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Professional career and family life of Viennese Primadonnas. The case of Catarina Cavalieri and Aloysia Weber (Lange)

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to present the issue of female singers and their role in the society of eighteenth-century Vienna on the example of two women: Mozart's sister-in-law Aloysia, née Weber, later Lange, and Catarina Cavalieri, the first Constance. These singers were rivals on the opera stage in late 18th century Vienna, as evidenced by the parts written for them by Mozart in his *Der Schauspieldirektor*. From the social point of view, the biographies of these two outstanding singers are very different.

KEYWORDS: singer, opera, 18th century, Vienna, history of 18th century music, Mozart, Aloysia Lange, Catarina Cavalieri

Researchers are not particularly interested in the life stories of singers, which is why we rarely come across their biographies or any mementos relating to them. This means that, depending on the status of given performers, accessible information about them is usually vestigial. It is always the composer who is in the centre of discussions of the history of music. Mementos of him, that most precious figure, are revered, preserved with respectful care, published with attention to detail and read with great interest. Performers do not attract such interest from later generations, hence any traces of their existence have to be sought in composers' letters and other kinds of legacy relating to their lives and works. Reports concerning performers are on the margin of all the sources at our disposal in relation to the history of music. However, in the case of eighteenth-century singers we can also refer to newspaper reviews, while Ludwig Fischer, Mozart's first Osmin, created a new phenomenon in this professional group by writing his autobiography.¹ Other important data is to be found in account books recording salaries, which show who at a given time was the most highly valued performer; information can also be found in such items as obituaries published in the press, or other extant documents, such as wills.

¹The book with that title was edited by Paul Corneilson and published by the American Mozart Society (2011).

Research into singers' importance and functioning understood in a wider sense, from the perspective of history of performance, requires an interdisciplinary approach. Information about changes in the voice and its capabilities may be provided by medical history, put together as far as possible even hundreds of years later. It turns out to be important to know the illnesses suffered by a given person, and in the case of women whether they had children, when, and how many.

I would like to present the issue of female singers and their role on the example of two women who were rivals in eighteenth-century Vienna; Mozart's sister-in-law Aloysia née Weber later Lange, and Catarina Cavalieri, the first Constance. Aloysia Lange and Catarina Cavalieri were very closely connected professionally, since their vocal profiles were similar, both played the part of Constance in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. This part undoubtedly belonged to the repertoire of each of them, and there may have been more works of this kind, but we have no information on this subject.

Aloysia Lange (Weber)

There is a considerable number of sources relating to Aloysia Lange. We owe this mainly to the romantic legend which shrouds the beginnings of her acquaintance with Mozart. The Weber family initially lived in Zell. The mother, Cäcilia Stamm, was a singer, and the father – Fridolin Weber, six years younger than his wife – was a court official. There were six children in the family: two sons, born respectively in 1759 and 1769 (Glover, 2005, p. 102) and died in childhood, and four daughters: Josepha, Aloysia, Constance and Sophie. When, in 1765, Fridolin and his father were accused of embezzlement (Glover, 2005, p. 101), the whole family left Zell and found refuge in Mannheim. Fridolin worked there as a copyist and chorister, and the daughters were probably pupils at the girls' Catholic school *Congrégation de Notre Dame* (Glover, 2005, p. 102).

It was probably the father who taught his daughters music and singing. At a later time Aloysia, exceptionally talented, became a pupil of Georg Joseph Vogler (Corneilson, 1998) and as a teenager became a court singer in Mannheim. Her remuneration supported the whole family. She received a comprehensive musical education. We know that she not only sang, but was also an accomplished pianist; during a concert organised at the house of Christiann Cannabich two days after Mozart left for Paris, she sang the arias which Mozart had written for her and played one of the parts in *Concerto for three pianos* KV 242.² Evidence of Aloysia's musical skills also comes from the numerous places intended for *abbellimenti* in the works she performed, while witness reports tell us that she accompanied herself when singing with ease, 'like a maestro di cappella'.³

² She appeared together with the then fourteen-year-old Rosa Cannabich, the composer's daughter, and Therese Pierron, who was then fifteen years old and was a stepdaughter of the landlord of the house where Mozart stayed while in Mannheim; Therese's lessons were in lieu of payment for the room occupied by the composer and his mother (Glover, 2005, p. 105).

³ Report by Joachim Daniel Preisler.

In the autumn of 1777 Aloysia Weber met Mozart, who was staying in Mannheim. Towards the end of January 1778 she set out with him and her father on a journey to Kichheim-Bolanden, where the young musicians gave concerts at the court of Princess Carolina von Orange-Nassau-Diez. During rehearsals Mozart gained detailed knowledge of Aloysia's voice. He taught her to sing arias from the opera *Lucio Silla* (*Ah, se a morir mi chiama* and *Parto, m'affretto*), which he had written earlier for one of the greatest singers of those times, Anna de Amicis, as well as the aria from *Il re pastore* (*Aer tranquillo*), *Ah, lo prevedi* KV 272 written earlier for Josefina Duškova and an aria by Johann Christian Bach, to which he added ornamentation especially for Aloysia (KV 293e). Paul Corneilson (1998) is of the opinion that Mozart was in competition with Vogler over who should be Aloysia's teacher. In 1778 the composer planned an artistic journey to Italy, to be shared with Aloysia, her father and her sister Josepha (who was to be entrusted with the duties of a quartermaster and not an artist). He wanted that expedition to bring him the conquest of Italy, and he composed a number of works towards this aim. However, the planned journey met decisive opposition from Leopold Mozart, who gave expression to it in a letter.⁴ Before leaving Mannheim, Mozart wrote for Aloysia the farewell aria *Alcandro, loconfesso – Non so, d'onde viene* KV 294.

Aloysia supported her family out of her salary of 1000 guilders, together with her father, who earned only 600 guilders (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Aloisia_Lange). In December 1778 Mozart was returning defeated from his artistic journey to Paris. He stopped in Munich and there asked for Aloysia's hand in marriage, but was rejected. Shortly after her debut at the court theatre in Munich in the role of Parthenia, Aloysia Weber's talent came to be appreciated and she was engaged by the German Viennese Burgtheater ensemble. The whole family moved to Vienna, but Fridolin Weber died shortly after the move.

In October 1780 Aloysia married Joseph Lange, actor and painter. Since it was she who supported her mother and sisters after the death of their father, the new husband undertook to pay 700 guilders a year to Cäcilia Weber (Lange, 1808, p. 117). Lange was a widower; his first wife was Viennese primadonna Maria Anna Elizabeth Schindler, often remembered with affection on the pages of his autobiography (Lange, 1808). He was extremely popular in Vienna, known for his Shakespearean roles, playing Hamlet and Romeo (Glover, 2005, p. 110). In a letter to his father Mozart would describe him as a jealous fool.⁵ The couple's daughter, Maria Anna Sabina (Nannette), later actor and singer, was born six months after the wedding. On 23 September 1782 was born their next daughter, Philippina Anna Thekla, who died at the age of three. After a difficult childbirth Aloysia became ill, and the emperor granted her six months' leave to recuperate (Unsel, 2005, p. 80); later she gave birth to at least four more children. While

⁴Letter from Leopold Mozart to his son dated 11 and 12 February 1778, see Mozart Briefe und Dokumente – Online-Edition <<http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=986&cat=2>>, accessed: 15 IV 2017.

⁵'ihr Man ein Eifersichtiger Narr ist', Mozart's letter to his father dated 16 May 1781, see Mozart Briefe und Dokumente – Online-Edition [at:] <<http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1162&cat=3>>, 18 IV 2017.

Aloysia and Mozart lived in Vienna they performed together very frequently. Aloysia would perform works written for her by her brother-in-law, also those written in Mannheim

In 1787 she obtained specialisation in Italian *Fach* (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Aloisia_Lange) and began to appear in Italian operas, but performed with this ensemble for only eight months. She fell out of the emperor's favour, it is not known exactly why, whether because of a request for higher pay, frequent absences on tours or indisposition. She became depressed after being dismissed (Kutsch & Riemens, 2003, pp. 4983–4), and did not succeed in rejoining the ensemble until 1790.

On 31 March 1795 Aloysia made her farewells to Viennese audiences. Her last performance on the Viennese stage was the role of Sesto in a concert performance of *La Clemenza di Tito* during a charity concert, the proceeds from which were intended to support Mozart's widow and her sons. In the same year she left Vienna with her sister Constance and pianist Anton Eberl (Strebel, 2001, p. 35) on a tour with all three of them performing in concerts. From the time of leaving Vienna (she never returned there) she lived in separation from her husband, who maintained a liaison outside marriage which produced three children. He paid to his wife an alimony of 600 guilders (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Aloisia_Lange). In Vienna her repertoire was partially taken over by her older sister Josepha. The roles she took on included Donna Anna, Constance, Madame Herz and, among other parts by Mozart not intended for Aloysia, also Fiordiligi (Glover, 2005, p. 324). In 1808 the Burgtheater ensemble accepted as its member Aloysia's daughter Maria Anna Sabina, known as Nanette. Her roles included that of Zerlina (Strebel, 2001, p. 29).

During the concert tour the Weber sisters first went to Hamburg; there Aloysia was engaged by the Schröder'schen Theater, where she often performed the part of Constance. In 1798 she went to Amsterdam, where she appeared at the Deutschen Theater. Reviews of her performances do not mention her singing but only her qualities as an actor and as a person in general (Strebel, 2001, p. 29). In 1801 we find Aloysia in Paris, where she was a member of Théâtre Mozart which opened on 16 November (Strebel, 2001, p. 39). However, that theatre quickly went bankrupt, and still in the same year Aloysia settled in Frankfurt am Main, where she obtained the position of the Erste Sängerin at the Nationaltheater. There she sang numerous large parts (Strebel, 2001, p. 41) (we may guess that they included the part of Constance in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*) and began working as a teacher. In 1813 she took refuge in Zurich because of the Napoleonic wars. There she continued her teaching career, which brought her success; her pupils included Marianne Hardmeyer and Caroline Unger. She often appeared with her pupils at chamber concerts, performing duets and ensembles together. Later she moved to Salzburg, where she lived with her sisters Constance and Sophie. Her pension was only 333 guilders 20 kreutzer. Towards the end of her life she suffered serious problems with her eyesight. She died in penury in 1839.

Aloysia's health was seriously undermined by the pregnancies and births, of which there had been at least seven. In 1782 she was so seriously ill during

childbirth that the emperor granted her six months' leave (Unsel, 2005, p. 80). After she had given birth in 1785 there was speculation that she did not survive; probably this was a rumour spread by her artistic rivals. Aloysia's return to the stage in 1785 was a great sensation. She sang then the part written for her in *The impresario*, even though she was pregnant again. There is a very well known account by a Danish diplomat who visited European theatres, Johann Daniel Preisler; he was a guest in the Lange household when Aloysia was not working because of her advanced pregnancy; however, she sang especially for their guest.⁶

In 1782, the year which saw the premiere of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, she was receiving higher pay than Cavalieri, earning 1706 guilders per year (Cavalieri – 1200 guilders). However, Lange could not take part in the premiere performance, since she was pregnant with her second child, born in September 1782 (the premiere took place in July). Although it was generally accepted that singers in advanced stages of pregnancy appeared on the stage and returned to it soon after giving birth (Unsel, 2005, p. 81), Lange did not try for the part of Constance. What made a quick return to work possible was the practice of feeding infants common during that period. In breastfeeding her children, Marie Antoinette broke with the seven-hundred-years-old tradition of the French court as well as going against the wishes of her mother, Maria Theresa Empress of Austria. Usually, however, it was only the poorest mothers who breastfed their children, while the most frequent course of action was to employ a wet-nurse or feed infants in some other manner. One of Mozart's letter mentions these methods and it is shocking to find him advocating the idea of feeding infants water.⁷

⁶'Wednesday, 20 August [1788]. Between 10 and 11 [a.m.] the actor Lange came to fetch us, to see his collection of pictures by himself and to hear his wife sing. – A melancholy ecstasy was to be read at once in her eyes. She was great with child and could not perform in that condition. Too bad for us! For she was, although a German, the prima donna of the Italian Opera. The well known Mozardt [sic!] is her brother-in-law, and has taught her so well that she accompanies from a score and plays interludes like a Kapellmeister. Thus she sang and played a grand aria di bravura for us, a scena by Paisiello and a rondo from the opera Cresco. The voice is something exceptional! But not by a long way as good as that of our Müller; yet her high range and her delicacy, her execution, taste and theoretical knowledge cannot fail to be admired by any impartial critic. [...] She receives scarcely half the salary given to the Italians, and yet she is made to and can sing the longest and most difficult parts incomparably better than the songstresses who are here pampered by the Viennese nobility.'

From Joachim Daniel Preisler's *Journal over en rejse igiennen Frankerige og Tyskland i aaret 1788*, Copenhagen 1789 (after Deutsch, 1966, pp. 323–324).

⁷'I trust with God's help that, as she is taking good care of herself, she will make a complete recovery from her confinement. From the condition of her breasts I am rather afraid of milk-fever. And now the child has been given to a foster-nurse against my will, or rather, at my wish! For I was quite determined that whether she should be able to do so or not, my wife was never to feed her child. Yet I was equally determined that my child was never to take the milk of a stranger! I wanted the child to be brought up on water [emphasis added by H.W.], like my sister and myself. However, the midwife, my mother-in-law and most people here have begged and implored me not to allow it, if only for the reason that most children here who are brought up on water do not survive, as the people here don't know how to do it properly. That induced me to give in, for I should not like to have anything to reproach myself with.' (18 June 1783) (Mozart, ver 1938)

Original version:

Ich hoffe zu gott, daß, da sie sich gut hält, sie ihr kindbett auch glücklich überstehen wird. – auf das Milchfieber habe ich Sorge! – den sie hat ziemliche Brüste! – Nun hat das Kind wieder meinen Willen, und doch mit meinem Willen eine Säug=Ame bekommen! – Meine frau sie seye es im Stande oder nicht,

Lucien Karthausen (2011, p. 557) tells us that this refers to a particular mixture resembling mucilage, made out of barley or oats and seasoned with liquorice and aniseed. When one examines the data on infant mortality, or even the information on the survival rate of the siblings of Mozart and Aloysia, as well as their own children, one may well suspect the use of this mixture as a contributory factor.

Harald Strebel (2001, p. 35) suspects that the reason why Aloysia was not considered when casting on at least two occasions was precisely her pregnancy and afterbirth complications; these were parts in important works by Mozart, the already-mentioned *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Marriage of Figaro*. While in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* the part was finally sung by a singer with a similar profile and Lange could perform it later, *The Marriage of Figaro* has no part suited to Aloysia's voice. The fact that the part of Constance was sung by Catarina Cavalieri enabled Aloysia to include it in her own repertoire.

Catarina Cavalieri

The question of the dates of birth, real surname and identity of Catarina Cavalieri's parents remains unresolved. I adopt the version proposed by Melanie Unseld, author of the most recent and reliable texts on the singer. Catarina Cavalieri was born on 13 March 1755 in Vienna as Francisca Helena Cavalier and was one of the five living daughters⁸ of a musician, Joseph Carl Kavalier and his wife Maria Anna.

At the age of 20 she made her debut on the stage of the Kärntnertortheater in the reasonably demanding part of Sandrina in *La finta giardiniera* by Pasquale Anfossi. She was taught singing by Antonio Salieri, who nurtured the development of her career, composing parts intended specifically for her and making efforts to have her cast in spectacles. Schaeffer's play helped to perpetuate the conjecture that Cavalieri was Salieri's mistress. Today this idea is being questioned (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Catarina_Cavalieri). We know that she adopted two of Salieri's daughters from among the eight children of his marriage to Theresia Helferstorffer (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Catarina_Cavalieri), and that she performed in the majority of the operas composed by him.

In 1782 she appeared in the premiere of Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Originally the role of Constance was to be given to the composer's

sollte niemalsen ihr kind stillen das war imer mein fester vorsaz! – allein, einer andern Milch solle Mein kind auch nicht hineinschlucken! – sondern beÿ Wasser, wie meine Schwester und ich, will ich es aufziehen. – – allein – die Hebame, meine schwiegermutter, und die meisten leute hier haben mich ordentlich gebeten ich sollte das nicht thun, nur aus dieser ursache weil hier die meisten kinder beÿm Wasser darauf gehen, indem die leute hier nicht damit umgehen können. – das hat mich nun bewegt – nachzugeben – den – ich möchte mir nicht gerne einen vorwurf machen lassen. – **Nun wegen der gevatterschaft!** See *Mozart Briefe und Dokumente – Online-Edition* [at:] <<http://dme.mozarteum.at/DME/briefe/letter.php?mid=1321&cat=>>, 18 IV 2017.

⁸ Her four sisters are referred to in her will from 1801 (Unseld, 2005, p. 125).

sister-in-law, Aloysia Lange; she however, gave birth to a child and according to Julian Rushton (2006, p. 106) this was the reason for a change in the casting even at the stage of the work being composed (the premiere of the *Abduction...* took place in July of the following year). In spite of significant differences in the flexibility of registers and voice power, Cavalieri and Lange were very often compared to each other; they appeared in Vienna during the same period and both performed similar virtuoso soprano parts. In spite of the differences in their vocal profiles they were rivals, with their repertoires partially overlapping; after her return to the stage Lange also appeared as Constance in 1785. A confrontation between the two singers took place during a theatrical event which involved the performance of one-act works by Mozart and Salieri, *Der Schauspieldirektor* and *Prima la musica e poi le parole*.

Three years after the premiere of *The Abduction from the Seraglio* Mozart composed the cantata *Davide penitente* KV 469 commissioned by Tonkünstler-Soziet, where the part of the first soprano was intended for Cavalieri. The work was written in a hurry, with a large section of the material being fragments of earlier compositions. Fragments of *Kyrie* and *Gloria* from *Mass in C minor* KV 427 were adapted by Mozart to an Italian libretto (probably by Lorenzo Da Ponte) with the addition of two new arias – *A te, fra tanti affanni* for Valentin Adamberger and *Fra l'oscure ombre funeste* intended for Cavalieri. Since both of them appeared in the premiere of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Mozart was familiar with their vocal capabilities. The first performance took place at the Nationaltheater, at a charity concert the proceeds from which were to support widows and orphans. That occasion also included a performance of Haydn's *Symphony in D minor* Hob. I/80. The concert attracted an audience of 605 (Quinn, 2006, pp. 59–60).

Mozart planned to have Cavalieri sing the part of Bettina in *Lo sposo deluso*, but he abandoned this composition. The extant fragments contain only vestiges of Bettina's part, without any solo numbers, and thus provide no significant data which might serve to reconstruct its profile. Later on he did not compose any full parts for Cavalieri, but as she was appearing in a revival of *The Marriage of Figaro* and in the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in Vienna, Mozart composed special arias for her.

During her life Cavalieri acquired sufficient funds to provide for herself after the end of her career in 1793 (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Catarina_Cavalieri). She died in 1801 and her death certificate gives *Faulfieber* – spotted typhus – as the cause of death. According to Melanie Unseld (2005, p. 134) Cavalieri's illness was in fact closer to a venereal disease. Unfortunately Unseld does not explain her reasons for this hypothesis, but a number of facts from Cavalieri's biography suggest that she might have been struggling with a chronic disease. After suffering a progressive ailment affecting her voice she gave up her career in 1793. We do not know what had been happening to her until 1801, when on 9 February she wrote her will, witnessed by Salieri; she died on 30 June 1801. Perhaps her ailment was indeed related to a serious chronic systemic disease, such as syphilis (Lahav et al, 2011), which would coincide with the suspicions of Unseld. Cavalieri's worsening condition may have been caused by

being generally wasted by syphilis, but that disease attacks all organs, including the larynx and the voice organ, thus making it impossible to perform as a singer. Syphilis may attack the larynx during any stage (early, primary, late) (McNulty & Fassett, 1981). Neurosyphilis may cause dysarthria, which significantly disturbs articulation, so important in the work of a singer. Pathological changes may also cause dysphonia by damaging particular anatomical structures in the larynx (Kluger, Aractingi & Saint-Guily 2008). Voice problems may be caused by secondary syphilitic changes on vocal folds (Kluger, Aractingi & Saint-Guily 2008), mouth and tongue. Moreover, tertiary syphilis causes damage to the bones, including the bones of the skull which form the resonance spaces in the head. For example, a fistula formed between the oral and nasal cavities, a chancre in the oral cavity or the throat, or glossalgia (Yoda, 2005) make correct phonation impossible because of the pain, discomfort and changes in the acoustic condition of the larynx. The use of mercury, popular in the treatment of syphilis from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries (O'Shea, 1990), may also have played a part, since it irritates and negatively affects the functioning of the skin and mucous membranes. This element was administered orally, but also as ointment, fumigant or in steam baths (O'Shea, 1990). Side effects of this therapy also included loss of hair (which was not a problem at a time when wigs were in general use) and teeth. This illness, widespread during the eighteenth century, and a cause of stigma, was very often covered up (Tampa, 2014) – as Unseld supposes. Writing her will six months before her death indicates that Cavalieri must have suffered from a serious and chronic disease, while spotted typhus entered on the death certificate is a rapid and acute illness. We may consider it likely that the cause of Cavalieri's death was syphilis and that this illness was involved in her gradual loss of voice and the ending of her career eight years prior to her death.

Cavalieri was one of the greatest singers of her time, but it was often emphasised that she lacked acting talent. A letter from Emperor Leopold II to Count Rosenberg gave rise to the supposition that she was blind in one eye.⁹ Tracing the parts composed for Cavalieri by Mozart and other composers during the years 1782–1789 reveals the condition of the singer's voice when she was on top form, and its later growing disfunctionality which resulted in her career ending in 1793.

Lange's career took a long time to fade out, and the singer herself moved to an activity typical of retired primadonna, to teaching. Cavalieri's career was extinguished suddenly (perhaps because of illness). We may guess that, having saved sufficient funds, without any family obligations and the obvious lack of necessity to finance family members, she did not have to seek employment, as Lange was forced to, at times feverishly. We know nothing about her possible teaching activities.

⁹ 'vielleicht macht sie sich, die Rolle ist nämlich sehr ernst, es ist nur der Moment, wo es sich darum handelt, zärtliche Augen zu machen, was ein wenig schwer fallen dürfte' (http://mugi.hfmt-hamburg.de/Artikel/Catarina_Cavalieri).

The two singers represent a professional model which was modern for the eighteenth century. At the peaks of their careers they had professional ties to their place of abode: they lived in Vienna and performed there. They had a wide circle of professional and personal contacts, not limited to members of a touring theatre troupe, who often intermarried and produced great theatrical families and where the trade was passed on from father to son and, it should be added, from mother to daughter (on the subject of the functioning of singers in troupes see Piperno, 2007). At the time of Lange and Cavalieri such troupes continued to function successfully. Among their members was the famous Mozart singer Francesco Baglioni. However, these were mainly Italian ensembles which specialised in staging comic operas. Lange and Cavalieri were not Italian, and their *Fach* was universal, since they also appeared in *opere serie*. As singers who could sing in German, who at the same time became skilled in Italian vocal art, they were the most universal performers one could imagine on the stages of 18th century Vienna. Roles included in their repertoires belonged to nearly all the genres which functioned in theatrical life there at that time; these were comic operas and *opere serie*, in the two most important languages, German and Italian. Appearances in *opere serie* created an aura of prestige around the performers and distanced them to some extent from the negative connotations associated with the alleged doubtful morality of buffa singers (Hunter, 1999).

Translated by Zofia Weaver

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