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Venanzio Rauzzini and the Birth of a New Style in English Singing

Scandalous Lessons

Brianna E. Robertson-Kirkland

ROUTLEDGE

Venanzio Rauzzini and the Birth of a New Style in English Singing

Since the eighteenth century, the one-to-one singing lesson has been the most common method of delivery. The scenario allows the teacher to familiarise and individualise the lesson to suit the needs of their student; however, it can also lead to speculation about what is taught. More troubling is the heightened risk of gossip and rumour with the private space generating speculation about the student–teacher relationship. Venanzio Rauzzini (1746–1810), an Italian castrato living in England who became a highly sought-after singing master, was particularly susceptible since his students tended to be women, whose moral character was under more scrutiny than their male counterparts. Even so in 1792, *The Bath Chronicle* proclaimed the Italian castrato: 'the father of a new style in English singing'. Branding Rauzzini as a founder of an English style was not an error, but indicative of deep-seated anxieties about the Italian invasion on England's musical culture. This book places teaching at the centre of the socio-historical narrative and provides unique insight into musical culture. Using a microhistory approach, this study is the first to focus in on the impact of teaching and casts new light on issues of celebrity culture, gender and nationalism in Georgian England.

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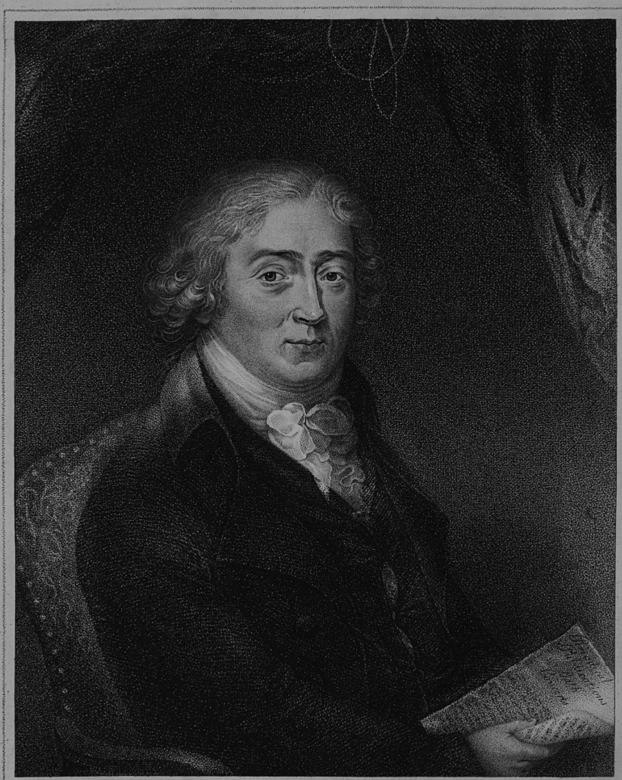

Frontispiece: 'Mr. Rauzzini'. University of Glasgow Archives & Special Collections.

For Gran and Grandpa.
Always in my heart.

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Prelude

'The First Master for Singing in the Universe'

A Master's Final Days

A young man shyly knocks on the bedroom door of his old master. A soft groan comes from the other side of the door, and while the man hesitates, unsure if this is an invitation to enter, his passion for learning pushes him to proceed into the room. Inside, the room is dark, and the young man blinks rapidly as his eyes adjust to the blackness. The old master would normally be up and about by this time in the morning and would almost certainly have completed his own practice. Though he has not performed on stage in years, his morning exercises are ingrained in his daily routine.[1] Today, however, the master lies still in his bed, and the young man fears the worst. He is ashamed to think of how disappointed his father will be if the old master dies after only giving him six lessons. His father was so delighted when this master, who had trained so many famous singers, agreed to train him. After all, singing was the young man's real passion, and he hoped to become a celebrated opera singer one day.

The old master gently beckoned the young man to come to his bedside and, without hesitation, he followed his master's instruction. The rosiness from his master's cheeks had all but disappeared, and instead, he lay there, thin and pale.[2] He gestured again, this time indicating the young man should sing. The young man selected his mark carefully, choosing the middle of the room as his stage. Perhaps the young man naively believed his voice would rouse the master from his lethargy. He had diligently practised Exercise One from the master's treatise, ensuring accuracy and precision as he moved through the *solfeggio*. For those who are unfamiliar, *solfeggio* are vocal exercises composed in the style of a song and typically sung to the solfa syllables, Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La, which are a core area in Italian music education. Surely, such a careful performance would show the master how far he had come in just six, short lessons. The young man sang each note with such meticulousness both in tuning and intention, but was disheartened that only silence followed his performance. His master was usually so forthcoming with encouragement, but today there was no bravo. The young man suddenly realised the old master was

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slipping away. He rushed to his bedside, immediately ringing the bell for attention. Surely, this was not his master's time. A young maid answered the call, and before she could fully enter the room, the young man hurried her to find a doctor. Fortunately, the master was still breathing, and the young man hoped that with medicine and rest he would be restored. The young man wanted to stay, but he knew that his presence would only be a burden. He whispered a fond farewell to his master and hoped to see him again. Just a few hours later, he heard that his master was no more.[3]

* * *

This is a fictional retelling of Charles Edward Horn's (1786–1849) last lesson with famous castrato singer and singing master, Venanzio Rauzzini (1746–1810), which he recorded in his memoirs on July 17, 1828.[4] He stated the following:

> … singing was my aim and [my father], not be[ing] able to draw from me this point, sent me to Bath with a letter of recommendation introduc[ing] me to the celebrated Rauzzini who, tho' at a very advanced age, gave me lessons and, poor man, nearly expired in the very act of hearing me sing. While he lay there, almost senseless, and whose silence roused me from not hearing his bravo, I flew to his bedside, rang the bell, and soon learnt he had not strength enough to say farewell. A few hours [later] he was no more.[5]

His brief account was powerful in its sentiment as it encapsulated Rauzzini's commitment to teaching, even as he lay on his deathbed. Rauzzini had spent the majority of his musical career living and working in London and Bath, and while he could boast success in a variety of lucrative musical activities, such as attaining the high status of *primo uomo*, a leading man of the Italian opera at London's King's Theatre, composing several operas, and becoming the leader of the Bath subscription concert series, it was his influential role as a singing master that established his legacy.[6] Even at the height of his performance career, Rauzzini had taken on aspiring professionals as his pupils, and on more than one occasion he had used his influence as a celebrity singer to secure them professional work.[7]

In 1792, *The Bath Chronicle* boasted about Rauzzini's teaching prowess, optimistically declaring him to be 'the first master for teaching in the universe'.[8] Two articles published in *The Monthly Mirror* in 1803 and 1807 ardently promoted Rauzzini as a prominent singing master, as did many of his pupils.[9] Charles Incledon (1763–1826) and Michael Kelly (1762–1826) credited the castrato as setting them on the path towards professional success.[10] In the decades after his death, he was cited by William Bingley (1774–1823) in 1814, Joseph Nightingale (1775–1824)

in 1819, and John Britton (1771–1857) in 1825 as one of the most important singing masters whose fame was unrivalled by any other in Britain.[11]

Musicologists have also evaluated Rauzzini's standing as a singing master. In 1943, Mollie Sands' article, 'The Teaching of Singing in Eighteenth Century England', considered the fashion for Italian singing as well as listing well-known singing masters during the period.[12] Only a small portion of the article looked at Rauzzini, though in 1953 she dedicated two articles specifically to the castrato. The first, 'Venanzio Rauzzini. Singer, Composer, Traveller', was a biographical overview of his life on the continent and later in Britain, while the second, 'Rauzzini at Bath', gave a more detailed account of his role organising and directing the subscription concert series and as a teacher in Bath.[13] In 1990, Kenneth James drew attention to Rauzzini's distinguished contribution to the musical scene in Bath as a singer, director and singing master.[14] Sheila Hodges, in her 1991 article, 'Venanzio Rauzzini: "The First Master for Teaching in the Universe"', took a more nuanced view of Rauzzini's role as a singing master in England, though much of it was devoted to the education he received as a young castrato.[15] Paul Rice was the first musicologist to write a monograph that focussed on Rauzzini's career in Britain. The main discussion was dedicated to performance and composition, though teaching was briefly mentioned with Rice acknowledging that 'in the world of singing in Britain, … Rauzzini's name carried much clout with audiences and singers alike.'[16]

When examining the life of a musician, particularly a famous singer, singing teaching is often on the periphery of larger topics of discussion, such as performance and composition. Patricia Howard's 2014 book, *The Modern Castrato Gaetano Guadagni and the Coming of a New Operatic Age*, briefly touched on the musical training required to achieve an operatic career, though it mainly focussed on professional performance.[17] John Rosselli's *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* provided an overview on female vocal tuition in eighteenth-century Italy while Susan Rutherford, Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss mentioned the student–teacher relationship between Giuditta Pasta (1797–1865) and castrato Girolamo Crescentini (1762–1846) in their respective studies, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815–1930* and *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*.[18] More recent publications, such as Robert O. Gjerdingen's *Child Composers in the Old Conservatories* (2020) and Nicholas Baragwanath's *The Solfeggio Tradition* (2021), placed teaching at the centre of their investigations, examining the pedagogical methods used to train music students at the Italian conservatories from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.[19] These are useful studies that explain the tools music masters used to tutor their students in composition and performance, though neither look at an individual master and the kind of support he offered to his pupils during their training. Examining the teaching methods employed by masters is crucial to

understanding what students were expected to learn and the techniques they needed to develop to become fluent musical readers and performers. However, teaching methods are only one piece of a much larger puzzle, particularly when studying vocal training in late eighteenth-century Britain.

There was no institution dedicated to musical instruction in Britain until 1822, and up to that point the country was, for the most part, reliant on independent music masters to provide instrumental, vocal and musicianship training.[20] As such, a single music master could be responsible for a pupil's entire musical education. The relationship shared between master and student was just as impactful as the training methods used in the practice room. Indeed, if a student emerged as a successful performer and publicly credited their master for providing quality instruction that was a powerful endorsement of his teaching skill. Time and time again, Rauzzini received endorsements from former pupils, two of whom have already been mentioned, Incledon and Kelly.[21] He also needed to negotiate a variety of complex social issues, including attracting students and giving them a platform to demonstrate their abilities, ensuring his private and public conduct was appropriate, adapting teaching methods he learned in Italy to serve his students in England, and aligning teaching style to changing attitudes with regards to education and popular musical trends. Moreover, Rauzzini tutored both the rich amateur and the aspiring professional student and while both needed to learn to read music and sing competently, the two different kinds of student held very different positions in society. Rauzzini did not necessarily change his overarching pedagogical strategy when working with rich amateurs and aspiring professionals, at least until the aspiring professional required more advanced methods of training, but there were different social concerns at play that could positively or negatively affect his standing as a singing master.

Richard Leppert, in his 1988 study *Music and Image*, provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of concerns facing Georgian parents who were in the market for a singing master to teach their amateur daughters.[22] Singing was considered a feminine activity, with wealthy, amateur women encouraged to cultivate their vocal ability as part of their catalogue of ornamental accomplishments.[23] Hiring an honest and skilled singing master, who was kind in his approach but not overly flattering, was of utmost importance. In 1797, Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) advised that singing masters should be 'well qualified to sing and play' and should be able to teach 'with good temper and genteel behaviour'.[24] However, there was no training, regulation or licensing required to become a singing master in Britain, an issue bemoaned by composer John Potter (*fl.* 1754–1804) in 1762 and composer, impresario and music-master Domenico Corri (1746–1825) in 1810.[25] How was a family to determine the skilled master from the unskilled without wasting time and money? Recommendations from other families were useful, but the real test of a master's expertise

was how well his students performed before an audience. Of course, elite amateur women were not permitted to perform in public for money but singing and playing at social occasions in the safety of a private home was expected.[26] Even these performances came with some amount of risk. If the young, amateur student performed well, it demonstrated that she was appropriately educated and worthy to marry a young man of similar peerage. If she performed badly, she could be ridiculed by her peers, who wondered if she was unaware of her inadequacies or that she was poorly taught.[27] In 1777, Hannah More (1745–1833) did not care for a young woman showcasing her musical talents at private gatherings, stating it was quite 'wrong' for people to 'form their judgement of education'.[28] She continued, 'Music, dancing, and languages gratify those who teach them, by perceptible and almost immediate effects; and when there happens to be no imbecility in the pupil, nor deficiency in the master, every superficial observer can, in some measure, judge of the progress.'[29]

Italian singing masters were particularly sought after, in part because of the vogue for Italian opera. One only needs to look at the leather-bound collections of single song sheets found in elite homes to see the popularity of Italian arias during the period. Jeanice Brooks, whose investigation into musical practices in Georgian homes, particularly Boughton House and Tatton Park, has uncovered a vast array of Italian musical repertoire in these collections.[30] The fashion for Italian music was directly linked to the Grand Tour, a custom that encouraged primarily elite young men to travel across Western Europe, particularly Paris and Italy, as part of their coming of age.[31] It was established around 1660 and continued throughout the eighteenth century. Such travel was educational and pleasurable, and kindled new tastes and cultural interest in art, architecture, and music that many continued to cultivate once they returned to their home country.[32] According to Brooks, several Italian musicians were recruited by Englishmen on the Grand Tour, which partly explains the steady influx of Italian musicians who performed in theatre bands and sang at opera houses and concert venues in England throughout the eighteenth century.[33] Charles Burney (1726–1814), who wrote a detailed account of the music he experienced while on his first Grand Tour of Paris and Italy in 1770 and his second Grand Tour of Germany, the Netherlands and the United Provinces in 1772, praised various Italian musicians, including Corri and Rauzzini, who were later invited to come to work as musicians in Britain.[34] Corri became the leader of the Edinburgh Musical Society in 1771, and Rauzzini was hired as *primo uomo* at the King's Theatre in 1774.[35] Seeing the glittering Italian opera stars as they performed virtuosic arias impelled elite female amateur singers to purchase and perform arias from the opera. Who better to train them than an Italian music master who likely knew the methods and techniques that enabled these stars of the operatic stage to sing such music? Leppert states 'so ubiquitous were [Italian music masters] in London society that they were regularly

satirised in print and on the stage'.[36] Though Italian musicians, particularly singers, were handsomely paid to perform in Britain, they were also the subject of ridicule.[37] In the epilogue of the 1698 comedy, *Love and a Bottle* by George Farquhar (1677–1707), a section is specifically marked 'Mocking the late Singers', but what follows is an attack on Italian singers specifically:

> *When their Male Throats no longer drew your Money*;
> *We got you a Eunuch's Pipe*, Signor Rampony.
> *That Beardless Songster we cou'd ne'er make much on*;
> *The Females found a damn'd Blotch on his* 'Scutcheon.
> *An* Italian *now we've got of mighty Fame*,
> Don Sigismondo Fideli–*There's Musick in his Name*:[38]

The play was regularly performed in London theatres until 1760, and it was also printed in *The Works of the Late Ingenious Mr. George Farquhar*, which was in its tenth edition by 1772.[39] In printed dialogues, an Italian could easily be spotted by their broken English. Charles Dibdin (1745–1814) satirised Italian music masters in a recitative, writing: 'Shone, pring te tesk, te moosic pook, | Sholter your muskit, master Shaky'.[40] Even Rauzzini's spoken English was written down in a broken style by English actor, John Bernard (1756–1828), in *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830).

Italian music masters were also viewed with suspicion. Giuseppe Baretti (1719–1789), in his *An Account of the Manners and Customs of Italy*, published in London in 1768, claimed that Italian parents prevented their daughters becoming musically educated because the 'best singers and masters of music have seemed studious to acquire' a 'general character of immorality'.[41] In 1811, *The Scourge; or Monthly Expositor* printed a damning article warning against the intentions of foreign music masters:

> Our virgins are frenchified and italianized by a crowded succession of foreign music masters, teachers of graces, and instructors in the continental tongues: alien artists convert the pencil into an instrument of seduction; and in the person of the youthful pupils of the Waltz, elegance and impurity become synonymous.[42]

Such comments inferred that the master could seduce a student with his foreign teaching methods. While it was not representative of all music masters and how they treated their female students, there were some Italian music masters who exemplified the stereotype. Elizabeth Harris (*c*. 1682–1744), wrote in a letter to her brother in 1776 that the Italian master who instructed her sisters wished 'to be a companion which can not be allow'd in this house' and, as such, he needed to be 'kept at a very great distance'.[43] There were also those female students who misinterpreted the close working relationship shared with a master as

a sexual invitation. Dibdin, in *The Musical Tour of Mr. Dibdin* (1788), recounted a tale of a female student who fell in love with her music master. She even proposed they elope together, but the master refused and immediately went to her father to explain the situation. Dibdin praised the young master for his actions: ‘This amiable young man’s unheard-of-prudence saved the family; the daughter became prudent, by despising the man she had courted; was married soon after to one of equal birth’.[44] Dibdin’s not-so-subtle comment that the music master’s ‘prudent’ actions were rather unusual served as yet another warning to readers that masters were generally willing to engage in a sexual relationship with their student. For the elite Georgian family, such a love-match was typically unacceptable since the master was socially inferior. As a skilled tradesman, he was higher in rank than a servant, but certainly not of equal rank to members of an elite family.[45] There were, of course, those exceptions where an elite woman’s circumstances allowed her to marry a music master, though it was still considered a social faux pas.[46] Thomas Rowlandson’s *Comforts of Bath: The Music Master* (1798) and *Reflections, or the Music Lesson* (undated) depicted a music master and his female amateur student engaged in a clandestine affair (Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1 Thomas Rowlandson, 1756–1827, British, *Reflections, or the Music Lesson*, undated, Watercolor and graphite with pen and gray ink and pen and brown ink on medium, moderately textured cream wove paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1975.4.701.

By incorporating a third figure who was in the room but turned away from the intimate moment shared between the master and his student, Rowlandson hint that a father or a husband could be unaware of a brewing romance taking place in the practice room. These concerns directly impacted upon singing masters, especially since many of their pupils were women. Any scandal could seriously affect a master's, or indeed any professional musician's, public reputation. As such, maintaining professionalism was crucial.

Even the castrato singer who was incapable of impregnating a woman was thought of as sexually promiscuous. In 1727, an anonymous writer implied that the famous castrato Senesino (1686–1758), who sang for Handel, was capable of lasting much longer in the bedroom than other men because he could not ejaculate.[47] In 1735, *The Happy Courtezan* explicitly suggested that the castrato as a lover was much preferred by English woman, stating:

> They [women] know, that safe with thee they may remain; Enjoy Love's Pleasures, yet avoid the Pain; … This, by Experience, know the Prudes full well, Who're always virtuous, if they never swell. … Eunuchs can give uninterrupted Joys, Without the shameful Curse of Girls and Boys: The violated Prude her Shape retains, A Vestal in the publick Eye remains.[48]

While women may have enjoyed all the pleasure with no fear of pregnancy, such a relationship also made it much harder to detect if a woman was having an affair with a castrato. There were, of course, those satirists who speculated as to whether a castrato was even able to perform sexually; however, these were overshadowed by the many stories of castrati who ended up in surreptitious relationships with women.[49] Rauzzini was sexually objectified when he sang for the King's Theatre, and even much later in his life, *Bath Characters, Or, Sketches from Life* (1808), implied that women, namely Miss Susannah Wroughton (1732–1816), still became intimately attached to him.[50] In 1826, *The Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, which was published sixteen years after Rauzzini's death, fed into the sexual allure of the Italian castrati, even relaying a tale that claimed Rauzzini needed to leave his court position and come to England to escape sexual scandal.[51] For the elite family, a castrato was not even a viable love-match, since he was unable to give a woman a child and, therefore, was unable to marry. However, that did not prevent a woman and a castrato secretly engaging in an intimate relationship. Rauzzini was accused of having an affair with Elizabeth Sarah Real Villa Gooch (1757–1807) in 1778.[52] As such, a castrato, particularly one that was young and handsome, was not necessarily the safer option when hiring a singing master. It is no surprise then that the most illustrious endorsements Rauzzini received for his teaching came after he was past his sexual prime, notably from *The Monthly Mirror* in 1807 when he was sixty-one years old. Even so, Rauzzini had

trained singers for most of his career, even when he was engaged as a principal opera singer on the continent and in London.

Hiring an old music master, who a young woman was unlikely to see as an intimate companion, was already a known tactic. Lawyer and amateur musician, Roger North (1653–1734), explicitly recommended that parents should hire an older master who was married, had a family, and was an experienced teacher.[53] Rauzzini may not have had a wife or children, but as he got older, he was no longer thought of as the young, virile singer and instead was described by his colleague Andrew Ashe (*c.* 1758–1838) as an experienced 'father' in the music industry.[54] A prominent theme in this book is that Rauzzini's skills as a singing master were not confined to his musical ability and aptitude for teaching, but were also closely connected to his demeanour and image.

Villainising Female Singers

Simply put, a relationship between an elite woman and a music master was undesirable. Those women who did have a legitimate relationship with a music master, such as the widow Hester Thrale (1740–1821) who married Gabriel Mario Piozzi (1741–1809) in 1784, were ridiculed by the press for marrying someone so below their station.[55] Publications up and down the country denigrated Elizabeth Gooch (1757–1807) for her alleged intrigues with Rauzzini and his friend the violinist, Franz La Motte (1751–1780), after her divorce proceedings in 1779, with *The Scot's Magazine* stating that her 'scandalous and profligate conduct had been fully proved'.[56] However, it was not just elite women who faced such harsh public criticism. Female professional singers were similarly decried as they were portrayed as highly sexualised by the press and assumed to be morally corrupt.

Vocally, Rauzzini's female pupils, who emerged as professional singers, were among the finest examples of vocal performers in Britain, with their voices cultivated and refined to a level of skill that allowed them to 'supersede' the castrato singer.[57] After all, the female soprano had performed alongside the castrato since opera was established as a form of musical entertainment. By the late eighteenth century, there was already a long-standing tradition of trouser roles for women, and it was not uncommon for a female soprano to perform the leading male role when a castrato was unavailable.[58] Treble voices, no matter if the voice belonged to a castrato or a woman, had more opportunities to be challenged, to push the boundaries of vocal technique and performance, and to fulfil its potential. The tenor voice, which, for almost two centuries, had been cast aside in favour of treble voices, had not benefitted from this long period of vocal development, and there were few examples prior to 1820 of quality tenors who pushed the boundaries of virtuosity in quite the same way as treble voices. As rightly pointed out by Naomi André, Michel Poizat and Susan Rutherford, women inherited the virtuosic legacy of

the castrati, and for a brief time were the leaders of operatic entertainment.[59] Many of Rauzzini's aspiring professional female pupils, including Ann Harrison (née Cantelo) (1766–1831), Maria Dickons (née Poole) (*c.* 1775–1833), and Rosemond Mountain (née Wilkinson) (*c.* 1768–1841), came to stardom right at the point when the popularity of castrati was in decline and the female soprano was rising to prominence.[60]

Unfortunately, a by-product of this success was that several of Rauzzini's female pupils, as well as women he worked alongside, were vilified in print, with most scandals centring on undesirable romantic relationships. A notable example is James Ridgway's 1792 publication, *Memoirs of Mrs Billington*, which portrayed famous opera singer Elizabeth Billington (1765–1818), who was cited as being a pupil of Rauzzini, as sexually promiscuous, incestuous and an adulterer.[61] Even where there was no evidence the woman was involved in such heinous acts, she was frequently portrayed as the villain. In 1816, tenor and former pupil of Rauzzini, John Braham (*c.* 1774–1856), was involved in a highly publicised court case where he was accused of having an affair with a married woman. However, it was his lover, celebrated opera singer and also a former pupil of Rauzzini, Nancy Storace (1765–1817), who was denigrated by the press. Storace, who never married Braham though she had lived with him for many years and had a child by him, was accused of corrupting the married woman who engaged in the affair simply by associating with her.[62] In reality, Storace was a victim of Braham's betrayal. From society's perspective, women who performed publicly were morally questionable, although Rutherford asserts that women would earn respectability as skilled artists by the turn of the nineteenth century.[63] Though Rauzzini was closely connected with each one of these women, he was not associated with their scandals. Even so, they exemplify just how important it was for a musician, and how difficult it was for a female professional musician, to build and maintain a positive public reputation.

In Opposition: Italian and English Singing

Much like the masters who came before him, such as Niccolò Porpora (1686–1768), whose name is synonymous with eighteenth-century vocal pedagogy, Rauzzini's reputation as a singing master was tantamount to those former students who emerged as popular operatic singers in Britain and on the continent.[64] Unlike Porpora, who tended to train Italian castrati such as Farinelli (1705–1782), Caffarelli (1710–1783), and Porporino (1719–1783), Rauzzini's pupils were typically English. British-born opera singers often struggled to achieve success in Italian opera and yet, many of the exceptions, including Braham, Dickons, Storace and Mountain, were, at some point in their career, trained by Rauzzini.[65] The *Morning Post* (1801), *The Monthly Mirror* (1807), and *The Musical World* (1851) listed the many opera singers Rauzzini trained as evidence of his teaching skill and

presented him as an astute master who could transform a mediocre singer into an operatic star.[66] Rauzzini being described as a 'father' was a key theme in the 1807 *Monthly Mirror* article, where he was labelled 'the father of a new style in English singing'.[67] This powerful, albeit odd declaration tapped into a broader patriotic agenda, which attempted to claim Rauzzini as England's own, despite the fact he was an adult when he arrived in the country in 1774 at the age of twenty-seven and each one of his pupils only gained success after adopting a more Italianate style of singing. As discussed by Robert Toft, 'the style of singing employed by Braham and other singers was mixed [with Italianisms] rather than purely English'.[68]

As a castrato, it was virtually impossible for Rauzzini to dissociate himself from Italy. The castrato voice had been the ultimate representation of opulence and virtuosity, features that had defined Italian opera since the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, it was an open secret that castrati were exclusively created in Italy and were, according to Valeria Finucci, 'the single best-known Italian commodity export', distributed to opera houses all over Europe, though by the time of Rauzzini's death in 1810 the use of the castrato in opera was in significant decline.[69] While training in Italy, Rauzzini had been exposed to an intensive regime of musical instruction. Indeed, as a boy, Rauzzini must have shown himself to have real potential for singing, as the castration operation was legally and medically risky, and there was no guarantee that a boy would develop a voice worthy of an operatic career after the procedure. To better ensure results, boys with excellent musical skill and accurate vocal intonation were recommended for castration, and, after the procedure, they were expected to undergo a long course of study in an Italian music conservatory or as an apprentice to a music master.

The Italian singing tradition to which Rauzzini belonged encouraged the development and maintenance of a flexible voice, which allowed vocalists to sing light and fast-paced virtuosic passages.[70] Virtuosity was an aesthetic that grew in popularity over several centuries, with training styles specifically developed to facilitate vocal flexibility. Many castrati were distinguished for their flexibility and frequently pushed the boundaries of their vocal capabilities.[71] Carlo Broschi (1705–1782), better known as Farinelli, is one of the most cited examples of a castrato who performed with feats of supposedly superhuman vocal technique. His vocal agility was put to the test when competing with a trumpet, with Farinelli demonstrating a level of skill both in dexterity and projection which allowed him to win the contest.[72] The anecdote does well to mythologise both Farinelli's vocal technique, and the abilities of castrati more generally. Rauzzini was similarly recognised for his agile voice and was praised by Charles Burney for singing with neatness and accuracy.[73] However, as outlined by Baragwanath, all singers in Italy were instructed using similar training techniques, regardless of whether they were castrated or not. These methods were designed to maximise a singer's vocal flexibility.[74]

England had its own vocal aesthetics, which had developed out of sixteenth-century court entertainments and were maintained in the restoration masque, a genre that would develop into English opera.[75] English opera had separated itself from its Italian counterpart by including spoken sections in place of sung recitative. These declamations could drive the narrative forward, allowing the singer to demonstrate their rhetorical persuasiveness and gestural elegance in addition to their singing.[76] Even in song, textual clarity superseded all other elements. As such, the text setting of English airs tended towards the syllabic, and the accompaniment subordinate to the voice with singers judged on their ability to move their audience.[77] Textual clarity in Italian opera was less of a concern, particularly in arias, since these were designed to give singers the opportunity to showcase musical virtuosity.

However, the rise in popularity of Italian opera in Britain from the early eighteenth century onwards stirred serious debates about the quality of English songs and singing. In 1740, Colley Cibber (1671–1757) feared that English music was thought inferior to Italian opera and was in danger of being disregarded entirely, arguing that 'English Musick had been so discountenanced, since the Taste of *Italian* Opera prevail'd'.[78] Cibber was writing at the point when the Grand Tour had propelled the fashion for Italian music. Historian, H. James Jensen has documented the changing attitudes towards English music from 1660 onwards, the point at which embarking on the Grand Tour became popular among the elite.[79] Just as Cibber observed, English songs and singing are consistently described in earlier eighteenth-century sources as too simplistic, brash, and often associated with the lowly and ill-bred. English poet and playwright Thomas Shadwell (*c*. 1642–1692), who Jensen states was 'conscious of the latest musical opinion', frequently incorporated discussions on English and Italian music in his plays.[80] In *Bury-Fair* (1689), those characters who were well-bred often performed Italian arias and, as such, showed themselves to be sophisticated members of society with a fine musical taste.[81] Meanwhile, those characters who enjoyed English music, were either of lowly birth, or were stupid and uncouth. The lowly Oldwit in *Bury-Fair* drunkenly staggered on stage singing the old English song, 'There Were Three Men Came Out of the West'.[82]

The idea that the simple English song and the unrefined English singer were distasteful was a recurrent theme in English farces throughout the eighteenth century. Singing-master Signor Masquali, a character in George Colman's (1732–1794) *The Musical Lady* (1672), shows himself to be a man of taste when he explains to his female amateur student:

> English ballad-singing! – O the ridiculous idea! — To hear a huge fellow with a rough horrible voice roaring out, *O the roast beef of old England!* Or a pale faced chit of a girl, when some country neighbour asks her in company, 'Pray, Ma'am, could you favour us with *Go,*