
TO PHILIP GOSSETT

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Philip Gossett died on 13 June 2017, in Chicago. At the time, the “Vox Imago” team was busy on working on a new issue of the publication dedicated to Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*. Gossett had been forced to abandon his role as artistic supervisor of the last couple of editions of the series because of illness. From the first release in 2004 up until 2014, the American scholar had been the driving force behind “Vox Imago”, participating in all the documentaries and writing the listening guides published with the various editions. We do not want to retrace his academic career, which was spent largely at the University of Chicago and La Sapienza in Rome, nor describe his work as a researcher, a true pioneer in the rediscovery of sources relating to Italian opera, nor to outline his enormous number of publications (among many things he was editor of critical editions of Rossini and Verdi), nor even enumerate his active participation in the production of numerous performances. We would just like to remember his work as a populariser, his conviction that the results of the most advanced research should be accessible to everyone. This was why he became committed to “Vox Imago”. That is why we wanted to bring together the recollections of colleagues who, over time, contributed to the series and worked closely with Gossett on several occasions. These are personal memories, far from an official celebration, but they give an idea of the network of human and professional relationships he wove during his life, and his role as an indispensable point of reference for anyone who has been involved in opera.

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...par che el svola: Philip Gossett

I was not one of the great US musicologist's closest friends, but Philip Gossett was fundamental to my career, which developed partly thanks to his example and his help. Shortly after I graduated, I read Luigi Rognoni's book on Gioachino Rossini. When I got to the end, I came across a catalogue of works by "Dr Philip Gossett of the University of Chicago [...] directly compiled from the original sources," which sparked my interest more than the rest of the book. It was clear from the bibliographical references that the scholar had no prejudice towards Rossini's *opera seria*, usually over-shadowed by the *opera buffa* and *semiseria* masterpieces, even in the aesthetic vision of Rognoni and other specialists of the time. So when Gossett came to La Fenice in Venice to present the performance on his critical edition of *Tancredi* in June 1983, I was there to hear him, full of expectations. I thought I would see a stuffy young academic, instead he was like a firework display, shooting out critical bursts, singing and accompanying himself on the piano. This exciting musician-musicologist was also a great communicator, who demonstrated how important it is to get the widest possible number of people interested in the topics one is working on. His interpretation opened up vast horizons for me.

He then made me understand how important it is to put one's skills at the service of one's colleagues, without hierarchical distinctions, thereby promoting every cultural experience and helping the young to mature. I was at the Rossini Opera Festival in September 1985 to see *Mosé in Egitto* and *Il signor Bruschino*, and one morning I ventured

into the premises of the Fondazione Rossini to find Gossett up to his eyes in staves. He was reviewing the score of *Edipo Coloneo* about to be published in the critical edition of Rossini's works. He was very busy, but he was kind and friendly, explaining, among other things, how important revision work was in order to restore the score to its original sensibility. I have never forgotten the simple way he welcomed a young scholar, as I was then, and if I have become a better organiser of cultural events and teacher, I have him to thank.

I became particularly aware of his generosity when I found out, many years later and not from him, that his personal commitment had been decisive in convincing the University of Chicago Press to translate my Puccini monograph that came out in 2000 into English, despite being opposed by an anonymous reader. Gossett indirectly explained his choice in a review of three Puccini monographs that appeared in the *New York Times* three years later. He had methodological objections, but he saw a critical perspective worthy of note in what I had written.

This review was and remains a special source of pride, but I still did not know Gossett from the human point of view, as I did later in many conferences and other circumstances, including an after theatre dinner in 2004 in the company of his wife Suzanne, a friendly, lively woman and renowned professor of English literature. We sat at a table at Ae do Spade, a Rialto restaurant that boasts an illustrious tradition, because one of the libertine Casanova's boldest adventures took place there. Of course Philip knew that and joked about it. He also talked to me about *Divas and Scholars*, which he was preparing.

With its analysis, performance practice and political culture of the system of producing Italian opera in *Il Bel Paese* and abroad, he believed it was destined to cause some controversy, because he had taken the opportunity to get a few things off his chest. He talked to me again in 2008, proudly, when the Italian edition was about to come out, and he had been teaching at La Sapienza for six years. He had good reason to be satisfied, because he had been able to translate his whole life into a unique artistic and

cultural experience by writing a very, very compelling book, as the unforgettable Maestro Bruno (Bartoletti), the great conductor who shared many experiences with him in Chicago, said. After reading the book, two years ago I thanked Gossett, who was ill (he spoke about it openly) and I'm glad, because my message gave him a moment of relief. *Par che voli* (he seems to be flying), because he wrote an indispensable chapter in modern musicology, a chapter that will always remain relevant.

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