

MORE EVELL DEEDS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH CASTRATI WERE THE SUPERSTARS OF CENTURIES GONE BY!

It is a known fact that castration prevents the necessary flow of hormones, whereby the vocal cords cannot enlarge. As a result, castrati had the high voice of a boy soprano but the lung power of a grown man. Because the Roman Catholic Church always gathered pre-puberty boys to sing high parts in chorals during service (women were not allowed to participate), the finest boy sopranos were hand picked by the masters of Church music. Their aim was to castrate the boys.

The first castrati were reported in Spain around **1550** and their presence in the Roman Catholic Sistine Chapel Choir was reported to have started around 1565. The Spanish falsetto ruled the Sistine Chapel. The falsetto voices were more agile and had a richer sound. It has been debated that some of the Spanish falsetto were castrati. The change from falsetto to castrati came about because the castrato's voice sounded more natural.



The earliest castrati known were Jacomo Spagnoletti (probably a Spaniard) and Martino, both of whom were admitted to the Sistine Chapel Choir in 1588. Other two good castrati were mentioned in the archives of 1599, the Italians Pietro Folignani and Girolamo Rosini. By 1640, castrati were used throughout Italy despite much theological debate, the music need of the church always prevailing over anti-mutilation surgery. They were formally banned from the papal chapel by Pope Pius X in **1903**.

For over 350 years the Roman Catholic Church in itself, via the Vatican, castrated hundreds of thousands of young boys so they could hear a particular sound that was pleasant to their ears. To think that they were willing to do such an unbelievable thing to these children is one thing, but to do it in the name of Christianity is beyond description. History shows us their form of proclaimed Christianity in the name of the Pogroms, Crusades, Spanish Inquisition, and unknown to most, this despicable act of castration. It is amazing to think that even today, with

some of millions of pedophile Catholic priests being caught and charged, some people still honestly think the Roman Catholic Church is Christian.

Because of castration, castrati tended to be fat, volatile and impossible to get along with (Handel was known to have shouting matches with his castrato Senesino and he certainly did not get on with Farinelli). Sometimes, they were charming not only for their beautiful voices but also for their mannerisms. Farinelli soothed the King of Spain with the same songs every night for years!



On the stage, the castrati were superstars. **Some of them had a range of four octaves, up to 'a' or even 'c' above 'high c' in full voice.** In fact, castrati were pioneering singers in promoting belcanto and those with the finest voices became operatic idols. Composers were bending backwards to please them so that they would kindly sing their works. Castrati were always showing vocal acrobatics and forever changing melody lines. Indeed, just because the notes were written, would they be sung like that on the stage? No! They would be sung as it suited the singers.

Castrati were often punished for being egocentric, vain, stupid and greedy; certainly some of them were. However, several of them, Farinelli, Senesino and Caffarelli, amassed large fortunes and surely were not stupid. **Nicolino, who sang Rinaldo in Handel's opera,** was an extremely intelligent actor, who won praise even from prejudiced composers and became a composer himself. Theatres were always filled with die-hard supporters.

In the second half of the 18th century, composers such as Mozart and Gluck, instead of castrati, they ended using new singers and heroes: Tenors! The composers started to rule the stage and spelled the end of castrati. Despite all this, Mozart turned to a castrato teacher, Giovanni Manzuoli, when he was studying in London in 1764.

Farinelli Conti Marchesi Senesino

Many things are known about castrati. For example, **they were not allowed to marry in church and sing in Lutheran churches.** In France, Italian singers and castrati were not welcomed because of their excessive ornamentation and decadent life style. In the 17th and 18th century Italy, castrati were considered to be natural sopranos, whereas falsettos, which would still possess all tokens of masculinity, were considered to have artificial voices. **They were so treasured that, in 1625, all sopranos in the choir of the Sistine Chapel were castrati.** In Bach's time, there was already heavy competition between the clerical courts of Venice and Rome, so that the local opera theatres were ordered to engage the best castrati.

Castrati were paid at least double the wages of top tenors and basses. Good female sopranos sometimes succeeded in performing in masses and operas, disguised as castrati. The castrati also travelled abroad and soon got famous all over Europe, including Vienna, Munich, Dresden and Berlin, etc. They usually sang in Italian operas and grew immensely popular in Handel's London. He composed the aria *Ombra mai fu* for the famous castrato Guadagni, **who created the role of Xerxes.** Handel admired him greatly. He composed the famous aria from his 'Foundling Hospital Anthem' for Guadagni and re-worked an aria from the '**Messiah**'. Imagine if you will, God looking down at a popular play "Handels Messiah", knowing that a castrated man was participating.

The Italian Church of Rome was willing to do almost anything to satisfy its own wants and needs. It shows how far an organization will go in the name of music and some unknown God they claim to serve.

There are some additional interesting facts about castrati.

Castrati are as far away from being gays as ordinary young singers studying at the conservatory) one will discover that the castrato voice did not reach 'above G5'. Ornamentations used in their singing might go higher but nothing may be found as proof of extremely high notes.



At the peak of time, there were 4000 boys between the ages of 7 and 9 castrated per year.

The young castrati would be dressed as cherubs to accompany funerals.

All castrati came from poor families - except for Farinelli, whose father was the Governor of Maratea and Cisternino.

They would have one day a week solely allocated to improvisation.

Castrato Senesino was paid 3000 guineas for a season in London.

Castrato Siface was murdered by the Marchese Marsili's family.

All countertenors/falsettos were replaced by castrati in the Sistine Chapel Choir, since they could sing higher and louder.

Castrati loathed their parents and families for allowing the surgical intervention. Domenico Mustafa's family told him that, when he was a child, his testicles were eaten by a pig and he always swore he would kill his father for lying.

Castrato Loreto Vittori, according to books written about him in the past centuries, told his father, who asked him for money, that all he owned his family was an empty purse.

The last castrato to perform in opera was in 1825 London. He was castrato Giovanni Battista Vellutti, who performed in *Il Crociato* by Meyerbeer (He died of old age in 1861 - a relic of the past that could not be

resurrected). The last castrato to appear on stage in England was Pergetti in 1844.

Castrati survived a while longer on the continent, at catholic electorates, kingdoms of Germany and at the Vatican, **until 1922**. Alessandro Moreschi, the last castrato, died in Rome, witness of a world long gone.

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