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**Small-Scale Opera Genres in Vienna before and after
Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*:
Adaptation and Polemics**

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Abstract. The article is devoted to works pertaining to small opera genres (*festa teatrale*, *azione teatrale*, *componimento drammatico*) created in Vienna during the 1750s and the 1760s. As a rule, they were produced in honor of some significant event in the lives of the imperial family. Most of them were endowed with a festive character corresponding to the spirit of court festivity, an uncomplicated mythological or allegorical plot, relatively short duration and only three or four characters. The article examines genre-related indications of short operas, their varieties (the chamber and the scenically representative) and their indicative examples which has served as a foothold for the approbation of a mixed style, including the components of both the French (the choral and ballet scenes, the immense weight of the orchestral recitatives) and the Italian traditions (developed arias and *secco* recitatives). The conclusion is arrived at about the special position of Gluck's *azione teatrale Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) among

Translated by Anna P. Evstropova

a set of analogous genres. Gluck's rejection of the genre of the monumental aria indicated his polemics with the poetics of both the opera *seria* and the *festa teatrale*. Despite the implementation in *Orfeo* of a considerable amount of *festa teatrale* compositional techniques, such a rejection is perceived as the greatest avant-garde reforming gesture of the 1760s. The author compares two operas with Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. These are Florian Leopold Gassmann's *Amore and Psyche* (1767) and Johann Adolf Hasse's *Piramo e Tisbe* (1768), composed later. In the first case, we can talk about a direct influence, while in the second case, it is possible to observe in Marco Coltellini's libretto of a set of allusions to Ranieri Calzabigi's poetical text of *Orfeo* and at the same time the polemic qualities of Hasse's positions in regard to Gluck's score.

Keywords: small-scale opera genres, *festa teatrale*, *azione teatrale*, *componimento drammatico*, Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*

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Старинная музыка

Научная статья

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**Малые оперные жанры в Вене до и после
«Орфея и Эвридики» К. В. Глюка:
адаптация и полемика**

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена сочинениям малых оперных жанров (*festa teatrale*, *azione teatrale*, *componimento drammatico*), созданным в Вене в 1750–1760-е годы. Как правило, их ставили в честь какого-то значительного события в жизни императорской семьи. Большинство имело праздничный характер, отвечающий духу придворного торжества, несложный мифологический или аллегорический сюжет, небольшую протяженность, всего 3–4-х персонажей. В статье рассмотрены жанровые обозначения малых опер, их разновидности (камерная и сценически-репрезентативная) и показательные образцы, которые послужили плацдармом для апробации смешанного стиля, включающего компоненты как французской (хоровые и балетные сцены, большой вес оркестровых речитативов), так и итальянской традиции (развитые арии, речитативы *secco*). Сделан вывод об особом положении *azione teatrale* «Орфей и Эвридика» (1762) К. В. Глюка в ряду аналогичных жанров. Отказ Глюка от монументальной арии обозначил его полемику с поэтикой и оперы *seria*, и *festa teatrale*. Несмотря на претворение в «Орфее» значительного количества композиционных приемов *festa teatrale*, такой отказ воспринимается как наиболее авангардный реформаторский жест 1760-х годов. Автор сопоставляет две оперы — «Амура и Психею» (1767) Ф. Л. Гассмана и «Пирама и Фисбу» (1768) И. А. Хассе, написанных позднее, с «Орфеем и Эвридикой» Глюка. В первом случае можно говорить о непосредственном влиянии, во втором же — о наличии в либретто Марко Кольтеллини ряда аллюзий на поэтический текст «Орфея» Раньери Кальцабиджи и одновременно о полемичности позиции Хассе по отношению к партитуре Глюка.

Ключевые слова: малые оперные жанры, *festa teatrale*, *azione teatrale*, *componimento drammatico*, Глюк, «Орфей и Эвридика»

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Small-scale opera genres of the 18th century, found in Italian and Italian-language scores and librettos, were referred to by various names such as *azione teatrale*, *serenata*, *componimento drammatico*, and *festa teatrale*. Typically, these compositions were small in size, consisting of one or two acts, featuring uncomplicated plots and only three or four characters. Unlike operas *seria* or *buffa*, which were performed on different occasions, they were usually associated with festive events, and were very common at the Habsburg court in Vienna. Edward Dent even suggested calling these operas “dynastic” due to their popularity at the monarchical houses [1, p. 134].

For a long time, small-scale genres remained overshadowed by full-length operas and were rarely staged or recorded in the 20th century. However, the attention of musicologists gradually increased, leading to the inclusion of separate chapters in historical works [2], special articles [3; 4; 5, 6], monographs [7; 8], and even conferences dedicated to these genres [9; 10]. This research initiative can be attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, there was a natural desire to fill the gaps in the study of the 18th-century opera heritage. Small-scale operas held a prominent place among the musical-theatrical performances at the Viennese court. Pietro Metastasio, for instance, composed 28 out of his 32 librettos of *feste teatrali*, serenades, and other works in Vienna, and in his later years (1750–1760), he composed them twice as often as *seria* operas.¹ This disproportion by no means suggests that shorter librettos required less effort. In fact, in his 1752 letter to Farinelli, Metastasio stated, “These little bagatelles (*fanfaluche*) are more difficult, with respect to invention, than the great.”² Thus, a comprehensive understanding of the musical and theatrical culture of the time would be incomplete without considering these “bagatelles.”

1 Empress Maria Theresa especially appreciated small operas based on Metastasio’s libretto, which, in her opinion, should serve the upbringing and musical education of her children [11, p. 16]. In 1753, by order of Farinelli, Metastasio wrote *azione per musica L’isola disabitata* to celebrate the name day of the Spanish king Ferdinand VI [12, p. 41, p. 43].

2 In a letter dated December 16, 1752. Pietro Metastasio. (1954). Lettere. B. Brunelli (Ed.), *Tutte le opere di Pietro Metastasio*. (Vols. 3, 4 & 5). A. Mondadori Editore, La edizione elettronica del 18 maggio, 2005. https://www.liberliber.it/mediateca/libri/m/metastasio/lettere_edizione_brunelli/pdf/letter_p.pdf, p. 384.

The second reason for the increased interest in the 18th century small-scale genres among musicologists is the reassessment of their role in the history of opera. As early as 1973, Raymond Monelle published an influential article titled *Gluck and the 'Festa Teatrale,'* which prompted a fresh perspective on such works. “If ‘Orfeo’ is regarded as a *festa teatrale*, and not compared with contemporary Italian opera, many of the accepted judgments must be revised,” he asserted unequivocally [3, p. 324]. Therefore, the focus of my paper ultimately lies in understanding the nature, logic, and outcomes of the opera reform in the mid-18th century.

Terminological Designations and Genre Variations

In the 1750s and 1760s, almost all composers, whose full-length works were staged in the court theater, also created works of small-scale genres.

Table 1. Works of small-scale genres in the 1750–60s

Title	libretto	year	genre	festive event
<i>Le cinesi</i>	Metastasio/Gluck	1754	<i>azione teatrale</i>	Maria Theresa’s visit with her husband to the Schloss Hof
<i>L’Isola disabitata</i>	Metastasio/Bonno	1754	<i>azione teatrale</i>	name day of King Ferdinand VI
<i>La danza</i>	Metastasio/Gluck	1755	<i>componimento pastorale</i>	Archduke Leopold’s birthday
<i>L’innocenza giustificata</i>	Durazzo- Metastasio/ Gluck	1755	<i>festa teatrale</i>	birthday of Franz Stefan, husband of Maria Theresa
<i>Il Sogno</i>	Metastasio /Reutter	1757	<i>componimento drammatico</i>	unidentified Habsburg family celebration
<i>Tetide</i>	Migliavacca /Gluck	1760	<i>serenata</i>	wedding of Archduke Joseph and Isabella of Bourbon
<i>Alcide al bivio</i>	Metastasio /Hasse	1760	<i>festa teatrale</i>	wedding of Archduke Joseph and Isabella of Bourbon
<i>Armida</i>	Durazzo-Migliavacca - Quinault /Traetta	1761	<i>azione teatrale</i>	name day of Isabella of Bourbon
<i>Orfeo ed Euridice</i>	Calzabigi/Gluck	1762	<i>azione teatrale</i>	name day of Franz Stefan
<i>Egeria</i>	Metastasio /Hasse	1764	<i>festa teatrale</i>	coronation of Joseph II
<i>Il Parnaso confuso</i>	Metastasio/Gluck	1765	<i>serenata</i>	the wedding of Joseph II and Maria Josepha of Bavaria
<i>Il trionfo d’amore</i>	Metastasio / Gassmann	1765	<i>azione teatrale</i>	the wedding of Joseph II and Maria Josepha of Bavaria
<i>La corona</i>	Metastasio/Gluck	1765	<i>azione teatrale</i>	name day of Franz Stefan (the opera was not staged)
<i>Amore e Psiche</i>	Coltellini / Gassmann	1767	<i>festa teatrale</i>	the engagement of Ferdinand IV of Bourbon and Maria Josepha of Austria
<i>Partenope</i>	Metastasio /Hasse	1767	<i>festa teatrale</i>	the engagement of Ferdinand IV of Bourbon and Maria Josepha of Austria
<i>Piramo e Tisbe</i>	Coltellini/ Hasse	1768	<i>intermezzo tragico</i>	private production of the opera

Genre definitions could possibly serve as the foundation for distinguishing between the various types of small-scale operas. However, this criterion is not entirely effective since in the 18th century, the same work could have multiple genre designations. For instance, Metastasio's *Partenope* was published with different subtitles, such as *festa teatrale*, *componimento drammatico*, and even *dramma per musica*.³ Musicologists, when discussing terminology, have proposed one name after another to define the genre that best suits its nature. Monelle, after a detailed examination of manuscripts, editions of librettos and operas, as well as articles in theoretical and encyclopedic sources of the 18th century (Johann Mattheson, Johann Adolf Scheibe, Francesco Saverio Quadrio), decided on *festa teatrale* as the primary genre for Viennese "sub-operatic" forms [3, pp. 308–315]. Jacques Joly, relying on Monelle's work, confirmed the leading role of *festa teatrale* in Metastasio's works [7, pp. 54–60]. Michele Calella, while restating Monelle's arguments, proposed the term *componimento drammatico* ("dramatic composition") as a neutral and generalized designation [2, pp. 59–60].

Although the arguments put forth by scholars are understandable and convincing in their own ways, the question remains as to how necessary a universal term is today, when historical designations emphasize different aspects of the genre and were not always strictly interpreted in the 18th century. Thus, it is perhaps most logical to recognize the collective designation *small-scale opera genres* for dynastic representations, relying on the simplest but effective criterion. This approach is akin to Yuri Tynyanov's consideration of magnitude and associated constructive principles as the main distinguishing feature of literary genres [13, pp. 154–155].

Two main types of small-scale operas coexisted at the Viennese court. Depending on the scale of the celebration and the nature of the occasion, the performance could be chamber-like, almost homey, with the audience restricted to a close circle of relatives, guests, and courtiers; or it could be lavish and solemn. Assessing the variety of small-scale Viennese operas, Andrea Chegai noted that they were located halfway between the splendor of the Baroque theater and the intimacy of Arcadian lyricism, designed for an erudite audience [14, p. 4]. The peculiar combination of pompous design with refined plots and musical nuances was more prevalent in these operas than in *seria* operas, which focused on the display of passions, dramatic arcs, and character development.

Chamber Variation

Members of the imperial family often participated in performances of the first type, the chamber variation. Operas such as *La danza*, *Il Parnaso confuso* and *La corona*, written by Christoph Willibald Gluck to librettos by Metastasio,

³ Sartori, C. (1990–1994). *Libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800. Catalogo analitico con 16 indici*. Bertola & Locatelli. (Vol. 4), p. 361.

were composed precisely for such private performances. One such *azione teatrale*, *Il Parnaso confuso*, was performed in 1765 as part of the festivities celebrating the wedding of Joseph II to the Bavarian princess Maria Josepha. The typical program for such festivities usually included a major opera, a French dramatic tragedy, a French comedy, a ballet, and an *azione teatrale*. The wedding party was held at the Schönbrunn Palace, the summer residence, even though it was celebrated in winter. The presented artworks included Gluck's opera *Telemaco*, with a libretto by Marco Coltellini, along with two ballets featuring music by Florian Leopold Gassmann and choreography by Franz Hilverding. Gasparo Angiolini staged the ballet *La Semiramide riconosciuta* by Gluck, and Racine's tragedy *Bajazet*.⁴ Each performance was held only once, except for *Il Parnaso confuso*, which was shown three times. Emperor Joseph's sisters Maria Amalia, Maria Elisabeth, Maria Josepha, and Maria Carolina took the stage, while their brother Leopold, Grand Duke of Tuscany, directed the



Figure 1. J. F. Greipel. *Maria Theresa's daughters on stage*. Presentation of *Il Parnaso confuso* K. V. Gluck's. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, 3146. Open access resource

young singers and orchestrators of the chapel from the harpsichord. The two performances at Schönbrunn (January 24 and 27) and the third one at the Hofburg (February 9) were highly successful. It is difficult to say whether the warm reception was due to the artistic and musical talents of the princesses or only a desire to comply with court etiquette. Nonetheless, the three performances speak for themselves. Maria Theresa commissioned court painter Johann Franz Greipel to create a group portrait of her daughters in theatrical costumes (Figure 1). He also painted the Hall of Ceremonies in Schönbrunn, adapted for the performance (Figure 2): this image is known from various descriptions, including the latest edition dedicated to the relationship between music and architecture in the musical theater of the 17th–18th centuries [15, p. 485–486]. Judging from this image, the opera performed by the royal amateurs was

meticulously designed and staged. Metastasio, responsible for the general direction, along with Gluck and Hilverding, who worked on gestures and dances, had to

4 Wienerisches Diarium. 2. Februar. 1765. <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=wrr&datum=17650202&seite=5&zoom=33> (accessed: 15.12.2023).

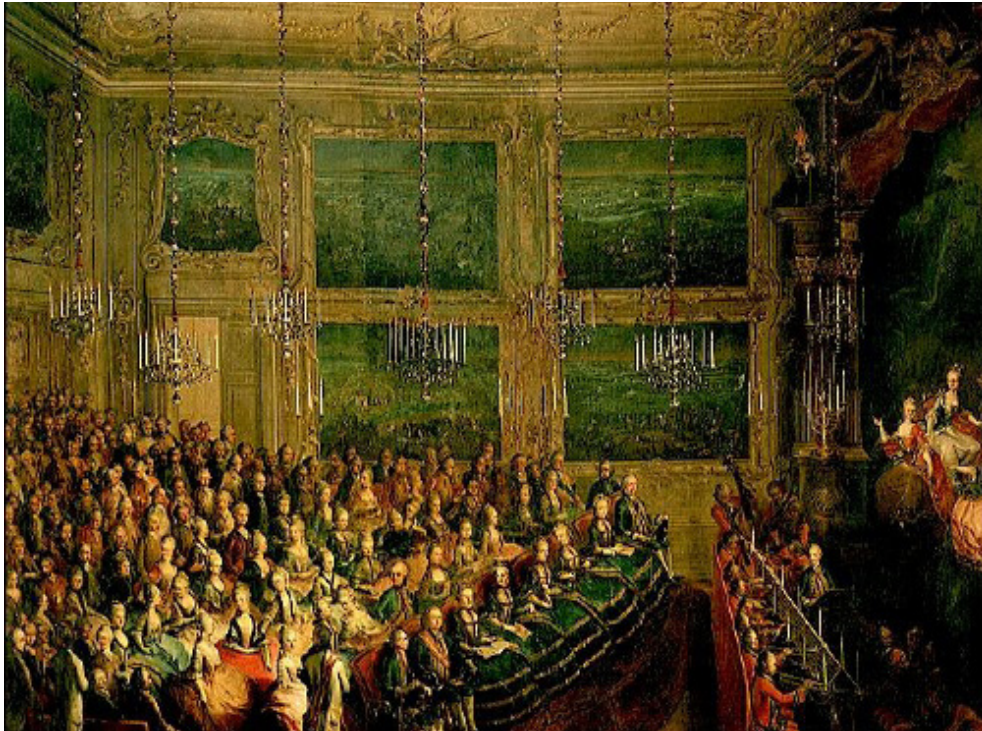


Figure 2. J.F. Greipel. *Premiere of Il Parnaso confuso Ch.V. Gluck's.*
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, 4075.
Open access resource

exhibit great ingenuity in adapting the roles to the capabilities of the high-born non-professional performers. A simple and appropriate plot was chosen: on Parnassus, the muses Melpomene, Euterpe, and Erato struggle to agree on how to congratulate the newlyweds. Apollo resolves their doubts by advising them to trust in improvisation and to express their sincere feelings and talent in a congratulatory message. The work on *Il Parnaso confuso* was conducted hastily. Metastasio received the order only in early November [16, p. 132], and by December rehearsals were in full swing. Within five weeks, the libretto and music were written, and the learning of musical numbers and recitatives began [17, p. 42]. In a letter to Farinelli, Metastasio lamented that he spent every day before and after lunch in the imperial “gynoecium,” engaged in the preparation of the play⁵.

The solo numbers were maximally adapted to the girls’ vocal abilities. The eldest sister, Maria Elisabeth, who possessed a strong vocal technique and was 22 years old at the time, portrayed Melpomene, the muse of tragedy. She successfully performed two arias, one of which was metaphorical with a maritime theme and featured intricate coloratura. Maria Josepha, portraying Euterpe, the muse of lyric poetry, had lighter and simpler solos. Maria Amalia, in the role of Apollo, had the opportunity to showcase her excellent high notes.

⁵ Metastasio, P. *Lettere*, p. 798. It is worth noting that this marked the first collaboration between Metastasio and Gluck, with Gluck composing the music for Metastasio’s libretto. As is well known, the poet did not have a favorable opinion of the composer, although he acknowledged Gluck’s unique talent. However, in the case of *Il Parnaso confuso*, they apparently worked closely together.

The youngest sister, 12-year-old Maria Carolina, played the role of Erato, the muse of love songs. She had only one solo number in *Il Parnaso confuso*, which had a simple, yet charming melody, reminiscent of the beginning of the Countess' aria from *Le nozze di Figaro*. The vocal part resonates against the delicate pizzicato of violins, simulating the sound of a zither: in Metastasio's poetic text, it refers to the gentle, loving tone of this ancient Greek instrument (*Example 1*). Significantly, numbers like Erato's aria exemplify the typical qualities found in small-scale chamber genres — elegance and simplicity.



Example 1. Erato's aria.
Biblioteca Conservatorio S. Pietro a Majella, Napoli.
I-Nc 27.4.12

Stage-Representational Variation

In other instances, lavishly adorned *festa teatrale* were striking in their grandeur. A notable example was the staging of Johann Adolf Hasse's *Alcide al Bivio*, with a libretto by Metastasio, and Gluck's *Tetide*, with a text by Giovanni Ambrogio Migliavacca. These compositions, created in 1760 to celebrate the marriage of Joseph, then Archduke, to his first wife Isabella of Parma, boasted magnificent scenery, elaborate costumes, and a special mechanism imported from France that could elevate gods and goddesses into the air. Caterina Gabrielli, the lead actress in *Tetide*, sat on a throne adorned with seaweed, surrounded by nereids

and newts [16, p. 102]. The renowned theater decorator and architect Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni (1695–1766) traveled from Paris to Vienna to supervise the preparation of the sets for both performances.

Theatrical representation appears to have been a prominent distinguishing characteristic of this particular variety of dynastic operas. Another essential aspect could be seen in the association of mythological or allegorical figures with the noble patron, who was greatly flattered by such parallels. In Metastasio's serenade, the wise character of Thetis symbolized Maria Theresia, serving as an exemplary figure for newlyweds [17]. Similarly, in *Alcide al Bivio*, renowned for its storyline revolving around the ancient hero's choice between pleasure and virtue, the parallels with Joseph were equally evident. However, these allusions were not exclusive to *festa teatrale* or serenades; they were also present in operas seria staged in court theaters. Nevertheless, while the plot structures and dramatic motifs in grand and minor opera shared similarities, the composition had its distinct characteristics. Monelle summarized the defining qualities of *festa teatrale* poetics as follows [3, p. 310]:

- inclusion of choruses featuring gods, nymphs, shepherds, fishermen, hunters, where choral lines alternated with solo lines;
- incorporation of ballet numbers;
- elaborate arias;
- significant presence of *accompagnato* recitatives, sometimes integrated within an aria, transforming it into a dramatic scene;
- departure from the conventional grand opera composition with exit arias of characters leaving the stage.

All of the mentioned compositional principles, albeit to varying degrees, are present in both the 1760 wedding operas, *Tetide* and *Alcide al Bivio*. In the case of *Tetide*, there are three choruses, two *accompagnato* recitatives, a duet, and a quartet. *Alcide al Bivio* has six *accompagnato* recitatives, one of them (Alcides') being an extended scene with dynamic orchestral ritournelles, along with three choral numbers. These choral numbers include the cupids in the retinue of Edonide, who personifies Pleasure, the heroes and heroines in the retinue of Arete, symbolizing Virtue, and the servants of the temple of Glory. Additionally, the libretto of *Alcide al Bivio* indicates the presence of three dances. In all cases, the solo numbers consist of large *da capo* (*dal segno*) arias with elaborate vocal parts. The roles performed by Caterina Gabrielli — Tetide in Gluck's opera and Edonide in Hasse's opera — showcased remarkable virtuosity. The vocal splendor of her arias, as well as the solo numbers written for the castrato Giovanni Manzuoli, resonated with the festive spirit of the performances and complemented the opulent stage decorations and theatrical "miracles." It was this representational variation of *festa teatrale* that set the context for Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*, introducing a new perspective in evaluating the reformist transformations.

Despite the opposition between the Metastasio-Hasse alliance and the “party” led by Giacomo Durazzo, the intendant of the imperial theatres, *Alcide al Bivio* was repeatedly regarded as a work closely aligned with the reformist movement in Vienna. Monelle first expressed this idea [3, pp. 317–324], which was later supported by Ernest Harris, who thoroughly described the opera scene by scene [5], as well as by Raffaele Mellace [4], and Andrea Sommer-Mathis [17, p. 40]. Their conclusions are hardly disputable today. Between *Alcide al Bivio* and Calzabigi-Gluck’s *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), there exists not only chronological proximity but also musical and dramaturgical similarities, such as baroque stage effects, choruses, dances, accompanied recitatives, and instrumental episodes, including extended opening ritournelles in the arias.

Orfeo ed Euridice Among Viennese Small-Scale Genre Operas

This analogy with *feste teatrali* is further reinforced by two other works that bear resemblance to *Orfeo*: Gluck’s *L’innocenza giustificata* (1755) and Tommaso Traetta’s *Armida* (1761). The main roles in these works were performed by the same singers as in *Alcide al Bivio* and *Tetide* – Caterina Gabrielli and Giovanni Manzuoli. Durazzo, the chief ideologist of the reform, was involved in both operas. For Gluck, he wrote the libretto, borrowing some verses from Metastasio; and for Traetta, he adapted the text of Philippe Quinault, composed in 1686 for Jean-Baptiste Lully.

Both operas followed the Franco-Italian style, which was fashionable not only in Vienna but also in Parma, Stuttgart, and Mannheim. This trend had a political background due to the rearrangement of state alliances during the Seven Years’ War, with France increasingly asserting its leadership role. As a result, Gallomania began to influence new tastes in musical theater. The recipe was simple yet highly effective: a combination, or rather a fusion, of features from French and Italian opera. French opera contributed choruses, ballet, recitatives accompanied by an orchestra, and a compositional variety of scenes, while Italian opera brought forth large extended arias.

In *L’innocenza giustificata*, an opera based on the story of the virtuous vestal Claudia who proved her innocence, Gluck and Durazzo proposed a fundamentally new solution for the finale. Departing from the customary *festa teatrale* format, they crafted a large and dramatically tense scene consisting of choruses, solo lines, and secco and accompanied recitatives. Only the small final dance divertissement aligned with the spirit of this *festa teatrale*, written to celebrate the birthday of Franz Stephan, Maria Theresa’s consort. The rest of the action exuded a mood of anxious anticipation leading to the denouement. This opera marked a turning point for Gluck, as its final scene was unlike anything he had created before. It paved the way for his operatic experiments of the 1760s.

Armida must have appeared even more avant-garde and distinctly “French” to the Viennese audience. The libretto vividly depicted colorful stage settings such as Armida’s gardens, a gloomy gorge, miraculous transformations with moving mechanisms, and even Armida’s flying chariot — everything that evokes the theatrical techniques of the 17th century. The chorus, integrated into the action, plays a significant role in *Armida*. Particularly impressive is the dynamic c-moll chorus of the Furies, summoned by Armida to overcome her love and gain the strength to kill Rinaldo. It exhibited a kinship with the choruses and dances of the Furies from *Orfeo* and the “furioso” episodes from the ballet *Don Juan*, staged in October of the same year 1761 as *Armida*. It is probably this episode that became an inspirational impulse for Gluck.

Gluck’s *Orfeo* was also written in this vein and within the same genre. It seems like only one step remains to conclude its parity with works composed of the same compositional and stylistic elements. Then, one could even refer to *Orfeo ed Euridice* as the adaptation of the *festa teatrale* genre norm. However, despite extensive research on small-scale opera genres and the literal “rediscovery” of dozens of compositions, despite the wealth of collected material, and despite the assertions that *Orfeo* proposed nothing revolutionary beyond the compositional and dramaturgical means already known at the time, the historical assessment of Gluck’s masterpiece as a whole must remain unchanged.

Judging by the result, Gluck formed his position in polemics not only with grand opera *seria* but also with the diverse range of small-scale operas, regardless of their terminological designations. The crucial difference, in my opinion, is that *Orfeo* was not just “one of” but the most radical reformative experience. Gluck presented the techniques and means familiar from other small forms with maximum concentration and dramatic effectiveness. However, he did not stop there.

What fundamentally distinguished this composition from previous works, including those by Gluck, was the treatment of the solo number — the aria. It was the “backbone” and core of the musical composition in both opera *seria* and *festa teatrale*. The monumental *da capo* form, typically accompanied by virtuoso coloratura, and the various yet recognizable types of expressiveness, all constituted the artistic essence of the Italian operatic tradition of the 18th century. It was this concept of the aria that was retained in almost all the operas of the “new wave,” including the *feste teatrali*, which shared structural similarities with *Orfeo*. The grand Italian aria remained the defining feature of the Italian tradition, representing mixed Franco-Italian works, and it was not abandoned by Hasse, Traetta, or even Gluck himself — until *Orfeo*. Against the backdrop of brilliant solo numbers, the large scenes with choruses and dances, as well as the recitatives with dynamic orchestral accompaniment, seemed like important additions rather than determining factors.

In *Orfeo*, however, the priority of the aria as the major element of an opera composition was shaken, and its place was taken by flexible arioso forms, where simple and expressive cantilena alternated with expressive recitatives, transforming the solo number into a scene. Gluck's rejection of the monumental aria, which had turned operas into gigantic suites, marked his polemic with tradition. Even though *Orfeo* adapted numerous compositional techniques from the *festa teatrale* tradition, this departure is still seen as a reformist gesture.

Small-Scale Genres After "Orfeo"

It is even more intriguing to examine the fate of small-scale genres after *Orfeo* and explore its possible influences. I have selected three works written almost simultaneously: Hasse's *Partenope* (1767) and *Piramo e Tisbe* (1768), and Florian Leopold Gassmann's *Amore e Psiche* (1767).

The relation of Hasse's *Partenope*, written to a libretto by Metastasio, to Gluck's "gold standard" is the easiest to discern. It was composed to celebrate the betrothal of King Ferdinand IV of Naples and Maria Josepha, daughter of Empress Maria Theresa. This two-part *festa teatrale* consists of a sequence of arias and secco recitatives, unfolding the unpretentious intrigue of two pairs of noble lovers. In accordance with Monelle's conventions, each part of *Partenope* includes choruses and accompanied recitatives. The choruses, akin to two grand portals, frame the entire composition with their static nature. The orchestral recitatives are quite modest. Hasse's arias, as in his later operas, are graceful, harmonious, and virtuosic. The desired harmony sought by the royal newlyweds is only slightly tempered by minor nuances, while the choruses imbue the *festa teatrale* with the necessary solemnity. However, all these elements are mere supplements to the arias. In other words, there are no traces of *Orfeo*'s influence to be found in *Partenope*.⁶

Gassmann's *Amore e Psiche*, performed only once — just two days before *Partenope* — for the same occasion, presents a more ambiguous relation to the direction set by *Orfeo*. Gluck shared more similarities with Florian Gassmann than with Johann Adolph Hasse.⁷ Although Gassmann initially relied on Metastasio's authority in his early career in Vienna, after *Amore e Psiche* he did not compose another opera based on Metastasio's texts and eventually joined the "party" of Durazzo.

6 The vibrant melodies of *Partenope* formed a stark contrast with the tragic events that unfolded just a month after its performance on September 9th. On the very day Maria Josepha was scheduled to travel to Naples to meet her future husband, she tragically passed away due to smallpox. Gassmann's opera, *Amore e Psiche*, is also intertwined with this sorrowful event.

7 In terms of their biographies, Gluck and Gassmann shared several similarities, particularly in their early years. With a 15-year age difference, both were born in Bohemia. They defied their fathers' wishes and pursued careers in music, finding success first in Italy and later in Vienna. In 1763, Gassmann took over as composer of ballet and later theater music, following in Gluck's footsteps

Amore e Psiche was crafted to a libretto by Marco Coltellini, a friend and pupil of Ranieri de' Calzabigi. Therefore, the similarities between Coltellini's libretto and *Orfeo* are hardly coincidental. Gustav Donath and Robert Haas, authors of the sole dedicated work on Gassmann published over a century ago, suggested that the composer himself selected the plot and influenced its development. According to them, the striking resemblance in both the poetic text and musical solutions to the Gluckian model cannot be explained otherwise [19, p. 66]. However, this hypothesis, in my view, holds little legitimacy. It diverges excessively from the typical dynamics of the relationships between the client (impresario), the poet, and the composer during that era, where the composer, as a rule, was solely responsible for the music and had minimal influence on the choice of the plot. Nevertheless, it is highly plausible that Coltellini was familiar with Calzabigi's libretto and may have drawn inspiration from it, whether consciously or subconsciously.

There are indeed many similarities between the librettos of the two operas. And it is not only the reliance on ancient sources—the Greek myth in *Orfeo* and the tale from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in *Amore e Psiche*. There are also more specific points of contact in plot motifs and compositional means. Both operas explore the theme of separated lovers, where the heroes (Orpheus and Psyche) descend into the underworld to fulfill the gods' commands. Additionally, the plots revolve around motifs of prohibition and its violation: Orpheus must not look back while leading Eurydice out of Hades, or else she will perish, and Psyche must not see her husband's face, or she will lose him forever. Inevitably, both protagonists break these taboos, resulting in death or a perilous ordeal. Following the Franco-Italian style of the 1760s, Coltellini, influenced by his mentor, incorporates choral and dance scenes into the libretto.

The musical composition of *Amore e Psiche* reveals Gassmann's close familiarity with the score of *Orfeo*. Certain scenes appear as paraphrases of Gluck's work. Gassmann seems particularly impressed by the technique of alternation between choral and solo parts, creating grand rondo-like compositions. The opera showcases numerous expressive declamatory passages and a well-developed orchestral part that reveals the influence of Gluck's techniques and Gassmann's own experience in composing orchestral works. There are even instances where melodic and harmonic solutions exhibit noticeable closeness. The initial phrases in Cupid's aria from Act 1, for instance, seem to be composed of two unmistakable melodic turns from Orpheus's arias in Acts 1 and 3 (*Example 2*).

And when sorrowful nymphs accompany Psyche to a gloomy cave where she is to wed a dreadful monster in Act 2 of Gassmann's opera, the texture and harmony of their chorus directly reference Gluck's chorus of the Furies and sympathetic spirits, who took pity on Orpheus.

In *Amore e Psiche*, Gassmann undoubtedly drew upon Gluck's expertise. Moreover, it seems like he even aimed to surpass Gluck in certain aspects,

Allegro molto

Grand' a - pra al di le ci - glia fra tan - ta ma - ra - vi - glia

b) Eu - ri - di - ce?

a) Orfeo: Chir - mo il mio

Example 2. Florian Gassmann *Amore e Psiche*, 1st Act, Amore's aria (a),
Christoph Willibald Gluck *Orfeo ed Euridice*, 3rd Act, Orfeo's aria (b),
1st Act, Orfeo's aria (c)

including quantitatively. Gassmann's opera features as many as six roles for the chorus: shepherds, nymphs, priests, furies, Psyche's sisters, and spirits of pleasure, compared to *Orfeo's* three: shepherds and nymphs, blissful shadows, and Furies. Additionally, Gassmann employed the compositional technique of comic opera by crafting a genuine ensemble finale at the end of the second act, a technique Gluck did not employ. But on the whole, both Gassmann and his librettist Coltellini exhibit less radicality and consistency compared to Gluck and Calzabigi. The action in *Amore e Psiche* is more congested and ramified than what is typical for small-scale operas, reflecting the influence of opera *seria*. But, most importantly, the musical composition is divided into two independent layers: one featuring developed scenes and expressive recitatives, and the other showcasing large virtuosic arias that seem to have come directly from opera *seria*, standing completely apart from the reformist path. And these arias are performed not only by supporting characters like Psiamore e psicheche's father Palemont, Venus, and Zephyr, but also by the main characters, Cupid and Psyche. Gassmann's opera is more dramatically intense and compositionally complex than many "dynastic" works. It does carry a hint of the energy found in Gluck's *Orfeo*, but only to a certain extent.

The last work to be discussed is *Piramo e Tisbe*, Hasse's *intermezzo tragico* with a libretto by Marco Coltellini. It stands apart from other small-scale operas for several reasons. It was composed not for the court theater but on a commission from a French lady⁸ and performed in her private theater in 1768. Two years later, the opera was repeated several times in the presence of the imperial family at the small theater of Laxenburg castles, located on the outskirts of Vienna, which was the court's summer retreat. Hasse proudly wrote to Giammaria Ortes,

Si è data l'occasione, che ha dovuto esser rappresentata davanti alla M. dell'Imperadrice l'ultima mia opera, de' cui già le scrissi nell'anno dunque in scena nel teatro di Laxenburg, ove la corte si trovò in villeggiatura. Si recitò varie volte. Vi fu sempre oltre la Famiglia Imp. le il fior della nobiltà. <...> E m'è permesso di dir quello ch'è vero, non ho mai avanti monarchi prodotto una cosa che abbia avuto un sì felice incontro, né che sia

8 Pancino L. (Ed.). (1998). Johann Adolf Hasse e Giammaria Ortes. *Lettere* (1760—1783). Brespolis, p. 160.

stata ascoltata con simile silenzio. Sin dalla prima sera la M. dell'Imperadrice mi fece dopo l'opera montar nella sua loggia, per palesarmi il clementiss.mo suo gradimento, e l'ultima sera fece l'istesso, degnandosi di donarmi colle proprie sue mani un magnifico anello.⁹

In both the initial and subsequent stagings, performers were amateurs, hence their names were not included in the libretti printed by the Viennese printing house *Ghelen*. But perhaps most remarkable of all, unlike other small-scale operas, these performances were not associated with any specific celebration. For Hasse, a commission for summer “entertainment” music, and furthermore, intended to be performed by amateurs, was unlikely to be particularly lucrative. Nevertheless, the 69-year-old composer accepted the commission and later, in letters to his friend, the Venetian composer and philosopher Giammaria Ortes, he repeatedly regarded *Piramo e Tisbe* as his finest work, highlighting his advanced age with a sense of pride: “The fact that I am still writing operas <...> surprises everyone here.”¹⁰ The unconfinedness and deliberate simplicity of such a “bagatelle” granted the composer much more artistic freedom. Hasse, who had previously left the court service in Dresden and had no obligations in Vienna, may have found such a task appealing.

The second important point is the opera's unique genre designation as an *intermezzo tragico*. Coltellini and Hasse played on a paradox: the *intermezzo*, a comedic genre, was given a tragic plot for the first time. The libretto was based on a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about the two unhappy lovers separated by the will of their parents. The small size, simplicity of the plot, absence of mass scenes, and the small number of characters (Pyramus, Thisbe, and her father) were inherited from *intermezzo*. However, the overall composition of the opera, with its original combination of components familiar from various opera genres and national traditions, is apparently unparalleled – neither in opera seria, nor in musical comedy, nor even in *festa teatrale*. *Piramo* has seven scenes grouped in two parts, as is usual for an *intermezzo*, but that is where the similarities end. It features ten arias, four duets, 11 *accompagnato* recitatives, and only seven *secco* recitatives. Additionally, there is a large ballet scene, but not a single choral episode – a unique “set” of components for a 18th-century composition.

The unusual nature of this opera prompts us to look for points of contact with works of a reformist persuasion, despite the fact that the composer himself never declared any such ideas. Moreover, Hasse belonged to Metastasio's “party” in opposition to the triumvirate of Durazzo-Calzabigi-Gluck. Nor, as far as we can tell from his operas of the 1750s and 1760s, did he share the enthusiasm

9 “I had the opportunity to present my latest opera, which was written a year ago, to Her Majesty the Empress. <...> The opera enjoyed multiple performances, with each one graced by the presence of the imperial family and the vibrant atmosphere of high society. <...> Truth be told, never before has my composition been received so warmly in the presence of monarchs, nor have I experienced such profound silence during its performance. On the very first night, Her Majesty graciously invited me to her box after the show to express her approval. And on the final evening, she personally presented me with a splendid ring”. *Ibid.*, p. 212.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 160–161, 165.

for the Franco-Italian style. Nevertheless, the closest association arises with Gluck's *Orfeo*, written six years before *Piramo e Tisbe*. It is no coincidence that Francesco Degrada in 1974 [20] and Sieghart Döhring in 1999 [21] drew from this thesis in their analysis of Hasse's opera. Both scholars examined the *intermezzo tragico* in the context of Gluck's operatic reform and concluded that while there are undoubted parallels between Hasse's late opera and *Orfeo*, they do not define its essence. Degrada saw a difference in aesthetic orientations—the classical style (Gluck) versus pre-Romantic impulses (Hasse) [20, p. 22]. Döhring, referring to the assessments of Hasse's contemporaries — Johann Adam Hiller, Johann Friedrich Reichardt, Johann Carl Friedrich Rellstab — interpreted *Piramo e Tisbe* as a search for a new path to the synthesis between tradition and innovation, somewhat similar to Gluck's approach, but not identical to it [21, p. 138, p. 146].

The closest connection to the reformist movement can be observed in Coltellini's libretto. The poet boldly included quotes from Calzabigi's famous lines in *Orfeo*: in Pyramus' aria, he used the opening of Orpheus' recitative in Elysium, *Che puro ciel* [20, p. 17]. In addition to Degrada's example, we can note Thisbe's line, *Che faro senz' il mio ben*, which literally coincides with the words from Orpheus' aria, *Che faro senz' Euridice*, along with several other allusions. The emphasis in the libretto is not on demonstrating stereotypical affects or figurative topoi; rather, it focuses on the nuances not even of affects but of emotions, albeit expressed most often through the familiar lexical turns of *dramma per musica*.

Unlike Coltellini, Hasse did not opt for dialogue. It seems as if he purposefully turned away from reformist temptations and returned to the melancholic Arcadian pastorals of his teacher, Alessandro Scarlatti. The tragic *intermezzo* is completely devoid of monumentality. The absence of choral scenes directs all attention to the arias, which Hasse greatly emphasizes. However, unlike Gassmann, there is no ambivalence, as the solo numbers seamlessly integrate into the through-composed "reformist" scenes. They are perceived as a nostalgic reverence for the bygone 1730s and even for an earlier tradition — the refined Roman operas of the late 17th century. Their verbal expressiveness, melodic plasticity, skillfulness, and touching naivety bring to mind the music of both the late Pergolesi and the young genius who was only 12 years old in 1768 — Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Thus, Hasse's position is polemical in relation to both Gluck's *Orfeo*, with its vivid scene contrasts and dynamic musical development, and *festa teatrale*, where there were no — and could not be — such flexible transitions between singing and recitation, and such a focus on the characters' nuanced personal experiences, as seen in *Piramo e Tisbe*.

In Hasse's correspondence with Ortes, the topic of *Orfeo* arose in 1771. This discussion was prompted by the staging of Gluck's opera in Bologna, which, according

to Ortes (a letter of June 22), incurred significant expenses¹¹ [13, p. 231]. After a month of silence, Hasse finally responded to his friend on July 17, with a touch of irony, “I was delighted to hear that everyone in Bologna was thoroughly entertained and found an opera to their liking. Although the opera was performed here four times, I did not have the opportunity to hear it due to my gout attacks.” [13, pp. 231–232] It is difficult to say for sure whether the aging composer slyly pretended or genuinely did not know a single note from the score of *Orfeo*. Most likely, even if he was acquainted with it, he simply did not want or could not “hear” it, let alone admit it.

Summary

Small-scale opera genres did not have a long life in Vienna. Hasse’s *Partenope* (1767) was the last to use the term *festa teatrale*. After Metastasio, none of the librettists addressed it again. The opera *La corona* (1765, Metastasio-Gluck), intended to be performed but canceled due to the death of Franz Stephan, marked the end of *azione teatrale*. The reign of Maria Theresa seems to have been the most fruitful period for dynastic genres at the Viennese court. However, with the passing of her beloved husband, the Empress lost her interest in lively jublations, including operas of this kind. Nevertheless, the history of these genres in the 18th century encompassed virtually all the acute collisions in the development of musical theater.

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¹¹ The libretto, published for this production by the Bolognese printing house Sassi, includes not only the names of the performers, composer, and set designers but also the creators of the costumes and stage machinery, as well as the number of choristers (11 men and 11 women). Such a detailed description may have been intended to justify the expenses.

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