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Huub van der Linden

A family at the opera:
the Bolognetti as an audience at the theatres of Rome
(1694–1736)

1. Introduction

Following his visit to Rome in 1729, Montesquieu wrote about the then operating Alibert, Capranica, and Pace theatres: “that is where all the people flock to, down to the last bourgeois impassioned by music”.¹ Although, as Montesquieu wrote, opera theatres were frequented by a large section of society, opera also remained inextricably tied to the aristocracy. Aristocrats were the genre’s direct patrons by acting as the main financial sponsors and backers of theatres and theatre productions. Numerous studies have shown how the major families of Rome were deeply and directly involved with the city’s musical life, paying for music and musicians and creating their own musical events.² But what about all those others, bourgeois and aristocrats

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1. MONTESQUIEU, *Scritti postumi (1757–2006): i miei pensieri, i miei viaggi, saggi, romanzi filosofici, memorie e discorsi accademici, poesie*, ed. Domenico Felice, Firenze, Bompiani, 2017, p. 554: “c’est la que concourt tout le peuple jusques au dernier bourgeois furieux de musique”.

2. Too many Roman families have been the object of study to name here, but see URSULA KIRKENDALE, “The Ruspoli documents on Handel”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XX/2, 1967, pp. 222–273; URSULA KIRKENDALE, “Handel with Ruspoli: new documents from the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, December 1706 to December 1708”, *Studi*

alike, the ones who were not grand patrons but who were the ones that actually filled the theatres, the patrons in the modern sense of ‘paying audience members’?³

We still know relatively little in detail about the audiences that attended specific theatre performances in Rome. Moving beyond anecdotal clues about audiences on the one hand and large generalisations on the other poses a particular challenge. There are several potential ways to arrive at a more precise view of theatre audiences at Roman theatres. One is to start from the theatres themselves: documents about the assignment of boxes and ticket sales can provide precious information about the composition of at least the box-holding part of the audience.⁴ Another approach is to look at a par-

musicali, xxxii/2, 2003, pp. 301–348; FABRIZIO DELLA SETA, “I Borghese (1691–1731): la musica di una generazione”, *Note d’archivio per la storia musicale*, n.s. 1, 1983, pp. 139–208; ARNALDO MORELLI, “Un modello di committenza musicale: i Borghese nella seconda metà del Seicento”, in *Musikstadt Rom: Geschichte, Forschung, Perspektiven*, Beiträge der Tagung “Rom – Die Ewige Stadt im Brennpunkt der aktuellen musikwissenschaftlichen Forschung” (Rome, 28–30 September 2004), ed. Markus Engelhardt, Kassel, Bärenreiter, 2011, pp. 204–217; ANNE-MADELEINE GOULET, “La musique à Rome dans la seconde moitié du XVIIe siècle d’après les fonds d’archives familiales: le cas du fonds Lante Della Rovere”, in *La musique à Rome au XVIIe siècle: études et perspectives de recherche*, eds. Caroline Giron-Panel – Anne-Madeleine Goulet, Rome, École française de Rome, 2012, pp. 75–94; ALEXANDRA NIGITO, *La musica alla corte del principe Giovanni Battista Pamphilj (1648–1709)*, Kassel, Merseburger, 2013.

3. On interest having been skewed towards ‘grand’ family patronage, see ARNALDO MORELLI, “La musica a Roma nel Seicento e la ricerca storica: un quarantennio di studi”, in *La musique à Rome au XVIIe siècle*, pp. 1–13. For a lesser family directly involved with theatre productions see ELISABETTA MORI, “I Maccarani dal teatro di corte al teatro Alibert”, in *La musica a Roma attraverso le fonti d’archivio*, atti del convegno internazionale (Roma 4–7 giugno 1992), eds. Bianca Maria Antolini – Arnaldo Morelli – Vera Vita Spagnuolo, Lucca, LIM, 1994, pp. 183–203.

4. For a number of major theatres in Rome, much archival material exists that still awaits comprehensive study. See in particular on the Capranica archive at the Archivio Storico Capitolino (I-Rasc, AC) and elsewhere JOHN ROSSELLI, “I teatri di dipendenza della famiglia Capranica”, in *La musica a Roma attraverso le fonti d’archivio*, pp. 177–182. The archive of the Sovereign Order of Malta in Rome holds material on the Teatro d’Alibert starting in 1725 which has yet to be put to full use. It was first used in EMMA AMADEI, “Documenti sul Teatro delle Dame nell’Archivio del S.M.O. di Malta in Roma”, *Archivi d’Italia e rassegna internazionale*, III/1, 1936, pp. 42–53. Material concerning the later 18th century forms the basis of ANTONIETTA CEROCCHI, “Il teatro Alibert o ‘delle Dame’: struttura e organizzazione”, in *Mozart, Padova e La Betulia liberata: committenza, interpretazione e fortuna nelle azioni sacre metastasiane del ’700*, atti del convegno (Padova, 28–30 settembre 1989), ed. Paolo Pinamonti, Firenze, Olschki, 1991, pp. 395–405. For an extensive handlist

ticular slice of the audience across multiple theatres, such as one family or person in particular. While the former approach can provide more detailed information, it also still foregrounds the audience from one particular theatre's point of view. While yielding a spottier and less homogenous body of evidence, looking at one family has the benefit of offering a wider panorama of theatrical venues and events over the years. Along with other longitudinal surveys focused on chronicles and *avvisi*, or on the musical and theatrical repertoire itself, a detailed look at one family's presence at a city's theatres can add yet another cross-section of Rome's theatrical life.⁵ Eventually, of course, all these types of sources and approaches ought to be combined, cross-referenced, and used in tandem.

The aim of this article is to present such a (semi)longitudinal case-study of one aristocratic family's presence at the theatres of Rome, using part of its surviving financial administration.⁶ A prerequisite for such an approach is archival material with relatively detailed information. Given the nature of Italian family archives and their survival, this means we still have to turn to an aristocratic family, although, as will appear, glimpses at other theatre-goers emerge from it as well. Since this is admittedly a considerable limitation, such an approach makes most sense when the material is at least surveyed fully and systematically, including all the smaller and larger payments that inform us about a family's theatre attendance.⁷ The Bolognetti family lends itself well to such an approach. They were on the whole no prominent direct musical patrons, but they were steady theatre-goers over the years. This article principally uses the *giustificazioni di pagamento* of the conte Ferdinando

of mostly notarial documents concerning theatres see MARIA GRAZIA PASTURA RUGGIERO, "Fonti per la storia del teatro romano nel Settecento conservate nell'Archivio di Stato di Roma", in *Il teatro a Roma nel Settecento*, 2 vols., Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1989, II, pp. 505–587.

5. For different panoramas of opera and theatre in Rome in this period see ALESSANDRO ADEMOLLO, *I teatri di Roma nel secolo decimosettimo*, Roma, Pasqualucci, 1888; Saverio FRANCHI, *Drammaturgia romana*, vol. I *Repertorio bibliografico cronologico dei testi drammatici pubblicati a Roma e nel Lazio: secolo XVII*, vol. II *Annali dei testi drammatici e libretti per musica pubblicati a Roma e nel Lazio dal 1701 al 1750*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1988 e 1997. *Avvisi* (news letters) are e.g. the basis of GLORIA STAFFIERI, *Colligite fragmenta: la vita musicale romana negli avvisi Marescotti, 1683–1707*, Lucca, LIM, 1990.

6. For a similarly family-centred approach, but using letters and diaries, see DONALD BURROWS – ROSEMARY DUNHILL, *Music and theatre in Handel's world: the family papers of James Harris 1732–1780*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

7. The lack of a systematic approach to music patronage in Roman family archives was brought up e.g. by MORELLI, "La musica a Roma", p. 12.