

INTRODUCTION

“We are now arrived at a splendid period in the annals of the musical drama, when, by the arrival of GIOVANNI MANZOLI, the serious opera acquired a degree of favour to which it had seldom mounted, since its first establishment in this country.”¹ Thus Charles Burney, in his chronicle of Italian opera in eighteenth-century London, introduced his account of the 1764–65 season at the King’s Theatre, which began in November 1764 and ended in May 1765, by focusing the reader’s attention on a single great singer. Leopold Mozart confirmed the status of the *musicò* Manzoli as the season’s central figure. The Mozarts lived in London during the entire season. In a letter of 8 February 1765, about halfway through the season, Leopold wrote:

This winter nobody is making as much money as Manzoli and a few others in the opera. Manzuoli is getting 1500 pounds sterling for this winter. . . . In addition he has a benefit, that is, a night’s receipts for himself, so that this winter he is making more than 20,000 German *Gulden*. He is the only person whom they have had to pay decently in order to set the opera on its feet again [after a previous impresario went bankrupt].²

Leopold’s principal interest in the London opera was financial; but nevertheless he agreed with Burney in placing Manzoli at the center of attention.

Burney recorded the impression that Manzoli made in the season’s first opera, in a paragraph that mentions a composer only in passing:

The expectations which the great reputation of this performer had excited were so great, that at the opening of the theatre

1. Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, vol. 4 (London, 1789), 484. This introduction, with slight modification, is based on John A. Rice, “Adriano in Siria,” in *Operas of JCB*, 85–96.

2. “Niemand macht diesen Winter grosses Geld als Manzoli und einige andere von der Opera. Manzuoli [*sic*] hat 1500 Pf: Ster: für diesen Winter. . . . Nebst diesem hat er auch ein Benefit, das ist eine Nachts-Recita für ihn, so daß er diesen Winter über 20000. Teutsche gulden ziehet. das [*ist*] auch der einzige den man rechtschaffen hat bezahlen müssen, um der Opera wieder aufzuhelfen.” Leopold Mozart to Lorenz Hagenauer, 8 February 1765, *MBA*, 1:178–79. Author’s translation here and in note 5. Manzoli’s name is often spelled “Manzuoli” in the secondary literature, but the present volume uses “Manzoli,” as it most often appears in eighteenth-century documents.

in November, with the pasticcio of EZIO, there was such a crowd assembled at all the avenues, that it was with very great difficulty I obtained a place, after waiting two hours at the door. Manzoli’s voice was the most powerful and voluminous soprano that had been heard on our stage since the time of Farinelli; and his manner of singing was grand and full of taste and dignity. In this first opera he had three songs, composed by Pescetti, entirely in different styles: *Recagli quell’acciario*, an animated *aria parlante*; *Caro mio bene addio*, an adagio in a grand style of cantabile; and *Mi dona mi rende*, of a graceful kind, all which he executed admirably. The lovers of Music in London were more unanimous in approving his voice and talents than those of any other singer within my memory. The applause was hearty, unequivocal, and free from all suspicion of artificial zeal; it was a universal thunder. His voice alone was commanding from native strength and sweetness; for it seems as if subsequent singers had possessed more art and feeling; and as to execution, he had none. However, he was a good actor, though unwieldy in figure, and not well made in person; neither was he young when he arrived in London; yet the sensations he excited seem to have been more irresistible and universal, than I have ever been witness to in any theatre.³

Burney went on to evaluate the troupe that had been gathered around Manzoli:

SCOTTI, the first woman, with an elegant figure, a beautiful face, and a feeble voice, sung in a very good taste; and, though in want of power, she possessed great flexibility and expression. Tenducci, the second man, now arrived for the second time, and much improved; Ciprandi, an excellent tenor; Cremonini, second woman, a good musician, with a modern style of singing, but almost without voice; and Miss Young, afterwards Mrs. Barthelemon, composed the company.⁴

Especially noteworthy in this company was the presence of a second first-rate *musicò* in the person of Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci. He had sung in London for several years, in English as well as Italian opera. In other words, he lacked Manzoli’s novelty, which helps to explain why he now attracted much less attention. The Italian opera

3. Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:485.

4. *Ibid.*

troupe in the King's Theatre for the operatic season 1764–65 was as follows:

Name	Voice type; role in troupe
Giovanni Manzoli	<i>musico; primo uomo</i>
Teresa Scotti	soprano; <i>prima donna</i>
Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci	<i>musico; secondo uomo</i>
Ercole Ciprandi	tenor; <i>secondo uomo</i>
Clementina Cremonini	soprano; <i>seconda donna</i>
Polly Young	soprano; minor roles
Leopoldo Micheli	tenor; minor roles

I have followed Burney in describing Tenducci as the troupe's *secondo uomo*; but I have also applied the same term to Ciprandi, since many *secondo uomo* parts were written for tenor.

Leopold Mozart, after enviously enumerating Manzoli's financial gains, turned to the operatic repertory: "Five or six operas are being performed. The first was *Ezio*, the second *Berenice*, both so-called pasticcios by different masters; the third was *Adriano in Siria*, newly composed by Signor Bach. And I know that a newly composed *Demofonte* by Vento is coming, and then a couple of more pasticcios."⁵ Leopold came close to a complete list of the season's operas (see table 1). In that list, three things stand out. The repertory in the King's Theatre in 1764–65 consisted entirely of opera seria; it was dominated by settings of libretti by Metastasio, author of six out of seven; and a big part of the repertory consisted of pasticcios.⁶

In discussing the singers who performed these operas, Burney slipped Bach's name into the narrative surreptitiously, in a footnote attached to the tenor Ciprandi, who "was very deservedly applauded and generally encored in Bach's charming air: *Non so donde viene*, originally composed for the celebrated tenor Raaf."⁷ Only later did Burney give more sustained attention to composers—those of the individual arias and ensembles in the pasticcios, and those of complete operas.

"Every composer now in London," wrote Burney, "was

5. "Hingegen werden 5. oder 6. opern aufgeführt, die erste ware Ezio, die 2.^{te} Berenice, alle zwey waren sogenannte Pasticci von unterschiedlichen Maistern. die 3.^{te} ware Adriano in Syria von Sigr: Bach neu componirt. Nun weis ich das eine neu componirte Demofonte vom Vento kommt. und dann noch ein paar Passticci." *MBA*, 1:179.

6. The information in table 1 relies primarily on Frederick C. Petty, *Italian Opera in London, 1760–1800* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 105.

7. Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:485 for this and the subsequent quotation. "Non so donde viene" was written for *Alessandro nell'Indie* (JCB:ODW, vol. 3) but was performed in *Ezio* in a revised version (see JCB:ODW, vol. 16, pt. 1).

ambitious of writing for such a performer as Manzoli." Bach was presumably among the composers eager to collaborate with the celebrated *musico*. But the feeling may not have been mutual. According to Elizabeth Harris, an enthusiastic follower (and spreader) of operatic gossip, "Monzolie [*sic*] had made a vow never to sing where Bach compos'd."⁸ If Harris's report is true, Italian musicians in London who resented the privileged place that the self-described "Saxon Professor" had won at court may have encouraged Manzoli to refuse to work with him. Unlike two of the other famous singers for whom Bach wrote parts in his later operas—Tommaso Guarducci and Anton Raaff—Manzoli had not established a professional relationship with Bach in Italy, perhaps making the singer susceptible to the malign influence of his countrymen on his arrival in London.

The conflict, in any case, did not last long, as Harris wrote: "but this quarell is now made up & Bach is to compose one opera."⁹ After spending the 1763–64 season writing instrumental music and overseeing its publication, teaching, and strengthening his ties with Queen Charlotte and the royal family, Bach returned to the Haymarket and to Italian opera.

The Libretto

With his first two operas for London, *Orione* (Warb G 4) and *Zanaida* (Warb G 5) (both settings of libretti by Giovan Gualberto Bottarelli, the latter only distantly related to Metastasio's early libretto *Siface, re di Numidia*), Bach had distanced himself from Metastasio. With *Adriano in Siria* (Warb G 6) he may have hoped to repeat the success he achieved with his settings of Metastasio's libretti in Italy. This libretto, presumably chosen by mutual agreement of Manzoli, Bach, and the management of the King's Theatre, could have appealed to them for several reasons. It was one of Metastasio's most popular dramas, produced more than fifty times between its first performance (with music by Antonio Caldara) in Vienna in 1731 and the performance of Bach's opera in 1765. Several of the most celebrated composers of the age, including Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, Baldassare Galuppi, and Johann Adolf Hasse, had set it to music. Two settings had been performed in London, in 1735 (with music by Francesco Veracini) and

8. *Music and Theatre in Handel's World: The Family Papers of James Harris, 1732–1780*, ed. Donald Burrows and Rosemary Dunhill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 430.

9. *Ibid.*

TABLE I. REPERTORY OF THE KING'S THEATRE IN THE OPERATIC SEASON 1764–65

Opera	Librettist	Composer	Number of performances	First performance
<i>Ezio</i>	Metastasio	pasticcio	19	24 November 1764
<i>Berenice</i> (= <i>Antigono</i>)	Metastasio	pasticcio	6	1 January 1765
<i>Adriano in Siria</i>	Metastasio	J.C. Bach	7	26 January 1765
<i>Demofonte</i>	Metastasio	Mattia Vento	14	2 March 1765
<i>Il re pastore</i>	Metastasio	Felice Giardini	3	6 March 1765
<i>L'olimpiade</i>	Metastasio	Thomas Arne	2	27 April 1765
<i>Il Solimano</i>	Migliavacca	pasticcio	7	14 May 1765

in 1750 (with music by Vincenzo Ciampi). Those productions, fifteen years apart, made the libretto familiar enough to some London opera lovers to enhance their pleasure another fifteen years later, giving those with good memories (or copies of the *Favourite Songs*) a chance to compare Bach's new setting with the earlier ones.

Like most opera seria libretti based on historical personages and events, *Adriano* is mostly fiction. In the *argomento* that precedes the drama, Metastasio cited the ancient historians Dio Cassius and Aelius Spartianus. From them he took a few elements of his story. Hadrian was governor of the Roman province of Syria, residing in its capital Antioch during a war between Rome and the Parthians, who occupied a vast territory corresponding to today's Iraq, Iran, and parts of Turkey. On the death of Emperor Trajan, Hadrian was acclaimed emperor. Trajan's conquests had left the Roman empire overextended, and the new emperor found himself beset by rebellions. To consolidate the empire he withdrew to more defensible borders, including, in the far east, the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Of his personal life the historians said little except that his wife was named Sabina and that he loved a young man named Antinous so deeply that when Antinous died, Hadrian named a city after him and proclaimed him a god.

Metastasio placed the action in Syria, shortly after Hadrian (henceforth *Adriano*) has attained the imperial throne. The only other character that he derived from the historians is *Adriano's* fiancée Sabina. Osroa, the fierce king of the Parthians, is a product of Metastasio's imagination, but inspired by the histories in that he personifies the rebellions that threatened the empire. *Adriano*, despite being engaged to Sabina, falls in love with Osroa's beautiful young daughter Emirena. She is another newly invented character; she serves as a kind of heterosexual stand-in for the historical Antinous, since a homosexual relationship

between *Adriano* and Antinous could not be depicted on stage. Emirena is the drama's *prima donna*; her lover, the Parthian prince Farnaspe, is the *primo uomo*. Metastasio rounded out the *dramatis personae* with the Roman tribune Aquilio, who is in love with Sabina and deviously tries to keep *Adriano* from reconciling with her.

The libretto printed for the third London production of *Adriano* does not mention who arranged Metastasio's drama in preparation for Bach's setting, but it was probably Bottarelli, the house poet who had provided him with the libretti for *Orione* and *Zanaida*, and with whom he was later to collaborate on *Carattaco* and the heavily revised version of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. The editor greatly reduced the length of Metastasio's libretto, while also adding to it a minor character and two scenes that, as set to music by Bach, are among the opera's musical and dramatic high points.¹⁰

The editor cut a few scenes in their entirety and, in almost every remaining scene, radically pruned the luxuriant dialogue that Metastasio intended to be set as recitative. In the original libretto, act 2 ends with arias sung in quick succession by Emirena, Osroa, and Farnaspe. The editor replaced them with a trio for the same characters—a major change in a libretto that originally contained only a single ensemble (the love duet for Emirena and Farnaspe at the end of act 1).

The cuts left room for new elements. The editor gave Sabina a confidante, Barsene, who has only a few lines of dialogue but two arias. More important additions are recitatives and arias for Emirena and Farnaspe in act 2, slowing down the action and focusing the audience's attention on the two young lovers. In Metastasio's scene 6, Emirena,

10. For a chart listing the numbers in all three London versions of *Adriano* see Michael Burden, "Metastasio on the British Stage: A Catalogue," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 40 (2007): 34–35.

waiting for Farnaspe to be freed from prison, expresses her impatience in an opening cavatina, which is followed almost immediately by Farnaspe's appearance. In the version of the libretto set by Bach, the cavatina is replaced with a long and emotional monologue for Emirena ("Ecco l'ora, ecco il loco"), followed by a big aria (no. 12), "Deh lascia, o ciel pietoso." Only after this aria does Farnaspe appear. In the following scene, Metastasio placed Farnaspe and Emirena alone together, but forestalled any amorous conversation with the off-stage sound of combat. Whoever revised the libretto for Bach delayed the *strepito d'armi* for several minutes, giving Farnaspe and Emirena time to exchange endearments and for Farnaspe to sing a passionate love song (no. 14), "Cara, la dolce fiamma."

The Cast

Bach's opera made full use of the Italian opera company, as listed in the libretto:

Singer	Role
Tenducci	Adriano
Ciprandi	Osroa
Scotti	Emirena
Manzoli	Farnaspe
Cremonini	Sabina
Young	Barsene
Micheli	Aquilio

Indeed, the libretto's editor probably added the role of Barsene so that Young, a member of the troupe, would not be idle during performances of *Adriano*.

By 1765 most of the greatest *musici* had portrayed Farnaspe. A more unusual feature of the libretto is that the role of Adriano (the *secondo uomo* role, which normally would have been sung by a tenor) also attracted castrated singers, making it especially useful for troupes that included two excellent *musici*. For instance, in Veracini's opera of 1735, Farinelli sang Farnaspe and Senesino sang Adriano. Before 1765 Manzoli had portrayed Adriano at least twice, while possibly never singing the role of Farnaspe.¹¹ Tenducci, in contrast, had sung Farnaspe, but apparently not Adriano.¹² We might have expected them to take the roles in Bach's opera with which they were most familiar, especially since Manzoli was considerably older than Tenducci. But Manzoli, as the company's pre-eminent star, sang Farnaspe while Tenducci sang Adriano.

11. Sartori, 7:395–96.

12. *Ibid.*, 7:633.

Synopsis and Musical Commentary

The time: about 117 AD. The place: Antioch, capital of the Roman province of Syria. Adriano, governor of Syria, has defeated the Parthians and has been acclaimed emperor of Rome. The Romans have captured Emirena, daughter of Osroa, king of the Parthians. Despite being engaged to the Roman Sabina, Adriano has fallen in love with the beautiful foreign princess.

After an overture in the three movements (fast-slow-fast) typical of the Italian operatic *sinfonia*, act 1 begins with Parthian dignitaries, including Osroa (who does not reveal his identity to Adriano) and Prince Farnaspe, bringing gifts to the emperor as tokens of their submission. Farnaspe declares his allegiance to Rome and asks Adriano to free Emirena. He tells the emperor that he and Emirena are engaged to be married, arousing Adriano's jealousy. But in the aria "Dal labbro che t'accende" (no. 1) the emperor expresses his willingness to let Emirena decide between Farnaspe and him. The aria is in binary form, with the second stanza of text set to music as the beginning of the *seconda parte*. Throughout the opera, arias vary in form, with various permutations of binary form constituting about two-thirds of the arias. Bach reserved *dal segno* arias—more old-fashioned but also more prestigious—for the four leading singers (Manzoli, Scotti, Tenducci, and Ciprandi); but only Manzoli sang *dal segno* arias exclusively.

Left alone, Osroa alludes to his plan to renew his struggle against the Romans while Farnaspe expresses his confidence in Emirena's love. The prince looks forward to a brighter future in "Disperato, in mar turbato" (no. 2), an aria in which a long stream of staccato 16th notes depicts a stormy sea. He goes off to find Emirena. Osroa proudly refuses to acknowledge defeat, likening himself to a mighty oak (aria no. 3, "Sprezza il furor del vento"). March rhythms and horn fanfares convey the Parthian king's military prowess.

The scene changes to the apartment in which Emirena is being held captive. The Roman tribune Aquilio loves Sabina, Adriano's fiancée, and hopes to win her by persuading Emirena to break off her engagement to Farnaspe and to marry Adriano. Following Aquilio's advice, when Farnaspe enters Emirena pretends not to recognize him. He responds to her apparent rejection in an aria (no. 4), "Dopo un tuo sguardo, ingrata," in a moderate tempo and with an accompaniment of strings alone: a tender expression of melancholy. After he leaves, Adriano

offers Emirena his hand in marriage. She, aware of his engagement to Sabina, refuses.

At that moment Sabina arrives from Rome with her confidante Barsene. Adriano, embarrassed and tongue-tied, withdraws. In “Vuoi punir l’ingrato amante?” (no. 5) Barsene advises Sabina (with gentle music in triple meter, accompanied by strings alone, and no coloratura) how to win back an errant lover. Emirena, left alone with Sabina, sees Adriano’s fiancée as a potential ally, but Sabina rejects her plea for help. Emirena expresses despair in her aria (no. 6) “Chi mai d’iniqua stella,” orchestrated with pairs of flutes and horns. So rare is Bach’s use of the minor mode in this opera that the B-section of Emirena’s *dal segno* aria, featuring a short but adventurous tour of minor keys (G minor, C minor, A minor, E minor) stands out conspicuously. Sabina asks the gods to help her win back Adriano’s love in an aria (no. 7), “Numi, se giusti siete,” whose fast tempo and exuberant coloratura suggest that Sabina believes the gods are indeed just and will answer her prayer.

Another change of scene reveals the imperial palace at night. Osroa and his followers have set the palace on fire. Farnaspe runs into the burning building to rescue Emirena. She emerges safely; he returns in chains. Suspected of starting the fire, Farnaspe is now a prisoner of the Romans. Emirena reveals her love for him. In the duet with which act 1 ends (no. 8), “Se non ti moro allato,” the lovers declare their willingness to die together. The duet is in sonata form, with the peaceful lyricism of the exposition and recapitulation (*Larghetto*) relieved by a more energetic development (*Allegro*). After addressing each other in turn, the lovers bring their voices together in chains of dissonant suspensions: an ascending sequence in the exposition replaced by a descending sequence in the recapitulation. To use Robert Gjerdingen’s terminology, a Corelli Leapfrog gives way to a contrapuntal Prinner.¹³

At the beginning of act 2 Emirena convinces Sabina that she loves Farnaspe, not Adriano. Sabina agrees to help the Parthian lovers escape together. Emirena expresses confidence in Sabina’s good will and looks forward to her marriage with Farnaspe in an aria (no. 9, “Non è la mia costanza”) that sparkles optimistically with coloratura.

Osroa enters, on his way to try to free Farnaspe from prison. Always the fierce warrior, he uses another simile to boast of his fortitude, now comparing himself to a

wounded lion in “Leon piagato a morte” (no. 10), an aria with an unusually richly orchestrated accompaniment, with a triplet figure being tossed back and forth from the second violins and violas (in parallel thirds) to the bass. A slowly ascending 7–6 sequence conveys something of the lion’s indomitable strength. Barsene, alone, expresses pity for soldiers and lovers, who seem to her to feel more pain than pleasure. Her aria “Quanto grato nell’amare” (no. 11), features one of Bach’s favorite galant schemata, the Triadic Ascent, which he deployed almost exactly as Mozart did twenty-five years later, near the end of the duet “Fra gli amplessi” in *Così fan tutte* (in the same key of A major).

In the imperial garden, Emirena waits for Farnaspe, expressing her anxiety and impatience in an orchestrally accompanied recitative. In her aria “Deh lascia, o ciel pietoso” (no. 12), colorfully orchestrated with flutes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns, she asks heaven to grant her peace. This is an exit aria, and Emirena is about to leave the stage when Sabina finally returns with Farnaspe. Sabina urges the couple to flee, wishing them happiness in her aria “Volga il ciel, felici amanti” (no. 13), in which chromatic appoggiaturas, resolving first to scale degree 6, then to scale degree 5, anticipate one of Mozart’s characteristic melodic devices. Emirena and Farnaspe declare their love once again, and Farnaspe urges Emirena not to fear for the future. In his splendid aria “Cara, la dolce fiamma” (no. 14), the vocal part begins with a long-held note accompanied by a Sol–Fa–Mi in the orchestra, allowing Manzoli to display his *messa di voce*; the melody that follows deploys the Galant Romanesca with exceptional beauty.¹⁴

The lovers begin their escape, but at the sound of clashing arms they stop. Osroa appears, disguised as a Roman soldier, and believing that Adriano has been assassinated. But the emperor has survived the attempt on his life, and he enters, accusing Farnaspe of treachery. To save her lover, Emirena shifts the blame to the man dressed as a Roman soldier, who now reveals his identity, proudly admitting his guilt. Enraged by Osroa’s hostility and Emirena’s rejection, Adriano orders the Parthians to be imprisoned, expressing anger and confusion in “Tutti nemici e rei” (no. 15)—the aria with the opera’s fastest tempo marking, *Allegro assai*. As if unable to wait for the expected orchestral introduction, Adriano enters the aria almost immediately, his voice overlapping with a short statement in the orchestra. A trio (no. 16), “Ah, genitore amato,” in which Emirena and Farnaspe ask Osroa for pity and urge him to moderate his

13. Robert O. Gjerdingen, *Music in the Galant Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 45–60 (on the Prinner) and 471 (on the Corelli Leapfrog).

14. *Ibid.*, 25–43 (on the Romanesca) and 253–62 (on the Sol–Fa–Mi).

anger, while Osroa boasts yet again of his courage, promising that his death will serve them as an example, brings act 2 to an end. Emirena and Farnaspe sing the same music, in turn, accompanied by legato strings; Osroa responds with completely different music, accompanied by staccato strings and loud exclamations in the winds.

Act 3 begins with an attempt by Aquilio to persuade Sabina to leave Antioch, to avoid any chance that she might win back Adriano. She follows his advice. Her aria “Digli ch’è un infedele” (no. 17) is a parting message for Adriano in which she states that she still loves him, despite his infidelity. Aquilio, alone, likens his dishonest machinations to the pruning of grapevines: “wounds” that eventually produce fruit (no. 18, “Più bella, al tempo usato”).

Adriano summons Osroa, to whom he offers the throne in exchange for Emirena’s hand in marriage. Osroa pretends to accept the offer, but when Emirena is summoned, he tells her to refuse the emperor’s proposal. Adriano responds with another expression of rage (no. 19, “Se l’amistà tu sdegni”). He decides to send Osroa to Rome in chains. Emirena comes close to fainting as she bids farewell to her lover and her father (no. 20, “Oh dio! mancar mi sento”). Bach accompanied the distraught princess with muted strings and bassoons that play in dialogue with the voice.

Osroa urges Farnaspe to show more strength and courage (no. 21, “Non ritrova un’alma forte”). Farnaspe, alone, sings the opera’s last aria. In “Son sventurato” (no. 22) he thanks heaven that, despite his misfortune, at least the causes of his suffering (the eyes of his beloved Emirena) are so beautiful. With pairs of clarinets, bassoons, and horns that play together—a wind band alternating with the strings—Bach may have intended to evoke the beauty to which Farnaspe refers in the aria.

The opera’s final scene presents a sudden reversal of fortune. The discovery of Aquilio’s deception leads to a reconciliation between Adriano and Sabina. In response to pleas for mercy from Emirena and Farnaspe, Adriano gives Osroa his freedom and his throne. He forgives Aquilio, and to Sabina he offers his hand in marriage. In the final chorus, a cheerful Allegro in triple meter (no. 23, “S’oda, Augusto, insin sull’etra”), everyone praises the emperor.

Reception and Sources

The large crowds that welcomed Manzoli at the beginning of the 1764–65 season and that filled the King’s Theatre for nineteen performances of the pasticcio *Ezio* reappeared at the premiere of *Adriano* on 26 January 1765. In a letter dated 27 January, Horace Walpole reported: “Our

last three Saturdays at the Opera have been prodigious, and a new opera by Bach last night was so crowded, that there were ladies standing behind the scenes during the whole performance.”¹⁵ Burney later remembered: “The expectations of the public the first night this drama was performed, occasioned such a crowd at the King’s theatre as had been seldom seen there before. It was impossible for a third part of the company collected together on this occasion to obtain places.”¹⁶ Everything, in short, boded well for a successful production of *Adriano*, as measured in large audiences, many performances, and perhaps even subsequent revivals.

But it was not to be. Bach’s opera was given seven times, considerably fewer than *Ezio* and Vento’s *Demofonte*, but more than Arne’s *L’olimpiade* (performed only twice). Unlike some of Bach’s other London operas (*Orione* and *La clemenza di Scipione*, Warb G 10), it seems never to have been revived. Although it cannot be called a total failure, Bach must have been disappointed at its reception.

Opera composers depended not only on the skill, but also on the good will of singers. The level of energy and enthusiasm that singers brought to an opera could make the difference between its success or failure. This was the theme of an anonymous article, attributed only to “A Footman,” in one of London’s daily papers, which attributed the failure of Arne’s *L’olimpiade*, performed three months after Bach’s *Adriano*, to the hostility of the Italian singers who performed it. The author singled out Manzoli, who “could not be persuaded to sing with the least brilliancy, and the most charming airs in the opera appeared, under his performance, to be totally devoid of spirit.” But “the whole Italian crew” was equally guilty: “for it seems that it has been a rule of long standing among Italian singers, never to *squall with éclat* in any other operas than those which are pure Italian.” The opera-loving “footman” went on to discuss the lack of success of Bach’s opera:

Indeed Dr. Arne’s is not the first opera *this season* which has furnished us with instances of this murderous partiality; for the extraordinary merit of Mr. Bach’s *Adriano in Siria* could not rescue it from the vengeance of these destroyers. It, like Dr. Arne’s was doom’d to oblivion as soon as it was presented; and why? because forsooth Mr. Bach did not breath Italian air as soon as he was born. It is strange that bigotry to one spot of ground should so violently overpower the rational

15. *The Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, ed. Peter Cunningham, 9 vols. (London, 1866), 4:320.

16. Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:486.

faculties. All but the Italians acknowledged the beauties of Mr. Bach's opera; and none but the Italians could have been capable of smothering so elegant a production.¹⁷

Burney reported *Adriano's* lack of success; indeed, he exaggerated it. Although he acknowledged that "the Italians" were delighted with this outcome, he refused to attribute the failure to Manzoli or the other Italian singers:

But whether from heat or inconvenience, the unreasonableness of expectation, the composer being out of fancy, or too anxious to please, the opera failed. Every one seemed to come out of the theatre disappointed, and the drama was performed but two or three times. This seemed matter of great triumph to the Italians, who began to be jealous of the Germanic body of musicians at this time in the kingdom. The songs were printed by the elder Welcker, and many of them sung afterwards at concerts with great applause, and found, as detached airs, excellent, though they had been unfortunate in their totality.¹⁸

17. *Gazetteer and Daily Advertiser*, 21 May 1765, as quoted in Petty, *Italian Opera in London*, 106–7.

18. Burney, *A General History of Music*, 4:486–87.

Apart from individual arias (notably "Cara, la dolce fiamma") that remained in the repertory, *Adriano* was not given again after Bach's lifetime until a concert performance in March 1982 at the Camden Festival under Charles Mackerras. The first fully staged modern revival was in April 2015 (250 years after its premiere) by Classical Opera, conducted by Ian Page, at the Royal College of Music in London.

The only complete musical source for *Adriano* is a score in the hand of an evidently reliable copyist (in P-La, 44-II-28 a 30). No autograph material for the work survives at all. Copies of individual arias are transmitted in various manuscripts. Twelve of the numbers were published in the *Favourite Songs* and may represent Bach's original versions that were later modified. The original printed libretto for the 1765 performances is also extant.¹⁹

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19. See Warb G 6 for a summary of the sources.