

Book Reviews

Academic review

UDC 78.071.1; 82-6

<https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-270-281>

EDN [FYWZIY](#)



**Paisiello e la Russia.
Lettere al conte Voroncov,
by G. Giuliano and P. De Simone***

Anton O. Demin

Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House),
Russian Academy of Sciences,
Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation,
✉ irliran@mail.ru,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1459-7819>



Abstract. This review presents the first volume of the new scholarly series *Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa* (University of Salerno, Italy), edited by Giuseppina Giuliano and Andrej B. Shishkin. The volume presents the first annotated edition of sixteen letters (1780–1816) from the Italian composer Giovanni Paisiello to the Russian diplomat and patron of the arts Count Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov, prepared by Giuseppina Giuliano and Paola De Simone and accompanied by an extensive critical apparatus.

Keywords: Giovanni Paisiello, Count Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov, correspondence, Italian opera, Catherine II, the 18th-century Russian and Italian literary and cultural ties

For citation: Demin, A. O. (2025). *Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov*, by G. Giuliano and P. De Simone. *Contemporary Musicology*, 9(4), 270–281. <https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-270-281>

* **Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov**, by G. Giuliano and P. De Simone. Roma: Valore Italiano Editore, 2024. 256 pages. ISBN 979-12-81584-09-9 (Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa / Collana diretta da G. Giuliano e A. Shishkin. Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università di Salerno. Centro Studi e Ricerche V. Ivanov. Vol. 1 — Ottobre 2024)

Рецензии

Научная рецензия

**Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П.
Паизиелло и Россия.
Письма к графу Воронцову***

Антон Олегович Дёмин

Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом)
Российской академии наук,
г. Санкт-Петербург, Российская Федерация,
✉ irliran@mail.ru,
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1459-7819>

Аннотация. В рецензии представлен первый том новой научной серии университета Салерно (Италия) «Встречные течения между Россией и Европой» под редакцией Дж. Джулиано и А. Б. Шишкина, включающий первое комментированное издание шестнадцати писем (1780–1816) итальянского композитора Дж. Паизиелло российскому дипломату и покровителю искусств графу С. Р. Воронцову, подготовленное Дж. Джулиано и П. Де Симоне и сопровождаемое богатым научным аппаратом.

Ключевые слова: Джованни Паизиелло, граф Семен Романович Воронцов, переписка, итальянская опера, Екатерина II, русско-итальянские литературные и культурные связи XVIII века

Для цитирования: Дёмин А. О. Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov = Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П. Паизиелло и Россия. Письма к графу Воронцову. Roma: Valore Italiano Editore, 2024. 256 p. ISBN 979-12-81584-09-9 // Современные проблемы музыкознания. 2025. Т. 9, № 4. С. 270–281.

<https://doi.org/10.56620/2587-9731-2025-4-270-281>

* Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov = Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П. Паизиелло и Россия. Письма к графу Воронцову. Roma: Valore Italiano Editore, 2024. 256 p. ISBN 979-12-81584-09-9 (Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa / Collana diretta da G. Giuliano e A. Shishkin. Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell'Università di Salerno. Centro Studi e Ricerche V. Ivanov. Vol. 1 — Ottobre 2024)

Among this year's publications, special attention should be paid to the first volume of the series *Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa*, released in late 2024. Conceived by Salerno-based Russian studies scholars Giuseppina Giuliano and Andrej B. Shishkin, both leading specialists in the history of Russian literature and, in particular, the 18th-century Russian and Italian literary and cultural ties, the series is supported by International Scientific Committee, which includes prominent Slavists from universities in Italy, Poland, France and North America, as well as from the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The aim of the project *Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa* is to present concrete examples of cultural interaction, transmission, development and transformation of creative impulses across borders. The series will be based on annotated editions of primary sources (memoirs, articles, letters, diaries, etc.) illustrating cross-cultural interaction between Russia and European countries. It fits into the rich and fruitful tradition of Italian Russian studies and the study of Russian and Italian cultural ties. This purpose is best served by the annotated edition of the letters of Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816) to Semyon Romanovich Vorontsov (1744–1832) — see *Illustration 1*.

The letters are preceded by an informative introductory essay by G. Giuliano, *Tra diplomazia e melomania: il conte Semen Romanovič Voroncov e Giovanni Paisiello*, which, drawing on a broad range of bibliographic and documentary sources, traces the history of the relationship between the two correspondents [1].

GIUSEPPINA GIULIANO
Джузеппина Джулиано

PAOLA DE SIMONE
Паола Де Симоне

PAISIELLO E LA RUSSIA
LETTERE AL CONTE VORONCOV

Паизиелло и Россия
Письма к графу Воронцову

*in tanto spero ancora che S. A. il Príncipe
voglia ammettermi nel Numero de suoi rispet-
tossimi servitori e voglia credermi ubbi-
dientissimo a tutti' quelli comandi che vorrà
onorarmi, e facendo a V. E. più riverente
sal: Conte mi ha onorato, mi dà l'onore di
essere.*

*Vi V. E. s. Pietroburgo il dì
28 Agosto 1780.*

*Umiliss: servo
Giovanni Paisiello.*



VALORE ITALIANO EDITORE

Illustration 1. Book cover

The topic of “Paisiello and Russia” has been studied for over two centuries.¹ The renowned Italian musician, who was acclaimed in the musical capitals of Europe and brilliantly successful on the St. Petersburg court stage (1776–1784), maintained a long-lasting correspondence with S. R. Vorontsov, a prominent Russian diplomat, patron of the arts, and passionate music lover. Paisiello shared with him his artistic ideas, reflections, and news. Vorontsov’s wife, Ekaterina Alexeyevna Sinyavina (1759 or 1761–1784), a lady-in-waiting to Catherine II, was Paisiello’s student, and he dedicated several works to her — a Concerto for Harpsichord and Orchestra and thirteen duets based on poems by Pietro Metastasio [2, p. 139].

The Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts holds 16 letters from Paisiello to Vorontsov, written in Italian. Three ones were previously published in the Vorontsov Prince’s Archive (vol. XXX, 1884). The prince’s response letters have not survived.

In the new edition, Paisiello’s letters are accompanied by extensive footnotes, which are supplemented by rich supporting materials. Paola De Simone, one of the leading specialists in the history of 18th-century Italian musical theatre, examines the published letters in great detail against the backdrop of a vast body of already known data about Paisiello’s life and work. She demonstrates how the new documents correct and supplement earlier knowledge, how they align with it and how they are integrated into its framework. All this information is conveniently summarized in three tables concluding the article [3, pp. 124–148].

¹ Let us list just a few publications: Ivan de Dominicis [Dominicis, G. de]. (1818). *Zhizn’ kavalera Don Zhuana Paesiello, znamenitogo sochinitelya muzyki* [The Life of the Cavalier Don Juan Paesiello, the Famous Music Composer]. V tipografii Avgusta Semena (the first Russian biography of Paisiello); Panareo, S. (1910). *Paisiello in Russia: Dalle sue lettere al Galiani*. Vecchi & C.; Pryashnikova, M. V. (2000). Iz istorii notnogo sobraniya Vorontsovykh: S. R. Vorontsov i Dzh. Paiziello [From the History of the Vorontsov Music Collection: S. R. Vorontsov and G. Paisiello]. In V. A. Udovik, & M. I. Mikeshein (Eds.), *Vorontsovy — dva veka v istorii Rossii* [The Vorontsovs — Two Centuries in the History of Russia]: *Proceedings of the Vorontsov Society* (Issue 5, pp. 66–78). Tsentr istorii idej Publ.; Shcherbakova, M. N. (2004). Giovanni Paisiello: rossijskie shtrikhi k portretu ital’yanskogo maestro [Russian Touches on the Portrait of the Italian Maestro]. In A. K. Kenigsberg, & N. A. Braginskaya (Eds.), *Russko-ital’yanskije muzykal’nye svyazi* [Russian and Italian Musical Relations] (pp. 5–28). Izdatel’sтво Politekhnicheskogo universiteta; Russo, F. P. (Ed.). (2007). *Giovanni Paisiello e la cultura europea del suo tempo: Convegno internazionale di studi. Taranto 20-23 giugno 2002*. Libreria Musicale Italiana (LIM).

Among the letters, the earliest one, dated 28 August 1780, stands out for its dedication to questions of musical theory and practice. Paisiello extensively discusses the structure and stylistics of the minor mode, paying special attention to the sixth degree in the ascending motion of the scale. The letter responds to a now-lost message from Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Gotha-Altenburg (1745–1804). The Duke, together with his court Kapellmeister Anton Schweitzer (1735–1787), speculated about the possibility of avoiding the low sixth degree (*sesta minore*) and using instead the raised sixth (*sesta maggiore*) when approaching the high seventh degree (*settima maggiore*). Paisiello firmly rejects this melodic and harmonic solution, referring to Italian taste, experience, and nature:

Così gl’Italiani hanno convenuto e sostenuto da molto più tempo, che quando la scala è in terza minore, la sesta deve essere anche minore montando alla settima maggiore; e non già come dicono i Tedeschi che si puol passare, ma dev’essere minore per assioma, e stabilimento fisso senza nessuna eccezione [4, p. 32].

The composer supports his argument with examples from works by Italian composers Antonio Sacchini, Leonardo Vinci, Giovanni Battista Bononcini, and Nicola Porpora, as well as the German composer Johann Adolph Hasse. These examples were examples previously sent by Duke Ernst in favor of the raised sixth degree in the ascending minor scale. Paisiello’s objections are twofold. In some cases, the raised sixth functions as a passing tone, which is easier for singers and string players to execute and scarcely perceptible to the listener:

...in una simil velocità di Note facendosi la sesta minore montando alla settima maggiore sarebbe scabrosa per chi deve eseguirle in un’istromento da corde, e per chi deve eseguirle con’il canto, ma per l’effetto non pregiudica niente alla melodia, mentre in simile velocità l’orecchio non’arriva a distinguere se la eseguissero maggiore o minore [4, p. 36].

In leisurely melodies, however, he links the choice of the high sixth degree in a minor key with the correspondence of the musical intonation to the meaning of the sung text. In the example from Vinci’s opera, the raised sixth degree falls on the words *nel vendicarmi* (“in vengeance”). Paisiello notes: “...onde da questo si vede bene che l’è una minaccia, onde se la sesta fossesi eseguita minore l’espressione non’avrebbe quella forza che hà facendo la sesta maggiore” [4, p. 37].

There is another interesting example of musical rhetoric: the words *Non'avrai di me pietade* require, according to Paisiello, a low sixth degree to express a tender plea, while Hasse mistakenly uses a high sixth degree here, which makes the expression “harsh and rough” (*aspra e dura*) [4, p. 38]. Bononcini, in contrast, introduces a high sixth degree at the words *mensognero, ti burli di mia fé*:

...non è che un rimprovero che si fa, addunque come possono pretendere la sesta minore. Perché, mai io hò veduto rimbroversi piangendo onde saviamente il Bononcini si è servito della sesta maggiore in tale occasione [4, p. 39].

Thus, in a friendly letter to his patron, amid the tricks and distortions born of polemical fervor against the “coarse German ear” in favor of the “delicate Italian one,” a small aesthetic treatise on the artistic expressiveness of a particular degree of the minor scale is born.

The volume also contains two appendices. The first one will be of particular value to historians of Russian musical theatre, as it provides a list of 27 works by Paisiello, written and performed in Russia during the reigns of Catherine II and Paul I. The table consists of titles, librettists, dates of premieres and subsequent performances, *dramatis personae*, voice types and performers, as well as the locations of manuscript scores. The second appendix contains a new publication of Paisiello’s letters from Russia to his Italian correspondents — Abbot Ferdinando Galiani (1727–1787), an economist and honorary member of the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences (1781), involved in the creation of the libretto for *Socrate immaginario* (1775), and Pastor Johann Paul Schulthesius (1748–1816), a German composer and theologian, resided in Livorno. This expressive correspondence, brought together and re-verified against the manuscripts after its initial publications in the early 20th century, usefully complements the main subject of research and deserves mention on the title page of the edition. A valuable component of the scholarly apparatus is the name index, which ties together diverse reference materials.

A further noteworthy item is a brief curious note by P. De Simone, placed at the end of the volume, concerning several biographical anecdotes about Paisiello, which were printed in the Milanese newspapers *Illustrazione Popolare* and *Illustrazione Italiana* in 1881, 1883, and 1886 [5].

The first amusing and touching anecdote describes a concert at the court of Catherine II, where Paisiello played the clavichord and rubbed his hands, frostbitten from the cold. Noticing this, the Empress took the ermine coat with diamond clasps from her own shoulders and placed it on the musician's shoulders with words of care and affection. The second anecdote recounts the composer's fortunate deliverance from prison in Naples, where he had been thrown by the government of the restored Bourbons for composing a hymn for the ephemeral Parthenopean Republic in 1799. Help came unexpectedly from Russian soldiers.² Remembering the maestro's successes at the Russian court, they demanded his release and that he be honored, which was carried out. Both anecdotes were accompanied by illustrations, which are also reproduced in the book alongside a portrait of the musician and some handwritten title pages of his compositions written in Russia.

This first issue of the series *Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa*, using a specific example and drawing upon both new and expertly systematized known materials, concerning intercultural and diplomatic ties in the realms of music and theatre, fully reflects the concept and fulfills the objectives set by the publishers. The book will undoubtedly be of great interest to scholars, students, and all readers fascinated by the cultural history of that "century of madness and wisdom," remarkable for the openness of its borders and the sociability of its peoples. One can only hope that copies of this publication will reach the major Russian libraries and become accessible to interested readers. It would also be most desirable for this important source publication on the history of music in Russia to receive a full translation and a Russian edition.

² Probably the naval sailors of the squadron of Captain-Commander Alexander Andreyevich Sorokin, who stormed the city together with supporters of King Ferdinand IV.

References

1. Giuliano, G. (2024). Tra diplomazia e melomania: il conte Semen Romanovič Voroncov e Giovanni Paisiello. In G. Giuliano, & P. De Simone (Eds), *Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov* (pp. 11–30). Valore Italiano Editore.
2. Giust, A. (2025). G. Giuliano, P. De Simone, Paisiello e la Russia, Lettere al Conte Voroncov, Valore Italiano Editore, Roma 2024. (= Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa). *Studi Slavistici*, XXII(1), 139–142. https://doi.org/10.36253/Studi_Slavis-17992
3. De Simone, P. (2024). Nuovi dati sulla vita e le opere di Paisiello dalla corrispondenza con il protettore Voroncov. In G. Giuliano, & P. De Simone (Eds.), *Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov* (pp. 71–148). Valore Italiano Editore.
4. Giuliano, G., & De Simone, P. (Eds). (2024). *Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov*. Valore Italiano Editore.
5. De Simone, P. (2024). Post Scriptum. Un aneddoto su Paisiello. In G. Giuliano, & P. De Simone (Eds.), *Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov* (pp. 221–224). Valore Italiano Editore.

Список литературы

1. Giuliano G. Tra diplomazia e melomania: il conte Semen Romanovič Voroncov e Giovanni Paisiello // Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov. Roma: Valore Italiano Ed., 2024. P. 11–30.
2. Giust A. G. Giuliano, P. De Simone, Paisiello e la Russia, Lettere al Conte Voroncov. Valore Italiano Editore, Roma 2024 (= Correnti d'incontro tra Russia ed Europa) // Studi Slavistici. 2025. XXII, № 1. P. 139–142. https://doi.org/10.36253/Studi_Slavis-17992
3. De Simone P. Nuovi dati sulla vita e le opere di Paisiello dalla corrispondenza con il protettore Voroncov // Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov. = Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П. Паизиелло и Россия. Письма к графу Воронцову. Roma: Valore Italiano Ed., 2024. P. 71–148.
4. Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov. = Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П. Паизиелло и Россия. Письма к графу Воронцову. Roma: Valore Italiano Ed., 2024.

5. *De Simone P.* Post Scriptum. Un aneddoto su Paisiello // Giuliano G., De Simone P. Paisiello e la Russia. Lettere al conte Voroncov. = Джулиано Дж., Де Симоне П. Паизиелло и Россия. Письма к графу Воронцову. Roma: Valore Italiano Ed., 2024. P. 221–224.

Information about the author:

Anton O. Demin — Cand. Sci. (Philosophy), Academic Secretary of the Department for the Study of 18th-Century Russian Literature; Executive Secretary of the *18th Century Series*, Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), Russian Academy of Sciences.

Сведения об авторе:

Дёмин А. В. — кандидат философских наук, ученый секретарь, Отдел по изучению русской литературы XVIII века, ответственный секретарь серии «XVIII век», Институт русской литературы (Пушкинский Дом) Российской академии наук.

The article was submitted 26.09.2025;
approved after reviewing 06.11.2025;
accepted for publication 18.11.2025.

Статья поступила в редакцию 26.09.2025;
одобрена после рецензирования 06.11.2025;
принята к публикации 18.11.2025.