

## Giovanni Pacini (1796-1867): An Overview of His Writings

A highly prolific composer of operas - he wrote more than seventy of them between 1813 and 1867, despite an interruption from February 1835 to December 1839 - Giovanni Pacini was equally productive as a writer. His writings divide into two groups: didactic essays and autobiography.

The beginning of Pacini's pedagogical vocation is usually dated to 1835, when, after the failure of his *Carlo di Borgogna* at La Fenice in Venice, the composer withdrew to Viareggio on the Tuscan coast to found a music academy. His theoretical writings certainly related closely to his pedagogical practice, allowing him to solidify and synthesise his teaching methods. His first publication in fact dates to 1834, however: the *Cenni storici sulla musica e Trattato di contrappunto* (*Historical Remarks on Music and Treatise on Counterpoint*), whose propaedeutic purpose is amply acknowledged in the introductory remarks. Similarly pedagogical is his *Principi elementari di musica, di accompagnamento e di armonia*, published in 1839, at the end of his contemplative interlude. However, his return to the theatre (with *Furio Camillo* at the Teatro Apollo in Rome in 1839) did not detract from his educational writing. The treatise *Sulla originalità della musica melodrammatica italiana del sec. xviii* was above all the result of a particular occasion, an address to the Royal Academy of Lucca, designed to advance the titular argument. The *Corso teorico-pratico di lezioni di armonia*, published first in Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* in 1834 and then as a volume the next year, tries to found music theory, and therefore music pedagogy, on the nature of sound. In 1849 followed the *Principi elementari di musica e Metodo per l'insegnamento del meloplasto*, partly concerned with perfecting the arguments of the earlier works, while also illustrating pedagogical techniques with numerous concrete examples. Finally, the *Memoria sul migliore indirizzo degli studi musicali* (1863) was designed to inform the organisation of musical education by the new Kingdom of Italy. In addition, countless unpublished manuscripts, dating from the 1835 until the composer's death in Pescia in 1867, are held at the Museo civico of that city, including further texts on music pedagogy and speeches given at various institutions.

Pacini's memoirs, *Le mie memorie artistiche*, were first published as a series of feuilletons in the periodical *Boccherini* in 1864, and then as a volume the next year. They are a rich mine of information about his life as well as the history of Italian opera in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Pacini's style is engaging and agreeable to read. Even in the pages that one might expect to be arid, such as in the treatises and lessons, his writing remains sprightly so as to hold the attention of students and readers. His brief history of music from 1834, the *Cenni storici sulla musica*, already anticipates something of the memoirs

in its loquacious narrative. Though this work in no way gives precedence to theatre music (except in the final pages), or calls for vocal examples, the link between writing and operatic composition arises naturally, especially in the autobiography, so rich in anecdotes of theatrical life and the composer's relationships with impresarios, performers, and the public. While the memoirs have enjoyed a certain attention from specialists, due precisely to the numerous anecdotes, the theoretical works seem to have fallen definitely into oblivion, though still available in certain libraries, especially in Italy, and in some cases even on line. *Le mie memorie artistiche* has, by contrast, seen two new editions in the 1970s-1980s and an English translation, published in the United States. These documents deserve to reach a wider range of readers, especially through translation into the languages of other countries interested in nineteenth-century Italian opera (French, German, even Spanish).

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### **Further Reading**

[Giovanni Pacini, \*Cenni storici sulla musica e trattato di contrappunto\*, Lucca, Giusti, 1834, 54 p.](#)

Giovanni Pacini, *Principj elementari di musica, di accompagnamento, e di armonia*, Lucca, Baroni, 1839, 26 p.

Giovanni Pacini, *Sulla originalità della musica melodrammatica italiana del sec. XVIII: ragionamento letto alla reale accademia lucchese nella tornata degli 8 agosto 1840 dal socio ordinario Cav. Giovanni Pacini*, Lucca, Bertini, 1841, 15 p.

Giovanni Pacini, *Corso teorico-pratico di lezioni di armonia compendiato dal maestro cav. Giovanni Pacini, direttore del Regio Istituto Musicale di Lucca*, Milano, Ricordi, 1845, 31 p.

[Giovanni Pacini, \*Principj elementari di musica e metodo per l'insegnamento del meloplasto\*, Lucca, Baroni, 1849, 20 p.](#)

Giovanni Pacini, *Memoria sul migliore indirizzo degli studi musicali*, Firenze, Tofani, 1863.

[Giovanni Pacini, \*Le mie memorie artistiche\*, Firenze, Guidi, 1865<sup>1</sup>, 148 p.](#) ; [Roma, Sinimberghi, 1872<sup>2</sup>, 118 p.](#) ; [Firenze, Le Monnier, 1875<sup>3</sup>, XIX-328 p.](#)

Giovanni Pacini, *My artistic memoirs*, Hillsdale, Pendragon press, 2018, XXII-158 p.

Alexander Weatherson, *Giovanni Pacini. His life and Music* : <http://alexander.weatherson.info/Books.php>

Camillo Faverezani, « “Notre goût, qui à soi est si souvent contraire, / Ne goûtera l’amer doux ni la douceur amère”. Entre légende et poésie : lecture de la *Saffo* opératique de Giovanni Pacini (1840) », in *Afinidades electivas. El poeta-isla y las poéticas homoeróticas*, Alicante, Instituto Alicantino de Cultura Juan Gil-Albert, 2014, « Colectiva », p. 75-92 [cf. aussi *Silène*, revue en ligne : [http://www.revue-silene.com/f/index.php?sp=liv&livre\\_id=147](http://www.revue-silene.com/f/index.php?sp=liv&livre_id=147)].

Camillo Faverezani, « Métastase au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle : l’expérience de l’*Alessandro nell’Indie* de Giovanni Pacini (1824) », *Chroniques italiennes*, XXV, 83-84 (2009), p. 137-159.

Camillo Faverezani, « “Se nell’Erebo discendi, / Io ti seguio”. La fortune de *La Vestale* de Spontini en Italie », in *European Drama and Performance Studies*, II, 15 : *Théâtre et musique, transferts culturels et identités nationales* (Paris, Garnier, 2020), p. 73-91.

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