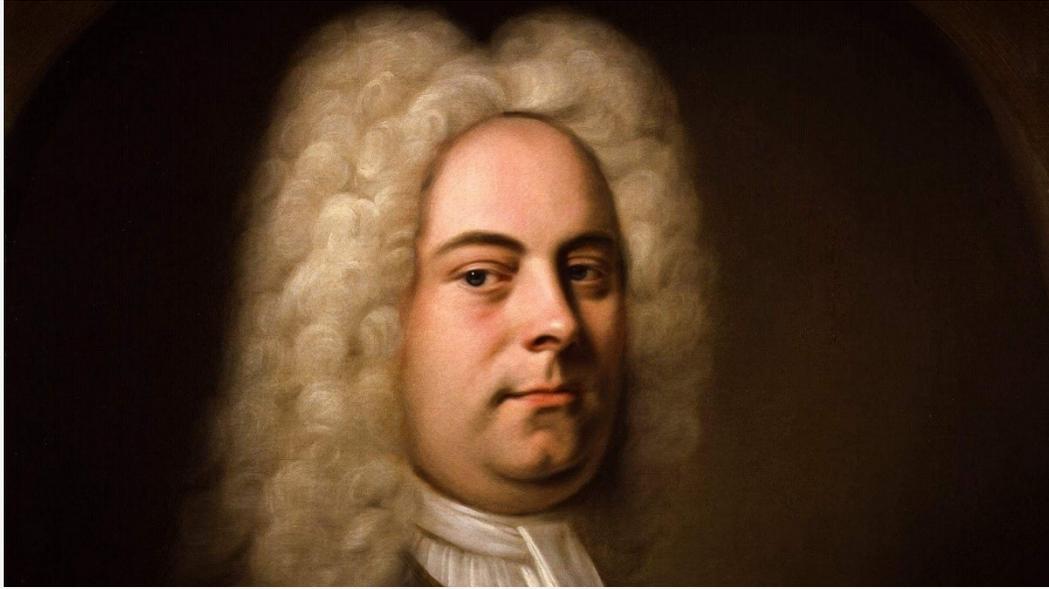


# *THE CLASH OF THE NIGHTINGALES*

U3A Timaru, 2020

*John Drummond*



# *Opera seria*

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- Six singers
    - Prima donna
    - Seconda donna
    - Another woman
    - Primo uomo
    - Secondo uomo
    - Another man
  - 'Da capo' arias
- 



*The King's  
Theatre,  
Haymarket*

Royal Academy of Music

# *Italian opera seria*

- Tragic story taken from Classical or Renaissance literary sources
  - Main characters face dilemmas requiring moral choices (compare French tragedies of Racine and Corneille)
  - Spectacular settings (stage machinery)
  - In Italian (the language of opera)
-

*George Frederick  
Handel*



*The Royal  
Academy of  
Music opera  
company*

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- Formed joint stock company
- Took over King's Theatre
- Appointed two composers
  - Attilio Ariosto aged 53
  - G. F. Handel aged 34
- Found and hired singers
  - 'Senesino'

# *Opening seasons*

- 1720: 4 operas, including *Radamisto* by Handel
- Giovanni Bononcini joins the company



*Rivalry  
as a  
principle  
and a  
way of life*

---

- Business competition



*Rivalry  
as a  
principle  
and a  
way of life*

---

- Business competition
  - Political rivalries
  - Argument and debate
- 

*Rivalry  
as a  
principle  
and a  
way of life*

---

- Business competition
  - Political rivalries
  - Argument and debate
  - Musical rivalry
- 

*John  
Byrom*

Some say, compar'd to Bononcini  
That Mynheer Handel's but a Ninny;  
Others aver, that he to Handell's  
Scarcely fit to hold a Candle.  
Strange all this Difference should be  
'Twixt Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee!<sup>L31</sup>

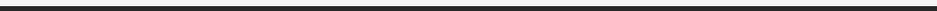
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# *Opening seasons*



- 1720: 4 operas, including *Radamisto* by Handel
- Giovanni Bononcini joins the company
- 2<sup>nd</sup> season: Bononcini's *Astarto*, revival of Handel's *Radamisto*.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> season: Bononcini's operas *Crispo* and *Griselda*; Handel's *Radamisto* and *Floridante*.

*Francesca  
Cuzzoni  
1698-1770*



*Francesca  
Cuzzoni  
1698-1770*

- 4th season: Cuzzoni is prima donna in Handel's *Ottone*.



# *Cuzzoni,* *soprano*

- “. . .so soft and touching was the natural tone of her voice that she rendered pathetic whatever she sang . . . In a cantabile air, though the notes she added were few, she never lost a favourable opportunity of enriching the cantilena with all the refinements and embellishments of the time. . .”



# *Cuzzoni,* *soprano*



- “. . .so soft and touching was the natural tone of her voice that she rendered pathetic whatever she sang . . . In a cantabile air, though the notes she added were few, she never lost a favourable opportunity of enriching the cantilena with all the refinements and embellishments of the time. . . .”
- “Short and squat, with a doughy cross face, but fine complexion; ... not a good actress; dressed ill ; and was silly and fantastical.” (Burney)

*The  
triumph of  
Handel  
and  
Cuzzoni  
1724*

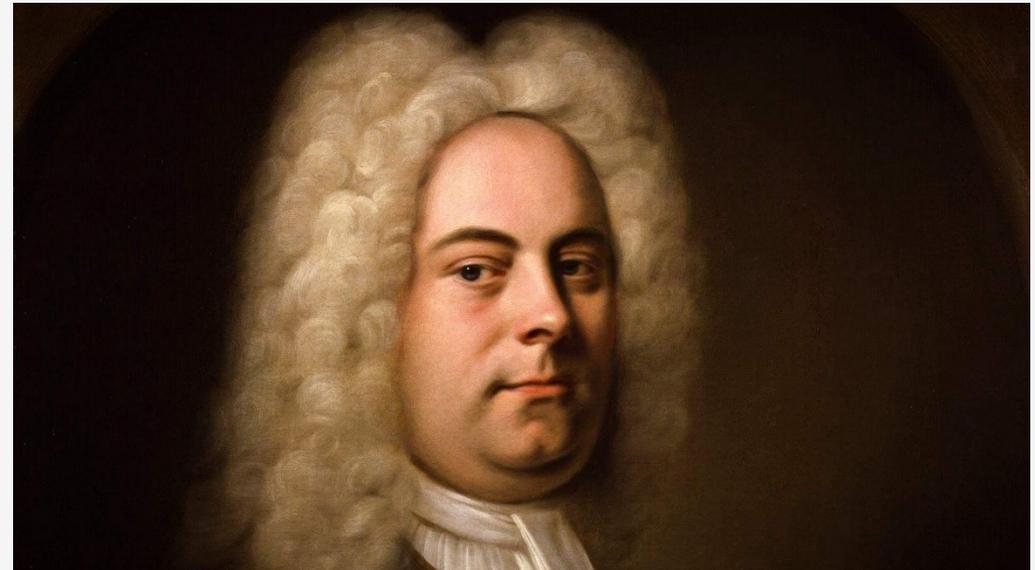
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*Giulio Cesare (1724)*



*The Royal  
Academy  
Sixth  
Season*

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*Faustina  
Bordoni  
1700-1781*





“Her execution was articulate and brilliant. She had a fluent tongue for pronouncing words rapidly and distinctly, and a flexible throat for divisions, with so beautiful a shake that she put it into motion upon short notice, just when she would. She sang adagios with great passion and expression. . . . In her action she was very happy, she succeeded equally well in furious, amorous, and tender parts. In short, she was born for singing and acting.” (Burney)

*Three  
Glorious  
Seasons:  
Season 1*

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- *Alessandro* (5 May 1726)
  - Faustina Bordoni as Rossana
  - Francesca Cuzzoni as Lisaura



*Three  
Glorious  
Seasons:  
Season 2*

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- *Admeto* (31 January 1727)
  - Faustina Bordoni as *Alcestis*
  - Francesca Cuzzoni as *Antigona*

# *Rival factions*

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- The Cuzzoni supporters led by Mary, Countess of Pembroke. Her husband a pillar of the Whig establishment.
  - The Faustina Bordoni supporters led by Dorothy Boyle, Countess of Burlington. Her husband was a Tory.
  - “Old poets sing that beasts did dance  
Whenever Orpheus played;  
So to Faustina’s charming voice  
Wise Pembroke’s asses brayed.”
- 

*John  
Arbuthnot  
: “The  
Devil to  
Pay at St.  
James’s”*

---

- "TWO of a Trade seldom or ever agree ... But who would have thought the Infection should reach the Hay-market and inspire Two Singing Ladies to pull each other's Coiffs, to the no small Disquiet of the Directors, who (God help them) have enough to do to keep Peace and Quietness between them. ... I shall not determine who is the Aggressor, but take the surer Side, and wisely pronounce them both in Fault; for it is certainly an apparent Shame that two such well bred Ladies should call Bitch and Whore, should scold and fight like any Billingsgates."

*Three  
Glorious  
Seasons:  
Season 3*

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- *Riccardo Primo* (11 November 1727)
- *Siroe* (17 February 1728)

*Three  
Glorious  
Seasons:  
Season 3*

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- *Riccardo Primo* (11 November 1727)

- *Siroe* (17 February 1728)

31 May 1728: Company wound up.

*Cuzzoni  
and  
Faustina;  
Cuzzonists  
and  
Faustinians*

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- They sang together in Venice.
- In London they sang together in nine operas including six by Handel.
- They sang in four operas *after* the *Astianette* fiasco

*Cuzzoni  
and  
Faustina;  
Cuzzonists  
and  
Faustinians*

---

- The Royal Academy

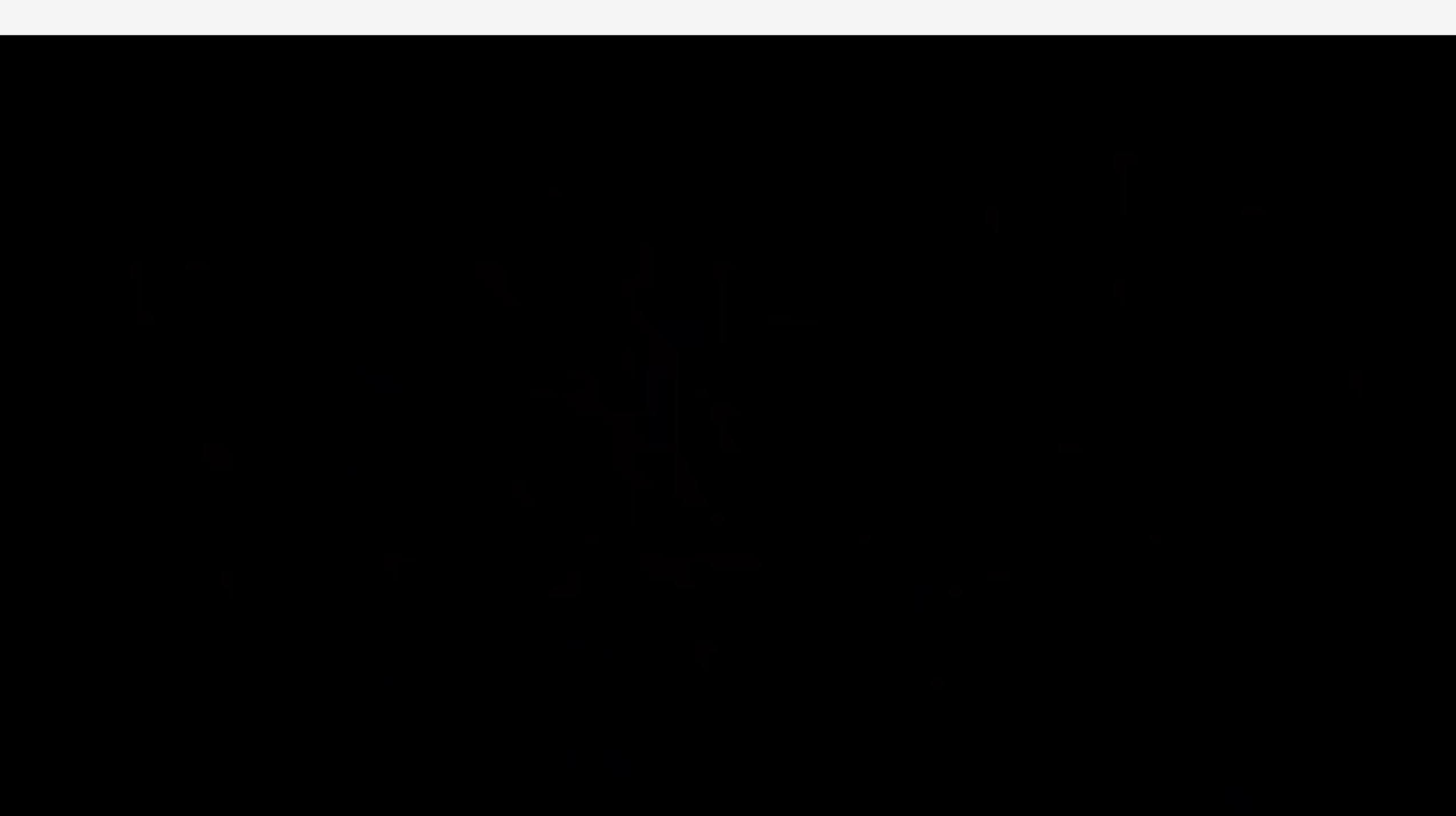


*Cuzzoni  
and  
Faustina;  
Cuzzonists  
and  
Faustinians*

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- The Royal Academy
  - Rivalry as a marketing tool





Thank you

