Obizzi, Pio Enea degli

Castello del Catajo (Padua) 1592 – 1674


Padua, Paolo Frambotto, 1638

FOLIO (270 × 175 mm), (60)ff. signed +4 (engraved title printed from two matrices; publisher’s dedication Al Serenissimo Prencipe di Venezia; address Al Lettore with cast list Attori on verso; blank) A–O4 (description of the action and libretto) and paginated (8) 1–112; plus fifteen unnumbered folding engraved plates (see below).

Bound in the copy and not normally present are three printed scenarii: ‘Argomento del primo Festino’ (at p.10); ‘secondo Festino’ (p.42); ‘terzo Festino’ (p.64).


BOUND contemporary vellum-backed boards.

The Illustrated Libretto of an opera performed in Padua on 11 April 1636 by a travelling company of ‘mercenarii musici’, as the prelude to a tournament in the Cavallerizza di Prato della Valle of which Obizzi was the promoter. A prose description of the horse ballet and tournament by Nicolò Enea Bartolini is interspersed throughout Obizzi’s verse libretto; the music, by Giovanni Felice Sances, was not printed.


Fig. 1 Title-page (page height 270 mm)
Unlike previous operas, *L’Ermiona* was not commissioned to celebrate a special occasion, nor was it performed before an audience exclusively made up of the nobility. The architect and stage designer Alfonso Rivarola (called ‘Il Chenda’, 1591 or 1607–1640) set up a temporary wooden theatre with five vertical tiers of separated boxes accessed from the rear by corridors and common staircases. The tiers functioned as class divisions: common citizens occupied the highest and most distant tier, the principal gentlemen and women of Padua and Venice the lowest, and students and foreign nobility were sandwiched between. According to Bartolini’s description (pp.6–8), spectators were assigned a time to enter the level of the box they occupied, and a new type of mixed audience was thus accommodated while preserving social hierarchies. It is the first major Italian box theatre on record and had immediate influence, guiding the design of the new Teatro San Cassiano, the first public opera stage in Venice, where a year later the modern tradition of commercial opera was inaugurated.6

The unsigned engravings reproduce Chenda’s settings and stage machinery.5 The first folding plate (bound at p.11) is printed from two matrices, one (275 × 400 mm) showing the proscenium and the illustrated stage curtain, the other (55 × 50 mm, irregular) positioned above the arch and displaying the insignia of the dedicatee, Francesco Erizzo, doge of Venice (1566–1646). The fourteen other plates reproduce perspective scenes, each (circa 165 × 165 mm) framed by the same proscenium plate (the curtain now masked).6 Steps at the front of the stage suggest that part of the performance took place on the floor of the hall (see Fig. 3).

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3 For this scenery, and especially the symbolic representations of Venice, see Anna Laura Bellina, ‘L’armonia del buon governi. Un’immagine di Venezia nel dramma per musica del primo ‘600’ in Letteratura italiana e arti figurative, edited by Antonio Franceschetti (Florence 1988), II, pp.685–690.

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Fig. 2 Act I: ‘Il Rapimento d’Europa’, scene 2.
Stage setting by Alfonso Rivarola detto il Chenda (sheet 320 × 400 mm)
Before the curtain was raised, a dance was performed. Bartolini describes the scene:

Along the ground of the theatre were set up two banks on which were arrayed eighty Padovan ladies of surpassing beauty and majestic manners, who, because of the excellency of their noble bearing and the luxury of their adornments, seemed to be worthy of being invited to the wedding of a goddess. To the onlookers their eyes seemed more luminous than stars when they began a stately dance to the music of violins and viols. When this was over and they had returned to their seats, the banks where they sat moved up by means of hidden wheels to a position facing the scene. Then various concerts of musical instruments made the auditorium resound. The most noble senses were so enraptured with the beautiful sight and the sound of harmony that the spectators could believe they had ascended to the skies. Then while the spectators were overwhelmed by the many delights, the music changed and the action on the stage began.”

A ballet danced by twelve ‘giovani padovani’ costumed as shepherds, accompanied by nine musicians representing the Muses, concluded the opera.
The Roman composer Giovanni Felice Sances (1600–1679) had been working in Padua since 1618, latterly under the patronage of Obizzi, to whom he dedicated in 1633 two volumes of cantatas (some accompanying texts supplied by Obizzi). Obizzi’s libretto contains the texts of four laments, two of which employ the descending tetrachord, and that of ‘Europa’ enhanced by the sound of strings. The singers were mostly Romans and included Girolamo Medici, Felicita Uga, Maddalena Manelli (wife of Francesco), Anselmo Marconi, and Monteverdi’s son, Francesco. According to the cast list, the role of Cadmus was sung by Sances himself.

Three scenari (half-sheets, circa 260 × 140 mm) summarising each act of the opera scene-by-scene are preserved in this and a few other copies (see Fig. 4). It is likely that these sheets were sold at the entrance of the theatre in 1636, were retained by some spectators, and bound by them in the libretto when it was published two years later.

The final leaf O4 is recorded in two states, the first without and the second with errata on p.112. These copies are known to the writer


REFERENCES

15 Located by Suzanne P. Michel, Répertoire des ouvrages imprimés en langue italienne au XVIIe siècle conservés dans les bibliothèques de France (Paris 1976), VI, p.30 (also locating copies in the Arsenal and Bibliothèque Nationale de France).
17 Exhibited Illusione e pratica teatrale: proposte per una lettura dello spazio scenico dagli Intermedi fiorentini all’opera comica veneziana, catalogue of an exhibition held at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, edited by Franco Mancini, Maria Teresa Muraro, Elena Povolato ([Vicenza] 1975), p.61 no. 17.
18 Beatrice Corrigan, Catalogue of Italian Plays, 1500–1700, in the Library of the University of Toronto (Toronto 1961), p.68.