

## Preface

This book explores the origins and evolution of Classical opera, a musical tradition so unique with respect to those that preceded and followed. In particular, we travel to 18<sup>th</sup> century Venice and into the world of Carlo Goldoni, a Venetian lawyer who, in adolescence, ran away from school to join a troupe of traveling actors. His father held high hopes for his diplomatic career, but his own life and all his hopes lay in theatre. His true calling was comedy.

Goldoni wrote comedies for the musical stage, too. In fact, close to 100 libretti. He became so famous as a playwright that, to this day, the public knows little of his ‘musical’ career, yet it had a tremendous impact on how Classical opera developed. In the past, researchers separated his theatrical texts from his musical texts, but when considered together, new discoveries come to the surface.

We will trace the history of Classical opera and its signature genre, the *dramma giocoso per musica*, from its early antecedents to its fully evolved form. Traveling from the Neapolitan *commedia per musica* and the Venetian *intermezzo*, through Goldoni’s adventures in experimentation, all the way to the Mozart/da Ponte operas, we will uncover how Carlo Goldoni, a pioneer of realist theatre, unified past traditions to sculpt and canonize a new musical art for modern times.

The progressive impulse he gave to opera, transforming musical ‘comedies’ into works of social significance and psychological depth, is intimately connected to his transformation of theatrical comedy. A man of the Enlightenment, Goldoni dedicated his life’s work to restoring theatre, whether musical or prose, to its highest potential, that is as the realistic portrayal of the contemporary world. Classical opera still speaks to us, and still fills theatres in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for its ability to shine a critical light on the contradictions of our society, and on the universal human condition. Goldoni was the first to invest opera with this extraordinary potential, and he could not have changed this musical art so completely without his experience and vision for literary innovation

in prose theatre. His life and his legacy are a vibrant testimony to the intimate complementarity of the arts.

Taking example from Goldoni, more broadly this book was born from a desire to connect the world of the humanities to the world of music. Worlds that thrive on one and the same thing: human creativity, which, history has shown us, is limitless.