

# His Voice and Something More: Francesco Borosini's Cantata *Quando miro o stella o fiore* for Anton Ulrich, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen

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## Abstract

Eighteenth-century opera singers often engaged in activities that far exceeded their role as mere performers. Not only could they have a decisive impact on a composer's musical choices; they often functioned as "cultural middlemen," cultivating contacts to various noblemen. We can observe a prime example for a singer's "networking abilities" in the tenor Francesco Borosini, who, despite belonging to Italian baroque opera's "lower league," was able to have a career that outshone some castrati. Not only did he become the highest paid tenor of the court chapel of Charles VI in Vienna; he also gained more and more influence with respect to his social status. Part of his off-stage success was actually due to his key role as a supplier of music for numerous aristocrats throughout Europe. In Vienna, he became acquainted with Duke Anton Ulrich of Saxe-Meiningen, who aimed to replicate the Habsburg musical library at his residence in Meiningen. Borosini, known to be active as a composer, gifted him with a cantata for soprano voice and basso continuo. This piece represents an occasional work of the singer, whose compositional activity has to date not been brought into focus. However, the piece, as simple as it might seem at first glance, displays a rare virtuoso singing style which differs remarkably from the usual writing for soprano. It contains steep jumps between registers and uncanny low notes that may cast doubt on the intended voice type. Many possibilities come to mind, as vocal technique in late baroque Italian opera still puzzles scholars today. More importantly, the piece—being the only composition by a singer within Anton Ulrich's collection—raises questions about the reason for its inclusion alongside works by Vienna's most prestigious composers. An illustration of Borosini's role as a networker and connoisseur of "good quality music," of his peculiar role profile as well as his singing style, underpins why this occasional and unique piece might have been intended as a gift for the duke.

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# Introduction

[1] For several decades, musicologists have been commenting on the complex social networks singers created and the key functions they assumed for the creation of operas. When dealing with early *settecento* opera, scholars mostly devoted themselves to castrati and in some cases to female sopranos.<sup>[1]</sup> Their fame and prestige inevitably reflected on their connections to people of influence, a matter that was key for almost all singer careers. Whether the performer was a member of an itinerant opera troupe or at the service of a nobleman or a court chapel, the involvement of patron-like figures was important for securing a stable income and regular engagements at the opera theaters.<sup>[2]</sup> All of the investigations regarding the connections between singers and noblemen have been conducted with notable focus on the baroque opera's high-voiced protagonists.<sup>[3]</sup> In opposition to this, the goal of my article is to illustrate how one particular baroque tenor could come close to if not outshine many of the castrati's key positions within an early *settecento* cultural ambience. I plan to illustrate this assumption on the basis of a particular composition, the cantata for solo voice and basso continuo *Quando miro o stella o fiore*, composed by the tenor Francesco Borosini (ca. 1690–1755).<sup>[4]</sup> Born in Modena around 1690 into a family of musicians, Borosini presumably debuted in Venice in Antonio Lotti's *Il vincitor generoso* in 1709. His father Antonio Borosini, a successful tenor himself and active at the Viennese court under the reigns of Leopold I and Joseph I, is likely to have taught his son and to have introduced him to the Habsburg musical scene. Shortly after his admission to the court chapel of Charles VI in 1712, he received a notable raise in salary, which made him the highest paid tenor of the entire *Hofkapelle* (court chapel).<sup>[5]</sup> We can assume that he obtained at least basic training in counterpoint, as was common for most baroque singers.<sup>[6]</sup> However, the cantata I am about to discuss is the only surviving document of Borosini's compositional activity.<sup>[7]</sup>

Borosini's cantata raises questions of variegated nature: first, its vocal peculiarities prompt performance practice-related questions, most significantly concerning the kind of voice for which it was intended. Second, and perhaps more importantly, I wonder why this simple, small-scale occasional composition was included in Anton Ulrich's *Sammlung* (collection) at all. I assume that the value of this piece might be linked to Borosini himself and that behind the unique vocal style lies a pointer to his important *persona*. To underline this hypothesis, I would like to point out that the catalogue of the collection shows a large number of operas that featured Borosini as a protagonist. The list displays court composer Francesco Bartolomeo Conti's famous carnivalesque tragicomedies *Don Chisciotte in Sierra Morena*, *Il finto Policare*, and *Archelao, re di Cappadocia*, Antonio Caldara's carnival opera *Penelope*, Johann Georg Reinhardt's serenata *La più bella*, and many other works.<sup>[8]</sup> Besides strictly Viennese repertoire, the collection contains a copy of Francesco Gasparini's *Bajazet*, given in Reggio Emilia in 1719, and one of the very few non-Viennese works in the collection. Borosini had sung the homonymous role of Sultan Bajazet in 1719 and apparently provided Anton Ulrich with a copy of Gasparini's opera, as revealed by the inside of the front binding of the manuscript. It reads "Von Mr. Borrosini Verehrt Bekommen in Wien" ("received by the revered Mr. Borosini in Vienna").<sup>[9]</sup> It is interesting that the singer, who had a decisive impact on the genesis of the role of Bajazet—as I will discuss later—gifted the duke with a copy of the most important character of his career.<sup>[10]</sup> The striking presence of Borosini's name in the manuscript collection—paired with the fact that he is the only singer who provided a composition for the duke—points to his important role within European operatic life.



**Figure 1: Francesco Borosini (caricature by Anton Maria Zanetti); by courtesy of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice), [Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe](#)**

# Borosini the Composer: The Anton-Ulrich-Sammlung and the cantata *Quando miro o stella o fiore*

In order to contextualize the musical and poetic content of the cantata, it is necessary to illustrate some key aspects regarding its genesis and its codicological coordinates: the copy of *Quando miro o stella o fiore* is preserved in the Max-Reger-Archiv at Schloss Elisabethenburg in Meiningen, Germany, and is the sole extant copy of this work. It is part of one of the largest collections of Viennese music outside the Habsburg capital, the Anton-Ulrich-Sammlung, bought and assembled by Duke Anton Ulrich of Saxe-Meiningen (1687–1763),<sup>[11]</sup> who during one of his residences in Vienna (1725–28) acquired a large number of scores, libretti, and other items of value and had them shipped to his main residence. The music manuscripts were all copied and bound in Vienna. Afterwards they were shipped to Meiningen, once the duke returned home in 1728. The *Sammlung* contains mostly vocal compositions of various secular genres, such as operas, serenatas, cantatas, and some sacred music. The vast majority of the works had been written by Viennese composers and staged in Vienna for courtly occasions prior to their shipping to Meiningen (Gasparini's *Bajazet* is one of the few exceptions). Because of its great heterogeneity (some chamber works, others large-scale theatrical ones) and because of the absence of Italian musicians at the Meiningen court chapel, Anton Ulrich most likely did not gather them with the intention of performing music at his residence. The main reason for collecting the musical material could well have been prestige, personal interest, and the desire to provide his Meiningen court composers with study scores.<sup>[12]</sup>

[2] Borosini's cantata is part of the anthology D-MEIr Ed 115f/1. The description of the manuscript was meticulously done by Lawrence Bennett and shall thus only be summarized in the following.<sup>[13]</sup> The volume displays quite typical hallmarks of manuscripts of Viennese provenance in terms of its oblong format (24 x 32 cm) and leather binding. There are no imprints on the cover, except for the manuscript's spine, which displays the names of the featured composers.<sup>[14]</sup> It consists of 81 folios in total. Two types of Viennese papers were used in this particular manuscript: a lighter one for the cantatas 1–5 (see table 1) and a darker one with a different watermark for the remaining three cantatas. Bennett concluded that it was Viennese paper, probably acquired by Anton Ulrich's servants. He notes, however, that the latter paper type was used *only* for the present volume and does not appear in any other sources of the *Sammlung*. Overall, the manuscript is in a good condition, although it does not appear to be particularly "well-polished," especially with regard to the hyphenation, as shall be explained below. The anthology contains a total of eight cantatas for solo voice. The volume is composed as illustrated in table 1. The cantatas do not receive explicit titles, yet the individual authors are mentioned specifically on the first folio of every work, for example "Cantata del Borosini."<sup>[15]</sup> There is no specification regarding the origin of the poetic text of the cantata.<sup>[16]</sup>

No.	Composer	Incipit	Voice, Instruments	Structure	Folios <sup>[17]</sup>	Copyist
1	Francesco Borosini	Quando miro o stella o fiore	S, bc	A-R-A	Fol. 2r–5v	A?
2	Ignazio Maria Conti	Bersaglio di sventure	S, vn I, vn II, va, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 7r–20v	B
3	Ignazio Maria Conti	Dunque deggio tacer	S, vn I, vn II, va, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 21r–33v	B

4	Leopold Timmer	All'apparir di risplendente Aurora spunta	S, vn I, vn II, va, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 34r-41vB
5	Georg Reutter, Jr.	Vieni Laurindo mio	A, vl I, vn II, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 42r-50vB
6	Georg Reutter, Jr.	Or che dorme l'idol mio	S, vn I, vn II, va, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 52r-59vB
7	Georg Reutter, Jr.	Solitario passeggiando su le spiagge	B, vn I, vn II, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 60r-68vB
8	Georg Reutter, Jr.	Nascer sento nell'alma	S, vn I, vn II, bc	R-A-R-A	Fol. 70r-79vC

**Table 1: The anthology D-MEIr Ed 155/f1 (A = Aria, R = Recitative)**

What is striking about the volume at first sight is the total number of eight pieces assembled, as cantatas tended to be bound by groups of either six or twelve during that period. Although Anton Ulrich's cantata collection does contain other volumes with the same number of works,<sup>[18]</sup> the fact that the internal six cantatas were seemingly copied by the same Viennese scribe could suggest that the two external works were added at a later point. However, the aforementioned differing paper used for copying the last three works puts that into doubt.

Other than Borosini's work, the anthology contains cantatas by Ignazio Maria Conti, son of Francesco Bartolomeo Conti, Leopold Timmer, and Georg Reutter Jr.<sup>[19]</sup> As we can see, all of the works are written for a soprano voice, except cantata no. 5 and cantata no. 7 by Reutter. As regards the copyists, I was able to identify at least three different hands. What catches the eye at first is that Borosini's cantata is the only one copied by whom I refer to as copyist A, whose hand I could not identify clearly: while copyists B and C display a handwriting common for Viennese secular dramatic compositions of the 1720s, to my knowledge copyist A does not appear in operas, oratorios, or serenatas of that period. I cannot exclude that Borosini's cantata is in fact an autograph. However, some inaccuracies in the hyphenation and the fact that his handwriting does not seem to appear in dramatic compositions of the *Hofkapelle* could indicate that whoever wrote it down was not given to copying vocal music very often and—probably—was not too familiar with the Italian language.<sup>[20]</sup> It is evident that in a few bars the copyist made emendations or corrected mistakes. The other curious aspect is that this seemingly occasional composition by a singer appears in conjunction with Viennese composers who were to some extent professionals, although none of them had a particularly high status within the hierarchy of the court chapel.<sup>[21]</sup>

In the following paragraphs, I would like to take a closer look at the musical and textual aspects. As illustrated in table 1, the work displays a typical yet condensed formal structure of an early eighteenth-century cantata: two da capo arias with a middle recitative.<sup>[22]</sup> It is written for solo voice (in soprano clef) and basso continuo. Both arias have very short instrumental *ritornelli*, although the second aria reveals itself to be slightly longer than the first one. When one examines the poetic content of the first piece—two stanzas with four *ottonari* verses each—it is clear that the principal character is male. He opens up his thoughts and nostalgia regarding his female love interest, already giving away a clue about her identity by comparing her to a flower (see appendix 1).<sup>[23]</sup>

The confirmation of her identity occurs at the beginning of the recitative (appendix 2, mm. 73–79), when the singer finally mentions the name of his love interest, Clori, the Greek nymph and goddess of flowers and springtime (known as Flora by the Romans), whose name the protagonist “can hear inside and outside his head.” Thematically, the work is embedded in a pastoral and arcadian context, where the addressee of the protagonist's declarations happens to be Clori quite often.<sup>[24]</sup> Therefore, the identity of the anonymous male character of Borosini's cantata could be ascribed to a variety of mythological figures, such as Zephyr, the Greek god of the west wind, Tirsi, Daliso, or Mirtillo.<sup>[25]</sup>

The musical realization of the first aria mostly underlines its poetic content in an obvious manner, as for example the close repetitions of the short motive of mm. 23-24 with the ascending octave leap, perhaps illustrating the “recurring thought” of the protagonist’s love interest (see figure 2).<sup>[26]</sup>

It does not contain excessive coloratura or any other technically challenging parts. The entire piece is written in soprano clef and the overall ambitus just slightly exceeds the soprano’s central octave, keeping within a very narrow *tessitura*. The first measures of the entry of the vocal line are illustrated in figure 2 below and should give an idea of the musical style. The top note of the aria, f#', is reached several times and should not be considered a particularly demanding note for soprano or mezzo-soprano voice. Actually, the aria could probably be interpreted by an amateur singer and does not require high technical ability. It is evident that the vocal line avoids descending into the lower part of the central octave, as the bottom e' is reached almost exclusively in preparation for the ascending octave leaps, for example in mm. 24-25 and 28-29.

**Figure 2: Quando miro o stella o fiore, mm. 19-30**

[3] The second aria also praises Clori’s qualities and the feelings Zephyr has for her and does not present a particular thematic contrast to the first piece (see appendix 1). With striking poetic simplicity, the *ego loquens* of the cantata sees his beloved Clori everywhere: in the meadow, atop a mountain, and on the plain. However, as unspectacular as the text may seem, the musical

realization certainly is not. It is here that the reader of the cantata is challenged with the question regarding the possible interpreter for this piece. In the middle of the A section of the da capo aria, the soprano clef is abandoned and the vocal line descends into an almost baritone-like register, even reaching bottom A, as illustrated in my transcription of the aria in the appendix to this article.

The aria is written in A major, just like the first one, and starts with a 15-bar instrumental introduction. Unsurprisingly, the vocal line is notated in the soprano clef and starts out in the soprano's middle tessitura. At m. 119, however, at the conclusion of the first stanza and significantly coinciding with the word "piano" [plain or ground], the voice drops to bottom B before concluding the cadence in the dominant key of E major. After the repetition of the first stanza at m. 124 in a high, soprano-like tessitura, the musical underscoring of the verse "Ed ella ascende al monte, ed ella è al piano" ("And I see her ascending the mountain, and I see her on the plain") between mm. 134–53 prompts the usage of upward scales. The soprano clef is then abandoned, and between m. 137 and m. 186 all four clefs are alternated frequently, thereby adding a visual component to the continual shift in registers. What is particularly interesting is that the low notes (written in bass clef) are often used as "surprise effects": on one hand, they appear during cadences (e.g., m. 119/120, m. 152/153, m. 168/169), while on the other hand they are clearly used to baffle, as it is evident at mm. 138–45, when the short three-note motive of mm. 138–39 is repeated. The composer inserted low notes where one would expect them an octave higher, in a way that would baffle not only a potential reader of the manuscript but also a potential listener of the piece. The placement of those notes towards the end of the work is tactical: it creates a clear "internal climax" within the composition—whether it was intended to be sung or read—underlined by the fact that this abrupt shift in register, the frequent changes of clefs, and the uncommonly low notes grow denser as the piece goes on.

At m. 145, the voice even reaches bottom A, a note that is definitely uncommon for the majority of so-called high voices, whether we imagine a female singer or a castrato. The low A is touched several times throughout the piece, mostly at the cadences. However, it is not only the single low notes that baffle me: the ascending scale, evoking the climbing of the mountain ("Ed ella ascende al monte, ed ella è al piano"), is located in a notably lower register than previously, especially at mm. 146–65. It is also here that we can see the most dense alternation of clefs, which in some cases is even redundant and seems to have been done on purpose to also visually underline the shift to a lower register. The changes from tenor to alto clef (at mm. 148–51 and mm. 164–67) do not necessarily arise from structural considerations, as the copyist could have easily remained in tenor clef for two more bars. The note a' would have required only one ledger line and was commonly written in tenor clef in the Viennese scores of those years. One supposes that the virtuosity of this aria could also have been expressed visually, through the frequent clef changes illustrating the adaptability of the singer.<sup>[27]</sup>

In the B section of the aria (m. 177 onwards), the vocal line persists in a low register during the first verse ("E quando nulla io miro spenti del sole i rai" / "And when I see nothing, because the sun's lights are out/off [so they cannot guide me]"). Clearly, the composer was aiming to conjure up the darkness by using the singer's bottom notes. The vocal line returns shortly afterward to the soprano clef and a high tessitura, even reaching the soprano g', the cantata's overall top note. The B section of the aria, however, closes in its low register, even engaging in a short melismatic passage on the word "vano" (mm. 207–19). This short coloratura is located between the notes c and f', almost an octave below a soprano's central octave. Another interesting aspect here is the obvious use of parallel octaves at the conclusion of the B section, at mm. 214–19.

Perhaps this could be interpreted as another underscoring of the poetic text, specifically alluding to the word “vano” (vain). These means of imitating the literal content of the aria using hypotyposis—that is, parallel octaves, ascending and descending scales according to the text—were a common, however also quite simple way to express the content musically. Supposing the author of the piece was an amateur composer, this technique would be the most immediate one available.

The vocal peculiarities of the second aria, “Clori al prato rimiro,” illustrate clearly that the vocal part insists on two different ranges (figure 3): one seemingly comprising the high register from a' to high e'', and the other from low g to e', mostly employed in the second half of the aria. Low g would probably be the bottom limit of most high voices (except maybe uncommonly low contralto voices). However, in this piece it recurs so frequently (see, e.g., mm. 201–5) that a potential performer of this cantata must be comfortable with this pitch. Interestingly, there are various sections of the aria that use either the high register or the low one. The notes in between those two fields are not completely omitted yet are used as transitions from one register to another. It seems as if the piece were aiming to juxtapose those two ranges, almost as if the singer should display two different voices: the high, “soprano-like” one—employed throughout the first aria, the recitative, and the first half of the second aria—and a notably deeper register, which is displayed at the end of the second aria.



**Figure 3: Two tessituras of the second aria**

## A Cantata for Soprano?

[4] The above analysis of the ambitus and vocal peculiarities of the second aria makes it increasingly difficult to believe that it was actually intended for a soprano voice, although this is suggested by the beginning of the cantata. Now is the appropriate moment to pick up the numerous looming quandaries that this piece raises: First, what kind of voice did Borosini have in mind when composing a piece that contains such uncommon shifts in vocal range? Second, did he imagine a specific voice at all, or was it simply written down to be included in the duke’s collection? If so, why would he use this unusual kind of vocal ambitus? As I already mentioned, there is no proof of a performance of the cantata, either for Vienna or for Meiningen. However, what would be the purpose of collecting this small-scale composition of mediocre musical quality, based as it is on an unknown text, written by a well-established singer, who, however was *not* an actual composer? Anton Ulrich aimed to replicate the Habsburg library for reasons of mere prestige without necessarily planning to perform all the music, but as far as we know at this point, there is no copy of this cantata in Vienna. It simply exists as part of Anton Ulrich’s *Sammlung*, without signs of it in the Habsburg capital or elsewhere.

It is conceivable that the piece was performed at some point (perhaps in a private setting, as occurred regularly with the cantata genre),<sup>[28]</sup> during which the duke would have witnessed the execution of those extraordinary vocal challenges. After all, the diaries Anton Ulrich kept during his Viennese stage reveal that Borosini was a frequent visitor at the duke’s residence.<sup>[29]</sup> Between October 1726 and January 1728, the tenor’s name is mentioned nine times, one time even in connection with a musical performance.<sup>[30]</sup>

Supposing that this piece was performed at some point, however, one has to ask what kind of voice it was conceived for. Certainly, it is physically possible for a woman to produce notes as low as bottom A,<sup>[31]</sup> however, we can assume that those cases are exceptional and probably would not have gone unnoticed. If there was a female singer in Vienna for whom the cantata was written, there would probably be some trace of her. Imagining a female singer *en travesti* for this part seems highly unlikely.

As I assumed initially and before examining the piece closely, the work could have been intended for a castrato with an extraordinary vocal ambitus. After all, there are documented cases of *evirati cantori* who despite singing soprano or contralto parts were still able to descend into a low, almost baritone-like register. Marco Beghelli has even undertaken studies on several castrati regarding the use of their low, “male” range.<sup>[32]</sup> Presumably, there were castrati who could go as low as bottom B, thus almost covering the ambitus of Borosini’s cantata. This phenomenon remains unclear to this day, as scholars have not yet been able to explain how some evirated singers could maintain their low register.<sup>[33]</sup> Beghelli advances the hypothesis that, depending on the exact moment of castration in a young boy’s life, the intervention did not in some cases entirely prevent the voice breaking after puberty. In those rare cases, the singer might have still been able to engage his low register, although singing in a “female” register most of the time. Even some of Farinelli’s arias contain low notes that Beghelli interpreted as baritonal as they exceeded his typical soprano range.

However, those notes by no means covered the ambitus displayed in Borosini’s cantata.<sup>[34]</sup> As tempting as it might seem to attribute the execution of the piece to the famous Farinelli, it seems rather unlikely: first of all, the castrato’s presence in Vienna in 1728, as stated by Burney,<sup>[35]</sup> is not assured. Furthermore, during the 1720s Farinelli was on the verge of becoming a well-established singer. Considering Anton Ulrich’s detailed diary entries, I would find it very odd that a visit or even a performance of a cantata by Farinelli would not have been mentioned. However, supposing Borosini had “access” to a castrato singer of those capacities, it would have absolutely been possible for him to interpret the second aria. Another interesting aspect propagated by Beghelli, but also by other scholars, is that many castrati were praised by contemporaries for their “many different voices,” implying that their voices sounded different depending on the vocal register.<sup>[36]</sup> This would fit my assumption that the cantata’s musical writing for voice accentuates the contrast between the higher and the lower register of the singer (see figure 3). Supposing a castrato “equipped” with such a vast vocal ambitus had sung this cantata, the last aria would have been an excellent opportunity for him to showcase his talent. However, as with the Farinelli hypothesis, would we surely not have records of a castrato with such abilities? At the Viennese *Hofkapelle*, the contralto Gaetano Orsini was without a doubt the star of the 1720s, but no such arias are to be found in Viennese manuscripts. Numerous other castrati employed by Emperor Charles VI during those years (and prior) did not display such an unusual ambitus in their arias either. The possibility of the cantata being intended for a castrato is obviously there and would certainly suit the vocal style of its first aria, but it still seems unlikely given the very specific features of the work.

[5] The partially very low, almost tenor-like *tessitura* in parts of the second aria (especially mm. 207–19), the characteristic leaps, and the technical simplicity of the first “soprano” aria could point to another possibility: Borosini might have written the piece for himself. Of course, this would mean that he must have sung the higher parts using his *false* register, switching between that and his natural, low voice in order to cover the vast ambitus of the cantata.<sup>[37]</sup> This could explain the aforementioned avoidance of the middle register, therefore evoking two

different vocal “ranges” (see figure 3). The possibility of transposing the parts written in bass clef an octave higher, as was practiced in string parts—such as violins playing in unison with a bass line on paper, but actually an octave higher—seems quite unlikely in this case. First of all, a transposition of some parts written in bass clef does not explain the incredibly low tenor-like *tessitura* in mm. 200–19. Since the second aria makes use of all four clefs of four-voiced chorus, it would be quite difficult to determine which parts should be transposed. Second, the transposition would actually harm the melodic line at certain points. While it would be possible to transpose low notes in cadences just as in mm. 119–20, the upwards and downwards scales would not make sense musically if parts of them were transposed an octave higher. Judging from what is written on paper, if the piece was executed then most likely by a singer able to cover the actual ambitus of the piece.

It is a well-known fact that Italian secular vocal music of this period did not make use of actual countertenors for soprano or contralto roles, as are often employed in modern-day performances of baroque operas. Basses and tenors, however, very clearly made use of their *falsestto* in certain comic instances, for example when imitating a woman. There even is one such example in Borosini’s career, as discovered by Claudia Michels (figure 4), where he mimics the different vocal registers in a *recitativo secco* (accentuated in the score by changes in clef and by the text underneath). The example derives from a *tragicommedia*—a native Viennese genre performed at court during carnival season—by the composer Francesco Bartolomeo Conti, *Archelao re di Cappadocia* (1722).<sup>[38]</sup> Obviously, this example does not come close to the ambitus of the cantata. The g' written in soprano clef is almost an octave beneath the highest note of the cantata. Yet I think that this short extract of Archelao’s recitative is quite revealing. It clearly indicates the usage of the *falsestto* technique, something that is continuously debated in discussions of the low male voice’s vocal technique of the pre-Romantic era, particularly regarding the production of the tenor’s top notes.<sup>[39]</sup> However, in this case the *falsestto* is *not* used to reach a high note but rather to evoke a very distinct sound in a comical situation.

The image displays four systems of musical notation for a vocal and continuo piece. Each system consists of a vocal line and a continuo line. The vocal lines are written in a treble clef with a 3/8 time signature. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines. The continuo lines are written in a bass clef. The lyrics for the four systems are: 'men - te Cap-pa-do - cia, Se - na - to, Au - gu - sto ci', 'les - se di te - nor di con - tral - ti, e di so - pra - ni.', 'Tu par-la - sti poc' an - zi. A chi dar fe-de? Ma pre-sto, pre-sto,', and 'pre-sto, que-sta è la fir - ma: e'l re-gio im-pron-to è que-sto.'

**Figure 4: Claudia Michels, *Karnevalsoper am Hofe Kaiser Karls VI.* (1711-1740): *Kunst zwischen Repräsentation und Amusement*, Publikationen des Instituts für Österreichische Musikdokumentation 41 (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2019), 232; adapted by the author.**

This short extract should in no way count as proof that Borosini was the intended performer of his own cantata. However, it could underline that the cantata was constructed as a sort of musical joke. As I pointed out earlier, the technical difficulty of the first aria could potentially be handled by a professional tenor-baritone engaging his *false* *setto*, as the style is mostly syllabic or semi-syllabic. The top note g'' is reached only once throughout the whole work and could have been slightly lower as a result of temperament. It seems reasonable that the cantata was actually intended for a low male voice using his falsetto register, rather than for a castrato or (even less probably) for a woman. The evident comic character of this piece could therefore also justify a supposed “poor” musical rendition of the first aria, considering that Borosini was not a countertenor. It is safe to assume that singing the whole first aria in falsetto register, even if the tenor/baritone was a professional singer, might not have sounded particularly good. However, if the purpose of the piece was to mock a specific singing style, the supposed “poor” quality of sound might have even contributed to the comic factor.

Even though the castrato hypothesis would work best from a musical point of view, supposing it was a castrato with said vocal peculiarities, the falsetto hypothesis seems just as plausible to me. Considering Borosini’s recurring comic roles for the Viennese carnival operas—Archelao being one of his most significant roles—a musical joke of that kind would not be out of character.

Perhaps he indeed engaged in a sort of musical challenge—maybe even a “virtual” challenge that was never meant to be put on stage—to show off the abilities for which he was most known. One could even go a step further and assume that the previously mentioned alternation between a higher and a lower range and the display of high notes were meant to mimic a castrato’s voice.<sup>[40]</sup> After all, the narrating character of the cantata’s text is male. This would mean that the whole cantata was intended as a parody on baroque opera’s protagonist. However, no doubt exists that there are also traces of this virtuoso style in the parts Borosini wrote for the Viennese stage, as I will illustrate in the following paragraphs.

## Francesco Borosini: His Roles, his Network, and his Position in Europe’s Cultural Life

[6] Having examined his theatrical roles and vocal profile in and outside Vienna, I contend that Borosini was particularly drawn to comedy. His vocal and acting abilities contributed to the creation of highly unusual roles that can be considered unique in the history of Italian baroque opera.<sup>[41]</sup> This included comic roles that challenged baroque acting conventions in that they required him to “run across the stage screaming”<sup>[42]</sup> or dangling from a cage on one arm at several meters’ height. His acting spectrum was unusually broad, as he was one of the few singers of the court chapel who successfully navigated between the comic and the serious operatic genre. In Vienna, he regularly sang *seria* characters, like villains, father figures, and lovers, and often appeared in sacred plays. Not many other singers switched roles that effortlessly, as it is evident that a sort of specialization concerning certain role types took place among members of the Viennese *Hofkapelle*.<sup>[43]</sup> Even more than his apparent acting abilities, however, it was his voice that set him apart from his colleagues. He received arias that showcase an enormous vocal range, from low F to high b', an ambitus that he was able to maintain for almost his entire career. His technical abilities included switching rapidly between vocal registers and making wide leaps, as we can see from a tiny excerpt (figure 5) of Caldara’s *Ifigenia in Aulide*.<sup>[44]</sup> This peculiarity ensured that composers and librettists wrote highly emotional and impulsive roles for him, since Borosini was able to portray those “mood swings” musically. The musical writing the Viennese composers applied to him seemingly inspired him in his own musical output.

**Figure 5: Antonio Caldara, *Ifigenia in Aulide* (1718)**

This highly virtuoso style, focusing on wide leaps and the musical underscoring of the text (e.g., It. “caduta,” Eng. “fall”), was used almost exclusively by Viennese composers, especially by Caldara and Conti. One cannot help but notice parallels to the vocal style of *Quando miro*, if we think about the obvious underlining of “Ed ella ascende al monte, ed ella è al piano.” Although I could not find a role in Borosini’s career that came close to the vocal style of his cantata (e.g., him singing in falsetto for an extended amount of time), his composition does evoke some

characteristic traits of arias written for him.

It is not only his arias and roles that set him apart, though: his activities “off stage” far exceeded a typical singer’s ones. Shortly before his official retirement from the court chapel in 1729, he became the manager of Vienna’s first public theater, the Kärntnertortheater, along with court dancer Joseph Selliers.<sup>[45]</sup> In fact, the actual reason for Borosini’s withdrawal from the court stage might have been his wholesale dedication to his impresario role and networking activities. The singer used his vast number of acquaintances in the opera world to procure scores and libretti to be staged at the theater and to hire singers, Italian and non-Italian.<sup>[46]</sup> Although the theater underwent serious financial trouble under the control of the two court musicians and Borosini ultimately quit his position at the Kärntnertortheater in 1741, his expertise regarding the financing and organization of operatic seasons even impelled him to write a text entitled *Memoria del Sig.r Borosini Sù l’Impresa delle Opera in Vienna. 1749.*<sup>[47]</sup> In this bundle of letters, the singer offers advice to theater owners concerning how to spend money wisely and how to balance costs and quality. He also gives very practical instructions about how to find low-cost props for the stage and what to look for when hiring a singer.<sup>[48]</sup>

Borosini cultivated contacts to numerous noblemen, composers, and librettists, a fact that made him an influential part of a large network in and outside Vienna. He became acquainted with Count Johann Adam von Questenberg (1678–1752), an enthusiast of the Viennese music repertoire, who aimed to recreate some of the performances at his Czech residence in Jaroměřice. The singer regularly provided him with libretti and scores for his collection.<sup>[49]</sup> As the correspondence between the count and the singer proves, Questenberg also instructed Borosini to obtain scores of certain operas during his trips to Italy (even Borosini’s wife Rosa, also a member of the Viennese *Hofkapelle*, was employed to obtain material when she was singing abroad).

Apart from Vienna’s aristocracy, Borosini’s networking activity even went beyond Austria’s borders: in 1724, he was appointed to sing at the Royal Academy and created what today can be defined as the first true tenor role in the history of Italian opera, George Frideric Handel’s Bajazet in *Tamerlano*. It is a well-known fact to Handel scholars that Borosini provided the composer with a study score of Gasparini’s *Il Bajazet*, a fact that compelled Handel to re-write (and enlarge) most parts of Borosini’s role.<sup>[50]</sup> In 1747, long after his official retirement from the opera stage, the tenor returned to London to appear in two operas by Pietro Domenico Paradies and Domingo Terradellas (with little success, as both operas failed at the box office).<sup>[51]</sup> As we know now, Borosini’s trip to London was far more due to networking and marketing reasons than for the sake of those performances. It coincided with the publication of a collection of canons entitled *One Hundred Cantici in Italian after the manner of English Canons and Catches, Collected by Sig.r Borosini*, most of them composed by a then deceased Caldara. As Glennys Ward illustrates, Borosini most likely brought the collection to London (it is unclear in what physical form, but supposedly written out as a “pocket-book”) and organized its publication subsequently.<sup>[52]</sup> The addition of Borosini’s name to the title of the collection underlines his influential role, also outside Vienna, and suggests that his *persona* was somewhat an indicator of good taste and authority. Knowing that Borosini had successfully sung in London prior to 1747, perhaps his name could both attest to the “Italianness” of Caldara’s canons and provide a link with the English stage at the same time, as he had sung there in 1724/25.



**Figure 6: Kärntnertortheater (colored engraving, approx. 1850); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

[7] We can securely affirm that Borosini must have been a well-known link in a large network of singers, composers, librettists, and noblemen which expanded throughout Europe. His functions as an advertiser for Caldara's canons, an "expert" on opera management, and an overall connoisseur of quality music reveal him to be a sort of arbiter of taste as well as an authority figure within this opera network. His advice was highly regarded, and even the appearance of his name on a collection of Italian songs clearly had a decisive impact on the opera-consuming public. Perhaps his fame and his status motivated Duke Anton Ulrich to include "a piece by him" in his otherwise strictly composer-dominated collection.

## *Quando miro o stella o fiore*, Borosini's Memory

Given the circumstances, I assume that the value of this piece might ultimately be connected to Borosini himself. In this regard, I would first like to point to the internal organization of the anthology Ed 115/f. One cannot help but notice that Borosini's cantata serves as an introduction to the codex, as it is bound first and it is the only piece that starts with an aria. It does seem that the cantata holds a special position within the anthology, despite being the most plain one regarding length, instrumentation, and overall musical quality. It is also the only piece within Ed 115/f that displays an actual title page, reading "Cantata del Borosini," although, as I stated earlier, the visual aspect of the copy is not particularly elaborate. However, the other cantatas (written by well-established composers) do not have title pages but simply display the composer's name, followed directly by the incipit of the music. This could indicate that Borosini's work had a distinct significance within the volume, as if it were meant as an introduction to the

cantatas by the “younger generation”<sup>[53]</sup> of Viennese composers. Another visual element that sets it apart is the copyist’s hand, although the little information regarding its origin makes it difficult to draw a conclusion on this point. Supposing the cantata were indeed an autograph, as suggested by Bennett, this could possibly strengthen the special position of the work. After all, the majority of the works in the Anton-Ulrich-Sammlung were copied by professional Viennese scribes. Could it be that the special value of the cantata was further accentuated through the inclusion of the singer-composer’s own hand? As I mentioned earlier, the notable inaccuracies regarding hyphenation make it difficult to believe that a native Italian had set it down in writing. However, it does seem rather interesting that this is the only piece within the whole Meiningen collection written by a different hand from the rest of the repertoire. Regardless of whether it is Borosini’s autograph or not, it seems as if it were copied separately from the other manuscripts.

Another significant hint concerning the singer’s value for the collection was mentioned earlier: the copy of Gasparini’s *Bajazet* explicitly gifted by Borosini. Without going into too much detail about the dramaturgical exceptionality of this work, it goes without saying that—at least retrospectively—the part of Sultan Bajazet was Borosini’s role of a lifetime. It seems as if the tenor were already conscious of that when he provided Anton Ulrich with a score of the opera that he himself helped create. At the end of the day, Borosini was heavily involved in the modification of the opera, even the opera’s libretto, as he is credited with the conception of Bajazet’s famous death scene towards the end of the work. There must have been a distinct reason why Borosini chose *this* work and not one of the numerous other ones he appeared in, which are probably even more vocally challenging than *Bajazet*.<sup>[54]</sup> This clearly points towards a cult of memory—after all, the inscription “Von Borosini bekommen” links the work to the singer—and to the score of *Bajazet* as a materialization of that memory,<sup>[55]</sup> chosen by the singer himself: in all probability, Borosini thought that this work represented his legacy at its best. Perhaps this process is also the key to the “role” of the cantata *Quando miro* within Anton Ulrich’s collection. Given the stylistic traits of the piece, which in part resemble the Viennese arias written for the tenor, it seems reasonable to think that he wanted to preserve his memory not only in the form of Gasparini’s work but also in the form of an original composition. Vice versa, it could be just as plausible that the motivation for its composition came from Anton Ulrich himself, who employed the singer to create a work that “preserved” his abilities using the “humorous twist” for which Borosini was known.



**Figure 7: title page of *Il Bajazet* by Francesco Gasparini (1719); by courtesy of Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, [Bildarchiv Austria](#)**

Regardless of who appointed whom with the composition, even the fact that this specific piece was written down and included in the collection speaks volumes for its historical significance. The mere “materialization” of a musical event—the act of writing down a musical work—can be interpreted as an act of memorialization. To be deemed worthy of being committed to paper, bound, and shipped to Meiningen alongside the “bestsellers” of early *settecento* Viennese operas and cantatas is itself a semi-cultic act.<sup>[56]</sup> After the analysis, it is clear that it stands out because of the unusual vocal writing, not, however, because of its musical demands. The style of the vocal part is clearly what sets the piece apart. The fact that it is possible to draw parallels between the vocal style of the cantata and Borosini’s arias in Conti’s and Caldara’s operas might point to a very specific act of commemoration, in which the singer wrote and (supposedly) interpreted a cantata in the style that the Viennese audience associated with him. The comic, perhaps even parodic overtones might reflect Borosini’s roles in the Viennese *tragicommedia* as well, while at the same time alluding to the sound of baroque opera’s true protagonist, the castrato.

[8] Whether the composition and conservation of the cantata was indeed an act of commemoration cannot be answered, and ultimately does not need to be. However, many factors point to the possibility that his cantata was intended as a way to conserve the tenor’s abilities. This further underlines what recent research about Borosini’s life and overall presence in cultural life suggests; his involvement on the theatrical scene far exceeded his function as an interpreter and helped him to achieve a level of fame that is not evident from the mere consideration of his on-stage presence. In other words, it was not only his engagements that contributed to his Europe-wide renown but also a complex set of social skills that has not been brought into focus

yet. Apparently, he was a figure of authority and a representative of a very distinct (comic) style within the heterogeneous operatic genres of the early eighteenth century. This all contributed to the composition of this unique piece and to the singer's exceptional position within the duke's *Sammlung*, a position that seemingly no other Viennese singer could fill.

As far as can be seen today, however, Borosini seems to be the only proponent of low male voices who was able to burnish such an achievement. An example like this compels us to reconsider the presumably less important role of tenors and basses in early *settecento* opera, not only from a dramaturgical but also a social point of view. Furthermore, and perhaps more interestingly, this case prompts questions regarding vocal production in low male voices and how it apparently was connected to dramaturgical frameworks. A crucial next step would be to conduct more detailed research on the presumed use of *falseto* when male characters imitated women (or castrati).

## Appendix 1: Transcription of the Text of the Cantata *Quando miro o stella o fiore*

The transcription of the text remains faithful to the source as regards orthography. Since the score, as is common for vocal music of the period, contains numerous inaccuracies that inhibit the comprehension of the syntax, I edited the text according to the criteria of [Progetto Metastasio](#) (accessed July 27, 2021). This pertains mainly to the addition of interpunctuation and the use of capital letters only for names. The same criteria were applied in the underlaying of the text in the transcription of the music.

Quando miro o stella o fiore  
che la terra e il cielo adorna  
tosto al core mi ritorna  
il pensier della mia bella.  
Ma poi dice entro del core  
un pensier nuovo di lei,  
che assai vaga e ben colei  
più di fiore e più di stella.

Così della gentil dolce mia Clori  
io tutt'ognora ragionare ascolto  
dentro me stesso e fuori,  
qual chi lo sguardo lungamente volto  
tenne nel sole, allor che più nol mira,  
ovunque il guardo gira  
veder per tutto suole  
macchia che sembra il sole.

Clori al prato rimiro,  
rimiro Clori al fonte;  
ed ella ascende al monte  
ed ella è al piano.  
E quando nulla io miro  
spenti del sole i rai

dentro il mio cor non mai  
la cerco in vano.

## Appendix 2: Transcription of the Cantata

The transcription of the music remains as close to the source as possible with regard to original clefs, beaming, and key signature. The hyphenation, as already stated, often seems uneven, so I adjusted it in unclear instances according to the beaming displayed in the source (assuming that it matched the accentuation of the Italian language). The decision in favor of a transcription, as opposed to a critical edition, was taken consciously, as it should facilitate the reader's understanding of the article's explanation regarding the clefs and the possible voice type. Furthermore, the critical edition, although a scholarly work, should always be equally directed at musicians and render the music as "playable" as possible. It therefore would follow a completely different aim than the present article, which relies on a faithful reproduction of the source in order to visualize possible questions regarding the voice. Adapting the clefs to modern standards, for example, would seriously hinder the comprehension of my article. My interventions were limited to:

- The addition of accidentals, when they were obviously implied (e.g. the g#, as the cantata is in A major, but only has two sharps in key).
- The extension of slurs, when they pertain to similar motives.
- Ornaments (e.g. trills, mordents) were included only when written explicitly in the score.
- With regard to beaming, I remained faithful to the score for the singing voice (as it mostly follows the subdivision of syllables). In some instances, the beaming of the vocal line did not correspond to the accentuation of the Italian language, in which case I adapted it in order to accommodate the poetic text. However, I modified the beaming in the bass line according to modern standards, interrupting the beam at each beat.
- The poetic text was underlaid according to appendix 1. Thus, I standardized the orthography and added punctuation where needed.



# References

1. On castrati, see, for example, Melania Bucciarelli, "Senesino's Negotiations with the Royal Academy of Music: Further Insight into the Riva-Bernardi Correspondence and the Role of Singers in the Practice of Eighteenth-Century Opera," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 27, no. 3 (November 2015): 189–213. Although quite dated, Lowell Lindgren's article on the castrato Gaetano Berenstadt also gives an interesting insight into the singer's network as a collector of art: Lowell Lindgren, "La carriera di Gaetano Berenstadt, contralto evirato (ca. 1690–1735)," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 19, no. 1 (1984): 36–112. The recently published volume by Johanna E. Blume, *Verstümmelte Körper? Lebenswelten und soziale Praktiken von Kastratensängern in Mitteleuropa, 1712–1844* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), proves that they are still a category of interest. Johanna Blume draws attention to the castrati's functions at court (on and off stage) and as entrepreneurs. ↑
2. Those patrons have become subject of musicological inquiries themselves. See, for example, Jana Perutková, *Der glorreiche Nahmen Adami: Johann Adam Graf von Questenberg (1678–1752) als Förderer der italienischen Oper in Mähren* (Vienna: Hollitzer, 2015). ↑
3. By "high voice" I mean singers who sing in a woman's tessitura, thus, alto and soprano voices as opposed to "low voices," by which I mean male registers like tenors and basses. ↑
4. The date of his death was confirmed recently by Claudia Michels, "Francesco Borosini und seine *Memmicheoria, Sù l'Impresa delle Opere in Vienna (1749)*" (in preparation). ↑
5. According to records in the Hofkammerarchiv, Vienna, Hofstäbe Kontobuch 1723–48 (Sammlung der Hofzahlamtsbücher Sig. 157), fol. 16v., referenced by Claudia Michels, "Francesco Borosini: Tenor und Impresario," *Musicologica Brunensia* 47, no. 1 (2012): 116, his salary was increased by 40 thaler in 1719. ↑
6. After all, the ornamentation of the repeated A section of the da capo aria was usually written by the singers themselves, so as to suit their individual "needs." This, however, could not be done without a minimum of skill regarding the voice leading of the instruments. It seems reasonable to assume that most singers could also compose to a certain level. ↑
7. There certainly was at least one other cantata written by him in Anton Ulrich's collection, which was lost during the numerous relocations of the archive. See Lawrence Bennett, "A Little-Known Collection of Early-Eighteenth-Century Music: Vocal Music at Schloss Elisabethenburg, Meiningen," *Fons Artis Musicae* 48, no. 3 (2001): 270. The missing work was also part of an anthology and bound with other cantatas by Giovanni Bononcini and Johann Adolph Hasse. ↑
8. The collection even contains a copy of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*. The opera was given in London in 1725 in a revised version and featured Borosini in the role of Sesto (formally a role for soprano). I did not consult the Meiningen copy of the opera, but it would be interesting to know whether Borosini had something to do with its inclusion in the Meiningen collection. ↑
9. Bennett, "A Little-Known Collection," 259. ↑
10. Borosini performed this role twice during his career, once in the aforementioned opera by Gasparini and the second time in Handel's setting of *Tamerlano* (1724). ↑
11. Anton Ulrich was born as the last child of Duke Bernhard I of Saxe-Meiningen. He entered the military aged 20, and during his service he put his entire inheritance at risk by marrying a commoner, Philippine

Elisabeth Cäsar. After initially keeping the marriage a secret, increasing financial pressure forced him to come clean, which resulted in him and his wife being banned from the Meiningen court. As a last resort, Anton Ulrich came to Vienna in 1725 to supplicate for a title of nobility for his wife. His wish was not granted right away, and it took Anton Ulrich almost two years to be successful (ultimately, the title was given to Philippine in 1727). During those two years, Anton Ulrich became an active member of the Viennese cultural scene and started collecting scores, libretti, and other items of value. For more information regarding Anton Ulrich's biography, see Bennett, "A Little-Known Collection," 251-54. ↑

12. Ibid., 255-62. There are traces of performances of the repertoire in Meiningen, but I could not find proof of a performance of Borosini's cantata. ↑
13. Ibid., 271-74. ↑
14. XIII | CANTATE | DEL SIG. | BOROSINI | CONTI | TIEMER E | REITER. ↑
15. D-MEIr Ed 115f/1, fol. 2r. ↑
16. It seems reasonable to assume that Borosini also wrote the text of the cantata. After all, he contributed the poetic text to two major works, the spoken comedy *Il Cavalier Benvenga* given at the Kärntnertortheater in 1731 and a celebrative cantata in honor of Princess Augusta of Saxe-Gotha, composed by Giuseppe Sammartini, the court musician of the Prince of Wales and his family. See Giuseppe Sammartini, *Cantate a voce sola*, ed. Mariateresa Dellaborra (Lucca: Lim, 2011), xi-xiv. ↑
17. Blank folios are not taken into consideration. ↑
18. Lawrence Bennett, "The Italian Cantata in Vienna, 1713-1740: Repertoires and Sources," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 76, no. 3 (2019): 230, mentions the volume Ed 119v. ↑
19. Timmer (1701-57) was a composer and a valet at court. He was later appointed to be director of chamber music of Francis I. Duke of Lorraine, the later husband of Empress Maria Theresia. Not much is known about his life or his compositions, which seem to have revolved around instrumental music and occasionally cantata repertoire. Dagmar Glüxam, s.v. "Timmer," *MGG Online*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/23573>, accessed July 23, 2021. ↑
20. Bennett, "Italian Cantata in Vienna," supposes that this unidentified copyist's hand might even be Borosini's, as the hand never appears in the Viennese repertoire of those years. However, I assume that Borosini, being Italian and a singer, would have been more familiar with the rules of hyphenation. ↑
21. One exception is perhaps the case of Ignazio Maria Conti, who was also a theorbist just as his father. However, Fux advocated for him to succeed his father as court composer (*Hofcompositeur*), which he was never able to realize. See Francesco Bussi, s.v. "Conti (I), Ignazio Maria," *MGG Online*, <https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/395684>, accessed July 23, 2021. Interestingly, judging from Bussi's list of works, the cantatas in D-MEIr Ed 155f/1 might be some of Conti's earliest works. ↑
22. Andrea Zedler, *Kantaten für Fürst und Kaiser: Antonio Caldaras Kompositionen zwischen Unterhaltung und höfischem Zeremoniell*, Schriftenreihe des Österreichischen Historischen Instituts in Rom 5 (Vienna: Böhlau, 2020), 257-58. Zedler underlines, however, that the tendency was leaning towards the RARA model. ↑
23. The anonymous (mostly male) lover who expresses his affections for the other lover can be defined as a topos within the recurring themes of Viennese cantatas, especially the ones belonging to the "arcadic-pastoral" category, as defined by Andrea Zedler in her recently published monograph *Kantaten für Fürst*

*und Kaiser*, 255, regarding Caldara's cantata production. ↑

24. Zedler, again referring to Caldara, describes Phyllis as the most often-cited addressee, followed by Chloris and Irene (*ibid.*, 255). ↑
25. All of them are frequently identified as protagonists (*ibid.*, 255). ↑
26. A complete transcription of the cantata will be given in appendix 2. ↑
27. Cantatas with ranges comparable to or even greater than *Quando miro*, although very rare, have been the object of scholarly research: the most prominent example that comes to mind is Benedetto Marcello's famous cantata *Cassandra* (1727), which to this day baffles musicologists and musicians with a three-octave range. Similarly to Borosini's work, it is written for a contralto voice, albeit switching frequently between clefs. One aria is written entirely in bass clef, even reaching low F. The theories regarding its possible performance practice are manifold: some claim that it might have actually been intended for more than one singer, although the cantata is clearly labeled as a solo cantata. As Talya Berger, editor of the cantata's critical edition, suggests, Marcello usually made it very clear if a work was intended for more than one singer, usually including several duets or trios: Benedetto Marcello, *Cassandra*, ed. Talya Berger (A-R Editions: Middleton, 2016), ix-xii. Another possible explanation regarding *Cassandra* is that the parts in bass clef actually should have been sung an octave higher and that the peculiar annotation should simply point to the advanced age of Priam, the character speaking at this point. However, none of these possibilities seem plausible regarding Borosini's cantata (which by no means comes close to Marcello's large-scale, highly dramatic musical writing). The more-than-one singer theory can be safely dismissed, as the clef switching and shifts in register appear at cadences or at other points where it would be impossible for another singer to enter. Singing the bass clef parts an octave higher in *Quando miro* cannot be the solution either, as the aforementioned model at mm. 138–45—displaying the low notes as a “surprise effect”—would not be effective if they were sung higher. ↑
28. Bennett, “Italian Cantata in Vienna.” ↑
29. *Ibid.*, 227. The diaries are preserved at the Thüringisches Staatsarchiv in Meiningen. ↑
30. An entry in December 1727 states that Borosini sang a psalter composed by Marcello. The composer is also mentioned in connection with Borosini another time in 1727, which may reveal a closer acquaintance between Marcello and Borosini. They must have known each other, since Borosini performed in Marcello's *Serenata a sei voci per Carlo VI* in 1725. See Fabrizio Della Seta, “La ‘Serenata a sei voci’ per Carlo VI,” in *Benedetto Marcello: La sua opera e il suo tempo*, ed. Claudio Madricardo and Franco Rossi (Florence: Olschki, 1988), 161–94. I am grateful to Lawrence Bennett for providing me with information on these references to Borosini in the Duke's diaries. ↑
31. One only needs to think about Antonio Vivaldi's female singers in the Venetian Ospedali, who regularly sung the bass part of his four-voiced choir pieces. See Michael Talbot, “Tenors and Basses at the Venetian ‘Ospedali,’” *Acta Musicologica* 66, no. 2 (1994): 123–38. However, singing a solo part of that low reach would be a more challenging matter, even for very low female registers. ↑
32. Marco Beghelli, “Un'occasione perduta: Lo studio anatomico e fisiologico dei ‘musicisti’ castrati,” *Laboratoire Italien* 20 (2017); and “La voce virile dei castrati: un'ipotesi,” in *Femminile e maschile nel Settecento*, ed. Cristina Passetti and Lucio Tufano (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2018): 303–8. ↑
33. Contemporary medical treatises completely avoid writing explicitly about eunuched singers, since their existence was commonly accepted but formally forbidden. See Beghelli, “Un'occasione perduta,” 11. ↑

34. Marco Beghelli, "Il 'baritono' Farinelli," in *Il Farinelli ritrovato*, ed. Luigi Verdi (Lucca: LIM, 2014): 63–74. [↑](#)
35. Anne Desler, "'The Little That I Have Done Is Already Gone and Forgotten': Farinelli and Burney Write Music History," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 27, no. 3 (2015): 224–25. [↑](#)
36. One notable contribution is Marco Beghelli and Raffaele Talmelli, *Ermafrodite armoniche: Il contralto nell'Ottocento* (Varese: Zecchini Editore, 2011). As the title suggests, the focus of the monograph is on the contralto voice in early nineteenth-century opera and the peculiar vocal style with which it could even imitate "male voices." Since evirated singers were still present on the opera stage and active as singing teachers at the time, the authors suppose that this distinct way of singing originated from the castrato's singing technique. [↑](#)
37. Interestingly, Talya Berger, *Cassandra*, xi, advanced a similar hypothesis regarding Marcello's *Cassandra*. Marcello—a gifted singer himself—might have sung it, accompanying himself at the harpsichord. [↑](#)
38. A copy of the score is preserved at the Austrian National Library, A-Wn, Mus. Hs. 17283/1–5. [↑](#)
39. Marco Beghelli, "Il 'Do di petto': Dissacrazione di un mito," *Il Saggiatore musicale* 3, no. 1 (1996): 105–49. [↑](#)
40. There is a continuous debate about the presumed sound of the evirated singers' voices, as pointed out in Beghelli, "La voce virile," 306–8. [↑](#)
41. Reinhard Strohm, "Pietro Pariati librettista comico," *La carriera di un librettista: Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia*, ed. Giovanna Gronda (Reggio Emilia: Il Mulino, 1990): 73–112. Strohm underlines the importance of Borosini in the creation of unique role types within Viennese carnival opera, along with the composer Francesco Bartolomeo Conti and the librettist Pietro Pariati. [↑](#)
42. [Michels, "Francesco Borosini," 119.](#) [↑](#)
43. This topic will be consolidated in the context of my present research on the basses and tenors of the Viennese *Hofkapelle*. As for now, however, I can safely assume that there were certain singers who sang predominantly comic roles (in intermezzi and in the carnival operas), such as the bass Pietro Paolo Pezzoni and the castrato Giovannino, and other ones who specialized in the serious genre. [↑](#)
44. For more information regarding his roles in *drammi per musica* and Viennese serenatas, see [Emilia Pelliccia, "Francesco Borosini \(ca. 1690 – nach 1756\): Leben und Karriere eines Tenors im frühen Settecento, \*Musicologica Brunensia\* 53 \(2018\): 109–21.](#) [↑](#)
45. The Viennese scene was far slower to develop a public theater system, as opposed to the pioneer city of Venice, for example, and subsisted almost exclusively on a court-controlled opera system. The Theater nächst dem Kärntnertor was built in 1708 and hosted comedies up until the former tenant Joseph Anton Stranitzky's death in 1726. After being left to Stranitzky's widow for two years, the management of the Kärntnertortheater finally passed on to Borosini and Selliers, "whose ultimate goal was to stage Italian operas there." Judit Zsovár, "Insights into the Early Years of Vienna's First Public Opera House: Farinella at the Kärntnertortheater, 1730–1732," in *Opera as Institution: Networks and Professions, 1730–1917*, ed. Cristina Scuderi and Ingeborg Zechner (Vienna: LIT, 2019), 37. They ultimately managed to do so. However, because of an imperial decree that forbade staging Italian opera, the impresari had to "disguise" them as comedies or intermezzi. [↑](#)

46. In fact, he and Selliers even founded an opera academy in which singers who were not native speakers of Italian could be trained. See Zsovár, "Vienna's First Public Opera House," 37. ↑
47. Michels, "Francesco Borosini," 126. ↑
48. Vienna, Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Staatskanzlei Interiora 86-2. ↑
49. The correspondence between Borosini and Questenberg suggests an actual friendship, as illustrated by Perutková, *Der glorreiche Nahmen Adami*, 187. ↑
50. J. Merrill Knapp, "Handel's Tamerlano: The Creation of an Opera," *Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1970): 405-30. ↑
51. Handel had already withdrawn from London's theatrical scene, and the quality of the operas given there dropped drastically. Additionally, London was struck by the Jacobine rebellion in 1745, which forced theaters to remain closed. After that, theater owners struggled to provide opera seasons. ↑
52. Glennys Ward, "Caldara, Borosini and the *One Hundred Cantici*, or some Viennese canons abroad," in *Antonio Caldara: Essays on his Life and Times*, ed. Brian Pritchard (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1987): 309-11. ↑
53. These are the words Bennett uses to characterize the subdivision of Anton Ulrich's cantata volumes into two categories. See Bennett, "Italian Cantata in Vienna," 231. ↑
54. One only needs to think about the highly demanding parts Conti had written for him. See Pelliccia, "Francesco Borosini": 111-15. ↑
55. On behalf of the materiality of memory culture, see Astrid Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017): 98-102. ↑
56. Melanie Unseld, "Musikwissenschaft und Erinnerungsforschung: Einige Überlegungen," in *Musik als Medium der Erinnerung: Gedächtnis, Geschichte, Gegenwart*, ed. Lena Nieper and Julian Schmitz (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016): 29-38. ↑