



**AMS Annual Meeting Model Submission Abstracts
Posters**

Proposal Title: "An American Caruso": Mario Lanza and the Birth of the Modern Crossover Tenor

Topics: Opera / Musical Theater, 1900–Present, Film and Media Studies

Keywords: Opera, film, media

From the sumptuous opera films of Franco Zeffirelli to operatic excerpts in *Moonstruck* and *The Godfather Part III*, opera has been employed in a variety of on-screen contexts, as scholars including Marcia Citron, Michal Grover-Friedlander, and Jeongwon Joe have shown (Citron 2014 and 2000, Grover-Friedlander 2005, Joe 2013). And yet the appearance of opera luminaries in non-operatic commercial cinema has received limited attention, even though the use of such singers originated during the silent era, including soprano Geraldine Farrar as Carmen (1915) and Enrico Caruso's dual role in *My Cousin* (1918).

In the era just after World War II, the most recognizable onscreen operatic presence belonged to tenor Mario Lanza. Born Alfredo Coccozza, Lanza was the first tenor to become a bona fide movie star, appearing in six films for MGM and Warner Brothers in the decade between 1949 and 1959. Largely self-taught, he devoted his career to constructing an idealized image of a working-class everyman in possession of remarkable talent, much like Caruso, his self-proclaimed idol. The summit of Lanza's filmography came with *The Great Caruso* (MGM 1951), recognized as the most popular opera-related film ever made. Rife with historical inaccuracies—especially concerning the elder tenor's premature death—it's release triggered a lawsuit from Caruso's widow and palpable unease regarding opera singers on screen that persists to this day. Operating within the liminal space between opera, biography, and camp, the film reveals Lanza as a more complex crossover artist than he may at first appear.

Drawing on interviews, first-hand accounts, and excerpts from selected films, the poster argues that Lanza's movies and recordings provide the template for tenors in contemporary mass media, evident in *Yes, Giorgio* starring Luciano Pavarotti (1982) through The Three Tenors phenomenon and Andrea Bocelli's mega concerts and occasional stage roles. The addition of QR codes will allow viewers to access relevant examples and film clips. Despite persistent criticism of Lanza's movies as little more than "elaborate pops concerts," I demonstrate how his meteoric rise and enduring fame reveals bonds between opera, film, and popular culture that have yet to be severed.

Proposal Title: Intervening in Art: A Case Study in Contemporizing Consent

Topics: Opera / Musical Theater, Gender / Sexuality / LGBTQ Studies, Race / Ethnicity / Social Justice

Keywords: *Così fan tutte*, consent

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Catherine Clement's 1979 text "Opera, or, the undoing of women" catalogues the mistreatment that leads to the death of many of opera's most beloved leading ladies. However, death is not the only way women are undone in many operatic stagings and libretti. While much of the critique surrounding the treatment of women is dismissed as a historical grievance rather than an operatic one, McClary reminds musicologists that "just as in any anthropological investigation, these cultural objects and rituals are studied not as autonomous entities in and of themselves but as constructions that reveal a great deal about the values of the people who produce, preserve and transmit them" (p.xi, Clement, 1979). In the case of opera, we—the audience member, performer, and musicologist—are not only acting as conservators of these cultural objects but assume the role of transmitters of these values as well.

Modern stagings of many operas have changed the setting, time, gender and even plot of a given performance as an act of social commentary, but perhaps broader, genre-wide changes are due. To ensure that musical performances don't avoid social inquiry, we must consider the responsibility we have to the audience—and the content they are subjected to—perhaps more than our allegiance to a given script.

The Juilliard School's 2019 performance of *Così fan Tutte* did exactly this when reversing the role of consent for its characters. In an opera that traditionally tolerates the abuse of consent, this modern staging granted agency to Fiordiligi and Dorabella by keeping them informed of the attempted masquerade by Guglielmo and Ferrando. This was achieved entirely through staging techniques and did not affect the libretto or score in any way. In this poster, I plan to explore this 2019 performance of *Così* as a case study in scrutinizing consent for the sake of contemporary audiences.