

PREFACE

Costumes have always been a crucial component of any musico-theatrical event – defining characters, actions and beliefs, enhancing the sonic dimension of performance, and blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction, past and present, the human and the fantastic. Yet even as costumes, textiles, and accessories have conditioned the reception of opera and musical theatre alike, the material traces of their histories have too frequently slipped through the cracks of our critical discourse. To theorize costume is a truly interdisciplinary project, necessitating the combined expertise and methodological agility of musicology, theatre studies, fashion and textile history.

The international conference “Fashioning Opera and Musical Theater: Stage Costumes from the Late Renaissance to 1900” was held at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini on the Isle of San Giorgio, Venice, from 29 March through 1 April, 2012 to provide a forum for the kind of interdisciplinary collaboration that the topic requires. The conference included 28 presentations, nineteen of which are published here, with a “Nota sul costume teatrale” written by Professor Paola Bignami to accompany the volume. Thanks to the publishing team of the Fondazione Cini, who have willingly hosted this collection on their website, the conference proceedings are now available to a broad and diverse online audience.

As will be evident from these proceedings, the intellectual fruits of our labor exceeded the organizers’ expectations on many levels. The discussions between disciplines engaged historians of music, fashion, costume and theater, revealing a large body of original work on the subject. Reaching beyond the issues of aesthetic and economic context outlined in the original call for papers, the contributions to this volume also invoke the importance of politics, national identity and cultural transfer to questions of representation and reception. Ultimately, the conference reflected the topical importance of costumes to opera and musical theater, while confirming the necessity of an interdisciplinary and trans-national approach for a full understanding of the subject.

On behalf of the conference organizers, I would like to thank the Fondazione Cini and staff for graciously hosting the meeting; the Fondazione Cini proved an ideal environment for conducive and spirited discussions. In particular, we would like to thank the director of the Centro Studi per la Ricerca Documentale sul Teatro e il Melodramma Europeo, Maria Ida Biggi, who also lent us her expertise as a profound connoisseur of theater and opera.

On a more personal note, I would like to express my gratitude to Isabella Campagnol, for her work co-hosting the conference and for the generosity with which she shared her knowledge of fashion and textiles, both in the preparation phase and during the conference. I also wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to my fellow members of the program committee, Maria Ida Biggi, Isabella Campagnol, Doretta Davanzo Poli and Helen Greenwald, for the riveting program they assembled. Last but not least, my thanks go to the conference participants themselves who, with stimulating papers and lively discussion, made this conference such a success.

This volume is dedicated to the memory of Professor Pierluigi Petrobelli, pioneering opera scholar and friend of the Fondazione Cini who believed in this project since the early stages.

THE EDITOR