


Preface

ultural time lies somewhere between the absolutes of astronomers and the abstract constructs of philosophers. It undoubtedly plays some role in every society, but its evolution in the Venetian Republic was, like so many other aspects of civilization there, idiosyncratic. Because Venice endured in that role for more than a thousand years, it accrued more ritualistic uses of time than grander but more ephemeral empires. This enquiry is largely limited to the two final centuries of the Republic's existence, though it occasionally looks back to earlier times. The overall story it relates is largely untold.

Song and Season is a by-product of my attempts to answer a practical question: How does one date a Venetian opera? The answers are multiple, the ambiguities many, the practical results endlessly inconsistent. In the research for a related book, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera*, I entertained the notion that through the process of collecting theatrical minutiae from widely-circulated but unpublished news-sheets, it would be possible to produce a template for the theatrical seasons mentioned so ubiquitously. News-sheets would pin down the years. Exact dates, disclosed by the sources, would define functional boundaries. Once a chronological spine was in place, the template would enable me to place any undated work in its appropriate position on a chronological continuum.

My scheme failed for three reasons. Each of them generated one of the sections of this book. First, I underestimated the number of virtual years which operated in parallel (*Marking Time*). Second, the theatrical seasons were variable in number and ever-changing in definition (*Using Time*). Third, no two cataloguers used temporal vocabulary in precisely the same ways (*Telling Time*). Since no template ever materialized in the way I had hoped, I simply kept reading news-sheets. By the time I had collected firm dates sufficient to complete the *Chronology*, I had much material incidental to theatrical dates but enlightening in other ways. Only that portion which relates to understandings and calibrations of time is absorbed here. Its interpretation required additional investigations of scientific, social, economic, political, musical, journalistic, and theatrical history. While attempting to give each its due, I have tried to show here how and why their interactions mattered.

While the contents of *Song and Season* are a byproduct of more than two decades of research, this book in its present form is a creation of the past thirteen months. My personal gratitude to those who have been so kind in times of need, both here and in Venice, is especially deep. This extends to friends, neighbors, and associates who have patiently submitted to interrogation on cultural nuances of timekeeping. My biggest professional debts are to those who have commented on substantial portions of the text — Lorenzo Bianconi, Lowell Lindgren, and Michael Talbot; to those who so meticulously proofread it — Edmund Correia, Jr. (who also compiled the index), and Margaret Duggan; and to the librarians and archivists of Venice, as well as those of Bologna, Florence, London, Mantua, Modena, Rome, and Vienna. In Venice, matters of decisive importance were resolved with the help of Michela Dalborgo, Umberto LoCascio, Ivano Zanenghi, and numerous other members of the staffs of the State Archives, the Biblioteca Civica Correr, and the Marciana National Library. The unraveling of many intricacies of Venetian culture and history benefited from the wise counsel and cheerful advice of the late don Gastone Vio as well as that of Giuseppe Ellero, Maria Giovanna Miggiani, Loris Stella, Micky White, and diverse members of the Associazione Culturale don Gilberto Pressacco — in addition to many colleagues in Venice's libraries and archives. A calendar conference at the UCLA Humanities Center in 2002 offered useful perspectives on related topics. The research and writing were carried out with the assistance of the Center for Computer Assisted Research in the Humanities at Stanford University, the American Academy in Rome, the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the Stiftung Thyll-Dürr, and (by coincidence) the Vienna Science and Technology Fund. Publication has been assisted by a generous subvention from the Delmas Foundation.

It is my pleasure to dedicate this book to my husband, Clive Field, our son Brent A. Field, and my longtime colleague, Walter Hewlett, in recognition of their exemplary standards as well as their patience, kindness, moral support, and lively interest.

18 December 2005
Sunnyvale, CA