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Singing the King's Opera for the Empresses:
Eighteenth-Century Opera Seria at the Imperial Russian Court

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the role of Italian opera seria at the imperial Russian court from the introduction of the genre under Empress Anna through the reign of Catherine the Great. First presented in St. Petersburg in 1736, opera seria became an increasingly important part of court ceremonies under Anna's successors, serving as a novel form of spectacle and a means of justifying the empresses' authority. Beyond its elaborate presentation and its broad messages in support of absolute rule, opera seria provided the Russian empresses with an opportunity to demonstrate their fluency in Western European high art forms, a new means of communicating political aspirations, and an additional form of the stylized self-representation that characterized their reigns and their court cultures. Taking as examples three *opere serie* composed or performed under the patronage of the empresses in the period 1736-1796, I consider the reasons for the genre's close association with ceremonies celebrating the empresses and its continued prominence at the Russian court throughout the eighteenth century, even as alternative musical and theatrical forms developed alongside it.

I discuss the ways in which the preexisting conventions of opera seria as they developed in Italy, including musical forms as well as recurring character types, plots, and libretti, were utilized by both Italian and Russian composers employed by the empresses. Selections from the operas *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio* (Araia), *Ifigenia in Tauride* (Galuppi) and *Alcide* (Bortniansky) are analyzed within the contexts of their original compositions or revisions and performances as parts of court functions.

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Each of my committee members has provided meaningful contributions to this project and to my own academic development. The concept for this thesis originated in my final paper for Women, Music, and Culture, taught by Dr. Lynn Bertrand. Dr. Bertrand encouraged me to investigate further one of the topics addressed in my paper for expansion into my honors project. Her early enthusiasm regarding the musical life of the eighteenth-century Russian “women’s kingdom” convinced me that this topic was deserving of more detailed study and motivated me throughout the research and writing processes. From Dr. Elizabeth Goodstein I have learned not to be daunted by either the complexity of concepts or the length and scope of a project such as this. In addition to providing valuable insights on the formation of arguments and the structuring of lengthy and multifaceted pieces of writing, Dr. Goodstein has encouraged and supported my decision to focus on music research as I have attempted to balance my artistic and scholarly pursuits. Finally, I would like to thank my advisor for this project, Dr. Stephen Crist, whose

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Preface

I developed this thesis from a course paper in which I presented an overview of musical activity at the court of Catherine the Great, the last and longest-reigning of Russia's four major women rulers of the eighteenth century. Catherine's reign represented the culmination of the period that musicologist Inna Naroditskaya, borrowing a term from Michelle Marrese's history of noblewomen's property rights in imperial Russia, refers to as the "women's kingdom."¹ The period, which began with the coronation of Catherine I in 1725 and ended at the death of her namesake in 1796, was characterized by a profusion of music making influenced by the genres and practices that had been imported from Western Europe at the beginning of the century. By the time of Catherine the Great's reign, periodicals that published new compositions were being circulated among courtiers. No social or ceremonial occasion passed without the accompaniment of chamber music or an operatic production. Both comic and serious operas were being produced with regularity at the court in St. Petersburg and on the estates of noble families. The empress herself was writing libretti for operas developed in collaboration with her court composers.

From this variety of musical and especially operatic styles that flourished under Catherine and her imperial predecessors in the Russian women's kingdom, I chose opera seria as my focus because, to echo Mina Curtiss' reason for writing her study of Empress Anna, it wasn't there.² Even the most comprehensive of the recent English-language studies that discuss operatic activity under Catherine and her predecessors, most notably Marina Ritzarev's *Eighteenth-*

¹Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), xi.

²Mina Curtiss, *A Forgotten Empress: Anna Ivanovna and Her Era, 1730-1740* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1974), vii.

Century Russian Music and Naroditskaya's *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage*, tend to focus on early Russian-language operas based on mixed French and Italian models rather than the Italian-language *opere serie* that appeared on Russian court stages throughout the century. Because opera seria was adopted by so many European courts, the genre is often presented as having appealed to monarchs regardless of cultural or national particularities. With its plots confirming the righteousness and wisdom of kings and its celebrated singers showcasing the wealth of the courts able to hire them, presumably opera seria was put to the same uses, and interpreted similarly by court audiences, across Europe. The conventions to which the genre's dramatic scenarios and musical forms typically subscribed, particularly in the first half of the eighteenth century, support this view of opera seria as a widely applicable yet narrowly interpretable formula.

In the course of my research, however, I have found that even the most conventional of *opere serie*—represented in this thesis by Francesco Araia's *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio*—were “read” differently by audiences in the Russian women's kingdom than by court audiences in Western Europe. Much of my discussion regarding the interpretation and reception of opera seria at the Russian court has been informed by the works of Yuri Lotman and Richard Wortman, which respectively address the comportment and social activities of the nobility and the development of court ceremony during the period under consideration. Earlier studies of opera in eighteenth-century Russia have also incorporated concepts from these works, particularly the associations made between allegorical performances and assertions of power. However, these operatic histories tend to view Italian-language opera seria as the earliest step in the development of a Russian national form of opera, thus minimizing or obscuring a central tenet of Lotman and Wortman's perspective on eighteenth-century Russian court culture. In their

interpretations of the highly stylized performances and performative behaviors that characterized Russian court life, Lotman and Wortman argue that foreign attributes such as those of dress, language, and imagery were essential elements connoting status and power.³ Opera seria thus exemplified the attributes that they identify as desirable within the context of the eighteenth-century Russian court. Opera seria was not only foreign; it was also, as Martha Feldman indicates throughout her study of the genre in *Opera and Sovereignty*, interpreted as an intentional performance rather than an attempt toward realism.⁴

My study of opera seria within Russian court life affirms the importance of both the performance of foreignness as identified by Lotman and Wortman and the overt theatricality of the genre as described by Feldman. I depart from earlier narratives of Russian operatic history in that I identify the Italian-language repertoire as being significant to Russian court society in its own right. I am less concerned with the role of opera seria in the development of the Russian operatic tradition than I am with the reasons that the Russian empresses had for valuing the genre's foreign origins and its incorporation of Western European mythological and symbolic figures. In the following chapters, I attribute the importance of opera seria within eighteenth-century Russian court ceremony to the genre's amplification of preexisting means of imperial representation and to its resonances with subsequent political developments. Russian court audiences attending the opera encountered more than sword-wielding women, defiant

³Yuri Lotman, "The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture," in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, ed. Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. Vol. 1, *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

⁴Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

priestesses, and tyrannical kings. They experienced an art form that at once glorified the rule of their empress and perpetuated the performance of mythological foreignness in which they lived.

Introduction

In a February 1736 issue of the Russian court publication *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti* (*St. Petersburg News*), an anonymous reviewer reported on the performance of an opera entitled *Sila liubvi i nenavisti* that had been given in honor of Empress Anna Ivanovna (r. 1730-40).

Commending the opera's librettist, composer, set designer, and ballet director—all of whom were Italian—on their successful contributions to the “beautiful and lavish” production, the reviewer noted that the opera was performed to “the universal praise of viewers” and, most importantly, “to the great pleasure of Her Imperial Majesty.”¹ The reviewer gave the Russian title of the opera, and court audiences could purchase Russian-language libretti prior to the performance to facilitate their understanding of the plot. However, the opera was performed for Empress Anna and the members of her court in Italian under its original title, *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio* (*The Power of Love and Hate*) and is remembered as the first Italian opera seria performed in Russia.

Opera seria, a highly stylized form of music drama that developed in Italy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was already acknowledged in its native country and throughout Western Europe as a genre “to, for, and about the sovereign,” who was often represented by the central character or characters in the drama.² Most *opere serie* featured heroes and rulers inspired by classical mythology or history engaged in complex storylines that interwove political conflicts, romantic turmoil, and moral dilemmas. These figures were

¹*Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti* 10 (February 1736), qtd. in Nikolai Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, trans. Samuel William Pring, ed. Miloš Velimirović and Claudia R. Jensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 9.

²Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 8.

portrayed by virtuosic singers celebrated for their abilities to elicit emotional responses from listeners through their performances and for their skills in embellishing repeated phrases of their arias with elaborate vocal ornaments. The best singers became wealthy and well-known as courts vied with one another to obtain them for performances. With its allegorical possibilities and its potential for grand aural and visual spectacle, opera seria played a central role in European court ceremonies for most of the eighteenth century.

For the Russian court, which adopted the genre fairly late in comparison to Western European monarchies, opera seria presented additional benefits. As an established and highly regarded Western art form, opera seria furthered the Russian imperial goal of achieving parity with the Western courts in terms of cultural achievement. At a court in which foreignness and Western European associations connoted refinement, the Italian language of opera seria and the Greco-Roman origins from which the genre drew many of its characters were considered positive attributes. The recurrence of mythological figures, many of whom had become associated with Russian rulers as early as the reign of Peter the Great (Peter I, r. 1682-1725), lent the genre great potential for imperial representation at the court in St. Petersburg. Opera seria's tolerance and even desire for casting singers across gender, frequently resulting in gender ambiguity onstage, was viewed as an advantage by the unmarried empresses who ruled Russia for two-thirds of the eighteenth century. The empresses often adopted quasi-masculine self-portrayals, similar in effect to many female singers' portrayals of male heroes in opera seria, to convey their possession of qualities such as rationality and strength that had been gendered masculine.

Opera seria reached Russia at the request of Empress Anna, the niece of Peter the Great. Anna was the second of eighteenth-century Russia's four major women rulers, the first of whom

was Peter's wife and successor Catherine I (r. 1725-1727). She became empress in 1730 following the unexpected death of Peter's grandson, Peter II, from smallpox at the age of fifteen. The thirty-seven-year-old widowed Duchess of Courland had been living in that Baltic territory since 1711. Selected as empress by a council dominated by members of two influential noble families seeking a figurehead who could be manipulated easily, Anna refuted their machinations but ultimately ceded most of her real power to her despotic favorite, Ernst Johann von Biron. Although her ten-year reign has been severely criticized and often overlooked in favor of those of her predecessor Peter and her successors Elizabeth (Elizaveta Petrovna, r. 1741-1761) and Catherine the Great (Catherine II, r. 1762-96), Anna was responsible for some of the most significant developments in music and theater to reach the Russian court in the eighteenth century. Through correspondence with the court in Dresden, Anna arranged for the first Italian music and theater troupe, led by Giovanni Ristori, to perform in Russia. The troupe supplied musicians to perform instrumental and vocal works on ceremonial occasions and staged weekly performances of short comic *intermedi*. The comedy *Calandro*, staged in Moscow in 1731, was the first complete opera performed in Russia.

Anna's dedication to both comedy and ceremony converged in 1733 with the recruitment of Pietro Mira, a court violinist who also performed as a jester under the name Pedrillo. The following year, Anna sent Mira back to Italy with the task of recruiting a composer and performance troupe to produce operas for her court. In 1735, Mira returned to St. Petersburg with a large company of singers, instrumentalists, comedic actors, dancers, and artists led by the Neapolitan composer Francesco Araia.³ The twenty-six-year-old Araia had composed seven

³A list of the company's members can be found in Robert-Aloys Mooser, *Annales De La Musique Et Des Musiciens En Russie Au XVIII^eme Siècle*. Vol. 1, *Des Origines A La Mort De Pierre III (1762)* (Geneva: Mont-Blanc, 1948), 120-121.

opere serie between 1730 and 1735, which had been successfully staged in Rome, Naples, Milan, and Venice. In St. Petersburg, he was responsible for the production of operas to commemorate Anna's birthdays and coronation anniversaries. In addition to this primary role, his company was also responsible for continuing the weekly performances of comic *intermedi* and supplying unstaged music to accompany social gatherings at court. Through the recruitment of Araia's company and the "introduction of the custom of embellishing as many events as possible with Italian music," Anna initiated the connections between Italian music, courtly sophistication, and imperial power that would develop and strengthen throughout the reigns of Elizabeth and Catherine the Great.⁴ Of the several Italian vocal and instrumental genres that Anna instated at her court, none became more closely associated with the figure of the reigning empress herself than did opera seria.

After Empress Anna's death in 1740, Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1741 following the overthrow of Anna's niece Anna Leopoldovna and Anna Leopoldovna's son Ivan VI, whom Anna had chosen as her successor. Expanding upon the contributions of Anna and of her father, Elizabeth further developed her court musical institution by establishing a permanent company to produce opera seria. In 1742 Francesco Araia, who had been sent back to Italy during the period between Anna's death and Elizabeth's accession, returned to St. Petersburg. There he entered the service of Elizabeth and composed seven *opere serie* for court ceremonies held during her twenty-year reign. Unlike the three earlier works composed or revised for performance at Anna's court, Araia's operas for Elizabeth often represented or referenced the figures and events that they were composed to commemorate.

⁴Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 41.

These later operas also communicated support and praise for the empress and her relatives using forms borrowed from spoken theater and from other musical genres performed at Elizabeth's court. Overall, however, their music and plots are typical for *opere serie* from the first half of the eighteenth century. They represent the adaptation of the Italian genre to imperial Russian circumstances rather than the creation of a new operatic genre.

Two of these works were significant in the history of opera seria in Russia. The first, *Scipione* (*Scipio*, 1745) was Araia's second opera seria for Elizabeth and was commissioned by the empress for the marriage of her nephew and chosen heir, Peter Fedorovich, to Sophie Auguste Fredericke von Anhalt-Zerbst, the future Catherine the Great. The second was Araia's penultimate operatic composition for the Russian court, *Tsefal i Prokris* (*Cephalus and Procris*, 1755), which represented Elizabeth's strongest effort to Russianize opera seria. The Russian-language libretto was written by the noted playwright Alexander Sumarokov, and the opera was performed by a cast of Russian singers. However, its musical forms are indistinguishable from those of Italian-language opera seria.⁵ Although well-received by court audiences and given repeat performances, *Tsefal i Prokris* did not set a precedent for the composition of Russian-language opera seria. The series of Italian and Italian-trained Russian music directors who succeeded Araia at the Russian court composed predominantly Italian-language opera during the reign of Catherine the Great.

Catherine came to power by leading a revolt against her husband and Elizabeth's successor, Peter III, who was dethroned and later assassinated. As a foreign-born woman ruling alone following the death of her husband, Catherine's legitimacy as empress was contested. She

⁵As an example, see the dal segno aria for Procris reproduced in Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, 2: 369-375.

had reason to seek means of reinforcing her absolute power over her court and her subjects and thus continued and expanded her predecessors' practice of commissioning dramatic and musical spectacles honoring her rule. In addition to organizing elaborate balls and pageants and commissioning theatrical works, Catherine patronized Italian opera seria alongside native Russian comic opera, using both forms to promote herself as a cultured and powerful ruler. Presented at her Hermitage Theater, which was connected to the Winter Palace, *opere serie* commemorated Catherine's birthdays and coronation anniversaries with greater frequency and more elaborate productions than had taken place under her predecessors.

While Araia had been the sole court composer of opera seria employed under Anna and Elizabeth, Catherine sought out a series of composers recognized throughout Western Europe. She was introduced to the Venetian Baldassare Galuppi through his comic operas, but hired him in 1765 to provide *opere serie* for court functions. After his *Ifigenia in Tauris* was premiered in St. Petersburg in 1768, Galuppi returned home upon the expiration of his contract. He took with him Dmitry Bortniansky, a singer from the Imperial Court Choir whose studies with Galuppi were financed by Catherine. Upon his return to St. Petersburg, Catherine assigned Bortniansky a position composing and teaching music at the "Young Court," the household and surrounding circle of courtiers headed by Catherine's son and future successor, Paul (Paul I, r. 1796-1801) and Paul's wife Maria Fyodorovna. The three *opere serie* that Bortniansky composed during his training with Galuppi in Italy strongly influenced his later operatic compositions for the Young Court.

Although French and Russian-language comic operas began to infringe upon the dominance of opera seria in the mid-1780s, *opere serie* were still being composed and staged in Russia as late as the turn of the nineteenth century during Paul's brief reign. Initially viewed as a

foreign novelty expressing favorable absolutist allegories, opera seria developed into an integral component of eighteenth-century Russian court ceremony. The grandiose and multifaceted genre was especially capable of supporting the ongoing project, which reached its peak during Catherine's reign, of the self-mythologization of the empress.

Chapter I

Gods and Courageous Heroes: Ceremonial Figures on the Seria Stage

On January 29, 1736, Francesco Araia's opera seria *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio* was presented as part of the extended celebrations for the forty-third birthday of Empress Anna. Recounting the premiere of this event in his chronicle of music at the Russian court, the German-born Russian Academy of Sciences professor and writer Jacob von Staehlin claimed that "the court accepted this opera with much applause and great pleasure...all the boxes and the parterre were filled to overflowing."¹ Staehlin, whose writings comprise the most comprehensive first-person account of opera seria in eighteenth-century Russia, was involved in operatic productions under Empresses Anna and Elizabeth as a writer of prologues and an editor of printed translations of libretti. He was also the editor of the *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti*, to which he contributed an eighteen-part serial educating court audiences on the origins and characteristics of opera. Like his account of the premiere of *La forza dell'amore*, Staehlin's extended definition of opera seria is uncompromisingly adulatory:

Opera is a show performed by means of singing. Except for gods and courageous heroes, it does not allow anyone else on stage. Everything in it is noble, magnificent, and amazing. In its contents, nothing can be found save sublime and incomparable deeds, divine qualities in man, a blissful state of the world, in fact it depicts a golden age...opera presents to us the splendor of the heavens and the beauty of the universe; on the earth, [it presents] the strength and valor man displays...²

¹Jacob von Staehlin, "Nachrichten von der Musik in Russland," *Haigolds Beylagen* 4:90, qtd. in Nikolai Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, trans. Samuel William Pring, ed. Miloš Velimirović and Claudia R. Jensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 9. January 29 is an Old Style date, and is thus eleven days behind the equivalent New Style date (February 8) in the eighteenth century.

²*Primechanie na vedomosto 1738*, pt. 17, 16, qtd. in *ibid.*

Because Staehlin's description appeared in a newspaper published by the Academy of Sciences, an institution operating under imperial control, it is valuable as an indication of the ways in which court audiences were intended to interpret the foreign art form introduced by and in celebration of Empress Anna. The "blissful state of the world" and "golden age" mentioned by Staehlin refer to the tendency of opera seria plots, at least since the standardization of the genre in Italy in the 1720s, to portray an idealized version of an absolutist "world order in which ranks cascaded downward in the great chain of being from God to sovereign or ruling class to the various classes and orders below."³ The support that opera seria as a genre expressed for absolute rule, most blatantly communicated through a standard denouement in which the onstage ruler's wise and benevolent decision resolves the major conflicts of the plot, was as appealing to Anna as it was to monarchs in Western Europe who had adopted the genre for their own courts prior to its introduction to Russia.

Extending its endorsement of absolutism to include the specific figure of the ruler himself, opera seria was valued at the Russian court, as elsewhere in Europe, for its ability to represent the ruler in the audience more or less directly through one or more of the characters in the drama. In St. Petersburg, the representative capability of opera seria was bolstered by adaptable characters and scenarios that "with some tweaking...could be identified with a specific monarch or empress" and by the composition of additional choruses and staged prologues, the latter of which Staehlin wrote several, that mentioned the ruling empress by name.⁴ Beyond this widely applicable ability to exalt a given ruler and his or her reign via dramatic allegory, opera

³Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 6, 8.

⁴Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera: The Tsarina from State to Stage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.

seria had particular significance in Russia as a Western art form and as an extension of a preexisting tradition of ceremonial performances intended to assert the authority of the ruler, celebrate his or her achievements, and display the great wealth and high cultural status of the court.

While Western European imagery and forms of ceremony had influenced aspects of Russian court life prior to the reign of Peter the Great, it was Peter who initiated a change in court culture “far more profound than a simple shift in the customary social order.”⁵ Beginning with the founding of the new capital of St. Petersburg in 1703 after the territory was acquired in a victory over Sweden, the Russian court and especially its ruler became engaged in enactments of Western European court culture. The Westernizing social reforms for which Peter is remembered, including the adoption of European dress and art forms and an emphasis on facility in foreign languages, were in effect conscious performances by the members of his and his successors’ courts. The theatricality of Petrine and immediately post-Petrine court life, combined with the value ascribed to Western forms, resulted in the proliferation of increasingly elaborate staged ceremonies.

Beginning with Peter’s creation of a “ceremonial image of triumphal conqueror” via staged military processions rife with textual and visual references to figures from Western European classical history and mythology, the grandeur and variety of these ceremonies expanded under the reigns of the four major successive empresses to include coronations, weddings of courtiers and members of the royal family, formal social gatherings, and theatrical

⁵Yuri Lotman, “The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Eighteenth-Century Russian Culture,” in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, ed. Alexander D. Nakhimovsky and Alice Stone Nakhimovsky (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 68.

productions.⁶ These grandiose events, developed concurrently with the adoption and expansion of Western European musical genres and institutions, could include “military ‘signaling music,’” sacred choral music, chamber music, and music for dancing, depending upon the purpose of the celebration.⁷ Ceremonies also marked the empresses’ birthdays, name days, and coronation anniversaries. These events, the earliest of which preceded the first court performances of opera seria, introduced several of the musical forms and representative images and themes that were combined subsequently in operatic productions.

The established ability of opera seria to allegorize and glorify absolute rule and rulers, combined with its overt theatricality and its use of Western European imagery and musical-dramatic forms, all contribute to an explanation of its centrality to celebrations of the Russian empresses’ lives and reigns for most of the eighteenth century. However, the lasting importance of opera seria in Russia extended beyond its use as a display of power, wealth, and cultural sophistication and its role in the ongoing performance of Western court culture. More than an additional imported form of ceremony expressing equality or rivalry with Western Europe, opera seria shared with the Russian court a repertory of figures and themes adopted from Western European traditions of imperial representation that had taken on additional meanings associated with specific empresses when they appeared in the context of Russian court ceremony.

Derived from Western mythology and literature, figures such as the goddess Minerva and broader character types such as the heroic or warrior woman had appeared prominently in earlier court ceremonies and in visual arts, written documentation, and formal social gatherings. The

⁶Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*, vol. 1, *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7. For descriptions of masquerades, coronations, and weddings under the empresses Anna, Elizabeth, and Catherine the Great, see Inna Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, 21-40.

⁷Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, 31.

portrayals of such figures in opera seria were communicated through the use of Italian music, the basic forms of which Russian court audiences had been familiar with since the coronation of Empress Anna. Consistent with the connection between Russian royalty and foreign imagery that had formed prior to the reign of Peter and had developed to include almost all aspects of court life under him and his successors, opera seria's recurring figures and settings also resonated with past displays associated with specific rulers, their achievements, and their characters. Opera seria presented these familiar figures and themes using a musical language that was increasingly recognizable and valued, simultaneously securing its position as an established Western form of art and imperial representation and speaking to the recent history and specific interests of the Russian court and its empresses.

Strength and Valor: Abiazar's Display of *Muzhestvo*

Whether due to the demands of the libretto or to casting decisions, not all of the "courageous heroes" on the Russian seria stage to which Staehlin draws his readers' attention appeared as men. Operatic warrior women and queens predated the standardization of seria forms, first appearing in seventeenth-century Venetian operas that were "revived or imitated throughout Europe wherever Italian opera was produced" and recurring throughout the eighteenth century.⁸ Such figures appeared early in Russia's operatic history: the second opera performed for Anna's court, and the first to be composed there, was Francesco Araia's setting of Metastasio's libretto *Semiramide riconosciuta*, centered on the mythologized Assyrian queen Semiramis. However, queens needed not be present onstage in order for women to appear as militaristic or otherwise

⁸Daniel E. Freeman, "'La guerriera amante': Representations of Amazons and Warrior Queens in Venetian Baroque Opera," *The Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (Autumn 1996): 433.

powerful characters. The preference for high voices in opera seria resulted in frequent “disjunctions” between body and voice type or between voice type and character presented by castrati and women in male roles, respectively, which were expected and even eagerly anticipated by Italian and other European audiences of seria.⁹ Nor was the redistribution of a castrato role to a female singer in a repeat performance uncommon.¹⁰ Beginning during the reign of Catherine I, both the warrior queen and the woman as male warrior appeared in Russian imperial representations prior to the introduction of opera seria to the court.

Catherine, who succeeded her husband Peter after his death in 1725, was the first of the four unmarried empresses who would rule Russia for most of the century. Her assumption of the throne, both unexpected and unprecedented, was justified in part through references to a constructed image, established several years before her coronation, of Catherine as strategist and warrior. In 1721, she appeared at the celebration of the Peace of Nystadt wearing a “sword studded with diamonds,” an ornate indication of this portrayal.¹¹ While the coronation homily delivered by Feofan Prokopovich, Archbishop of Novgorod, and much of the subsequent documentation surrounding Catherine’s ascension likens her to an Amazon and especially to Semiramis, her own “vaunted heroism, specifically her manly bravery (*muzhestvo*)” and use of strategy at the battle of Pruth, are mentioned repeatedly.¹² According to the argument presented in the homily, Catherine’s possession and exhibition of *muzhestvo* indicated her ability to rule independently. The image of the *muzhestvo*-bearing empress in visual art, imperial ceremony, and social gatherings, often portraying the ruler in men’s military dress, reappeared throughout

⁹Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*, 14, 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 14.

¹¹Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 1: 60.

¹²*Ibid.*, 182-183.

the reigns of Catherine's three major successors. Although less prominent under Anna than under Elizabeth and Catherine the Great, the image of the warrior woman resurfaced during Anna's reign, including in *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio*, the first opera seria produced in Russia.

Francesco Araia revised *La forza dell'amore* for its Russian premiere in 1736, having composed the opera on a libretto by Francesco Prata in Milan in 1734. Prata's libretto adheres closely to the models for character relationships and plot development associated with Pietro Metastasio, the most influential of opera seria librettists. The Metastasian model comprised six or seven characters, including a ruler and two young couples, presented in a hierarchy of relative power and struggling with interpersonal conflicts and internal excitements and distresses, often romantic. In Prata's libretto, the hero Abiazar, whose character name provided an alternate title by which Staehlin claimed the work was known to some audiences and commentators in St. Petersburg, secretly marries Nirena, the daughter of the Indian king Sofit. Sofit and his ally Barzant capture and imprison Abiazar, and Sofit attempts to arrange a new marriage between Nirena and Barzant's nephew, Taksil. Taksil, however, is in love with Abiazar's sister Talestria. The younger characters' goal of freeing Abiazar drives most of the action in the second and third acts, while their interiorities are revealed in arias expressing their romantic discontentment and their hostility toward Sofit, who is at one point the target of an assassination plot. Animosity and tension between Abiazar's sympathizers and Sofit increase continuously, culminating in Nirena's near suicide.

The resolution is brought about by Abiazar's refusal to kill Sofit when the opportunity arises, a decision for which Sofit rewards Abiazar by sparing his life, restoring his freedom, and affirming the legitimacy of his marriage to Nirena. While this resolution seems to occur hastily in comparison with earlier plot events such as Abiazar and Nirena's tearful separation, it

succeeds in restoring Sofit's reputation as a benevolent and morally guided ruler. Although Sofit's actions are perceived as tyrannical and questioned by the four younger characters throughout most of the opera, the work ultimately "reproduced...the prevailing social structure" of Anna's court by concluding with the wise decision of the king.¹³

Sofit, however, is not the only character whose trajectory resonated with the structure and concerns of the Russian court and its empress. The casting of the mezzo-soprano Caterina Giorgi in a role that originally had been written for a castrato, while not an unusual decision for an opera seria production and not necessarily one made with the goal of imperial representation, placed the familiar figure of the warrior woman in a lead role and at the forefront of the audience's attention. The characteristics that Feofan Prokopovich collectively labeled *muzhestvo* in his coronation homily for Catherine I and that reappeared in descriptions and depictions of subsequent empresses—bravery, determination, military ability—were present onstage in the figure of Abiazar, communicated through an intelligible musical language and likely furthered through Giorgi's expected abilities of improvisation. Opera seria scores do not preserve the elaborate ornamentation for which the singers and the genre itself became famous and thus cannot be interpreted as complete records of individual performances. However, an examination of Araia's musical characterization of Abiazar can still provide an indication of the ways in which this figure, and the broader character type that he (or she) represents, was presented for an audience familiar with such a figure from earlier ceremonial forms.

As the hero of the opera, Abiazar is resolute in his goals despite the treatment he receives at the hands of Sofit and Sofit's allies, and he is brave in the face of his defeat, capture, and

¹³Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*, 6.

arrest. He is one half of the opera's central romantic pairing that, once affirmed by Sofit, provides the opera with its requisite happy conclusion. His expressions of genuine concern and love for Nirena, conveyed in his first act entrance aria and in the closing duet of that act, earn him the audience's sympathy. His bravery and determination, however, are the characteristics that make him admirable and constitute the focal point of his character. His consistent exhibition of the latter two qualities secure his heroic status and ensure that he is always interpreted positively despite his defiance of Sofit's established, if misguided, declarations of authority. Abiazar's bravery is evident in his first aria in the second act. The aria occurs after Sofit has paraded Abiazar in chains in front of the populace and condemned him to death, to Nirena's horror, in the preceding recitative:

Nirena:
Oh Dio: chi lo condanna?

[...]

Sofite:
No Figlia mia non sei
Se pretende salvar
Un traditore¹⁴

Nirena:
Oh God: who condemns him?

[...]

Sofit:
You are not my daughter
If you want to save
A traitor.

This tense confrontation between father and daughter, which concludes with Sofit's refusal to pity or spare Abiazar despite Nirena's pleas, is disrupted by the opening ritornello of Abiazar's aria. The fast tempo, securely established major key, and repeating dotted sixteenth figure that characterizes the violin parts contribute to senses of lightheartedness and inconsequentiality that seem to defy the grave danger of Abiazar's situation (Example 1a).

¹⁴Francesco Araia, *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio*, manuscript score, ca. 1739, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Austria, accessed February 20, 2017, International Music Scores Library Project, [http://imslp.org/wiki/La_forza_dell%27amore_e_dell%27odio_\(Araia,_Francesco\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/La_forza_dell%27amore_e_dell%27odio_(Araia,_Francesco)), Act II Sc. 2: 6.

Example 1a: Francesco Araia, aria for Abiazar, "Ecco alle mie catene," opening ritornello (mm. 1-11).

Allegro

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello/Double Bass

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Cello/Double Bass

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Cello/Double Bass

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Cello/Double Bass

Abiazar's vocal entrance, set to a restatement of the opening ritornello and accompanied by unison strings for the first two lines of text, expresses confidence despite the presence of

Sofit:

Abiasare:	Abiazar:
Ecco alle mie catene	Here are my chains
Ecco a morir m'invio, sì	Here I am sent to die, yes
Ma quel core è mio, sì	But that heart is mine, yes
Ma tu cedi a me	But you yield to me
Quel core è mio	That heart is mine
Tu cedi a me, tu cedi a me, [etc.] ¹⁵	You yield to me, you yield to me, [etc.]

Abiazar's delivery is made declamatory and emphatic through the adoption of the violins' dotted figure from the ritornello and the separation of each statement of "sì" from the main melodic line via rests. The aria utilizes a predominantly syllabic setting for the complete first statement of the opening text and for its restatement up to the initial repetition of "tu cedi a me" (mm. 12-36), ensuring that Abiazar's words are understood by the audience.¹⁶ Not until the third repetition of "cedi" within this restatement is he granted the rapid seven-measure melisma that draws attention toward the virtuosity of the singer, Caterina Giorgi, who portrayed the character (Example 1b).

Example 1b: Francesco Araia, aria for Abiazar, "Ecco alle mie catene," transition from syllabic to melismatic text setting (mm. 32-44a).

The musical score for Example 1b consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line for Abiazar, written in a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 8/8. The lyrics under the vocal line are: "Sì quel core è mi-o tu cedi a me quel core è mi-o tu cedi a me tu". The middle and bottom staves are labeled "A." and represent the string accompaniment. The middle staff shows a melismatic passage with the lyric "ce" under a dotted figure. The bottom staff continues the melismatic passage with the lyrics "di a me" under a dotted figure.

¹⁵Araia, *La forza dell'amore*, Act II Sc. 2: 6-7.

¹⁶Ibid., Act II Sc. 2: 7-9.

Abiazar's main melody for this first (A) section of the aria operates well within the scene to convey his bravery and resolve despite Sofit's threats of death and separation from Nirena. Following Johanna Ethnerson's reading of the early eighteenth-century critic Ludovico Antonio Muratori's remarks on clarity of text and the portrayal of male heroes in opera seria, the syllabic setting and dotted rhythms of Abiazar's aria lend it a "majestic" character and would "have been considered appropriate for a heroic ideal...as it gives prominence to the words."¹⁷ Muratori contrasts such declamatory settings with more lyrical, less consistently syllabic settings that he deems "effeminate," establishing a gendered dichotomy within which to categorize seria arias.¹⁸ Thus in Muratori's terms, the primary music of Abiazar's aria reestablishes his heroic status and his masculinity. Within the context of the scene and of the larger drama, it is an expected and unextraordinary, although energetic, restatement of Abiazar's character and his purpose. As performed by Caterina Giorgi for a Russian courtly audience, it could have been interpreted as a display of *muzhestvo* reminiscent of, if not directly connected to, earlier appearances of the image of the warrior woman in connection with the ruling empresses.

The structures of both the aria and of the genre of opera seria ensure that the audience would simultaneously have been aware of the character of Abiazar and of the singer portraying him. Concerned with allegorical representation and grandiosity of display over realism, opera seria did not demand the effacement of the performer's identity in favor of that of the character. Within the initial statement of text set to the primary "heroic" melody, Giorgi's approaches to pitches higher in her range (E5 and F5 in this aria) could have made the audience aware of the

¹⁷Johanna Ethnerson, "Music as Mimetic Representation and Performative Act: *Semiramide riconosciuta* and Musical Construction of Sexuality and Gender," *STM-Online* 11 (January 2008), accessed October 19, 2017, RILM.

¹⁸Ibid.

woman singing the role of Abiazar, while the initial notated melisma on “cedi,” as indicated above, likely shifted their focus to the performer. However, the most blatant display of individual virtuosity would have occurred upon the repeat of the A section, in which Giorgi would convey Abiazar’s reaffirmation of bravery via the application of improvised or seemingly improvised embellishments of the main melody and a restructuring of the pattern of the “cedi” melisma.

The embellished return can be interpreted as having a dramatic function, in that it indicates Abiazar redoubling his efforts to express his defiance of Sofit or that it represents an even more ostentatious performance of bravery and confidence intended to hide his fear from his captors and bolster his own resolve. As a performance expectation of seria arias, however, the embellishments were intended to showcase the abilities of the singer with little regard for specific character or for that character’s position or rank within the hierarchy established in the drama. If both the potential dramatic and the requisite non-dramatic functions are taken into account, then the embellished return can be viewed as strengthening the possibility of identification of the performer with her character by the audience.

The heroic aspects of Abiazar’s character established in his second act aria are reaffirmed in his final aria in the first scene of the third act, which also provides an opportunity for Giorgi’s most blatant display of *muzhestvo* in appropriately militaristic terms:

Abiasare:
 Ò sul soglio o in campo armato
 Il mio fato o la mia sorte
 Questo core sosterrà,
 Questo core sosterrà, [etc.]¹⁹

Abiazar:
 Whether on the ground
 or armed on the battlefield,
 My destiny or my fate
 This heart will support,
 This heart will support, [etc.]

¹⁹Araia, *La forza dell’amore*, Act III Sc. 1: 4-5.

The steady and insistent quarter-note repetitions in the bass and viola in the opening ritornello are march-like and stately, further supported by dotted-eighth figures and notated staccato articulation in the violins. The melody introduced in the violins, which reappears in an adapted form in Abiazar's vocal line, concludes with a nearly three-measure flourish descending to Abiazar's entrance (Example 2):

Example 2: Francesco Araia, aria for Abiazar, "Ò sul soglio," opening ritornello (mm. 1-16).

Andante

The musical score consists of two systems, each with four measures. The first system is marked 'Andante'. The Violin I and II parts play a melody of quarter notes with staccato articulation, while the Viola and Bass parts play a steady quarter-note accompaniment. The second system continues the same pattern, with the Violin I and II parts playing a melody that concludes with a flourish descending to Abiazar's entrance.

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is Violin I (Vln. I) in treble clef, starting with a B-flat and playing a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The second staff is Violin II (Vln. II) in treble clef, playing a similar melodic line. The third staff is Viola (Vla.) in alto clef, playing a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The bottom staff is Bass in bass clef, also playing a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

The second system continues the musical score with four staves. The Violin I and II parts continue their melodic lines, with the Violin I part showing more rhythmic complexity. The Viola and Bass parts maintain their accompaniment patterns.

The third system concludes the musical score with four staves. The Violin I and II parts end with sustained notes, while the Viola and Bass parts conclude their accompaniment.

Confirming the character of the aria established in the ritornello, Abiazar enters in slow declamatory fashion as repeated quarter notes in all the string parts contribute to the tension of the scene and the portrayal of Abiazar's steadfastness.²⁰ The introductory measures of the vocal entrance confirm, in Muratori's terms, Abiazar's heroic status through their use of dotted rhythms and primarily syllabic text setting, much like his aria in the previous act. However, the overwhelming focus of this aria as a whole is not so much the character as the singer performing

²⁰Araia, *La forza dell'amore*, Act III Sc. 1: 4.

him, as indicated by the three increasingly complex melismas setting the word “sosterrà” each time it occurs at the end of a repetition of the A section text.²¹ As in Abiazar’s second act aria, an interpretation of the successive melismas that supports his characterization and the meaning of the text is possible. All three statements of “sosterrà” are characterized by dotted rhythms, an extension of the musical representation of the heroic as identified by Muratori and exhibited in Abiazar’s previous aria. While melismatic settings tend to highlight the virtuosity of the singer and inspire awe in the listener, the extended settings of “sosterrà” also contribute to the meaning of Abiazar’s repeated statement that he is capable of continuing or persevering through hardships. The final repetition of “sosterrà” that concludes the A section, with eight trills notated in one measure, suggests that Abiazar will not only survive adversity but triumph over it.²² This is the final outcome of the act that the aria introduces, as Abiazar survives his imprisonment and is reunited with Nirena at the conclusion of the opera.

Despite its relevance to Abiazar’s character and to the dramatic situation of the third and final act, Caterina Giorgi’s vocal ability remains the primary focus of the aria, particularly upon the repetition of the A section with its expectation of additional improvised ornamentation on an already florid line. Although slower than the second act aria and situated in a slightly lower vocal range, never extending beyond D5, the number of lengthy melismas in close succession in the third act aria contribute to its difficulty. As the last time in which she appeared onstage alone, the aria presented Giorgi with a final opportunity to showcase her own virtuosity, to connect herself with the character of the likably resilient and steadfast hero Abiazar, and to present the figure of

²¹Ibid., Act III Sc. 1: 4-7.

²²Ibid., Act III Sc. 1: 8 (first m. of the page).

the warrior woman in powerful and positive terms prior to a conclusion in which she (or he) would ultimately be deemed victorious in the wise decision of the king.

The casting of Giorgi as Abiazar does not necessarily indicate an intentional attempt to represent the empress onstage, particularly since *La forza dell'amore* was not originally composed for performance in St. Petersburg. Casting across gender would have been standard practice for an Italian opera company such as Araia's troupe wherever it performed. Additionally, within opera productions that did not include staged prologues making overt references to the empress in the audience, interpreting any single character as a direct representation of the empress is likely to be misleading. However, it is difficult to overlook the potential significance of this decision in a performance for a court and nation ruled by an unmarried woman, particularly since the figure of the warrior woman had been at the forefront of imperial imagery since the coronation of her predecessor, twelve years before the Russian premiere of Araia's opera. The image that Caterina Giorgi created onstage as Abiazar, costumed "in the clothing of a simple soldier" and singing significant portions of her music in the declamatory, text-driven style associated by at least one eighteenth-century critic with male heroes, fell within the expectations of opera seria as a genre and of Russian court audiences, who were familiar with this image from earlier representations of their empresses.²³

The figure of the heroic or warrior woman in Russian court life and in productions of opera seria became more prevalent during and after the reign of Anna's successor Elizabeth. As part of the festivities surrounding Elizabeth's coronation in 1742, a performance of Johann Adolf Hasse's setting of *La clemenza di Tito* was staged with Caterina Giorgi singing the title role.

²³Ibid., Act III Sc. 1: 4.

Unlike *La forza dell'amore*, *La clemenza di Tito* incorporated a prologue by Staehlin and a chorus that directed the audience's attention to the comparison being made between onstage emperor and offstage empress. Elizabeth readily adopted the masculine image of military hero for herself, incorporating it into court social life by hosting dances at which women wore military uniforms and men wore women's dresses. The playfully subversive tone of these events suggests one of the reasons for the lasting interest in gender ambiguity in opera seria. In a more serious manner, both Elizabeth and her successor Catherine the Great portrayed themselves as military leaders, complete with appropriate dress, in portraits conveying their authority. Both Elizabeth and Catherine came to power via coups d'état. While this presented potential compromises to their already tenuous claims to the throne, the memories of their respective accessions could also be conjured intentionally as reminders of their strength and military connections. For this purpose, the image of the empress as military commander—a descendant of the image constructed by Catherine I and revived when Caterina Giorgi performed in opera seria—flourished in visual art, at social gatherings, and onstage under Elizabeth and Catherine.

Divine Qualities: Minerva as Representation and Source of Power

An equally if not more prominent figure shared by Russian imperial representations and opera seria was the Greco-Roman mythological counterpart of the mortal warrior woman, the goddess Athena or Minerva. The Russian court had adopted figures from classical mythology and history during the reign of Peter the Great: in staged military processions, Peter presented himself as a new Julius Caesar and a new Alexander the Great, while in contemporaneous artworks and

documents he is likened to the mythological figures of Hercules and the god Mars.²⁴ During Peter's reign, Minerva appeared alongside the goddess Venus as a symbol of "love, beauty, and civilization" according to his recently adopted Western models.²⁵ Like the other female mythological figures who appeared in Petrine imagery, Minerva symbolized culture rather than power and was not interpreted as an authoritative figure. Her role began to change as the proliferation of classical and mythological images representing the ruler in art and ceremony expanded throughout the reigns of Peter's female successors.

Minerva first became associated with the power of the Russian empress when she appeared alongside the goddess Diana in written and visual representations of Catherine I created as justifications for Catherine's reign upon her coronation. However, the figure of Minerva is most closely associated with Catherine the Great, who actively promoted herself as Minerva, modelling her actions and her public image after that "polymorphic goddess symbolizing at once military prowess, wisdom, and...patronage of the arts."²⁶ The connection between goddess and empress was initially established via staged ceremony in the form of "a grand three-day pageant" entitled "Triumphant Minerva" held in 1763, half a year after Catherine's coronation.²⁷ This imagery was furthered in all forms of art, both visual and staged, that had been adopted by the Russian court from Western Europe during the reigns of Catherine's predecessors.

Under Catherine, the composition of operas on mythological subjects was commonplace, even as opera seria elsewhere in Europe tended toward subject matter derived from ancient history. Catherine's interest in classical mythology extended beyond her self-representation as

²⁴Wortman, *Scenarios of Power*, 1: 42-43, 48.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 1: 55.

²⁶Katia Dianina, "Art and Authority: The Hermitage of Catherine the Great," *The Russian Review* 63, no. 4 (October 2004): 635.

²⁷Naroditskaya, *Bewitching Russian Opera*, 22.

Minerva. Continuing and expanding the social and cultural reforms initiated by her predecessor Peter the Great, whose descendant and successor she sought to be viewed as, Catherine attempted to construct a genealogical connection between ancient Greece and eighteenth-century Russia that would strengthen her own claim to the cultural achievements of classical civilizations in the manner of Western European monarchies who had long portrayed ancient Greece and Rome as their ancestors. Catherine's constructed associations between ancient Greece and imperial Russia and between herself and the goddess Minerva form the background to the composition and performance of Baldassare Galuppi's opera seria *Ifigenia in Tauride*, which premiered at Catherine's Hermitage Theater for her thirty-ninth birthday in 1768.

Libretti based on Euripidean tragedies were relatively common in opera seria of the second half of the eighteenth century, and *Iphigenia in Tauris* was one of the most frequently adapted plays. Eighteen operatic versions were produced prior to 1800.²⁸ For the production at Catherine's court, Galuppi set a libretto written by Marco Coltellini, which previously had been set by Tommaso Traetta for a performance in Vienna the previous year. Coltellini's libretto adheres fairly closely to the general trajectory of Euripides' play: Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, is believed by her brother Orestes to have been sacrificed by their father, but has actually been spared and in return for her survival serves as a priestess in a region near the Black Sea populated by a people known as the Taurians and ruled by a king, Thoas. Sent by the god Apollo to retrieve a statue from the remote temple at which Iphigenia is priestess, her brother Orestes arrives in the Taurian lands accompanied by his cousin and confidante Pylades, unaware that the priestess is his sister. Initially captured in order to be

²⁸Blair Hoxby, "The Doleful Airs of Euripides: The Origins of Opera and the Spirit of Tragedy Reconsidered," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 3 (Nov. 2005): 266.

sacrificed, Orestes and Pylades eventually reveal their identities to Iphigenia. Brother and sister are reunited, plan their escape from Thoas and the Taurians, and with the help of the gods return to Greece.

Coltellini's libretto differs from Euripides' play and from other adaptations in two crucial ways, both of which potentially indicate Catherine's interest in this particular version. In Euripides' play, the goddess who spares Iphigenia and at whose temple Iphigenia serves is Artemis, or Diana; in Coltellini's adaptation, Artemis is replaced by Pallas Athena, or Minerva. Referenced throughout the opera, particularly by the chorus at the conclusions of acts and at central moments in the drama, Pallas Athena stands as the highest authority to which the characters can appeal and the ultimate arbiter of their fates. Like *La forza dell'amore* decades earlier, *Ifigenia in Tauride* was not presented with a prologue delineating an association between the figure of Minerva in the opera and Russia's self-styled Minerva, the empress Catherine II. Nor was the libretto originally written for use at Catherine's court. However, Galuppi's opera was composed and performed in the same decade in which Catherine's Minerva image had been formed and widely disseminated, and it was premiered within five years of the "Triumphant Minerva" pageant. Russian audiences attending *Ifigenia in Tauride* would have immediately associated all references to Pallas Athena with their empress.

The second major difference between Euripides and Coltellini lies in the latter's treatment of the conclusion and the fate of Thoas, the Taurian king. Euripides allows Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades to escape to Greece without killing Thoas, although Orestes suggests this plan to Iphigenia, who rejects it. In Coltellini's ending, Thoas is portrayed as a tyrant and is killed in order to facilitate the protagonists' escape. In her readings of Coltellini and other Italian libretto adaptations of the play, Edith Hall notes the recurrence of this uncompromisingly

negative portrayal of Thoas and interprets his character as a representative non-Western entity against which the European courts and rulers that patronized Italian opera, who identified with the Greek characters, could define themselves.²⁹ This interpretation, consistent with Catherine's ongoing attempts to construct a Greek lineage for the Russian people and with her own self-representation as a figure from Greek mythology, also seems a likely reason for Catherine's approval of Coltellini's version of the Iphigenia story.

According to Marina Ritzarev and Anna Porfirieva, however, Galuppi likely chose Coltellini's libretto for its ten choruses, as he was impressed by the abilities of the Imperial court choir and composed sacred and secular music for that institution during his three-year engagement in St. Petersburg.³⁰ Empress Anna increased the prominence of the court choir during her reign by founding a school in Ukraine that supplied boys to the choir each year upon completion of their musical training. As court ceremonies grew more elaborate and more frequent under Anna and her major successors, choral music became a regular component of staged and unstaged musical ceremonies and performances held by the empresses. Thus, while opera seria as it had developed in Italy generally included no chorus and few, if any, ensembles, opera seria productions in Russia incorporated larger choruses when possible, either through the composition of an additional nondramatic prologue praising the ruler or through the selection of libretti that accommodated the chorus. While neither the subject matter of *Ifigenia in Tauride* nor several of Coltellini's textual and Galuppi's musical forms conform to the expectations of opera

²⁹Edith Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 160.

³⁰Marina Ritzarev and Anna Porfirieva, "The Italian Diaspora in Eighteenth-Century Russia," in *The Eighteenth-Century Diaspora of Italian Music and Musicians*, ed. Reinhard Strohm (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 226, 228.

seria as closely as did earlier works by Francesco Araia, the opera was suited to the available performance forces and in some choruses recalled the functions of staged prologues.

Whereas the staged prologues of earlier Russian seria productions did not serve a dramatic function, instead stating connections between the characters and events of the plot and real figures and occasions, the choruses in *Ifigenia in Tauride* commented upon and helped shape the action onstage, as in the Greek tragedy upon which the opera was based. Any associations between the actions and attributes of Pallas Athena, a figure absent from the stage but represented and spoken for by a chorus of figures who serve at the temple where Iphigenia is priestess, and those of Catherine II had to be inferred by an audience familiar with Catherine's Minerva persona. Although the dramatic functions of the choruses prevent them from making the connection between goddess and empress explicit, their recurring mentions of Pallas Athena, the power she wields, and the ultimate control she has over the opera's events functioned as references to Catherine.

Pallas Athena and the chorus members who serve as her earthly representatives onstage first appear in the introduction to the third scene of the first act, helping to establish the new setting of the temple prior to the first appearance of its priestess, Iphigenia. According to Coltellini's stage directions, "some [maidens consecrated to the goddess] adorn the altar, [while] others prepare garlands" in preparation for a holiday dedicated to Pallas Athena as they dance and sing to the goddess in a chorus foreshadowing the major conflict of the opera:

Coro:

Fra gl'inni, e i cantici
fiori si spargano
in questo gran dì.
La casta Pallade
armata d'egida
s'onori così.

Chorus:

Among the hymns and the singers
flowers blossom
on this great day.
Pure Pallas Athena
the army of the aegis
honors in this way.

Umane vittime
la deà placabile
non sempre gradi.³¹

The placable goddess
does not always like
human sacrifices.

Suggestive of the festive atmosphere indicated in the stage directions, the opening of the chorus introduces dotted figures in the violins and oboe which will, in modified form, rhythmically characterize the chorus members' lighthearted and optimistic declaration of their first six lines of text. The horns, functioning outside their more common military context, here indicate the ceremonial importance of the holiday being celebrated and draw the listener's attention to this significant scene, in which the name of the goddess is invoked onstage for the first time (Example 3a).

Example 3a: Baldassare Galuppi, chorus, "Fra gl'inni e i cantici" (mm. 1-8).

Allegro

The singers' entrance preserves the dotted figures but omits the sixteenth-note flourishes of the violin and oboe parts, indicating that textual clarity is a primary concern. A predominantly homophonic texture is interrupted only once, by imitation on the words "umane vittime," creating the effect of textual repetition. This use of imitation draws the audience's attention to

³¹Marco Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, libretto, 1763, accessed November 14, 2017, Libretti d'Opera Italiani, http://www.librettidiopera.it/zpdf/ifitau_ct_bn.pdf, 9.

the concept of human sacrifice, unexpected within a cheerful chorus praising a beneficent goddess in preparation for festivities. However, like the text, the musical setting rejects this negative aspect of Minerva's power: the imitative section is brief; it preserves the lively tempo and major key of the chorus as a whole, and the original texture is quickly restored upon the final mention of "la deà placabile" to whom the chorus members sing praises. While the chorus acknowledges the threatening side of Pallas Athena, it ultimately portrays her as benevolent. The trajectory of the chorus—from a celebration of Pallas Athena, to the recognition of her power, to an affirmation of her goodness—is restated and reaffirmed by the da capo structure of the chorus, which mandates the complete repetition of the sung text (Example 3b).

Example 3b: Baldassare Galuppi, chorus, "Fra gl'inni e i cantici," vocal parts (mm. 25-32).

The image displays a musical score for four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Each part is written on a staff with a treble clef (except for Bass, which has a bass clef) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The lyrics are: "U - ma-ne vit - ti-me la deà pla - ca-bi-le la deà pla - ca-bi-le non sem - pre gra - di." The Soprano, Alto, and Tenor parts have a similar melodic line, while the Bass part has a lower, more rhythmic line. The score ends with a double bar line and a repeat sign.

Both repetitions of the sung portion of the chorus are followed by a sixteen-measure trio for flute, violin, and bassoon, which likely accompanied either the enactment of continued preparations for Pallas Athena's holiday or the transition from the temple exterior and garden, where the chorus is sung, to the temple interior, where Iphigenia is introduced in conversation with her confidante Dori. The chorus members, often integral to the dramatic action but mutable

in character, next appear as soldiers prior to the introduction of King Thoas, who has captured Orestes, bound him in chains, and plans to sacrifice him to Pallas Athena according to regional custom. Engaged in militaristic rather than celebratory and sacred duties, this second interpretation of Pallas Athena and her power differs significantly from the initial portrayal of the goddess presented in the first chorus:

Coro:
 Misero giovane
 qual fiera sorte
 in ira a Pallade
 ti guida a morte!³²

Chorus:
 Wretched youth
 what cruel fate
 in anger to Pallas Athena
 leads you to death!

Effective if predictable, the establishment of a slow tempo and minor key imply the captured Orestes' probable fate at the hands of Thoas prior to the singers' entrance confirming the king's plans. Repeated dotted figures in the strings create a sense of irreversible motion suggestive of Orestes' seemingly inevitable progression toward sacrifice, while wide leaps in the violins contribute to the intensity and unsettled nature of the scene. The flutes, having lost their celebratory, somewhat pastoral connotation from the trio that concluded the first chorus, here interact in dialog with the strings, doubling the violins at the octave for the final scalar pattern, which ultimately descends to the singers' entrance (Example 4a).

³²Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 10.

Example 4a: Baldassare Galuppi, chorus, "Misero giovane" (mm. 1-8).

Largo

Flute

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

p

Detailed description: This system shows the first four staves of the musical score. The Flute part begins with a rest in the first two measures, then plays a melodic line in the third measure. Violin I and Violin II play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Viola part provides harmonic support with a similar eighth-note pattern. The dynamic marking *p* (piano) is indicated at the end of the system.

Fl.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

f

Detailed description: This system continues the musical score for measures 5-8. The Flute part enters in measure 5 with a melodic line. Violin I and Violin II continue their accompaniment. The Viola part features a more active role with sixteenth-note patterns. The dynamic marking *f* (forte) is indicated at the end of the system.

Fl.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

p

Detailed description: This system shows measures 9-12. The Flute part plays a complex, rapid melodic line. Violin I and Violin II play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Viola part provides harmonic support. The dynamic marking *p* (piano) is indicated at the end of the system.

Upon their entrance, the chorus of soldiers confirms the dire outlook presented in the instrumental opening, declaiming Orestes' misfortune with a recurring dotted figure and frequent use of repeated notes (Example 4b).

Example 4b: Baldassare Galuppi, chorus, "Misero giovane" (mm. 9-13).

Largo

Soprano
Mi - se - ro gio - va - ne qual fie - ra sor - te

Alto
Mi - se - ro gio - va - ne qual fie - ra sor - te

Tenor
Mi - se - ro gio - va - ne qual fie - ra sor - te

Bass
Mi - se - ro gio - va - ne qual fie - ra sor - te

S.
in i - ra(a) Pal - la - de ti gui - da à mor - te

A.
in i - ra(a) Pal - la - de ti gui - da à mor - te

T.
in i - ra(a) Pal - la - de ti gui - da à mor - te

B.
in i - ra(a) Pal - la - de ti gui - da à mor - te

Limited in rhythmic and melodic variation and narrow in range, the vocal parts present the text in an intoned speech-like manner, the monotony of which contributes to the ominous forward motion of the chorus and the scene. Elaboration is limited to the instrumentalists, much of whose material from the opening eight measures recurs throughout the chorus, supplemented

by brief references to the sung text such as the repeated sixteenth-note figures in the first violins illustrating the anger of Pallas Athena.³³ Despite its brevity, the twenty-measure chorus is able to convey the dangerous aspect of Pallas Athena's power and the grim likelihood of Orestes' sacrifice.

Separated by just one scene of recitative introducing Iphigenia and Dori, the two choruses present opposing perspectives on Pallas Athena's power, communicated via easily interpretable choices of key and tempo. Located before the respective entrances of Iphigenia and Thoas, the choruses introduce the antagonism between priestess and king that is central to Coltellini's libretto and Galuppi's operatic setting but not to Euripides' play. While both choruses reference Pallas Athena's control over the course of human events and foreshadow the importance of the role she will play in the resolution of the characters' conflict, they reveal opposing facets of the goddess's power and associate these with Iphigenia and Thoas, respectively. In the first chorus, the maidens of the temple present a relatively benevolent portrayal of Pallas Athena, associating this aspect of the goddess with themselves, the temple, and Iphigenia. In the second chorus, Thoas's soldiers reveal the threat of Pallas Athena's anger, connecting this facet of the goddess to the Taurian king.

Because the choral portrayal of Pallas Athena associated with Iphigenia is the more positive one, the opposition of these first two choruses implies that Iphigenia rather than Thoas will benefit from the goddess's intervention later in the opera. The association of Iphigenia with Pallas Athena's benevolence becomes particularly significant when the opera is read as a form of imperial representation. An audience familiar with Catherine's history of presenting herself as

³³Baldassare Galuppi, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, manuscript copy score, 1907, Library of Congress Music Division, Washington, D.C., Act I Sc. 4: 97 (m. 16 of chorus).

the goddess being invoked onstage would have known that the character associated with the benevolent rather than the threatening side of Pallas Athena's—thus Minerva's, and thus Catherine's—power will be ultimately victorious.

The association of Iphigenia and her temple with the positive aspects of Pallas Athena's power does not prevent them from asking the formidable goddess for mercy as the threat of Orestes' sacrifice grows imminent. At the conclusion of the first act, the maidens of the temple and the people of the Taurian lands join in a more extended chorus asking the goddess to spare the still-unrecognized captive:

Coro:
 Temuta Pallade
 figlia di Giove
 deà del saper.
 Rivolgi altrove
 l'asta terribile
 del tuo poter.³⁴

Chorus:
 Feared Pallas Athena,
 daughter of Jove,
 goddess of wisdom.
 Apply elsewhere
 the terrible rod
 of your power.

The name of the goddess is first invoked by the sopranos and altos, sparsely accompanied by the violins doubling their parts. The tenors and basses join them on the descriptor “figlia di Giove,” at which point the horns enter and the violins take on a more active role independent of the vocal parts. Repetitions of portions of the first three lines of text addressing and describing the goddess comprise the first half of the sung portion of the chorus (mm. 9-38).³⁵ Beginning in the predominantly homophonic, text-centered style of the briefer, earlier choruses, upon the conclusion of the first statement of “deà del saper,” the men and altos enter independently on

³⁴Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 16.

³⁵Galuppi, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, Act I Sc. 5: 193-197.

different lines of text beneath the sopranos' sustained A5 (Example 5). Following the concluding statement of "dèa del saper," the complete first section of the chorus (through m. 38) is immediately repeated.

Example 5: Baldassare Galuppi, chorus, "Temuta Pallade," mm. 25-38.

Soprano
dè - a del sa - per

Alto
dèa del sa - per te - mu - ta Pal - la - de

Tenor
dèa del sa - per te - mu - ta Pal - la - de fig - lia fig - lia di

Bass
dèa del sa - per te - mu - ta Pal - la - de fig - lia di Gio - ve fig - lia di

S.
dè - a del sa - per.

A.
fig - lia di Gio - ve dè - a dè - a del sa - per.

T.
Gio - ve dè - a del sa - per dè - a dè - a del sa - per.

B.
Gio - ve dè - a del sa - per dè - a dè - a del sa - per.

Located at the end of the act prior to the first of Gasparo Angiolini's ballet entr'actes, the role of this chorus is not to introduce characters or advance the plot, as were the previous two. Rather, it restates the major conflict introduced but not resolved in the act and appeals to the

goddess in whose hands Orestes' fate ultimately lies, confirming her control over events to come. The textual repetition necessitated by the extended choral setting draws the listener's attention to those aspects of Pallas Athena that seem to make her omnipotent: her descent from Zeus and her status as the goddess of wisdom. The latter attribute, a central component of Catherine's self-stylization as Minerva, is given a place of prominence in Galuppi's setting as the concluding statement of the first half of the chorus. Although integrated into the drama and consistent with choral references to Pallas Athena throughout the act, the placement, structure, and use of repetition in this chorus is reminiscent of the nondramatic staged prologues from earlier Russian seria and was likely interpreted by Catherine's court audience as a reference to the empress.

The centrality of Minerva to Coltellini and Galuppi's telling of the Iphigenia story illustrates that the staged prologue, appropriate to the grandeur of imperial ceremony as it was, was not necessary for opera seria to serve representative purposes. Nor, as *Ifigenia in Tauride* and especially Francesco Araia's *La forza dell'amore* indicate, did the libretto or even the music have to be composed in St. Petersburg in order to be interpreted in relation to circumstances specific to the Russian court and its empresses. At a court in which foreign and especially Western European influences were highly valued as indicators of wealth and power, such origins were advantageous. Far from being requisite formalities that imposed unfamiliar languages, musical styles, and characters on unreceptive court audiences, productions of opera seria showcased many of the same figures and personal attributes with which the Russian empresses had publicly aligned themselves since the reign of Catherine I. Onstage representations or references to the empress via characters in the drama were not the only means by which an audience member would have been able to recognize aspects of his or her own surroundings depicted using the repertory of symbols and expectations shared by opera seria and the Russian

court. The actions of the goddesses, priestesses, warriors, and kings onstage were in some cases as meaningful to court audiences as were the figures carrying them out.

Chapter II

“Follow the Brave Woman”: Shifting Perspectives on Succession

At the conclusion of Araia's *La forza dell'amore*, the king Sofit at last acknowledges the marriage of his daughter Nirena to the hero Abiazar in one of the opera's final exchanges of recitative. Sofit proclaims that “Abiazar [will be] both husband and master” to Nirena, prompting effusions of gratitude from the young royal couple and the opera's other pair, Barzant's nephew Taksil and Nirena's friend and confidante Talestria.¹ With all romantic and political conflicts having been resolved, the six surviving characters join in a final brief da capo chorus celebrating the ability of love to create peace among former enemies.

Sofit's decision is responsible for the requisite uplifting ending characteristic of the genre in its classic form and the affirmation of his status as a just ruler. Most important to the opera's message regarding authority and kingship is the implication that Sofit's approval of his daughter's marriage will result in Abiazar succeeding him as ruler of India. For Russian court audiences who may have seen in Abiazar, as portrayed by Caterina Giorgi, a figure similar to certain stylized representations of their own empress, the conclusion of Araia's opera would have seemed to reward the bravery, commitment, and determination that he (she) exhibited and thus imply that such qualities are valuable in a ruler. However, Abiazar's presumed succession is not the result of his own commendable character or actions, communicated to the audience via a combination of virtuosic arias and expressions of genuine love for Nirena, but of Sofit's

¹(Sofite) “...ed Abiasare sia sposo, e assieme Signore / (Nirena) Quanti gratie ti deggio,” O Genitore. Francesco Araia, *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio*, manuscript score, ca. 1739, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, Austria, accessed February 20, 2017, International Music Scores Library Project, [http://imslp.org/wiki/La_forza_dell%27amore_e_dell%27odio_\(Araia,_Francesco\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/La_forza_dell%27amore_e_dell%27odio_(Araia,_Francesco)), Act II Sc. 10: 51.

magnanimity. The opera upholds the familiar message confirming the righteousness of the ruler and thus the legitimacy of standard succession from monarchial parent to child.

Such an expected pattern of succession, however, was becoming increasingly rare in Russia following Catherine I's assumption of the throne after the death of Peter the Great. Her successor Empress Anna, under whom *La forza dell'amore* was given its Russian premiere, was selected via the political machinations of powerful noble families seeking control of the monarch rather than through the expected procedure of succession demonstrated in the opera, although Araia's opera was a foreign import not tailored to specifically Russian circumstances. Even in the age of coups d'état that brought Anna's successors Elizabeth and Catherine the Great to power, most Italian *opere serie* continued to espouse the righteousness of their king figures, connecting those characters' positive attributes and wise decisions to those of the ruling empresses. Correlation between the empress and one or more characters onstage was the usual means of allegory, and potentially representative plots tended to demand broad interpretation rather than indicate close parallels to specific events in imperial Russian politics.

Coltellini and Galuppi's *Ifigenia in Tauride* is thus unusual for its representation of regicide when Iphigenia kills Thoas, the king of the Taurians, in order to make her escape back to Greece. Onstage murder in opera seria was "still relatively new" in the 1790s, over two decades after the composition and performance of *Ifigenia*, nor would it have been familiar to Russian audiences from earlier forms of imported Western European musical and theatrical entertainments, most of which were comedic.² Departing from both its Euripidean source and

²Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 403. For opera's musical and theatrical predecessors at the Russian court, see Nikolai Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, trans. Samuel William Pring, ed. Miloš Velimirović and Claudia R. Jensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 5-7.

one of the major plot conventions of classic opera seria, *Ifigenia* challenges the authority and legitimacy of the onstage king figure, ultimately upholding the righteousness of Iphigenia in his place. The killing of the tyrannical non-Greek king by the priestess of the goddess Athena would not have been overlooked in Catherinian Russia, in which depictions of Athena (Minerva) referenced the empress and her construction of the descent of the Russian people from the ancient Greeks.

Performed thirty-two years apart under two empresses who came to power through different means, *La forza dell'amore* and *Ifigenia in Tauride* present two perspectives on succession. The former opera affirms that the ruler in power, however misguided he or she may be initially, ultimately makes the right decisions in all matters, including the choice of successor. The latter permits the possibility of unjust rulership and posits the use of force to alter the course of succession as a plausible and sometimes necessary action, a view familiar to audiences living during the reigns of Elizabeth and Catherine the Great.

Omnipotent and Magnanimous: Sofit's Trajectory in Araia's *La forza dell'amore*

La forza dell'amore exemplifies a standard seria plot, best known from the libretti of Metastasio, that asserts that “the king is omnipotent and magnanimous” via a “process that tests the monarch’s authority, especially in deciding affinal relations, and ultimately affirms it.”³ Because Abiazar demonstrates, both dramatically and musically, bravery and dedication to Nirena increasingly throughout the opera, Sofit’s eventual acceptance of his daughter’s marriage to the

³Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*, 25, 250.

young hero is inevitable. Were he to decide otherwise, Sofit would be acting unfairly or tyrannically, calling his absolute authority into question.

Thus, while Abiazar must continually prove himself worthy of his future position through an unflinching dedication to his wife despite the threats of Sofit's army and prison and through a series of increasingly demanding melismatic arias, Sofit's musical characterization is one of unwavering power. Although he sings the same number of arias as Abiazar, he participates in fewer exchanges of recitative and is less often present onstage than are the hero and the other young characters. He sets in motion rather than participates in the conflicts of love and alliance that consume the other characters' attentions and lead to their development. As the opera's figure of authority, Sofit does not grow or waver in his positions aside from the final reversal that reveals he is a just ruler. His consistency is presented through arias that convey certainty and power regardless of their location in the drama.

Occurring over halfway through the first act, Sofit's first aria confirms his authority over his daughter, her beloved, and the actions of the others under his rule in a declamatory style never fully adopted by the young characters, whose arias tend to express pathos and heroism rather than unwavering control. The scene is one of tension between father and daughter: Sofit commands Nirena not to think of Abiazar anymore, to which Nirena responds that she would then die. Sofit leaves his daughter with Taksil, his intended match for her, threatening her to "think meanwhile [about] who I am [and] who you are" before expounding on this order in his aria.⁴ Moderately paced and characterized by unison descending dotted figures in the strings and bass, the opening ritornello suggests conformity to commands. The initial scalar descent

⁴(Sofite, à Nirena) "...tu pensa intanto chi son io chi sei." Araia, *La forza dell'amore*, Act I Sc. 8: 38.

reappears to accompany Sofit's vocal entrance, in which he begins his extended address to his daughter:

<p>Sofite: Pensa che ti son Padre Pensa che (mi) figlia sei Voglio ch'ai detti miei Serbi fedele il cor [etc.]⁵</p>	<p>Sofit: Think that I am your father Think that you are my daughter I want you to say what I have said Let the heart remain faithful [etc.]</p>
--	--

Consistent with Ludovico Muratori's gendered interpretation of predominantly syllabic text settings as "masculine," Sofit's aria progresses almost entirely in quarter notes, ensuring clarity of text and emphasizing the message's purpose as a command.⁶ While syllabic settings appear elsewhere in Abiazar's heroic and Barzant's militaristic arias, connoting related values such as confidence and strength, they are never so regularly employed as in Sofit's first aria. Extending the duration of "pensa" (mm. 16-17), situating the word high in the range of the aria, and separating it from the remainder of the text by rests (m. 25) all stress the imperative quality of the word and the aria as a whole. The strings and bass, kept to either varied repetitions of the characteristic dotted figure or series of repeated quarter notes, support the clarity and declamatory nature of the text (Example 6).

⁵Ibid., 39-40. A slightly rephrased repetition of the opening two lines in m. 12 inserts "mi," which is not present in the initial statement of the text.

⁶Johanna Ethnersson, "Music as Mimetic Representation and Performative Act: *Semiramide riconosciuta* and Musical Construction of Sexuality and Gender," *STM-Online* 11 (January 2008), accessed October 19, 2017, RILM.

Example 6: Francesco Araia, aria for Sofit, "Pensa che ti son Padre," vocal entrance and first statement of A section text (mm. 15-25).

Andante

The musical score is divided into four systems. Each system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and the vocal line (Sofit). The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The time signature is common time (C).

System 1: Violin I, Violin II, and Viola play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Sofit enters with the vocal line: "Pen - sa che ti son Pa - dre pen - sa che fi - gia sei__".

System 2: The instrumental accompaniment continues. Sofit continues the vocal line: "Vo - glio ch'ai det - ti mie - i ser - bi fe - dele il cor che ti son".

System 3: The instrumental accompaniment continues. Sofit continues the vocal line: "Pad - re che mi sei fi - gia Pen - sa".

System 4: The instrumental accompaniment continues. Sofit continues the vocal line: "Pen - sa".

In the G-minor B section of the aria, similarly declarative, Sofit threatens Abiazar directly.⁷ Having stated his position regarding the younger characters and their relationships to one another in this aria and having set the central conflict of the plot in motion by denying Abiazar's marriage to Nirena in the opening scene of the act, Sofit need not reappear onstage constantly to reassert his control. The other characters' reactions to Sofit's rearrangements of their relationships, ranging from grief and sadness to trickery and threats against him, comprise the immediate dramatic action and emotional appeals of numerous arias and subplots.

Although referenced frequently by the other characters, Sofit appears only once more in the first act to assert his power via an extended *dal segno* simile aria on a text not by the opera's librettist Francesco Prata but by Metastasio, originally from *Il Tempio dell'Eternità, a festa teatrale* libretto written in 1731.⁸ The Metastasian text used in the Russian performance of the opera replaced Prata's own simile aria, of similar sentiment and meter, from the opera's premiere in Milan in 1734.⁹ Similarly, Sofit's final aria, featuring active string figurations and lengthy melismatic passages, takes its text from an aria that originated in an earlier Metastasian *festa teatrale, Endimione* of 1721.¹⁰ The practice of substituting texts and even whole arias for repeat performances of *opere serie*, often according to singers' preferences, was common wherever the genre spread and thus cannot be considered a revealing detail about the Russian premiere of *La forza dell'amore*. However, the interchangeability of these aria texts illustrates the dominance of

⁷(Sofite) "...deve provar la morte quell'empie e traditor." Araia, *La forze dell'amore*, Act I Sc. 8: 42-43.

⁸Araia, *La forza dell'amore*, Act I Sc. 13: 66-81. For the source of the text, see "Leon di straggi altero" in Pietro Metastasio, *Tutte Le Opere Di Pietro Metastasio Volume Unico* (Firenze: Tipografia Borghi e Compagni, 1832): 589.

⁹"Sai, che la Tigra Ircana" in Francesco Prata, *La forza dell'amore e dell'odio...Nel Carnovale dell'anno 1734* (Milano: Stampatore Regio Camerale, 1734): 17.

¹⁰Araia, *La forza dell'amore* Act II Sc. 12: 68-75. For the source of the text, see "Chi provato ha la procella" in Metastasio, *Tutte le Opere*, 562.

the Metastasian model in constructing opera seria libretti and demonstrates the ubiquity of powerful and resolute ruler figures like Sofit in the opera seria repertoire of the 1730s.

Despite the young characters' schemes to challenge and usurp Sofit's power, only Sofit's concern for another person can alter the course of his actions. His sincere love for his daughter Nirena somewhat balances the severity of his character, and Nirena's near-suicide in the prison in which Abiazar is held serves the dramatic function of bringing about Sofit's reversal of his opinion on Nirena's marriage to Abiazar. This softer, equally necessary side of Sofit's character is revealed in his final aria, roughly halfway through the second act, preceded by a brief recitative in which Sofit appears alone onstage for the first and only time in the opera:

Sofite:	Sofit:
Miei pensieri che dite?	What are you saying, my thoughts?
Par che felice io sia	It is a happy thing
Ma pure un tal timore	But also such a fear
Agita l'alma mia	That stirs my soul
Che il cor non è contento [...]	That my heart is not content [...]
Vile pensier, vani sospetti	Ignoble thoughts, vain suspicions
Addio.	Goodbye.
A questo seno ritorni amore	Return to this breast, love
Ritorni amore	Return, love
E lasci il core	And leave the heart
Tutt'agl'affetti la libertà	All to the affections [of] freedom.
La libertà. ¹¹	

The aria's opening ritornello features relatively few instrumental divisi, ensuring that Sofit's rare moment of reflection is the central focus of the audience. The violins' descending dotted figures introduce the general contour and leaning appoggiaturas that characterize Sofit's vocal line upon his entrance and throughout both sections of the aria. Sofit's A section text is relatively short, emphasizing its most important words via repetition and offsetting them from

¹¹Araia, *La forza dell'amore*, Act II Sc. 6: 35-37. "Tutt'agl'affetti la libertà" ("All to the affections [of] freedom" or "All to freedom") refers to Sofit's freedom from troubling emotions.

the remainder of the line by rests. Most conspicuous are the increasingly ornate melismatic sections of the word “libertà” that conclude each repetition of the A section text. In this aria, melisma is primarily used to draw attention to the freedom that Sofit seeks from his fear and discontent, as this desire leads to his concluding act of benevolence toward Abiazar. Sofit’s increasingly lively vocal line, commented upon by the ornamented interjections of the violins over his longest sustained pitch, continue his characterization as a decisive and formidable ruler even as the text indicates the change in his plans (Example 7).

Example 7: Francesco Araia, aria for Sofit, "A questo seno ritorne amore," vocal entrance and first statement of A section text (mm. 11-23).

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system includes Violin I, Violin II, and Sofit. The second system includes Violin I, Violin II, and Sofit. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line for Sofit includes the lyrics: "que-sto se-no ri-tor-ni a-mo-re ri-tor-ni a-mo-re" and "re e-la-sci(il) co-re tutt'_agl' af-fet-ti la li-ber".

Violin I

Violin II

Sofit

que-sto se-no ri-tor-ni a-mo-re ri-tor-ni a-mo-re

Vln. I

Vln. II

Sofit

re e-la-sci(il) co-re tutt'_agl' af-fet-ti la li-ber

Vln. I

Vln. II

Sofit

- tà

Vln. I

Vln. II

Sofit

Vln. I

Vln. II

Sofit

la li - ber -

The image shows a musical score for four parts: Vln. I, Vln. II, Sofit, and Bass. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. Vln. I and Vln. II play a complex, fast-moving melodic line with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Sofit has a single note followed by a rest, with the syllable 'tà' written below. The Bass line plays a simple, slow-moving accompaniment.

While the increasing length, complexity, and range of each subsequent melismatic setting of “libertà” are not unique to this aria, to Sofit’s character, or to Araia’s opera as a whole, this familiar device effectively conveys the turning point of *La forza dell’amore*. As Sofit reflects on his potential for emotional freedom with increasing enthusiasm, he understands the action he must take in order to achieve this freedom. This realization leads to the kindly and magnanimous use of the power he wields that restores his relationship with his daughter and ensures that a legitimate succession will occur. The aria confirms that Sofit is no tyrant and foreshadows an ending to the opera that had been predetermined at the time of the rise of Metastasio, whose earlier libretti supplied Prata with half of the aria texts for Sofit. *La forza dell’amore* illustrated the artistic and cultural contemporaneity of Anna’s court with its Western counterparts and was consistent with imperial values during her era, including the legitimation of absolutism and, more specifically, the accession of a woman to a position of absolute rule. The consistently favorable presentation of the onstage king that was characteristic of Metastasian and similarly-modeled libretti, however, was sometimes challenged in operas staged under Anna’s successors.

Ifigenia in Tauride: An Opera for the Age of Coups d'État

By November 1762, when a production of Vincenzo Manfredini's setting of Metastasio's *L'Olimpiade* was staged in celebration of the coronation of Catherine II, many of the beliefs espoused by Metastasian opera seria, including the righteousness of the king and the worthiness of his child as his successor, no longer resonated with developments in the Russian monarchy. While the accessions of Empresses Catherine I, Peter the Great's second wife, and Anna, his niece, were unconventional, their major successors achieved their positions even more disruptively via coups d'état. Passed over first for Anna and then for Ivan VI, the infant son of Anna's niece Anna Leopoldovna, Peter's daughter Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1741 following the overthrow of Anna Leopoldovna and Ivan. Elizabeth had Ivan imprisoned and Anna Leopoldovna exiled with the remainder of her family. Ivan was eventually murdered by his guards early in the reign of Catherine the Great. Catherine, like Elizabeth, became empress after the overthrow of the designated successor, her husband Peter III. The military plot that brought Catherine to power in 1762 culminated in Peter's assassination.

Despite these successive coups and the absence of direct filial succession in Russia since the death of Peter the Great, most Italian-language *opere serie* performed in Russia through the reign of Catherine the Great continued to adhere to the Metastasian model, asserting the unchallengeable natures of onstage kings and their chosen successors. Performed within the first year of Catherine's reign, Galuppi's setting of Coltellini's libretto *Ifigenia in Tauride* thus represents an unusual and significant break with operatic expectations. Thoas, the opera's king figure, is not a misguided but ultimately redeemable autocrat as is Sofit in *La forza dell'amore*, but the upholder of a tyrannical practice requiring the sacrifice of foreigners that impedes the righteous priestess Iphigenia's reunion with her brother and their long-sought journey home.

While Iphigenia's murder of Thoas cannot be considered a coup, since she returns home to Greece rather than assuming his position as ruler of the Taurians, the opera's dramatic finale challenges the tenet of the genre that holds that the king is always right. *Ifigenia* presents a new model of succession in which ethnicity, individual morality, and the favor of the gods all contribute to perceptions of power and legitimacy.

As the choruses in the first act indicate prior to their respective introductions of Iphigenia and Thoas, the priestess reveres the goddess Athena while the king fears her power. Russian court audiences would have noted not only Iphigenia's favor by Athena, the goddess most closely associated with the empress, but also the character's Greek heritage. Russian imperial representation in its various artistic and ceremonial forms had drawn on classical history and mythology even prior to Peter the Great's Roman triumph-styled military processions. Catherine, however, extended the connection between classical antiquity and eighteenth-century Russia via the construction of a genealogical descent of her people from the ancient Greeks. Associated with the military expeditions that led to Catherine's annexation in 1783 of the Crimean Peninsula, around which *Ifigenia* and its Euripidean source play take place, the Greek lineage that Catherine proposed also strengthened the perceived connection between Russia and the Western European artistic and cultural heritage whose forms Russia had adopted relatively recently. Thus, while in earlier opera seria such as *La forza dell'amore* the nationality of the king figure matters little to his ability to represent onstage the authority of the real ruler, in Galuppi's *Ifigenia* the title character's nationality aligns her with the Russian audience in opposition to her non-Greek and thus non-Russian antagonist, Thoas.

The size of Thoas' role and the stage time allotted to him are smaller than those of Iphigenia and the other central figures, Iphigenia's brother Orestes and his cousin and confidant

Pylades. In this respect, his role is reminiscent of the more traditional form of operatic kingship exemplified by Soffici in *La forza dell'amore*, in that Thoas is an established authority who need not constantly reassert his presence and his power until he is challenged directly by Iphigenia and her family members. While Galuppi's setting diversifies the opera's musical forms by utilizing choruses and extended passages of accompanied recitative in addition to the standard forms of simple recitative and da capo or dal segno aria, Thoas communicates only through the latter forms. This restriction prevents him from engaging in true dialogues with the other characters, represented in the opera by duets such as those between Iphigenia and her confidante Dori and between Iphigenia and her brother Orestes. Nor does he utilize recitativo accompagnato, the form largely responsible for Iphigenia's communication of her thoughts, fears, and emotions and integral to the effectiveness of the concluding death scene. Galuppi's limitation of the musical forms allotted to Thoas, especially as compared to those allotted to Iphigenia, characterize Thoas as inflexible and lacking in compassion.

In Euripides' play, Thoas is spoken of among the other characters but does not speak himself until Iphigenia deceives him into sending Orestes and Pylades to the ocean on the pretense of cleansing them before they are to be sacrificed. Coltellini's libretto enlarges the role of Thoas and alters his character from that of a morally ambiguous figure whom Iphigenia has not challenged before to that of an oppressive and unthinking ruler unwilling to consider the high priestess's concerns. He is introduced in the fourth scene of the first act, appearing onstage having bound Orestes in chains after the warning given by the chorus of soldiers regarding the fearsome power of the goddess Athena. As he prepares to sacrifice the captive Greek, Iphigenia becomes aware of the situation and confronts the king:

Ifigenia:
E se innocente,
se infelice, e non reo...

Iphigenia:
And if he is innocent,
if he is unlucky, and not guilty...

Toante:
Taci imprudente.
Tutta di morte è degna
Questa plebe mortal, che il ciel condanna:

Thoas:
Silence, incautious one.
All death is worthy
This mortal populace, that heaven
condemns:
And whoever looks for someone guilty,
rarely is deceived.

E chi vi cerca un reo, rara s'inganna.¹²

In the aria that follows, Thoas dismisses Iphigenia's "insane" pity for the intended victim, speaking for the gods as well as himself, and proclaims that as king his decision regarding Orestes' fate must be respected by all.¹³ In its assertion of monarchical authority, its condescending address of a younger woman, and its direction for the addressee to "think" in order to come to eventual agreement with the king's decision, Thoas' first aria parallels Sofit's in *La forza dell'amore*. Galuppi's aria for Thoas reflects developments in musical form and dramatic style that occurred over the intervening three decades between Araia's composition of *La forza dell'amore* and the composition of *Ifigenia*, including the extension of the ritornello, likely as accompaniment for additional actions or gestures onstage; the expansion of the instrumental palette to include oboes and horns; and the modification of the strict da capo or dal segno aria forms. Despite these stylistic differences, however, the arias utilize a shared repertory of musical cues to convey the kings' self-assurance.

The arias' opening ritornelli are characterized by descending dotted figures in the violins, and their rhythm and contour recur in their respective vocal lines. They utilize predominantly syllabic text settings for clarity and the creation of an authoritative tone, reserving the requisite

¹²Marco Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, libretto, 1763, accessed November 14, 2017, Libretti d'Opera Italiani, http://www.librettidiopera.it/zpdf/ifitau_ct_bn.pdf, Act I, Sc. 4: 11.

¹³(Toante) Frena l'ingiuste lagrime, / pensa, che un re t'intende, / pensa che il nume offende / la folle tua pietà," *ibid.*

melisma for the ends of sections and the embellishment of important repeated words, and they extend high into the tenor range. As in Sofit's aria, Thoas' urgings of "pensa" are repeated and demarcated by surrounding rests (Example 8a). Similar to Sofit's self-identification as Nirena's father to justify his authority over her and thus the righteousness of his decision regarding her marriage, Thoas explicitly identifies himself as "king" to assert his authority over Iphigenia, even in judgments regarding the gods that fall more properly under her domain. The word is ornamented upon its repetition, suggesting Thoas' self-centered wielding of power (Example 8b).

Example 8a: Baldassare Galuppi, aria for Thoas, "Frena l'ingiuste lagrime," vocal entrance and first statement of A section text (mm. 22-35, horns and oboes omitted).

Allegro ma non presto

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Allegro ma non presto

Thoas

Fre - na_ l'in-gius - ta la - cri-me pen -

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Thoas

sa_ che un Re_ t'in-ten-de Pen - sa_ ch'un Re_ t'in

Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Thoas
 ten - de Pen - sa ch'il numi of - fen - de ch'il numi of -

Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Thoas
 fen - de La fol - le tua pie - tà

Example 8b: Baldassare Galuppi, aria for Thoas, "Frena l'ingiuste lagrime," scalar embellishment of "Re" (mm. 69-71).

Thoas
 ten - de ch'un Re l'in - ten - de

Despite the similarities in sentiment, form, and expressive features shared by their arias, the two misguided rulers do not represent the same form of kingship. Thoas presumes knowledge of the gods' minds in front of the priestess of Athena and he is an enemy to all Greeks, both offenses within the Iphigenia story and within the mythology of Catherinian imperial

representation. Although both arias are directed toward women that the kings consider their inferiors and thus under their jurisdiction, Iphigenia cannot be equated to Nirena. The latter is a passive figure whose primary role is to marry Abiazar, thus ensuring that the worthy hero succeeds the king through legitimate means. Iphigenia, however, is a multifaceted character who enters into a conflict with Thoas that cannot be resolved through such a fortuitous and bloodless adherence to the standard succession procedure. The Taurian king's first aria introduces the major oppositions between Iphigenia and Thoas: Greek against non-Greek, reason and sympathy against senseless violence, and reverence against fear of the gods.

Thoas' two remaining arias arise out of further confrontations with Iphigenia. In the second act, he insists that a sacrifice must occur despite Iphigenia's continued protests and the absence of the originally intended victims. The aria is imbued with militaristic connotations via the prominence of the horns throughout. In another major departure from Euripides, upon realizing that Iphigenia has tricked him into allowing Orestes and Pylades a means of escape, Thoas threatens to proceed with the sacrifice of Dori, Iphigenia's fellow priestess, in place of the Greeks. Featuring haunting flutes that function similarly to those in the first act chorus that foretells Orestes' impending doom, Thoas' ominous final aria precedes an emotional parting duet between Iphigenia and Dori and, ultimately, his death at Iphigenia's hand.¹⁴ His willingness to sacrifice Dori, presumably a member of his own populace rather than a Greek, reveal that his primary motivation lies in vengeance rather than in defending his people or perpetuating a sacred custom. It is this decision that solidifies Thoas' unfitness to rule and, in the viewpoint espoused by the opera, justifies his murder.

¹⁴Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 28, 30; Galuppi, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, Act II Sc. 7: 174-188; Act III Sc. 2: 31-46.

All three of Thoas' arias alter the *dal segno* form and utilize additional instrumental timbres for dramatic purposes in accordance with changes to the genre of opera seria occurring in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, Thoas is still bound by the forms of solo aria and simple recitative. The lack of variation in the musical forms allotted to Thoas suggests the static nature of his character and his beliefs, in contrast to Iphigenia's diverse modes of musical communication. Like Thoas and in accordance with one of the fundamental expectations of opera seria, Iphigenia expresses her emotions and intents largely through arias. Unlike Thoas, however, she is able to convey multiple aspects of her character, from fear to devotion to bravery, through her stylistically varied arias. Empathetic and willing to engage with other characters and their concerns and experiences, Iphigenia sings two duets in the opera. As a spiritual figure possessing a special connection to the gods, particularly the goddess Athena, Iphigenia is also able to communicate her prayers through accompanied recitative. The overall character presented through this multiplicity of musical forms is a heroic and sincere individual committed to the just treatment and welfare of others as well as to her own religious role.

Although she acts heroically, Iphigenia expresses fear and vulnerability in her two arias. The first occurs after she converses with Dori, from whom she is seldom separate in the opening act, regarding her disgust for the sacrifice that she has been ordered to officiate.¹⁵ Her aria, addressed to the gods, expresses the conflict between her understanding of the deities as generally benevolent and Thoas' earlier insistence that they demand sacrifices:

Ifigenia:
 So, che pietà de' miseri,
 Numi, da voi s'apprende:
 So, che il timor che m'agita,
 Forse da voi discende;

Iphigenia:
 I know that pity for the wretched,
 O gods, is learned from you:
 I know that the fear that agitates me,
 Perhaps descends from you:

¹⁵Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 12.

E a raffrenarne i palpiti,
 So, che non è valor.
 Se nell'ufficio barbaro
 La mia pietà v'offende,
 Scegliete in me la vittima,
 O mi cambiate il cor.¹⁶

And to restrain heartbeats,
 I know is not brave.
 If in the barbarous role
 My pity offends you,
 Choose in me the victim,
 Or change my heart.

Iphigenia's aria does not characterize her as a typical seria hero or protagonist in the manner of Abiazar from *La forza dell'amore* or even that of Orestes and Pylades in her own opera, who communicate via dal segno arias combining bold declarations of action with the requisite melismatic passages revealing their virtuosity. Nor is Iphigenia supported by the horns, flutes, and oboes that appear throughout Thoas' arias and in several choruses to strengthen dramatic contexts. Despite the complex and somewhat contradictory mixture of defiance and fear that she expresses, her aria is relatively subdued. It is characterized by a triplet figure first introduced in the violins and short, embellished phrases in the vocal line.

The singer is not denied all opportunity to showcase her abilities, as indicated in the first statement of the initial text by an octave leap upon an immediate repetition of the fourth line of text (m. 28). However, these are instances of restrained virtuosity, appropriate to the entreaty of a modest, somewhat fearful priestess to the gods she serves (Example 9). Even in the B section of the aria, when Iphigenia condemns the "barbarous office" in which it is her duty to participate under Thoas' rule, the only musical expression of her disapproval is two brief measures of insistent repeated eighth notes. The genre's expected means of communicating agitation, via

¹⁶Ibid., 13. The Latin *pietas*, from which the Italian *pietà* is derived and which is being invoked here in this Italian-language drama on a classical subject, connoted not only pity for suffering individuals but also a sense of duty to the gods, to one's family, or to another established affiliation. Throughout the opera, Iphigenia exhibits *pietà* in the sense of pity toward Orestes as well as in the sense of religious duty in her role as a priestess of Minerva and familial duty in her efforts to save the man who is revealed to be her brother. In its first appearance in this aria ("So, che pietà de' miseri"), the word *pietà* refers to Iphigenia's pity for Orestes, while in its second appearance ("La mia pietà v'offende"), it takes on the sense of Iphigenia's duty to her religiously-derived sense of morality.

consecutive measures of rapidly repeated sixteenth notes in the strings, is avoided. More cautious and less ostentatious than the arias of the three major male characters or of most seria protagonists, Iphigenia's initial expression of fearful disapproval toward Thoas' sacrificial custom belies her violent refusal of his demands toward the conclusion of the opera.

Example 9: Baldassare Galuppi, aria for Iphigenia, "So che pietà de' miseri," first vocal statement (mm. 19-40).

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the first vocal statement of Iphigenia's aria. The first system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Iphigenia. The second system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Iphigenia. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 2/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves.

System 1:

- Violin I: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Violin II: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Viola: Bass clef, 2/4 time, notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3.
- Iphigenia: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. Lyrics: So che pie-tà de' mi - se-ri nu - mi da voi_ s'ap - pren-de
- Bass: Bass clef, 2/4 time, notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3.

System 2:

- Vln. I: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Vln. II: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4.
- Vla.: Bass clef, 2/4 time, notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3.
- Iphigenia: Treble clef, 2/4 time, notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4. Lyrics: nu - mi da voi_ s'ap - pren-de So ch'il ti-mor che m'a-gi ta for -
- Bass: Bass clef, 2/4 time, notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, B3, A3, G3, F#3, E3, D3.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Iphigenia

- se da voi_ dis - cen-de for - se da voi_ dis-cen-de E(a)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Iphigenia

raf - fre - nar-ne(i) pal - pi - ti So che non è va-

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Iphigenia

lor_So che non è va - lor_so che non è va - lor.

In place of additional da capo or dal segno arias like those sung by the other characters, Iphigenia participates in both of the opera's duets. Her ability to engage with two other characters in song rather than merely through recitative suggests her capacity, unique among the characters of this opera, to share in the emotional experiences of others. In the first duet, Iphigenia and Orestes lament the latter's impending sacrifice. The characters' close musical engagement in the duet foreshadows the famous recognition scene, presented in the penultimate scene of the opera in Coltellini's retelling, in which they are revealed to be brother and sister. The second duet sets an exchange unique to Coltellini's adaptation of the play. Thoas has decided to punish Iphigenia for her refusal to sacrifice Orestes and Pylades by replacing the intended Greek victims with Dori, the fellow priestess closest to Iphigenia. In a manner similar to the debate between Orestes and Pylades in the original play, Iphigenia discusses with Dori whether or not she should take the place of her friend as the sacrificial victim. Despite Dori's adamant refusal to let Iphigenia take her place, Iphigenia questions her ability to survive Dori's sacrifice in a duet that seems to foreshadow tragedy for both characters:

Dori:
 Il mio destin non piangere
 tratta a morir son io,
 ma non è fallo il mio,
 o colpa è la pietà.

Ifigenia:
 Invan mi nega un barbaro,
 che teco mora anch'io;
 in quel funesto addio,
 il duol m'ucciderà.

Dori:
 No, resta in pace, e vivi.

Ifigenia:
 Per chi restar dovrei?

Dori:
 Do not cry that my destiny
 Is that I am to die,
 But the fault is not mine,
 O, the fault is pity.

Iphigenia:
 In vain a barbarian denies me,
 That I die as well;
 In that fatal goodbye,
 The mourning will kill me.

Dori:
 No, remain in peace, and live.

Iphigenia:
 For whom should I remain?

Ifigenia e Dori:
Ah non vi placa, o dèi,
sì tenera amistà?

Iphigenia and Dori:
Ah, does it not placate you, O gods,
Tender friendship itself?

Dori:
Ah che crudel tormento!

Dori:
Ah, what cruel torment!

Ifigenia:
Che divisione amara!

Iphigenia:
What bitter separation!

Ifigenia e Dori:
Addio, tra poco, o cara,
l'eliso ci unirà.¹⁷

Iphigenia and Dori:
Goodbye for now, O my dear,
Elysium will unite us.

Divided into two sections in contrasting tempi, the latter of which begins with Dori's exclamation of "Ah, che crudel tormento" and restates portions of both characters' opening texts before closing on an ornamented "addio," the lengthy duet is rather unusually situated near the middle rather than at the end of the act. It begins sparsely with a hushed duet in the violins that introduces the leaning rhythms and general melodic contour characteristic of the initial vocal lines. Dori and then Iphigenia enter in succession, stating their respective positions as guiltless victim and suffering mourner in nearly identical fifteen-measure solos. Both singers are doubled by the first violin, further reducing the number of independent parts in this subdued opening section and drawing attention to the two characters' vulnerability and impending isolation. With the exceptions of Iphigenia's higher vocal range and her slightly longer ornaments at cadences, her role is equal to that of Dori's. The similarities between the two priestesses' experiences at this moment and their abilities to understand and share in the other's sufferings, rather than their difference in rank, are communicated through their evenly-sized roles in the duet.¹⁸

¹⁷Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 32. See my comment on potential translations of *pietà* in the previous footnote (fn16). While Dori is undoubtedly pitiable in this scene, she could also be using the word here in reference to Iphigenia's religious duty to the sacrificial custom as mandated by Thoas.

¹⁸Galuppi, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, Act III Sc. 3: 55-60 (mm. 1-41).

Anticipated by increased activity in the violins, whose own duet replaces the singers' longer phrases with an anxious sixteenth-note figure, and by the entrance of the oboes, Iphigenia and Dori join together upon the first mention of the gods in this duet. Supported by a mournful chromatic descent in the viola, Dori introduces the question as to whether the two priestesses' close friendship was not enough to placate the gods. Iphigenia repeats the text in imitation a fourth above Dori, reinforcing the threat of potentially unsympathetic deities. In the ensuing duet extending the word "amistà," suspensions between the voice parts perpetuate tension relating to the characters' uncertain fates and close vocal ranges reinforce their emotional equality under the circumstance of an imminent sacrifice. This first section concludes with a repetition of the two previously stated lines of text, ending in unison to establish definitively the characters' inseparability (Example 10).

Example 10: Baldassare Galuppi, duet for Iphigenia and Dori, "Il mio destin non piangere" (mm. 49-67, horns and oboes omitted).

Andantino

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Andantino

Iphigenia

Ah non vi pla-ca(o) de-i sì te-ne-ra a - mis-tà_____

Dori

Ah non vi pla-ca(o) de - i sì te-ne-ra a - mis - tà_____

Bass

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Iphigenia

Dori

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Iphigenia

Dori

The musical score shows a duet between Iphigenia and Dori. The vocal lines are in a recitative-like style, with lyrics: "tà ah non vi pla-ca(o) de - i si__ te - ne - ra(a) mis - tà". The instrumental accompaniment features agitated repeated sixteenth-note figures and tremolos in the violins and a bass line.

The second section of the duet, which changes tempo to allegro and meter to 4/4, is characterized by agitated repeated sixteenth-note figures and tremolos in the violins as Dori and Iphigenia lament their impending separation in a recitative-like exchange of interjections. Dori's return to her opening vocal line, reminiscent of a modified da capo or dal segno aria returning to its A section, is followed by both singers alternating fragmented repetitions of their opening texts. They reunite for their final two lines, concluding their extended melismatic settings in unison on the final statement of "addio."¹⁹ The duet's reaffirmations of Iphigenia's close friendship with Dori and the threat that the sacrifice of the other priestess poses to Iphigenia's future foreshadow the inevitable confrontation between Iphigenia and Thoas that unfolds over the final two scenes.

While the duet between Iphigenia and Dori appears to confirm the latter as Thoas' intended sacrificial victim, upon his reentrance Thoas reveals that he does not care who is

¹⁹Baldassare Galuppi, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, Act III Sc. 3: 65-76. See especially pp. 65, 69, 73-76.

sacrificed as long as the ritual takes place and Iphigenia participates according to his demands. In a series of anxious exchanges of recitative that bring all five of the central characters onstage together for the first time, Dori, Orestes, and Pylades are each threatened by Thoas. The recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes occurs hastily through the commonplace musical form of simple recitative, suggesting that the most important moment in Coltellini's adaptation of Euripides is not the reunion of the long-separated brother and sister but the death of the unfit ruler, which occurs shortly after the recognition in the same scene. Prior to either of these major events, however, Iphigenia addresses Minerva in a desperate final attempt to prevent the sacrifice of her friend or the two Greeks:

Ifigenia:
Ecco il punto fatal!
Figlia di Giove,
vindice irata dèa; se vano è il pianto,
la tua giusta a placare ira funesta
questo sangue la plachi.²⁰

Iphigenia:
Behold the fatal point!
Daughter of Jove,
avenging wrathful goddess; if tears are in vain,
[it is] your right to appease fatal anger
let this blood appease it.

The recitative, presented with stage directions indicating that Iphigenia is “advancing toward the altar and taking the sacred knife from it,” foreshadows Thoas’ death moments before it occurs onstage. Unlike the death scene, however, which follows an exchange of simple recitative between Thoas and Iphigenia, the recitative at the altar is accompanied by sustained strings. The accompaniment is characteristic of what Bruno Forment terms the “numinous accompagnato,” a convention of opera seria in which “a layer of strings [is] superimposed onto a recitative, allow[ing] composers to literally *under-score* those particular moments during which characters invoked the divine.”²¹ Iphigenia’s recitative at the altar incorporates the “thick ‘halo’

²⁰Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 33.

²¹Bruno Forment, “Addressing the Divine: The ‘Numinous’ Accompagnato in Opera Seria,” in *(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Bruno Forment (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2012): 98.

of strings” associated with the divine since the earliest operas of the seventeenth century. The chromatic ascent in the first violins and descent in the bass communicate the threat posed by the sacrificial knife and the tension surrounding Iphigenia’s seizure of the weapon (Example 11).

Example 11: Baldassare Galuppi, recitativo accompagnato for Iphigenia, “Ecco il punto fatal” (mm. 1-6).

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Iphigenia. The second system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Soprano. The Iphigenia and Soprano parts include Italian lyrics.

Violin I
Violin II
Viola

Iphigenia
 Ec- co(il) pun to fa- tal! Fig - lia di Gio - ve, vin- di- ci(ei) ra - ta dè - a!

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.

S.
 Se va- no(il) pian- to la tua gius- tia pla- ca- re(i) ra fu - nes - ta ques- to san- gui la

By the eighteenth century, even operas such as *Ifigenia in Tauride* that were based on classical sources, in which mythology figured heavily, generally avoided presenting Greco-Roman gods and goddesses as characters onstage so as not to conflict with prevailing religious beliefs or ideas regarding rationality in drama. Librettists and composers instead utilized means

by which “the gods could be spoken of, but not speak for themselves.”²² *Ifigenia in Tauride* thus characterizes Pallas Athena through the several choruses that reference her and through Iphigenia’s recitatives. As a protagonist and a high priestess who is favorably aligned with Pallas Athena in opposition to Thoas, Iphigenia is the only character who sings accompanied recitative. Thus, although Iphigenia calls on Pallas Athena for assistance shortly before she kills Thoas, she does not do so in accompanied recitative because the action takes place following a dialogue with Thoas, who lacks Iphigenia’s connection to the goddess and thus cannot access the mode of musical communication associated with the divine.

After Thoas’ death, the remaining characters celebrate their safety from sacrifice and their presumed future return to Greece in a chorus advocating that they “follow the brave woman who punished the guilty monster.”²³ Although Iphigenia did not kill Thoas with the intent of succeeding him as ruler of the Taurian lands, at the end of the opera she has effectively taken on a new leadership role. Subsequent developments concerning the selection of Thoas’ permanent replacement or whether or not Iphigenia will return home with her brother and cousin are not addressed in Coltellini’s libretto. The victory of righteous Iphigenia over cruel Thoas, and by association the victories of Greek over non-Greek and of the goddess Pallas Athena (Minerva) over any opposition to her omnipotence, are the primary focuses at the conclusion of the opera. *Ifigenia in Tauride*, like *La forza dell’amore* three decades before it, was not staged with an explanatory prologue revealing any intended allegorical associations with Catherine the Great. However, a Catherinian court audience would likely have noted the connections the opera made between deference to the goddess Minerva and rightful rulership, even at the cost of a coup.

²²Forment, “Addressing the Divine,” 111.

²³(Oreste, Pilade, Dori, e Coro) “Seguiam la donna forte / che il mostro reo punì,” Coltellini, *Ifigenia in Tauride*, 36.

Catherine In Tauride: The Afterlife of Ifigenia

Despite its resonances with Catherine's chosen figure for self-mythologization and its support for the means through which she obtained the throne, *Ifigenia in Tauride* was reported to have bored the court audience for whom it was performed.²⁴ However, the opera received at least one repeat performance in Russian translation, and the Iphigenia story experienced renewed relevance prior to and during Catherine's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 1783. Letters between Catherine and Prince Grigory Potemkin, her former romantic partner and the military leader of Russia's southern expansion to the Black Sea, contain numerous references to the Iphigenia myth.

Because Catherine linked the southern expansion and Crimean annexation with the Greek heritage that she had constructed for the Russian people, she and Potemkin regularly referred to the region by its classical name, Tauride.²⁵ In recognition of his contributions to the expansion, Catherine bestowed upon Potemkin the title "Tavrisheski," the Russian adjectival form of "Tauride." Catherine made an etymological reference, perhaps unintentional, to the classical name of the region when she wrote to Potemkin that "the Tatars are herding their cattle in the shadows of our fortresses," drawing a parallel between the eighteenth-century Crimean dwellers and the herdsmen who populate the mythological and Euripidean "Taurian" lands.²⁶ Nearly one year later, Potemkin referenced the story more directly in a letter to Catherine in which he envisions her grandchildren ruling over the Black Sea region, where "there stood a temple of Diana in ancient times.... Iphigenia was its priestess."²⁷ Additional correspondence between

²⁴Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 86.

²⁵*Love and Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin*, ed. and trans. Douglas Smith (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005): 124, 154, 158.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 122.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

Catherine and Potemkin regarding the Crimea and the Black Sea is addressed to pseudonyms derived from the Iphigenia myth: Potemkin is Orestes; Catherine is Pylades.²⁸ Leading up to and during the southern expansion and Crimean annexation campaigns, the story became yet another means through which Catherine could mythologize herself and her actions as empress.

The Crimean annexation occurred fifteen years after the premiere of Galuppi's *Ifigenia in Tauride* at Catherine's court and retellings of Euripides' play were already commonplace among opera seria librettists. *Ifigenia* is more securely connected to Catherine's self-representation as Minerva and to the violent maneuverings that had brought her to the throne six years prior to the opera's performance than it is to the later military expansion with which it shares its geographical region. However, the resurfacing of aspects of the Iphigenia story as retold by Coltellini and Galuppi, particularly the conflict between Greek and non-Greek peoples and the forced replacement of an illegitimate non-Greek ruler with a rightful Greek one, in the correspondence surrounding Catherine's military campaign ought not to be overlooked. Expanding upon the opera's messages whether intentionally or not, these later references to the Iphigenia story in support of the annexation reveal continuities in the ways that Catherine interpreted the myth and used it to represent herself and her goals. Despite its reported unpopularity among court audiences at the time, Coltellini and Galuppi's *Ifigenia* is significant for introducing a new mythological framework through which major components of Catherine's reign, including her ascension and her military endeavors, could be interpreted and promoted.

²⁸Edith Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15-18.

Chapter III

Educating Heroes, Princes, and Composers: Bortniansky's *Alcide*

Although Baldassare Galuppi departed St. Petersburg for Venice after Tommaso Traetta replaced him in the role of court composer, his return home did not completely sever his connection with the musical life of Catherine's court. In August of that year he was joined by his former pupil Dmitry Bortniansky, who had been sent by Catherine to receive further compositional instruction from Galuppi in preparation for an expanded role in her musical establishment.

Born in 1751 in Glukhov, the Ukrainian city from which boys had been recruited for the court choir since Empress Anna's reign, the young Bortniansky was selected in 1758 and thus moved to St. Petersburg, where he became a favorite singer of the Empress Elizabeth. In addition to singing in the choir, Bortniansky performed in at least one opera seria, a 1764 revival of the 1758 Russian-language *Al'tsesta* composed by German-born kapellmeister Hermann Raupach, in which he took the leading male soprano role at the age of thirteen. Bortniansky first came to Galuppi's attention when the latter took over direction of the choir upon his hiring in 1765 and from its members selected promising students for compositional instruction. While this initial instruction was in choral composition, Bortniansky's training with Galuppi in Venice focused on opera seria, the genre with which he was required to develop familiarity and facility before he could assume a position of musical leadership at Catherine's court.

Bortniansky studied with Galuppi in Italy for ten years, during which he produced three *opere serie* within the last four years of his training there. Each of these operas was given one Italian performance, and scores for all of them were brought back to Russia with Bortniansky in

1779 as evidence of his abilities as a composer in the requisite ceremonial form.¹ The first, *Creonte*, had received its premiere in November 1776 in Venice, where it was so unsuccessful that the continuation of Bortniansky's studies in Italy was threatened.² Because Catherine agreed to continue funding Bortniansky's training, however, he was permitted to remain in Italy and produced two additional *opere serie*, *Alcide* for Venice in 1778 and *Quinto Fabio* for Modena in 1779, before returning to St. Petersburg.

Bortniansky's second opera is a setting of Metastasio's *Alcide al bivio*, one of the librettist's lesser-known *fiesta teatrale* texts that was first set by Hasse in 1760. Characteristic of the subgenre of *seria* to which it belongs, *Alcide* contains three acts but is shorter than a standard eighteenth-century opera and features a mythological subject and a celebratory ending. The story centers on the young Alcide, or Hercules, left by his tutor Fronimo at a crossroads between Pleasure and Virtue, both personified as women. Pleasure indicates that happiness stems from a carefree life, while Virtue reveals that honor and satisfaction are obtained through embarking on worthy if challenging endeavors. The women attempt to draw him to their respective sides, and Alcide has difficulty deciding between the different futures that they represent. Returning to the crossroads after each encounter with Pleasure and Virtue and frustrating Fronimo with his indecision, Alcide initially directs himself toward the easier path of Pleasure until a dreamlike encounter with a band of infernal spirits forces him to reconsider. He ultimately selects the representative path and kingdom of Virtue, where Pleasure is permitted to join him because "the

¹A 1779 letter to Bortniansky from I. P. Elagin, director of the court theaters, instructing the young composer to return home "as soon as possible, bringing all your works with you" can be found in Nikolai Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, vol. 2, *The Eighteenth Century*, trans. Samuel William Pring, ed. Miloš Velimirović and Claudia R. Jensen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 542n298.

²The opera's failure is discussed in a letter from Marquise Pablo Maruzzi, a Russian diplomat in Venice from 1762-1783, to Elagin, which can be found in Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 123.

two must ever be united.... Each must sustain the other.”³ Alcide’s wise judgement thus brings about the positive ending for everyone involved in this straightforward and moralizing rendition of the standard seria ending.

Like his teacher Galuppi had done in *Ifigenia in Tauride*, which predates *Alcide* by a decade, Bortniansky adhered to later eighteenth-century developments in operatic composition in his student works. Both composers modified the da capo and dal segno aria structures characteristic of classic opera seria, incorporated accompanied recitative, and expanded their instrumentation to include flutes, oboes, trumpets, and horns in addition to strings and continuo. Bortniansky takes each of these developments further than Galuppi had in the 1760s, alternating arias with sections of accompanied and simple recitative as well as arioso to create larger solo scenes for major characters such as Alcide, obscuring but not eliminating the distinctions between the closed forms comprising opera seria. Wind and brass instruments are integral parts of Bortniansky’s scoring that play almost throughout the opera, in contrast to their sparing use as indicators of specific affects, characters, or offstage deities in *Ifigenia*. The expanded orchestra in combination with the increased use of accompanied recitative facilitate instrumental commentary on the shifting thoughts, plans, and motivations of the singing characters. In an opera that is centered on the wavering impulses of an indecisive youth and that features few other characters or scenes of action until the final act, this commentary is an effective means of maintaining listeners’ interest and their engagement with the internal drama of the title character.

While the music of *Alcide* reveals that Bortniansky embraced the stylistic developments of the latter half of the century, presumably through his studies with Galuppi, the plot of its

³Pietro Metastasio, *Alcide*, trans. Louise Guiney, in liner notes to *Dimitri Bortniansky: Alcide* (Erol, ER 98001, 1998, compact disc), 64.

libretto indicates continuity in the values espoused by both opera seria as a genre and the Russian court at which Bortniansky was seeking employment. Alcide's deference to leader figures, whether his tutor Fronimo or the gods to whom he prays repeatedly for guidance in his decision, and his eventual acceptance of rationality and difficult but rewarding work over mindless pleasures all align with eighteenth-century absolutist values. If not unique to the Russian court, such principles had been ingrained in Russian court life since at least the time of Peter the Great's endeavor to found his namesake city at the beginning of the century.

Although likely coincidental, Alcide's focus on the moral education of a young hero also resonated with a new role that opera played late in Catherine's reign and in which Bortniansky became involved. Upon his return to Russia in 1779, Bortniansky was assigned by Catherine to a position at the Young Court of Paul I, Catherine's son and the future emperor, where his responsibilities included composition and music instruction for Paul's wife, Maria Fyodorovna. During his employment in Paul's household during the latter half of Catherine's reign, Bortniansky would have become familiar with Catherine's use of opera as a means of influencing the next two generations of emperors, Paul and his son Alexander, regarding proper monarchical behavior and decision making. This concept originated in *opere serie*, appeared blatantly in certain libretti such as that of *Alcide*, and recurred in Catherine's own Russian-language libretti for the partly spoken, partly sung comic operas that she wrote in collaboration with several of her court composers and secretaries in the last decade of her reign. Bortniansky's setting of *Alcide* as part of his compositional training thus not only instructed him in the musical language of late opera seria but also in one of the genre's purposes within an absolutist court, one particularly applicable to a young composer largely responsible for the musical education and representation of the next two imperial families.

Alcide: Learning to Choose the Path of Virtue

The initial step in Alcide's development from youth to adult or, if the libretto is read as absolutist allegory, from ruled to ruler is his acceptance of his independence. In the first scene of the opera, Fronimo prepares to leave Alcide at the crossroads because Alcide's "father Jupiter, king of the gods, has decreed that today [Alcide's] merit must be put to the test," invoking a higher authority to whom the young hero must defer without question.⁴ Following an upbeat melismatic aria utilizing Bortniansky's full orchestra in which Fronimo urges Alcide to decide his future prudently but quickly, a gentle dotted figure in the strings segues into the accompanied recitative that begins Alcide's first extended solo scene.⁵ Over unobtrusive sustained chords, Alcide reveals his fear at making a decision unaided by either of the authority figures to whom he has looked for guidance throughout his life:

Alcide:
 Fronimo leaves me a prey to uncertainty!
 Must I then take my first steps on the path of life, the most difficult of all, alone?
 And yet, Jupiter my father, and Fronimo my friend, would not thus confront me with
 danger
 I am not able to surmount.
 Let my own reason, innate and free, which is now my guide,
 Observe these two paths and decide.

[...]

A stream [murmurs], and a fragrant birch-tree sways,
 Seeks to lure but does not entice me.⁶

⁴Metastasio, trans. Guiney, *Alcide*, 50. I have used a published translation for *Alcide*, whereas translations from the other two libretti have been my own. I have included the original Italian texts for *Alcide* in the footnotes alongside the page locations in the liner notes for both the original and translated texts.

⁵Dmitri Bortniansky, *Alcide*, ed. M. Berdennikov (Kiev: Muzychna Ukraina, 1985), 51-73.

⁶"In qual mar di dubbiezze Fronimo m'abbandona! / Il primo dunque, il più difficil passo nel cammin della vita muover solo io dovrò! / Ma Giove è padre, Fronimo è amico: e non m'avranno esposto a rischio, che non sia superabil da me. / Sì quell'innata e libera ragion ch'ora è mia guida, / L'uno e l'altro sentier vegga, e decida...onde, / col vaneggiar d'un'odorosa auretta / Par che voglia sedurmi, e non m'alletta," *ibid.*, 32, 51.

Alcide asserts confidence in the wisdom of these established authorities and in the guiding power of his “own reason, innate and free,” although his minimally accompanied vocal line and the numerous redirections to which it is subjected by the answering or commentating chords imply vulnerability and indecision (Example 12a).⁷ The accompaniment transitions from a commentary on Alcide’s emotional state to a continuous descriptor as he describes the two locales between which he must choose. The characterizations are familiar: a gentle sixteenth figure over a tonic pedal for the land of Pleasure, transformed into an agitated repeating figure in the relative minor prior to Alcide’s description of the formidable land of Virtue (Example 12b). As Alcide continues to reflect on his uncertainty, the accompaniment returns to the commentary style, wavering between moderato and allegro tempi to communicate Alcide’s alternating trust in authority and anxiety over the impending decision that he must make alone. The recitative concludes with his decision, exhibiting piety reminiscent of Iphigenia and portending a similarly positive outcome, to consult the gods.

Example 12a: Dmitri Bortniansky, recitativo accompagnato for Alcide, "In qual mar di dubbiezze" (mm. 15-21). Adapted from *Alcide*, ed. M. Berdennikov (Kiev: Muzychna Ukraina, 1985), 51-52.

The musical score for Example 12a consists of four staves. The top three staves are for the string ensemble: Violin I, Violin II, and Viola. The bottom staff is for Alcide. The tempo is marked "Allegro" above the first staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The time signature is common time (C). The Alcide part begins with a recitative-like melody, and the lyrics "Si quell' in-na-ta e li-be-ra ra-gion ch'ora è mi-a" are written below the notes. The string accompaniment features a repeating sixteenth-note figure in the violins and a similar pattern in the viola.

⁷Ibid., 51.



Vln. I

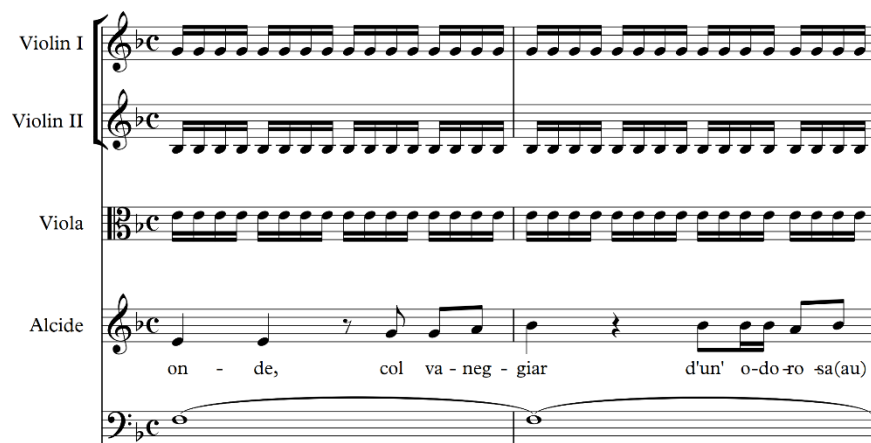
Vln. II

Vla.

Alcide

gui-da. L'u -no(c) l'al-tro sen-tier veg-ga e de - ci-da.

Example 12b: Dmitri Bortniansky, recitativo accompagnato for Alcide, "In qual mar di dubbiezze" (mm. 26-32). Adapted from *Alcide*, ed. M. Berdennikov (Kiev: Muzychna Ukraina), 1985, 53.



Violin I

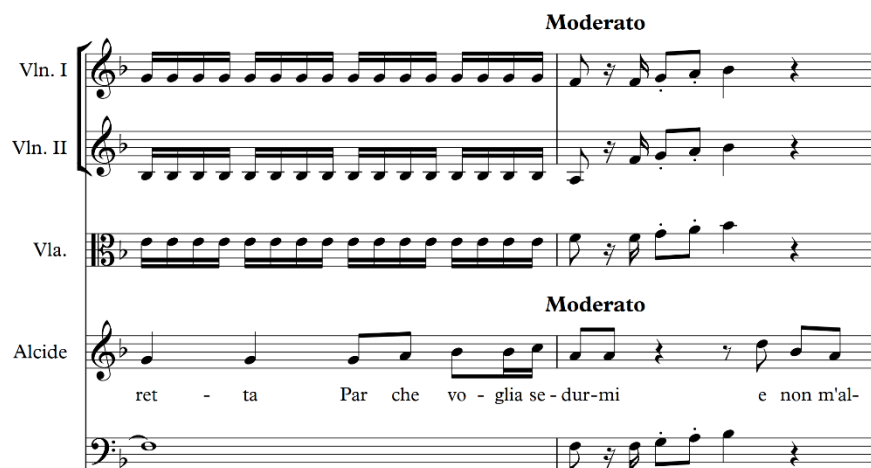
Violin II

Viola

Alcide

on - de, col va - neg - giar d'un' o-do-ro sa(au)

Moderato



Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Moderato

Alcide

ret - ta Par che vo - glia se - dur-mi e non m'al-

Allegro

Allegro

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Alcide

let-ta.

Much as Iphigenia did in Galuppi's opera, Alcide acknowledges that the gods control the fates of humans and attempts to invoke his special favor with the immortals in order to find a solution to his concerns. In a gentle two-part aria whose structure indicates both Bortniansky's adoption of newer musical forms as well as the innocence and simplicity of Alcide's character, the young hero asks the gods, to whom he is indebted, for help in making his decision:

Alcide:

Merciful gods, benevolent gods, who see into my heart, I pray thee, send a single lightning flash to illumine my spirit.

Without thee, my slow and tremulous heart languishes within my breast; but I sense that, with thee, I will have the strength to act.⁸

The instrumental opening introduces the melody in the first violins that is adopted by the singer upon his entrance. The violin melody is supported by tonic arpeggiations in the lower strings and decorated with several short additions of horns and oboes playing softly. This introduction presents the contrast between the stability of the gods and the uncertainties of humans that the aria conveys overall. When Alcide enters, making his initial plea to the gods, his

⁸“Dei clementi, amici Dei, che il mio cor vedete appieno, / io vi chiedo un sol baleno che rischiari il mio pensier. / Senza voi dubbioso e lento sento il cor languirmi in seno: ed equal con voi lo sento, / ogni impresa a sostentar,” Metastasio, trans. Guiney, 32, 52.

part is doubled by the first violins. His relatively long, slow phrases mark his aria as the first moment of calm in the opera.

The setting does not particularly emphasize or obscure the text, instead drawing the listener's attention toward the melody and the senses of hope and reverence it suggests. Even the first melismatic setting of the word "pensier," which ends the first textual phrase, reduces in length the expected sixteenth-note passages and alternates them with gentler ascending quarter notes (Example 13). The subsequent decorations of "pensier" and of "sostener," the counterpart of "pensier" in the second textual phrase, furnish the aria's modest opportunities for vocal virtuosity.⁹ Avoiding the extremes of the soprano range as well as extended ornamentation, the aria's simplicity both indicates Bortniansky's familiarity with changes to operatic conventions and helps characterize Alcide as young and innocent.

Example 13: Dmitri Bortniansky, aria for Alcide, "Dei clementi, amici Dei" (mm. 18-31, horns and oboes omitted). Adapted from *Alcide*, ed. M. Berdennikov (Kiev: Muzychna Ukraina, 1985), 59-60.

The musical score is for an aria by Dmitri Bortniansky. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Alcide. The tempo is marked "Larghetto" and the key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 3/4. The vocal line for Alcide includes the lyrics: "io vi chie - do un sol ba - le-no".

⁹For the decoration of "sostener," which includes an octave leap to A5, see Bortniansky ed. Berdennikov, 63. Note that in the single performance the opera received, the title role was sung by a female soprano whose name is recorded as Signora Davida. See Findeizen, *History of Music in Russia from Antiquity to 1800*, 2: 202.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Alcide

che _____ ris - chia - ri il mio pen - sier, il mio pen -

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Alcide

sier.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Alcide

Although Alcide cannot remain in the realm of security associated with the gods and must return to facing his decision, the prayer that he made in the aria proves effective. Following his transition from the aria to accompanied recitative, the latter, more flexible form associated with mortal uncertainty, Alcide thanks the gods and states the decision to which he believes he has come at last:

Alcide:

My thanks to thee, O Heavenly gods! I now feel the effects of your favor.

Now, my soul is freed from doubt.

Now I see myself strong and sure in my decision. It is hardship that attracts me. It is hardship I will choose.¹⁰

Alcide is unaccompanied in his direct address to the gods, a startling change from the conclusion of the aria in which the oboes and horns as well as the strings had been particularly active. This stark opening statement returns both singer and listener to the tense reality of the momentous decision that Alcide is now expected to make. The string accompaniment in the remainder of the recitative resumes its commentary function, adapted to the changes in mood associated with Alcide's newfound confidence. Material familiar from the first accompanied recitative takes on new meanings following the affirmation of the aria. For instance, the repeated sixteenth-note figure that comments on Alcide's claim that he "now feel[s] the effects of [the gods'] favor" expresses anticipation rather than anxiety as it had in his first recitative (Example 14, mm. 4-5). Similarly, while the accompaniment resumes its role of redirecting Alcide's vocal line to communicate sudden shifts in his thoughts and emotions, it now expresses excitement rather than insecurity. The dotted figure supporting Alcide's belief that "now [his] soul is freed from doubt" is reminiscent of one of the means of musically characterizing heroes and kings

¹⁰“Grazie, O Numi del Ciel, gli effetti io sento già del vostro favor. / Già sgombra è l'alma delle dubbiezze sue. / Franco, sicuro, arbitro di me stesso, io già mi veggo: quell'asprezza mi alletta, e quella eleggo,” Metastasio, trans. Guiney, 33, 52.

familiar from earlier opera seria (Figure 14, m. 8). This brief accompanimental figure is the first indication in the opera that Alcide may be developing beyond his initial state of youthful uncertainty. The minor inflection of the accompaniment supporting Alcide's hasty decision to embark upon the path of "hardship" or Virtue recalls the first recitative (Figure 14, mm. 11-15).

Figure 14: Dmitri Bortniansky, recitativo accompagnato for Alcide, "Grazie, O Numi del Ciel" (mm. 1-15). Adapted from *Alcide*, ed. M. Berdennikov (Kiev: Muzychna Ukraina, 1985), 64-65.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Alcide (soprano), and Bass. The second system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Alcide (soprano), and Bass. The music is in common time (C) and G major. The lyrics are: "Gra-zie, i Nu-mi del Ciel. Gli(ef) fet-ti(io) sen-to già del vos-tro fa vor. Già sgom-bra(è)".

Moderato

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Moderato

Alcide

l'al - ma del - le dub-biez-ze su - e.

Moderato

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Moderato

Alcide

l'al - ma del - le dub-biez-ze su - e.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Moderato

Alcide

Fran - co(e) si - cu - ro(ar) - bitro di me stes - so, io già mi

The musical score consists of four staves. The top three staves are for Vln. I, Vln. II, and Vla. The bottom two staves are for Alcide, with the vocal line in the upper staff and a bass line in the lower staff. The lyrics for Alcide are: "veg- go, quell' asp-rez-za m'al - let-ta e quel-la(e) leg-go."

Although Alcide's decision to follow the path of Virtue is deemed correct at the end of the opera, in the first act his choice is complicated by the appearance of the alluring personification of Pleasure. Upon the conclusion of his recitative, an abrupt shift to a lengthy instrumental passage featuring Bortniansky's full orchestra and characterized by a tranquil and repetitive melody in the first violins and oboes indicates Pleasure's arrival.¹¹ Interrupted by Alcide's unaccompanied commentary on the unfamiliarity of the approaching figure, the recurring melody assumes the role of commentary to Alcide's recitative as he identifies her as Pleasure. The focus of the scene shifts away from the figure of Pleasure and back toward Alcide, who begins to question his decision. Familiar attributes of the two earlier accompanied recitatives return, including sustained chords, anxious repeated notes, and silence upon his invocation of the gods.¹² Alcide's extended solo scene, the longest in the opera, closes much as it began, with a still-indecisive young hero wavering between the moral righteousness of Virtue and the bliss and ease of Pleasure via a means of musical communication as changeable as his emotions.

¹¹Bortniansky, ed. Berdennikov, 66-68, mm. 1-20.

¹²Metastasio, trans. Guiney, 33. See Bortniansky, ed. Berdennikov, 68-72, mm. 41-42, 47-48.

Bortniansky's extensive use of accompanied recitative, particularly in combination with an aria and instrumental passages to form a single larger scene, supports Alcide's character development. As Alcide progresses along the path of moral education that will result in his assumption of the heroic role with which his name is commonly associated, he begins to adopt the characteristics of a seria hero in his emotions and in some of the supporting music that communicates those developments to the listener. Future rulers listening to settings of this libretto were not likely to have missed the instructions for them regarding the pursuit of virtue and the value of hard work presented allegorically through Alcide's journey. For Bortniansky as for the opera's protagonist, *Alcide* was an educational endeavor. Through this first opera, the composer familiarized himself with the musical forms of late-eighteenth century seria as well as the allegorizing and instructive potentials of the form upon rulers present and future. His training would serve him well during his long career as a court composer and music director under Catherine and later her son Paul and grandson Alexander.

Bortniansky's Operas for the Young Court

Bortniansky composed no true *opere serie* in Russia during his employment at the Young Court. However, the three French-language comic operas that he wrote for the entertainment of Paul, Maria Fyodorovna, and their courtiers reveal the strong influence of Bortniansky's training in opera seria during his studies in Italy with Galuppi. Bortniansky derived the overture to the first of the three, *La Fête du Seigneur*, from that of *Quinto Fabio*, his last Italian opera seria, composed seven years before the first of the French works.¹³ The second opera, *Le Faucon*, uses

¹³Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*, 176.

seria aria forms to distinguish the noble characters from their servants, who sing simpler song types, while the third, *Le Fils Rivals*, utilizes the accompanied recitative with which Bortniansky acquired familiarity through the composition of *Alcide*.¹⁴ The long association between opera seria, court ceremony, and the ruling and upper classes, which had been developing in Russia for fifty years by the time Bortniansky composed the first of his French operas in 1786, thus exerted its continuing influence on additional, newer forms of court entertainment and operatic composition. In both Bortniansky's French-Italian operas and the Russian-language works to which Catherine herself contributed the libretti, the musical forms of seria and their associations with the splendor of the Russian court and the authority and righteousness of its ruler almost always reappeared.

¹⁴Ibid., 178, 180. Ritzarev provides an overview of the three operas, which she describes as *demi-seria*, on pp. 176-181.

Conclusion

The Roles of Opera Seria Within the Russian Women's Kingdom

Between the Russian premiere of Araia's *La forza dell'amore* under Empress Anna in 1735 and the death of Catherine the Great in 1796, Russian court audiences had witnessed Italian opera seria gain its place as a requisite component of court ceremony marking almost every major event and anniversary in the lives and reigns of their empresses. The ubiquity of the genre was challenged somewhat by new operatic forms being staged concurrently, often for entertainment rather than ceremonial purposes. Comedies, popular in Russia since the introduction of opera via traveling companies during Empress Anna's reign, were performed in Italian as well as French. The latter language and associated culture gained significant popularity among the Russian court and nobility during Catherine's reign, resulting in composers like Bortniansky adapting their training in Italian seria to the stylistic demands of the French *opéra-comique*. Also developing late in Catherine's reign were Russian-language operas that utilized elements of both opera seria and *opéra-comique*. These works represented a step toward a new kind of operatic mythologization, of Russia as a nation rather than of the empress. None of these newer forms, however, took the place of opera seria in court ceremony, and all were indebted in some way to the earlier Italian form.

While the premiere of Araia's *La forza dell'amore* may have "looked undeniably funny and clumsy" to a court audience then possessing "little more than a vague idea of European secular music" and little if any background in the Italian language, they would have well

understood the purpose for the production as well as the messages it conveyed.¹ The audience's ability to engage with the convoluted plot of the work may have been limited, albeit aided by the publication of translated libretti. However, by the year of the production, midway through Empress Anna's reign, art forms and entertainments imported from Western Europe were not novelties. Associations between royalty and foreign attributes in Russia predated the imperial court of the eighteenth century, at which those associations were strengthened by successive rulers' desires to achieve artistic and cultural status equal to that of any Western court.² Araia's opera was a means of perpetuating the Russian courtly practice of ceremonial and social performances and rivaling the sophistication of the Western courts from whose traditions those performances of foreignness were derived. Empress Elizabeth's attempts to facilitate the composition of Russian-language opera seria were short-lived in part because the foreign aspect of Italian opera seria was one of its most desirable attributes.

Like other Russian court ceremonies or the social gatherings over which the empresses presided, opera seria tended to exhibit awareness of its status as performance. Seria was concerned with allegory and moral or political instruction above realism of plot and character. Heavily ornamented arias and the adulation of the singers who performed them contributed to this aspect of the genre. Audiences of *La forza dell'amore* were intended to see not only Abiazar, the hero figure, but Caterina Giorgi-as-Abiazar, the singer embodying the heroism of the character. Giorgi's portrayal of Abiazar had particular significance at the Russian court, where her role recalled parallel performances by the empresses—whether carrying swords, being memorialized in coronation speeches, or attending dances in military dress—at ceremonial and

¹Marina Ritzarev, *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 41.

²Richard Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy*. Vol. 1, *From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 22.

social functions. Similarly, audiences of *Ifigenia in Tauride* did not see the goddess Athena onstage, but their own Minerva was among them in the theater, being honored on her birthday. Opera seria was uniquely capable of representing the Russian empresses using the same set of figures that they had adopted for their offstage personae. Even as its popularity declined late in the century, its musical forms continued to represent ruling or powerful figures in new genres. The noble figures in Bortniansky's French-Italian operas and the kings and queens who populate Catherine's own Russian libretti all communicate in arias that would not be out of place in an opera seria from earlier in the century.

The consistent support for absolutist rule espoused by opera seria did not preclude the genre's dramatic or musical development. Although *Ifigenia* represents a rare example of deviation from the plots and morals associated with the Metastasian model of libretti among *opere serie* performed at the Russian court, it nevertheless indicates a step forward in the genre's ability to reference the political circumstances of a specific court. Although Coltellini's libretto was not written for St. Petersburg, his and Galuppi's Iphigenia is a seria heroine for the Catherinian period: she values reason, serves Minerva with reverence, and is unwilling to defer to a ruler she deems unfit. The choruses to Minerva created an reference unique to Russian court audiences, who would have drawn an additional connection between the onstage chorus made up of the members of the empress's Imperial Choir and the goddess to whom they sang. Classic Metastasian plots could have new relevance as well, as Bortniansky gave *Alcide* through the updated forms he learned in his studies with Galuppi and brought back to Russia, where he applied his training to a position in which the education of princes was as much a concern as it was within the allegory constructed in *Alcide*.

Opera seria was introduced as a project of Russia's second major empress and began to relinquish its leading role within court ceremonial and musical life upon the death of its last woman ruler. The genre was inextricably bound to the particular forms of representation and self-mythologization through which the century's succession of empresses promoted and secured their power. Simultaneously able to resonate with earlier imagery associated with the empresses, express support for their actions, convey their artistic currency and sophistication, and instruct their successors as they saw fit, opera seria was the central artistic form of the larger performance of the Russian court as a whole.

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