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CHAPTER ONE

Phantoms in the Archive

> Personally I have had the sense that remembering the dead is important for them but also for us. Because not to know anything is as if you had a hole, a black hole—to know that before us there were people in certain places who lived, suffered, got sick, and then suddenly silence, forgetfulness, oblivion descended. And that pushed me to search for others too, other recollections of other persons. . . . I now preserve the names both of persons who lived and I've known, and those that I didn't know. And periodically I name them, let's say I say a prayer. Even if I'm not particularly observant, still I think that to utter the names of the dead helps them, helps the person who has crossed over. At least that's my thought, it's not a certainty, I can't say such a thing as a certainty.
>
> —Fabio Panconesi, March 23, 2015

The Son, the Wife, the Thief, and Her Lover

After Rita's death and through May of 2015, Fabio continued running their belt shop, Fellini, as its sole living proprietor, perhaps the only one of the many business establishments around the world named for Fellini that had actual blood ties to the family.[1] A broad-minded man of innate intelligence, Fabio was first raised in cosmopolitan Cairo by his father, Edoardo, himself descended from a Florentine military man decorated in the African campaign,[2] and

did his elementary schooling there in French, one of his family's two languages, along with Italian, even after their return to Italy around the time Fabio began secondary school. Most of what he and Rita knew about Moreschi family history came from Rita's grandmother, Vittoria Cevasco (1899–1985), the strong-willed Genoese woman who married the castrato's son in 1925.[3] In the mid-1920s, Vittoria had been one of Giulio's chief pupils, staged by him in concerts of arias built around the then-fashionable verismo repertory. A program in the Moreschi-Fellini Archive features her in a concert produced by Giulio at the Hotel Plaza on Corso Umberto I six months after their marriage, singing repertory by Tirindelli, Puccini, Ponchielli, and Catalani (his famed "Ebben ne andrò lontano" from *La Wally*) (figs. 1.1a and 1.1b)—this in the same period in which the couple reenacted an operatic scene for the camera (fig. 1.2).

The next year, their daughter, Alessandra, was born, on October 10, 1926, and Vittoria became the family's staunch matriarch. Years later, after eighteen-year-old Alessandra—by then married, but still footloose and fancy-free—had prematurely birthed her own daughter, on March 20, 1945, Vittoria energetically helped rear her fragile granddaughter, Rita. And then once more, from 1973 through 1984, it was Vittoria who housed Rita and Fabio when the two were young newlyweds.[4] Those were the years immediately following their wedding at the Campidoglio on September 14, 1973, which Vittoria attended along with both of Rita's parents, her young half brother, Julio (Alessandra's son, then aged eleven), and the female half of the couple composed of uncle Federico (Fellini) and aunt Giulietta (Masina) (fig. 1.3).[5]

By the time Rita and Fabio married, Vittoria had been widowed for almost two decades and had become the family memory bank and storyteller, despite a poorly executed operation done on her vocal cords that left her with a rough, low-pitched voice.[6] On Vittoria's account, as Rita and Fabio remembered things, Alessandro Moreschi had married a woman named Guendalina, surname unknown to them. That in itself is remarkable. Over the course of


Programma del concerto con Vittoria e Giulio Moreschi

HOTEL PLAZA

(CORSO UMBERTO I)

Domenica 20 Settembre 1925

alle ore 21

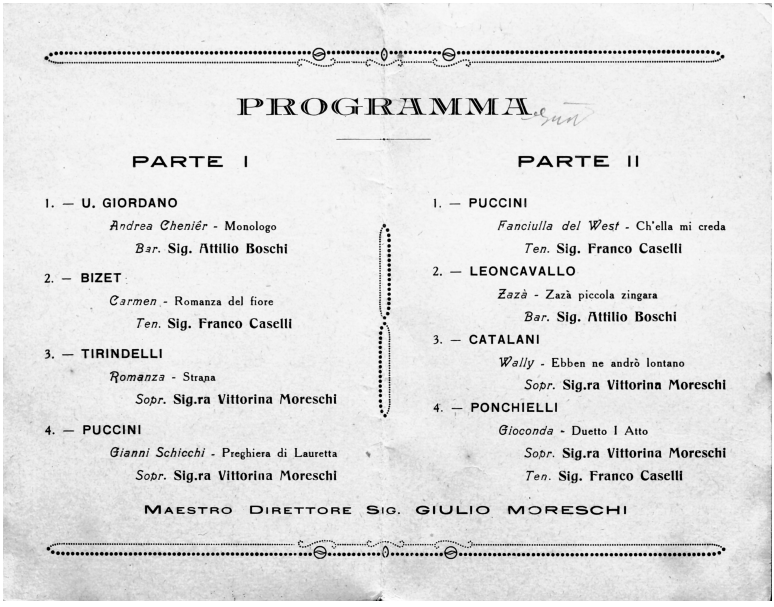
GRANDE CONCERTO DI GALA

A BENEFICIO DEL

RICREATORIO VITTORIO EMANUELE III

La Direzione si riserva di variare le esecuzioni

È PRESCRITTO L'ABITO NERO


PROGRAMMA

PARTE I

1. — **U. GIORDANO**
   Andrea Chenièr - Monologo
   Bar. **Sig. Attilio Boschi**
2. — **BIZET**
   Carmen - Romanza del fiore
   Ten. **Sig. Franco Caselli**
3. — **TIRINDELLI**
   Romanza - Strana
   Sopr. **Sig.ra Vittorina Moreschi**
4. — **PUCCINI**
   Gianni Schicchi - Preghiera di Lauretta
   Sopr. **Sig.ra Vittorina Moreschi**

PARTE II

1. — **PUCCINI**
   Fanciulla del West - Ch'ella mi creda
   Ten. **Sig. Franco Caselli**
2. — **LEONCAVALLO**
   Zazà - Zazà piccola zingara
   Bar. **Sig. Attilio Boschi**
3. — **CATALANI**
   Wally - Ebben ne andrò lontano
   Sopr. **Sig.ra Vittorina Moreschi**
4. — **PONCHIELLI**
   Gioconda - Duetto I Atto
   Sopr. **Sig.ra Vittorina Moreschi**
   Ten. **Sig. Franco Caselli**

MAESTRO DIRETTORE SIG. GIULIO MORESCHI

Figures 1.1a–b. Program book (outside and inside) for a benefit vocal concert put on by Giulio Moreschi at the Hotel Plaza on Corso Umberto I, featuring his wife, Vittoria Cevasco, Sunday, September 20, 1925, at 9 p.m., to benefit the Recreatory of Vittorio Emanuele III—a kind of black-tie affair ("prescritto l'abito nero"). As director, Giulio reserved the right to change the program, which leaned in a veristic direction. Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

Figure 1.2. Giulio Moreschi and Vittoria Cevasco posing for an unidentified operatic scene, probably 1924. (See Appendix One, 5 and 6.) Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

history, very few castrati ever married, and of those who did, none married Catholic women or did so on Italian soil. (The only possible exception dates from the later sixteenth century, well before the castrato phenomenon had fully taken hold.)[7] The prohibition forbidding castrato marriages traces back to a bull of Sixtus V, "Cum frequenter," dated June 27, 1587, made in answer to a complaint from the bishop of Navarra, albeit without naming the object of the prohibition as singing castrates (see below). Although "Cum frequenter" was evidently bound up at least partly with the advent of castrati, marriage continued to be forbidden to anyone incapable of procreation. And until rules of celibacy were lifted on March 7, 1891, for lay members of the papal chapel, marriage was also forbidden to everyone in the Sistine Chapel.[8]

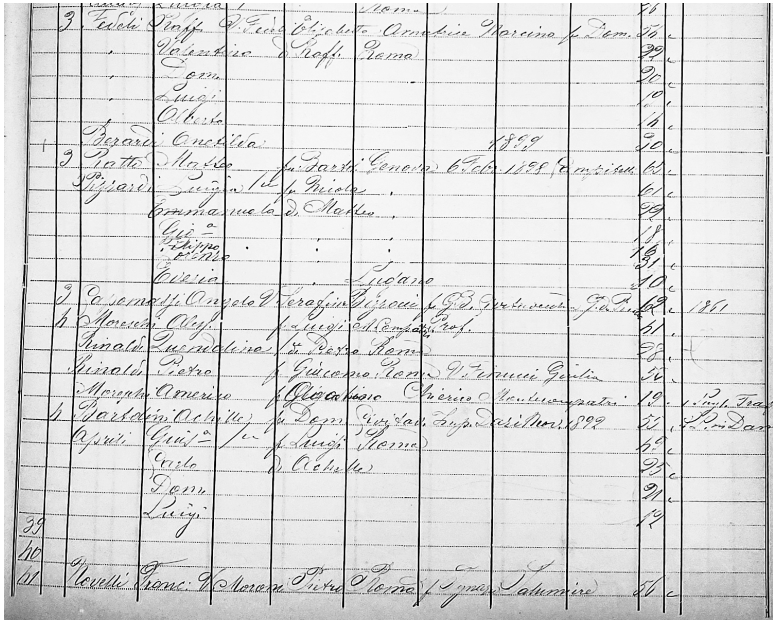
Even after that, Alessandro's marriage was extraordinary because he was patently incapable of procreating. Yet what the archives reveal about it is even more so. According to parish records (*gli stati delle*

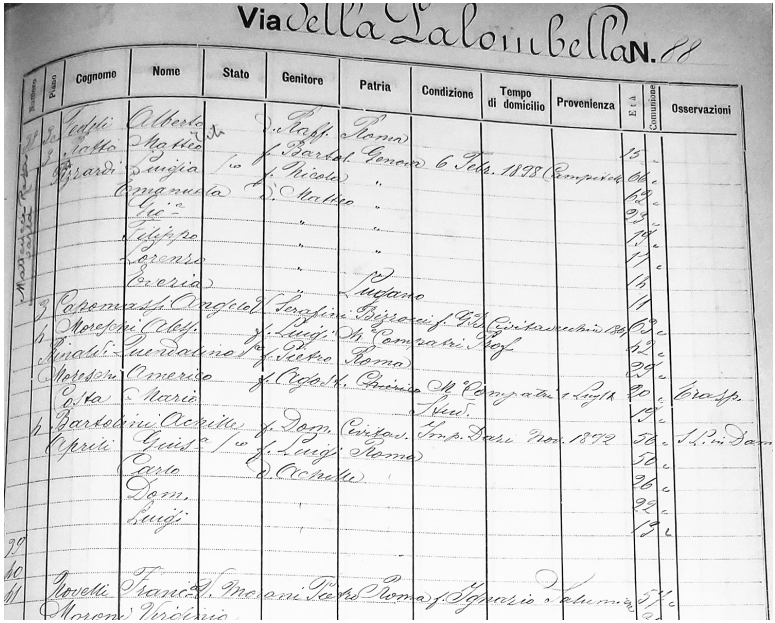
Figure 1.3. Group shot of the wedding party for the marriage of Rita Fellini and Fabio Panconesi. *Left to right*: Julio Salvador Solinas Moreschi, Fabio Panconesi, Riccardo Fellini, Rita Fellini, Alessandra Moreschi, Vittoria Cevasco, and Giulietta Masina. Campidoglio, Rome, September 14, 1973. Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

anime), in 1901 Guendalina (then twenty-eight) and Alessandro (forty-three) were living in an elegant flat steps away from the Pantheon, on the fourth floor of what is now numbered as via della Palombella 38 (fig. 1.4), together with his nineteen-year-old nephew, Amerigo Moreschi (sometimes "Americo") (fig. 1.5), and Pietro Rinaldi (age fifty-seven)—the same man who is buried in the Moreschi-Rinaldi tomb (see fig. P.7).[9] The records list Guendalina as "Guendalina Rinaldi" and Pietro as Guendalina's father, while cemetery documents show that on April 24, 1900, he and Moreschi had become concessionaries of the new joint family tomb (properly, "Moreschi-Rinaldi").[10] Venturing into such a legally and symbolically freighted arrangement suggests a degree of closeness as well as stature and perhaps wealth, plus a goodly amount of initiative on at least one of their parts. But by 1902, the father had absented the flat. Moreover, with the description in that year's parish record of Guendalina as "*fu* Rinaldi," meaning "daughter of the *late* [Pietro] Rinaldi" (figs. 1.6a and 1.6b), the father

Figure 1.4. The apartment building at via della Palombella 38 (= no. 88) near the Pantheon, where Alessandro Moreschi lived on the top floor with Guendalina Rinaldi between at least 1900 and 1905, along with Alessandro's nephew, Amerigo Moreschi, and others. Guendalina birthed Giulio there in 1904. Photograph by the author.

Figure 1.5. Amerigo (Americo) Moreschi (1882–1925). Moreschi-Fellini Archive.





Figures 1.6a–b. 1901 parish record, annotated as being for via della Palombella 88, but coincident with via della Palombella 38, and 1902 parish record for via della Palombella 88 (= via della Palombella 38). In 1901 (figure 1.6a, top), Guendalina's father is listed among those living there, but is represented in 1902 (figure 1.6b, bottom) as deceased through the designation "Rinaldi Guendalina fu Pietro" (i.e., of the late Pietro Rinaldi)—falsely so because he did not die until 1924. Archivio Storico Diocesano del Vicariato di Roma. Reproduced by permission.

was represented as being deceased—falsely so since Rinaldi senior died only in 1924, when, tellingly, he left no heirs, even though Guendalina was alive then and, per family memory, destitute. "*Fu* Rinaldi" therefore sounds more like a claim about their relationship than a life-or-death claim, a way of asserting emancipation or claiming a permanent "estrangement," as if to say, "I used to be his offspring, but no longer am." Whatever the specifics, there has to have been a severe crossing of swords at some point, and a profound falling out between father and daughter.[11]

As for Alessandro and Guendalina, the story continued, although, as choir member and sacred music historian Alessandro Gabrielli (1882–1941) put it years later, Moreschi's "intimate family life was not tranquil."[12] According to government archives, ratified by the private diaries of a chapel singer, Guendalina gave birth to Giulio Maria Pietro Luigi Moreschi on March 15, 1904.[13] Notably, Giulio's surname in official documents was always Moreschi. Vittoria told her grandchildren that Alessandro immediately became Giulio's adoptive father and went on to become his sole parent when Giulio was quite small. She also suggested that the biological father was a young nephew. And though various candidates are possible, and the truth cannot be verified, young Amerigo seems the likeliest candidate.[14]

The rest of the tale has two variants, one even more heartbreaking and scandalous than the other. In both, Guendalina flew the coop not too long after Giulio was born—something the unofficial papal diarist chronicled in June 1907.[15] According to Fabio's recollection of the grandmother's account, she quickly made off with her husband's entire fortune, including precious objects and jewels, which she sold, some on the street, and the proceeds of which her lover, a croupier, promptly lost at the gaming tables such that none of the losses could ever be recouped. According to Rita's recollection, doubtless mined from the same source, Guendalina returned for the jewels (or perhaps it was just the remaining ones) only sometime later. Rita crafted her version of things for her unpublished

book *In viaggio con lo zio* (Travels with my uncle), a memoir whose odd-numbered chapters record her explorations of magic with uncle Federico (Fellini) and whose even-numbered chapters mostly record histories and memories of the Moreschi and Fellini families.[16] By contrast with Fabio's account, Rita's elaborates on the deterioration of Alessandro and Guendalina's marriage and its aftermath by painting Guendalina in more forgiving, even quasi-feminist terms.

> The love that my great-grandfather showed his adoptive son was not enough to halt his gradual disaffection for Guendalina. While he resigned himself to accepting her whims, he was unable to prevent her from leaving him. His son remained with him while Guendalina moved away and changed cities, and sometime later, after Alessandro's death, remarried. Little by little, all trace of my great-grandmother, who was reported first in Naples, then in Florence, was lost. It was also found that she had had another son, then nothing more.[17]
>
> After her estrangement from her first husband, Guendalina never learned to adjust to her reduced circumstances, and she was forced to come back to ask for her famous jewels, her effects [*il corredo*, which can also mean dowry or trousseau], her clothes, and all the goods that had belonged to her. It was easy for my great-grandfather to abide by her requests, if only to get her as far away from the child as possible so that she would remain only a faint memory. Years later I did some ancestry research to find out more about her, but despite my efforts I wasn't even able to find the cemetery where she was buried, she had traveled so far and so wide throughout Italy that hardly any trace was left of her movements.[18]

For Rita, as for Alessandro, Giulio, Vittoria, Fabio, and all the others, Guendalina thus endures as an absence, a haunted and haunting figure. Of her jewels and garments, vagaries and caprices, torments and misfortunes, only faded memories survive, fragments of multiple, sometimes conflicting views and recollections, reworked over time in the form of a myth, a tale told again and again, with variants to buttress an ever-shifting set of understandings about family fortunes and misfortunes. In the account of her great-granddaughter,

Figure 1.7a. Console in the dining room of Giulio Moreschi and Vittoria Cevasco at via Lungotevere degli Anguillara 11, with possible picture of Guendalina Rinaldi hanging on the right. Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

Figure 1.7b. Blurry detail of a portrait of Guendalina Rinaldi. Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

Rita, Guendalina's own son even vacillates between being "adopted" and being simply Moreschi's "son." And the meager state of her survival in the Moreschi-Fellini family archive—or perhaps it is a systematic erasure—only exacerbates the mystery. The archive cannot even claim with certainty to contain a single photograph of her, although survivors believe she is visible in one taken of the dining room at via Lungotevere degli Anguillara 11. The photograph features an elegant imperial-style console (fig. 1.7a) situated before an eighteenth-century gilded mirror and topped with ornate candelabra and a tabletop clock, to the right of which hangs another photo, depicting a woman whose neck is stylishly swathed in a lacy white cowl, her dark hair swept up and knotted with a large piece of jewelry (fig. 1.7b, detail from another image).[19] Who is she, this ghosted woman? And how did the identity of Guendalina come to be ascribed to her? None among the living can say, and no trace of the past will speak about her, much less speak up for her.

Moreschi as Subject of History

Tack backward some forty-nine years and thirty-five kilometers away from Rome to a small Lazian village on its outskirts, where Alessandro's life began on November 11, 1858, not to end until

April 21, 1922.[20] His story is more accessible than those of most other members of his family and circle, yet largely limited to a public profile, since his legacy is virtually devoid of diaries, correspondence, scrapbooks, or memoirs, or what was once there was later lost or sold. What did church politics mean to Alessandro in his teen years? Did he read literature or frequent cafes in Rome? How often did he dine out with friends? Later, did he listen to phonograph records or possess his own gramophone? Or in the grander picture: What were his views on politics, war, art, or the great events and vexations of the day? What did he think of Lombroso's theories of atavism and scientific racism, for instance, if they even appeared on his radar, or the growing scientific racism that would eventually lead to Mussolini's racial laws? What did he feel in older age about the phallic machinery of modernism that so blatantly motored the sound world and imagery underlying a strongly emergent Fascism — of Marinetti's futurist airplane man of 1909 or the futurist noise music explicated by Luigi Russolo in 1913? How did he react to news of the new pseudo-utopia built by Gabriele D'Annunzio after he cantered into Fiume in September 1919, or, much earlier, to the buzz around the gender-bending eroticism of D'Annunzio's wildly popular novel *Piacere* (1889)?[21] What did he think of Italy's shady involvement in World War I and the growing power of the Fascist Blackshirts (Camicie Nere) in Rome, who organized themselves formally in 1919, a year in which Moreschi was involved in a workers' rights group?[22] Or, had he lived a few months longer: What, we might wonder, would he have thought of Mussolini's assumption of power in the coup d'état of October 1922 — the infamous "March on Rome" that turned the National Fascist Party into Italy's ruling party?

We know nothing about any of this and cannot even hazard a guess. To judge from the stance of his colleague and superior, Domenico Mustafà (1828–1912), he likely adhered complacently to nineteenth-century church dogma. He was probably not thrilled about the gradual replacements of castrati with unaltered boys in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the banning

of castrati from the papal chapel in 1903. But Sistine Chapel documents show that he dutifully assumed responsibilities as the chapel's *segretario-puntatore* in 1891, maintaining the chapel's daily diaries, and served the next year as *maestro pro tempore*, scheduling rehearsals and meetings and approving absences and leaves.[23] And civil documents, mostly fairly conventional ones, show he assumed full legal responsibilities of fatherhood for his young boy from the outset. From the last, we can infer that before the birth of Giulio, he wanted passionately to have family, something supported by a suggestive comment in the diaries of his 1902 recording engineer, who wrote about the choir: "I particularly remember their rosy-cheeked conductor and solo soprano, Professor Moreschi, whom I then judged to be about sixty but who was amazingly fresh and youthful [Moreschi was actually forty-three at the time] and boasted of a large family, which greatly interested me."[24]

Besides that and the abundance of evidence that he was a highly dedicated musician, all else is mostly anecdote thickly overlaid with the fantasies of contemporaneous critics and travelers and more recent would-be history-makers, people like the storied *New York Times* critic Harold Schonberg, who concluded that Moreschi had no sexual adventures to equal those Schonberg believed true of other castrati and who painted him instead as "a short, plump man" whose "life appears to have been unexceptionable. He sang, he conducted the Vatican Choir, he left a handful of records, and not much more is known about him."[25]

Despite the thin legacy, a fragmentary history survives. Young Alessandro was born to Luigi Moreschi and Rosa Pitolli, the seventh of nine children, and christened Alessandro Nilo Angelo Moreschi. The Moreschi family lived southeast of Rome and just west of Palestrina's eponymous Lazian hometown in the outlying town of Montecompatri in the diocese of Frascati, where Alessandro was baptized by his uncle, Pietro Moreschi, standing in for the priest at the town's parish church of Santa Maria Assunta in Cielo.[26] Located

on one of the Alban Hills nestled in the Castelli Romani, Montecompatri in the mid-nineteenth century was still a backward hilltop town with low rates of literacy, no rail transport, and little in the way of modern hygiene. Nevertheless, the town had certain claims to fame, including two churches. One was Santa Maria Assunta itself, a church whose importance rose during Alessandro's childhood when it became too small for the town's populace and talk of expanding it or building a new church was in the air. On August 12, 1865, Pius IX went to Montecompatri to inaugurate the new headquarters of the Municipal Palace and the Clergy. The townspeople reportedly showered the papal carriage with gold coins, though the papacy by then had fallen on hard times since the Papal States had already lost massive amounts of territory to Risorgimento efforts that would soon culminate in a new Italian state. The town's other claim to fame was the church (or "sanctuary") of the Madonna del Castagno. Though tiny, it was a mecca because it housed a cultic, revered image of the madonna and child that drew townspeople and visitors, including popes and high-placed clerics. Situated at the bottom of a hill just below the monastery of San Silvestro, the church had functioned thus since at least the sixteenth century, especially after an 1867 cholera epidemic suddenly came to a seemingly miraculous sudden end when Alessandro was eight years old.[27]

Many years later, in 1914, Alessandro told the Austrian singing teacher Franz Haböck (1868–1921) that he had performed there to great acclaim as a boy soloist, specifically, in the Madonna del Castagno, though he surely performed on high feast days at Santa Maria Assunta, as well.[28] And here things become curious. In 1871, at about age twelve, Alessandro was whisked off to the Holy City. The Italian state had already been in place for about a year by then, and word of the beautiful boy singer from Montecompatri had reached Rome. The papacy used one of its own agents, Nazareno Rosati (1817–1877), to effect Alessandro's removal and relocation. Nazareno, a Minorite friar and high tenor (even alto) soloist much esteemed as a papal singer, had lost his upper register and was mainly working

as a composer and teacher by then. None of this would have been documented had Haböck not been writing an ambitious book on castrati, for which he interviewed survivors of the practice in Rome. Rosati "himself," he reported, "had brought [Moreschi] to Rome, where he was accepted into the Scuola dei Carissimi at San Salvatore in Lauro, whose director Fra Vincenzo Torro, together with Rosati, initiated the young singer into an artistic career."[29] Lest there be any question about the accuracy of the account by Haböck (whose factual reports mostly check out), note that the Vatican's expectation to arrange for boys to be located, trained, and later joined to the Sistine Chapel as castrati is documented in papal records dating from as late as 1897, as I explain below.

Thus, we have to wonder whether at a time when castrations for singing had otherwise become very rare, Nazareno was assigned not just to escort Alessandro to Rome, but to see to his castration. More than this, we have to ask whether it's imaginable that the church did *not* encourage and even help organize and attend to boys' castrations, whether in Rome or more likely in their hometowns.

After surgery, a castrated boy would begin tuition-free training at the sheltered church school of San Salvatore in Lauro, as well as gigging in the city's churches, ideally leading to eventual placement in one of its papal basilicas. The school, more precisely, the Schola Cantorum A. Braschi, was run by the religious order of the Fratelli delle Scuole Cristiane and served *in loco parentis*, similar to an orphanage, with all the intensely hierarchical discipline one might imagine. Boys were divvied up into junior and senior classes and further divided by levels, with regular yearly examinations carried out by the chapelmasters of Rome's patriarchal basilicas: Gaetano Capocci, director of San Giovanni in Laterano (the Basilica Lateranense), Settimo Battaglia, director of Santa Maria Maggiore (the Basilica Liberiana), and Salvatore Meluzzi, director of the Cappella Giulia in St. Peters (the Basilica Vaticana).[30] Capocci joined with Rosati in overseeing Moreschi's training, Rosati devoting himself

fully to it. Their efforts were repaid in July 1873 when Moreschi made a major debut, only aged fourteen, as soloist at the Lateran, where Capocci was organist and chapelmaster.[31]

A practitioner of neotheatrical styles, Capocci steeped his student in various sacred idioms, always infusing them with then-popular operatic idioms.[32] Unsurprisingly, this aesthetic mixture had already marked a landmark celebration in 1867, staged to commemorate the school's imminent founding on February 1, 1868, prior to Moreschi's arrival in Rome, namely, the humongous performance of Mustafà's motet "Tu es Petrus" for the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. Some four hundred-plus participants from various papal basilicas, plus boy singers — all or mostly all unaltered — solemnized the feast by singing under the cupola of St. Peter's. Boys came from the Collegio Romano, the Ospizio Orfanelli (presumably the Pia Casa degli Orfani), the Seminario di San Pietro (which educated future priests), the Ospizio di Tata Giovanni (an orphanage begun in 1784), the Ospizio Termini, the scuola Notturne Sabini, and the scuola Notturne M. Ricci, converging for a production that Robert Buning aptly calls a "gigantic, quasi-Berliozian performance of a work harking back to the polychoral extravagances of Mustafà's Baroque Roman predecessor Ottavio Pittoni (1657–1743)."[33] Mustafà's biographer, Alberto De Angelis (1885–1965), explains that the choreography of the performance was so bloated that it required choirs placed at either end of the nave, one conducted by Capocci, the other by Mustafà.[34]

Ironically, given the thoroughgoing linkage of the occasion to a prominent castrato, 1867 also marked a new initiative in educating unaltered boys in vocal studies. Through its colossal performing forces and vaunted occasion, the performance operated as Mustafà's own way of saving what were otherwise failing soprano sections in flailing church choirs while addressing the growing reluctance of provincial families to let sons be castrated for the church.[35] It also drove home the hard fact that Rome's papal chapels needed boy trebles and that most of them were no longer going to be eunuchs. In

this respect, it marked the true beginning of the end for castrati in Roman churches. And by augmenting the presence of *unaltered* boys, it greased the wheels of the reform-minded churchmen, widely known as Cecilianists, who wanted music to return to the role of serving liturgy through chant and simple polyphony and who also wanted to eliminate *altered* male singers associated with solo virtuosity—a direction that Mustafà paradoxically ended up fiercely resisting while tangling with by-then chapel codirector Lorenzo Perosi (installed in 1898) and finally resigning from his post once and for all in January 1903.[36] To quote Buning again, "Mustafà's success with the performance was unintentionally ironic in that it ultimately enabled Perosi to justify his substitution of boy trebles for eunuch sopranos—just as Baini's work on Palestrina [earlier in the nineteenth century] gave rise to the Austro-German Caecilian reforms which eventually reached Italy and also came to militate against any further use of castrati in the mother-city of Catholicism."[37]

After 1867, uncastrated boy trebles started to become regular features of Vatican and basilican life. As will be seen below, they appeared annually at the Office of Tenebrae at St. Peters, for instance, and continued to be called on for particular celebrations in the 1880s up to and especially after the new constitution of 1891 formally sanctioned their participation, specifically, that of boys from San Salvatore in Lauro.[38]

During the intervening years of 1883 to 1891, Moreschi, already a rising star when Capocci appointed him *primo soprano* at the basilican church of the Lateran in 1873, became the Vatican's biggest vocal attraction. Ten years after the Lateran coup, he carried off a sensational performance of the leap-filled coloratura part of the Seraph in Beethoven's *Christum am Ölberge*, performed in the Italian version on Maundy Thursday, March 22, 1883, during Lent. The next day, he joined the prestigious Sistine Chapel choir as a regular chapel member, still only twenty-four years old and just in time to sing the soprano part in the occult, age-old *Miserere* ascribed to Gregorio

Figure 1.8. Small albumen *portrait d'amitié* of Alessandro Moreschi, one of the earliest surviving images of him. Moreschi-Fellini Archive.

Allegri, thereby avoiding the glacially slow, hierarchical process that usually regulated admission to Sistine ranks.[39] The papal diaries make much of this sudden admission to an exalted post.[40] By virtue of the performance, Moreschi also acquired fame and the epithet of "angel." Mustafà was by then well into his sixties, and the only other Sistine soprano who was both highly regarded and still regularly singing solos was the excellent coloraturist Giovanni Cesari (1843–1904). No wonder one of the earliest images of Moreschi to survive, a small, unknown albumen *portrait d'amitié* from around this time (fig. 1.8), shows him looking well-groomed and buoyant, an air of candid confidence pushing through his youthful gravitas.[41]

Histories of Moreschi have logged parts of these accounts while repeating anecdotal tales of Moreschi's second life singing female arias in fancy salons and hotels. In 1883, he tossed off Gounod's "Jewel

Song" from *Faust* at the salon of a prominent society lady, as noted by the admiring, but disconcerted singer and diplomat's wife Lillie de Hegermann-Lindencrone (1844–1928, formerly Lillie Greenough, later Lillie Moulton).[42] In 1888, according to Gabrielli (active in the Sistine Chapel in the 1920s through the early 1940s), he performed Leonora's mezzo aria "O mio Fernando" from Donizetti's *La favorita* with piano accompaniment supplied by a then sixteen-year-old Perosi, as well as parts of Abigaille's vocally treacherous music from Verdi's *Nabucco*.[43] More public salon performances took place at the fancy Hotel de Russie, near piazza del Popolo, where he shared the bill and quite possibly some ensemble numbers with Verdian superstars—baritone Antonio Cotogni and tenor Francesco Marconi. Luigi Devoti offered the only reference to the event, claiming that "the celebrated soprano [Marie] Durand, whom it was known should have appeared in the concert, did not want to sing, fearing the comparison."[44]

Further evidence of freelancing seems to have gone astray or been occulted by accounts so spare and fragile that they hardly register as evidence of musical or social practice.[45] Only Hegermann-Lindencrone's reports say something more. Writing of salon shows by papal singers, including Moreschi's of the "Jewel Song," she focuses on the hazardous political circumstances that marked the performances and calls out the stakes in Moreschi's semipublic performances of female arias. From her we learn that salons open to both "blacks" and "whites"—respectively, the right-wing religious party of the Vatican and the liberal party of the state—could be hosted by only one Roman household: that of the ultrarich Grace Bristed, aka Grace Ashburner Sedgwick Bristed (1833–1897), daughter of Charles Sedgwick and Elizabeth Buckminster Dwight and second wife of American writer Charles Astor Bristed (1820–1874, hence deceased by the time of Hegermann-Lindencrone's account), whose guests probably cast an inquisitive, if jaundiced eye over the proceedings. The account warrants quoting in full.

> Mrs. Charles Bristed, of New York, a recent convert to the Church of Rome, receives on Saturday evenings. She has accomplished what has hitherto been

considered impossible—that is, bringing together of the "blacks" (the ultra-Catholic party, belonging to the Vatican) and the "whites," the party belonging to the Quirinal. These two parties meet in her *salon* as if they were of the same color. The Pope's singers are the great attraction. She must either have a tremendously long purse or great persuasive powers to get them, for her *salon* is the only place outside the churches where one can hear them. Therefore this *salon* is the only platform in Rome where the two antagonistic parties meet and glare at each other.

We went there last Saturday. The chairs were arranged in rows, superb in their symmetry at first, but after the first petticoats had swept by everything was in a hopeless confusion. Two ladies sitting on one chair, one lady appropriating two chairs instead of one, and another sitting sideways on three. The consequence was that there was a conglomeration of empty chairs in the middle of the room, while crowds of weary guests stood in and near the doorway, with the thermometer sky high! When one sees the Pope's singers in evening dress and white cravats the prestige and effect are altogether lost. This particular evening was unusually brilliant, for the monsignors and cardinals were extra-abundant. There were printed programs handed to us with the list of the numerous songs that we were going to hear.

The famous Moresca [sic], who sings at the Laterano, is a full-faced soprano of forty winters. He has a tear in each note and a sigh in each breath. He sang the jewel song in "Faust," which seemed horribly out of place. Especially when he asks (in the hand-glass) if he is really Marguerita, one feels tempted to answer "*Macché*" [No way!] for him. Then they sang a chorus of Palestrina, all screaming at the top of their lungs, evidently thinking they were in St. Peter's. It never occurred to them to temper their voices to the poor shorn lambs wedged up against the walls.[46]

Hegermann-Lindencrone confronted the experience with her usual attentiveness and wit while advancing Moreschi's age by fifteen years and feminizing his name. She could not separate his emotionality from the dizzying gender inversions of his music-making.

We should take a moment to think about that in view of writings about castrati, still shot through with prurient curiosities. Take

Schonberg's piece, which presupposes sexual excess as endemic to castrati (and is stopped short by its presumed absence in Moreschi), or older ones aghast at men doing vocal masquerades as women. Or think about more recent writings that metabolize Moreschi's "female" performances through gender-bending paradigms. Recently, Nicholas Clapton has been tempted to think in terms of gay camp,[47] but then what exactly does camp mean—a *sensibility* marked by a "love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration," as Susan Sontag had it, and what she called "a private code, a badge of identity even, among small urban cliques"?[48] That seems possible as an explanatory frame for certain off-duty chapel activities, but doubtful for Moreschi, given his marriage and other attempts at normative respectability. More likely, he recognized the irony of impersonating females, not least the irony of Marguerite gazing at herself in a mirror in the "Jewel Song," which so perturbed Mrs. Hegermann-Lindencrone when Moreschi delivered it. If so, it seems likely that his sense of humor was shared by his coterie of peers—used to hearing voices that always already bore marks of difference for outsiders. And then what, too, did such gender mismatches mean in a place like Pisa, where Moreschi toured in 1897, singing the treble part in Rossini's *Messe solonelle*, where the local paper described him as that "excellent *soprano* of the Cappella Sistina"[49]—a common descriptor at the time that naturalized high male voices in a conventional way, euphemizing them in the process and thereby neutralizing the issue.

More famous in its time, and more symbolically potent than any of these, was Moreschi's performance given after King Umberto I of Italy was assassinated in Monza on July 29, 1900, and funerals were held all over Italy. The capital city staged two funerals in Rome's Pantheon, the king's eventual burial place.[50] Correspondent A. Roberto Colombo described performances at both for *La nuova musica*'s September 1900 issue, with two special callouts: one to composer-conductor Pietro Mascagni for the first funeral and another to Moreschi for the second.

> In Rome, the divine powers among the arts mourned with us the sad event that assailed the Italian nation at the Pantheon alongside the venerated corpse of the Martyr. There were two solemn funerals. For the first, the Ministry of Education called Maestro [Pietro] Mascagni, who was able in this painful circumstance to show himself up to his name, giving us new proof of his highly varied talent. . . .
>
> Mascagni's direction was admirable, and equally so the performance by one hundred sixty voices, including the best of our music conservatory.
>
> The second funeral, on the thirteenth, was another worthy commemoration of our unfortunate deceased King. The same choral masses took part, among which were the sopranists of the Sistine Chapel, including the famous Moreschi. This time the direction was entrusted to the maestro Stanislao Falchi (well-known author of the Devil's Trill), who also directed in a magnificent way.
>
> The program consisted of five parts of a Mass by an unknown author from the sixteenth century (Palestrina school), Pitoni's *Dies Irae*, Palestrina's *Peccavimus* and Falchi's *Libera*, also written for the funeral of Vittorio Emanuele II.
>
> Maestro Alessandro Vessella, director of the Municipal Band, composed an elaborate funeral March in those days of suffering.[51]

In recompense for his services and the honor done to the king, Moreschi received from Umberto's son, Vittorio Emanuele III, a gold watch and gold pin—among various items Giulio designated for reverential, perpetual preservation in his will that are now long gone.[52]

Of course, the greatest personal event, as well as the greatest paradox of Moreschi's life, came four years earlier. On April 30, 1896, he was profoundly altered by marrying Guendalina in a union that lasted for eleven years.[53] The marriage certificate sounds conventional enough, except that the couple made no public vows, not even in the chamber of a civil official, but stayed at home, where they had a private wedding. A government official recorded the event:

> Guendalina Rinaldi, having demonstrated with a medical certificate the impossibility of going to city hall to celebrate her marriage, I Esquire Salvatore Bugarini [?] municipal councilor delegated to civil status officer, with my municipal secretary Anastasio Cocchi, went to this house where I found: 1. Alessandro Moreschi, 36 years old [he was actually thirty-seven at the time] and maestro of music, born in Montecompatri, resident in Rome, son of Luigi and of Rosa Pitolli. 2. Guendalina Rinaldi, 23 years old, born and resident in Rome, daughter of Pietro and of Giulia Ferrucci, who asked me to join them in matrimony.[54]

Would that something definite were known of how this came about. Before her death, Rita supplied the following in her *In viaggio con lo zio*, evidently based on oral reports passed down to her (again) by her grandmother Vittoria: "In addition to having an amazing voice my great-grandfather was extremely cultured and refined; his singing career enabled him to travel widely, and his professional achievements gave him tremendous gratification. The only thing missing to make him happy was a family. What he did not dare to do a beautiful woman did: my great-grandmother Guendalina, who asked him to marry her."[55]

What might we make of the notion that by time of Rita's adolescence and young adulthood, Vittoria as the only surviving family memory bank had reported to her granddaughter that Guendalina was audacious enough to co-opt the ritual of the male marriage proposal? Vittoria had married Giulio some eighteen years after Guendalina's abandonment of her husband and son and three years after Alessandro's death, hence her knowledge came from Giulio. Perhaps the proposal was not Guendalina's after all, or perhaps she made it under pressure from her father—according to her birth certificate, a stonecutter (*scalpellino*).[56] Was the marriage an attempt to move the Rinaldi family upward in a rigidly classist world of delimited social and financial possibilities, a strategy that vicissitudes like the king's funeral would have justified, but a highly problematic one for Guendalina? Was the Moreschi family, or at least Vittoria, unable

to imagine a castrato proposing or a woman accepting, or was it reluctant to cast Guendalina, who apparently asked Vittoria and Giulio for money for many years, in a less venal scenario?

Whatever the case, marriage changed Moreschi's life profoundly, at least as much as Guendalina's, and in ways that speak to the collision of traditional ways with modern ones. But the radically evolving media environment of the turn of the century transformed his life as well. In April 1902, during Moreschi's married years, the prominent young American recordist Fred Gaisberg captured his voice for a major international label, the famed London-based Gramophone and Typewriter Company, using the latest flat-record technology with horn and cutting stylus shortly after its invention and just before the same team recorded Enrico Caruso. More recordings were made two years later, in April 1904, when the company sent Gaisberg's young compatriot and colleague William Sinkler Darby to record a much more ambitious set of sessions, paying Moreschi a fat advance of 3,000 lire.[57] As exorbitant preservation projects, the recordings recognized the renown and distinctiveness of Moreschi's singing and capitalized on its niche historical value for marketing to new global audiences. Chapter 3 below takes up the nature and impact of those recordings, but here, we should notice the irony of the moment. April 1904 was a half year after castrati were banned from the Sistine Chapel (although Moreschi was grandfathered in until his retirement age ten years later) and less than a month after Giulio was born to Guendalina, auguring a new personal happiness for Alessandro, but intersecting with growing disarray in his personal life.

And then, on June 20, 1905, only a year after Giulio's birth, Pius X disseminated his *motu proprio* titled *Quo Collegium Cantorum Xystini Sacrarii rectius constituitur ac proprio statuto ornatur*, regulating once and for all the rules that ran the Cantoria. By that time, Moreschi's castrato colleagues were basically gone, and Moreschi was helping to raise his fifteen-month-old boy.[58] Just two years later came

ruinous upheaval in his home life, culminating in his abandonment and apparent despoliation by his wife. A Roman chapel singer and diarist, alto Luigi Gentili, wrote on June 29, 1907 that Moreschi "could not sing, for he was sick because his wife has fled."[59] The personal history that has been so invisible, forgotten, submerged, and erased contrasts starkly with the recordings that dominate his legacy. Without them, he would never have been emblazoned in the public imagination as "the last castrato," a rubric widely used first on the notes to the 1984 Opal transfers and soon thereafter on the title of a reissue, as I note further in the Epilogue.[60] The moniker has stuck in detailed scholarly studies such as Buning's and more accessible ones such as Clapton's, to say nothing of all the blogs, YouTube posts, podcasts, fan pages, college lectures, and festivals whose flotsam has littered streaming sites and internet highways.[61] Inscribed on shellac, the recordings have also made him *endure*—to harden, indurate, becoming *durable*, or lasting, in that other common sense, which still applies to this day.[62]

The Modern History of Castrati

Let's turn the clock back before Moreschi's time. His transfer to Rome and eventual induction into the pontifical choir flung him onto a career path not unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors': new castrati were added to church rosters after being discovered among or fabricated from carefully selected boy singers found in provincial chapels, mostly on the outskirts of Rome. As in Moreschi's case, they were procured with considerable secrecy by insiders of the papal musical establishment. But contrary to what might be imagined, given their substantial and continuous presence in the chapel through 1903 and beyond, their path was knotty.[63]

The issues had partly to do with procurement, partly with the nature of their status. Not unlike Chinese foot binding, or indeed eunuchs in nineteenth-century imperial China, castrations of boys in the West were largely driven by aesthetic desires—in the castrato case, by the irresistible allure that European listeners found

in high, brilliantly resonant voices.[64] Papal documents, reviews, and visitors' accounts reveal those voices as avidly sought after for Roman churches of the *Ottocento*. The whole phenomenon of *castratio euphonica*, exacerbated by the conjoint dilemma posed by the Pauline prohibition on women singing in the church, produced the solution of manufacturing "specialty" eunuchs like those found in societies of ancient and geographically distant worlds, males who were deliberately castrated as a way of forcing them to renounce sex, but who in the Italian case had principally been castrated to preserve their boyhood singing voices. Even if tacit symbolic, cultural, and economic reasons accompanied aesthetic ones, the Italian case differed from many ancient and early modern cases inasmuch as compromised sexual ability was in their instance a secondary outcome.[65]

Regardless of the impetus for and consequence of surgery, it institutionalized eunuchism. Buning argues the point by quoting an eighteenth-century German who recognized the reality by reversing the equation when he called celibate Italian monks "castrati . . . who have not been subjected to surgery,"[66] a witty way of pulling the curtain back on the indirection and obfuscation that was second nature to church ethics. Once castrated — or even when making dubious petitions to *be* castrated, as boys were compelled to do because their consent was nominally required — petitioners produced statements that explained away their actions with the same rhetorical strategies their elders used, especially after the seventeenth century, when modern liberal ideas made castration for singing increasingly anathema.[67] Boys and their handlers and patrons often claimed castrations to be sacrifices to church and God when they didn't ascribe them outright to accidents, or even when they did. The two kinds of claims were often intermixed, since assertions of castrations as sacrifices came to be elided with explanations of them as therapies done to forestall the consequences of physical misfortunes, like falls from horses or trees and bites from wild boars.[68] All such tropes explained away the loss of fertility, which was devastating for Italian males. If Black slave women functioned

as what Saidiya Hartman calls "the belly of the world"—a birthing creature who "transfers her dispossession to the child"—the castrate represented their near opposite, the barren of the world, produced by a cut and abjected by virtue of seedlessness, which inverted the condition of a generative, property-owning male mandated for him from biological birth and left him with nothing to transfer in male-to-male "generation."[69] Not only did the church fail to acknowledge such loss, it also failed to acknowledge or deal with its further ill consequences: beardlessness and feminine patterns of fat, but still worse a lifetime of deleterious skeletal deformations, plus physiological disorders such as osteoporosis and physiologically based psychological disorders, above all, melancholia, but also other emotional imbalances. Moreover, the church condoned all this for over four centuries without ever doing so openly or directly. To the contrary, popes such as Alexander VII (1655) and Innocent XII (1691), to take just one slice of historical time, made mention of the existence of castrated singers only to note that they were not to replace falsettists in alto sections.[70]

Indirection hovers everywhere over the earliest papal brief on castrati, the 1587 *Cum frequenter*, issued by the notoriously severe Pope Sixtus V two years after he admitted castrati to the Cappella Giulia.[71]

> Experience shows that *spadones*, though they repeatedly claim themselves capable of coition, together with the women they marry, actually enter into such base unions not in order to live in a sexually disciplined manner, but so that both parties may engage in physically perverse and lewd practices under the outward appearance and form of matrimony. Such unions, which are the occasion of sin and scandal, and lead to the damnation of souls, must henceforth be put aside by the Church, especially in consideration of the fact that eunuch-marriages serve no procreative purpose, but give encouragement instead to the snares of temptation and sexual excess.[72]

Without naming the principal object of the prohibition as *singing* castrati—calling them *spadones* (eunuchs or barren men) instead—

Sixtus V denied them marriage rights, but also the only thing that made up for the lack of marriage rights: namely, their professional identities as musicians.[73] The many castrati who obscured their own castrations necessarily took their lead from Sixtus V and the reams of rhetorical secreting that he and his kind worked to enforce.

And this because for Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and especially in Rome, intense desires for high voices trumped all other considerations. Additionally, since Italian Catholicism prohibited women singing in church, especially in the Papal States, where they were also forbidden from appearing on secular theatrical stages, the main alternative was castrated males. Consequently, castrati dominated the auditory imagination, proliferating on stages and altars not just in Rome, but far beyond, including in the Papal States, where they could be found in such outposts as Perugia, Spoleto, Orvieto, Ravenna, Rimini, and Ancona, located in today's regions of Lazio, the Marches, Umbria, Romagna, and parts of Emilia—all of which had opera houses in addition to numerous churches, many very large.[74] A boom industry in stocking chapel choirs with altered male sopranos and altos resulted, though the system was rarely without signs of distress. Across Europe, philosophes and theologians in the eighteenth century and almost everybody outside the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century launched ethical objections to *castratio euphonica*, which came under repeated attack in the invective tracts of moralists and the poems, plays, and dialogues of satirists, to say nothing of the iconography, often cruel, that marked many visual caricatures.

Still, uses of castrati held up easily in Rome until the 1798 French occupation of the city fractured the system by anticipating the Napoleonic codes (officially installed in March 1804), which forbade both the practice of castration and the use of castrati.[75] The codes were put into effect by making substitutions at Rome's most important public ceremonies and celebrations. At one festivity, at which litanies were performed along the street, held as early as

January 17, 1798, two "'voci virili'" ("manly voices," tenors, in this case) replaced castrati.[76] After the second French invasion, the secretary of state wanted minimally to ban castrati from the presbytery, declaring that their voices, far from being "virile," resembled those of "women and prepubescent boys."[77] Vocal timbre, and not just pitch, was a sonic means through which gender was marked and measured. Given the Napoleonic moral climate, even castrati who were already employed in the papal chapel tried to distance themselves from the practice, as if they had had no part in it.[78]

None of this prevented castrati from continuing to be one of Rome's urban attractions and eventually urban legends, wondrous audiovisual spectacles that could be enjoyed only in Rome's churches, even while they were denigrated in the atmosphere of masculinist revolutionary fervor that marked the Napoleonic years and their aftermath. Musician travelers as illustrious as Otto Nicolai and Felix Mendelssohn reported on them in detail, and expatriates and travelers continued to write about them with stupefied fascination, even after the heyday of the Grand Tour.

Remarkably, the making and use of "*evirati*" went on virtually unabated throughout much of the nineteenth century, despite the challenge of obtaining youths who could be surgically altered, trained, and eventually employed in soprano sections. And contemporary records leave little doubt that church authorities strategized to meet the challenge, especially once the Sistine Chapel suffered the rapid departure of no fewer than three castrati who had been admitted in the years 1816 to 1817. After that, everything hinged on getting hold of more boys. Witness the following supplication, made to Pope Pius VII in 1819, in which a *maestro pro tempore* in the Cappella Sistina joins forces with the soprano castrati:

> The present, and also future, impossibility, of finding sopranos for the service of our church has threatened the Collegio with a crisis. Therefore our maestro, together with the soprano section, supplicates with the Holy Father, that he might wish to deign to admit four castrated youths, to

> be sought throughout Italy, into the venerable Pia Casa degl'Orfani [in S. Maria del Aquiro], so that they might be educated in piety and instructed in music.[79]

The supplicants don't hesitate to blurt outright that procuring four young boys for St. Peter's means averting a calamity. Finding "castrati" for the purpose means "finding sopranos," because using any other voice for high parts is musically unthinkable. The Pia Casa degli Orfani, effectively a small-scale version of the Neapolitan conservatories of the early modern period, though likewise an orphanage in name and practice, expressly cultivated boys to become singers in basilican and other Roman churches.[80] Following the petition above, three boys were brought to the Pia Casa degli Orfani to be taught by a soprano castrato from the Cappella Giulia, Domenico Sgatelli (born 1787), who himself had trained at a Neapolitan conservatory.[81]

Inexorably, we return to the historical questions that bleed through all castrato studies, especially of later times: By what means were boys identified; and when were they removed from their families, and in this instance, transferred to Rome? When in this cycle, additionally, were they castrated?[82] Amazingly, we get no help here from the proliferating news-and-information media landscape that marks the nineteenth century. To the contrary, what's stunning is the church's success at concealment. Still, two clusters of documents let on that the Collegio paid for recruitments, minimally including everything from travel and education to room and board, and raise the question of whether it organized and paid for castrations as well. One involves an allegation by insinuation, made in connection with recruitments of 1861; the other comes straight from the Collegio's mouth in the form of an 1896 resolution, ratified in 1897.

The former, 1861, represents the last time a recruitment of multiple castrati was made (a decade before Moreschi's castration) and included the outstanding Cesari, as well as the much inferior choral singers Giuseppe Ritarossi (1841–1902) and Giosafat Anselmo Vissani

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