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(Article begins on next page)

‘She is a degenerate cocaine addict’: Emma Carelli, A Diva-Impresario facing her Opponents

Matteo Paoletti

The entrepreneurial career of the former diva Emma Carelli (Naples, 1877 – Montefiascone, 1928) at the Teatro Costanzi of Rome represents one of the better known examples of female impresarios’ activity in the history of music, making of her – as Susan Rutherford noted – one of ‘the handful of women that achieved access to management in the major opera houses of Britain, Europe, and North America’.[1] A soprano of international renown, at the age of twenty-two Carelli was already performing opposite Caruso and Chaliapin at La Scala and by the turn of the century an acclaimed diva in both Europe and South America. Starting from 1908, however, she gradually replaced the limelight with managerial activity. In the autumn of 1911 La Teatral, a company held by her husband Walter Mocchi (1870-1955), appointed her manager of the main opera house of the Italian capital city, Rome, which she ran until 1926.[2] At the Costanzi, Carelli organised memorable seasons that included premieres of works by Mascagni and Puccini, the first continuous Italian runs of Djiagilev’s *Ballets Russes*, and several Futurist nights and exhibitions, hosted in the foyers of her theatre.[3] The former singer had to cease her activity when the Costanzi was purchased by the fascist Governor of Rome to create the current Teatro dell’Opera di Roma. Two years later, in 1928, Carelli died in a car accident at the wheel of her flaming red Lancia Lambda.

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1 Susan Rutherford, ‘The Prima Donna as Opera Impresario. Emma Carelli and the Teatro Costanzi, 1911-1926’, in Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (eds.), *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 273. Besides Emma Carelli, these women were Marguerite Brunet Montansier at the Théâtre Italien in Paris (1801-03), Angelica Catalani at the same theatre (1815-18), Lucia Vestris at Covent Garden in London (1839-42), Cosima Wagner at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth (1883-1908), and Mary Garden for the Chicago Opera Association (1921-22). Like Emma, most of them were former singers that focused on management in the second stage of their careers.

2 For a biographical overview see: Raoul Meloncelli, ‘Emma Carelli’, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia italiana, 1960-), vol. 20 (1977), *ad vocem*. For the history of the Costanzi during Mocchi and Carelli’s exploitation, see: Matteo Paoletti, *Mascagni, Mocchi, Sonzogno. La Società Teatrale Internazionale (1908-1931) e i suoi protagonisti* (Bologna: Dipartimento delle Arti e ALMADL, 2015).

3 For a detailed reconstruction of the seasons managed by Emma Carelli see: Vittorio Frajese, *Dal Costanzi all'Opera: cronache, recensioni e documenti in 4 volumi* (Rome: Capitolium, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 56-180.

The tragic death, the unusual career, and the role of the fascism in her removal from theatre management, contributed to making Carelli 'an unexpected protofeminist',[4] who – according to the epigraph by the poet Guido Guida – 'gave life to the lyrical art, and to modern Rome the beginning of a great Theatre'[5]. As historian Victoria De Grazia observed, that was a period in which 'young women of all backgrounds coming of age […] were [exposed to] a disconcerting experience of new opportunities and new repressions: they felt the enticement of things modern; they also sensed the drag of tradition.'[6]

Even though Carelli's contribution to the feminist cause is questionable – and as we are about to see, she did not seem interested in either politics or in the improvement of the female condition – the former diva certainly played a crucial role in the development of the main opera house of Rome, as was already recognised in the mid-twenties by the board of directors of the Società Teatrale Internazionale (STIN), the joint-stock company that held the Costanzi: 'Mrs Emma Carelli […] combines the quality of an exquisite artist to the one of perfect manager of the main opera house of Rome', organising 'seasons of artistic perfection' without any 'fear of incurring losses nor losing her unfailing energies'[7]. However, when talking about an idiosyncratic figure such as Carelli, the risk of perpetuating an uncritical celebratory narrative is always present. Hitherto unpublished archival sources preserved in Rome and Milan (including the voluminous correspondence produced by Carelli and her partners) prompt us to rethink her activity and her role in the Italian theatrical system from a more complex and nuanced perspective. Up to now, Carelli's work has always been reconstructed using secondary and very partial sources, mostly based on the biography written in 1932 by Carelli's brother, the scene designer Augusto Carelli.[8] Written shortly after his sister's

4 Sergio Lambiase, *Adriana. Cuore di luce* (Milano: Bompiani, 2018), Vol. IV, p. 2.

5 Emma Carelli rests at the Cemetery Verano of Rome. The full epigraph is: 'A Emma Carelli / Passione d'ogni atto / Purezza alata di canto / Umanità fra le finzioni della scena / Che diede all'arte lirica ammaestramento di vita / E alla Roma moderna / L'inizio d'un grande Teatro'. All translations are the author's own, unless otherwise specified.

6 Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 1.

7 'la signora Emma Carelli […] unisce la qualità di squisita artista a quella di perfetta direttrice del massimo teatro di Roma […] e non teme di subire perdite né di logorare le sue inesauribili energie.' Archivio Storico della Camera di Commercio di Roma, *Ex Tribunale Civile e Penale di Roma – Sezione Commerciale*, b. 710/1908, f. 26, Verbale dell'assemblea generale degli azionisti della Società Teatrale Internazionale, Roma, (28 February 1925).

8 Augusto Carelli, *Emma Carelli. Trent'anni di vita del teatro lirico* (Rome: Maglione, 1932).

death, the book used some selected sources – such as private letters and press reviews – to shape an exemplary and distinctive portrait of a successful woman, that fought against the male power system until she was tragically put aside by the rise of fascism. Despite his fascinating and brilliant storytelling, Augusto Carelli – who was himself a supporter of Mussolini – produced a narrative which marginalised the contributions made by his sister's business partners and co-workers, who certainly played very important roles in her progress. Carelli was indeed a strong and successful theatre manager, but she did not achieve this all by herself; she was a relevant part of a complex system that involved several stakeholders, including her father (the musician and singing teacher Beniamino Carelli, who launched her singing career at a very young age), as well as prominent members of the Italian cultural, political ,and economic infrastructure, with whom she had to relate to get subsidies, agreements, and – notably – her chairing position.

A Powerful Marriage: Emma Carelli and Walter Mocchi

The most important of Carelli's business partners was certainly her husband Walter Mocchi (Turin, 1871 – Rio de Janeiro, 1955), former leader of the socialist party and future supporter of the fascists, whom she married in 1898. A powerful theatrical agent, representative of the publisher Sonzogno, and impresario for the South American tours of Pietro Mascagni, for the first three decades of the twentieth century, Mocchi was a key protagonist of the trans-Atlantic musical trade. Through the companies he established in Italy, Argentina, and Brazil (such as the Sociedad Teatral Ítalo-Argentina, the Società Teatrale Internazionale, La Teatral) the impresario formed a 'trust' that controlled the main venues in Italy and South America, including the Colón of Buenos Aires; thus deeply influencing the commerce of artists and scores between Europe and the rising South-American market. A few months after the debut of Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York (December 1910), in June of 1911, Mocchi organised at his Teatro Coliseo in Buenos Aires the lavish world premiere of Pietro Mascagni's *Isabeau*, making the

Argentine capital city a metropolis able to compete with New York, London, and Milan[9]. Even though Mocchi officially became his wife's agent after abandoning politics (1904), he had supported Carelli's singing career since they married while simultaneously exploiting his political connections. To give one curious example from the archives, as reported by the secret police (who were always attentive to left-wing activity), during the 1902 South American tour Mocchi held revolutionary lectures in Buenos Aires while escorting his wife, and during her run at the Opera engaged some anarchists 'as an enthusiastic and zealous claque, that one night, with a wholly American exaggeration, after the show took the horses from Carelli's carriage and pulled her coach to the hotel'[10]. This exploit was certainly 'unnecessary', as the policeman pointed out, since the soprano was already an acclaimed diva who was accustomed to singing with the best performers of the time and often conducted by Toscanini. However, Mocchi – who had become one of the main editors of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*, and also instituted in his companies special funds for propaganda – managed to support his wife's performances with massive press coverage. As part of this media strategy, a special eight-page issue of the Brazilian magazine *Rua do Ouvidor* was dedicated to Carelli during her 1903 run at the Teatro Lyrico of Rio de Janeiro, testifying to her international success through the reproduction of pictures and letters dedicated to the diva by Arrigo Boito, Umberto Giordano, Ruggiero Leoncavallo, as well as many enthusiastic critics from her previous international tours.[11]

After the establishment of two joint-stock companies with large share capital (the Sociedad Teatral Ítalo-Argentina, founded in Buenos Aires in 1907, and the Società Teatrale Internazionale, established in Rome in 1908), Carelli and Mocchi became probably the most powerful couple in the interoceanic theatrical business. While Mocchi ran the most important venues overseas in Argentina

9 Matteo Paoletti, *'A Huge Revolution of Theatrical Commerce'. Walter Mocchi and the Italian Musical Theatre Business in South Americ*a (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

10 'egli ha trovato in loro una claque entusiasta e zelante, che, con esagerazione tutta americana, giunse una sera, a fine di spettacolo, a togliere i cavalli dalla vettura della Carelli, per tirarla a braccia fino all'albergo'. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, *Casellario Politico Centrale*, b. 3321.

11 *Rua do Ouvidor*, VII (1903), 1 and 3 October.

and Brazil, Carelli travelled the ocean as an acclaimed diva to sing in the theatres managed by her husband's associates. When Mocchi was away, Carelli demonstrated her entrepreneurial artistic leadership through controlling Mocchi's business in the theatres in which she was engaged as singer. For instance, during the 1908 Carnival season at the Teatro Regio, the theatre administrator Carlo Körner protested:

> Mrs Carelli domineered in Turin. Besides calling and keeping the Administrator and the Deputy Director of the Theatre at her disposal almost all day, she was pleased to interfere, to give advice, to order on how to stage the shows, with what moral benefit, I leave to others to judge.'[12]

Far from being (only) characteristic diva stereotypes, Carelli's behaviour testifies her prominence in the productive process, sometimes being perceived as a proxy of her husband. The previous season, in Trieste, Carelli's performance of Leoncavallo's *Zazà* had to be stopped by the police and ended up with a fight between the choristers – who supported Carelli – and members of the audience who accused her of 'imposing the opera' and 'being the wife of a socialist leader'.[13]

Carelli's business leadership was unusual during a period in which all Italian women were subject to the *autorizzazione maritale* (marital authorisation), that per the 1865 law stated: 'The wife cannot donate, dispose of immovable property, subject it to mortgage, contract mortgages, transfer or raise capital, establish security, or compromise or stand trial with respect to such acts, without the authorisation of the husband.'[14] Until the repeal of the law, in 1919, the major acts of Carelli had to be accompanied by a document by Mocchi that stated the capacity of his wife to underwrite agreements and run the family business.[15] Minor acts and ordinary administration could be signed

12 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale*, b. 18, f. 2, Report of Carlo Körner to STIN's administration, (3 April 1909).
13 *La Stampa*, (3 February 1907).
14 'La moglie non può donare, alienare beni immobili, sottoporli ad ipoteca, contrarre mutui, cedere o riscuotere capitali, costituirsi sicurtà, né transigere o stare in giudizio relativamente a tali atti, senza l'autorizzazione del marito'. Codice civile del Regno d'Italia, 1865, Book I, tit. V, art. 134.
15 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55.

independently, as far as they did not interfere with 'the interest of the marital union and of the family of whom [the husband] is the head, the custodian, and the legitimate representative'[16]. According to late nineteenth-century jurisprudence, in case of doubt on a contract signed by a woman, 'especially in the presence of children', the male position should prevail[17]. Despite the juridical framework, Carelli used to negotiate as the highest level all by herself, and Mocchi was sometimes described as a kept man,[18] especially during his political career. For instance, the classified reports of the police often pointed out that 'Walter Mocchi […] is said to be the husband of the singer Emma Carelli, but he lives on her behalf only as a lover'[19].

The letters written by the soprano during her singing career confirmed the temper of the future manager, as she always negotiated her contracts herself, often using provocative tones. For instance, in 1909 she telegrammed Alberto Marghieri: 'If you think that it might be bad paying me L. 40,000 for the whole Carnival season, consider this […] in America that is what I earn in a single month, and next year I will be paid L. 60,000. I respectfully bid you goodbye and I quit.'[20] A very effective portrait of Carelli's character emerges in a classified report which the fascist police filed in 1925 after an anonymous person accused her of insulting the fascist leaders and even Mussolini himself in her private conversations. This document is especially important, because it testifies that Carelli had never taken part in any feminist or political movements, and underlines the deference that the fascists seemed to have for her managerial role and expertise:

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[16] 'gli interessi di quella unione conjugale, di quella famiglia di cui egli è capo, custode e legittimo rappresentante.' Enrico Rosmini, *Legislazione e giurisprudenza dei teatri* (Milan: Hoepli, 1893), p. 393.

[17] Ivi, p. 395.

18 Even though Mocchi, as a left-wing politician, had been criticised more for his hypocritical attendance of sumptuous opera houses together with his wife, the 'husband of the prima donna' had long been a derisory figure. See Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.149-160.

19 'Walter Mocchi [è] insieme alla cantante Emma Carelli, di cui si dice marito ed a cui carico vive soltanto come amante'. Archivio Centrale dello Stato, *Casellario Politico Centrale*, b. 3321, Letter of the Legazione d'Italia of Petropolis (Brazil) to the Ministry of the Interior, (2 September 1903).

20 'Giacché pensate possa fare cattiva impressione pagare quarantamila Carnevale Quaresima Emma Carelli che guadagnale al mese in America e che guadagnerà sessantamila anno venturo all'estero tira una bella riverenza all'Internazionale e vi saluta'. Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale*, b. 4, f. 8, *Telegram of Emma Carelli to Alberto Marghieri*, (22 April 1909).

Emma Carelli, owner of the Costanzi Theatre, is renowned for her authoritative character and for her language, which is excessively free and shows little deference to anybody who has to deal with her. She has already been a famed lyrical artist, who has always lived in the theatrical environment, in which she is especially famous and held in special consideration for her artistic competence. All these things contribute to form her independent character, that makes her assume an attitude of superiority towards everybody; this attitude makes her a hostile person for most people, especially in the artistic field, and for her employees, that depend on her and are afraid of her. Regarding the anonymous accusation, the investigation demonstrated that she uses her speeches in the premises of the theatre to attack members of the fascist government, as well as the Prime Minister. However, she seems to talk that way because Carelli demanded from the government a grant to lighten the heavy expenses that she has to carry for the forthcoming lyrical season, and had not obtained it. Whoever listens to her accusations does not give them any credit, because everybody is aware of her attitude of backbiting and coarse language. Mrs Carelli does not have any political principles, because she does not care about politics at all. However, it is well known that she is the wife of Walter Mocchi, former socialist.[21]

Carelli as Impresario

Carelli's managerial career officially started in the autumn of 1911, when La Teatral took control of the Costanzi and appointed her manager of the Italian branch of the family business. Since Mocchi,

21 'Emma Carelli, proprietaria del teatro Costanzi, è nota per il suo carattere autoritario, e per il suo linguaggio troppo libero, e poco deferente per chiunque abbia occasione di trattare con lei. Essa, che fu già rinomata artista lirica, ha vissuto sempre nell'ambiente teatrale, ove è notissima, e tenuta in speciale considerazione per la sua competenza artistica. Tutto ciò è valso a formare in lei un carattere indipendente che le fa assumere atteggiamenti di superiorità verso chicchessia, atteggiamenti che hanno finito per renderla invisa alla maggioranza, specie nel ceto artistico, e nel personale, che da esse dipende, e dal quale è anche temuta. Circa quanto si addebita alla Signora Carelli con l'anonimo che restituisco, è risultato che veramente costei nei locali del teatro con I suoi discorsi attacca I componenti il Governo Fascista ed anche S.E. il Presidente del Consiglio. Si attribuisce tale contegno al fatto di aver la Carelli richiesto al Governo la sovvenzione per alleviare le forti spese che dovrà sostenere per la imminente stagione lirica, e di non averla ancora ottenuta. Chi la ascolta non dà però importanza al suo parlare, tenuto conto della sua spiccata proclività alla maldicenza, e al turpiloquio. La Carelli non può dirsi che abbia principi politici, perché di politica non si interessa. È noto però che è moglie di Walter Mocchi, ex socialista.' Archivio Centrale dello Stato, *Ministero dell'Interno. Direzione generale di pubblica sicurezza. Divisione polizia politica. Fascicoli personali*, b. 245, f. Carelli, Report of the Chief of Police, (14 December 1925).

as Carelli's brother recalled, was 'engaged in America due to Mascagni's tour, and was not endowed, like Saint Anthony, with the gift of ubiquity, he had unceasingly solicited the personal involvement of Emma in the preparation of the first season of the Costanzi.'[22] Carelli's first act as theatre manager was to negotiate with the Municipality of Rome to obtain the 'yearly grant of L. 80,000 for the lyrical season', this was justified by 'the usual practice of the main cities, including Rome', and by the 'difficult conditions of the operatic market'. In the same letter, the diva appointed by La Teatral explained that 'The new company has the project, and the necessity, of giving new and modern shows, to respect all the tastes of the audience and to encourage the artistic proposals of young composers'.[23] The left-wing mayor Ernesto Nathan seemed unwilling to award a grant to an opera house that was perceived as a luxury for the Roman upper class, but the difficulty was solved by Mocchi, who – back from South America – exploited his socialist background to demand from the mayor 'not the mere subsidy of a patron, but the development of a regular agreement between [his] company and the Municipality, that could give in return the rights of a real business partnership'. Mocchi's letter continued: 'the theatrical grants, once considered unproductive or luxury liabilities, or even worse a facility for the rich classes' had now to be considered an aid for 'the economic development of the working classes and the establishment of performances at popular prices', in a country in which 'opera should be considered a real aesthetic education'.[24] The consummate experience of the former politician succeeded in financing Carelli's activity with the requested L. 80,000 yearly subsidy, accorded for the three years 1911-14. In return,

22 '[Mocchi], che a causa della lunga permanenza in America quell'anno per la *tournée Mascagni*, non poteva come S. Antonio godere del dono dell'ubiquità, aveva incessantemente sollecitato il concorso personal di Emma alla preparazione della prima stagione al Costanzi'. Carelli, *Emma Carelli*, p. 162.

23 'la nuova Impresa ha il progetto, e la necessità di dare spettacoli nuovi e moderni, per rispettare tutte le tendenze del pubblico ed incoraggiare le promesse artistiche dei giovani.' Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 3, Letter of Emma Carelli to Ernesto Nathan, (2 November 1911).

24 '[…] non per ottenere una pura e semplice sovvenzione a titolo mecenatistico, ma per addivenire, fra il MUNICIPIO e la mia Società, che gestisce il Teatro COSTANZI, ad un regolare contratto mecenatistico, ma per addivenire, fra il MUNICIPIO e la mia Società […], ad un regolare contratto, in cui i diritti derivanti al Comune, per la sua collaborazione finanziaria, siano ben chiariti e tutelati […]. [Le] sovvenzioni teatrali, considerate come spese improduttive o di lusso o, peggio ancora, come facilitazione fatta alle classi ricche […]. La sempre maggiore elevazione economica delle classi lavoratrici, da un lato, e l'istituzione delle recite a prezzi popolari dall'altro, hanno ormai abolito il privilegio delle classi ricche, in materia teatrale, e che ovunque lo spettacolo lirico è ormai considerato, non più come un semplice divertimento, ma come una vera educazione estetica.' Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 3, Letter of Walter Mocchi to Ernesto Nathan, (15 December 1911).

La Teatral had to extend the usual obligation of popular performances with moderate prices. Mocchi and Carelli consciously positioned their argument within the wider contemporary trend of opening up classical music to all classes[25], also enhancing working opportunities for local practitioners. According to the agreement, the company had to guarantee priority to Roman workers and to create an orchestra and a choir 'that will ensure their fortune including when the Costanzi is closed, providing for most of them a job in the South American tours'[26]. Carelli's season was planned in tight connection to the South American tours of Mocchi's companies. The archives are full of the telegrams and letters that Carelli and Mocchi exchanged across the Atlantic to coordinate their seasons, break down the brokerage costs, and engage leading artists and composers.

The 1912 season of the Costanzi was prepared and performed with the usual quickness, since La Teatral 'victoriously staged 4 operas and 10 runs in 15 days, thus eloquently proving the seriousness with which the season was planned and directed',[27] and also hosted the international star Isadora Duncan, who performed *Dances and Choruses* from Gluck's *Iphigenie*. The most relevant event of the season was *Elektra*, staged from February *7* to 13 April 1912. This was the last appearance of Carelli in a continuative run in Italy. Her performance was described by the Italian critics as 'one of the most genius and complete in the theatrical world', and the diva 'seemed to be willing to forget she was a distinguished and gifted artist, and she had not sung for almost two years, dedicating all the fervour of her rich nature to the humble, ignored labour of theatrical management.'[28] It is common opinion that after the success of *Elektra*, Carelli was overwhelmed by

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[25] Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Carlotta Sorba, *Il melodramma della nazione. Politica e sentimenti nell'età del Risorgimento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2015).

26 'assicurerà anche la loro sorte nei mesi in cui il Costanzi non funziona, scritturandoli, per la maggior parte, nelle proprie tournée sud americane, fintanto che farà tali tournée'. Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 3, *Verbale di deliberazione della Giunta Municipale di Roma – Seduta del 24 gennaio 1912*.

27 'ha preparato e mandato in scena vittoriosamente 4 opere in 15 giorni e 10 rappresentazioni; e queste cifre sono la più eloquente prova della serietà con cui la stagione è stata organizzata e viene diretta.' 'La grande stagione lirica del Costanzi'. *Il Teatro Illustrato*, (15 January 1912).

28 'Emma Carelli [...] sembra voglia far dimenticare a sé stessa di essere un'artista di doti veramente eccezionali, e da quasi due anni non canta più e dedica il fervore della sua ricca natura alle umili, ignorate fatiche dell'azienda teatrale.' *La Vita*, (8 February 1912). The quotation is from the press review published in Frajese, *Dal Costanzi all'Opera*, pp. 62-63.

her entrepreneurial role, and thus forced to give up her singing career. Although the South American activity of Mocchi indeed pushed the diva to focus more on the family business, Carelli did not abandon the stage straight away. In 1912 she accepted the offer made by Gabriele d'Annunzio and Ildebrando Pizzetti to perform *Fedra*, the new opera produced by Lorenzo Sonzogno. The project was discussed in Paris in August, and during all of the autumn the soprano studied the score in her studio.[29] On 31 October 1912, Mocchi included the premiere of *Fedra* in the programme presented to the Municipality of Rome, with his wife in the leading role.[30] Shortly after, the elegant brochure given to the subscribers of the Costanzi advertised the premiere for mid-March.[31] However, the delay of Sonzogno, who at the beginning of March had not even delivered the sketches of the opera, forced La Teatral to renounce the production for reasons of *force majeure* 'and Carelli, in the absence of *Fedra*, could not perform'.[32] The opera debuted at La Scala on 20 March 1915, with Salomea Krusceniski (a soprano bound to Mocchi's agency) in the leading role. Thereafter, Carelli focused on her managerial career, but she did not give up singing. For example, she successfully performed in the leading role of *Elektra* in Mocchi's 1914 South American tour.

While the orchestra and the choir of the Costanzi were engaged overseas, in Rome Carelli kept her theatre closed, reopening the venue in October 1912 with a dramatic season that often involved the star Ermete Zacconi as a guest artist. Following the return of the company from South America, the Carnival season started again on 26 December with the Italian adaptation of Wagner's *Die Walküre*, often hosting some of the most successful South American titles, such as Mascagni's *Isabeau*, which, starting from 6 February 1913 had a run of nineteen nights. During the 1913 season, La Teatral also organised at the Costanzi an exhibition of Futurists painters and sculptors, that culminated in a conference with a speech of Umberto Boccioni and in two 'Futurist nights'.

29 *Il Teatro Illustrato*, (1 October 1912 and 1 November 1912).
30 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 4, Letter of Walter Mocchi to Alberto Tonelli, (31 October 191)2.
31 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 4, Programme of the lyrical season 1912-13.
32 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 4, Letter of Walter Mocchi to the City Council of Rome, (2 March 1913).

Following the South American productive rush, in Rome Carelli also increased the theatre's production to optimise personnel costs, as the orchestra and the choir were paid in lump sums. For example, between 26 December 1912 and 17 April 1913, Carelli staged the astonishing number of 98 nights, thereby even surpassing the record of 84 nights performed in 1909-10 during Mascagni's direction.[33] According to critical reception and box office revenues, quantity did not affect quality, and 'outstanding honours' ('onori superlativi')[34] were tributed to soprano Rosina Storchio. The productive routine did not find favour with the musicians, however, who addressed their complaints to the municipality:

> The victims of the orchestra protest against Mrs Carelli, [who] treats her employees as beasts, [and] shows no respect either for the elderly or for young people, that needing their job undergo her will and resignedly bear maltreatment and tortures.[35]

The Carnival season 1913-14 was the last one in which La Teatral directly ran the Costanzi. Starting from 1914, the company was replaced by the 'Impresa Teatro Costanzi', a new enterprise especially created by Mocchi and Carelli to manage the Roman opera house, which was still formally property of STIN. In 1914, Mocchi and his associate Faustino Da Rosa once again won the grant of the Colón of Buenos Aires,[36], which they ran exclusively until 1918,[37] with the reasoning that 'their offer guarantees the usage of a preventive artistic organisation of one of the main stages of Europe, that is the Costanzi, indisputable advantage that warrantes the homogeneity

33 These numbers are taken from an analysis of the financial statements, conserved in the Archivio Storico della Camera di Commercio of Rome. The comparison with Mascagni's direction confirms the substantial unreliability of Augusto's narrative when talking about numbers: '[Emma staged] fourteen titles whereas seven or eight had always been performed, and a season of four months with more than hundred nights, whereas the theatrical openings had never overcome sixty or seventy days and the number of nights the cypher of sixty'. Carelli, *Emma Carelli*, pp. 164-165.

34 Frajese, *Dal Costanzi all'Opera*, vol. 2, p. 69.

35 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, fasc. 4, Anonymous letter to the City Council of Rome [delivered on 4 April 1913].

36 *Il Teatro Illustrato*, (15-31 December 1914).

37 Roberto Caamaño, *La historia del Teatro Colón 1908-1968* (Buenos Aires: Cinetea, 1969), vol. III, pp. 77-78.

of the company and its preparation.'[38] The last official Roman season of La Teatral was particularly important for two artistic events: the Italian premiere of Wagner's *Parsifal*, staged on 1 January 1914, and the Roman debut of Mascagni-d'Annunzio's *Parisina*, which was finally staged after several troubled years between Mocchi, Sonzogno, the composer, and the librettist.[39] The season confirmed the impressive productive rhythm of La Teatral: 100 nights in three and a half months, 22 of which were *Parsifal*. The Italian and South American activities were so deeply intertwined that the press wrote about a 'tour of the Teatro Costanzi to Buenos Ayres'.[40] Even during the troubled times of the First World War, the tight trans-Atlantic cooperation revealed itself as a winning strategy to keep the venues open. Although Italy remained neutral until 23 May 1915, the conflict immediately impacted on the Italian theatrical world, causing a sudden shutdown of theatres and agencies.[41] Thanks to Carelli's work, the Costanzi managed to continue to organise its seasons during the conflict, due to an ingenious 'combination' of major international venues planned by Mocchi, that involved the Roman theatre, the Colón of Buenos Aires, La Scala in Milan, and the Opéra and Opéra Comique in Paris. Carelli's contribution to the achievement of this project is confirmed by the archival sources, that testify how the female manager worked strenuously to engage the artists through a rich exchange of telegrams with his husband across the Atlantic. For instance, 'La Scala obtained the orchestra at special conditions. On the other hand, the choir broke up', telegraphed Carelli to Moochi during the organisation of the season, 'Engage the masses as I

38 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Ripartizione X (Antichità e Belle Arti) 1907-1920*, b. 55, f. 3, Letter of Emma Carelli to Adolfo Apolloni, [24] February 1915.

39 Renzo Sonzogno wanted Mascagni to work with d'Annunzio, after Franchetti and Puccini refused *Parisina*. In April 1912, the composer accepted the task, and completed the first part of the opera in only four months, but then he was stopped by the excessive length of the libretto, that was cut with much controversy. After the premiere at La Scala (15 December 1913), the opera was shortened and d'Annunzio menaced a trial, but a new version of *Parisina* debuted once again at the Costanzi (21 March 1914). Sonzogno accused the composer of causing heavy losses to the company. See: Cesare Orselli, *Pietro Mascagni* (Palermo: L'Epos, 2011), pp. 91-95, 269-283.

40 *Il Teatro Illustrato*, (15-31 March 1914).

41 Isabella Piazzoni, *Dal "Teatro dei palchettisti" all'Ente autonomo: la Scala, 1897-1920* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1995), pp. 196-200.

told you, and complete them in North America […], and you will avoid huge expenses and unbearable difficulties'[42].

Post-World-War-One Success

Despite the harsh attacks of Toscanini on Mocchi's endeavours ('No, Mr. Walter Mocchi, you cannot create anything, but only destroy everything – you cannot reform anything, but only deform everything'[43]), even in the after-war period the support of Mocchi and Carelli seemed to be crucial for the musical success of new scores in Italy and South America, as confirmed by the letters of Giacomo Puccini and Giovacchino Forzano during the production of *Il Trittico*, whose Italian premiere was performed at the Costanzi in 1919. 'I would like everything to be done with exceptional care: scenery, artists, and the calm that is needed for everyone […]. Would this be possible with Carelli?' asked a concerned Puccini after Ricordi's proposal.[44] 'If you had been in Rome you would have seen how […] exceptionally Mocchi had emphasised the extraordinary success of *Il Trittico*', replied the librettist Forzano after the premiere, and explained: 'Mocchi was working in his own self-interest and for Rome and […] thinking about America […] and Puccini could not be indifferent to that'.[45] The prominent role of the couple is also testified by other major composers of the time: 'I know that Carelli is in Milan to form the company of the Costanzi, where two Puccini, two Zandonai, and two Mascagni operas will be staged, protested Italo Montemezzi to

42 'Scala ottenne orchestra condizioni intesa, invece rottura coro […] formati masse così, completandole nordamerica facendole istruire prima, eviterai enormi spese, difficoltà insuperabili'. Archivio Visconti di Modrone, Milan, b. H71, f. 9, Telegram of Emma Carelli to Walter Mocchi, (7 October 1916).

43 Harvey Sachs, *Reflections on Toscanini* (Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), p. 56, Letter of Toscanini to Uberto Visconti di Modrone, (1916).

44 'Vorrei che le cose fossero fatte con cura eccezionale – sia scene sia artisti sia calma necessaria in tutti. […] Sarà questo con la Carelli?' Archivio Ricordi, *Lettere*, Letter of Giacomo Puccini to Carlo Clausetti, (16 November 1918).

45 'Se foste stato a Roma avreste veduto con quale attività, con quale affettuoso buon volere e con quale esito il Mocchi abbia dato risalto al grande successo del *Trittico*. […] Il Mocchi lavorava nel suo interesse e per Roma e… pensando all'America […]. Ora capirete che a tutto questo Puccini non può essere rimasto insensibile.' Archivio Ricordi, *Lettere*, Letter of Giovacchino Forzano to Carlo Clausetti, (12 February 1919).

Ricordi's manager Carlo Clausetti, 'Please propose *L'Amore dei tre re* to Carelli. That is an idea that Carelli may like.'[46]

The successful activity of Mocchi and Carelli was also sustained by their tight cooperation with the publisher Renzo Sonzogno, competitor of Ricordi, who provided new scores (such as Mascagni's, or, as discussed above, Pizzetti's *Fedra*), singing stars, and constant press coverage through the magazines he controlled. During her singing career, Carelli had been a beloved interpreter of Sonzogno's composers, the most remarkable being Leoncavallo and Cilea. As a manager, she always paid great attention to Renzo's proposals. Renzo was a shareholder of Mocchi's companies and the publisher of his most important client, Pietro Mascagni, who had been appointed manager of the Costanzi in 1909-10, right before Carelli's takeover. In a public protest during Carelli's production of his new opera, *Il Piccolo Marat*, Mascagni gave an accurate and ironical description of that partnership. Mocchi considered the work overly expensive compared to predictable box office results, while Sonzogno obviously sustained the initiative. In the end, Carelli produced the opera anyways, although the staging was considered slovenly and shabby by Mascagni. The composer publicly observed:

> Mrs Carelli […] tried an audacious stroke, thus demonstrating much more bravery than her husband […]. I am experienced in publishers and editors and I especially know Mr Sonzogno, Walter Mocchi, and Mrs Carelli, and I don't trust them at all: every week they fight, and every seven days they make peace due to many mysterious interests, carried on through a hundred Limited Companies, fifty Federations and twenty-five

46 'Veda di proporre alla Carelli *L'Amore dei tre re*, io direttore. È un'idea che la Carelli può trovare buona.' Archivio Ricordi, *Lettere*, Letter of Italo Montemezzi to Renzo Valcarenghi, (1925).

> Syndicates that are dizzily made and undone through games of million*s*, of which they talk about together as though as they were nickels.[47]

As Mascagni pointed out, Mocchi and Carelli – along with their business partners – built up a huge network of influence, which they manipulated for their own interests, thus making them a powerful but not uniformly well-liked couple in the theatrical world. In 1922, after a South American tour in which Mascagni was overshadowed by the Wiener Philarmoniker engaged by Mocchi, the Maestro denounced his impresario to the fascists as the 'Buffalo Bill of the Italian impresarios abroad', who 'offends Italian art by preferring German artists and repertoire'.[48] The powerful Mocchi, who was also a supporter of Mussolini, managed to manipulate his personal disagreement with Mascagni into a large-scale debate in the press regarding the crisis of musical theatre, which led to the Conference for the Lyrical Theatre that took place in Rome in 1923. These were indeed years of great difficulties for the traditional performing arts, as in Italy, as elsewhere, they could no longer withstand the competition from the cinema and new light genres (such as the successful 'varietà'[49]), while in South America the European companies had to face increasing demand from their audiences for a new national repertoire 'that never asserted itself'.[50] These phenomena led to a general crisis of for theatrical exports, and Mocchi and Carelli had to balance their overseas losses with the earnings of the Costanzi, thus causing a significant deficit in STIN's budget.[51]

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47 'La signora Carelli […] tentò il volo d'audacia, dimostrando più coraggio di suo marito […]. Io, che ho pratica di editori e di impresari e che particolarmente conosco il sig. Sonzogno, Walter Mocchi e la signora Carelli, ogni settimana in lite ed ogni sette giorni in pace, in forza di tanti interessi misteriosi, in virtù di cento Società Anonime e cinquanta Federazioni e venticinque Consorzi, che tra loro si fanno e si disfanno vertiginosamente, attraverso alla ridda di milioni, di cui tutti insieme parlano come di nichelini, io (dicevo) non ci credo punto né poco.' *La Tribuna*, (2 April 1920).

48 *La Stampa*, (15 March 1923).

49 Already in 1905, the revenues of varietà-star Leopoldo Fregoli alone doubled those of the most important drama companies in Italy. In the meantime, without subsidies, opera could no longer offset productive costs. For an overview, see: Livia Cavaglieri, *Il sistema teatrale. Storia dell'organizzazione, dell'economia e delle politiche del teatro in Italia* (Roma: Audino, 2021, p. 59).

50 Annibale Cetrangolo, *Dentro e fuori il teatro. Ventura degli italiani e del loro melodramma nel Rio de la Plata* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone, 2018), p. 185.

51 The couple had obtained the majority shareholding in the early 1920s, through a shady turnaround of stocks. For the corporate evolution of STIN, see Paoletti, *Mascagni, Mocchi, Sonzogno*, pp. 338-49.

Financial Difficulties and Fascist Disapproval

The financial crisis of the couple met the interests of Mussolini, 'that commanded and wants the rebirth of the theatre', as explained to the 'Duce' by the Governor of Rome Filippo Cremonesi.[52] Since their early days in power, in late October 1922, the fascists had been seeking a solution to provide the capital city with a public opera house, and, already in 1923, the architect Marcello Piacentini – who transformed the Costanzi into the current Teatro dell'Opera di Roma – had proposed several solutions in a pamphlet dedicated to the forthcoming creation of the National Opera House.[53]. Mocchi and Carelli took advantage of the situation, and proposed that the Governor of Rome acquire their majority shareholding of STIN – the joint-stock company that still owned the Costanzi – as well as their debts.[54] The operation was pain-stakingly planned,[55], and, after a long negotiation, in the summer of 1926 the Governor paid off Mocchi and Carelli's majority shareholding (376 shares out of 400) at the inflated price of L. 1.886.662[56], which included an overrated estimate for scenery, props, furniture, and costumes.[57]

After its refurbishment in 1928, the grand opening of the Teatro Reale dell'Opera di Roma was entrusted to Ottavio Scotto, a competing impresario to Mocchi in the South American market. Although Augusto Carelli argued that his sister was put aside because the board of directors 'was trembling at the idea of working with Mrs Carelli', who was 'a manager of such competence' that

52 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale - Appendice*, b. 1, f. 1, Letter to Benito Mussolini [June 1926].

53 Marcello Piacentini, *Studi per il Teatro Massimo di Roma* (Roma: Sansaini, 1923).

54 According to STIN's financial statements, the company had debts for L. 5,436,792, paid by the Governor of Rome through an installment schedule that lasted until 1935.

55 For a reconstruction of the ministerial debate, see: Emanuela Scarpellini, *Organizzazione teatrale e politica del teatro nell'Italia fascista – nuova edizione riveduta e aggiornata* (Milan: LED, 2004), pp. 78-80; Gianfranco Pedullà, *Il teatro italiano nel tempo del fascismo* (Corazzano: Titivillus, 2009), pp. 69-72.

56 Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale – Appendice*, b. 1, f. 2, *Dal Verbale delle Deliberazioni del Governatore adottate il giorno 18 maggio 1926 – Acquisto delle azioni del Teatro Costanzi*.

57 The Governor's lawyer even suggested a lawsuit against Mocchi and Carelli, because inside the theatre there were 'neither costumes nor footwear property of STIN, except for an insignificant bunch of deteriorated and useless […] consumed material'. Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale – Appendice*, b. 1, f. 2, *Relazione sulla riconsegna del materiale in uso alla Società in Accomandta 'Impresa Teatro Costanzi'*.

she 'could not have never run the theatre as a dependant,'[58] the Governor of Rome probably preferred a fresh start with a less compromised manager. There is no evidence that the fascists excluded Carelli as a woman. As a matter of fact, during the early 1920s, rising fascism had a controversial attitude towards the women's role in Italian society: as Victoria De Grazia observed, on one hand 'Mussolini's regime stood for returning women to home and hearth, restoring patriarchal authority, and confining female destiny to bearing babies', but at the same time 'the fascist dictatorship celebrated the Nuova italiana, or 'New Italian Woman'.'.[59] The regime at first seemed to accept Carelli's leadership. It should be noted that right before Mussolini's rise to power, in January 1920, Carelli's leading position had been recognised by some future fascist leaders through her appointment as member of the committee of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance that should reform theatrical taxation in Italy. In that three-member commission, Carelli was not only the only woman, but also the sole representative of the theatre and opera managers.[60]

However, it is also true that some factions of fascist supporters could not stand seeing a woman in a powerful role, and Carelli became the victim of several anonymous letters sent to discredit her managerial activity. In 1925 an anonymous letter denounced Carelli to the police for supposed anti-fascist behaviours, thus causing an investigation that resulted in the report of Carelli's character by the fascist police quoted above. Once the Costanzi was sold and Carelli no-longer held the management of the Costanzi, some anonymous 'fascist artists' ('artisti del Fascio') addressed a letter to the Governor of Rome to congratulate him on his decision:

> It was a real shame that a theatre of the highest importance was managed by a woman like Carelli, who is a true degenerate cocaine addict, that leaves the running [of the

58 'tremavano al pensiero di dover lavorare avendo in sott'ordine la signora Carelli', 'si rendevano conto che una direttrice così competente come la signora Carelli, non avrebbe mai potuto dirigere in sott'ordine il Costanzi'. Carelli, *Emma Carelli*, pp. 301-302.

59 De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women*, pp. 1-2.

60 The other two members were Marco Praga, representative of the Italian Society of Authors, and Franco Liberati, representative of the theatre owners, STIN shareholder, and future executive for the fascists. The works were concluded by February 1921, when the new taxation scheme was approved (*L'Arte Drammatica*, 15 January 1921).

> theatre] to her chauffeur – that is to her lover – and also to that Spanish bass, Sabat. These foreigners should be eliminated, because we Italians, who also have beautiful voices, are sadly unemployed. But these foreigners are intrusive, and find ways to seduce the faded diva Carelli, who is a mobster. We all support your Highness the Governor of Rome and applaud in unison the vigorous fact that now the Capital of Italy will have its theatre, properly run by people that will not have any second purpose but justice.[61]

It is interesting that the anonymous fascists not only described Carelli's power and influence in terms of 'camorra' (mob), but also denounced her moral unfitness to run the main opera house in Rome, throwing assertions on her sexual behaviour. There had long been rumours, in the theatrical world, regarding Mocchi's and Carelli's affairs, although their business partnership had survived their marriage: as divorce was illegal in Italy, they separated in 1924 but kept on working together until the Costanzi was sold. The loss of the opera house definitely split Mocchi and Carelli as a couple and broke up their relationship. Mocchi moved to Brazil to support the career of his new lover and future wife, the soprano Bidu Sayão, while Carelli tried to reinvent her managerial activity, unsuccessfully proposing herself for the management of the San Carlo of Naples, as well as for other theatres in Italy and abroad. Publishing some excerpts from his sister's letterbook (in the early 1930s conserved in the Archive of the Teatro dell'Opera, but currently missing), Augusto Carelli gave an effective description of Emma Carelli's mood after the sale of the Costanzi:

> What is tormenting, entering into the heart of the correspondence of such a painful soul, is to find Mrs Carelli (who a few weeks earlier dictated the law to everyone, always raising her voice), to find her with the extended hand to ask so humbly for work

61 'Era una vera vergogna che un teatro della massima importanza fosse gestito da una donna che è una vera degenerata da una cocainomane come è attualmente la Carelli, che lascia fare tutto al Chauffeur cioè l'amante – e quel basso Sabat spagnuolo idem. Questi stranieri vorrebbero eliminati, perché noi italiani siamo purtroppo in molti a spasso – e delle bellissime voci. Ma quelli stranieri che sono invadenti e trovano le vie per entrare nelle seducenti grazie della diva tramontata Carelli cammorrista. Noi tutti ci uniamo a Sua Eccellenza il Governatore di Roma ed applaudiamo all'unisono dell'energico fatto: ora la Capitale d'Italia avrà il suo teatro gestito bene e da persone che non avranno il secondo fine – ma la giustizia.' Archivio Storico Capitolino, *Società Teatrale Internazionale - Appendice*, b. 1, f. 3, Lettera to Filippo Cremonesi, [delivered on 21 June 1926].

> […] And all her friends in Milan, Florence, Trieste, Naples, Paris, New York, answered her with fine words, but either making empty promises or betraying her.[62]

Unable to find a new position, Carelli wandered Europe driving her flaming red car, until the tragic accident which occurred on 17 August 1928 cut her life short at the age of 51. Augusto Carelli chose to conclude the reconstruction of his sister's last years with a note written by Carelli a few days before her death: 'Three passions I had in this world: Walter Mocchi, the Costanzi Theatre and this damned car, that someday will crush me'[63].

Conclusion

The activity of Emma Carelli has been long described (and rightly so) as an outstanding experience of female leadership in the theatrical world of the early twentieth century. However, only a thorough analysis of primary and secondary sources is able to frame this exceptional figure in her kaleidoscopic complexity. The documentation produced by the police, by her partners, and notably by her opponents, provides an effective portrait of woman who had been crucial for the Italian culture and its circulation worldwide in a period of deep social transformations. Composers like Mascagni and Puccini had to deal with the theatrical networks Carelli and her husband envisioned and created, while Toscanini denounced their shady connections and their prominence in the international operatic commerce. Carelli's wide range of interests – from opera to dance, from operetta to futurist avant-gard – is proof of her brilliant mind no less than her business acumen. And the letters of her fascist detractors, focusing on sexual behaviour and moral unfitness to run the main opera house in Rome, underline the regression of parts of the Italian society during Mussolini's regime.

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62 'Quello che strazia, entrando nel vivo della corrispondenza di un'anima così dolorante, è il ritrovare la signora Carelli (che poche settimane prima dettava la legge a tutti, alzando la voce sempre), il ritrovarla con la mano tesa a chiedere così umilmente lavoro [...]. E tutti i suoi amici di Milano, di Firenze, di Trieste, di Napoli, di Parigi, di Nuova York, le rispondevano con belle parole, ma o promettendo a vuoto o disingannandola.' Carelli, *Emma Carelli*, p. 309.

63 'Tre passioni ho avuto al mondo: Walter Mocchi, il Teatro Costanzi e questa maledetta macchina che un giorno o l'altro mi schiaccerà.' Carelli, *Emma Carelli*, p. 317.