PACINI'S CHILDREN: *AMAZILIA* AND AMAZILIA

Charles Jernigan, April, 2025

Amazilia marked an especially important moment in Pacini's personal life. To understand the connection it is helpful to look back five years from the opera's premiere to 1820 when the young, handsome—and single—composer met Paolina (Pauline) Bonaparte in Rome. An aria of his had been inserted into a performance of Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* at the Teatro Valle and its success had induced the Princess Paolina to invite the young composer to her box. Paolina, who was 41, was immediately attracted to the 29 year old. She invited him to her home and put him in charge of her musical salons. He wrote songs for her, and she put together a private performance of his opera *La schiava di Bagdad,* with important singers like Mombelli and Tacchi, and with young Giovanni (whom she called Nino) playing the piano. In spite of their age difference (and her marriage to Prince Camillo Borghese in 1803) they became lovers. Pauline, who was living in Rome under the protection of Pope Pius VII, promoted Pacini's work including the production of his *Cesare in Egitto* in 1824; when she went to Lucca, he followed her and there they mounted his *La sacerdotessa d'Irminsul.* She gave Pacini a lock of Napoleon's hair as a token of her love; Pacini lost it. Pacini spent a summer with Paolina in Frascati and stayed with her in Tuscany, and for awhile they were inseparable.

Paolina was no longer, however, the beautiful, vivacious twenty-five year old who had posed nude for Canova's famous statue "Venus Vinctrix" in 1805-06. She was ill and slowly declining (modern biographers have suggested tuberculosis or leukemia or severe anemia). She and Pacini fought—and reconciled. Life for them eventually became intolerable, and Pacini made a clean break of their relationship in the spring of 1825. According to an old story, she told him she would not leave him until he married, and so in May, 1825, he suddenly asked his father Luigi to accompany him to Naples to find a wife.

The chosen girl was Adelaide Castelli, the daughter of a friend of his father. In his *Memorie artistiche* Pacini tells us that they married eight days after they met for the first time. So much for Paolina, who, sick and alone, went back to her long-estranged husband Camillo Borghese, who had been living in the Palazzo Salviati-Borghese in Florence. (Years before he had

moved from Rome to Florence to escape Paolina when she was a scandalous party girl in Rome). Pacini and his new wife honeymooned in Portici while he worked on the new opera to celebrate the Queen's birthday at the San Carlo: *Amazilia.*

Amazilia, following a tradition in Naples at the time for works intended to be part of state occasions, was in a single act and was paired with a ballet to fill out the evening—*Cesare in Egitto* (what else!). Three days after *Amazilia'*s successful premiere on 6 July, Paolina Bonaparte died in Florence on the 9th. The opera, which Pacini composed on his honeymoon must have signified a new life for him personally; it also must have been a musical marker for the end of his life with Paolina, who had been so important to him both personally and professionally.

In *Le mie memorie artistiche* Pacini tied the events of his personal life to his music. At the end of Chapter XV he writes of his marriages and children in musical terms:

Tutti e tre i miei letti produssero la triade armonica: per cui, come ognuno sa, 3 via 3 fa nove, ed io ebbi per conseguenza, oltre il complemento dell'ottava, anche la nona; ond'è che potei formare con preparazione e risoluzione, partendo dalla dominante, l'accordo di nona sulla tonica. *Che cosa vuol dire conoscere un poco le regole armoniche! Dei novi suoni ora non me ne rimangono che cinque; cioè: Amazilia vedova Manara, del primo letto; Giulia, maritata al dottor Fantozzi, del secondo; e del terzo Isabella, Luigi unico maschietto, e Paolina. Degli altri quattro ricordo con dolore:*
Che l'anime volàro in grembo a Dio!

["My three marriage beds form the harmonic triad: by which, as everyone knows, 3 times 3 makes nine, and consequently I had, besides the completion of the octave, also the ninth, so that, starting from the dominant with preparation and resolution, I could form a ninth chord on the tonic. That means that one should have some understanding of the principles of harmony! Only five of the nine chordal notes remain to me; these are: Amazilia, the widow of Manara from my first marriage bed; Giulia, married to Dr. Fantozzi from the second; and from the third Isabella*,* Luigi*,* the only male; and *Paolina*. I remember the other four sadly:
May their souls fly to the bosom of God!

From this we know that Pacini had three wives and nine children, naming only those who were alive at the time he wrote his *Memoirs,* but elsewhere in the *Memorie* he mentions his first child, Paolina, and Ludivico, who died soon after his birth, but there is some mystery about the others.

Adelaide Castelli gave Giovanni two daughters soon after their marriage. He named them Paolina (b. 1826) and Amazilia (b. 1827), remembering with the first name his former life with the Princess and celebrating his new life with Adelaide Castelli with the second name. In 1828 Adelaide died soon after the birth of Ludivico, their third child, who followed his mother to the grave a short time later. Now Pacini was left with two infant daughters, which did not at all suit his frenetic career. It was a new wealthy, aristocratic mistress who came to the rescue. The beautiful, young Russian Countess, Iulia Samoylova, née Pahlin, who had left her husband in Russia and migrated to Italy, became Pacini's new benefactor and lover (probably from 1828 to 1832). She became the guardian of at least one of Pacini's daughters—Amazilia—and gave her a life of comfort and wealth which the peripatetic Giovanni could never have afforded. We do not know what happened to Paolina or when she died, but Amazilia was raised by the Countess and lived a long life, marrying Achille Manara, the brother of Luciano Manara, a hero of the Italian unification movement.

Unable to wed Samoylova since she still had a Russian husband, Pacini soon married again (probably in 1832). His second wife was Marietta Albini, a singer who had appeared as Gulnara in the premiere of his *Il corsaro.* Pacini himself seems to indicate that she bore him three children, but we do not know the names of two, if they were indeed with Albini. The one child whom we know was Albini's (and whom Pacini mentions in the *Memorie artistiche*) bore the same name as his mistress—Giulia.

Marietta Albini died in 1848 and in 1853 Pacini married Marianna Scoti, who outlived him. She gave him three children as mentioned in his *Memorie artistiche.* The last, like the first of the nine, was named Paolina (Pia Paolina), since his first child was evidently dead by the time his last was born. It is striking that of his nine children, three were named for his two famous mistresses.

Pacini never mentions a daughter named "Giovannina" or "Giovanina," but she is usually included by chroniclers among his children because one of the children associated with Samoylova who appears in paintings by Karl

Bryullov, is usually identified by art historians as “Giovannina Pacini.” Recent genealogical research by Manuel Plas indicates that she was probably Giovanina Bartoletti (1821-1874), another ward of the Countess Samoylova, and unrelated to Pacini.

AMAZILIA AND THE ARTIST

The young woman misidentified as “Giovannina Pacini” and Amazilia both appeared in several paintings by Karl Bryullov, perhaps the most important Russian painter of the early nineteenth century; he had come to Italy in 1822 to study and had lived there until 1835 when he returned to Russia. (When ill health forced him to leave Russia, he eventually returned to Italy, dying there in 1852.) In Italy, Bryullov met Samoylova and they were likely lovers, perhaps even overlapping the time that Pacini and Samoylova were lovers; both couples remained friends for many years.



One Bryullov painting, usually entitled “The Horsewoman,” shows a girl—probably Giovanina Bartoletti—in a beautiful white dress and pale blue bodice sitting atop a rearing black horse. On an adjacent balcony a younger child dressed in an elaborate pink dress watches. This is Amazilia Pacini, who appears to be about five years old, which would date the painting to about 1832, after the Countess had taken the girls as wards. Another marvelous work, painted after Bryullov had returned to Russia, shows Samoylova and a teenage Amazilia leaving a ball.



Perhaps Bryullov’s most famous painting was the large historical canvas “The Last Day of Pompeii” (1830-33). All three—Samoylova, Amazilia and Giovannina—posed as figures huddled together (lower left) as Vesuvius erupts in the background. Bryullov was fascinated by Pompei and visited the site at least twice. He based some of the

architecture in his painting on the excavated city, but he also used Alessandro Sanquirico's set designs for Pacini's *L'ultimo giorno di Pompeii* for inspiration, particularly for the exploding volcano in the background. Thus Pacini's daughter, mistress and opera all serve as inspiration for several of the most famous Russian paintings of the nineteenth century.



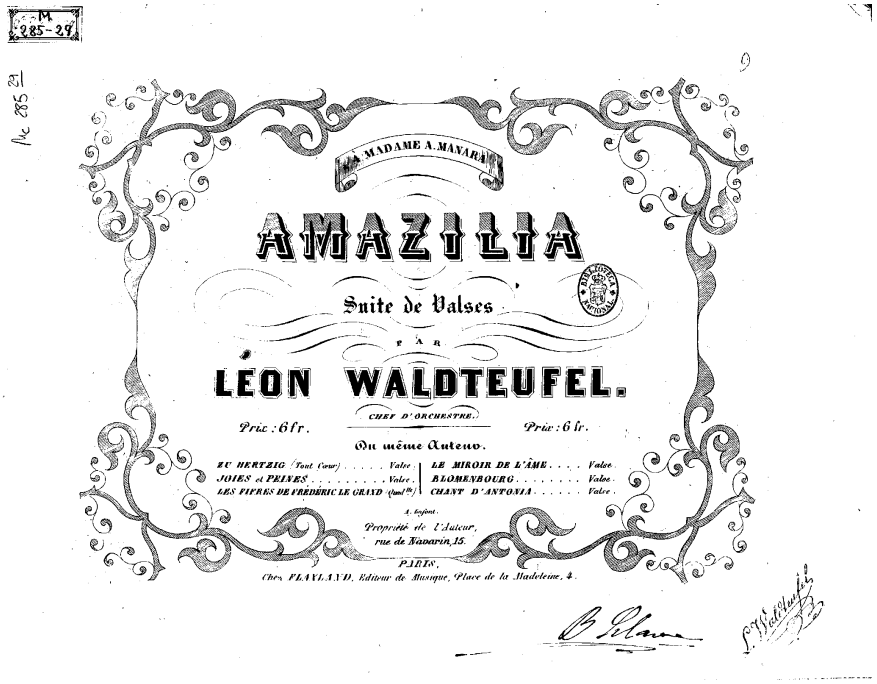
It is also interesting to note that both of Pacini's aristocratic mistresses and his daughter owe their enduring fame to artists. Canova's sculpture is still a work which elicits awe in the Galleria Borghese in Roma and



Paolina Bonaparte as Venus Victrix

Bryullov's canvases hang in museums in St. Petersburg and Baltimore.

Amazilia and her namesake have lived on in the work of other musicians too. Mauro Giuliani composed a suite of variations for guitar on Zadir's cabaletta "Io ti vidi, t'adorai"; Léon Waldteufel, older brother of the more famous Émile, composed a suite of waltzes dedicated to Amazilia Pacini; and the great soprano Beverly Sills introduced Amazilia's slow cabaletta "Parmi vederlo" into her performances as Rossini's Pamira in *L'assedio di Corinto* in the late 1960s and '70s. It is not clear whether Sills was aware that the piece was by Pacini, but the substitution had precedence: Giuditta Grisi had substituted it for "Dal soggiorno degli estinti" in Venice in 1829. As such, it became the only piece by Pacini (while unacknowledged) ever to be sung from the stage of the Met in New York. The pieces by Giuliani and Sills/Pacini can be found on YouTube.



Amazilia, who started out as a character in an eighteenth century French novel on the Incas; who gave her name to a species of hummingbird native to the west coasts of Mexico and South America; who became a character in an opera about Native American tribes in Florida; who

became the second daughter of the opera's composer; who was taken on as the ward of a Russian countess; who was immortalized by a Russian painter and celebrated by musicians died in Milano in 1911. By that time the Countess Amazilia had long been a fixture of Milanese society.

Il Bel Canto Ritrovato festival, concentrating this year on Pacini as the "main composer," will revive *Amazilia* at the Teatro della Fortuna in Fano on 23 August, 2025, the two-hundredth anniversary of the opera's premiere.