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.


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.
1830, oil on canvas. Artist unknown. (Age 45)
Povero cor tu palpiti    My poor heart you flutter
ne a torto in questo di    My poor heart, you palpitate so,
tu palpiti così povero core    How right you are to tremble.
si tratta o dio di perdere    You throb so, poor heart
per sempre il caro ben    For fear of losing forever
che di sua mano    Of losing forever that beloved image
in sen m’impresse amore.    That love’s hand
                               Has engraved in my heart.