

2.2. Alison DeSimone (Maine, USA)

Elisabetta de Gambarini and the Exhaustion of Trauma in Eighteenth-Century Music

In the summer of 1764, Johanna Stradiotti filed a lawsuit was filed in a London court against her son-in-law, Étienne Chazell, alleging physical assault and abuse against her and her daughter, Elisabetta de Gambarini. Gambarini was an accomplished performer and composer, who, by the time of her marriage, had published two books of harpsichord music and who routinely organized public concerts. Before the lawsuit could proceed, Chazell fled England, a diplomatic scandal ensued, and the case was quickly dropped. Gambarini's trauma disappears from history.

This presentation uses Elisabetta de Gambarini's experience as a lens for examining the exhaustion and difficulty of being a professional woman in patriarchal eighteenth-century Britain. On the one hand, Gambarini constructed a highly successful and artistically rich public life for herself as a performer, as a composer, and as a businesswoman—no mean feat for “the fairer sex” in this period. Yet the ambitious labors of her professional life were further hampered by the spousal abuse she endured at home, and the eventual legal battle she attempted to wage before being summarily erased from her own narrative by the male diplomatic powers of England. This presentation asks: can Gambarini's music, or her performances, tell us something about how she managed the emotional and physical exhaustion of her public and private lives? I will also reflect on how uncovering Gambarini's story and contending with its implications required me to process my own exhaustion as a female scholar and a survivor of sexual assault, and why I eventually quit academia in 2023.

Alison DeSimone is an independent scholar and a senior business analyst at a Fortune 500 company. Previously, she was Associate Professor of Musicology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She is the author of *The Power of Pastiche: Musical Miscellany and Cultural Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Clemson University Press, 2021). With Matthew Gardner, she edited *Music and the Benefit Performance in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). She has published in *Eighteenth-Century Music*, *Journal of Musicological Research*, *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, *Händel-Jahrbuch*, and *Early Modern Women*. In 2018, her article, “Equally Charming, Equally Too Great: Female Rivalry, Politics, and Opera in Early Eighteenth-Century London,” won the Ruth Solie Prize from the North American British Music Studies Association.