

BRIANNA E. ROBERTSON-KIRKLAND, *VENANZIO RAUZZINI AND THE BIRTH OF A NEW STYLE IN ENGLISH SINGING: SCANDALOUS LESSONS* (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2022). ISBN: 978-1-032-20029-3, 244pp, £39.99 (paperback)

Venanzio Rauzzini (1746–1810), a castrato from Camerino in central Italy, educated at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, arrived in London in 1774. He initially took up the position of *primo uomo* at the King's Theatre, having recently enjoyed successful engagements across Italy (including the first performance of Mozart's *Exsultate, jubilate*), as well as in Vienna and at the Bavarian court. In 1780, he moved to Bath and became director of the concert series there, inviting some of the most celebrated singers in England to perform at the series. His generosity and engaging, polite manners made him beloved by audiences and performers, some of whom waived their fee for the pleasure of his company. While in Bath, he established himself as the most popular singing master of the day. Distinguished amateurs and aspiring professionals studied with him and enjoyed his hospitality at his summer residence in Perrymead on the outskirts of Bath.

This book takes Rauzzini's teaching as a focal point, exploring complex issues relating to eighteenth-century culture, education, and nationalism as they converge on the elusive phenomenon of the singing lesson. Judged by the careers of his pupils – their improvements, reception, and experience of the operatic profession in both their professional and private lives – Rauzzini's students are at the heart of the research. Eighteenth-century treatises by eminent teachers, including Giambattista Mancini, Pier Francesco Tosi, and Domenico Corri, are supplemented by biographical studies in the popular press as well as articles by Mollie Sands, Kenneth James, Sheila Hodges, and Paul Rice.¹ Recent publications by Robert O. Gjerdingen and *The Solfeggio Tradition* by

¹ Giambattista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on Figured Singing (Pensieri e Riflessioni Pratiche sopra il Canto Figurato, Engl.) The Edition of 1774 and 1777 compared*, trans. and ed. by Edward Foreman (Champagne, Illinois: Pro Musica Press, 1967); Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song: or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, trans. by John Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743); Domenico Corri, *The Singer's Preceptor* (London: Silvester, Longman, Hurst, Rees & Orme, [1810]); Mollie Sands, 'The Singing-Master in Eighteenth-Century England', *Music & Letters* 23.1 (1942), 69–80; Sands, 'The Teaching of Singing in Eighteenth-Century England', *Proceedings of the Musical Association* 70 (1943), 11–33; Sands, 'Venanzio Rauzzini. Singer, Composer, Traveller' *The Musical Times* 94.1319 (1953a), 15–19; Sands, 'Rauzzini at Bath' *The Musical Times* 94.1321 (1953b), 108–111; Kenneth James, 'Venanzio Rauzzini and the Search for Musical Perfection', *Bath History* 3 (1990), 90–114; Sheila Hodges, 'Venanzio Rauzzini: "The First Master for Teaching in the Universe"' *The Music Review* 51 (1991), 12–30; Paul F. Rice, *Venanzio Rauzzini in Britain. Castrato, Composer and Cultural Leader* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester, 2015).

Nicholas Baragwanath facilitate a more in-depth study of music education in the eighteenth century.²

The book opens with a Prelude, presenting the reader with Rauzzini on his death bed, passing away during the course of a lesson.³ Attention is drawn to the unregulated nature of singing lessons and the tasks of the teacher are itemised as: attracting students; giving them a platform; maintaining appropriate conduct; adapting Italian methods to English students; and aligning with changing attitudes and popular musical trends. The author contextualises the presence of Italian singing masters in England and guides the reader through attitudes to these musicians, often perceived as dangerous and immoral because of their appeal and sexual impunity. Brianna Robertson-Kirkland makes a convincing case that Rauzzini's skills did not rest solely in his musical ability 'but were also closely connected to his demeanour and image' (9). Forty years after his death, Rauzzini was remembered as 'an astute master who could transform a mediocre singer into an operatic star' (11). Practical aspects of the creation of a castrato are discussed and a stimulating summary of the circumstances of the female professional singer is provided. A concise overview of the English and Italian musical styles reveals a hint of the shifting sands encountered when discussing this topic in this period. The author later remarks that researchers 'do not necessarily agree on whether the Italian and the English styles of singing were audibly dissimilar' (88). Patriotic and moralistic agendas are repeatedly cited as complicating the criteria of genre, performance practice, and training methods for identifying national styles.

Robertson-Kirkland is well placed to author this monograph, with an established record of publications on eighteenth-century music education, music-making, and opera, and having performed music of this period and taken master classes with experts in historical performance practice. Careful analysis of archival documents and print sources reveals how musical ideas and practices were shaped by wider cultural and nationalistic interests and concerns. This book is timely as it investigates how singing teachers' response to their environment has an effect, from the success of their students to cultural appreciation of their art.

² Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories: How Orphans became Elite Musicians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Nicholas Baragwanath, *The Solfeggio Tradition* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

³ This is a fictionalised account of Charles Edward Horn's last lesson with Rauzzini, based on an extract from Horn's *Memoirs* where he relates that the 'poor man, nearly expired in the very act of hearing me sing. While he lay there [...] I flew to his bedside'. Charles Edward Horn, *Routledge Revivals: Charles Edward Horn's Memoirs of his Father and Himself*, ed. Michael Kassler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 115, quoted in Robertson-Kirkland (2). With his emphasis on physical exercise, including sending students to run in the hills outside Bath, it was certainly not Rauzzini's habit to teach from his bed!

Chapter one provides biographical details of Rauzzini, documenting his status as a singing master. Broader issues relating to a growing wish for a national music institution are discussed in terms of national honour and recouping the large fees paid to foreign musicians. The only means of education available to aspiring professional singers in Britain at the time are specified as residential apprenticeships, private lessons or a choir school. The significance of vocal exercises and other pedagogical publications is explored, and the author illuminates the often murky practices of music masters, among whom Rauzzini appears to stand as an exception to prove the rule.

Chapter two investigates his teaching arrangements for the six years he spent in London (1774–1780). The reception of his pupil Caterina Schildlerin, who travelled to London with him in 1774 to be *prima donna* at the King's Theatre, is weighed up in order to reflect on Rauzzini's teaching. Prolonged attention is given to marketing a child prodigy to foreground his pupil Nancy Storace, who made her operatic debut in Rauzzini's opera *Le Ali D'Amore* at the age of ten, singing a recitative and aria Rauzzini had composed for her. This chapter introduces the aspect of earning power and market forces, which recurs through the book.

Chapter three progresses to the well-established and celebrated singers who studied with Rauzzini in Bath, including apprentice tenors John Braham and Charles Incledon. The sopranos Elizabeth Billington and Gertrud Mara, regular performers at the concert series in Bath, were often pitted against each other in the popular press and, somewhat surprisingly, listed as students of Rauzzini. Robertson-Kirkland speculates that Billington may have been eager to support the reputation of a favourite colleague, while Mara may not have been aware of the reports. Mara's reluctance to acknowledge anyone as her singing master prompts a general comparison between natural talent and instruction. The Irish tenor Michael Kelly also endorsed Rauzzini's formative influence.

Chapters four and five constitute the most relevant and practical section of the book for researchers of vocal technique and performance practice, reviewing Rauzzini's training methods and legacy and returning to the quotation referenced in the book's title: 'In [his] career he has become the father of a new style of English singing, and a new race of singers, who have naturalized, to an English ear, the florid song and ornamented style of the Italians'⁴ (81). Gauging attitudes to national styles and how they influenced each other is challenging in this period, complicated by political issues and variable levels of consistency within individual sources. The author observes '[a]fter all, it was really Arne who lay the groundwork for a blended Anglo-Italian musical style to emerge', and briefly compares Arne's compositional style with Rauzzini's teaching style

⁴ 'Memoirs of Signor Rauzzini', *The Monthly Mirror: Reflecting Men and Manners. With Strictures on their Epitome, the Stage*, vol. 1, April 1807 (London: Vernor, Hood and Sharp, 1807), 232.

(98). As Arne and Rauzzini were both singing masters and composers, it would have been illuminating to highlight the contrast between the two musicians in these two distinct spheres. Rauzzini was known for his supportive manner, encouraging singers to be aware of their limitations so that intended graces did not become 'Disgraces' (31). In 1808 he published *Twelve Solfeggi or Exercises for the Voice* (which does not claim to be innovative in its short introduction) and Robertson-Kirkland hypothesizes that this represents a legacy document rather than a promotional tool. Many sources describe Rauzzini as a 'professional father' to some of the leading opera singers of the day, and the author illustrates the life-long bonds he established and maintained with John Braham, Nancy Storace, Elizabeth Billington, Michael Kelly, Gertrud Mara, Charles Incedon and Rosemond Mountain.

Chapters six and seven broaden the focus to survey the social position of music masters and professional singers and the dangers to which they were exposed. Particular attention is given to scandals involving female students and performers, who endured an even more precarious position than the 'socially blurred' status of the castrato (141). The author reveals that performers resorted to engaging with the public press to settle scores with each other. The Postlude acknowledges that 'very little has been said about what the lesson entailed' (169). The author reflects that 'Rauzzini's ability to build positive working relationships with his musical colleagues, theatre managers, and the public gave him access to opportunities that he could use to benefit his students' (172). Appendix one lists Nancy Storace's juvenile performances. Appendix two is particularly helpful for the reader, listing the singers who were advertised as Rauzzini's pupils.

At times, the contextualisation of the topic casts the net a little too wide: the relevance of the discussion of solfa and pre-sixteenth-century hexachords is tenuous. Repeated allusions to Rauzzini's 'treatise' may be misleading for readers, who will discover in the endnotes that this is a reference to the brief introduction to the 1808 *Twelve Solfeggi*. Readers would have benefitted from the addition of extracts from these exercises, as illustrations of the varying styles and incremental difficulties involved. The title of this book might lead readers to expect a more extensive discussion of vocal technique and specific teaching methods. Vocal pedagogy research is a growing field, and prominent studies investigate the terminology and approaches found in eighteenth and nineteenth-century treatises.⁵ In the literature surveyed in this book, Rauzzini is variously described

⁵ Daniela Bloem-Hubatka, *The Old Italian School of Singing* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); Kenneth W. Bozeman, *Kinesthetic Voice Pedagogy: Motivating Acoustic Efficiency* (Gahanna: Inside View Press, 2017); Richard Miller, *National Schools of Singing: English, French, German and Italian Techniques of Singing Revisited*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002); Brent Monahan, *The Art of Singing: A Compendium of Thoughts*

as ‘the scientific Rauzzini’ (83) and ‘a friend to science’ (24). While the word ‘science’ may have been understood quite differently in the eighteenth century, scientific references and the ongoing development of the concept in the nineteenth century (where some treatises include anatomical illustrations (24, 108)) invite further exploration. Ultimately, the author leaves these aspects to the periphery, perhaps favouring the attitude of an anonymous contributor to the *Quarterly Music Magazine and Review* in 1818: ‘[t]here is indeed a jargon on terms, a mixture of Italian and English methods, but after all, these go little further than the technical parts of the art’⁶ (13). However, the extensive range of sources on vocal technique and pedagogy in the bibliography will prove very beneficial to the reader.

This book offers a reminder of the aspects of traditional music teaching models that persist to the present day and the problems that can still arise in specialist, individualised lessons. The chief accomplishment of the book is the insight it provides into the social context of music education and the life of the professional singer in the eighteenth century, casting new light on issues of celebrity culture, gender, and nationalism. The author’s painstaking untangling of the complex social networks within English musical life highlights the layers of cultural influence which affected the success of Rauzzini’s students and established his pedagogical legacy.

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on *Singing published between 1777 and 1927* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978); Karen Sell, *The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy: Towards an Holistic Approach* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014); James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁶ ‘Timotheus, “To the Editor”’, *Quarterly Music Magazine and Review*, vol. 1 (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1818).