

The final chapter on group portraits of civic guards offers fewer surprises perhaps, but it deftly posits the significance in Dutch cities of these free associations of power, where wealthy citizens enacted the role of corporate commitment to the commonwealth. Adams does raise provocative questions (254-58) about those groups, such as the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which did not commission similar group portraits about public service.

Adams's book bears the marks of its considered deliberation and is punctuated by numerous useful references to learned writings and leading ideas of seventeenth-century Dutch culture. While she may strive too hard to make connections to Calvinist thought per se, as well as to ends with a theoretical proclamation about the effect of portraits as sites for psychological identity formation (259-71), in the process of her analyses she skillfully and cumulatively builds upon well-founded interpretations of a neglected genre and its associated Dutch values.

Roget Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani*. Cambridge University Press, New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism, 2009. 431 pp. \$99. Review by R. BURR LITCHFIELD, BROWN UNIVERSITY.

This well researched and well written study is a biography of Atto Melani (1626-1714) as a specimen of a seventeenth-century singer. It is based primarily on Atto's correspondence for the periods it exists, and a catalogue of letters is in Appendices A and B. But the author has supplemented these well with contemporary works and recent scholarship. His discussion of Atto's career is illuminating.

Atto rose from middle class origins (his father was in the service entourage of the Bishop of Pistoia in Tuscany), to prominence, wealth, social standing, and nobility, through singing. He made a sacrifice to do this. He and four of his brothers were castrated when they reached their early teens. The Roman Catholic Church in this period did not allow women to sing in church (a prohibition from the letters of St. Paul), so for the high notes it used boy sopranos, and if their voices were good it tolerated the castration of some of them to keep their

voices in later life. The use of castrati was most prominent in Italy, but the practice declined with changes in musical taste in the eighteenth century, castration was prohibited in the Italian legal code of 1870, the Popes also forbade it, and the remaining castrati in the Sistine Chapel in Rome died out in the following generation.

Atto Melani learned to sing in the cathedral school of Pistoia, but he later did not sing in church much. Instead, he specialized in the new genre of operas. These became standard features in the festivities of princely courts, which vied for singers. He met his principal patron, Mattias de' Medici (younger brother of Grand Duke Ferdinando II of Tuscany) when he was singing in Francesco Saccati's *La finta pazza* in Venice in 1641. Thereafter he was traded around to different courts, spending significant periods in Paris, Germany, and Rome, and he soon aspired to be fully integrated into these aristocratic milieus.

A chapter is devoted to his sexuality. In the seventeenth century, sexuality was thought a continuum from women (thought very sexual, emotional, and uncontrolled) to mature men (thought restrained, rational, and more aloof). But the author notes that there was more "sodomy," casual man-to-man activity of mature aristocratic men, than is sometimes thought; they preferred "boys." Atto was caught in the boyish middle of this continuum (and there is a satirical poem about his ass—p. 103). He appears to have had some kind of homosexual contact when he was 26 with the young Duke of Mantua, Carlo II, while performing in an opera there. But later in Paris he was idolized by two nieces of Cardinal Mazarin. It is uncertain whether castrati could not get erections. In fact, he was banished from Paris in 1661 because of the jealous enmity of the husband of one of the nieces, although his contact with them in Rome and Paris continued in later life. Little emerges from the correspondence about his sex life in his later years.

That he was viewed partly as a sex object may have influenced Atto's career and even the portrayal of men in early operas. Aristocratic men who liked music and opera also liked to be intimate with the singers in operas. Atto demanded the leading roles, and the use of castrati tended to feminize male characters onstage. The author notes that in Claudio Montiverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643) "the two leading castrato roles, Nero and Otho, represent the two men

who have lost their rational, masculine self-control and are under the powerfully feminizing influence—that is, are in love with—Poppea, who in this context represents all that is most dangerous in women” (142-143). Atto also wrote music: secular cantatas appropriate for presentation in the refined aristocratic gatherings he sought to attend. Some of his cantatas have survived from the period ca. 1655-1665, and texts are printed in Appendix F. The themes were conventional: the laments of male lovers scorned by their beloved, or of female lovers abandoned. Atto’s musical settings, discussed at length, were conventional too: like the cantatas of Giacomo Carissimi or Antonio Cesti.

In later life Atto abandoned singing and became a kind of court-hanger-on, spy, gossip-monger, and diplomat based on his courtly contacts, a path on which he had earlier embarked. His last musical performance was in 1668. The author explains that he did this to achieve social advancement: “he sought to behave and be treated like a gentleman, a musical amateur rather than a professional. For a castrato, such a pose was challenging.” (149) To ingratiate himself he provided Cardinal Mazarin with inside information about the Imperial election of 1657, which earned him a pension from Louis XIV. He gave Mattias de’ Medici gossip about the preliminaries of the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659; he was already receiving a pension from Mattias. He lobbied for the election of papal candidates, and for the creation of French cardinals in Rome. Pope Clement X awarded him a post as *pronotario apostolito* and made him a noble of the city of Bologna. His chief early patrons died: Cardinal Mazarin in 1661 and Mattias de’ Medici in 1667. But by this time Atto had begun to accumulate a landed estate in Tuscany, and in 1675 he transferred permanently to Paris to live as a gentleman. He had already helped his younger brothers establish themselves in musical careers; now he introduced nephews to the court of Versailles. His family was ennobled in Tuscany the year of his death. The author concludes that he had used singing as a means, not so much of artistic achievement, as to gain social advancement. “It is this very human perspective on seventeenth-century music-making . . . that [Atto’s] story so engagingly illustrates” (327).