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Haydn's „Orfeo" plannes and realized: Diva-driven revivals by Callas, Sutherland, and Bartoli

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Haydn's "Orfeo" planned and realized: Diva-driven revivals by Callas, Sutherland, and Bartoli[1]

> "The new opera libretto which I am to compose is entitled Orfeo, in 5 acts, but I shall not receive it for a few days. It is supposed to be entirely different from that of Gluck[2]"

So wrote Joseph Haydn to Prince Anton Esterházy a few days after arriving in England in January 1791. Unfortunately, Haydn's Orpheus-themed opera never reached the stage in London that spring, nor in Haydn's lifetime, languishing in obscurity for 160 years. How an Orpheus opera by Europe's leading composer could reach such a fate has typically been explained by political rivalries between London's Haymarket Theatre, the traditional venue for opera performance in the capital, and the rival opera house, the Pantheon, which – unusually, and contrary to tradition – held the license to produce opera that season.

Composed in England under the shadow of the French Revolution, Haydn's Orpheus opera, whose original title was "L'anima del filosofo" (The soul/mind of the philosopher), Hob.XXIII:13, resonates with late-eighteenth-century socio-cultural and political events in uncanny ways. Unlike Haydn's other Italian operas, this one was conceived not for a private court theatre, but for a brand-new opera house, the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London – then the largest in the world – and run by a set of businessmen used to dealing in the cut-throat theatrical world of Europe's grandest metropolis. Conceived on a grand scale, "L'anima del filosofo" mirrors the French tragédie lyrique in many ways. It features many French (Gluckian) elements, including a 5-act structure based on Greek myth, much scenic spectacle, a cataclysmic storm, numerous choruses, and several large-scale scenic tableaux for possible dance sequences and ballet d'action. The ten choruses, many of which are repeated in whole or in part, also lend themselves to balletic representation. Non-Gluckian ele-

[1] My sincere thanks to Walter Reicher and Wolfgang Fuhrmann for the invitation to speak in 2015 at the conference "Joseph Haydn – Aufführungspraxis und Interpretationsforschung – zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Joseph Haydns Werken" in Eisenstadt, and to Emanuele Senici and Marco Stacco for their research assistance in Rome and Florence.

[2] Joseph Haydn letter to Prince Anton Esterházy, London, 8 January 1791, cit. after Landon III, p. 38.

ments and anti-reform aesthetic ideals also abound; these include extensive vocal coloratura for three of the main characters, a distraught hero who displays excessive passion, and no lieto fine[3]. All of these features, French and Italianate alike, suggest that the theatre managers crafted the opera for troubled times while seeking to show off the performing capabilities, superior staging capacities, and acoustic properties of the new King's Theatre Haymarket to a politically savvy and musically literate English audience. But as the opera was never performed in Haydn's lifetime, and eviscerated in early nineteenth-century publications by Breitkopf and Härtel[4], Haydn's "Orfeo" was consigned to a fate of silence – lying dormant for many decades before being revived in mid-twentieth century Tuscany.

"L'anima del filosofo" was eventually premiered under the title of "Orfeo ed Euridice" at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence in June 1951 as part of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, the city's annual spring music festival. Featuring the twenty-seven-year-old Maria Callas singing the role of Euridice, the long-awaited premiere of "Orfeo" was conducted by Erich Kleiber with performing materials furnished by Universal Edition Wien. Follow-

[3] I address many of these features in several articles: Revolution, Rebirth and the Sublime in Haydn's L'anima del filosofo and The Creation, in: Engaging Haydn: Context, Culture and Criticism, ed. Mary Hunter and Richard Will. Cambridge 2012, pp. 100–23; The Librettist's Dilemma in London: Badini's and Haydn's Orfeo ed Euridice, in: 'Music's obedient daughter' or Opera Libretto: from source to score, ed. Sabine Lichtenstein. Amsterdam and New York 2014, pp. 107–29; and the entry on "Theater and Theatricality," co-authored with János Malina, Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia, co-edited by Caryl Clark and Sarah Day-O'Connell, Cambridge University Press 2019, pp. 359–72, here pp. 367–70.

Other important publications on the opera include: Christine Fischer, Inszenierte Geschichte. Joseph Haydns und Carlo Francesco Badinis "L'anima del filosofo" als Gattungspoetik, in: Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis 32 (2008), pp. 67–86; Owen Jander, The Three Chapters of the Orpheus Myth, in: Words on Music: Essays in Honor of Andrew Porter on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday, ed. David Rosen and Claire Brook, Hillsdale, N.Y. 2003, pp.152–70; Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, vol. 1: The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778–1791, Oxford 1995, especially pp. 595–601; John Rice, L'anima del filosofo, in: Haydn: Oxford Composer Companion, ed. David Wyn Jones, Oxford 2002, pp. 203f.; Bernhard Waritschlager, Die Opera Seria bei Joseph Haydn. Studien zu Form und Struktur musikalischer Affektdramaturgie und Figuren-typologisierung in "Armida" und "L'Anima del filosofo ossia Orfeo ed Euridice" (Musikwissenschaftliche Schriften der Hochschule für Musik und Theater München 2), Tutzing 2005; Helmut Wirth, Joseph Haydn, Orfeo ed Euridice (L'anima del filosofo): Analytical Notes, Boston 1951.

[4] Breitkopf and Härtel published selected excerpts from the opera in two separate versions: a piano vocal score in 1806, and an orchestral score the following year entitled Orfeo e Euridice.

ing Callas's debut of Euridice in the production, her performance spawned additional diva-driven revivals by Joan Sutherland (1966–67) and Cecilia Bartoli (1995/96 and 2001) singing the same role, and also that of Genio, the Underworld guide whose role is noted for scintillating coloratura and virtuosity. Recognized for their ravishing vocal skills and captivating on-stage performances, these three singers – Callas, Sutherland, and Bartoli – are each responsible in their own way for rescuing Haydn's "Orfeo" from oblivion and putting it on the operatic stage once more. This essay discusses the theatrical and recorded performances of these three divas who, in building on the legacy of the one who came before, have championed the work on stage and in recording, each finding in Haydn's score a vehicle to showcase their particular vocal skills and dramatic talents. By examining the exploits of these singers alongside other pioneering performers, conductors, and opera practitioners who helped bring this long-silent opera to life in the second half of the twentieth century, we come to a better appreciation of the role played by music professionals in bringing historical relics to the stage while also gaining insight into changing vocal and orchestral practices across the centuries. Furthermore, by exploring some of the choices made by artists, creators and especially star female vocalists in reviving this opera, and comparing their performances to what Haydn envisioned in his score, we gain an understanding of the efforts of modern divas in reviving this long-forgotten opera. Not having any reports of how other musicians or audiences reacted to the opera during Haydn's lifetime, we are even more beholden to the twentieth-century pioneers who brought "L'anima del filosofo" to life. What must have been utterly perplexing and disappointing to Haydn – his last opera cancelled during rehearsal and never performed in London or elsewhere during his lifetime – is somehow rectified and 'set right' by the incredible star-power brought to this opera in the second half of the twentieth century. Indeed, diva rivalry, which has played a major role in bringing Haydn's "Orfeo" to public attention, has enacted a kind of restorative justice. The three divas who have excelled at bringing to life the portrayal of the dying Euridice inscribed within this opera have also helped revive Haydn's "Orfeo".

PLANNED IN 1791

Haydn's "L'anima del filosofo" was commissioned by Sir John Gallini for Haydn's operatic debut at the newly reopened King's Theatre in the Haymarket in London in 1791. The rebuilt theatre was erected on the site of the old one, which had been destroyed by fire in June 1789[5]. Plans of the

[5] See Curtis Price, Italian Opera and Arson in Late Eighteenth-Century London, in: Journal of the American Musicological Society, 42/1 (1989), pp. 55–107; and Price,

new theatre prepared in 1790 show how much larger the new Haymarket was in comparison to the old theatre. The opening of the new 3200-seat theatre was timed to coincide with Haydn's arrival in London, and the commissioning of "L'anima del filosofo" was calculated to help restore the company's prestige. After the fire, the Haymarket had been forced to yield the privilege to produce opera to financial consortium in charge of the Pantheon – an inferior venue that had to be hastily renovated for the purpose of producing opera, by all reports suffered from poor acoustics. So following the reopening of the Haymarket in the winter of 1791, Gallini and his supporters attempted to regain their license by means of outdoing the Pantheon: first by commissioning Haydn to write a new opera for the Haymarket Theatre; hiring the superstar singer and vocal novelty, Giacomo David; hiring as their resident ballet troupe of Vestris father and son; and finally by enlisting public support through a series of free rehearsals, during which the superior facilities, enhanced acoustics, and state-of-the-art stage properties of the new theatre were put on display[6].

The theme chosen for Haydn's opera was that of Orpheus, one rife with historic import in the history of opera. Indeed, it was calculated to place Haydn in a long line of opera composers invested in setting Orpheus for the operatic stage, ranging from Monteverdi through to Gluck, and also to offer the internationally famous Haydn the opportunity to revel in the Orpheus mystique as a composer invested with self-referential Orphic musical powers. Long-time resident librettist at the Haymarket Theatre, Carlo Francesco Badini, was enlisted to craft the libretto. And between January to May 1791 he and Haydn must have worked closely together in finalizing the opera – all the while Haydn was acclimatizing to London, getting to know other musicians in the city, and premiering his symphonies and participating in concerts at the Hanover Square Room under the aegis of the tireless impresario, violinist and orchestra leader, Johann Peter Salomon. For reasons not yet fully understood or accounted for, Haydn's opera was shut down in rehearsal sometime in mid-May of 1791, never to be resurrected during his lifetime. Dies records in his biographical account that Haydn claimed his opera was "declared contraband" [Kontreband erklärt], suggesting that this particular operatic setting of the Orpheus myth did more than violate the theatre licensing act[7]. Was Badini's libretto, with its unusu-

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Milhous, and Hume, Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, vol. I. Oxford 1995, pp. 595–601.

[6] Price, Milhous, and Hume, Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, vol. I, p. 60.

[7] Vernon Gotwals, Haydn: Two Contemporary Portraits. Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963, p.132; Dies's 15th visit with Haydn, January 14, 1806, in: Dies, p. 94.

al representation of the Orpheus story, in which a rowdy band of women, the Bacchantes, kill the Thracian hero with a poisonous drink, after which they are all destroyed in a cataclysmic storm – was this ending deemed too inflammatory for the times? It is worth noting that already in the early 1790s parliamentarians and the state were imposing more and more restrictions on citizens, writers, and artists in response to the French revolution unfolding in nearby France. Certainly, Haydn's words suggest that there were other factors beyond problems with the theatre licensing issues that prevented the opera from being performed then, or at any time during his two extended stays in London – even after the Haymarket regained their license to produce opera in 1793. By this time Badini was no longer working as the Haymarket librettist, having been replaced by Lorenzo Da Ponte, who had hastily left Vienna under a scandalous cloud and was now getting settled in London, where he could capitalize on his reputation as Mozart's famous librettist. England was on high alert ever since the revolutionary war broke out in France, and during William Pitt's so-called "reign of alarm", many artists and writers were placed under surveillance and their works confiscated[8]. "With the stirring events across the Channel audiences became unduly sensitive, and many authors, [even those] with no hidden meaning, had their works condemned because of supposed satirical or allegorical intent"[9].

Badini's and Haydn's setting of the Orpheus myth offers an exceptional retelling of the Orpheus narrative – one that might very well have caused alarm with the censors. Unusually, this Orpheus opera has a tragic ending, and ominous foreshadowing permeates the text. In Act 1 we find Euridice running through a gloomy forest while fleeing from followers of Arrideo, to whom she has been betrothed, apparently against her wishes. She is rescued by Orpheus, who subdues the ruffians by singing to the accompaniment of his lyre. Her father, Creonte, annuls her engagement to Arrideo (who never makes an appearance on stage), and consents to the marriage of Euridice and Orpheus. During the wedding celebrations in Act 2, she is bitten by a snake, and dies a slow poignant death on stage. Act 3 opens with her funeral, where the onstage community witness Orpheus's lamenting and Creonte's vow for revenge. A sibyl arrives to guide Orpheus in the Underworld, where in Act 4 they encounter the unburied dead – the lamenting souls unable to find rest – and the howling furies. Eventually Pluto admits the travelers to the Elysian Fields. There, Euridice gazes at Orpheus,

[8] See Kenneth R. Johnston, Unusual suspects: Pitt's reign of alarm and the lost generation of the 1790s. Oxford 2013.

[9] Barbara Darby, Spectacle and Revolution in 1790s Tragedy, Studies in English Literature 1500–1900, 39/3 (Summer 1999), p. 576.

and succumbs to a second death, after which Orpheus lashes out in anger, betraying his unhinged emotional state and tenuous hold on reality. Act 5 takes place on the isle of Lesbos, where the Bacchantes trick Orpheus into drinking a poisonous elixir, and he dies. The Bacchantes revel in Orpheus's death, but their celebrations are curtailed by a sudden storm, and all are washed away in a violent natural disaster. Haydn was right – this is indeed a very different Orpheus from that of Gluck!

Unusual for the time, Haydn conceived the role of Orpheus for a tenor. In contrast to earlier Orpheus operas where the leading male role was typically performed by a castrato (or an "haute contre" in the case of Gluck's "Orphée" for Paris), and in contradistinction to the vocal type typically assigned to opera seria heroes on the operatic stage in England, Haydn's Orpheus is modern in conception. The star singer at the Haymarket Theatre in spring 1791 was the tenor Giacomo Davide, a leading singer of his day known to possess a powerful and flexible voice that rivalled the best castrati. In "L'anima del filosofo" Haydn writes passages featuring virtuosic vocal display typically associated with heroic castrati, suggesting that Davide was able to compete with them in rendering florid passages while exceeding them in dramatic intensity and verisimilitude. Indeed, the hero's register and vocal style in this opera looks ahead to male lovers in nineteenth-century opera – ones for whom defeat is not ameliorated by a deus ex machina conclusion or a manufactured lieto fine. This hero's downward trajectory and ultimate demise is final. His vocal prowess as well as his weeping, wailing, raging, and noble capitulation at the end of the drama are rendered all the more real when performed by a male figure whose masculinity was never in doubt.

This new modern hero would have resonated with audiences steeped in the Enlightenment ethos of the later eighteenth century. By this time, binary sexual conceptions were becoming the norm, and replacing notions of sexual understanding in which the female was understood as an inversion of the male. In an era when the ruling classes were losing their powers, and marriages were being founded on mutual love, more natural partnerings were becoming the norm. Heteronormative love was founded on a woman marrying a natural man, hence a tenor would be more believable on stage than a castrato when conveying love on stage. The castrato was increasingly being understood by enlightened listeners as the sexual "Other", one allied to the old regime – an anti-enlightenment figure (as Rousseau had observed). A mutilated man could not be a viable lover for a young woman according to new societal conceptions of love among the rising bourgeois classes. By casting Orfeo as a tenor, then, the managers of the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, and Badini and Haydn in particular, were making a

thoroughly modern move, one allied to the Enlightenment and the newly emerging sexual politics[10].

Since the voice of the castrato could be loud and powerful, intense and rich in timbre, it was the task of the composer to convince audiences that the new male hero – the tenor – could be just as strong and commanding. And Haydn manages to convey this in the opening accompanied recitative and two-tempo aria for Orfeo ("Rendete a questo seno" and "Cara speme") where, through his multiple musical powers, the hero manages to rescue Euridice from the clutches of Arrideo's henchmen. Here, Orfeo demonstrates his powers as a rhetorician, vocalist, and instrumentalist. To begin with, his command of poetic lyricism and oratorical delivery are underscored by his vocal prowess, as demonstrated by his mastery of the aria's opening gesture – a "mezzo di voce" (gradual crescendo through a long-held note, making the listener marvel at his vocal timbre and breath control) in the opening "Largo assai" section. This in turn is followed by fast-paced roulades in the ensuing Allegro section, another marker of vocal skill. A singer who can master this, as Davide surely could, will ably win over the hearts and minds of listeners from the moment he appears on stage. And to cap this off, Orfeo's legendary command of the lyre is also on display. Here, the mythological lyre is represented first by harp in the accompanied recitative that precedes the aria proper. Haydn's initial foray into writing for this instrument soon gives way to the first and second violins, who take up the original "lyre-like" accompaniment pattern in the aria. With this switch from harp to string accompaniment, presumably the singer is also freed from the necessity of being tethered to his stage instrument/prop, allowing for a more naturalized stage demeanor and affective acting now that his charm-worthy musical credentials have been duly established.

In crafting his very first piece for the harp, Haydn may have had harpist Madame Krumpholtz in mind. A recent émigré from France, she played the harp in numerous concerts in the Hanover Square Rooms during Haydn's first season in London. Using the harp to imitate the lyre echoes Gluck's use of the instrument with the hero in the 1774 French production of his "Orphée". But unlike the hero's much-vaunted musical powers, which are on full display at the hero's first entrance in Haydn's "Orfeo", the musician's musical skills are never again on display for heroic purposes in the

[10] For more on conceptions about and the decline of the castrato, see Martha Feldman, The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds, Oakland 2015. See also Kirsten Gibson, Music, Melancholy and Masculinity in Early Modern England, in: Masculinity and Western Musical Practice, ed. by Ian Biddle and Kirsten Gibson. Burlington, Vermont 2009, pp. 41–66.

opera. After rescuing Euridice in the 'real' world (always an ironic concept in the world opera), in the Underworld scenes of Haydn's opera, Orpheus's vocal powers are diminished[11].

The role of the Genio, the sibyl or guide in the Underworld, is sometimes thought to have been created for an unnamed castrato. The single aria crafted for this character is a vocal tour de force; set in C major, this Allegro "trumpets and drums" showpiece features martial fanfares and vocal display typically associated with castrato arias, including large leaps and fast-paced coloratura demanding vocal agility. Notated in treble clef, this aria also features an expansive vocal range from c' (middle c) to c''' two octaves higher – and on one occasion extends up to e''' (m. 163). Following this climactic moment, three measures later the orchestra is silenced – the rests and fermatas signaling the moment where the singer inserts an improvised vocal cadenza. This aria represents bravura singing at its best – worthy of the castrato, and the best divas. While it's unlikely that a castrato could reach this high E (Gasparo Pacchierotti could apparently ascend up to B-flat and sometimes C)[12], a soprano singing this role 'en travesti' would nevertheless have understood herself as rivaling the powers of her castrato forbears.

REALIZED IN THE MID TWENTIETH CENTURY

When Haydn's Orpheus opera was finally premiered at the May festival in Florence in 1951, the circumstances surrounding its conception in late-eighteenth-century London were entirely unknown. A new group of performers, directors, and impresarios were responsible for reimagining Haydn's Orpheus and creating it anew, without any preconceived ideas about or understanding of eighteenth-century vocal or orchestral practices (historically-informed performance practice or HIP was still in its infancy). Indeed, the fact that the opera could be staged at all, and in central Italy, outside the geographical sphere normally associated with Haydn reception, should put to rest musicological concern that the score is incomplete and unable to be performed[13]. Italian opera scores are never fixed; they are

[11] For further analysis of Orpheus's entry in Haydn's opera, see my chapter, "Encountering Others: Haydn's 'L'anima del filosofo' as directed by Jürgen Flimm," in: Joseph Haydn im 21. Jahrhundert, Bericht über das Symposium der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, der Internationalen Joseph Haydn Privatstiftung Eisenstadt und der Esterházy-Privatstiftung (EHB 8), ed. Gernot Gruber, Walter Reicher and Christine Siegert. Tutzing 2012, pp. 417–32.

[12] Noted by Charles Burney, as recorded by Henry Pleasants, in: The Great Singers: from the dawn of opera to our own time. New York 1966, pp. 84f.

[13] H.C Robbins Landon noted as much in his prefatory remarks to the booklet accompanying the first recording of the opera by Hans Swarowsky conducting the Vienna State

mutable documents whose texts are able to be reworked and manipulated to accommodate the particular demands of a given cast, ensemble, theatrical space, and individual performance. And those responsible for bringing this work to the stage in 1951 were more than equipped to deal with the challenges posed by an incomplete score of a little-known opera that had yet to be performed on stage[14]. Unfixity of text is the lifeblood of theatre, especially theatre where music is integral to the performance. (Just think of all those insertion arias Haydn crafted for Luigia Polzelli, and she was by no means the only singer or performer for whom Haydn modified musical materials – especially in the opera house.)

The Maggio Musicale Fiorentino Festival managers assembled a very strong cast and creative team for the opera's premiere. The imposing cast included the young Maria Callas as Euridice, Boris Christoff as Creonte, and the Danish tenor Tyge Tygesen as Orfeo, with no less imposing a conductor, Erich Kleiber, the Austrian maestro highly praised as a Mozartean specialist. This stellar lineup is a marker of the prestige associated with the production and also with this Italian music festival at mid-century, prior to being eclipsed by other festivals on the European circuit. Flush with funds in the immediate postwar period, the festival was able to hire the best singers, and internationally famous conductors and Italian stage directors and scenographers, producing some of the most advanced musical events of the time, including several operas during the month-long festival. Simultaneously with Haydn's "Orfeo", lavish plans were put in place for the festival premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's "I vespri siciliani" ("Les vêpres siciliennes"), a five-act opera on the French model to a libretto by Eugène Scribe (Paris 1855)[15]. The same company of singers were to take part in both the Haydn

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Opera Orchestra and members of the Akadamie Kammerchor in Vienna, December 1950. There he observes that "Botstiber ...investigated the Autograph in the Preussische Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, and came to the correct conclusion that the work was 'nearly complete'. Karl Geiringer studied the Autograph even more thoroughly and came to the conclusion that the work was not at all unfinished" (p. 7). My own examinations of the Berlin Autograph and the manuscript copy at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest suggest that there's some unclarity about what was to happen during the couple's meeting in the Underworld scene of Act 4, where Euridice suddenly lifts her veil and reveals her face to Orpheus, contravening the directive that he not look at his beloved. The Berlin and Budapest sources suggest that the opera ends when all are destroyed in a cataclysmic storm, stifling all further action.

[14] Conductor Hans Swarowsky's recording of "L'anima del filosofo" with the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and members of the Akademie Kammerchor, Vienna, made for Haydn Society LP (HSLP2019; Vox OPBX193) had just been released in December 1950.

[15] The opera was quickly translated into Italian for performances in Verdi's homeland. Other musical-theatrical works performed at the MMF in the 1951 season alongside "I vespri

and the Verdi performances; indeed, Callas, Christoff and Kleiber all took part in performances of the ambitious production of "I vespri siciliani" at the large Teatro Communale[16]. Following the premiere of "I vespri siciliani" in late May, Haydn's "Orfeo" was performed twice on 9 and 10 June 1951 in the 950-seat Teatro della Pergola, the very same house where Verdi's "Macbeth" had premiered in 1847[17]. Although given less stature than the Verdi production – 2 performances versus 4 for "I vespri siciliani" – it too had all the makings of celebrity event, most notably because it marked the stage premiere of Haydn's "Orfeo"[18]. Post-performance photographs of the production show a rapturous Maria Callas, smiling broadly in pseudo-Grecian costume flanked by Kleiber to the right alongside Boris Christoff, the baritone who premiered the role of Creonte in this premiere stage production. See the Title Page and Cast List from the printed program and libretto reproduced in 'The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia', pp. 368f.[19]. Photographs of the production from Foto Locchi (Archivio Locchi) are reproduced in many biographies documenting the career of Maria Callas[20].

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siciliani" and "Orfeo" included: Verdi's "Macbeth"; a one-act tragedy by I. Pizzetti and A. Perrini entitled "Ifigenia" in conjunction with Monteverdi's "Tirsi e Clori"; Schumann's "Genoveva"; and Gluck's ballet "Don Juan". This gives an indication of the extensive programming on offer at the MMF in the mid-twentieth century. See Moreno Bucci, "I Desgni del Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino", inventario II (1943–1953). Florence 2012.

[16] A recording of this Florence production was made on 26 May 1951, broadcast in Italy on RAI and picked up by the BBC. It is one of the earliest recordings in Callas's professional discography. Callas sang the demanding role of Elena, and Christoff performed the role of the Sicilian activist, Procida, with Kleiber leading the chorus and orchestra of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. This Italian-language production included the extended ballets in Act 3 from the French original.

[17] The printed program states that the Saturday evening performance started at 21:00, followed by an afternoon matinee at 16:00 on Sunday 10 June. But correspondence from the spring of 1951 relating to the production suggests that the premiere was to be Friday 8 June, followed by the matinee performance on Sunday June 10.
The Teatro della Pergola was remodeled to a 1000-seat hall in 1855–57, and modified slightly in the early twentieth century. Today, the interior of the theatre and the stage appear much as they did at the "Orfeo" premiere in 1951.

[18] See documents relating to the premiere of Haydn's „Orfeo" in the Archivio Maggio Musicale Fiorentino. Correspondence between Maestro Kleiber and opera impresario Francesco Siciliani, artistic director of the MMF and Florence's Teatro Comunale from 1948–1947; Busta 441, #421, letter dated Firenza, 12 February 1951.

[19] The Cambridge Haydn Encyclopedia, Caryl Clark and Sarah Day-O'Connell (eds.), Cambridge 2019, entry on "Theater and Theatricality" by Caryl Clark and János Malina.

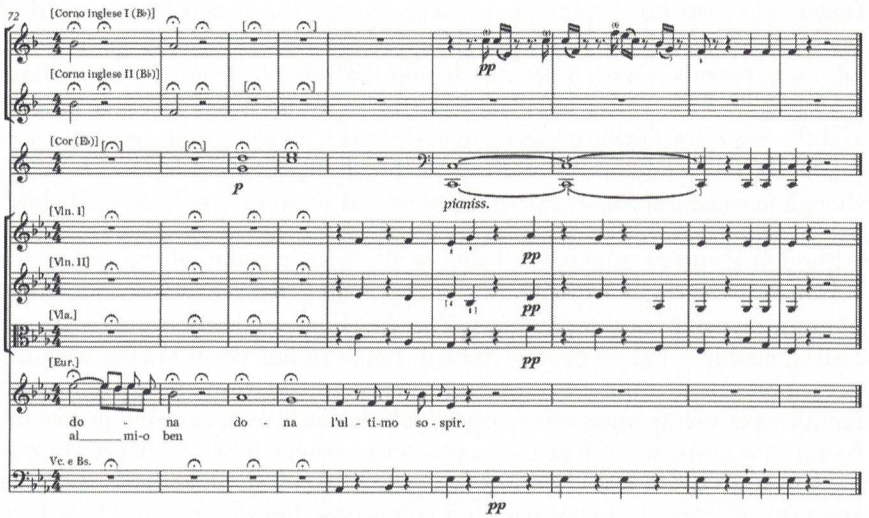
[20] www.fotolocchi.it/en/archive/?query=Callas%20Orfeo (21.10.2019). See also Stelios Galatopoulos, Maria Callas: Sacred Monster, London 1998, pp. 164ff.; and Sergio Segalini, Callas: Portrait of a Diva, trans. Sonia Sabel, London 1979 and 1981, pp. 20f.

Callas, who was just beginning to make a name for herself in the world of opera, sang the role of Eurydice, alongside the Danish tenor Tyge Tygesen, who was twenty years her senior, singing the role of Orfeo. Although both performances were later broadcast on two separate occasions – on June 14 and 19 – no recordings are known to exist[21]. As with eighteenth-century opera premieres, the sound of this mid-twentieth-century premiere is silent to us, although first-hand accounts exit in the press and elsewhere (as discussed below).

Although Euridice only gets to sing in the first two acts of the opera, she commands the stage for much of the time, and gets to display a wide range of emotions and vocal techniques. These elements would have appealed to Callas, enabling her to exploit the full range of her vocal talents within a very short span of time. For instance, fear and agitation are the dominant emotions at the opening of the opera, where she is seen running in gloomy forest in a desperate effort to escape her pursuers. Then in her accompanied recitative and aria, "Filomena abbandonata", she marshals her inner strength, displayed in commanding coloratura, her distress and hopelessness giving way to florid passages as she reflects on her pitiful situation. After being rescued by Orpheus, they fall in love and express their exuberant joy when Creonte blesses their union, their intertwining vocal lines blending in harmonious sixths and thirds as they celebrate their happiness in a rapturous duet.

Their brief moment of happiness is interrupted by intruders. As Orpheus runs off to investigate, Euridice is left all alone and vulnerable to hostilities once more. She is bitten by a snake, and dies a most pitiful death on stage. Haydn's Cavatina for the doomed heroine is a masterpiece of dramatic understatement. In this poignant moment, the somber musical accompaniment – enhanced by two Corno inglese – depicts the poisonous venom coursing through her circulatory and nervous systems, slowly but inevitably robbing her of her life. Her ebbing strength, shallow breathing, inert body, and waning voice are all depicted in Haydn's subtle and soft melodic writing, and delicate, sensitive scoring. The heroine's final breaths are punctuated by a series of fermatas that enable a gifted singing-actor to reap every possible nuance from the heroine's final moments. No longer able to vocalize, the orchestra finishes her final breaths with pianissimo sighing gestures (see Musical Example 1).

[21] Research undertaken in the RAI Archives in Florence in spring 2017 corroborates this. No secret or "pirate" recordings from one of the broadcasts are known to exist either. For instance, there are no tapes or recordings of this 1951 broadcast listed in the Robert Baxter Collection (Callas holdings) in the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound, Stanford University.



Example 1: Ending of Euridice's dying cavatina, "Dov'è, dov' è l'amato bene". JHW XXV/13, "L'anima del filosofo", Cavatina, 16b, mm. 72–80.

Reviews of her first performance note that Callas sang Euridice's dying recitative and aria in Act 2 "Nel sangue" / "Dov'è, dov' è l'amato bene" – "with rare insight and fine phrasing"[22]. Dramatic moments like this death scene, preceded by a series of contrasting emotional experiences, would have appealed to – and brought out the best in – Callas's sensitive and finely attuned acting abilities and expressive vocal qualities. A consummate actor, she possessed the ability to explore the emotional intricacies of character and display excellent dramatic instincts in intensifying a performance. According to Walter Legge, a classical record producer long associated with EMI: "[A]mong Callas's greatest strengths were her power of projection in the theater and communication with audiences, almost animal instincts that excited a public irrespective of her purely vocal form"[23]. As Michal Grover-Friedlander puts it: "This trope attests to a bodily presence beyond the sheer voice as something bordering on the inhuman. The whole body – gestures, movements,

[22] The original five-act structure of the opera was modified to two acts for the Florence premiere, with Euridice's death scene occurring in Quadro III, the third "painting" or scene of Act 1. 'Atto Secondo' opened with Euridice's burial, the equivalent of the choral scene opening JHW XXV/13 Act 3. Giulio Coltellacci, a young and meticulous set designer from Rome, developed the sets and scenery for the Florence premiere. Four images of the stylized set design are reproduced in the printed program from 1951.

[23] Walter Legge, Maria Callas-the Legend and the Reality, in: The Faber Book of Opera, ed. Tom Sutcliffe, London 2002, p. 382.

and expressions – participates in executing the music and creating the drama[24]. Although Callas was approaching nearly 200 pounds at the time she premiered this role, no reviewers mentioned her weight or size; only in the following year, after she had signed with La Scala in Milan, did the body shaming begin[25]. For the time being, Callas could harness her full vocal talents without fear of being chastised publicly for reveling in Euridice's subjectivity, interiority and consciousness at the heightened moment of her death. The pathetic language, broken orchestral gestures, and feeble voice assist the singer in portraying the character's real-time dilemma; for Euridice, time is running out. We witness her in the process of dying. Euridice's consciousness of this temporal moment as she gasps for breath create a heightened state of consciousness in the character that Callas could readily channel in her affective performance.

Howard Taubman, writing in the New York Times on 11 June 1951, noted that Callas "distinguished herself as Euridice, ..." proving she could "manage the classic florid style with assurance. She has full control of voice in soft singing, and she did coloratura passages with delicacy and accuracy"[26]. More than that, she was channeling a dramatic heroine invested with a wide range of emotionally expressive moments and a wide-ranging vocal palette to match. In realizing Euridice, Callas must have been aware – even at her relatively young age as a professional singer – that she was creating a new role, a never-before-heard Euridice, on stage. Biographer Michael Scott notes that, interestingly, "the only opera in which Callas ever created a role was by Haydn!"[27].

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[24] Michal Grover-Friedlander, The Afterlife of Maria Callas's Voice. The Musical Quarterly 88/1 (2005), p. 53.

[25] Nina Eidsheim notes that Callas's voice was usually allied to her body: "While singers are allegedly judged on the basis of their vocal performance, for female singers this judgment is intensely applied in the visual as well as the sonorous realm." See: Maria Callas's Waistline and the Organology Voice, in: The Opera Quarterly 33/3–4 (2017), p. 249. Not long after her debut as Euridice, Callas was put under increasing pressure to conform to a certain kind of femininity in her professional and personal life. Following a period of intense weight loss, many (male) critics observed a drastic decline in her vocal capabilities. Eidsheim's research suggests that "the material and medical realms do not support the narrative that Callas's weight loss led to vocal problems" (p. 262) She argues that voice studies would benefit from a critical organology of voice – one that sheds biases of gender and ethnicity and instead focusses on a stronger theoretical and practical understanding of voice.

[26] Here she proved herself to be a better performer than soprano Judith Hellwig, who recorded the role 6 months earlier in Vienna with Hans Swarowsky. As Jonathan Woolf notes in his review of a 2011 digital restoration of the original 1950 recording, Hellwig's "Filomena abbandonata" in the first act reveals her "real weakness in runs, which are, to be blunt, pretty awful." http://musicweb-international.com/classRev/2011/Dec11/Haydn_Orfeo_CD1250.htm

[27] Michael Scott, Maria Meneghini Callas. London 1991, p. 75.

AFTER CALLAS

The afterlife of Callas is a curious phenomenon. For instance, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's notion of the ghostly materiality of voice is the starting place for Grover-Friedlander detailed study of Franco Zeffirelli's 2002 film, "Callas Forever"[28]. But the Callas legacy also affected other singers – her powerful recording legacy in a broad range of (primarily nineteenth-century) operatic repertory ranging from Norma, Violetta, and Leonora, to Desdemona and Tosca, became the standard upon which other divas measured their own talents. That two other major female singers channeled her silenced performances of Euridice in the second half of the twentieth century has been a boon to Haydn scholars in particular. Without the major stagings and recordings undertaken by Joan Sutherland and Cecilia Bartoli, it's doubtful that Haydn's "Orfeo" would have the kind of recognition it does today.

Studying recordings made by Joan Sutherland in the mid to late 1960s (many soundtracks are now available on YouTube) helps us gain a feel for what Callas's performances from the preceding decade might have been like. Since the role of Euridice lies in the middle and lower registers of the soprano voice, as such it was not a completely satisfying role for Sutherland. More to her liking was the scintillating coloratura in Genio's aria, "Al tuo seno fortunato", even though, as Norma Major notes, "it caused her a good deal of trouble as she struggled with its vocal complexities"[29]. Sutherland's stylish yet cool, emotionless coloratura leaves us wishing for the passionate performances by Callas we have come to know from other recordings made by her in the early 1950s. Performances of the Genio's sole bravura aria in Act 3 became one of Sutherland's signature pieces during concert performances. Most notable is her improvisation; whether performing live at Carnegie Hall in New York, or in Chicago, Edinburgh, or at the Hollywood Bowl, it's apparent that she's not singing what's in the JHW edition to come[30]. In Genio's aria she introduces a lengthy cadenza at the fermata near the conclusion of the aria, just as any intelligent singer would. However, her extended foray into mystical vocal territory, initially in the minor mode, sounds like we've entered the soundscape of her beloved Bellini and Donizetti bel canto roles.

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[28] How the human voice exists separately from the human body in film is the focus of Grover-Friedlander's article, "The Afterlife of Maria Callas", pp. 35–62.

[29] Norma Major, Joan Sutherland: The Authorized Biography. London 1987 and 1994), p. 135. The opera's unfamiliarity in the 1960s worked in Sutherland's favour, since it was unlikely that anyone aside from her conductor husband, Richard Bonynge, was aware of her vocal lapses.

[30] The JHW edition of "L'anima del filosofo", XXV/13, ed. Helmut Wirth, appeared in 1974.

While this extended vocal excursus may be justified by an earlier reference in the text to dark shadows – "but he is hidden by a sacred veil" (ma l'adombra un sacro velo) – the mysterious meandering vocal line and somber accompaniment seem out of character with eighteenth-century vocal style and practice. Listen to the 45-second vocal cadenza near the end of a (remastered) live performance from Carnegie Hall, 7 February 1968, to get a sense of her extended vocal excursion (4:50–5:35)[31]. And this same improvisatory moment is preserved in several other of her recordings. Her nineteenth-century bel canto specialty trumps any sensitivity towards late-eighteenth-century vocal practice.

In her memoir, Sutherland claims to have never quite mastered Genio's aria, even though she programmed the piece regularly in concert performances. Although she performed the role of Euridice in stage productions in both Vienna and Edinburgh in 1966 and 1967, she did not develop an affinity for the role, since it lay in the lower register of her voice. It would take the mastery of eighteenth-century vocal practice and stylistics to fully realize the potential of this aria. And this is mezzo-soprano Cecilia Bartoli's contribution to Haydn's "Orfeo".

At the height of the historically informed performance practice movement, Bartoli and her instrumental collaborators championed HIP practices, setting the standard for tasteful embellishment. Several performances on YouTube capture her vocal performances[32]. Whether working with Nicholas Harnoncourt in staging productions in Basel or Vienna in the mid-1990s, or recording the opera with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music (1997)[33] and subsequently bringing the Jügen Flimm production to London's Covent Garden in 2001, Bartoli's performances have rivetted audiences.

Since I address aspects of Bartoli's stage performances of Haydn's "Orfeo" in another publication – EHB vol. 8 (cited in fn. 11) – I'll close here for now, and suggest that we haven't heard the last of this opera. There are other divas waiting in the wings, including Canadian soprano Jane Archibald, whose stupendous performance of Genio's aria pushes the boundaries of improvisation into the stratosphere[34].

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[31] www.youtube.com/watch?v=VvV4g6OEP-g (21.10.2019).

[32] among them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQjcfA7WTD8 (21.10.2019), her improvised vocal cadenza (5:25–5:28) is rooted in eighteenth-century practice.

[33] Joseph Haydn 1732–1809, L'anima del filosofo OSSIA Orfeo ed Euridice. DECCA 452 668-2, Editions de L'oiseau-Lyre (1997).

[34] https://youtu.be/Dbcr2Qyb8bY (21.10.2019).