

## Niccolò Porpora, his operas and disciples

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**Abstract:** *Niccolò Porpora was a famous singing teacher and composer with notoriety in the glory age of the castrati singers. He composed 50 operas; applying the formula specific to the baroque era, with simple recitatives and aria da capo, representing the basis of the early 18th century in the Italian opera, which gave many opportunities to the singers to assert themselves and become the true stars on the stages from all over the Europe. The well-known opera seria, introduced with great success in lyrical theaters, was the ideal platform for some singers who possessed a consistent vocal technique, managing to capture the audience's attention with extraordinary breathing power and their register of more than two octaves, even over three for some of them. Porpora's pupils were recognized as personalities that marked a historical time, identified with the pre-classical period, among the most important being: Farinelli, Caffarelli, Appianino, Salimbeni, Porporino and others.*

**Key-words:** *singer, opera, libretto, Naples*

### 1. Introduction

Niccolò Porpora (Nicola Giacinto Antonio Porpora) was born in Naples in 1686 on 17 August. During that time, the city was ranked as the world's capital of music. Alessandro Scarlatti was a famous composer, more than anyone else, the one who introduced the Italian *da capo* aria, with movements *allegro-largo-allegro*, being the piece of resistance in the *opera seria*. Porpora was a skilled exponent of Alessandro Scarlatti, and his influence was perpetuated by his disciples. *He was the son of Caterina and Carlo Porpora, the latter a Neapolitan bookseller. On 29 September 1696 he was enrolled at the Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo, where Greco is assumed to have been his composition teacher* (Grove 2001, 169).

Gaetano Greco was a composer, organist and teacher at the *Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo* in Naples. Porpora took his destiny in his own at the age of 10 when he got a seat at the *Conservatorio*. He had as teachers at the *Conservatorio* mentioned, as well as Matteo Giordano and Ottavio Campanile. At the age of 20, decided to embrace his composer's career, having an innate talent for this noble artistic preoccupation. He was authorized to write operas as *maestro di capella* for the Royal Palace in Naples, for the ambassador of Portugal, for the Prince Philipp of Hesse-Darmstadt, and from 1714 for the Imperial Court in Vienna.

### 2. Operas composed by Niccolò Porpora

*L'Agrippina* (1708) April 11<sup>th</sup> Palazzo Reale Naples, libretto by Nicola Giuvo; *Flavio Ancio Olibrio* (1711) San Bartolomeo Naples, libretto by Apostolo Zeno and Pietro Pariati, also represented in 1722 Alibert delle Dame Rome; *Basilio re d'Oriente* (1713) June 24 Nuovo De' Fiorentini Naples, libretto by B.D. Dominici after Giovanni Battista Neri; *Arianna e Teseo* (1714) October 1<sup>st</sup> Hoftheater Vienna, libretto by Pietro Pariati, also represented in 1727 San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, in 1728 Pergola Florence, in 1736 Pisa; *Berenice, regina d'Egitto o vero Le Gare di amore e di politica* (1718) by Domenico Scarlatti and Niccolò Porpora, Capranica Rome, libretto by Antonio Salvi; *Temistocle* (1718) October 1<sup>st</sup>.

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Hoftheater Vienna, libretto by Apostolo Zeno, also represented in 1743 February 22 King's Theatre Haymarket London, libretto by Pietro Metastasio; *Faramondo* (1719) November 19<sup>th</sup> San Bartolomeo Naples, libretto by Apostolo Zeno; *Eumene* (1721) Alibert delle Dame Rome; *Adelaide* (1723) Alibert delle Dame Rome, libretto by Antonio Salvi, also represented in 1732 Omodeo Pavia; *Radamisto* (1723) Genoa, revised and presented in 1726 with arias by Porpora and Attilio Ariosti at King's Theatre Haymarket London; *Amare per regnare* (1723) 12 December San Bartolomeo Naples, libretto by Francesco Silvani; *Semiramide regina dell'Assiria* (1724) May 19<sup>th</sup> San Bartolomeo Naples, libretto by Ippolito Zanelli; *Damiro e Pitia, o vero Le garre dell'amicizia e dell'amore* (1724) October 12 Munich or Monaco (Grove 2001, 171; Enciclopedia Dello Spettacolo 1975, 343), libretto by Domenico Lalli; *Griselda* (1724) libretto by Apostolo Zeno, the score is at the Library in Leipzig (Enciclopedia Dello Spettacolo 1975, 343); *Didone abbandonata* (1725) Pubblico Reggio nell'Emilia, libretto by Pietro Metastasio, also represented in 1745 Regio Ducal di Parma; *Siface* (1725) December 26<sup>th</sup> San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Pietro Metastasio after Domenico David, also represented in 1726 Teatro Ducale Milan, in 1730 February 7<sup>th</sup> Capranica Rome; *Imeneo in Atene* (1726) San Samuele Venice, libretto by Silvio Stampiglia, also represented in 1727 Teatro Nuovo Verona; *Meride e Selinunte* (1726) December 26<sup>th</sup> San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Apostolo Zeno; *La verità nell'inganno* (1726) Regio Ducal Milan, libretto by Francesco Silvani; *Siroe re di Persia* (1727) February 11 Alibert delle Dame Rome, libretto by Pietro Metastasio; *Ezio* (1728) November 20<sup>th</sup> San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Pietro Metastasio and Artino Corasio; *Ermenegildo* (1729) Naples (Enciclopedia Dello Spettacolo 1975, 343); *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1729) December 26<sup>th</sup> San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Artino Corasio, also represented in 1739 January 20<sup>th</sup> San Carlo Naples, in 1743 Regio Ducale Mantova; *Tamerlano* (1730) Regio Turin, libretto by Agostino Piovene; *Mitridate* (1730) 1st of July Capranica Rome, libretto by Filippo Vanstryp; *Alessandro nelle Indie* (1730) Dresda (Enciclopedia Dello Spettacolo 1975, 343); *Poro* (1731) Regio Turin, libretto by Pietro Metastasio; *Annibale* (1731) San Angelo Venice, libretto by Filippo Vanstryp; *Germanico in Germania* (1732) Capranica Rome, libretto by Niccolò Coluzzi; *Issipile* (1733) Palazzo Rucellai Rome, libretto by Pietro Metastasio with variants by Angelo Cori; *Arianna in Nasso* (1733) December 29 Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre London, libretto by Paolo Rolli; *Enea nel Lazio* (1734) May 11 Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre London, libretto by Paolo Rolli; *Polifemo* (1735) February 1<sup>st</sup> King's Theatre Haymarket London, libretto by Paolo Rolli; *Ifigenia in Aulide* (1735) May 3 King's Theatre Haymarket London, libretto by Paolo Rolli; *Rosbale* (1737) San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Claudio Stampa also known as *Eurene*, presented in 1736 Teatro della Città Arezzo; *Lucio Papirio* (1737) San Cassiano, libretto by Antonio Salvi; *Carlo il Calvo* (1738) Alibert delle Dame Rome, libretto by Francesco Silvani; *Il Barone di Zampano* (1739) Teatro Nuovo Naples, libretto by Pietro Trinchera; *L'Amico fedele* (1739) Teatro dei Fiorentini Naples, libretto by Giuseppe Di Pietro; *Alessandro Severo* (1739) San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice; *Il Triomfo di Camilla* (1740) January 20<sup>th</sup> San Carlo Naples, libretto by Silvio Stampiglia, this opera was represented in 1755 in Barcelona and 1760 on 30 May San Carlo Naples, libretto was signed by Giovanni Battista Lorenzi; *Tiridate* (1740) 19 December San Carlo Naples, libretto by Pietro Metastasio; *Il triomfo del valore* (1741) Teatro Nuovo Naples, libretto by Antonio Palomba, Antonio Palella, Giovanni Paolo di Domenico; *Statira* (1742) January 24<sup>th</sup> San Giovanni Grisostomo Venice, libretto by Francesco Silvani; *Partenope* (1742) Naples, libretto by Silvio Stampiglia; *Rosmene* (1742) London; *Filandro* (1747) July 18 The Court Theatre in Dresda, libretto by Vincenzo Cassani; *Giasone* (1732) April 23 Palazzo Reale Naples, libretto by Silvio Stampiglia; *Tolemeo re d'Egitto* - it is specified in *Grove dictionary* that is a copy of Händel's *Tolemeo* (Grove 2001, 172); *Orfeo* (1736) pasticcio by Porpora, Hasse, Araja, Vinci.

### 3. Niccolò Porpora's disciples

In 1715, Porpora enrolled as a full-time teacher, as *maestro di capella* at the *Conservatorio di Sant' Onofrio* in Naples, where he held lessons of *bel canto* art of singing and composition lessons. Porpora took the smallest details of the musical education of his pupils, who became famous names of the international lyrical stages, among the best known names, I mention: Carlo Broschi called *Farinelli* (soprano castrato); Gaetano Majorano called *Caffarelli* (alto castrato) (Marek 2016, 35); Giuseppe Appiani called *Appianino* (contralto castrato) (Marek 2016, 26); Felice Salimbeni (soprano castrato); Antonio Uberti called *Porporino* (soprano castrato). In this *Conservatorio* will remain until 1722, then goes to Venice in 1725, where he accepts the post of director of the choir in *Ospedale degli Incurabili* (Enciclopedia Dello Spettacolo 1975, 342). In 1733, he received an invitation from a group of noblemen in England, in order to present his operas in public, a kind of counterpart to the Company founded by another famous composer of that time, G.Fr. Händel. *The new company, the so-called Opera of the Nobility, opened its first season in December 1733 with the premiere of his Arianna in Naxo* (Grove 2001, 170). In London, Porpora will return for the last time in 1742, in November, where the premiere of *Temistocle* opera will take place. Returning to the chronological order of the thread of events where the protagonist was the famous composer Porpora, we were in 1736, when he returned to Venice; then 1738 received an commission to present a *dramma per musica* at the new *Teatro San Carlo* in Naples, on January 20<sup>th</sup>. The opera was a revised version of the *Semiramide riconosciuta*. In the same year he was appointed as *mestro di capella* at the *Conservatorio di Santa Maria di Loreto* in Naples. In 1741 he accepted the post as *meastro di coro* at *Ospedale della Pietà* in Venice; shortly after receiving this appointment, he taught pupils and began giving singing lessons from another Venetian *Conservatorio*, called *Ospedaletto*. Here, Porpora, had as pupil at the singing classes, the later became the famous soprano, Caterina Gabrielli, born Caterina Fatta. Starting with 1747, we will find the *maestro* Porpora as *singing teacher to the Electoral Princess of Saxony, Maria Antonia Walpurgis* (Grove 2001, 170). During this period of his career he will give singing lessons to Regina Mingotti, which had a vocal range of the *soprano coloratura*, very velvety, which he crafted with a lot of artistic expressiveness. In 1753 Vienna, he gave singing lessons to Marianne von Martinez, Metastasio's *protégée*; the same Metastasio, introduced the young composer Joseph Haydn to Porpora. Haydn assured the accompaniment to the clavecin in his singing classes, he was also a copist of musical notes and his valet. Haydn admitted that he had learned from *maestro* Porpora the real theoretical and practical *the true fundamentals* (Grove 2001, 171) of musical composition. Besides the appreciated mentioned names, who were the pupils of Porpora, was also Benedetta Emilia Molteni (soprano).

After the 7-year war, he had to leave Dresda, the Saxon Court pension never receive it. He returned home to Naples, teaching at the Conservatoires where he began his career and became the greatest singing teacher of the time, more than 70 years ago. For the last time, he had an order, to present a new version of the *Il Triomfo di Camilla* to the audience at the *San Carlo* on May 30, 1760. Among his last pupils were Giuseppe Gazzaniga and Domenico Corri, who were famous in their time. Porpora died in poverty and obscurity on 3 March, 1768 in Naples. His disciple, Giuseppe Gazzaniga, composed over 50 operas, recalling *Don Giovanni o sia Il convitato di pietra*, known as *Don Giovanni Tenorio*, libretto by Giovanni Bertati. The premiere took place on 5 February 1787 at the *Teatro San Moisè*, Venice. It can be noticed that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, inspired so much in his *Don Giovanni*, after this opera, little known to the general public.

## Conclusions:

Why was Porpora so important as a teacher for his pupils, who have become so special; very precise breath control. Porpora taught his pupils *filare il suono* (Somerset-Ward 2004, 55) - *spin the tone* to twist his voice to transmute breath in whisper then into a intonation. An another musical effect, Porpora taught the boys, was the ability to link together or linking notes and sentences, this being the quintessence of *bel canto*. The art of singing was not the only thing Porpora handed over to his pupils, he also introduced them into basic notions of composition. Porpora helped to create generations of singers and musicians who brought the *Baroque Galant Style* to the apogee. They were the ones who delighted Europe in the eighteenth century and brought the art of singing to the highest level. Over the time has remained to us the musical score, for those who want to perfect themselves in *bel canto* art of singing and bears the signature of the *maestro* Porpora, under the title *25 Vocalizzi ad una voce e a due voci (fugate) con accompagnamento di cembalo o pianoforte*, reprocessed by Paolo Mirko Bononi, Edition Ricordi, Milan.

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