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## Tekst 9

# Why castrati were pop stars of their time

## The special quality of the castrato voice

By Louise Jury

Arts Correspondent

Many were great artists, some were great lovers, and scandal seemed to follow them everywhere when they were at the peak of their fame. But the very thought of the operatic castrati today is enough to make a grown man wince.

A new exhibition, however, is hoping to overcome the public's squeamishness on the subject by telling the stories of the band of castrati singers who worked for the composer George Frideric Handel.

It will show that for all the pain caused in the 17th and 18th centuries, when up to 4,000 boys a year were castrated in the service of art, the rewards could be immense. They earned fortunes far in excess of what Handel himself earned and more than other singers of the time. One castrato, Caffarelli, a notoriously difficult man to work with, accumulated sufficient wealth to buy himself an Italian dukedom on retirement.



Alessandro Moreschi (top), was the last known castrato, whose emotional impact has been likened to pop singers such as Chris Martin of Coldplay (bottom)

They were like the pop stars of today, according to Sarah Bardwell, director of the Handel House Museum in London, which is mounting the show next March. "The best castrati were superstars, admired by audiences, appreciated by composers and adored by female fans," she said. "Their voices had a tremendous emotional impact on the audiences of the day. In some ways, pop singers like Chris Martin of Coldplay or Tom Chaplin of Keane are the castrati of today. They, too, have legions of fans and can use the highest register of their voices to deliver songs that go straight to the heart."

So famous were the castrati of Handel's time that while there were some cartoons which mocked them, many more engravings, paintings and accounts of their performances survive as testimony to their hero status.

The legendary Italian lover Casanova famously fell in love with a castrato, although the object of his attentions actually proved to be a woman in disguise.

The seven who worked regularly for Handel were Senesino, Nicolini, Bernacchi, Carestini, Caffarelli, Conti and Guadagni.

*Guilio Cesare*, which is being performed at Glyndebourne, was written for Senesino, whose likeness was captured in an oil painting which will be on show at the exhibition.

The original scores of pieces they sang will be among the items at the museum in Mayfair, alongside surgical

instruments used to perform the castrations.

Nicholas Clapton, the show's curator and author of a biography of the last known castrato, Alessandro Moreschi, said castration usually took place when boys were placed in a warm bath and drugged with drink and opium.

Performed before puberty, it prevented a boy's larynx from being fully transformed by the normal physiological

effects of puberty. As a consequence, the boys retained the vocal range of pre-pubescence and developed into adulthood in a unique way.

The result was a quality of voice unknown today when the parts are normally sung by women or by countertenors. Clues to the castrati sound survive in a single recording, dating from 1902, of Moreschi, which visitors will be able to listen to during the exhibition.

*The Independent*

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- 1p 42 “The special quality of the castrato voice” (onderkop)  
In welke alinea wordt de uitleg gegeven voor het bijzondere karakter van de stem van een castraat?  
Noteer de eerste twee woorden van deze alinea.