

Antonio **Sacchini**

ŒDIPE
À COLONE



ELPE-Musique

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Antonio Sacchini

1730 – 1786



Antonio Sacchini.

Antonio Maria Gaspare Sacchini was born in Florence on June 14th 1730. From the year 1741, when he commenced his musical education in Naples, Sacchini's career was first and foremost in Italy. Durante, his composition master, assured Sacchini at the end of his studies that he would become "Composer of the Century". Sacchini triumphed in Rome (Valle Theatre), Florence and Venice, with operas that made him famous throughout Europe : *Olimpiade* (1763), *Il Finto pazzo per amore* (1765), *La Contadina in corte* (1765). Sacchini was the renowned master of harmony, also teaching music in Naples with Fedele Fenaroli. Cimarosa was one of their pupils.

In 1770, Sacchini was appointed to the Ospedaletto Conservatoire in Venice, where he composed the major part of his religious music. He also went to Germany, as the Munich (Mozart discovered him there with *La Contadina in corte*) and Stuttgart opera houses had commissioned several operas from him.

Sacchini then moved to London in 1772, composing the major part of his Chamber Music there. However, at the summit of his career, financial setbacks and personal scandals forced him to leave England and take refuge in Paris. As his work was well known and much appreciated there, it was not long before he was introduced to Queen Marie-Antoinette, whose preference for Italian music was no secret. Indeed, Piccinni, Salieri and Gluck were amongst those who graced the Trianon with their magnificent masterpieces. In October 1781, the Royal Academy of Music signed a contract with Sacchini for three operas, as per the Queen's instructions. *Renaud* (libretto by Leboeuf) was followed by *Chimène* (libretto by Guillard) in 1783, with *Dardanus* (libretto by Guillard) in November 1784 (also very successful in Fontainebleau the next season). In 1786, Sacchini's masterpiece, *Œdipe à Colone*, was performed. However, the composer, known as "Music's Racine", was already quite ill and died in Paris on October 8th of that year.

Arvire et Evelina, his posthumous work (finished by J-B Rey) was first performed in 1788.

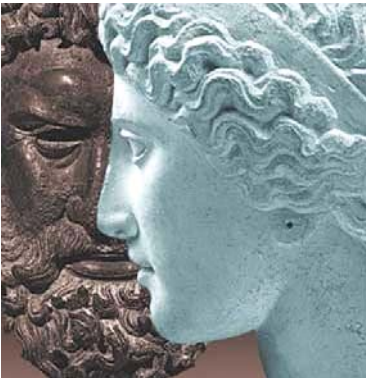


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The transformation of a myth



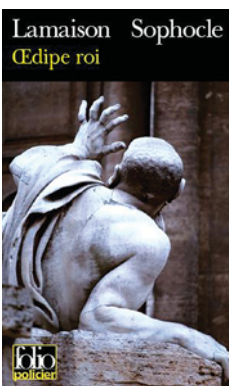
Œdipe and Antigone.

Here comes the elderly Œdipus, the man who assassinated his father and married his mother. After endless wanderings, he has finally arrived in Colonus at the end of the Age of Enlightenment. What new tribulations, what new transformations lay in store for this living legend?

Sophocles intended *Œdipus in Colonus* to be the twilight tragedy of an old man's death, an old man overcome with grief. A death that had been proclaimed and consented to, in accordance with the will of the gods. His daughters, Antigone and Ismene, help Œdipus accomplish his last rites. Accompanied only by Theseus, Œdipus then sets off on his journey to the mysterious threshold of death, calling down a final curse on Thebes, his brother-in-law Creon and his degenerate sons, Eteocles and Polynices. Thus ends the long drawn out tragedy of a family, a city and their gods; in which the triple ties of family, politics and religion were torn apart and to which only divine conflict could provide the solution. However, by transporting this story to the *Age of Enlightenment*, to the close of the 18th Century, it was inevitable that family ties would be preferred to political or religious bonds. This is exactly what Guillard chose, thus transforming *Œdipus in Colonus* into a family drama. The challenge involves reconciliation between a father, who had previously cursed his unworthy son, and his son, Polynices. The son is overcome by deep repentance. The father is overwhelmed with fatherly mercy and accepts his son's repentance. Therefore, there is nothing to preclude a political and religious solution to the conflict. Œdipus is followed by King Theseus, who has no difficulty in obtaining agreement from the gods. As the entire tragic process has been reversed, all the gods have to do is to ratify it.

In the past, nothing could have prevented everything from being swept away by tragedy. At the end of the 18th Century, nothing could have prevented anything from being carried away by pre-romantic lyricism, with the optimism and mania for being "happy on earth". And so the legend continues, changing in tune with the times and with their conception of the world.

Didier LAMAISSON



Cover for the book *Œdipe roi* by Didier Lamaison, Gallimard, 2005.



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Œdipe à Colone

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Antonio Sacchini.



Queen Marie-Antoinette.

1. Analysis

After the success of both *Renaud* and *Chimène* in 1783, and then of *Dardanus* in 1784, Sacchini's contract with the Royal Academy of Music expired in 1785, and he lost favour with Paris audiences. However, another opportunity knocked. Guillard, whose work included *Iphigénie en Tauride* by Gluck, had won the prize for lyrical tragedy in the King's competition for librettists the year before. His version of *Œdipus in Colonus*, in which he had taken some liberties with the original drama by Sophocles, omitted the roles of Ismene, Creon, a passer-by and a messenger. Sacchini was given the task of putting this to music and it gave him a last opportunity to compose his first entirely French work.

Although there was no Operatic Committee, Sacchini was able to count on the unreserved support of the Queen, who lived in semi-retirement at the Trianon within a very closed circle. Sacchini could only communicate with her via intermediaries, and in particular, Julien Bazin, her secretary, whose brother Charles and his wife were officially in charge of *Les Menus Plaisirs*, Light Amusements. Their daughter, Françoise, (Francesca or Fanny Bazin) was one of Sacchini's pupils. This allowed more direct communication with the Queen, to whom Françoise sang reductions of operatic melodies commissioned by Her Majesty from the composer. "I have asked my son to bring Sacchini's compositions to you. They are very precious. This great master composed *Œdipe à Colone* whilst he was in my father's house. He wrote beautiful melodies for me when I was a little girl of 11 years old, and made me 'sol-fa' them with admirable patience. He also wrote to me in Italian. I have kept his letters." Letter from Françoise Bazin to the Duke of Montmorency dated 15th September 1854. (*Unpublished correspondence*, Private Collection.)

In 1835, a letter from Berton's son was published in the "*Revue et Gazette musicale*", No.12, in which he described how Sacchini composed his operas. He mentions in this letter that Sacchini asked him to accompany him on a short leisurely stroll to the Tuileries after his lesson. He saw Sacchini take a few pages out of his pocket from the libretto to be put to music; whilst, at the same time, looking at one of Racine's plays, preferably *Berenice*, *Andromache* or *Phaedra*. Sacchini would then recite out loud some of the most beautiful passages, whilst jotting down the draft score. Apparently Sacchini would play an adagio or an allegro in its final form the next day, depending on the pace at which they walked to the Champs-Élysées. The fruit of the daydreams of a (not quite solitary) walker. After this, Sacchini then watched *boules* being played at the Carré Marigny.

Œdipe à Colone was finished by November 1785 and the Queen, impatient to hear it, insisted that the première took place for the inauguration of the new theatre in Versailles. However, this theatre had only just been built, the plaster was not completely dry and all the equipment had not yet been installed. Despite insufficient rehearsals in both number and length, *Œdipe à Colone* was



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The Château de Versailles Theatre, January 4th 1786 première.

performed on 4 January 1786, with inadequate sets and machinery that was not working as well as it should.

Œdipe à Colone was therefore only moderately successful, although critics essentially blamed the new theatre for this. To console Sacchini for this half-failure, the Queen promised that *Œdipe à Colone* would be performed under much better conditions at Fontainebleau in the autumn by the Opera Company. But the *Necklace affair* had weakened her position to the extent that, by the end of September, she was forced to give in to pressures that imposed Lemoine's *Phaedra* on her. On October 3rd she took the trouble of personally informing Sacchini of the situation in which she found herself and which made it impossible for her to keep her promise.

In his book, *La Cour et l'opéra sous Louis XVI*, Adolphe Julien dates this terrible announcement to the beginning of July 1786. This is based on the contents of the above-mentioned letter from Berton's son to the *Revue et Gazette musicale*. "[...] Having noticed that the Queen appeared to be avoiding his eyes for several Sundays in a row, Sacchini, tormented and worried, placed himself so ostensibly in front of Her Majesty that she was unable to avoid talking to him. She received him in the Music Salon and said to him with a voice full of emotion: 'My dear Sacchini, they say I accord too many favours to foreigners. I have been so forcefully called upon to replace your *Œdipe à Colone* by Mr. Lemoine's *Phaedra* that I am unable to refuse. You do understand my situation, please forgive me.' Sacchini, doing his best not to show his pain, respectfully bowed to her and immediately took the road back to Paris [...]."

Already very ill, Sacchini was devastated by this news that destroyed his hopes and died a few days later on October 8th 1786, during the night.


2. Plot

Opera in three acts.

The libretto, by *Nicolas-François Guillard*, is based on the tragedy by Sophocles







Oedipus in Colonus.
Marble statue by J-B Huges, 1882.

 Click on the icon to listen to the extract.

Overture

Act I

Polynices, one of Œdipus's sons, has taken refuge at the court of Theseus, the King of Athens. His brother, Eteocles, refuses to give him back his throne. Theseus, by offering the hand of his daughter Eriphile in marriage to the young man and putting him on the throne of Thebes, wants to establish an alliance between the two cities. Polynices joyfully praises the King and curses his brother. Theseus proclaims this news to the people and fires the imagination of his soldiers who strike up a war hymn . During a ballet  , the young girls from Colonus and Athens come to offer presents to Princess Eriphile, who is about to leave them. A young Athenian girl praises the beauty of the future Queen. Princess Eriphile expresses her happiness in marrying Polynices, but also her sadness at leaving her home country . Theseus invites Eriphile and Polynices to go to the temple to make a sacrifice to the gods. Polynices,

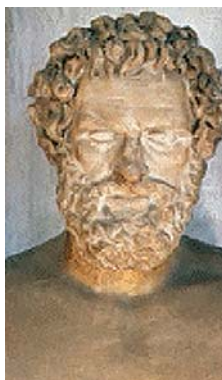
(*) This page is comprised of selected extracts taken from G. SAUVÉ's book, *Antonio Sacchini, Un musicien de Marie-Antoinette*, L'Harmattan, 2006, *op. cit.*




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Sophocles.

overcome with remorse, remembers how he had exiled his father Œdipus, after discovering the shameful secret of his birth . Theseus assures him that “Remorse replaces innocence”. Eriphile and the two men join together in a trio to implore pardon from the goddesses. The Priests approach the altar in a solemn chorus, joined by the High Priest. But bad omens emerge. The Furies are very angry. The temple doors are blown open and the three Eumenides, the furious goddesses of vengeance make their entrance.


The altar is on fire, there is general panic and everyone flees .

Act II

Polynices has fled. He is wandering, alone and tortured by remorse . Suddenly he sees an old man who appears to be accompanied by a slave. It is his father Œdipus, worn out, leaning on his daughter Antigone. Œdipus is dreaming of revenge against his ungrateful sons, particularly Polynices, but also bewailing the fate of Antigone, who is condemned to wander about with him . In vain Antigone begs him to forgive. Their steps have led them close to the temple where the interrupted sacrifice had just taken place. Œdipus hears the furious Eumenides . In a fit of madness, he imagines he is in the valley of Cytheron, where he killed his father, and thinks he is surrounded by serpents. He thinks Antigone is Jocaste, his wife, Antigone’s mother, and imagines he is holding her in his arms. Antigone begs the gods to have pity on her father. Œdipus calms down and finally recognises his daughter . Suddenly she hears a noise. It is the sound of the people approaching. They are furious to discover that the area surrounding the temple has been profaned by foreigners. They question the old man and recognise Œdipus. General indignation follows. Theseus enters and insists that they stop pursuing the old man . Antigone gratefully introduces her father to the King who decides to welcome them .



Extract from the original score in *Fanny Bazin's Music Book*: Antigone's air “Tout mon bonheur”, page 1 (priv. coll. G. Sauvé).


 Click on the icon to listen to the extract.

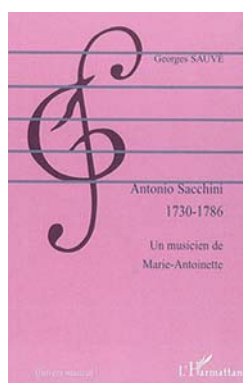


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Cover for the book by G. Sauvé.

Act III

Polynices tells his sister that he is prepared to give up everything, the throne of Thebes , and even Eriphile's hand, to obtain his father's pardon . During this time, Theseus comforts Œdipus, assuring him of his support and imposing silence on the people of Thebes. Antigone tries to intercede with her father to reconcile him with Polynices . Œdipus, amazed at such audacity, believes he has been betrayed by his daughter and thinks she has become her brother's accomplice. Polynices approaches them and begs his father to listen to him . But Œdipus's hatred is too strong and he explodes in anger, only wanting one thing, namely that his sons slit each others' throats in their fight for power. In a scene of extreme desperation, Polynices begs his father to kill him himself . His father's heart is finally touched and he decides to pardon Polynices, trusting the gods as to the sincerity of his son's repentance. The High Priest announces the clemency from the gods. Final chorus and general celebration. "Œdipus has disarmed the gods with his pardon" .

3. Performances During the 18th Century

- 1786 (4 January) : First performance in Versailles
- 1787 (1 February) : Paris
- 1790 : Hanover (German translation by C.A. Herklots)
- 1795 : (Dutch translation by P.J. Uylenbrook and J. Kinker, repeated in 1807)
- 1796 : Liège (French version)
- 1797 : Berlin
- 1796 and 1799 : Hamburg
- 1796 and 1797 : Cologne
- 1798 : Copenhagen (concert version)
- 1799 : Saint-Petersburg

The emotion caused by Sacchini's dramatic death was universal. Encouraged by the Queen's involvement and the sincerely complimentary article by Piccinni, who dedicated a moving funeral oration to him, public opinion radically turned around. Even before any instructions had been received from the Trianon, the Opera Committee had ordered rehearsals to recommence immediately.

Therefore, the true première of *Œdipe à Colone* took place on Tuesday 1st February 1787 at the Paris Opera. It was unanimously acclaimed as an inspired success. The singers put their heart and soul into it. Auguste-Athanase Chéron lent Œdipus his basso-profundo voice and his perfect diction. His wife, Miss Dozon, a born tragic actress, interpreted Antigone with all the passion she put into all her roles,



The theatre at St Martin's Gate in the 18th Century (February 1st 1787 performance).



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Œdipe and Antigone.
J.P. Krafft, 1809.



Œdipe.
Antoni Brodowski, 1825.

endowing them with the desired pathos required, thus completely winning over the audience. Lainé starred as the anguished Polynices, and Chardin, called Chardiny, in the role of Theseus. The cast was completed by Moreau as High Priest and Miss Gavaudan the elder as the moving Eriphile. Within a fortnight, *Œdipe à Colone* alone had earned the Opera nearly 25,000 pounds*.

*Georges Sauvé – *op. cit.*

During the 19th Century

Œdipe à Colone had an exceptionally long performance history with 583 performances up **until 1844**, on a parallel with Spontini's *Fernand Cortez*.

Young Berlioz was very enthusiastic about *Œdipe à Colone* and often wrote brilliant articles about it in his critical reviews, an example of which can be found in Chapter 12 of his *Memoirs*:

“The auditions have begun. One after the other, my rivals sing a variety of melodies that they have carefully studied, each in their own style. When it was my turn, the enormous stage manager, funnily enough called Saint-Lightweight asked me what I had brought with me.

– Me? Nothing.

– What do you mean, nothing? So what are you going to sing then?

– Well, whatever you would like me to sing. Isn't there a score somewhere, a solfeggio, a book of vocalization exercises even?

– We haven't got anything like that at all. Moreover, continued the stage manager in a fairly contemptuous tone of voice, I don't suppose you can sight read?

– I beg your pardon, I can sight-read anything you would like me to sing.

– Oh! That's different. But seeing as we are totally lacking in music, isn't there some well-known piece of music that you know by heart?

– Yes, I know *Les Danaïdes*, *Stratonice*, *La Vestale*, *Cortez*, *Œdipe à Colone*, both *Iphigénie*, *Orpheus*, *Armida*...

– Enough! Enough! What the devil! What a memory! Well, seeing as you are so clever, sing us ‘*She lavished tenderness and care on me*’ from Sacchini's *Œdipe à Colone*.

– With pleasure.

– Can you accompany him, Michael?

– Goodness me! But I can't remember which key it was written in.

– In E flat. Do you want me to sing the recitative?

– Yes, let's hear the recitative.

The accompanist gave me the E flat chord and I started to sing:

‘Antigone remains with me, Antigone is my daughter,

She is everything my heart desires, she alone is my family.

She lavished tenderness and care on me.

Her devotion has alleviated my suffering.’

The other candidates looked at each other with a crestfallen look while the impressive melody filled the air.”

(Berlioz, *Memoirs*.)



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1800 and 1836 : Stockholm (Swedish translation by C.G. Nordforss)

1800 : Munich

1802 : Vienna

1808 : Naples (Italian translation by G.Schmidt)

1816 : Saint-Petersburg (Russian translation)

1820 : Weimar

1826 : Cassel

Until 1827, *Œdipe à Colone* was regularly performed between twelve and fifteen times a year, and some years up to twenty times at the Paris Opera. From 1828 to 1830, it was only performed once or twice a year. In 1843 and 1844 six last performances took place.

1862 : Frankfurt (concert version)

1881 : Brussels (concert version)

During the 20th Century

1909 : Antwerp (Flemish translation)

1916 : Paris Opera – Partial revival – Campredon / Delmas

1971 (14/10) : Naples – Radio broadcast concert – Conducted by Franco Caracciolo / Renato Bruson

1992 (17/07) : Montpellier - Radio France Festival (concert version).
Paris Orchestral Ensemble and Vocal Ensemble *Audite Nova*
conducted by Jan Latham-Koenig

Œdipus Marcel Vanaud

Antigone Valérie Millot

Polynices Jean-Luc Viala

Theseus Daniel Galvez-Vallejo

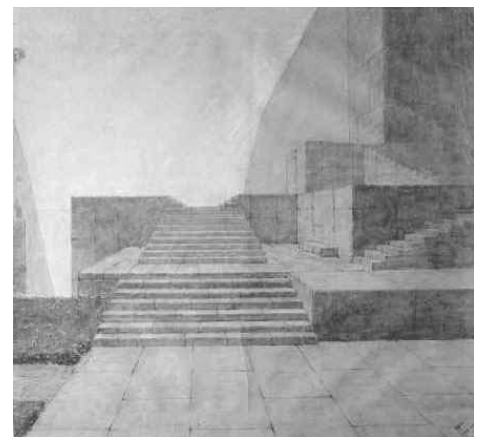
Eriphile Mireille Delunsch

An Athenian woman Valérie Lecoq

High-Priest Laurent Naouri



Œdipe and the sphinx, O. Redon, 1894.



Scenography sketch by Adolphe Appia.



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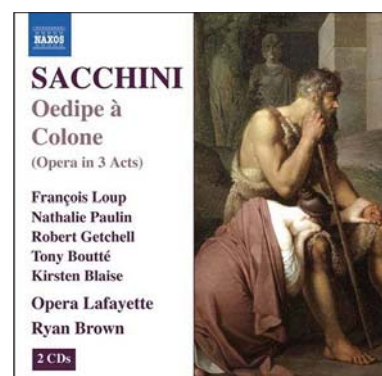
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4. Discography and recordings



2005 : Orchestre et chœur de chambre de la Camerata de Bourgogne, Dynamic.
Conductor : Jean-Paul Penin
Œdipe : Sviatoslav Smirnov
Antigone : Manon Feubel
Polynice : Fabrice Mantegna
Thésée : Daniel Galvez-Vallejo
Eriphile : Raphaëlle Farman
Le Grand-Prêtre : Jacques Gay
Une Athénienne : Géraldine Casey



2006 : Orchestre et chœur, Opéra Lafayette of Washington, Naxos.
Conductor : Ryan Brown
Œdipe : François Loup
Antigone : Nathalie Paulin
Polynice : Robert Getchell
Thésée : Tony Boutté
Eriphile : Kirsten Blaise

5. Editorial and musicological note

ELPE-Musique owns the complete modern version in French prepared from Sacchini's personal copy.

This version includes all the ballets.

"Piccinni dedicated an extremely complimentary article to his former rival, with no ill feeling. This was published in the *Journal de Paris*. The real première of *Œdipe à Colone*, therefore, only took place on February 1st 1787 at the Paris Opera with a full house. It was an immediate hit, but the composer was no longer alive to appreciate it. Until 1844, *Œdipe à Colone* had an exceptionally successful performance history*.

Sacchini appointed his friend Reboul as Executor. Reboul gives us a portrait of the musician that is very different from the usual one. For many people, Sacchini was a man with a difficult character, fussy, grasping, dissolute, insensitive. His close friend tells us that 'this rare man depicted himself in his work and his music is full of his goodness, simplicity and sensitivity'.

The really significant part of Sacchini's legacy lies in his papers, his manuscripts, his scores, his library, his instruments. Reboul sent a letter by hand on June 8th 1787 to Charles Bazin, in charge of the Queen's Light Amusements, in which he said he was 'very flattered to be, on this occasion, Mr Sacchini's Executor'. Sacchini bequeathed to Françoise Bazin, (Fanny) the daughter of Charles Bazin who, as a young girl, used to read to the Queen, his personal copy of the original version of the score of *Œdipe à Colone*, with the ex-libris signature of Sacchini top right. The initials A.P.D.R. (*Avec le Privilège Du Roi* – With the King's Authorization) are at the bottom centre as



Niccolo Piccinni.

(*) "*Œdipe à Colone* is the masterpiece of our lyrical stage, and particularly as far as the music is concerned," *Journal de l'Empire*, 19 April 1811. Quote by Michel Noiray, in *l'Empire des Muses*, Napoléon, Arts and Letters, directed by Jean-Claude Bonnet, Paris, Berlin, 2004, p. 223.



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well as, as was customary at the time to avoid counterfeit, the librarian-editor's counter signature - « Imbault, Mont d'or, 267 rue St Honoré entre l' Hôtel d'Aligre et la rue des Poutiers. Paris.

This edition of the score, including 235 pages in-octavo, was sold for 24 pounds (about 450 euros), which was a considerable sum of money at the time. However, this was usual at the time, as the number of copies printed of this type of publication rarely exceeded fifty. In addition, the printing process took a long time and was very delicate to do." (Georges SAUVÉ, *Antonio Sacchini, 1730-1786, Un musicien de Marie-Antoinette*, L'Harmattan, 2006.)

ELPE-Musique Editions used this document to prepare the full orchestral score and the performing materials (*Private Collection*).

There are several printed copies of the score at the Paris Opera Library [Mat. 18, L182 (1127)], together with a fine manuscript orchestra performing materials, which was used from May 9th 1830 to 21 July 1843 as can be seen by the dates written in pencil on the first violin part. However, most of these copies were printed at a later date than the first edition, and do not always correspond to this. This is particularly true for the ballets in Act I, as well as in the orchestration of the work, not forgetting the changes also made to the libretto, depending on what was happening at the time (Revolution, Empire, Restoration). One of the changes to a score prepared for a new *première* in 1854 is quite charming. "*Betrayed by my subjects*" was changed to "*betrayed by my friends*". We have also compared the different piano reductions available either at the Opera Library [A 317], or the French National Library [Music, Vm2 527, Vm3 528]. This study was very interesting as several scores include very specific metronome indications and tempo changes, particularly during the overture. These correspond also to preferences of the times.



A. Salieri.



Sacchini, bust.



C. W. Gluck.

The information about Sacchini is from the book by Dr. Georges Sauvé, by courtesy of the author. "*Antonio Sacchini 1730-1786. Un Musicien de Marie-Antoinette*" Georges Sauvé. L'Harmattan, 2006.



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6. Details of the scores

ELPE-Musique Editions have prepared the orchestral score and the performing materials from Antonio Sacchini's personal copy (*Private Collection.*)

The full orchestral score is included in a 320 page volume.

This is available in the usual A4 and B4 formats.

Performing materials for the 13 instruments are in large B4 format.

Instruments :

Woodwind : 2 flutes / 2 oboes / 1 bassoon / 2 horns

Timpani

Strings

Characters / Voices :

Œdipus, former King of Thebes	baritone
Antigone, daughter of Œdipus	soprano
Polynices, son of Œdipus	tenor
Theseus, King of Athens	tenor
Eriphile, daughter of Theseus	soprano
High Priest to the Eumenides	bass
A young Athenian girl	soprano

Chorus :

Young girls from Athens and Colonus

Soldiers – Local population

The full orchestral score and performing materials can be rented from ELPE-Musique



Sacchini, *Œdipe à Colone*. The composer's personal copy, 1786.

Sacchini, *Œdipe à Colone*. Extract from ELPE-Musique's Full Score, France, 2005.



ELPE-Musique

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