

BEYOND THE COURT THEATRE
RETHINKING THE ORIGINS OF EARLY OPERA HOUSES IN ITALY
WITH REFERENCE TO THE MUSICAL STAGE OF LADISLAS IV*

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ABSTRACT

In 1637, a *dramma musicale* entitled *La Santa Cecilia* was performed in Warsaw for the royal wedding between Ladislas IV, king of Poland, and the Archduchess Cecilia Renata of Austria. The sovereign himself had previously been an avid theatre-goer during his trip to Italy in 1625, when he met Claudio Monteverdi and other musicians. In the same year 1637, the Teatro San Cassiano opened in Venice, marking the birth of modern business of opera. For the first time since the genre emerged from courts and private palaces it became a form of public entertainment. Through a close examination of various documents, the aim of this study is to propose an innovative comparison between the court theatre of Ladislas IV and contemporary early playhouses in Italy—from Rome to Venice—with reference to spectacles set to music. The findings of this study will help us shed new light on the Royal Castle theatre in Warsaw during the reign of Ladislas, which may have been designed to accommodate more people than generally assumed, according to the most up-to-date construction principles of that time. Moreover, the paper makes use of recent historical enquiries on the San Cassiano for which an ambitious reconstruction project, following the model of Shakespeare's Globe in London, has recently been presented.

KEYWORDS

Ladislas IV; Virgilio Puccitelli; Agostino Locci; Benedetto Ferrari; Teatro San Cassiano; 1637; Warsaw; Venice; Rome; *Andromeda*; *La Santa Cecilia*; Barberini; opera and theatrical architecture in the early seventeenth century

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In any textbook on the history of music, the year 1637 is special because it marks the opening of the Teatro San Cassiano in Venice and the beginning of the so-called modern opera business with the staging of Benedetto Ferrari's and Francesco Manelli's *Andromeda*. For the first time in history, a musical spectacle was made available to a paying audience. A complex performance with music no longer needed a ruler's support but could rely solely on income from the sale of tickets and the rental of theatre boxes.

However, 1637 is also a milestone for Polish opera. Although the inauguration of Ladislav Vasa's theatre in the Royal Castle in Warsaw took place in 1628 (if not in 1627), and the theatre would function continuously in the years 1635–1648, in September 1637, the Royal Castle's new theatre hall was launched with the celebration of Ladislav IV's lavish marriage to Cecilia Renata of Austria. An Italian *dramma musicale* was performed to mark the occasion, namely Virgilio Puccitelli's *La Santa Cecilia* with lost music by unknown author(s), possibly including Marco Scacchi. Although well known in Polish musicology, this fact is not widely recognized in general literature on the history of music. The contemporaneity of the events in Venice and Warsaw has not been given adequate emphasis from a historical perspective. There are so many subtle analogies (along with evident differences) that an in-depth commentary is called for. In both cases, for instance, we are dealing with renovated theatrical buildings, and can only regret the unfortunate total loss of the musical scores. Yet what can we infer from this innovative comparison? Are there any aspects that can shed new light on either production?

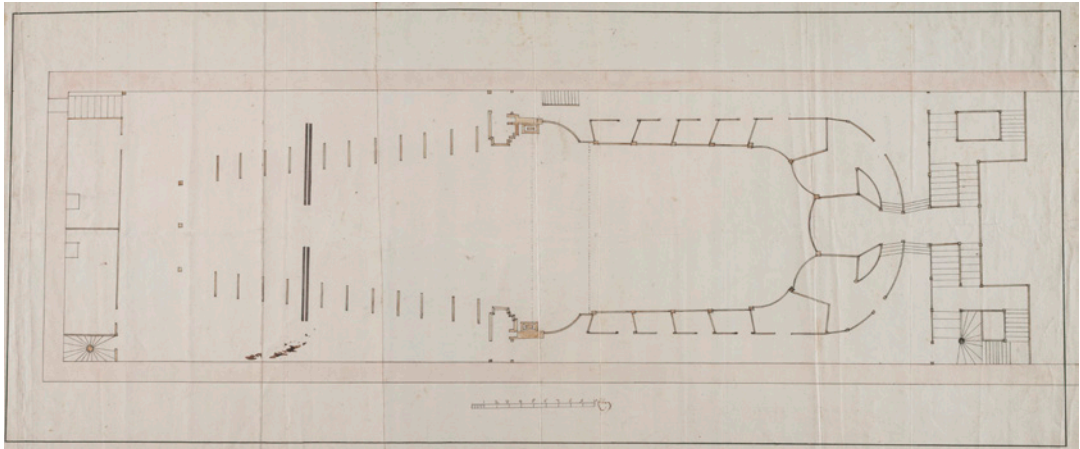
Firstly we intend to reconsider the historical venues. A distinctive set of circumstances unites the Teatro San Cassiano in Venice and the theatrical hall set up in the Royal Castle in Warsaw. No plans, no drawings, and no iconographical evidence have survived from the first half of the seventeenth century. In the first case, we know the measurements of the old theatre taken by the architect Francesco Bognolo before he began his renovation in 1763. As for Warsaw, the oldest plan dates back to 1699 (Fig. 1). These sparse documents are the main basis for hypothesizing about the original structures.

A fundamental overview of early Venetian theatres is found in the crucial work *I teatri del Veneto*.¹ However, it is necessary to integrate and update some of its achievements with the research promoted in recent years by the Teatro San Cassiano Group Ltd (led by Dr. Paul Atkin and Dr. Stefano Patuzzi). Today, this company intends to reconstruct the original theatre of 1637 and, in so doing, to restore historically informed Baroque opera to Venice.²

As for the Warsaw Castle, the surviving documentation and the most influential theories on the theatrical hall of 1637 are presented in detail in Hanna Osiecka-Samsonowicz's monograph

¹ Franco Mancini, Maria Teresa Muraro, and Elena Povoledo, eds., *I teatri del Veneto* (Venice: Corbo e Fiore, 1985–2000). See also Euguene J. Johnson, *Inventing the Opera House: Theater Architecture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

² For further information, see the official website: <https://www.teatrosancassiano.it/en>.



1. Johann C. Frische, plan of the theatrical hall inside the Warsaw Royal Castle (1699). Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, 12884 Karten und Risse, Schrank 7 Fach 90 Bl. 21cc / MF 10605. Photo © Sächsisches Staatsarchiv.

on Agostino Locci—architect, engineer, and scene designer for King Ladislas IV.³ In general, the hall in the castle seems to have occupied ample space on the second and third floors of the southern wing, built in 1619.⁴ Therefore, it was not a functionally specific construction but a repurposing of large areas within a pre-existing building. We can find similar examples in early seventeenth-century Italy, such as the Teatro Medici at the Uffizi in Florence, the Teatro del Palazzo del Podestà in Bologna, and the Teatro Farnese in Parma constructed on the first floor of the Palazzo della Pilotta. The new Teatro Barberini in Rome (1639) is a different case, as it was located in a separate building adjoining the palace.

We know that the Italian architect Agostino Locci designed the Warsaw hall and its stage equipment: the royal carpenter Hans Hanle and the painter Christian Melich also participated.⁵ As already mentioned, the court theatre re-opened on 23 September 1637 with the performance of *La Santa Cecilia*. Six months earlier, on 13 March, the nuncio Mario Filonardi had written a dispatch from Warsaw to Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew of Pope Urban VIII:

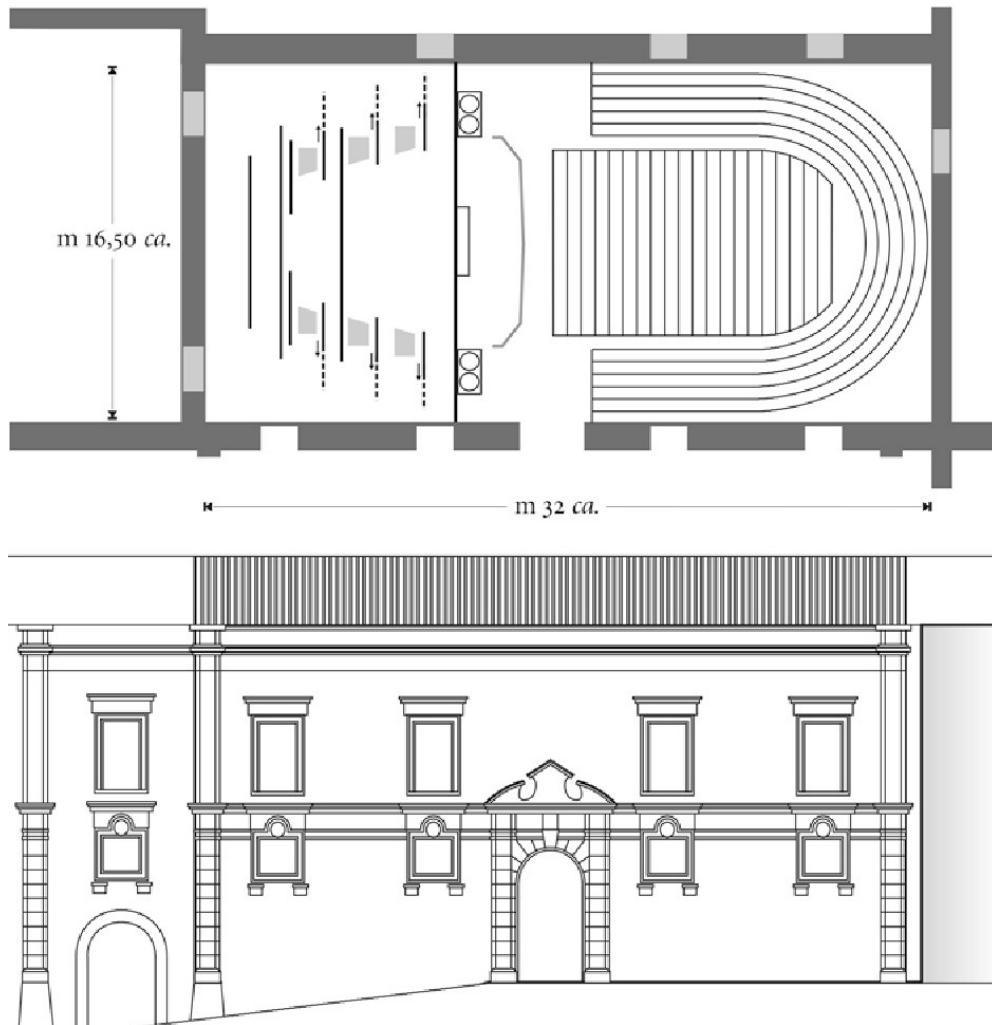
Il segretario Puccitelli che compose la comedia in versi che mandai l'anno passato, il Locci romano architetto battagliano continuamente in comporre versi, machine et altre inventioni per le comedie e feste che si preparano per il matrimonio di Sua Maestà con la serenissima arciduchessa Cecilia. S'accomoda per tal efetto una sala che sarà la maggiore che sia in queste parti.⁶

³ Hanna Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci. Scenograf i architekt na dworze królewskim w Polsce* (Warsaw: Instytut Sztuki Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2003), 125ff.

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 125.

⁵ *Ibid.* See also Jacek Żukowski, "Chrystian Melich oraz Strobel, Bierens i Decallo, czyli przygotowania na przyjazd Władysława IV do Wilna w 1643 roku," *Chronicon Palatii Magnorum Ducum Lithuaniae* 3 (2012–2013 [2015]): 353–94.

⁶ Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barberiniani Latini (Barb. Lat.) 6596, fol. 86. Quoted in Oreste Ruggeri, "Scenografia e cronaca teatrale in alcuni dispacci di Filonardi," in *Virgilio Puccitelli e il teatro per musica nella Polonia*



2. Reconstructed plan and front elevation of the new Teatro Barberini in Rome (1639), according to Davide Daolmi (2006).

[Secretary Puccitelli, who composed the comedy in verse that I sent last year, and the Roman architect Locci continually battle in devising verses, machines, and other inventions for the comedies and celebrations prepared for the marriage of His Majesty and the Archduchess Cecilia. For this purpose, a hall is being adapted; it will be the largest one in these parts.]

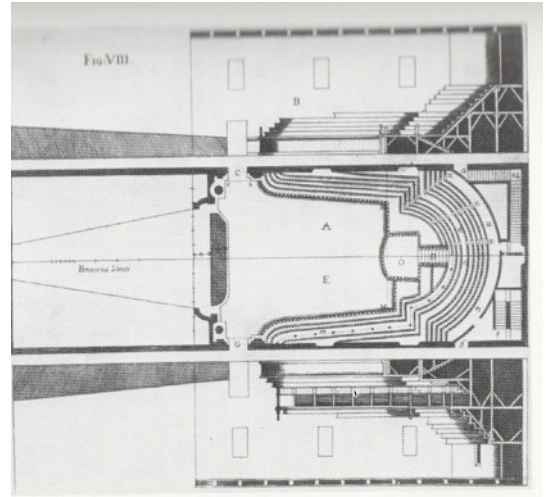
Only three months later, on 27 June, Filonardi himself gave news of the advanced state of the work: “È già finita una gran sala lunga 180 piedi romani fabbricata di novo per farci

di Ladislao IV, ed. Oreste Ruggeri (San Severino Marche: Bellabarba, 1979), 144, and Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 169.

comédie; oltre le quali se prepara un torneo a piedi e diverse caccie da farsi nel cortile del palazzo reale” (A large room, 180 Roman feet long,⁷ built from scratch to perform comedies, has already been finished; moreover, a tournament on foot is forthcoming, and several hunts will take place in the courtyard of the royal palace).⁸ Both letters speak of a large hall (“la maggiore,” “gran sala”) intended for theatrical use (“per farci comedie,” to perform comedies). The expressions “s’accomoda” and “fabbricata di novo” suggest a repurposing of pre-existing rooms in the castle, resulting, however, in a fundamentally new structure.

According to the renovation plan of 1699, preserved in the Staatsarchiv in Dresden, it appears that the hall had the shape of an elongated rectangle, approximately twelve metres wide and forty-eight long, that is approximately 580 square metres (see Fig. 1).⁹ Taking the measurement provided by Filonardi literally, however, we would have a slightly greater length of about 53.33 metres, which would yield an area of about 700 square metres. The size of the stage and of the auditorium must have been approximately 300 square metres each.

How many spectators could the hall accommodate? The chronicler Eberhard Wassenberg detailed the royal wedding celebrations, and it is assumed that his Latin text contains the answer to our question. Next to the marginal caption “Tragicomoedia de S. Caecilia in theatro miri artificij exhibetur 23. Sept[embris]” (On 23 September the tragicomedy of Santa Cecilia was performed on a stage of marvellous artifice), we read: “Structum à mille viris et amplius, in aula Regia, versatile Theatrum erat, eo artificio, ut in formas quascunque, momento temporis, variaretur.”¹⁰ This passage was translated into Polish by Karolina Targosz-Kretowa thus: “Urządzono na zamku królewskim teatr o obrotowych dekoracjach obliczony na tysiąc, a nawet więcej widzów” (A theatre with rotating scenery was set up in the royal castle: it was designed for a thousand or even more spectators).¹¹



3. Fabrizio Carini Motta, plan and longitudinal sections of a theatrical project published in his treatise of 1676, fig. viii. Photo public domain.

⁷ One Roman foot equals 29.63 cm.

⁸ Barb. Lat. 6596, fol. 111r–v. Quoted in Ruggeri, “Scenografia,” 145.

⁹ Cf. Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 125. The measurements of the theatre are derived from Jerzy Lileyko, *Zamek warszawski. Rezydencja króla i siedziba władz Rzeczypospolitej 1569–1763* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1984), 114.

¹⁰ Eberhard Wassenberg, *Gestorum gloriosissimi ac invictissimi Vladislai IV Poloniae et Sveciae regis. Pars secunda* (Gdańsk: typis Hunefeldianis, 1641), 251.

¹¹ Karolina Targosz-Kretowa, *Teatr dworski Władysława IV* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1965), 289. The same interpretation occurs in Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 128, but here the capacity of the hall is reduced to a few hundred spectators, not more.

Although this interpretation, at first glance, seems to provide a satisfactory result, some philological considerations make it problematic and, ultimately, implausible. In Latin, in the presence of a passive verb, the preposition *a* plus ablative indicates the agent complement; therefore, “structum à mille viris et amplius” should mean “built by a thousand and more men” and not “designed for a thousand or even more spectators.” Moreover, the subject of the sentence is the word “theatrum,” which, in this case, does not seem to refer to the entire theatre hall (with auditorium), but to the stage only.¹² It is the latter that is “versatile,” i.e., mobile, rotating, as—plausibly—equipped with *periaktoi*, that is, scenes painted on turning triangular frames. Hence the Wassenberg passage can be translated as follows: “In the Royal Palace, a changing stage had been built by a thousand or even more men with such ingenuity that it might rapidly assume any form.”

It is clear that “à mille viris et amplius” is a hyperbole. Still, it is not implausible to think of a large number of craftsmen—including carpenters, woodworkers, painters, and textile workers—committed to creating a sophisticated stage in a few months for the surprising scenic effects sought by Locci. If this interpretation is correct, Wassenberg tells us nothing about the actual capacity of the hall.

It is therefore advisable to turn to other sources to get an idea of the number of spectators. The French chronicler Jean Le Laboureur provides some crucial testimony. He describes another spectacular event, the performance of *Le nozze d'Amore e di Psiche*, held in Gdańsk on 15 February 1646 for the second marriage of Ladislas to Marie-Louise Gonzague de Nevers:

Le leudy quinziesme se joüa la grande Comedie, dont les machines merueilleuses, et les autres despenses du theatre cousterent, ce dit-on près de cent mille escus à la Ville, parce que la salle fut exprès bastie toute de bois, avec plusieurs galleries, capables avec le parterre, de contenir plus de trois mille personnes. Ce fut l'histoire des amours de Cupidon et de Psyché, que les Musiciens du Roy representerent en musique, composée pour le nopces en Vers Italiens par Virgilio Puccitelli.¹³

[On Thursday 15 [February 1646], a great comedy was staged. Its marvellous machines and other theatre expenses cost the city, it is said, nearly a hundred thousand *écus*, because the hall was purposely built entirely of wood, with several galleries, able to hold, with the parterre, more than three thousand people. The comedy deals with the story of the love between Cupid and Psyche. It was performed in music by the musicians of the King. Virgilio Puccitelli wrote it in Italian verses for the wedding.]

Although occurring almost ten years later, the Gdańsk production involved primarily the artists previously engaged in 1637. It featured the playwright Puccitelli and the royal chapel

¹² Even in the contemporary testimony of Albrycht Stanisław Radziwiłł (Warsaw, 23 September 1637) the Latin word *theatrum* has the same meaning. Cf. Albrycht Stanisław Radziwiłł, *Pamiętnik o dziejach w Polsce*, ed. Adam Przyboś and Roman Żelewski (Warsaw: Państw. Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980), 2:56.

¹³ Jean Le Laboureur, *Relation du voyage de la royne de Pologne* (Paris: A. Courbé, 1647), 157.

musicians. The French words used by Le Laboureur are entirely congruent with the Italian terms used by Filonardi and the Latin ones by Wassenberg. "Theatre" is the stage equipped with "machines merveilleuses"; "salle" is the entire theatrical hall with auditorium; "la grande comédie" corresponds to the "comedia in versi e musica con intermedi, mutationi di scene e machine" described by Filonardi¹⁴ ("tragicomoedia" in Wassenberg). Today we would speak of opera. Given that the typology of spectacle remains the same as for *La Santa Cecilia* of 1637, one wonders if Warsaw Castle's theatrical hall could have had a higher capacity than assumed so far: not a few hundred people, but many more.

How to accommodate so many spectators in an auditorium of approximately 300 square metres? Le Laboureur gives us the answer: by means of "plusieurs galleries" superimposed around the "parterre." Even though the fact that the Warsaw hall could have been equipped with boxes or balconies has been precluded,¹⁵ it is now time to question this belief.

Fabrizio Carini Motta's treatise on the structure of theatres was not published until 1676. Still, it seems to contain valuable information on various architectural typologies documented in the first half of the seventeenth century in Italy. Carini Motta describes two kinds of auditoriums: with *gradi* (steps) and *palchetti* (boxes). It should be noted that the seventeenth-century boxes differed from the better-known ones of the eighteenth century; here we are dealing with several tiers of superimposed galleries, also containing continuous amphitheatre seats (see Fig. 3, right side). One can see an early example in Aleotti's discarded project for the Teatro Farnese in Parma.¹⁶ The art historian Irving Lavin maintains that Aleotti's solution inspired Francesco Guitti's temporary wooden theatre specially built in the Cortile di San Pietro Martire adjoining the Farnese Palace in Parma where, on 13 December 1628, there was a lavish performance of Torquato Tasso's *Aminta*, with a prologue and five *intermedi* set to music by Claudio Monteverdi.¹⁷

Inspired by classical sources, the *cavea* (bowl) with steps had characterized, for instance, the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza and the Teatro Farnese. This solution could satisfy the academic taste of the late Renaissance, but it turned out to be disadvantageous in the case of small areas. Early boxes probably came into existence in imitation of the balconies in palace courtyards where civic or private ceremonies took place.¹⁸ The superimposed *palchetti* permitted a greater

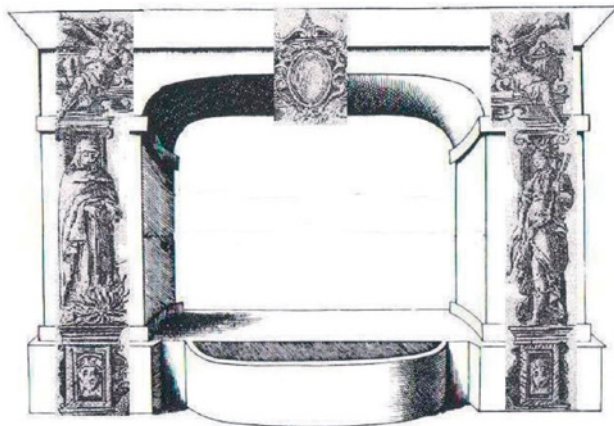
¹⁴ Barb. Lat. 6598, fol. 57r-v. Quoted in Julian Lewański, "Świadkowie i świadectwa opery władysławowskiej," in *Opera w dawnej Polsce na dworze Władysława IV i królów saskich*, ed. Julian Lewański (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1973), 34; Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 172.

¹⁵ "Widownia ułożona mogła być w podkowę, w sposób ustalony w teatrach włoskich jeszcze w XVI wieku. Wydaje się jednak, że ilość miejsc siedzących była ograniczona. Zlokalizowano je na poziomie podłogi sali, nie powstała więc powszechna w Italii konstrukcja amfiteatralna, a tym bardziej łoża, obecne w teatrach włoskich od lat trzydziestych XVII wieku" (The auditorium could have been arranged in a horseshoe shape, in a way that was already established in sixteenth-century Italian theatres. However, it seems that the number of seats was limited. They were located at floor level, so the amphitheatre structure common in Italy was not created, nor the boxes present in Italian theatres since the 1630s). Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 128.

¹⁶ Irving Lavin, "On the Unity of the Arts and the Early Baroque Opera House," in *"All the world's a stage...": Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque*, ed. Barbara Wisch and Susan Scott Munshower (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1990), 519–76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 520–24.

¹⁸ Jonathan E. Glixon and Beth L. Glixon, *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18 (quoted from a theory by Eugene



4. Author's reimagination of the proscenium of the Teatro San Cassiano in Venice (1637).

large part being reserved for the show itself. Around it, there were five orders of *palchettoni* (big boxes) plus two mobile *gradoni* (big steps). Despite the significantly reduced space compared to that of the Warsaw hall, it is assumed that the structure could accommodate up to 1,350 people.²⁰ Without the superimposed galleries, its capacity would probably have been limited to fewer than three hundred people.

Another fascinating case concerns the Teatro Barberini in Rome. First, a theatrical hall was created inside the Palazzo Barberini alle Quattro Fontane. In 1634, *Sant'Alessio* (libretto by Rospigliosi, music by Stefano Landi) was staged there for the third time—after the 1629 and 1632 performances—in honour of Prince Alexander Charles Vasa, brother of Ladislav. Undoubtedly this production represented a model for Puccitelli's *La Santa Cecilia*.²¹ Regarding the venue of the performance, the musicologist Davide Daolmi observes: "It is the room on the *piano nobile*, later called 'dei Marmi' which flanks the main hall frescoed by Cortona; this area,

number of spectators than the old-fashioned *gradi*. It is evident that in the case of particularly high halls (the one in Warsaw occupied two floors) the overlapping of "plusieurs galleries" represented an optimization of space.

Let us consider the temporary theatre built in 1636 in Padua (Prato della Valle) for the hybrid spectacle (opera-ballet-tournament) *Ermiona*.¹⁹ The structure was erected inside a building called the Stallone; it is estimated that the available area was about 200 square metres, a

Johnson). See also Eugene J. Johnson, "The Short, Lascivious Lives of Two Venetian Theaters, 1580–1585," *Renaissance Quarterly* 55.3 (2002): 945.

¹⁹ Mancini, Muraro, and Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, 3:94ff.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:94.

²¹ Cf. Mario Filonardi's dispatch to Cardinal Francesco Barberini (Vilnius, 5 July 1636): "Con occasione d'una comedia in musica, che fa Sua Maestà [Ladislav IV] porr'in ordine con grand'apparato per il mese d'agosto [with reference to *Il ratto di Helena*], ho io havuto occasione di parlar di S. Alessio, et havendo Sua Maestà desiderato di vederlo, di sei esemplari de quali Vostra Eminenza [Francesco Barberini] si degnò di farmi favorire avanti che partissi per Vienna, n'ho dato tre, quali m'ha detto Sua maestà d'haverli visto per se stesso, e fatto vedere all'autore, che compone la sua, ch'è il signor Virgilio Puccitelli della Marca suo segretario confidente, all'architetto che soprintende alla scena e machine, et è il signor Agostino Locci romano et al Scacchi parimente romano" (On the occasion of a musical comedy, which His Majesty [Ladislav IV] stages with great apparatus for August [with reference to *Il ratto di Helena*], I have had occasion to speak of *Sant'Alessio*, and having His Majesty desire to see it [the libretto], of the six specimens of which Your Eminence deigned to favour me with before I left for Vienna, I gave [the king] three copies, which His Majesty told me that he had personally seen, and shown to the author who composes his text, who is Signor Virgilio Puccitelli from the Marche, his confidential secretary, to the architect who supervises the scene and stage machinery, who is Signor Agostino Locci from Rome, and to Scacchi also from Rome). Quoted in Ruggeri, "Scenografia," 141.

still used today for celebratory occasions, measures 13 × 17 metres.”²² The dimensions were not markedly different from those of the Stallone in Padua.

A few years later, the Barberinis decided to place their theatre in a large new hall located outside the palace, on the north side of the building. Directed by the architects Valerio Poggi and Bartolomeo Breccioli, former collaborators of Bernini and Maderno respectively, the work ended in 1639, when the second version of *Chi soffre speri* was staged. On 2 March 1639 Raimondo Montecuccoli wrote to the Duke of Modena, Francesco I d’Este:

Hieri fui alla commedia Barberina. . . . Il signor cardinal [Francesco] Barberino et il signor cardinal Antonio [Barberini] travagliarono assaissimo per accomodar quanta più gente fusse possibile e si figura che ascendessero a 3 mila e cinquecento persone.²³

[Yesterday I was at the comedy of the Barberini. . . . Signor Cardinal [Francesco] Barberino and Signor Cardinal Antonio [Barberini] worked very hard to accommodate as many people as possible, and you can imagine that they amounted to 3,500 persons.]

Although another document speaks of four thousand people, Daolmi considers this number to be exaggerated and not very credible, due to the fact that contemporary descriptions of theatres might have a tendency to overestimate the size of the audiences they held. He explains: “Applying an approximate calculation and assuming a minimum space occupied by a seated person of 0.24 square metres (40 × 60 cm), 840 square metres would have been needed to accommodate 3,500 people, when the whole area of the Teatro Barberini measures about 600 (half of which is occupied by the stage). No more than 1,000–1,500 people would have been able to enter the theatre.”²⁴ This is reasonable if we assume that the auditorium was occupied by benches arranged parallel to the scene and surrounded by a semicircle of steps. But if you think of a wooden U-shaped structure with superimposed galleries, maybe consisting of various levels similar to those in Padua, then a capacity of more than 2,000 people becomes more realistic. Furthermore, the height of two floors of the new Teatro Barberini (see the elevation in Fig. 2) would justify this use of space. The architect and scenographer Francesco Guitti, who had been active in Rome since 1634, had already experimented in Parma with a system of multiple tiers of galleries.

The area of the Teatro Barberini (approx. 16.50 × 32 metres = approx. 528 square metres) roughly corresponds to that of the Warsaw hall (approx. 600 square metres). The large number of spectators would be appropriate to the pomp and ceremonial needs of the Roman cardinal’s court, as well as the Polish royal one. Considering the close and documented relationships between Cardinal Francesco Barberini and the nuncio Filonardi, this result should be of no surprise. If in 1646, at the *dramma musicale* performed in Gdańsk, there were “plus de trois

²² Cf. Davide Daolmi, “La drammaturgia al servizio della scenotecnica. Le ‘volubili scene’ dell’opera barberiniana,” *Saggiatore musicale* 13.1 (2006): 29, <http://www.examenapium.it/barberini/> (last accessed: 20 April 2021).

²³ Quoted in Alessandro Ademollo, *I teatri di Roma nel secolo decimosettimo* (Rome: L. Pasqualucci, 1888), 28–29.

²⁴ Daolmi, “La drammaturgia,” 56n106.

mille personnes” distributed between the “parterre” and “galleries,” the same model could likely apply to the Warsaw spectacle of 1637 (and, by extension, to the Roman one of 1639). Moreover, Johann C. Frische’s late plan (Fig. 1) seems to include a circle of galleries or boxes in the Warsaw hall: were they added for the renovation in 1699 or did they already exist?

Also, a passage from the *Gościniec albo krotkie opisanie Warszawy* (The High Road, or a Brief Description of Warsaw) by the Polish composer and poet Adam Jarzębski lends support to our interpretation:

Dwoiste ma okna w sobie,
w jednym staną dwie osobie;
wzdłuż tej dość, ma szerokości,
dostatek w niej bywa gości.²⁵

[It has double windows, which can accommodate two people standing; it is long enough and wide, and frequented by an abundance of guests.]

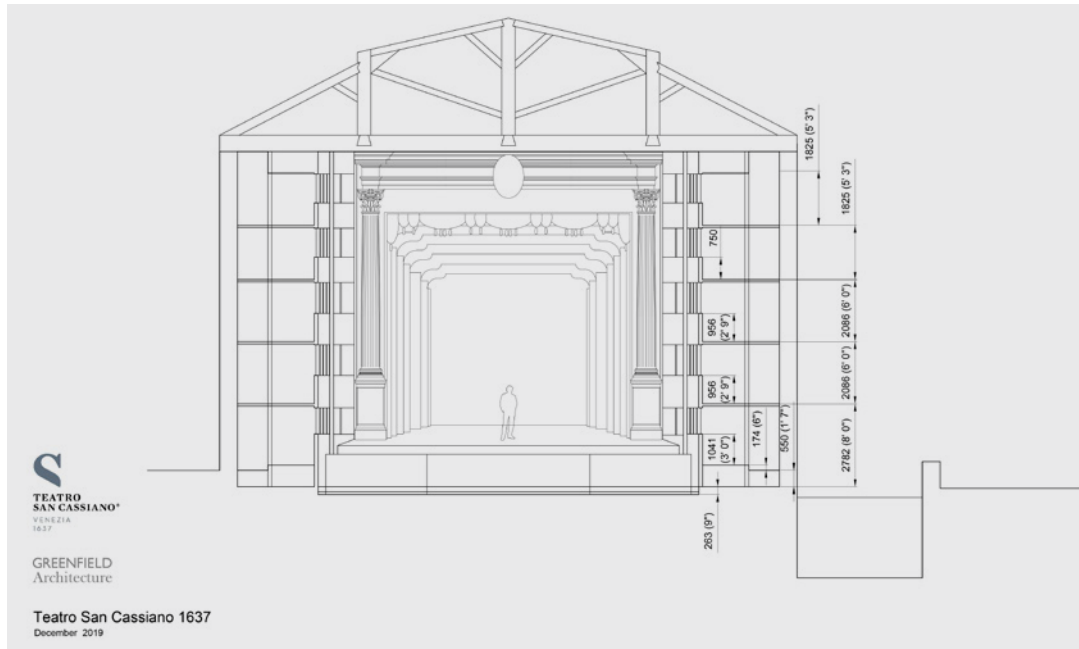
Although these lines are quite obscure, here the Polish word “okna” (literally, windows) seems to mean the front openings of the galleries instead of the castle windows. Each sector might include two people (“dwie osobie”) in the front row, and ample numbers of other guests (“gości”) in the rows behind, probably located on higher steps.

On the other hand, a letter by Filonardi of 1638 mentions the presence of senators and dignitaries seated on “benches covered with red cloth” along with “other ladies and nobility [who] stood.” This could be seen as possible evidence against the assumption of a vertical development of the Warsaw hall. But the reference is to a particular production, *L’Africa supplicante*, which no longer falls within the typology of the *grande commedia*, being rather a hybrid form, influenced by court ballet. The connection via two flights of stairs put the stage and the auditorium in direct communication. It presumably had the function of the direct involvement of at least a part of the audience, including those ladies and nobility who, we imagine, stood on the sidelines for a part of the show, before becoming an active part of the dance. A similar situation probably occurs in the well-known engraving by Jacques Callot (from Giulio Parigi), depicting the interior of the Teatro Medici in Florence during an *intermedio*.²⁶

Compared to the Warsaw hall, the historical evidence for the Teatro San Cassiano in Venice at the time of its inauguration is almost nil. This is of no surprise: in Poland, two prestigious royal houses with their diplomats and chroniclers were involved, while in the Lagoon, the initiative started from a simple—albeit daring and ambitious—company of itinerant musicians who had rented the theatre from the noble family Tron. The *Andromeda* libretto was printed for future reference but the name of the theatre is not even mentioned. At least for the moment, we know

²⁵ Quoted in Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 184.

²⁶ Florence, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, 8015 st. sc. This image is reproduced in Targosz-Kretowa, *Teatr dworski*, 92.



5. Cross section of the Teatro San Cassiano (Venice 1637) as reimaged by Paul Atkin, Stefano Patuzzi, and Jon Greenfield, by courtesy of the CEO of the Teatro San Cassiano Ltd.

of no dispatches, news reports, or notices that provide any information on the performance. Today we consider 1637 to be a landmark in the history of opera, but at the time, this awareness was latent. We do not even know the name of the architect who built the new *teatro de musica* on a site that had previously hosted *commedia dell'arte* troupes for at least fifty years. The comedians' theatre business represented the model subsequently reproduced and suitably adapted by opera companies.

Today nothing remains of the San Cassiano since it was razed to the ground in 1812; the garden of Palazzo Albrizzi now occupies the space. The adjacent streets Calle de la Comedia and Ramo secondo del Teatro are the only surviving toponymics. Other denominations such as Rio Terà de le Carampane and Ponte de le Tette evoke a sort of red light district of the lagoon city, since nearby there were brothels at least until the late eighteenth century.²⁷

Carefully created by Stefano Patuzzi, the recent Wikipedia entry on the Teatro San Cassiano²⁸ presents and contextualizes the few known seventeenth-century documents, among which there is an act dated 12 February 1657 by the notary Alessandro Pariglia²⁹ and a later description of the French traveller Jacques Chassebras de Cramailles published in the *Mercure Galant* (March 1683).³⁰ These sources allow us to reasonably hypothesize that the theatre, when *Andromeda*

²⁷ The Venetian word *carampana* means prostitute.

²⁸ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teatro_San_Cassiano; see also <https://www.teatrosancassiano.it/en/teatro-san-cassiano> (Our History) (last accessed: 15 March 2021).

²⁹ Mancini, Muraro, and Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, 1.1:131–32.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.1:109–10.

was staged, had 153 boxes divided into five tiers (see Fig. 5). The surviving materials of the architect Bognolo, commissioned to reconstruct the San Cassiano in 1763, provide a series of measurements that had probably characterized the theatre (called by him San Cassan Vecchio) at the end of the seventeenth century. The plot where the theatre was built measured just over 400 square metres, therefore a relatively narrow area, of trapezoidal shape, bordered on two sides by the Rio della Madonnetta and the Rio di San Cassiano. Despite the limited area (roughly half that of the Warsaw hall), the theatre, thanks to its vertical expansion, could have accommodated almost a thousand spectators in the auditorium and boxes.³¹

We have no specific information about the architect who planned the San Cassiano renovation in 1636–1637. As in the case of Warsaw, the creator of the playhouse had to be the person in charge of stage sets. Unfortunately, the *Andromeda* libretto is silent as to his name. There are two likely candidates. The first is Alfonso Rivarola, known as il Chenda, to whom we owe the staging of *Ermiona* in Padua. Although his previous collaboration with Benedetto Ferrari's troupe is proven, his early biographers do not mention his Venetian experiences. Anyway, Chenda signed the supply of scenery for Giulio Strozzi's and Francesco Saccati's *La Delia*, the opening production of the Teatro dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo in 1639.³² Alternatively, we can think of the Venetian Giuseppe Alabardi, known as Schioppi, who was also active as a painter. He was in charge of the stage sets for *La maga fulminata* (1638), the second show produced by the Ferrari troupe for the San Cassiano. Other decorations in Venice are attributed to Alabardi, relating to both the Doge's Palace and the Palazzo Mocenigo, where *Proserpina rapita* by Strozzi and Monteverdi appeared in 1630. Whether it be Rivarola or Alabardi, the business of opera at the beginning indeed relied upon previous experiences, since *Ermiona* and *Proserpina rapita* had been promoted in private theatres. Even though they did not belong to court theatre, they depended nevertheless on the local nobility.

Compared to the Venetian theatres of the late seventeenth century, the early San Cassiano (like the Warsaw hall) may have been characterized by archaic architectural traits, such as an auditorium shaped like an elongated U, rather than the modern horseshoe shape. Contemporary iconographic testimony often shows a narrow stage opening, surrounded by a monumental proscenium, laterally bordered by imposing columns (see Fig. 4).³³ One can imagine that the Warsaw stage also had the same setting; the *Gościńiec* mentioned above speaks of a wonderful *theatrum* "z kolumnami" (with columns, clearly on both sides). This architectural solution may have had a practical function: to hide, from the view of the spectators, the mechanisms of the scene changes, mainly based on rotating *periaktoi*.³⁴ Moreover, the Bologna theatre by Chenda

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.1:97.

³² In the libretto of 1639 (copy of the Braidense Library, Milan) the scene designer is not mentioned, while Rivarola's name appears expressly in Giulio Strozzi, *Argomento e scenario della Delia o sia della sera, sposa del Sole* (Venice, 1639), 3, dedication by Strozzi to Ercole Danesi.

³³ A Corinthian proscenium is found, for instance, in Ferrara in 1631 and 1638 (see the engravings for Borso Bonacossi's tournament and the Ascanio Pio di Savoia *Andromeda* with scenes by Guitti), in Padua, 1636 (*Ermiona* by Pio Enea degli Obizzi), and Florence, 1658 (*Hipermestra* by Giovanni Andrea Moniglia). Cf. Daolmi, "La drammaturgia," 64n128.

³⁴ The favoured use of *periaktoi* for visible scene changes is attested both by *Corago* (c. 1630) and *Pratica di fabricar*

and Carini Motta's treatise show a clear separation between boxes and proscenium (see Fig. 3): this device would have avoided seats with poor visibility as a result of being too close to one side of the proscenium. Finally, for reasons of acoustics and ventilation, the highest row of boxes or galleries could not be attached to the ceiling in order to safeguard their occupants against the carbon monoxide resulting from the fumes of candles and oil lamps³⁵ (present in large numbers even in Warsaw, as we read in the *Gościńiec*: "kagańców rzecz niezliczona").³⁶

Despite their profound diversity, Ferrari's *Andromeda* and Puccitelli's *La Santa Cecilia* share some aspects, aside from the total loss of the music that accompanied them. In both cases, the protagonists were female, and—more importantly (and, at the time, not an obvious fact)—the roles were entrusted to female singers: Maddalena Manelli, wife of the composer, in *Andromeda*; Margherita Basile Cattaneo, sister of the famous Adriana Basile, in *La Santa Cecilia*. All the other six performers of the Venetian spectacle were men, including the sopranists who impersonated female divinities such as Juno (Francesco Angeletti from Assisi), Venus (Anselmo Marconi from Rome), and Astrea (Girolamo Medici). Apart from Margherita Cattaneo, we have no information regarding the interpreters of the Warsaw drama. It is reasonable to think that they were *musiciciens du Roy*, and therefore men belonging to Ladislas's chapel.³⁷ It is possible that among the thirteen characters of the main action (excluding the Prologue and *intermedi*), more than one, as at the San Cassiano, was played by the same singer-actor. From this point of view, Venice and Warsaw seem to behave in the same way, distinguishing themselves from Roman opera, in which, as it is well known, women were not allowed to sing on a public stage.

We have no information on the performance of the choral sections. *Andromeda* had two choruses of nymphs and one of gods in the sky; in *La Santa Cecilia* (with its *intermedi*) there were at least fourteen choruses specified next to *dramatis personae*, both male and female. Given the total loss of scores, it is prudent not to pronounce on the music.³⁸ The instrumental ensemble had to be primarily based on strings and the continuo, with potential contributions from other instruments, which cannot be determined with certainty. In the *Gościńiec*, violins

scene by Nicola Sabbatini (1637) as well as in *La catena d'Adone* (1626) by Ottavio Tronsarelli and Domenico Mazzocchi. However, Daolmi argues that already in the 1630s, during the spectacles promoted by the Barberin in Rome, the most advanced technique of movable wings on sliding frames might already have been in use. Daolmi, "La drammaturgia," 2.

³⁵ See Edward Anthony Craig, introduction to Fabrizio Carini Motta, *Trattato sopra la struttura de' teatri e scene*, ed. Edward Anthony Craig (Milan: Il Prolifilio, 1972), xxi.

³⁶ Quoted in Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci* 184.

³⁷ See Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska, *The Baroque, Part I: 1595–1696*, ed. Stefan Sutkowski, trans. John Comber (Warsaw: Sutkowski Edition, 2002), 405. The singer Lucia Rubini also came to Warsaw in 1637. See Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska, "Muzyczne kontakty dworów polskich Wazów i austriackich Habsburgów w świetle dawniejszych i nowych badań," *Annales UMCS, Artes* 9.1 (2011): 45–58.

³⁸ For preliminary considerations, see Zygmunt M. Szweykowski, "La musica per i drammi di Virgilio Puccitelli," in *Virgilio Puccitelli e il teatro per musica nella Polonia di Ladislao IV*, ed. Oreste Ruggieri (San Severino Marche: Bellabarba, 1979), 167–86. Cf. also Agnieszka Pudlis and Marco Bizzarini, "La Santa Cecilia (1637) di Virgilio Puccitelli: le fonti di un dramma musicale alla corte reale di Varsavia," in *Libretti d'opera fra Italia e Polonia*, ed. Federico Della Corte, Leonardo Masi, and Elisabetta Tonello (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW, 2022), 157–73.

("skrzypki," violinists) and harpsichord ("klawicymbal") are mentioned.³⁹ At the same time, for *Andromeda* we must undoubtedly consider the theorbo, the favourite instrument of the poet and musician Ferrari. Both plays assign large amounts of recitative (in hendecasyllables and septenaries) to individual characters, while generally lyric lines are reserved for choral sections or ensembles.

In both cases, the librettos were printed after their performances. *Andromeda* includes a detailed description of the show using the past tense. No other accounts survive. In the same way, *La Santa Cecilia* has scenic captions referring to previous events. In both cases, each act encompassed at least one spectacular change of scene, to be carried out with the *periaktoi* and perhaps anticipations of the sliding scene technique that would be perfected a few years later by Giacomo Torelli.⁴⁰

The most striking difference between the two productions concerns their length: compared to the 1,003 lines of the three acts of *Andromeda*, we have an abnormal 3,169 lines for Puccitelli's *La Santa Cecilia*, distributed among the Prologue, five acts, and four *intermedi*. It is an exceptional size for an Italian libretto of that time. It certainly had to represent an incredible *tour de force* for the royal chapel-master Marco Scacchi—if indeed he was in charge—and his possible collaborators, but perhaps, as is documented in Italy,⁴¹ the printed libretto also included lines not set to music. This gap, in any case, is slightly reduced considering that the first edition of *Andromeda* omits some parts present in the general description, such as the Prologue of Aurora (twenty-four lines reported in the second edition of 1644),⁴² the *intermedio* between the first and second act with a *concertato* polyphonic madrigal with various instruments and a "very gracious dance" of "three beautiful young men costumed as Cupid," followed by the last *intermedio* between the second and third act, once again with another *concertato* madrigal and a ballet of twelve savages choreographed by Giovanni Battista Balbi. The latter would have enjoyed enormous success in Paris in 1645 for the staging of *La finta pazza* by Strozzi with the admirable scene effects by Torelli. However significant, the hidden aspects of *Andromeda* do not bear comparison with the Warsaw counterparts that included an allegorical prologue of 263 lines, four *intermedi* featuring Apollo and Phaeton, Pluto and Proserpina, Jason and Neptune, Tityus and Tantalus, and finally the apotheosis of the martyrs and the dance of the Royal Chamber pages.

Musical contacts between Venice and Warsaw had already been active for years. During his trip to Italy in 1624–1625, Ladislav had visited the city of the lagoons and had tried to hire

³⁹ Quoted in Osiecka-Samsonowicz, *Agostino Locci*, 184.

⁴⁰ Cf. footnote 34.

⁴¹ Cf., for instance, *La regina sant'Orsola* by Andrea Salvadori (Florence, 1625, with dedication to Ladislav): "quest'azione, acciò possa recitarsi senza musica, è stata dal suo autore più allungata in stampa di quello che fu stata cantata in scena" (So that it can be performed without music, this play has been printed by the author in a longer version than the one sung on stage).

⁴² *I drammi musicali veneziani di Benedetto Ferrari*, ed. Nicola Badolato and Vincenzo Martorana (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2013), 222. See also Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 70–73.

Claudio Monteverdi, whose exceptional qualities he greatly admired.⁴³ In 1638 Puccitelli, on behalf of the king, entered into negotiations with Venice's female singers.⁴⁴ Later, he became a member of the Accademia degli Incogniti. Therefore, he possibly met Giovanni Francesco Busenello, who wrote *L'incoronazione di Poppea* and a sonnet in praise of Ferrari. To confirm the close ties between Venice and Poland, Ferrari dedicated to Ladislav his drama *Il principe giardiniero*, set to music by himself and staged for the first time at the Teatro dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo in 1644.⁴⁵

Coming from Rome, the Ferrari and Manelli troupe had previously been in charge of the *Ermiona* performance in Padua. Certainly, they knew the key up-to-date secrets of contemporary court theatre regarding architecture, stagecraft, machines, equipment, instrumental music, singing techniques, choreography, and so forth. Similarly, Ladislav's artists, who came mainly from Italy (such as Locci, Puccitelli, and Scacchi), seemed to emulate the refined achievements of Mantua, Rome, Parma, Ferrara, and Venice. Moreover, in Poland, they could count on extraordinary economic resources. The Warsaw *Santa Cecilia* appears to exceed, by a quantifiable ratio of 3:1 (in terms of length, and maybe also stage equipment, number of musicians, and spectators) the Venetian *Andromeda*, which relied exclusively on private enterprise. By studying both productions simultaneously, without considering them self-contained entities, we can better understand the phenomenon of musical theatre during the first half of the seventeenth century, unfortunately rendered more elusive by the extensive loss of music scores.

⁴³ Paolo Fabbri, "Un soggiorno veneziano di Ladislav principe di Polonia: un incontro con Claudio Monteverdi," *Subsidia musica veneta* 3 (1982): 27–52.

⁴⁴ On 11 December 1638 King Ladislav wrote to Puccitelli from Warsaw: "Le qualità delle giovani cantatrici da Voi sentite in Venezia non sono di nostra piena sodisfazione conforme il ragguaglio datocene colle vostre lettere di 13 del passato [novembre 1638]" (The skills of the young female singers you heard in Venice are not fully satisfactory to us according to the information given to us in your letter of the 13th of the past month [November 1638]). Quoted in Targosz-Kretowa, *Teatr dworski*, 270.

⁴⁵ *I drammi musicali veneziani*, 177.

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