

# Isabella Colbran

Barratt Park, Vocal Rep and Performance  
April 23, 2007

## Timeline

- February 2, 1785 “Isabel Colbrandt” is born in Madrid, Spain. Her father Juan (later Giovanni) was a trumpeter for the royal court of Charles IV of Spain.
- 1791 First singing lessons from Pareja in Madrid at age 6.
- 1794 Begins studies with Neapolitan composer Marinelli (age 9). She later studied with the castrato Girolamo Crescentini.
- 1801 Concert debut in Paris at age 16.
- 1806 Opera debut in Madrid. (age 21)
- 1810 Colbran spends a year at the opera theater in Bologna.
- 1811- After performing a series of premieres at Milan’s La Scala Theater, Colbran comes to the attention of Domenico Barbaja, famed impresario of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples. She accepts a permanent position at the San Carlo and becomes Barbaja’s mistress.
- 1815-21 Rossini signs a six-year contract to produce operas for Barbaja. Colbran stars in a series of Rossini’s operas, including: *Elisabetta Regina d’Inghilterra* (1815), *Otello* (1816), *Armida* (1817), *Mose in Egitto* (1818), *Riccardo e Zoraide* (1818), *Ermione* (1819), *Semiramide* (1823).
- March 22, 1822 Colbran marries Rossini in Bologna.
- 1824 Colbran retires from the stage at age 39 as a result of vocal problems. Some say her voice began its decline as early as 1916.
- 1836 Rossini divorces Colbran after becoming involved in an affair with soprano Olympe Pélissier.
- 1836-1845 Colbran lives in Castenaso (near Bologna) with Rossini’s father.
- October 7, 1845 Colbran dies in Castenaso at age 60.

**Compositions:**

Colbran left behind four collections of original songs: one dedicated to her voice teacher Girolamo Crescentini, one to the Queen of Spain, one to the Empress of Russia, and one to the Prince of Beaumarchais. One of these works—*Sei Canzoncine*—is found in the MIT library. The poet of the texts, the city of premiere and the year of composition are all unknown. She is also believed to have composed songs dedicated to her father, but these are lost. Finally, Colbran probably played an extensive role in Rossini's compositions. Many of his ornamentations were written specifically for her voice, which had exceptional flexibility and wide range. Colbran signed her name under Rossini's on the score of *Armida* to emphasize the extent of her involvement in the composition.



1804 Portrait. Artist unknown. (Age 19)



1830, oil on canvas. Artist unknown. (Age 45)

Povero cor tu palpiti

Povero cor tu palpiti  
ne a torto in questo di  
tu palpiti così povero core  
si tratta o dio di perdere  
per sempre il caro ben  
che di sua mano  
in sen m'impresse amore.

My poor heart you flutter

My poor heart, you palpitate so,  
How right you are to tremble.  
You throb so, poor heart  
For fear of losing forever  
Of losing forever that beloved image  
That love's hand  
Has engraved in my heart.