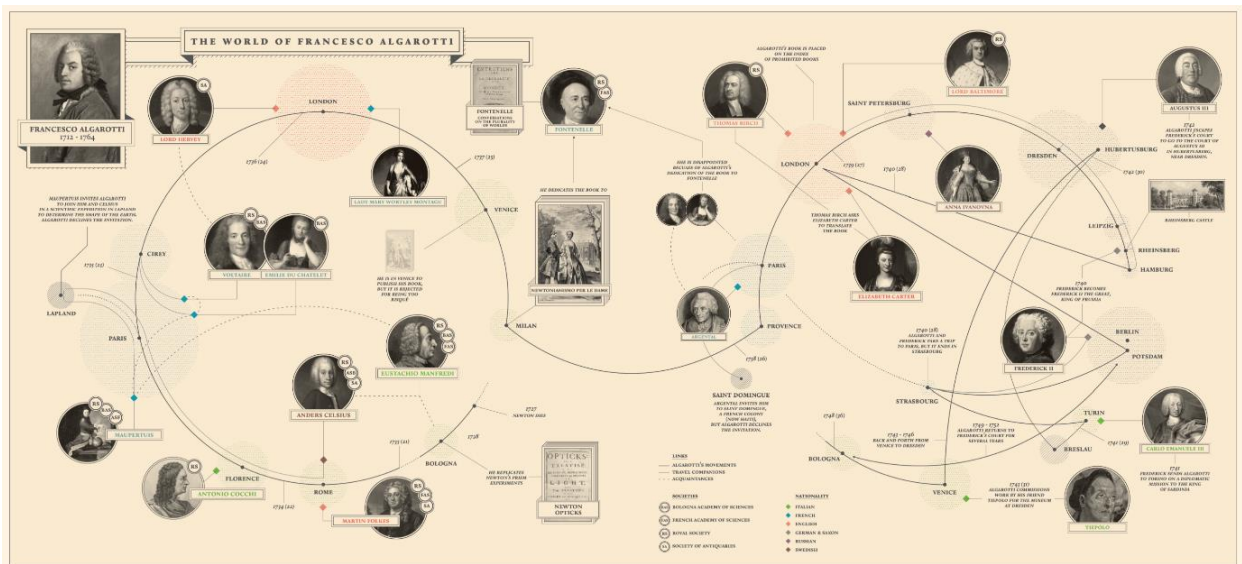


Figure 2.2: A diagram of Algarotti's "reverse grand tour of Europe;"³⁴ The starting point of the diagram is marked by Newton's death after which Algarotti begins replicating Newton's experiments as a student, followed by the chronicle of his travels and the acquaintances he made along the way. See Appendix II for a larger resolution.

³⁴ The description of the map on the website reads: 'A diagram of Francesco Algarotti's reverse grand tour based on Paula Findlen and Cheryl Smeall's research appeared in Corriere della Sera. The diagram was created by Giorgio Caviglia and others at DensityDesign based on sketches from the Stanford team.'; See 'Algarotti's Travels', *Mapping the Republic of Letters* (Stanford University, 2013), <http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/img/algarotti/worldofalgarotti.png> (accessed 12/11/2020)

Algarotti's enthusiasm and intellect as a writer is reflected in the publication of his first work in 1737, titled *Newtonianism for Ladies, or Dialogues on Light and Colours*, considered to be one of the most popular books to be consumed in the eighteenth century. Due to the success of his book, Algarotti managed to acquire membership into the Republic of Letters, cementing his prestige as an independent cosmopolitan author. This became evident in the years that followed, as Algarotti began engaging in a wide array of cultural products, eventually devoting more of his time to the emerging profession of literary and art critic.³⁵ The background and discourse behind the publication of this particular early work of Algarotti's is insightful as to how he came to be one of the most influential writers of his time, stemming from a determination that is evident even in his early career. In the preface to *Newtonianism for Ladies*, Algarotti proudly professes that it is through this work he has managed to fulfil his aspiration to become a writer:

The very same Reason that led me every Day to a Concert of Music, a gay and elegant Entertainment, a Ball, or the Theatre, induced me to write an Account of the Manner in which I passed my Time [...] with the Marchioness of E ---, and has thus from an idle and useless Member of Society, rendered me an Author. And the natural Desire that every Author has to appear in print [...] engages me at present to publish this Account.³⁶

The success of *Newtonianism for Ladies* granted Algarotti access to higher social status in European society, which according to him gave him the privilege to address an audience that possessed the curiosity to learn and mould public opinion – the category in between the experts and the ignorants. In a letter to an anonymous count, Algarotti explains his reasoning behind his target audience, stating that 'the learned because they knew the subject well, it would be difficult to judge them as ignorant once more,' whilst on the other hand 'the

³⁵ Massimo Mazzotti, 'Newton for Ladies: Gentility, Gender and Radical Culture', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 37/2 (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 122-5

³⁶ *Newtonianism for Ladies* is presented in the form of six dialogues between a chevalier (*cavaliere*) and a marchioness, the whole affair taking place over five consecutive days against the backdrop of a villa in the proximity of Lake Garda in the Republic of Venice. Algarotti dedicates the book to Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, to which the former states he is indebted to the latter for inspiring his choice of using a dialogic format between individuals of opposite genders. Francesco Algarotti, trans. Elizabeth Carter, *Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy Explain'd for the Use of the Ladies: In Six Dialogues on Light and Colours* (London: E. Cave, 1739), p. 1

ignorant were incapable of the attention necessary to understand the doctrines expounded.³⁷ Algarotti's beginnings from an Italian student to a successful author show us that his renown and credibility was acknowledged from his very first foray into scholarly societies, and his involvement in both Italian and French cultural spheres gave him the exposure he needed to acquire cultural legitimisation as an academic. Whilst it is entirely plausible that Algarotti sought to publish for economic reasons, he was also attempting to further his success as a writer in selecting what is apparently to him an audience that would be more open to accepting his ideas in writing. By the time Algarotti had written the *Saggio*, the amateur market was expanding, and the advancement of the printing industry had further aided the spread of his books across Europe and his status as one of the most eminent scholars of the eighteenth-century.

Undoubtedly a man of culture and ambition, Algarotti followed the career trajectory of a *philosophe* in eighteenth-century terms; as an intellectual, his involvement with opera would be another field that would benefit his career. Opera was culturally significant in eighteenth-century Europe – *philosophes* and men of letters would, over the course of the century, continually inquire into the nature of opera, its relationships with other genres of the arts, and its aesthetic and social functions. The most heavily debated subject was the intrinsic relationship between poetry and music in opera. However, over the ages the supposed hierarchical relationship of poetry and music in opera had been subverted as a result of changing priorities. According to the scholars of Arcadia, it was poetry that should have taken precedence by virtue of its ability to guarantee stylistic decorum and deliver dramatic action, but instead it had been subordinated to music, which in turn was subservient to the *bel canto* style that appealed to the senses.³⁸ This sentiment was echoed by Metastasio who had received a copy of Algarotti's *Saggio* as a gift, and replied to Algarotti stating:

[I] resent the abuses of our musical theatre more than anyone else, ... But [the] province for this is difficult. These parts of the opera, which need only the eyes and

³⁷ 'I dotti [...] perchè sapevano la materia, e troppo era difficile per giudicarne tornare ignoranti; Gli ignoranti [...] erano incapaci di quell'attenzione, che per intendere le dottrine [...] esposte era pur necessaria.'; Francesco Algarotti, 'Letter to Count N. N. (*nomen nescio*), 30th October 1763', *Lettere filologiche del conte Francesco Algarotti* (Venice: Di Alvisopoli, 1826), p. 191

³⁸ Renato di Benedetto, ed. Girolamo Imbruglia, 'Music and Enlightenment', *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 135

ears of the spectators to proselytise them, will always gather more votes than the others, whose merit can only be measured by intelligence and reasoning.³⁹

Metastasio's reply was a response to Algarotti's proposed remedy in his *Saggio*, in which he suggested to discipline "music" to be subservient to "poetry", and to re-establish verisimilitude (in French, *vraisemblance*) in all aspects of both the singing and recitative parts.⁴⁰ Verisimilitude is the common ground that the criticisms for both Italian and French opera shared, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

So, how did Algarotti come to be one of the most prominently mentioned figures when it came to the reform? While the distribution of his *Saggio* did contribute towards his fame, the principles he advocated were often raised in discussions on the performance of Gluck's *Alceste* and its accompanying preface to the libretto. A commonly cited source, Gluck's manifesto in the preface to *Alceste* explains Gluck and Calzabigi's motives to incorporate verisimilitude in the dramaturgical presentation of poetry and music, and to abolish the traits of traditional *opera seria* that detracted from the overall experience. Di Benedetto observes that similar metaphors of using parallels between *chiaroscuro* and musical form were used by Calzabigi and Gluck in the preface and mirrors the concepts laid out by Algarotti's in his *Saggio*, especially in this passage:

I have striven to restrict music to its true office of serving poetry [...] and I believed that I should do this in the same way as telling colours affect a correct and well-ordered drawing, by a well-assorted contrast of light and shade, which serves to animate the figures without altering their contours.⁴¹

Algarotti comments on musical composition in a similar fashion:

³⁹ 'Io che mi risento piu d'ogni altro degli abusi del nostro teatro di musica, ... Ma, [la] provincia e assai dura. Queste parti delle'opera, che non abbisognano che d'occhi e d'orecchi negli spettatori per farne proseliti, raccorran sempre maggior numero di voti che le altre, delle quali non puo misurare il merito che l'intelligenza e il raziocinio.' For the original letter and its translation, see Appendix 1. Pietro Metastasio, 'Letter to Count Algarotti, 9th February 1756', *Tutte le Opere di Pietro Metastasio*, Volume Unico (Florence: Borghie Compagni, 1832), p. 981

⁴⁰ Francesco Algarotti, *An Essay on the Opera* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1768), pp. 7-9

⁴¹ Di Benedetto includes Gluck's passage but does not provide a comparison between the preface and Algarotti's writings. See Renato di Benedetto, eds. Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli, 'Poetics and Polemics', *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 25; For a translated version of Gluck's preface to *Alceste*, see Patricia Howard, *Gluck: An Eighteenth-century Portrait in Letters and Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 83-4

In the earliest ages, the poets were all musical proficient [...] But now that the twin-sisters, poetry and music, go no longer hand in hand, [it is the business of one] to add colouring to what the other has designed, that the colouring, separately considered, appear beautiful; yet upon examination of the whole, the contours offend, by not being properly rounded, and by the absence of a social blending of the parts throughout.⁴²

In comparing the quotes above, it is convenient to assume that there was a direct line of influence from Algarotti to Gluck. There are several misconceptions that do not support this conclusion: the first being it was highly unlikely that Gluck had met Algarotti during his lifetime as the writer, who lived in Paris for most of his life, had passed long before Gluck first arrived in France; the second being that there was no evidence of Gluck mentioning that he had drawn inspiration from Algarotti's *Saggio* in any of his letters. It has been suggested by Smith that Gluck may have heard of Algarotti by word of mouth, namely through his collaboration with Lebland du Roulet, the librettist for Gluck's *Iphiénie en Aulide*. However, Smith's inference that du Roulet had suggested or influenced Gluck's stylistic direction is chronologically unfeasible because Gluck had produced *Alceste* first in 1767, whilst *Iphigénie* premiered only in 1774, long after the preface was written and almost 20 years since Algarotti's *Saggio* was made public.⁴³ This still shows that Algarotti did not directly influence Gluck in a personal manner, and that Algarotti's reputation as a reform advocate seems to rest solely by dint of association with the shared ideals that were held by Gluck. Whilst it can be argued that Gluck was the first composer to have substantial evidence proving that he was actively attempting a reform, his ideas were hardly revolutionary and in some aspects he was considerably conservative.⁴⁴ There is no doubt that the aesthetic ideals of the reform would have been circulating amongst the artistic community for Gluck and Algarotti to have been aware of them, since there is evidence to support the notion that there was growing discontent with the *seria* tradition. To address the issue of how reform came to

⁴² Francesco Algarotti, *An Essay on the Opera* (Glasgow: R. Urie. 1768), pp. 32-3

⁴³ Smith claims that du Roulet was highly influenced by Algarotti's ideas as presented in his treatise, as suggested by J. G. Prod'homme. See Annalise Josephine Smith, 'Gluck's *Armide* and the Creation of Supranational Opera', Master's Thesis (2010), p. 10; J. G. Prod'homme, trans. Marguerite Brown, 'Gluck's French Collaborators', *The Musical Quarterly*, 3/1 (Oxford University Press, 1917), p. 249

⁴⁴ Julian Rushton, 'The Theory and Practice of Piccinisme', *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association*, 98 (1972), p. 32; in John A. Rice, *Essays on Opera, 1750-1800* (New York: Routledge, 2016)

be, the answers may be found in the beginnings of the polemical standings of the French and the Italians, and the operatic traditions that had begun to receive criticism.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact juncture in music history where the idea for reforming opera emerged, it is possible to trace the trajectory of how the reform came to be, and the figures who advocated the evolutionary currents that made reform a reality. But why was there a desire and argument for reform in the first place? There were many before Gluck who advocated the idea of introducing some form of change as a result of dissatisfaction with what opera had become by the mid-1750s. In Italy, the opera went through a period of transition where what was a largely a private affair slowly evolved into profitable public entertainment as a result of market competition. The first two decades of the eighteenth century saw a growing climate of rivalry and competition at the opera houses, where patrons contended to flaunt their displays of taste, intelligence, influence, and wealth. Strohm labels this operatic boom as the period which ‘Arcadian opera went public,’ and during which the connotations associated with the genre (such as its aesthetic and social norms) essentially became public property as well.⁴⁵ Opera’s devotees were not limited to just musicians and poets – it was a social phenomenon that attracted people from all social classes, amongst whom were art critics and scholars who deemed it necessary to critique and comment on opera as a way to uplift their social standing and stay relevant to a wider cultural sphere. Strohm argues that the conscious selection of opera repertoire is based on a process of elimination between certain topics (i.e. mythological or historical) because theatrical practice is not only governed by a theoretical awareness of genres, but also cultural ideologies, social rituals, national preferences, and literary topics that subsisted in that particular society at any point in time.⁴⁶ Strohm’s argument also substantiates the view that reform should be considered part of a long evolutionary process that developed alongside the intellectual and philosophical developments that society underwent during the age of the Enlightenment. One of the earliest criticisms of opera can be traced back to the period of reform introduced by the Academy of Arcadia; albeit that the society’s reform was directed more towards forming a national literary identity instead of the operatic genre, scholars felt that the true meaning of the text was being misrepresented and obscured in melodramas by the music that

⁴⁵ Reinhard Strohm, ‘A Context for *Griselda*: The Teatro Capranica in Rome, 1711-1724’, *Dramma per musica: Italian Opera of the Eighteenth-Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 34-7

⁴⁶ Reinhard Strohm, ed. Bruno Forment, ‘Iphigenia’s Curious *Ménage à Trois* in Myth, Drama, and Opera’, *(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), p. 120

accompanied it. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ludovico Antonio Muratori, a priest and man of letters, had attacked contemporary opera by listing out the defects of modern music, among which were the excessive use of contrapuntal elaboration, the plethora of ariettas, and the weakness of the poetry as a result of music's hold over the text.⁴⁷

Several past scholars have argued that the decline of Italian opera coincided with the death of Alessandro Scarlatti, claiming that his death was the catalyst that caused the most perfect form of Italian opera at the time to disappear from the public stages. Abert, a Jommellian scholar, asserts on multiple occasions that Italian opera suffered a 'critical' decline after the death of Scarlatti.⁴⁸ While still enjoying mainstream success, the quality of *opera seria* at the start of the eighteenth century was in a worrying state – the 'unnaturalness and untruthfulness' of the genre and the rise of *opera buffa* contributed to the spread of contempt for serious opera, further encouraged by the use of persiflage and caricature on the *buffa* stage. Luigi Riccoboni went as far as to claim that all of Europe had agreed that Italian opera reached 'Perfection' from the middle of the seventeenth century up till the beginning of the next, of which Scarlatti's operas (amongst other Italian masters such as Bononcini) was 'undisputable proof' of Italian opera having reached its zenith. He then goes on to say that Italian opera's reputation outside of Italy had declined, in part due to the change in the 'Italian Taste of Music.'⁴⁹ The "Italian taste" that Riccoboni spoke of was not a reference to a change in societal and cultural thought, it was directed towards the people who were responsible for the creation of a performance. There is apparently no justifiable explanation for this change, as Riccoboni claims:

⁴⁷ Muratori's argument was that music could not do the poetry justice because it constantly drew the audience's attention away from the drama and instead towards itself. Ludovico Antonia Muratori, *Della perfetta poesia italiana* (Modena: Bartolomeo Soliani, 1706) in Reinhard G. Pauly, 'Benedetto Marcello's Satire on Early 18th Century Opera', *The Musical Quarterly*, 34/2 (Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 222; For a more comprehensive outline of Muratori's book, see Renato Di Benedetto, eds. Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli, 'Poetics and Polemics', *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 18-20

⁴⁸ Herman Kretzschmar, 'Zwei Opern Nicolo Logroscinos', *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek Peters für 1908* (Leipzig, 1908), p. 65f., in Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 32, 111

⁴⁹ Luigi Riccoboni, *An Historical and Critical Account of the Theatres in Europe*, reprint (London: T. Waller, 1741) p. 78

... at present it is all a Whim; Strength is sought instead of beautiful Simplicity; and Harshness and Singularity is substituted instead of Expression and Truth ... The surprising Capacity of their Singers [begets] Admiration, but moves no Passion ...⁵⁰

Here, Riccoboni has provided the basis of the argument that purported operatic reform: the drama lacked simplicity, expression and truth had been marginalised, and the virtuosity of the singers lacked the potential to incite the passions in the listener. As both Abert and Riccoboni have stated, these were views that were shared by opera and literary enthusiasts across Europe. Riccoboni's account of the views expressed appear earlier in the century before Algarotti published his *Saggio*, and whilst it may be argued that he was biased towards the previous form of Italian opera, it corroborates the argument that these opinions on opera's so-called "abuses" had already begun circulating in the first few decades of the eighteenth century.

It is possible to reason that the reform of eighteenth-century opera was often targeted at the Italians due to the reform operas being of the *seria* strain rather than the French *tragédie*. The advocacy of truth and simplicity was a phenomenon that was not exclusive to solely Italian music, as Jean-Philippe Rameau had received the same criticisms when he first debuted as an opera composer with *Hippolyte et Aricie* in 1733 as well. Rameau's operas were judged to be excessively Italianate and unnatural from his use of ornamentation and complex harmonies:

Here is what the critic says against modern music: if the difficult is beautiful, then Rameau is a great man, but if by chance beauty is only simple nature, which should be the model for art, then what a foolish man Rameau is.⁵¹

The critique of Rameau's music once again shows that the quality of truth and simplicity in expression in opera was highly rallied for and often appeared as the focus of the criticisms that opera received. There is a small, if not unfair, conclusion to be drawn from Rameau's experience: that any quality in music remotely related to the Italian style would draw prejudice towards itself. However, lest we forget Algarotti's statement to Voltaire, this 'new taste' that opera needed to acquire involves both the French and Italian traditions. Whilst

⁵⁰ Ibid. 78

⁵¹ Charles Dill, eds. Roberta Marvin, Downing Thomas, 'Ideological Noises: Opera Criticism in Early Eighteenth-Century France', *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (Ashgate Publishing, 2006), pp. 68-9

Italian opera was condemned for its musical abuses, French opera was not without its criticisms either. Since the seventeenth century, there was a preoccupation with attempting to integrate “the marvellous” (*le merveilleux*) into the French theatrical tradition, but it was in opera where the marvellous was permitted to thrive. The use of machinery in depicting the spectacular appearances of the supernatural were encouraged in opera, accepted as a convention of French Baroque opera for the operas of Lully, Rameau, and their contemporaries. However, the machines were thought to be unrealistic and therefore should be discarded in favour of simplicity and verisimilitude in the drama. Rousseau had stated that the ‘marvellous was as well placed in the epic poem as it was ridiculous in the theatre,’ and Diderot expressed that ‘The world of magic can please children, [...] the real world is pleased only by reason.’⁵² These opinions from renowned *philosophes* would contribute towards shaping the polemical debates on operatic reform, seemingly motivated by a common goal: that French opera was to be remodelled along Italian lines.⁵³

The polemical debates concerning French and Italian opera reached a high point during the infamous literary debate that occurred mid-century. The *Querelle des bouffons* was a pamphlet war that occurred following the arrival of an opera troupe under the management of Eustachio Bambini at the Paris Opéra in August 1752, and further provoked by a *buffa* production of Pergolesi’s *La serva padrona*. Up till recently, the motives behind the *querelle* are still being discussed, but there has been evidence that shows that the *querelle* was nothing more than publicity for the *philosophes* to further their own agendas.⁵⁴ One of the highlights of the controversy was Rousseau’s argument concerning the “nonexistence” of French music due to the inharmonious nature of the French language, and that Italian music was superior because the Italian language was more musical as stated in his *Lettre sur la musique française*.⁵⁵ Although the dichotomy of the *querelle* was emphasised from the start, the fallout from the debate is where we are able to observe the first seeds of an emerging

⁵² William L. Crosten, *French Grand Opera, An Art and A Business* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 48 in Aubrey S. Garlington, Jr., “‘Le Merveilleux’ and Operatic Reform in 18th-Century French Opera”, *The Music Quarterly*, 49/4 (Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 485-6

⁵³ *Ibid.* 486

⁵⁴ For a recent account of the new evidence on the *bouffons*, see David Charlton, ‘New Light on the *Bouffons* in Paris (1752-1754)’, *Eighteenth Century Music*, 11/1 (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 31-54

⁵⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Lettre sur la musique française* (1753); in Jørgen Langdalen, eds. Maria Gullstam, Michael O’Dea, ‘The Voice of Nature in Rousseau’s Theatre: Reconstructing a Dramaturgy’, *Rousseau on Stage: Playwright, Musician, Spectator* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2017), p. 81

discourse on operatic reform. A number of pamphlets, albeit still exhibiting a degree of bias towards either style, were written with proposals to combine the merits of French and Italian operas. Blainville's *L'esprit de l'art musical* contained specific proposals on combining the best of both worlds – he admired the dramatism of the *recitativo obbligato*, the expressiveness of Italian harmony, saying that ‘these are the flowers; we must collect them. We wish for French singing and Italian instrumental writing.’⁵⁶ Blainville's contribution appeared during the last year of the *querelle*, but there were others who would echo his sentiments. *Mémoires d'un musicien* was a pamphlet issued in 1756, narrated by an anonymous persona, urging that the current spread of comic opera be resolved by following a Ramellian synthesis: that is by blending Italianate with French elements in maintaining the serious genre.⁵⁷ From an Italian perspective, the pseudonymous *Lettres sur le mécanisme de l'opéra italien* sought to propose a form of ‘opera that will be neither French nor Italian, but a composite of the one and the other, purged of the defects of both [...]’.⁵⁸ The pamphlet has been used in many discussions of the faults of Italian opera, citing the author's many anecdotes on the Italian operatic practice. However, the *Lettre* served another function – to provide an Italian perspective and to educate:

Among those who are pained to see the decline of the Paris Opéra, some desire the establishment of an Italian opera, without knowing what they are wishing for; the others fear this same establishment, and would be hard pressed to say why. Neither the ones nor the others have an exact knowledge of that which constitutes the object of their fear or their desire.⁵⁹

The polemics raised in the *querelle* arguably contributed towards the discourse on operatic reform, since it provided the grounds for opinions to be expressed and publicised. The

⁵⁶ Charles Henri Blainville, *L'esprit de l'art musical* (1754); in Daniel Hertz, ed. John A. Rice, ‘Traetta in Parma: *Ippolito ed Aricia*’, *From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Pendragon Press, 2004), pp. 274-5

⁵⁷ The memoir is first discussed in David Charlton, Sarah Hibberd, ‘“My Father was a Poor Parisian Musician”: A Memoir (1756) concerning Rameau, Handel's Library and Sallé’, *Journal of the Royal Music Association*, 128/2 (Taylor & Francis, 2003), pp. 161-199

⁵⁸ The author of the pamphlet is thought to be Count Giacomo Durazzo. See *Lettre sur le mlchanisme de l'opera italien* (Paris: Duchesne, Lambert, 1756), pp. viii-ix; in Bruce Alan Brown, ‘Opera in France, Italy, and on the Moon, as Viewed by a Frenchman, Financier and *Philosophe*’, *Gluck, der Reformer? (Symposium report, Nürnberg, 18-20 July 2014)*, *Gluck-Studien* Vol. 8 (Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag Karl Vötterle, 2020), p. 9

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 10

context for the argument of the superiority of one operatic tradition over another can instead be explained through opportunistic bias – French opera being unexportable due to its highly individual characteristics (both aesthetic and production-wise) caused it to remain a foreign phenomenon outside the experience of the average Italian scholar, thus causing the latter to have no chance at comparing the disparity in national styles.⁶⁰

The perceived superiority of French *tragédie lyrique* and Italian *opera seria* may be alluded to historical developments rather than purely artistic evolution. Whilst Italy was embroiled in a series of territorial conflicts during the late seventeenth century, France had already begun developing their own dramatic tradition. Weber provides a comprehensive overview of the history and social constructs of the Paris Opéra. Opera in France began as a form of cultural mercantilism, where the Académie Royale de Musique (whose authority was transferred to Jean-Baptiste Lully in 1672) acted as an agent of state by monopolising the theatrical enterprise to cultivate its own national talent.⁶¹ Under the rule of Louis XIV, this state policy brought cultural isolation to French musical life, and likely reinforced a general preference for the French style and indirectly fostered a distaste for Italian opera. Given this monopoly of the national style, the Opéra was forced to recycle works in its repertory to fill its long schedule, most of them being the works of Lully and Quinault. And thus, Lully's operas came to be a symbol of the state: powerful and wealthy members of society came together at the Paris Opéra, perpetrating traditions and reinforcing French authority while experiencing the product of state policy. An anonymous author writing on the public's attachment to Lully claims:

The recitatives of Lully, [...] those beautiful verses of Quinault [...] all of this could not disappear from people's minds. The idea of their youth was bound to it; they thought themselves to love Lully, when in reality they loved the memory of that great age.⁶²

⁶⁰ Renato Di Benedetto, eds. Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli, 'Poetics and Polemics', *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 27

⁶¹ William Weber, 'La musique ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime', *The Journal of Modern History*, 56/1 (University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 60-61

⁶² Denise Launay, ed., 'Lettre critique et historique sur la musique française, la musique italienne, et sur les bouffons', *La Querelle des Bouffons, Vol. 1* (Paris: Minkoff Reprint, 1973), p. 456; in William Weber, 'La musique ancienne in the Waning of the Ancien Régime', *The Journal of Modern History*, 56/1 (University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 64

What was thought to be a love for French music was actually a deep-rooted nostalgia for the glory of France during their youth: to defend *la musique ancienne* was also to defend their nationalistic pride. On the other hand, unlike France, Italy had yet to firmly establish a cultural centre for opera by the 1700s, despite its reputation across Europe. The significant developments to the Italian operatic institution such as the rise of Metastasio, the growing renown of the Neapolitan conservatoires, the diaspora of Neapolitan musicians, the international successes of *opera buffa* were events that transpired a few decades after France had first attempted to integrate *tragédie lyrique* as part of French national culture. From these developments also arose an alleged myth that European culture was constructing by the 1750s: that Naples was home to the opera, a genre that was regarded as the closest definition of classical tragedy, occupying a seat of an incomparable ‘school’ that had imposed its hegemony over the European musical world.⁶³ Developing a sense of cultural identity was integral to Enlightenment thought, and France had gained a head start over Italy in establishing its reputation as a cultural centre in Europe, which contributed towards a nationalistic bias towards its own cultural output.

In focusing on the debate of aesthetic ideals there is also a need to consider the practical and business decisions made for the sake of the upkeep of the theatre enterprise. Unlike court opera, where the monarch would have the final say in all artistic decisions, opera companies in public entertainment sought to cater towards consumer demands and tastes. A major proponent of the opera business were the singers – the *castrati*, who were hailed as the superstars of the age. The *castrati* were famed for their virtuosic *coloratura* passages, and also for their execution of the *messa di voce*, a technique defined by an initial increase and subsequent decrease in volume of a held pitch-perfect note. It was the decline in the quality of these singers and that also contributed to many of opera’s mid-century criticisms, and because composers had to write music for the singers, this criticism extended to their compositional abilities as well. Algarotti in his *Saggio* blames the mediocre opera performances on the inferior quality of the singers,

[...] with their passages, their trillings, [...] with their splittings and flights of the voice, they over-do, confound, and disfigure every thing.⁶⁴

⁶³ Renato di Benedetto, ed. Girolamo Imbruglia, ‘Music and Enlightenment’, *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 137

⁶⁴ Francesco Algarotti, *Essay on the Opera* (Glasgow: R. Urie, 1768), p. 62

Algarotti's concerns addressed another problem that needed rectifying: the singers had gone out of hand, and the composers were writing music that permitted them to embellish melismatic passages that ruined the flow and expression of the arias. An early attempt at rectifying this situation was made at Parma, where Du Tillot, the theatre administrator, had set a strict rule that '*castrati* and actors may not repeat their speech or aria beyond what is determined in advance by the composer.'⁶⁵ If the composer left no room for improvising *coloratura*, and wrote out melismatic passages to be sung as written, then there would no longer be any risk of the singer inserting nonsensical additions at their pleasure. Criticisms of the voice aside, many of the judgements also stemmed from a general prejudice against the *castrati*. Many of them were professional singers and were not trained actors. A satire of one of Farinelli's performance, published anonymously, mocks:

What a pipe! What modulation! What ecstasy to the ear! But heavens! What clumsiness! What stupidity! What offense to the eye!⁶⁶

Needless to say, the perceived decline in the quality of singers contributed towards the deterioration of stage performances. The often complex and unflattering embellishments of the singers made for a convoluted delivery of the text, which in turn shattered the verisimilitude of the drama as a result of the nonsensical performance.

To conclude, it has been made apparent that the reform movement of the eighteenth-century was a gradual process that began as the Enlightenment unfolded, and the cultural and artistic views of the many intellectuals, poets and musicians who involved themselves in operatic discourse ultimately shaped the way which these reform ideals would become a reality. Algarotti was a writer who sought to make a name for himself through his writings, and his *Saggio* was more of a collection of the many criticisms and suggestions that were already present in his immediate social climate. The polemical differences between French and Italian culture also contributed in part towards the judgements made upon both genres, spurred on by nationalistic pride that saw a need to compete for the superiority of their national styles. In short, opera was undergoing an evolutionary growth that paralleled the evolutionary trends in societal thought.

⁶⁵ Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 168

⁶⁶ *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression in Tragedy*, (London, 1755); in Olga Termini, 'The Role of Diction and Gesture in Italian Baroque Opera', *Performance Practice Review*, 6/2 (1993), p. 153

Chapter 3: Jommelli's Place in Operatic Reform

I went away in high good humour with this truly great composer, who is indisputably one of the first of his profession now alive in the universe; for were I to name the living composers of Italy for the stage, according to my idea of their merit, it would be in the following order; Jomelli, Galuppi, Piccini, and Sacchini.⁶⁷

Burney wrote the statement above as a reflection on his first meeting with Jommelli in Naples on the 26th of October 1770. Based on Burney's ranked list, Jommelli's merit should deem him worthy of more attention in the discourse on mid-eighteenth-century opera, but instead we find him marginalised in comparison to the giant, Gluck. Concerning operatic reform, in the current discourse on composers that occupied the orbit of Gluck's period in Vienna, the figure that is commonly mentioned to have contributed to innovations in opera (alongside Tommaso Traetta) is Jommelli. Jommelli is best remembered for his Stuttgart works, when he was *Kapellmeister* at the court under Duke Carl Eugen from 1753 until 1769. In comparison to Traetta and Gluck, studies of Jommelli's life and works are fairly limited, with some of his works archived at the Mannheim Court having been destroyed or lost during the transfer of the electoral court from Mannheim to Munich in 1778 and subsequently during World War II.⁶⁸ Abert was one of the foremost Jommellian scholars at the turn of the twentieth century, after which focus on Jommelli gradually gained more traction towards the end of the century and is still ongoing till today. Attention to Jommelli's works have flourished in the past decade, with his operas being mounted again for modern audiences and several conferences focusing on his life and works being held, the most recent one on the tricentennial of his birth in 2014.⁶⁹ McClymonds published her dissertation on Jommelli's

⁶⁷ Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (T. Becket, 1773), p. 330

⁶⁸ Paul Corneilson, Eugene K. Wolf, 'Newly Identified Manuscripts of Operas and Related Works from Mannheim', *The American Musicological Society* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 245

⁶⁹ Jommelli's *Fetonte* and *Il Vologeso* was staged at Schwetzingen (2014) and at Stuttgart (2015) respectively. In 2018, Opera Lafayette premiered a modern performance of *Cerere Placata*, a *festa teatrale* composed by Jommelli in 1772 to celebrate the birth and baptism of Princess Maria Theresa of Naples and Sicily. The Coro e Orchestra Ghislieri, whose core aim is to explore forgotten repertoire of the eighteenth century, recorded Jommelli's *Requiem* in 2019 at the Gustav Mahler Hall in Toblach, Italy. Previous academic conferences include one held in Reggio Calabria (2011) and Queluz (2014). See Bruno Forment, Sergio Morabito, 'Le Stagioni di Jommelli: Covegno Internazionale nel Terzo Centenario della Nascita di Niccolò Jommelli', *Eighteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 285-7; Robert Hugill, 'Intimate and Forward-Looking: Niccolò Jommelli's Requiem from Italian Forces', *Planet Hugill* (17 September 2020), <https://www.planethugill.com/2020/09/intimate-and-forward-looking-niccolo.html> (accessed

last years based correspondence between the composer and the Lisbon court,⁷⁰ however there is still a gap in knowledge when attempting to locate Jommelli's place in the reform movement. After all, unlike Gluck, there is no explicit statement by Jommelli himself that showed he had found the need to initiate or contribute to a reform movement. It is possible to link the stylistic developments and any minute details in Jommelli's works to the circumstances around him that inspired him to modify the elements of *opera seria*.



Figure 3.1: Portrait of Jommelli⁷¹

In the small town of Aversa about 20 kilometres north of Naples, Niccolò Jommelli was born on the 10 September 1714 to Francesco Antonio Jommelli, a linen merchant and his wife Margarita Cristiano. He had three sisters and one brother, Ignazio who became a Dominican monk and assisted Niccolò in his old age. Jommelli received his first music lessons from the cathedral's choir director, Canon Muzzillo, and later continued his musical education at the Conservatorio San Onofrio a Capuana in Naples in 1725 under Ignazio Prota

1/11/2020); 'Niccolò Jommelli's *Cerere Placata*', *Opera Lafayette*, <http://operalafayette.squarespace.com/cerere-placata> (accessed 1/11/2020)

⁷⁰ Marita P. McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years* (1978)

⁷¹ Giuseppe Bonito, *Niccolò Jommelli*, 1764, oil on canvas, Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, Museo Pagliara, Naples

and Francesco Feo. In 1728, he transferred to the Conservatorio di Santa Maria della Pietà dei Turchini, training under Niccolò Fago and two *maestri di canto*, Don Giacomo Sarcuni and Andrea Basso. Beginning in 1730, Jommelli began his first lessons with Francesco Durante and Leonardo Leo, the former having stayed away from writing for the theatre and the latter playing an important role in securing Jommelli's first music appointments. Leo was instrumental in the young composer's education as he had advised Jommelli in both the dramatic and religious styles, moulding him to be adept at composing for the contemporary theatre and church – to which Jommelli claimed that it was indeed from Leo that he managed to learn the sublimity of music.⁷² It is speculated that Jommelli completed his formal training by 1735 or 1736, by which point he had begun work as a singing teacher for Neapolitan nobility. In 1736, Leo attended a performance of Jommelli's cantata at the house of the poet Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola, to whom he remarked that 'it will not be long before this young man becomes the amazement and admiration of the whole of Europe.'⁷³ At the recommendation of Leo, Jommelli was employed by the Marquis del Vasto, Giovanni Battista d'Avalos, under whose protection he composed his first opera, *L'errore amoroso* in 1737. This *buffa* production was Jommelli's first venture into the public theatre, and despite the endorsements of Leo and the Marquis, he took the precaution of using the pseudonym Valentino, and only revealed himself after the opera had been received with critical acclaim.⁷⁴

From Jommelli's background in the conservatories, there is no doubt that his compositional style was inherently Italian, and that this would later play a part in determining the extent to which he managed to introduce foreign elements into Italian *opera seria*. Jommelli's stylistic development is recognised by Burney to have three distinct phases,⁷⁵ and beginning from his education here in Italy, as a pedagogue of his many Neapolitan masters his style would have undoubtedly reflected his Italian roots. The reception of Jommelli's operas in this first stylistic period was generally received warmly by the critics. Jommelli's

⁷² Francesco Florimo, *La scuola musicale di Napoli e I suoi conservatorii: con uno sguardo sulla storia della musica in Italia, Volumi 2* (Stabilimento tip. di V. Morano, 1881), pp. 230-1

⁷³ Saverio Mattei, *Elogio del Jommelli o sia Il progresso della poesia e musica teatrale*, in *Memorie per servire alla vita del Metastasio* (Angiolo M. Martini, e Comp., 1785), p. 75

⁷⁴ Interestingly, in Burney's *General History*, he writes that the first opera to which he found Jommelli's name was '*Ricimero Rè de' Goti*', which is actually Jommelli's second opera; Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 37

⁷⁵ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, Volume 4* (1789), p. 553; See Chapter 1.

first *opera seria*, *Il Ricimero, re de'Goti*, was produced in Rome and premiered on January 16 1740, gaining him the patronage of Cardinal Henry Benedict, Duke of York. After witnessing a performance of *Ricimero*, a French tourist by the name of Charles de Brosses wrote the following on Jommelli, which can be found as a translation by McClymonds:

This young man promises to go far and to equal before long all that was ever done by the great masters. He has strength as well as taste and delicacy; he possesses a basic understanding of harmony, which he displays with astonishing richness.⁷⁶

De Brosses' statement shows us that Jommelli was deemed a great musician and tells us of Jommelli's grasp of harmony. However, we now know what the students in the conservatories studied, and its significance in evaluating a musician in eighteenth-century contexts. McClymond's translation raises questions about misconceptions at this point. If Jommelli's skill 'promises to go far and to equal before long all that was ever done by the great masters,' how could he only possess solely the basic understanding of harmony? De Brosses' praise has been mistranslated – "il possée à fond l'harmonie" in this context meant that Jommelli had understood harmony "to the full" [à fond], to the maximum of his ability.

Even though Jommelli demonstrated a thorough understanding of harmony, his training did not stop in Naples, nor did his occupation desire that he remain in Naples. Jommelli travelled to Bologna in the spring of 1741 for the first performance of *Ezio*, his fifth opera and incidentally the first opera set to a libretto by Metastasio. Whilst in Bologna, it has been suggested that he crossed paths with Padre Martini, a master contrapuntist with whom Jommelli would build a lasting relationship sustained through letters and occasional visits to Bologna during the composer's later years.⁷⁷ The year of Jommelli's initial meeting with Martini is questionable, as there is no source that confirms exactly whether Jommelli had met Martini during this particular visit to Bologna. Additionally, Burney's anecdote of Jommelli requesting pupillage under Martini does not provide a date and only refers to a vague timeline:

⁷⁶ 'Ce jeune homme promet 'aller loin et d'égalier bientôt tout ce qu'il y a jamais eu de grands maîtres. Il n'a pas moins de force que de goût et de délicatesse; il possède à fond l'harmonie, qu'il déploie avec une richesse suprenante.' Charles de Brosses. *Le président de Brosses in Italie: Lettres familières écrites d'Italie en 1739 & 1740*, II (Paris: Représentatives, 1929), pp. 335-6 in Marita McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years* (1978), pp. 2-3

⁷⁷ Howard Brofsky, trans. Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Jommelli e Padre Martini: Aneddoti e Realtà di un Rapporto', *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, 8/1 (Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1973), p. 132

... Jomelli acquired considerable fame by this composition for the church, yet he was so far from being intoxicated by it, that in a visit to Padre Martini, at Bologna, he told this learned contrapuntist that he had a scholar to introduce to him. [...] And a few days after, the good father asking who and where was the disciple he had talked of? Jomelli, answered, *Padre son io* [Father it is I]; and, pulling a *studio* of paper out of his pocket, on which he had been trying his strength in modulation and fugue upon *canto fermo*, begged of him to examine and point out his errors.⁷⁸

Burney's writings refer to what transpired between Jommelli and Martini 'soon after' the former had written several oratorios and pieces for the church, which is chronologically inaccurate if Jommelli had first produced an opera in Bologna. It is likely that Burney's anecdote came from Mattei, who he had met during his travels at Jommelli's recommendation. In his *Elogio del Jommelli* published in 1785, Mattei presents his version of the meeting:

Indeed, the first time [Jommelli] did not make himself known, immediately after he had arrived there, he went to find [Martini], begging him to admit him among his pupils. Martini gave him the subject of a fugue, and seeing it so excellently executed, he said: "Who are you, why are you coming to make fun of me? I want to learn from you." [Jommelli replied,] "I am Jommelli, I am the master, who will write the opera in this theatre, I implore your protection." The strict Contrapuntist replied, "Great fortune for the theatre to have a master like you, philosopher; but it is your great misfortune to lose yourself in the theatre in the midst of a disturbance by ignorant corruptors of music."⁷⁹

Mattei's version contradicts Burney's – in Burney's retelling of the meeting, Jommelli presented Martini with his *canto fermo* and sought advice, which Burney links back to

⁷⁸ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, Volume 4* (1789), p. 552

⁷⁹ 'Chiamato nell'anno stesso (1741) in Bologna scrisse l'Ezio, e non trascurò nel tempo della sua dimora in quella città di frequentare il P. Martini: anzi la prima volta egli senza farsi conoscere, subito che colà era giunto, v'andò a ritrovarlo, pregandolo di ammetterlo fra' suoi scolari. Gli diede il Martini un soggetto di fuga, e nel vederlo eseguito così eccellentemente: "Chi siete voi", gli disse, "che venite a burlavi di me? Vogl'io apprendere da voi". - "Sono Jommelli, sono il maestro, che deggio scrivere l'opera in questo teatro: imploro la vostra protezione". Il Contrappuntista severo, "gran fortuna," rispose, "del teatro di aver un maestro come voi filosofo: ma gran disgrazia la vostra di perdervi nel teatro in mezzo ad una turba d'ignoranti corruttori della musica.' Saverio Mattei, *Elogio del Jommelli* (stampato con *Memorie per servire alla vita del Metastasio*) (Colle, 1785), p. 76

Jommelli wanting to improve on his writing for the church; whilst in Mattei's version Martini is the one who provides Jommelli with the subject, and to which Jommelli answers that he wishes to write for the theatre. One could say that Mattei's version portrays Jommelli in an almost glorified manner, and in fact Gaetano Gaspari had commented that he was surprised by 'the bizzare manner with which Jommelli wanted to make Martini believe that he needed his lessons – but only sensed presumptuousness instead of true will to learn from the monk.'⁸⁰ The legitimacy of the Mattei's story has been contended, since his *Elogio* was published more than ten years after Jommelli's death, and that Jommelli would have had told the story to Mattei almost thirty years after his initial meeting with Martini. However, there is some element of truth to be found in this anecdote. Martini's comment that it is a loss that Jommelli would serve the theatre amidst the disturbances caused by 'ignorant corruptors of music' hints at the monk's perceived deterioration of Italian music at the contemporary theatre. In the context of operatic reform, it seems Martini regarded Jommelli as someone who had the potential to address and correct these abuses, yet Jommelli had chosen to focus his talents on opera instead. In a letter to Girolamo Chiti dated 5 August 1750, Martini complained of young composers who were many in number but ill-prepared for careers in both the theatre and the church, except for Jommelli who above all 'had such a talent for being able to succeed in one and the other.'⁸¹

Jommelli's musical style is said to have been influenced by several composers who were residing in Naples when he was still in education, amongst them was Leo, Vinci and most prominently Hasse. Abert goes as far as to say that Jommelli remained 'ein Schüler Hasse' even during his later years at Stuttgart.⁸² Given the records of Jommelli's early career and life are scarce, Hasse's influence on Jommelli has been attributed to Jommelli's use of the *recitativo accompagnato*, a style that Hasse had incorporated often in his operas. Admittedly, Hasse was not the first composer to use this technique over *recitativo secco* – Vinci had also incorporated orchestral accompaniment for his recitatives, although perhaps to a lesser extent than both Hasse and Jommelli. On the other hand, Hasse and Jommelli have

⁸⁰ Gaetano Gaspari, *Miscellanea II*, col. 437, ms. in Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, UU 12.; in Howard Brofsky, trans. Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Jommelli e Padre Martini: Aneddoti e Realtà di un Rapporto', *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, 8/1 (Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1973), p. 134

⁸¹ Federico Parisini, ed., *Carteggio inedito del P. Giambattista Martini coi più celebr musiciti del suo tempo: Volume Primo* (Bologna, 1888), pp. 332-3

⁸² Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 350

been noted to have understood the significance of using the orchestra to support the overall drama, providing the orchestra with more strength and vigour, ‘estimating that instrumental music should be for poetry what the animated contrast of the lights is for a painting, and what shadows are for figures.’⁸³ Abert goes on to note that this type of accompanied recitative would become widely imitated, normally appearing at the end of an act. In Jommelli’s case, it was a practice that he had begun cultivating at the start of his operatic career, which would explain the frequency of its occurrence in his operas. The accompanied recitative appeared in Jommelli’s *Ricimero*, which de Brosses praises:

[The] recitatives with obbligato accompaniment with the violin; they are, in fact, the most beautiful but they are rare. When they are perfectly treated, [...] one must confess that, for the strength of the declamation, the harmonic variety and the sublime accompaniment, one cannot see or imagine anything more dramatic – well above the best French recitative and the most beautiful Italian arias.⁸⁴

Whether Jommelli had drawn upon Hasse’s works for influence is difficult to verify due to the lack of solid evidence corroborating this conclusion, but the implementation of *accompagnato* scenes by both Hasse and Vinci hint at a growing trend of increasing the use of orchestral devices. Among Jommelli’s innovations is thus the elevation of the role of the orchestra in supporting the recitative by lending it similar treatment to what an aria would receive. Whilst Jommelli’s use of the *recitativo accompagnato* may not have been as extreme as Gluck’s intent to ‘restrict music to its true office of serving poetry’, his use of accompanied recitatives became characteristic of his operas, which by dint of association became a common trait that could be linked to the precepts that Gluck advocated in his preface to *Alceste*. However, this was not the only element of Jommelli’s operas that could be associated with Gluck’s operas, but it is one of the earliest hallmarks of Jommelli’s style that

⁸³ ‘[...] l’orchestra acquisto maggior forza e vigore fra le mani principalmente [...] dell’Hass, e del Jumelli, i quali seppero, non ostante, conservarla senza dar negli eccessi, stimando, che la musica strumentale esser dovesse per la poesia cio che per un disegno ben ideato la vivacita del colorito o il contrasto animato de’ lumi, e delle ombre per le figure.’ Stefano Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano, dalla sua origine fino al presente*, 2nd ed. (Carlo Palese, 1785), p. 256

⁸⁴ ‘[Le] récitatifs avec accompagnement oblige de violon, ce sont même les plus beaux; mais ils sont rares. Quand ils sont parfaitement traités, [...] il faut avouer que, par la force de la declamation et la variété harmonieuse et sublime de l’accompagnement, bien audessus du meilleur récitatif Français et des plus beaux airs italiens.’ Charles de Brosses. *Le president de Brosses in Italie: Lettres familières écrites d’Italie en 1739 & 1740*, II (Paris: Représentatives, 1929), pp. 335-6 in Marita McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years* (1978), pp. 2-3.

shows us that changes were already taking place before Gluck's reform. There is more to be found in Jommelli's Stuttgart operas.

By 1753, Jommelli's works in Italy, Vienna and also Paris had garnered him considerable fame, eventually catching the attention of several foreign sovereigns – the courts of Mannheim, Stuttgart and Lisbon were interested in employing the composer for theatrical activities at court. Carl Eugen, the Duke of Württemberg, had built a new opera house in Stuttgart in 1750 and was seeking to appoint a music director. The duke was no stranger to the opera – having been exposed to both Italian opera and the more spectacular operas of the French, which he managed to witness during a trip to Paris and Versailles in 1748. The Württemberg court had previously been exposed to both Italian and French operas under previous rulers, so the eventual amalgamation of both styles can be seen as an evolutionary trend rather than a forced attempt to create a new kind of opera. Prince Eberhard Ludwig (1676-1733) was educated in French mannerisms and continuously supported French culture at court, ultimately influencing the type of music that the court produced. Owing to the reputation of the Paris Opéra, Eberhard Ludwig was convinced that the staging of Lullian-style overtures and dances would summon the image of power and grandeur as it did for the court of Louis XIV. Although he was relatively uninterested in music, Eberhard Ludwig's artistic administrations reflected his political ambitions, a testament to how absolutists rulers had the authority to influence composition and performance within his sphere of influence.⁸⁵ At the turn of the eighteenth century, the court's musical taste began to turn towards Italy, encouraged by Carl Eugen's father, Carl Alexander who replaced Eberhard as the next duke. Carl Alexander installed an opera company headed by Riccardo Broschi and Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello, but his efforts were short-lived due to the duke's sudden death in 1737. The ducal seat was passed onto Carl Eugen in 1744, who had spent the years prior to his ascension at the highly musically inclined court of Frederick II of Prussia. Upon his return to Stuttgart, Carl Eugen brought with him a handful of musicians and, likely due to his father's influence and his experience with theatrical ventures in Prussia, began to establish and expand the number of musicians at the *Hofkapelle*.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Samantha Owens, 'Censorship of the Goût Moderne in 1730s Ludwigsburg and the Music of Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello', *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 2/2 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 310

⁸⁶ For a thorough history of the musical activities at the Württemberg court, see Samantha Owens, eds. Barbara M. Reul, Janice B. Stockigt, 'The Court of Württemberg-Stuttgart', *Music at German Courts, 1715-1760: Changing Artistic Priorities* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), pp. 165-78

Prior to his appointment at Stuttgart, Jommelli already had the opportunity to produce several operas at the Stuttgart theatre. These operas, commissioned by the duke, foreshadowed the capacity of the resources and creative space that Jommelli would possess to develop his ideas and expand the extent of his creativeness. In the years before leaving for Stuttgart, Jommelli lacked the opportunity to incorporate the use of a choir in his operas, an element common to French operas as opposed to Italian ones. As with most sovereigns, Carl Eugen was not one to shy away from extravagant theatrical displays, and thus he had encouraged the production of a choral opera when he engaged Jommelli, and Jommelli had obliged him without hesitation. The first opera he wrote was the first arrangement of *Fetonte*, performed on the 11 February 1753 based on a libretto by Leopoldo Villati in celebration of the duke's birthday. For this production, Jommelli had included a large choir of "ghosts" at the high points of each act.⁸⁷ In the spring of the same year, the duke paid a visit to Rome where he met Jommelli in person and extended an offer for Jommelli to work in Stuttgart, to which Jommelli accepted over an offer from Mannheim. Further arrangements were made for Jommelli to compose a *festa teatrale* for the birthday of Duchess Friederike on 30 August 1753, for which *La Clemenza di Tito* by Metastasio was chosen. Three choral scenes were included in this production, but unfortunately are unavailable for analysis as the score has since been lost to the ages. The combination of a French chorus and Italian opera was possible in the Duke's presence because the rulers of the non-Italian and non-French households were not compelled to differentiate French and Italian operas as the 'right' kind of opera.⁸⁸ This claim can be linked back to a point drawn in Chapter 1 – that Jommelli was hired to create a performance that the Duke would enjoy.⁸⁹ In that same argument, under the employment of the Duke there was no evidence to suggest that Jommelli's job requirement was to introduce any sort of reform in his operas. Jommelli's progressiveness is therefore directed towards his personal success at the Stuttgart court, and less towards contributing towards the reform movement although his works exhibited the combination of French and Italian elements.

Jommelli's role as *Oberkapellmeister* at Stuttgart and Ludwigsburg is regarded as the pinnacle of his musical career, where he produced the most brilliant and esteemed works

⁸⁷ Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 275

⁸⁸ See Audrey Lyn Tolkoff, *The Stuttgart Operas of Niccolò Jommelli*, Ph.D Dissertation (Yale University, 1974), Abstract

⁸⁹ See Chapter 1, p. 8

under the patronage of the duke. It is during this period in his career where it is possible to experience the progressiveness of Jommelli's operas that challenged the artistic boundaries that had long codified traditional *opera seria*. For Jommelli, the elements that he sought to introduce into his operas was to increase the role of the orchestra, and to aim for a more faithful and dramatic approach in the expression of the text. In his pursuit of dramatic expression, Jommelli aimed towards developing what Abert labelled as the 'dramatische Prinzip'.⁹⁰ Jommelli's dedication towards dramatic expression is disclosed in his letter to his friend and librettist, Gaetano Martinelli, in which he writes:

Be persuaded, therefore, that every effect that you experience, and that you can experience in listening, the composer who writes with soul and mind has experienced it first. I do not know how to [bring myself] to write expressive music if my soul itself is not touched and does not feel it.⁹¹

Jommelli's words are reminiscent of the *empfindsamer Stil* that C. P. E. Bach advocates in his *Essay on the True Art of Keyboard Playing* (1755), where Bach states that 'A musician cannot move others unless he too is moved, [thus] the expression of the piece [can be] more clearly perceived by the audience.'⁹² Though there is no evidence that Jommelli and Bach had met during their lifetime, Carl Eugen had studied with Bach during his time at Frederick the Great's court in Berlin, and could have communicated some of Bach's principles to Jommelli. Even if the duke neglected to mention Bach, Bach was a famous composer in his own right in the German musical sphere. The similarities between Jommelli's statement and Bach's are perhaps a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* that had started to pervade the musical climate of the German states.

Perhaps the work that most strongly resembled the ideas of Gluck and Algarotti was Jommelli's 1768 rewrite of *Fetonte* that premiered at the end of his employment with Carl

⁹⁰ Maurício Dottori, *The Church Music of Davide Perez and Niccolò Jommelli, with Special Emphasis on Funeral Music* (Curitiba: DeArtes – UFPR, 2008), p. 60

⁹¹ 'Persuadetevi perciò, che tutto l'effetto che prova, e può provare ogni ascoltante; lo sente prima, e lo prova il compositore della Musica, che scrive con Anima, e ragione. Io non so, ne possofarmi un'illusione che mi porti a quell grado di passione che mi è necessaria per fare una Musica espressiva; se l'anima, mia da se stessa non n'è tocca, e non la sente.' The transcription and translation of this letter appears in Marita P. McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years*, Ph.D Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1978), pp. 612-3

⁹² Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, ed. trans. William J. Mitchell, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1951), p. 152

Eugen. This time, Jommelli collaborated with the court poet Mattia Verazi, who turned to Quinault's *tragédie en musique* librettos for inspiration. Quinault's *Phaéton* was set for the stage by Lully in 1683 and is based on the mythological subject of Phaeton who was killed while riding his father, Helios' carriage through the sky. *Fetonte* was the antithesis to the Metastasian opera – simplicity and historical figures were exchanged for the combinations of chorus, scenery, dance and the possibility of spectacular stage effects for the supernatural aspect of the plot. Verazi's libretto allowed for the merging of Jommelli's programmatic Sinfonia and the first scene of the opera, blending the orchestral overture and the entrance of the chorus together. Throughout the opera the delineation of acts into scenes of recitative and aria were almost non-existent – the chorus would appear in scenes of recitative as a means of highlighting tension and high points in the drama. McClymonds has drawn the conclusion that French-inspired works such as *Fetonte* were the reason why Jommelli was regarded as part of the circle of opera reformers.⁹³ However, the decision of the choice of text ultimately rested with the Duke and not Jommelli or Verazi. It is likely that the French-libretto had enough leeway for Jommelli to experiment with more innovative ideas that were previously hindered by the limitations of the Metastasian libretto, and hence why by the end of his service at Stuttgart, Jommelli emerged with the experience of having composed with both Italian and French elements in his operas.

The overview of Jommelli's career and style shows his growth as a composer with Neapolitan roots to one who could be versatile in either the French or Italian genres. Although his output at Stuttgart was dictated by his employer, Jommelli has shown that he aspired to develop and achieve a successful dramatic style of his own, which he tried to apply in his works to the best of his ability. In the context of reform, Jommelli likely did not aim to purposely reform any of his operas, but perhaps he was aware of the prevailing trends that existed in the operatic sphere. In the next chapter, a comparison of the developing characteristics of his style will show the ways in which he aimed to enhance the dramatism of his operas.

⁹³ Marita P. McClymonds, *Niccolò Jommelli: The Last Years*, Ph.D Dissertation (University of California, Berkeley, 1978), pp. 31-2

Chapter 4: Case Studies – Excerpts from *Didone Abbandonata*

In this chapter, excerpts from the 1747 and 1763 versions *Didone Abbandonata* will be analysed. The results of the comparison will be used to discuss the ways in which Jommelli's style differs from his compositions in Italy to his Stuttgart compositions.

Over the course of his operatic career, Jommelli set his music to Metastasio's text of *Didone Abbandonata* three times – the first being in Rome in 1747, the second in Vienna in 1749 and the third the revision for Stuttgart in 1763. Jommelli's first setting of *Didone* received attention from Metastasio, who had praised the composer for his setting of the text. Writing on the premier of *Didone* in Vienna, Metastasio praises Jommelli's work in a letter to Princess Anna Francesco Pignatelli di Belmonte:

On the Christmas day of our most August master, my Dido was performed in this theatre, adorned with music that rightly surprised and enchanted both the city and the court. It is full of grace, novelty, harmony and above all expression. Everything speaks, even the violins and basses. I have not so far understood anything in this genre which has persuaded me more. The author is a Neapolitan called [Niccòlo] Jommelli, perhaps known to Your Excellency.⁹⁴

It seems that from Metastasio's comments, Jommelli's music at that point had already been known to already embody an expressive style, enough to 'persuade' the listening Metastasio. If we were to consider Burney's distinction of Jommelli's stylistic periods, the 1747 version of *Didone* would be considered to be written in Jommelli's earliest style. Here we have one of Metastasio's impressions of Jommelli's music, of which he will comment on again almost two decades later. In a letter dated 6 April 1765, Metastasio notes the change in Jommelli's treatment of harmony and orchestration:

I cherished the precious gift of the two masterly arias that you sent me [...] I admired the new and harmonious interweaving of the voice with the instruments. [...] I confess, my dear [Jommelli], that this style impresses me with respect for the

⁹⁴ 'Nel giorno natalizio del nostro augustissimo padrone, ando in iscena in questo teatro la mia Didone, ornata d'una musica, che ha giustamente sorpresa ed incantata e la citta e la corte. E piena di grazia, di fondo di novita, d'armonia e soprattutto d'espressione. Tutto parla, sino a'violini e contrabassi. Io non ho finora in questo genere inteso cosa che m'abbia piu persuaso. L'autore e un napoletano chiamato Nicolo Jommelli forse noto a vostra Eccellenza.' Pietro Metastasio, 'Letter to her Excellency the Princess of Belmonte, 13th December 1749', *Tutte le Opere di Pietro Metastasio*, Volume Unico (Florence: Borghie Compagni, 1832), p. 931

composer; but when it suits you, you have another style which immediately takes hold of my heart without the need for reflection of the mind. When I hear [your arias], I am no longer myself, and I find it agreeable in spite of myself to be gentle with you.⁹⁵

We now have two of Metastasio's impressions of Jommelli's music: the first praises the composer's expressiveness and use of harmony, the second acknowledges that Jommelli is now composing in a different style than previously experienced – with interweaving melodies and abrupt shifts of affects. Based on Metastasio's description, it seems that Jommelli managed to strive towards one of the goals shared by Algarotti and Gluck – that is to successfully evoke affections analogous with the poetry it is accompanying. Although Metastasio's opinions paint a positive picture of Jommelli's compositions, his authority as one of the leading figures in the staging of *opere seria* during this time frame give credibility to his comments. Thus, if Jommelli had managed to convince Metastasio that the changes he had introduced in his operas were viable, it must have been significant enough to draw the poet's endorsement.

A comparison between the earliest version (1747) and the last version (1763) of *Didone* will show the great strides that Jommelli has made in developing his idiom of dramatic expression. A characteristic modification of the latter version of *Didone* is the textual changes that Jommelli introduced to Metastasio's original libretto – these include the addition and deletion of entire scenes, and this treatment is also extended to the arias. It is likely that Jommelli was aided by the court poet Mattia Verazi, whom was in employment with Jommelli since 1755. Abert posits that Jommelli's practice of modifying the text was a privilege he cultivated as a result of his working relationship with Verazi and the Duke, where he could decisively influence and intervene in the composition of the text from the moment of their creation. The poet Christian Schubart called this a 'peculiar need', in the sense that Jommelli being able to take liberties with the text was considered an uncommon

⁹⁵ 'Mi e stato carissimo il prezioso dono delle due arie magistrali che vi e piaciuto inviarmi [...] ne ho ammirato il nuovo ed armonico intreccio della voce con gl'istrumenti [...] Confesso, mio caro Jomella, che questo stile m'imprime rispetto per lo scrittore; ma voi quando vi piace, ne avete un altro che s'impadronisce subito del mio cuore senza bisogno delle riflessioni della mente. Quando io risento [la vostre arie], io non son piu mio, e conviene che a mio dispetto m'intenerisca con voi.' Pietro Metastasio, 'Letter to Mr. Jomella, 6th April 1765', *Tutte le Opere di Pietro Metastasio*, Volume Unico (Florence: Borghie Compagni, 1832) p. 998

occurrence.⁹⁶ One such instance is the scene at the conclusion of the first act of *Didone* (Act 1 Scene 12), where Aeneas seeks out Dido to inform her that he is leaving her. Typical of the conscience-over-heart trope found in Metastasian drama, Aeneas reveals that he is returning to Italy to fulfil his obligations towards his father and the gods, which was a promise he made to reconquest Troy. In the 1747 version, Dido sings the aria “Non ha ragione ingrato” as a solo number, upset at the choice that Aeneas has made. The 1763 version is significantly different from the original: the solo has become a duet between Dido and Aeneas, and the text has been altered to reflect the emotions of both characters.

“Non ha ragione ingrato”⁹⁷

1747

Didone

Non ha ragione ingrato
un core abbandonato
da chi giurogli fé?

Anime innamorate,
se lo provaste mai
ditelo voi per me.

Perfido tu lo sai
se in premio un tradimento
io meritai da te.

E qual sarà tormento,
anime innamorate,
se questo mio non è!

1763

Didone

Indegno
Non ha ragione, ingrato
un core abbandonato
da chi giurogli fé?

Enea

Contra il destin severo
contra il celeste impero
che posso far per te?

Didone

Crudel! Tradirmi... oh dio!

Enea

Deh placati, idol mio

Didone

Lasciami...

⁹⁶ Hermann Abert, *Niccolo Jommelli als Opernkomponist: Mit einer Biographie* (M. Niemeyer, 1908), p. 274

⁹⁷ Translations of both versions of the aria can be found in Appendix 1.

Enea

Cara....

Duetto

Oh affanno!

Se questo è duol tiranno

anime innamorate,

ditelo voi per me

Didone

Tradir sì vivo amore!

Enea

Ah mi si spezza il core!

Senti...

Didone

Che vuoi?

Enea

Pavento...

Duetto

E qual sarà tormento,

anime innamorate,

se questo mio non è?

Example 4.1: “Non ha ragione ingrata”, Act 1 Scene 12 from the 1747 and 1763 versions of

Didone Abbandonata

As shown above, the text from the original only features Dido bemoaning Aeneas’ betrayal, whilst in the third iteration both characters are tormented by the preordained separation.

Jommelli’s involvement of Aeneas in the aria seems to be a compensation for the exclusion of Scene 13, which shows an indecisive Aeneas being torn between love and his duty to his

country ('And meanwhile confused/ in fatal doubt,/ I do not leave, I do not stay').⁹⁸ Admittedly, the decision to not show Aeneas' indecision and instead to portray his devotion to duty ('Against my severe destiny/ against the heavenly empire/ what can I do for you?')⁹⁹ has elevated his persona as a patriotic hero rather than have his persona be defined by being Dido's lover. Rather than choose to show Aeneas brooding over the impending fate of his relationship with Dido, Jommelli's Aeneas attempts to placate her whilst showing that he has no intention to turn his back on his responsibilities for the state. The voices of the duet are written canonically, and only unite during the first appearance of the line 'anime innamorate', highlighting the *affettuoso* nature of the duo.

The image shows a musical score for two vocal parts, Didone and Enea, and their instrumental accompaniment. The score is for bars 19-20 of the aria "Non ha ragioni ingrato" from the opera *Didone Abbandonata* (1763), Act 1, Scene 12. The instrumental parts (Violin I, Violin II, and Viola) are in the upper system, and the vocal parts (Didone, Enea, and Bass) are in the lower system. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics for both vocal parts are "a - nime in - na - mo - ra - te".

Example 4.2: Bars 19-20 of "Non ha ragioni ingrato", *Didone Abbandonata* (1763) Act 1
Scene 12

These are the only two bars in the aria where there is minimal orchestral activity. In other parts of the duet, the orchestra supports the vocal lines by complementing the highly pathetic declamations at certain points, occasionally featuring modulating passages that alternate with the voices to move the music away from its original harmonic centre.

⁹⁸ 'E intanto confuso/ nel dubbio funesto,/ non parto, non resto'

⁹⁹ 'Contra il destin severo/ contra il celeste impero/ che posso far per te?'

Violin I *p f p f*

Violin II

Viola

Didone
Ah la - scia mi cru-del in - gra-to oh

Enea
Ca - ra deh - pla - ca - ti I - dol mi - o

Bass *p f p f f*

Vln. I *p f p f*

Vln. II *p f*

Vla.

Didone
Di - o! ah lar - scia - mi oh

Enea
o - ca - ra o af - fan - no o

Bs. *p f p f*

Example 4.3: Bars 32-36 of “Non ha ragione ingrato”, Didone Abbandonata (1763) Act 1
Scene 12

Jommelli’s rewriting of parts of Metastasio’s original text can be viewed as a move towards taking the morals of the Metastasian librettos a step further. In merging the two characters

together in a duet rather than having two separate scenes for each, the didactic qualities of the dualities of love and duty that Metastasio's texts aim to convey are presented together, in this case placing both Dido and Aeneas as two main figures of the opera rather than solely focusing on Dido as in the previous versions. Jommelli is striving to go beyond the poet – he shifts the dramatic emphases of the characters to drive the development of the plot and seeks to achieve his aim by placing the music in the foreground as a means of expression. The polyphonic writing of the whole ensemble also shows how the orchestra has been given a much bigger role in supporting the expressiveness of the drama, which is a treatment that Jommelli extends to a few scenes of recitative, making it an early hallmark of his style.

Jommelli's *recitativo accompagnato* shows how he has expanded and elevated the role of the orchestra. Using the orchestra as a medium for dramatic expression, lines of recitative are interpolated with instrumental *passagi* in these *accompagnato* scenes to bring out an underlying affect of the text. It seems that Jommelli had another reason for writing these exciting *passagi* for the instrumentalist – he was convinced that in order to cultivate a good orchestra, the players need to have something to engage with, otherwise simple accompaniments would result in complacent players.¹⁰⁰ Given that he was equipped with one of the best orchestras in Europe at the time, he had an opportunity to develop the orchestra to its fullest potential; he had good players at his disposal and he was willing to make full use of their abilities. The accompanied recitatives are exemplary in showing how Jommelli furnishes the delivery of recitative with an additional layer of complexity to produce a higher dramatic effect, seeing as how *seria* traditions prior to this were split strictly into scenes of *recitativo secco* and arias. We will consider the *accompagnato* scene of the 1763 version that precedes the aforementioned duet, where Aeneas prepares to tell Dido that he has plans to leave her. In the 1747 version, the same lines of blank verse are presented as *secco* recitative and is unaccompanied. The scene will be analysed using topic theory since a majority of the orchestral entries have been observed to display some topical function, showing how Jommelli used expressive devices to enliven the text with as many programmatic elements as needed.

¹⁰⁰ Christian Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (Wien: Degan, 1806) in Marita P. McClymonds, *Niccolo Jommelli: The Last Years* (1978), p. 25

Andantino

Violin I *f* *p*

Violin II

Viola

Didone

Enea

Bass *f* *p*

E-nea sal-vo già se-i dal-la cru-del fe-

ri-ta. Per me ser-ban gli dei si bel-la vi ta.

Oh dio, re-gi-na!

5

p *f* *p* *f*

p *p* *f* *f*

Example 4.4: Bars 1-9 of the accompagnato, *Didone Abbandonata* (1763) Act 1 Scene 12.

The lively opening resembles the *gigue* dance. The melody consists of irregular phrases, and the instruments enter in a canonical fashion with a contrapuntal texture. Dido enters (bar 3), reciting that she is happy Aeneas has healed from his injuries and thanks the Gods that he is hers to have. The cheerful character of the opening music and Dido's happiness convey that all is well – she is unaware of what Aeneas is about to tell her. After her sentiments, the opening gesture is repeated again, but interrupted before it can continue into its second phrase with a discordant chord (bar 8). The interruption foreshadows the shocking news that Dido is about to hear.

As Aeneas explains to Dido that he has a duty to his homeland that needed to be fulfilled, the passage is a clear allusion to the *ombraszenen* that Jommelli often included in his operas that dealt with supernatural themes. *Ombra* as a topic, as defined by McClelland, was used to represent the supernatural in opera and afforded the opportunity for a special style of musical language – when stage effects were unavailable, it was necessary for the music to be able to convey the subject matter.¹⁰¹ McClelland also stresses that *ombra* was a highly stylised topic, concurring that several characteristics of the style needed to appear together simultaneously for the topic to be viable, and that having only a single feature in isolation would not constitute an *ombra* reference since the dramatic effect is considerably lessened.

¹⁰¹ McClelland also claims that Abert was the first to use the term “*ombra*” when referring to the ghost scenes in Jommelli's operas. See Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 1; Clive McClelland, ed. Danuta Mirka, ‘*Ombra and Tempesta*’, *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 280, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199841578.013.0011 (accessed 28/1/2021)

Violin I *p* *f*

Violin II

Viola

Didone

Enea
Di Gio-ve il cenno l'om-bra del ge-ni-tor, la patria, il cie-lo, la pro-mes-sa, il dover, l'o-nor, la fa-ma

Bass *p* *f*

Vln. I *p* *f* *p* *p*

Vln. II

Vla.

Didone *E così*

Enea
al-le spon-de d'I-ta-lia og-gi mi chia-ma. La mia lun-ga di-mo-ra pur-trop-po de-gli dei mos se lo sde-gno.

Bs. *p* *f* *p* *p*

Example 4.5: Bars 20-27 of the accompagnato, Didone Abbandonata (1763) Act 1 Scene 12

The excerpt above, although no otherworldly presence or environment is present, is an allusion to the supernatural through the divine order Aeneas has been given by Jupiter (bar 20). Going by the *ombra* criteria set by McClelland, the sombre passage is set in a flat key (in this case, the key of E \flat major), there are diminished sevenths (bars 20-23, 26), the recitative is exclamatory, the bass moves in chromatically stepwise (bars 22-23), there is motivic repetition in the recitative (falling thirds in bars 22-23), and the passage is syncopated. Overall, the *ombra* effect is especially felt in bars 22 and 23, where Aeneas recalls the list of things that await him on the shores of Italy (“of the parent, the homeland, the sky,/ the promise, the duty, the honor, the fame”), and the agitated and syncopated accompaniment in the strings ascend against the motif of falling thirds in the recitative. Jommelli’s use of the melodic and harmonic devices to represent the topic of *ombra* references the non-diegetic elements of Aeneas’ previous promise to his country and the allusion to a divine being shows how he makes use of musical language to emphasise the severity of his situation.

Also common in this scene is the lament. The lament topic appears at various parts throughout the scene, characterised by a stepwise descending bassline. William Caplin has suggested that the lament topic bears a special relationship to Gjerdingen’s harmonic schemata theory because while most schema are defined by a set of predetermined melodic and bass patterns, the lament is solely defined by its bass line; the upper melody is not bound to any conventional pattern and the schema in the bass is the defining feature of this topic.¹⁰²

¹⁰² William Caplin, ed. Danuta Mirka, ‘Topics and Formal Functions: The Case of the Lament’, *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, Oxford Handbooks Online (Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 416, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199841578.013.0016 (accessed 28/1/2021)

The image shows a musical score for the accompaniment of Didone Abbandonata. It features six staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Soprano, Tenor, and Bass. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto' for the first two bars and 'Larghetto' for the remaining three. The Soprano part includes the lyrics: 'sa-va co-me lun-ge da me vol-gere il pie-de! A chi, mi-se-ra me! da-rò più fe-de?'. The Bass part has a dynamic marking 'p'.

Example 4.6: Bars 34-38 of the accompagnato, *Didone Abbandonata* (1763) Act 1 Scene 12

In the example above, Dido has just realised that Aeneas was keeping his secret from her out of pity, and she berates herself for believing that she was going to follow Aeneas (bars 34-35). Suddenly the music abruptly shifts into *larghetto*, and the orchestra begins a series of descending melodic phrases, a pattern that is also mirrored in the base which spans the lines “A chi, misera me! darò più fede?” (“To whom, wretched me, shall I give my faith to?”) The lament schema is not initiated until bar 36 – it begins in the bass with a G that moves towards the D, and above it a pathetic delivery of Dido’s “misera me!” that is consecutively echoed by the violins. Since the passage is set in G minor, the descent of the lament bass shows a movement from the tonic to the dominant, spanning a perfect fourth which is a pattern that has been associated with a genre of expressive vocal music during the seventeenth century that contained mournful texts.¹⁰³ Interestingly, the lament bass only appears in conjunction with Dido’s lines. Whilst Aeneas’ also has his moments of despair, the bass lines under his recitative are never set to the descending tonic-dominant sequence of Dido’s texts, and that his texts possess a regretful tone rather than a mournful one.

From the results of the analyses above, Jommelli’s use of the orchestra as an expressive device to convey the various affects of the text fulfils an aspect of the main reform

¹⁰³ Ibid. 418

criteria of Algarotti and Gluck's reform principles – to have music aid in expressing the text. Abbé Georg Vogler spoke of Jommelli's music stating that '[Jommelli] spoke without words, and had the instruments declaim when the poet was silent.' Vogler's comment hints at the degree of progressiveness of Jommelli's handling of the orchestra, allowing the instruments to tell the story even if there was no text accompanying the music – Jommelli gave the orchestra a "voice" so to speak, that possessed a dramaturgical function in its own right. If we consider Vogler's comment and compare it to Algarotti and Gluck's manifestos, Vogler is stating that Jommelli has given the orchestra an equal standing as the poetry it is meant to represent; Algarotti and Gluck however have instructed that "the poet should resume the reins of power" and that "music [should be restricted to] its true function of helping poetry", implying that in the hierarchy of dramatical constituents the text comes first and that the music should function as a supportive element. To some extent, Jommelli did achieve the aim of having the music express the text, but he did not delegate the music to a supporting role in his operas.

Next, we will compare an excerpt of an aria from both the 1747 and 1763 versions of *Didone* to discern the methods in which Jommelli developed his melodic idiom for the voice, in search of the "new and harmonious style" that Metastasio had praised at the start of this chapter. But first, what did this "new and harmonious style" entail? In an entry for the *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, Ernst Ludwig Gerber writes of Jommelli that 'what is unique to him is that he often takes pains to trick and mislead the ear through strange and unusual harmonic progressions.'¹⁰⁴ In a supplement to Gerber's writings, Johann Reichardt's observation of Jommelli's late style offers a more vivid description:

[Jommelli] sought much more in his later works to give a learned air through striking and repeated evasions, often without rhyme or reason, [...] No one feels that better than the singer who is able to sing a melody comfortably, perfectly and assuredly without the accompaniment, whereas he can no longer do it when the unnatural dense, senseless harmony arrives. [...] Everything is momentary; for a single instant, one can hear the loveliest [music]; whereupon a violent unexpected chord destroys the entire beautiful impression.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ernst Ludwig Gerber, *Historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig: 1790), col. 695; in Audrey Lyn Tolkoff, p. 71

¹⁰⁵ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, 'Fortsetzung der Berichtigungen und Zusätze zum Gerberschen Lexikon der Tonkünstler, etc.', *Musikalische Monathsschrift* (October 1792), pp. 94-5; in *Ibid.* 72

Both Gerber and Reichardt's writings, although critical of Jommelli, once again resemble the writings on the C. P. E. Bach's *empfindsamer Stil*. Bach dedicated a set of keyboard sonatas to the Carl Eugen – the series known as the Württemberg Sonatas (1744) was the embodiment of Bach's *Empfindsamkeit*, featuring many hallmarks of his developed style. While it might be far-fetched to say that Bach had influenced Jommelli through the probable study of these sonatas during Jommelli's employment at Stuttgart, the notion that a certain degree of influence of *Empfindsamkeit* had starting pervading musical thought in Germany is possible, and that some traits of this style had made its way into Jommelli's musical language. David Schulenberg, a Bach scholar, provides an overview of Bach's *empfindsamer Stil*, which is comparable to Gerber and Reichardt's observations on Jommelli's music:

[These works] achieve intense expression through a combination of shock, surprise, and general confounding of present-day stylistic expectations for music of the period. The “shock” might be something as simple as a modest chromatic modulation or a fermata on a dissonant chord [...] Bach's innovation in these pieces was not the mere use of discontinuous or “nonconstant” music, which had been customary [in recitative]. What was striking was to incorporate such music into sonatas and other compositions that usually employed more homogenous writing, and to do so repeatedly.¹⁰⁶

What we can infer from these two composers is that the direct or indirect flow of musical ideas in a single music sphere may have had the potential to influence cross-genre innovations. That Jommelli was not the only one who was changing the conventions of the harmonic language of his time also contributes towards the main argument of this thesis – that the reform was a gradual process unfolding across Europe, and it did not begin with a single individual.

We now have an idea of the type of character Jommelli's music possessed in his later operas, but how exactly did Jommelli's musical language evolve from his earlier works compared to his later ones? The examples below are from Aeneas' aria “Quando saprai chi sono”, in a scene where Jarba demands to know Aeneas' name after inadvertently encountering the latter without knowing his true identity. Aeneas scoffs at the audacity of

¹⁰⁶ David Schulenberg, *The Music of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2014), p. 8

Jarba's questioning, and warns him that should he truly know who Aeneas is, he would not resolve to such behaviour:

Quando saprai chi sono,	When you know who I am,
sì fiero non sarai	You will not be proud
né parlerai così.	You would not speak like that.

The lyrics above correspond to the A section of the aria, which are the excerpts from the two versions of "Quando saprai" to be analysed using both Gjerdingen's schemata theory and Baragwanath's *solfeggio* principles.¹⁰⁷ For both examples, the top stave is the vocal melody of the aria, the middle stave represents the underlying *solfeggio* pattern of the vocal melody, and the third stave is the bass line.

¹⁰⁷ This methodology is discussed in Chapter 1.

Musical score for the first system (bars 1-7). The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of three staves: vocal line, piano accompaniment, and basso continuo. The lyrics are: "Quan - do sa - prai_ quan-do sa-pra-i chi so-no si fie-ro non sa rai_ nò si fie-ro non sa". The piano part includes a "PAC" (Piano Accompaniment) marking above the staff.

Musical score for the second system (bars 8-13). The score continues with three staves. The lyrics are: "rai_ né par - le - rai co - si no non sa rai si fie_ ro nò non par - le". The piano part includes a "Prinner" marking above the staff and two "PAC" markings above the staff.

Musical score for the third system (bars 14-18). The score continues with three staves. The lyrics are: "ra_ i no par-le rai co - si non par-le rai co - si". The piano part includes a "cadenza finta" marking above the staff and a "PAC" marking above the staff.

Example 4.7: Bars 1-18 of "Quando saprai chi sono", *Didone Abbandonata* (1747), Act 1
Scene 9

At a glance, this aria evidently possesses the qualities of the Metastasian aesthetic – the structure and melodic line is simple, each 4-bar phrase of text is clearly separated from the next by a cadence, and *coloratura* occurs at the concluding section of the vocal melody. The extracted *solfeggio* pattern shows us that the melody rarely strays from one hexachord to another, with the forward and backslash signs denoting a change either moving up or down a hexachord. The *obbligato* embellishment written in is short, and the *cadenza finta* on the *fermata* in the penultimate bar is the only irregularity in the passage. Nothing is fleeting, incomplete or senseless – Jommelli has made sure to finish each of his phrase with a perfect cadence. This was an aria that was typical of traditional Metastasian *opera seria*.

Quan - do sa - prai chi so____no si fie__ro non sa - ra - i nò si fie____ro_

Fa/do

fa do la sol fa mi fa sol fa re do re do /fa la sol do sol \la sol

HC HC

7 non____sa - ra - i no par - le - ra_____i co -

Prinner

fa sol mi fa (do) la sol fa mi sol fa mi fa mi

Passo indietro

13 si nò non sa - rai__si__fie__ro nò non par - le - ra_____

re sol sol /re fa \mi sol re re mi fa mi sol

HC

18

i co -

Quiescenza

sol \fa

22

si co-si non par_ le__ ra - i nò non par-le_rai co - si non par - le - rai non par-le_rai co -

(incomplete)

mi \mi \fa mi \fa mi la fa re do re \fa mi \la sol fa do re

IAC

27

si non par - le - ra

Grand cadence

fa mi \la sol mi fa

29

i co - si

mi la sol sol do

PAC

Example 4.8: Bars 1-31 of “Quando saprai chi sono”, Didone Abbandonata (1763) Act 1
Scene 10

Compared to the previous example, it is plain to see that the updated version of the aria is much longer and features more melodic invention on Jommelli’s part. Additionally, the phrases are irregular, the only perfect cadence occurs right at the end of the section, there are multiple instances of word repetition and *coloratura*, and there is frequent usage of chromaticism. These are the list of substantial differences between the 1747 version of the aria, showing a clear deviation from the standard form that was previously used.

Next, *solfeggio* principles and schema theory will be used to analyse the vocal section to locate any points of interest or idiosyncrasies that Jommelli has written into the music.¹⁰⁸ Jommelli uses rhetorical pauses to punctuate the phrases and deny their resolution, which he manages to delay until the final bar of the section (bar 31). For instance, the *fa/do* opening gambit is typical of an opening phrase in eighteenth-century music. There is a sense of security that the melody is developing as expected – which turns out to be false because Jommelli abruptly cuts off the phrase by ending with a *mi-fa-sol* (bar 2-3), which is a pattern used for continuation rather than resolution. In the next phrase, he ends with a brief pause,

¹⁰⁸ *Solfeggio* and schemata are methods used to define and identify melodic and harmonic patterns in *galant* music, hence are especially useful for the analysis of eighteenth-century works. See Chapter 1 for the outline of the methodology. The theories and identities of the patterns are taken from the research of Nicholas Baragwanath, *The Solfeggio Tradition: A Forgotten Art of Melody in the Long Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007)

and with the HC-*re* on the word “nò” (bar 5), it is as though he has changed his mind on the direction that the melody should move in. He starts again: the *solfeggio* pattern *la-sol-fa* from bar 2 appears to start again, but it is interrupted by a *passo indietro* (*sol-mi-fa*) – Jommelli has taken “a step back” (bar 7-8). He then starts with a Prinner (*la-sol-fa-mi*) and expands the schema by embellishing the melody, but he ends the phrase on another half cadence (bar 13). Gerber was accurate in his description of Jommelli – in the first 13 bars of the opening, Jommelli has indeed “taken pains” to mislead the listener through methods of surprise and disruption. By manipulating the syntax of the melodic constituents, Jommelli defeats the listener’s expectations over and over again, repeatedly denying any form of resolution. He does this towards the end of the section as well. In bar 21, after a lengthy *coloratura* that moves through a series of dominant sevenths, Jommelli frames the end of the passage with a Quiescenza schema. The Quiescenza is defined by the pattern *fa-mi/mi-fa* in *solfeggio*, which denotes a descending semitone that is answered by an ascending semitone, and this pattern is usually played twice in succession. Here, Jommelli completes the first iteration of the Quiescenza; he moves on to the second iteration, but the second half of the schema is a *fa-mi* on the lower hexachord (denoted with a \ in bar 23). The Quiescenza schema has been broken, and as if Jommelli has realised his mistake, he inserts another “nò”, and moves the melody back onto the previous hexachord. Finally, he ends the section with a grand cadence (*fa\la-sol-sol-do*), and the A section of the aria concludes with a gratifying PAC. Based on this analysis, was this not the ‘striking and repeated evasions, often without rhyme or reason’ that Reichardt spoke of in his description of Jommelli’s music?

The results of the analyses above confirm that Jommelli’s compositional style during his middle-to-late period was different from his earlier works, however his changing style was developed with the intention to intensify the dramatism of his operas. The use of programmatic elements and the added orchestral accompaniment in the recitative served to complement and uplift the plot. Additionally, we also see how Jommelli manipulates harmonic and melodic syntax to introduce contrast and diversify the harmonies of the music. However, his style was still inherently Italian – the appearance of *galant* schema in his music confirms this. Thus, Jommelli’s stylistic development was indicative of his aspirations to compose for the dramatic stage, but there is no radical shift towards the championing of either the French or Italian genre over the other.

Conclusion

This thesis started out by questioning Gluck's legitimacy as an opera reformer in his conquest to create a 'new trail' for future composers to follow, to revitalise Italian opera by reforming it along the lines of codified ideals. It can be argued then, that there were not really any other impactful advocates of reform opera after Gluck because the ideals of the reform strain of opera were already in circulation in the operatic industry. The 'abuses' of Italian opera were not Gluck's to discover and rectify alone, since the growing influence of the public sphere made these disagreeable traits of traditional opera seria the topic of conversation. Literary debates such as the *Querelle des Bouffons* although engineered for the sake of encouraging the flow of polemical dialogue also served to highlight the merits and flaws of both French and Italian operas. However, because of the publicity that Gluck's operas received as a result of his published preface and the subsequent Gluck-Piccini dispute, other composers who were incorporating reform elements into their operas were marginalised in the operatic history of the eighteenth-century.

To conclude, operatic reform did not occur as an organised, single, cataclysmic event. The reform came about as a result of the changing ideologies of the Enlightenment, alongside the role of the *philosophes* and the advent of the press in spreading ideas. Algarotti's *Saggio* was written as a collection of his observations at the opera over the years, and the popularity of his principles was further boosted by his reputation as a renowned writer. To reiterate a point in Chapter 2, the reform movement should be seen as part of a long process that was affected by the paradigmatic shifts in intellectual and philosophical developments that came with the Enlightenment.

The outcomes of the study of Jommelli's career show that change in *opera seria* during the mid-eighteenth century was not always done with the reform in mind. When he was dealing with stage performances, he aimed to introduce as many dramatic elements as possible to uplift the plot, thereby giving the music a kind of psychological complexity that was hardly seen in earlier works of the period. The analysis of Jommelli's music show that his style was inherently Italian – that he nurtured and developed this style to achieve more success with dramatic expression. Whether or not Jommelli could be considered as having contributed to the reform movement is still up for debate, since his stylistic decisions could have been made in response to the general trends that prevailed at the time. Nonetheless, it should be clear that the reform of opera during the mid-eighteenth century was influenced by a multitude of factors involving an evolutionary process that spanned several decades.

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Scores

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Didone Abbandonata (1763), Stuttgart, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (D-B): [Mus.ms.11246](#)

Libretto

Metastasio, P., eds. D’Ovidio, A., Mattei, L., ‘*Didone Abbandonata*’,

<http://www.variantiallopera.it/public/titoli/titolo/titolo/DIDONE> (accessed 30/8/2020)

Discography

Jommelli, N., ‘*Didone Abbandonata* [Opera] (3rd version)’, *Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra*, *Frieder Bernius* (conductor) (Orfeo, 1995)

Images

Bonito, G., *Niccolò Jommelli*, 1764, oil on canvas, Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa, Museo Pagliara, Naples

Liotard, J., *Portrait of Francesco Algarotti*, 1745, pastel on parchment, from *Friederisiko. Friedrich der Große. Die Ausstellung*, ed. Generaldirektion der Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, (Munich: Hirmer, 2012), p. 339

Appendix I: Translations

Metastasio's letter to Algarotti

Original:

Al signor conte Algarotti

Venezia

Una vostra lettera, un vostro libro e le felici notizie del vostro presente stato, delle quali io era avidissimo, son benefizii, de'quali rimarro sempre debitore al nostro signor Paona, a cui per isfogo di gratitudine ho offerto quanto io vaglio, augurandogli la difficile scoperta di trovarmi pur utile a qualche cosa.

Ho letto il vostro Saggio; vi ci ho trovato dentro, e l'ho tornato a leggere, per essere di nuovo con esso voi, da cui non vorrei mai separarmi. Io che mi risento piu d'ogni altro degli abusi del nostro teatro di musica, piu d'ogni altro vi son tenuto del coraggio, col quale ne intraprendete la cura. Ma, amico soavissimo, la provincia e assai dura. Queste parti delle'opera, che non abbisognano che d'occhi e d'orecchi negli spettatori per farne proseliti, raccorran sempre maggior numero di voti che le altre, delle quali non puo misurare il merito che l'intelligenza e il raziocinio. Tutti vedono, tutti odono, ma non tutti intendono, e non tutti ragionano. E vero che quando le prime e le seconde parti conjurant amice, anche lo spettatore grossolano sente senza intendere un maggior piacere: ma e vero altresì che la difficolta e la rarita di tale accordo obbliga, per cosi dire, i teatri da guadagno a fidarsi piu di quelle arti, delle quali son giudici tutti, e queste poi, sciolte da'ceppi d'ogni relazione e convenienza, ostentano in piena liberta senza cura di luogo o di tempo tutte le loro meraviglie, e seducono il popolo col piacere che prestano dal desiderio del maggiore, di cui lo defraudano. Ma questa lettera diverrebbe facilmente una cicalata, per poco ch;io secondassi la mia propensione ec.

Vienna 9 febbraio 1756

Translation:

To Count Algarotti

Venice

A letter from you, one of your books and the happy news of your present state, of which I was most eager, are benefices, for which I shall always remain indebted to our Signor Paona, to whom I have offered what I see as an expression of gratitude, wishing him the difficult discovery of finding me useful in some way.

I have read your essay; I found myself in it, and I have gone back to read it, so as to be with you again, from whom I would never want to be separated. I, who resent the abuses of our musical theatre more than anyone else, am more than anyone else indebted to you for the courage with which you undertake its care. But, my dearest friend, the province is very hard. These parts of the opera, which need only the eyes and ears of the spectators to proselytise them, will always gather more votes than the others, whose merit can only be measured by intelligence and reasoning. All see, all hear, but not all understand, and not all reason. It is true that when the first and second parts conjure up love, even the gross spectator feels a greater pleasure without understanding: But it is also true that the difficulty and rarity of such an agreement obliges the theatres of profit to trust more to those arts, of which all are judges, and these then, freed from the shackles of every relation and convenience, flaunt all their marvels in complete freedom without care of place or time, and seduce the people with the pleasure they give from the desire of the greatest, of which they defraud him. But this letter would easily become a chatterbox, as little as I would second my inclination and so on.

Vienna 9th February 1756

Metastasio to Princess di Belmonte

Original:

A sua Eccellenza la signora principessa di Belmonte

Napoli

[...] Nel giorno natalizio del nostro augustissimo padrone, ando in iscena in questo teatro la mia Didone, ornata d'una musica, che ha giustamente sorpresa ed incantata e la città e la corte. E piena di grazia, di fondo di novità, d'armonia e soprattutto d'espressione. Tutto parla, sino a violini e contrabassi. Io non ho finora in questo genere inteso cosa che m'abbia più persuaso. L'autore è un napoletano chiamato Nicolo Jommelli forse noto a vostra Eccellenza. La Tesi è ringiovenita di vent'anni; Enea è divenuto attore, *quantum Caffarelliana fragilitas patitur*. La Mattei rende considerabile la piccola parte di Selene; ed un Tedesco nominato Raff, eccellentissimo cantore, ma freddissimo rappresentate nel carattere di Jarba, ha cambiato a suo vantaggio natura con maraviglia universale. In somma quest'opera si risente tuttavia dei fausti auspicii di vostra Eccellenza, sotto de'quali è nata. [...]

Vienna 13 dicembre 1749

Translation:

To her Excellency the Princess of Belmonte

Naples

[...] On the Christmas day of our most August master, my Dido was performed in this theatre, adorned with music that rightly surprised and enchanted both the city and the court. It is full of grace, novelty, harmony and above all expression. Everything speaks, even the violins and basses. I have not so far understood anything in this genre which has persuaded me more. The author is a Neapolitan called [Niccòlo] Jommelli, perhaps known to Your Excellency. La Tesi has become twenty years younger; Aeneas has become an actor, *quantum Caffarelliana fragilitas patitur*. La Mattei makes the small part of Selene remarkable; and a German called Raff, a most excellent singer, but a very cold representative of Jarba's character, has changed his nature to his advantage, to the universal amazement of all. In short, this work is still affected by the favourable wishes of Your Excellency, under which it was born. [...]

Vienna 13th December 1749

Metastasio's letter to Jommelli

Original:

Al signor Jomella

Luisbourg

[...] Mi e stato carissimo il prezioso dono delle due arie magistrali che vi e piaciuto inviarmi. E per quanto si stende la mia limitata perizia musicale, ne ho ammirato il nuovo ed armonico intreccio della voce con gl'istrumenti. L'eleganza di questi, non meno che delle circolazioni, e quella non comune integrita del tutto insieme, le rende degne di voi. Confesso, mio caro Jomella, che questo stile m'imprime rispetto per lo scrittore; ma voi quando vi piace, ne avete un altro che s'impadronisce subito del mio cuore senza bisogno delle riflessioni della mente. Quando io risento dopo due mila volte la vostra aria Non so trovar l'errore, o quella, Quando sara quel di, ed infinite altre che non ho presenti, e sono anche piu seduttrici di queste, io non son piu mio, e conviene che a mio dispetto m'intenerisca con voi.

Ah non abbandonate, mio cara Jomella, una facolta, nella quale non avete e non avrete rivali! Nelle aria magistrali potra qualcuno venirvi appresso con l'indefessa e faticosa applicazione; ma per trovar le vie del cuore altrui, bisogna averlo formato di fibra cosi delicata e sensitiva, come voi l'avete, a distinzione di quanti hanno scritto note finora. [...]

Vienna 6 aprile 1765

Translation:

To Mr Jommelli

Ludwigsburg

[...] I cherished the precious gift of the two masterly arias that you sent me. And as far as my limited musical expertise extends, I admired the new and harmonious interweaving of the voice with the instruments. The elegance of these, no less than of the circulations, and that uncommon integrity of the whole, makes them worthy of you. I confess, my dear [Jommelli], that this style impresses me with respect for the composer; but when it suits you, you have another style which immediately takes hold of my heart without the need for reflection of the mind. When I hear again, after two thousand times, your aria 'Non so trovar l'errore,' or that one, 'Quando sara quel di,' and infinite others that I do not have in mind, and which are even

more seductive than these, I am no longer myself, and I find it agreeable in spite of myself to be gentle with you.

Ah do not abandon, my dear Jomella, a faculty in which you have and will have no rival! In the magisterial airs, someone may come after you with indefatigable and laborious application; but in order to find the ways of the heart of others, it is necessary to have formed it of such a delicate and sensitive fibre, as you have, in distinction to those who have written only notes up to now. [...]

Vienna 6th April 1765

“Non ha ragione ingrato” – *Didone Abbandonata* (1747)

Didone	Dido
Non ha ragione ingrato un core abbandonato da chi giurogli fé?	This isn't right, Ungrateful An abandoned/forsaken heart By whom do you swear your faith?
Anime innamorate, se lo provaste mai ditelo voi per me.	Souls in love If you ever try it You say it for me
Perfido tu lo sai se in premio un tradimento io meritai da te.	You know it is treacherous If betrayal is a reward I deserve from you
E qual sarà tormento, anime innamorate, se questo mio non è!	And what torment it will be Souls in love If this is not mine

“Non ha ragione ingrato” – Didone Abbandonata (1763)

<p>Didone Indegno Non ha ragione, ingrato un core abbandonato da chi giurogli fé?</p>	<p>Dido Unworthy This isn't right, Ungrateful An abandoned/forsaken heart By whom do you swear your faith?</p>
<p>Enea Contra il destin severo contra il celeste impero che posso far per te?</p>	<p>Aeneas Against the severe destiny Against the heavenly/celestial empire What can I do for you?</p>
<p>Didone Crudel! Tradirmi... oh dio!</p>	<p>Dido Cruel! Betray me... oh God!</p>
<p>Enea Deh placati, idol mio</p>	<p>Aeneas Calm down, my idol</p>
<p>Didone Lasciami...</p>	<p>Didone Leave me...</p>
<p>Enea Cara....</p>	<p>Aeneas Dear...</p>
<p>Duetto Oh affanno! Se questo è duol tiranno anime innamorate, ditelo voi per me</p>	<p>Both Oh distress/toil! If this is tyrannical grief Souls in love You say it for me</p>
<p>Didone Tradir sì vivo amore!</p>	<p>Didone To betray such a living love</p>

Enea

Ah mi si spezza il core!

Senti...

Didone

Che vuoi?

Enea

Pavento...

Duetto

E qual sarà tormento,

anime innamorate,

se questo mio non è?

Aeneas

Ah my heart breaks!

Listen...

Didone

What do you want?

Aeneas

I fear...

Both

And what torment it will be

Souls in love

If this is not mine

Appendix II: Diagram depicting Algarotti's travels

