

International Trumpet Research Journal

Volume 2, Issue 1
December 2025

Per Abbattere il Mio Core From the Opera Partenope by Neapolitan Composer Domenico Sarro (1679-1744): A Critical Edition

Luis Miguel Araya

luis.arayamorera@ucr.ac.cr

Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica and Universidad de Costa Rica

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Luis Miguel Araya

Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica

Universidad de Costa Rica

Abstract

This study examines the trumpet's evolving role as a solo and obbligato instrument in 18th-century vocal music, with particular focus on Domenico Sarro's aria *Per abbattere il mio core* from the opera *Partenope* (1722). Through historical and musicological analysis, the research corrects the work's prior misattribution to Alessandro Scarlatti while situating Sarro as a crucial transitional figure between late Baroque and early Classical styles. The paper provides: (1) a biographical sketch of Sarro's career in Naples, highlighting his institutional roles and compositional output; (2) a reception history of *Partenope*, tracing performances and textual variants across 1722–1739; and (3) a critical edition of the aria based on manuscript analysis, with editorial solutions for modern performance. Performance practice recommendations address ornamentation in the da capo section, reflecting the virtuosic traditions of soprano Faustina Bordoni, the aria's original interpreter.

Keywords: trumpet, aria da capo, obbligato, Faustina Bordoni

Abstract (Spanish)

Este estudio examina el papel cambiante de la trompeta como instrumento solista y obbligato en la música vocal del siglo XVIII, con especial atención al aria *Per abbattere il mio core* de Domenico Sarro, perteneciente a la ópera *Partenope* (1722). A través de un análisis histórico y musicológico, la investigación corrige la previa atribución errónea de la obra a Alessandro Scarlatti, al tiempo que sitúa a Sarro como una figura transicional crucial entre los estilos del Barroco tardío y el Clasicismo temprano. El artículo ofrece: (1) un esbozo biográfico de la trayectoria de Sarro en Nápoles, destacando sus cargos institucionales y su producción compositiva; (2) una historia de la recepción de *Partenope*, siguiendo las representaciones y variantes textuales entre 1722 y 1739; y (3) una edición crítica del aria basada en el análisis de manuscritos, con soluciones editoriales para la interpretación moderna. Las recomendaciones de práctica interpretativa abordan la ornamentación en la sección *da capo*, en consonancia con las tradiciones virtuosas de la soprano Faustina Bordoni, intérprete original del aria.

Palabras clave: trompeta; aria da capo; obbligato; Faustina Bordoni.

Introduction

The importance of the trumpet as a solo instrument during the eighteenth century is evident from the abundance of compositions utilizing the trumpet as either the main solo voice, or as a collaborative partner with other instruments or singers. Regarding collaborative works, obbligato arias have become an important part of the repertoire of modern trumpet performers. Arias like The Trumpet Shall Sound from G. F. Handel's Messiah, and J.S. Bach's "Großer Herr und starker König" from the Christmas Oratorio are just two examples of the many arias and cantatas that abound in the format with obbligato trumpet from the baroque period.

Since the beginning of the evolution of the aria-form around the year 1650, the orchestra has played an important role in supporting the expressive qualities of the text handled by the composers. With the passing of time, it became an equal partner with the voice during the late baroque era. Coincidentally, around the same time frame, the trumpet was also effectively used in opera to support stage actions that reflected sensationalism in instrumental numbers or choruses with large crowds, like armies or the like by writing fanfares or signals that reinforced military or courtly actions on stage. As the aria da capo consolidated around the year 1670, the trumpet started being used as an obbligato instrument in arias whose text reflected heroism in battle, not only real, but also metaphorically (Ciurczak, 1974).

One of the reasons for this study is to correct an attribution mistake, for one of the source manuscripts and the first modern edition of *Per abbattere il mio core* claims it to be composed by Alessandro Scarlatti instead of Neapolitan composer Domenico Sarro (1679-1744) from his opera *Partenope* (Scarlatti, 2013).

Historic Profile of the Composer

Domenico Natale Sarro was born on December 24, 1670, in Trani, a seaport in southern Italy. Between ages six and seven, he moved to Naples and started his musical training with Angelo Durante at the Conservatorio di Sant'Onofrio a Capuana (Brandenburg, 1990). His first known composition was *L'opera d'amore*, a sacred opera, performed at the Arciconfraternità Della Santissima Trinità de' Pellegrini in the year 1702 (Robinson & Monson, 2021). During the year 1703, Alessandro Scarlatti was denied an extension of a leave of absence from his position as Maestro di Capella Reale, and as a result, a competition was held to see who would occupy this position. Sarro won second place against Gaetano Veneziano, and a year later, on December 26 of 1704, they were appointed Vice-Maestro and Maestro di Capella Reale respectively by the Spanish viceroy (Wright, 1975). In that same year, Sarro composed the oratorio *Partenope liberata per il patrocinio della Vergine Addolorata* with a libretto by Nicolò Giupo for a performance at the L'Arciconfraternita Napoletana dei Sette Dolori (Magaudda & Constantini, 2003).

Sarro's first secular opera, *Candaule, Re di Lidia* was performed in October of 1706 at the Teatro di Fiorentini in Naples, after which he composed several other operas for Naples' public theaters (Roeckle, 1978). In 1707, Sarro lost his position at court due to the fact that the Austrian Empire conquered Naples, which prior to that time had been ruled by the Spanish Empire. In 1718 Sarro's career as an opera seria composer started to gain recognition, with 1718 to 1725 being the most productive for him. One of his most important accomplishments was to write the music for *Didone Abbandonata*, the first libretto written by Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), arguably the most important librettist of opera seria during the eighteenth century (Robinson & Monson, 2024). This opera was performed on February 1, 1724, at the Teatro San Bartolomeo (Roeckle, 1978).

In 1720, Sarro was promised two positions. First, as a Vice-Maestro de Capella of the court, which he occupied in 1725 (after A. Scarlatti's death), and second, as Maestro de Capella of the city of Naples, succeeding Gaetano Greco in 1728. In September of 1737, After Francesco Mancini (1672–1737)'s death, Sarro was promoted to the position of Maestro de Capella to the court, although it is believed that he had already been carrying the responsibilities since 1735 because of Mancini's poor health. One of his new duties was to organize the orchestra, which consisted of twenty-four violins, six violas, three violoncellos, three contra-basses, two harpsichords, two oboes, three bassoons, and three trumpets (doubling on horn) (Hucke, 1987).

As the new Maestro de Capella, Sarro's first assignment was to compose an opera, Achille in Sciro, for the opening of the new San Carlo theater, which had been built by order of Charles III. The performance took place on Charles III's name day on November 4, 1737 (Robinson & Monson, 2024). The last opera Sarro composed, L' Ezio, was performed on November 4, 1741, at the San Carlo theater. However, his last opera to be performed was a revival of l'Alessandro nelle Indie (1736), performed at the San Carlo theater during the carnival season of 1743 (Hucke, 1987).

Sarro died on January 25, 1744 in Naples, and according to Hucke (1987), his legacy was to become the only composer that bridged the gap between the older generation of Neapolitan composers (Alessandro Scarlatti among them) and the younger generation represented by Leonardo Leo (1694- 1744), Nicola Porpora (1686-1768), G.B. Pergolesi (1710-1736), and Leonardo Vinci (1690–1730), all of whom were introducing innovations that eventually consolidated the Classical style (Wright, 1975).

Historic profile of the work

The use of the story of the Greek mythological character Partenope in several musical works started at the end of the seventeenth century, one of them being a serenade called Il Genio di Partenope, la Gloria del Sebeto, il Piacere di Mergellina composed by Alessandro Scarlatti in 1696 (Dent, 1905). Parthenope was believed to be the founder of the city of Naples, Italy in two different versions of the myth. In the first version, she was one of the singing sirens that was defeated by Ulysses. In the second, she was a Greek virgin queen, daughter of Eumelus, King of Thessaly (Fabris, 2017).

The first opera that uses Parthenope's story was staged at the San Bartolomeo theater, Naples in 1699 and bears the title of simply Partenope. The libretto was written by Silvio Stampiglia and the music composed by Luigi Mancia. Stampiglia became one of the most important librettists between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writing librettos for no less than 40 operas, oratorios and cantatas set to music by the best composers of his day foreshadowing the work of Zeno and Metastasio. Mancia's score and Stampiglia's libretto was reused several times until 1709 in the cities of Rovigo, Mantua, Florence, and Brescia. Other composers to use Stampiglia's libretto were Beniventi, Caldara, Handel, Quintavalle, Predieri, Vinci, Vivaldi, Zumaya (in Mexico City, 1711), and Domenico Sarro (Fabris, 2017).

The first performance of Sarro's version of *Partenope* was in December 1722, at the San Bartolomeo theater in Naples, listing Faustina Bordoni (1697-1781) as the main singer in the cast (Griffin, 1993). The second performance was just a few months later in January or February of 1723 due to the unsuccess of Mancini's *Traiano* also at the San Bartolomeo theater, (Fabris, 2017) which probably saw Bordoni reprising her role (Roshmira) in *Partenope*, for she was also cast in *Traiano* as Giulia (Corago, 2024a). It is worth noting that Bordoni became one of the most celebrated female singers of the eighteenth century, working with composers like Albinoni, Caldara, Handel, Vinci, Hasse, and many others (Winton, 2021) (Refer to Figure 1). Roshmira's aria *Per Abbattere il mio Core* occurs during scene III of the second act after a recitativo involving the characters of Roshmira, Armindo, and Emilio.

According to the archive of opera performances and libretti Corago, (2024b) subsequent performances of this opera occurred twice in Rome 1724 and 1734, Foligno and Pesaro in 1729, and finally in Napoli in 1739. Analyzing the libretti for all these additional performances, makes it possible to think that a re-worked version of the aria *Per abbattere il mio core* could have been performed in Rome and Foligno, though in the character *Partenope*. In scene VII of the second act, the text for *Partenope*'s aria is very similar (Rome), or almost identical (Foligno). The other performances most likely didn't include the aria at all (Corago, 2024b). The only way to make sure of this is to analyze the scores, sadly the only one that remains for the complete opera is the inaugural performance according to a search in the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM) online search tool with the words: Domenico Sarro *Partenope* (RISM, 2025).

Notes on performance

The interpretation of the *appoggiaturas* in the B section should be the standard interpretation of the time, in which the small note (eighth note) takes half of the value of the regular note (quarter note). It is strongly recommended that the *da capo* repeat be ornamented, as it was one of the skills that Mrs. Bordoni was renowned for (Winton, 2021).

Figure 1. Faustina Bordoni, by Rosalba Carriera. Sala dei pastelli, Ca' Rezzonico, Venice



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Text and Translations (see Table 1)

English Translation for the Text of Per Abbattere il Mio Core	
ORIGINAL TEXT (ITALIAN)	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>Per Abbattere il mio core, tutto orror, m'assedia il gelo e crudel m'assalta il foco</p> <p>Cangiar spoglia e mutar cielo nulla giova al'alma mia perche amore e gelosia mi fan guerra in ogni loco</p>	<p>To break down my heart, with all horror, the frost besieges me and cruel the fire attacks me</p> <p>Changing my dress and altering the sky do nothing to my soul, for love and jealously make war to me in every place</p>
Note. Translated by Luca Giupponi	

Figure 2

Opening measures of “Per abbattere il mio core” from “Partenope” by Domenico N. Sarro (second source wrongly attributed to A. Scarlatti).



Note. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/it/deed.it>)

Critical Report

Sources

This present edition was prepared using two manuscripts found at the Neapolitan library *Biblioteca del Conservatorio di musica San Pietro a Majella*. The manuscripts, obtained in digital format, are well preserved and easy to understand. The first source comes from the complete opera. However, the second source comes from a collection of arias attributed to Alessandro Scarlatti titled *Cantata a Voce Sola Del Sig[no]r Cavaliere Alessandro Scarlatti. Per Abbattere il mio core* is listed as aria number 15, and in the first page of the music it shows the title *Aria con tromba della Sig[nor]a Faustina* (refer to Figure 2). It should be noted that the first source was the main source used for this edition.

Some degree of modernization was implemented to bring this edition to today's standards. The soprano clef on the voice part have been replaced with treble clef. Eighth and sixteenth note beams have also been standardized to modern practice. Flat signs to denote a lowering of a sharped note have been changed to natural signs. Brackets have been added to distinguish the violin and viola section from the two soloists (soprano and trumpet) and the *basso continuo*. Measure numbers have also been added. In the B section of the work (bars fifty-five to eighty), the time signature is shown as 3/8, but the actual grouping of beats should be either 6/8, or 3/8 by adding additional bar-lines in the middle of every measure. The editor has chosen the second option (take this into account if comparing the edition with any of the sources, as this will affect the measure numbers!).

The scoring of the opera calls for 1 flute, 2 oboes, 1 trumpet, 2 violin parts, 1 viola part, and *basso continuo*. Sometimes, the two violin parts would play in unison using only one staff when there are wind instruments performing (as is the case in this trumpet aria for measures 1-54). However, measures 55-80 are marked *senza tromba* and violins are not playing in unison anymore. For this reason, the violins have been split into two separate staves (Vn. 1 and 2) for the entirety of the edition.

Regarding dynamics, slurs, and other signs such as trills, all the original notation has been retained. Notation changed or added by the editor is clearly shown by using brackets or dotted slurs, except for the slurred *appoggiaturas* on the andante section, which have been left as normal slurs, even though they are not present in the original source.

All accidentals in the edition function according to modern conventions. Accidentals given in the source that are considered redundant or superfluous according to modern rules are tacitly deleted. In situations in the source where an accidental is not reiterated after a bar line or by change in octave but would have been understood as still in effect, the necessary accidental is added tacitly in the edition. Cautionary accidentals given in the source are retained only if deemed helpful, and those added by the editor are given in parentheses.

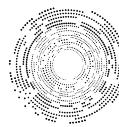
Critical Notes

Abbreviations List

M. = Measure. Tpt. = Trumpet. Vn. = Violin. 8ths = Eight notes. B.c. = *Basso continuo*. S. = Soprano. Mm. = Measure numbers. Va. = Viola.

Critical Notes

M. 10, Tpt., lacks trill sign, source 2. M. 11, Vn.1, Vn. 2, beat 2, two 8ths, source 2. M. 11-12, B.c., no music, source 2. M. 14, Vn., beat 3 lacks “p” sign, source 2. M. 15, S., notes 2-4 and 6-8 lack slur, source 2. M. 15, S., text is “*asedia*,” source 2. Mm. 17-20, S., the text for the 16th note runs is incomplete “*as[sal]ta*,” source 2. M. 18, S., notes 12 and 16 have cautionary accidentals, both sources. M. 19, Va., B.c., notes 2-4 lack the accidental sharp, both sources. M. 19, S., last note c#, source 2. M. 20, S., beat 3-4 lack slur, source 2. M. 20, S., beat 4 lacks trill sign, source 2. M. 23, Tpt., beat 4 lacks trill sign, source 2. M. 24, S., text is “*abbatere*,” source 2. M. 27, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, beat 1 lacks slur and “f” sign, source 2. M. 27, Va., beat 2 is 8th rest and e’ 8th, source 2. M. 27, S., slur only on notes 5-6, source 2. M. 33, B.c., note 2 is G, source 2. M. 34, S., notes 1-3 lack slur, source 2. M. 43, Tpt., S., beat 1-2 lack trill signs on dotted 8^{ths}, source 2. M. 44, S., beat 1-2 have trill signs on dotted 8^{ths}, source 2. M. 45, Tpt., beat 1-2 lack trill signs on dotted 8^{ths}, source 2. M. 45, S., beat 2 lacks trill sign on dotted 8th, source 2. M. 46, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, beat 3 lacks “f” sign, source 2. M. 46, S., note 6 lacks the trill sign, source 1. M. 48, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, beat 3 lacks “f” sign, source 2. M. 52, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, beat 3 lacks “f” sign, source 2. M. 58, Va., beat 3 lacks 8th rest, source 2. M. 63, Vn. 2, note 2 lacks appoggiatura, source 1. M. 64, Vn. 1, note 3-4 slurred, source 2. M. 65, Vn. 2, note 2 lacks appoggiatura, source 1. M. 71, Vn. 2, note 2 is a# and note 3 is g natural, source 2. M. 72, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, S., note 3-4 lacks slur, source 2. M. 73, Vn. 2, note 2 is g#, source 2. M. 74, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, S., note 3-4 lacks slur, source 2. M. 76, Vn. 1, Vn. 2, S., note 3-4 lacks slur, source 2. M. 78, Vn. 1, note 1 is b’, source 2. M. 80, all parts, no fermata, source 2.



Critical Edition

Per abbattere il mio core
from the opera *Partenope*

1

DOMENICO N. SARRO

Allegro

Trumpet in C [f]

Soprano

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

B.c. [f]

Tpt. [tr]

S.

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.



2



14

Tpt.

S. - te re il__ mio co - re tut - to or - ror m'as - se-dia il ge - lo e__ cru - del m'as-

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.

18

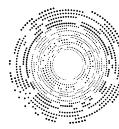
Tpt.

S. - sal - - - - ta il fo - - - -

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.

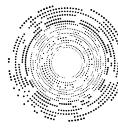


4

Tpt. 21
S. *co*
Vn. 1 *f*
Va. *f*
B.c. *f* [f] [p]

Per ab-bat

Tpt. 25
S. te-re il mio co-re tut-to or-ror m'as-se-dia il
Vn. 1 *f* [p] *f* [p]
Va. *p*
B.c. *p*



4

21

Tpt. - *[f]* *[p]*

S. - co Per ab-bat -

Vn. 1 *f*

Va. *f*

Va. - *[f]*

B.c. - *[f]* *[p]*

25

Tpt. S. Vn. 1 Va. B.c.

te-re il mio co - re tut - to or - ror m'as - se - dia il

[p] f [p] f [p]



37

Tpt. S. Vn. 1 Va. B.c.

43

Tpt. S. Vn. 1 Va. B.c.

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.



47

Tpt. *tr* *f*

S. *ta il fo co.*

Vn. 1 *f* *[meno f]*

Va. *f* *[meno f]*

B.c. *[poco f]* *[f]* *[meno f]*

51

Tpt. *Fine*

S. *[c]* *Fine*

Vn. 1 *f*

Va. *f*

B.c. *[f]* *Fine*



55 **Andante**

Tpt.

S.

Can - giar spo - glia e mu - tar cie - lo nul - la gio - va al -

Vn. 1 [mp]

Va. [mp]

B.c.

61

Tpt.

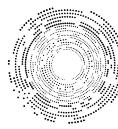
S.

-l'al - ma mi - a per ché a - - mo - re e - - ge lo - - - si - a

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.



67

Tpt.

S. mi — fan guer - ra in ogni fo - co per ché a - mo - re e — ge - lo

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.

74

Tpt.

S. sia, e — ge - lo si - a — mi — fan guer - ra in o - gni lo - co

D.C. al fine

Vn. 1

Va.

B.c.

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