

Celebrity Songster v. Justice Woodcock:
Love in a Village (1762), or Sexual Predators on Trial
 Dr. Berta Joncus

Love in a Village, which opened at Covent Garden on the 8th of December 1762, achieved unparalleled impact [slide 2]. Following an initial run of 40 nights, it spread nationally and globally, reaching Dublin the following year, Edinburgh in 1765, Boston in 1766, and Philadelphia in 1767. By 1791 audiences in New York, St Petersburg, and Kolkata had also flocked to see it. By 1800 more than 350 performances had taken place in London alone.

A pastiche, and therefore a work of many hands, *Love in a Village* always served diverse agendas, among them star production, audience education, and the promulgation of English-language opera. The de-centred, participatory way in which it came into being meant that its constituent parts could change according to need. As such, *Love in a Village* poses significant editorial challenges: with multiple authors, versions, and musical provenances, how can editors establish ‘authority’ among its sources? Is a critical score even appropriate?

The hybrid format of the OPERA series helped to make this critical edition of *Love in a Village* [slide 3] both possible and appropriate. The edition exists both as a score with sung and spoken text, issued in a cloth-bound volume by music publisher Bärenreiter, and as an on-line platform [slide 4, OPERA, ‘Source A, Air 38’, ‘Critical Notes box’ and ‘Score, Air 38’] where digitized sources, critical commentary, and the new edition can be viewed side-by-side. So for instance we can both see and read why the *Love in a Village* manuscript score RCM 342 [slide 4, OPERA, window ‘Air 38’ example] anchors the critical edition.

One of few scores to have survived the era’s many playhouse fires, RCM 342 was created for the opera’s first run. Prof. Vanessa Rogers, Dr. Zak Ozmo, and I studied this artefact to create the Baerenreiter volume, and I created, with the series editors’ support, the online critical apparatus. By

viewing RCM 342, users can see that the scribes changed air numberings [OPERA, ‘Source A. Air 22’]. By reading the Source Evaluation’ [OPERA, ‘Source Evaluation. Dating’], they can find out why: by the time its first season was over, three different versions of *Love in a Village* had been tried out. The wordbook of each was printed by William Griffin, Covent Garden’s official bookseller. Griffin’s third version, sold from 8 February 1763 [OPERA window 3 ‘Source T, half title and ‘Table of Airs’] matches both the final numbering of RCM 342 and the wordbooks Griffin printed after this date, making it the most authoritative source for the dialogue and stage directions of *Love in a Village*, neither which RCM 342 captures [OPERA window 3 ‘Source T, half-title’].

The establishment of these two ‘best texts’ [Source A, Source T] for the first run of *Love in a Village* led to other discoveries. Thomas Arne did *not* arrange and orchestrate the music, as had long been assumed; it was in fact trumpeter royal Edward Toms, Covent Garden’s go-to arranger for a bunch of pastiches, who prepared *Love in a Village*. We know this because we can see Toms’s signature on RCM 342 [OPERA, ‘Source A fol. 1r’], and because auction catalogues I found show how Toms and later owners of the manuscript named on its paste-down and flyleaf [OPERA, ‘Source A. I, V’] passed RCM 342 down to each other. Arne *did* compose five of the opera’s six new airs, and Carl Friedrich Abel, who in 1762 was London’s hot new composer, supplied a three-movement ‘Sinfonia’ to kick off the show [OPERA Source T ‘Table of Songs’].

This OPERA hybrid edition is ideal for showing where borrowed material came from. Both the music and the words of *Love in a Village* derived from earlier works [OPERA, Source T ‘Table of Songs’]. For the music, provenance was pedigree, and Griffin’s wordbooks indicated the original composer. Building on and correcting earlier scholars’ identifications, I detail the source of each number’s music and words [OPERA, ‘Borrowing. Air 38’]. Air 38 [OPERA, ‘Source A. Air 38’], for instance, is the only number in RCM 342 in Arne’s hand, meaning that Arne rather than Toms arranged

it: yet this music was not original, as some have assumed, but an air Arne had engraved fifteen years before [OPERA, Borrowings, Air 38, earliest extant print]. While borrowing music was standard for such productions, borrowing play texts was not, and playwright Isaac Bickerstaff was lambasted by critics for silently basing his playbook on *The Village Opera*, a 1729 ballad opera. But OPERA helps users to see that the real culprit probably wasn't Bickerstaff but rather Covent Garden manager and principal tenor John Beard [slide 6], who seems to have both selected the playwright and closely directed his efforts. Beard's fingerprints are all over *Love in a Village*: apart from its lead soprano numbers, most of the score came from Beard's repertory, and the only character original to the work was the one created for Beard.

The borrowings show not just Beard's hand but also his likely managerial aim: to showcase two young sopranos in one production [slide 5]. Unusually, the 1726 *Village Opera* – itself a collation of two earlier French comedies – had featured two sentimental heroines. By December 1762, the twenty-eight-year-old Charlotte Brent was an established star, having already led hits at Covent Garden for four years opposite the much-older Beard, who needed a vehicle to both showcase his existing talent and bring up promising newcomer Isabella Hallam, twelve years younger than Brent [slide 6]. The action of *Love in a Village*, which revolved around two gentlewomen helping each other, showed both singers to advantage. So, too, did the music arranged for them: exclusively among cast members, the sopranos were given fashionable Italian arias. Brent naturally got the flashier numbers, and the opera's climax 'Go, naughty man' [slide 7].

This air brings together the practices that made *Love in a Village* a hit. Having earlier in the production dispatched some of London's favourite music, Brent here premiered one of its few new compositions. The composer of 'Go, naughty man' was Arne, her lover and former singing teacher, and its action was Bickerstaff's invention. In the final scene, which in *The Village Opera* had served to

unpack false identities, Bickerstaff winds up an added subplot in which Justice Woodcock has been trying to seduce Rossetta, sung by Brent, who is posing as the chambermaid of Woodcock's daughter Lucinda. After her true identity is revealed, Rossetta excoriates Woodcock for having lied when promising marriage to procure a sex act that would have ruined a chambermaid:

Go, naughty man, I can't abide you;

Are then your vows so soon forgot?

Ah! Now I see if I had try'd you;

What would have been my hopeful lot.

Arne's music adds drama to Rossetta's charges: the full band drops out when her voice enters, and word meaning is heightened by the musical shadowing of verse scansion and the band's echoing of Brent's vocal gestures; leaps and sustained top notes signal her rising indignation. Because there is no commercial recording of this music, I can only show you what I mean by playing a Sibelius midi file: [slide 8]

Sadly, OPERA's digitized hybrid edition of *Love in a Village* does not make the opera audible (my son created the video score we just heard!). But it does invite performers to base any interpretation of this work on playhouse practices. One such practice was the right won by Brent's predecessor Kitty Clive, the subject of my 2019 monograph, to add bespoke airs to stage works. I think Brent's finale is an instance of this practice. [slide 9] As a hybrid edition, *Love in a Village* foregrounds *process*, allowing users to see its sources alongside the editors' analyses, and hopefully to create 21st-century recordings and stage productions.