Roster of Musicians and Biographical Details

The Figlie di Choro of the Pietà, 1739

- Candida, cello, age 64
- Menghina, cello, age 62
- Cattina, cello and violone, age 52
- Santina, cello and viola, age 37
- Febronia, cello and violin, age 32
- Cristina Maria, cello, age 31
- Claudia, cello, violin, and violin, age 30
- Teresa, cello and violin, age 19
- Veneranda, cello, age 15
- Rosana, violin, age 73
- Caterina, violin, age 66
- Silvia, violin, age 65
- Clemenzia, violin, age 57
- Michielina, violin, age 50
- Lugrezia, violin, age 48
- Anna Maria, violin, cello, viola d'amore, mandolin, lute, and tiorba harpsichord, age 43
- Bernardina, violin, age 42
- Marcolina, violin, age 35
- Meneghina, violin, cello, and viola, age 33
- Lugrezia, violin, age 33
- Anna Maria Seconda, violin, flute and recorder, age 33
- Maria Bolognese, violin and soprano, age 33
- Fiorenza, violin, age 27
- Maria Rosa, violin, age 24
- Chiara, violin, viola d'amore, and soprano, age 21
- Maria Arcangela, violin, age 20
- Perina, violin and violine, age 17
- Anna Maria Picola, violin and contralto, age 14
- Amabila, violin, age 13
- Liugia, violin, age 12
- Bastiana, violin and cello, age unknown
- Perpetua, violin, viola, and violone, age unknown,
- Basilia, viola and singer, age 3
- Pelegrina, violone, violin, and oboe, age 61
- Leonilda, violone and singer, age 14
- Rosana, organ, age 54
- Giulia, organ, age 52
- Antonia, organ, age 36
- Bianca Maria, organ, age 32
- Fortunata, organ, age 15
- Stella, tiorba, age 61
- Lucieta, flute, age 32
- Barbara, soprano, age 70
- Anastasia, soprano, ago 64
- Pasquetta, soprano, age 49
- Appolonia, soprano, age 48
- Giuletta, soprano, mandolin, and violone, age 31
- Fortunata, soprano, age 29
- Agata, soprano, age 27
- Margarita, soprano, age 21
- Soprana, soprano, age 20
- Francesca, soprano, age 16
- Madalena, contralto, age 76
- Soprana, contralto, age 67
- Geltruda, contralto, age 55
- Michilinea, contralto, age 53
- Ambrosina, contralto, age 43
- Mariana, contralto, mandolin, violin, viola, and violad'amore, age 30
- Paulina, tenor, age 67
- Maria, singer and mandolin, age 57
- Placida, singer, age 32
- Marina, singer, age 27
- Adelaide, singer, age 17
- Eufamia, singer, age 15
- Fortunata, instrument unknown, age 16
- Veronica, instrument unknown, age 34
- Felicita, instrument unknown, age 38
- Gegoria, viola and singer, age 21
- Michielina, violone, age 49

Edited 7/18/2025

Brief biographies of some of the women featured in this project

Agata Cantora: singer and composer of the cantata *Ecce Nunc*, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as a newborn in 1712, probably by a wealthy Venetian family, as she was wrapped in red silk and lace.
• Born with a physical disability, with one finger on her left hand, one toe on her left foot, and three toes on her right foot. She struggled with sickness throughout her life.
• Spent her life at the Pietà, only leaving occasionally to get fresh air in the countryside for her health.
• Served as a steward of the Pietà's music scores, copying parts for the other performers.
• She excelled at singing, and she learned how to compose later in her life.
• A student and companion of Apollonia (see below).
•Physical description: "ugly, yellow-skinned, lame, lean and undersized" but has "a pretty face and confidence"

Apollonia Cantora: mezzo soprano soloist and teacher, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant in 1692.
• Refused many offers of marriage, preferring to pursue her music career.
• Many roles and solo pieces written for her, including the part of Holofernes in Vivaldi's *Juditha Triumphans.*
• Studied with singer and theorbist Adrianna dalla Tiorba.
• Fell in love with, but was not allowed to marry, an elderly grifter at the age of 42.
• Had a scandalous fist fight with the door guard at the Pietà. This incident might have been related to her desire to see the man she was not allowed to marry.
•Physical description: "not good-looking at all" "over 30" "features sharp, dark and cold" But she has "wit and social grace" and "she out-sings all her sisters"

Giovanna Cedroni: soprano, Ospedale dei Mendicanti
• Trained in music by her mother Crestina, who was a former pupil at the Pietà.
• Sister of Emilia Cedroni, who was a well-known vocalist at the Ospedale degl'Incurabili.
• Known for her vocal quality, which was bright, clear, and extremely agile.
• Auditioned to enter the Mendicanti and sing in the musical ensemble when she was sixteen years old.
• Married at age 36 and left the Mendicanti, after singing in the ensemble for the required 10 years and then training 2 younger girls to replace her

Chiara dal Violin: violin soloist, singer, and organist, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned at the Pietà in 1712, when she was two months old, with a religious symbol as a family token. However, her family never came back to identify her.

• Talented musician who played the violin, the viola d'amore, as well as the organ. Also sang several solo parts.
• Performed violin concerti at the dedication of the new Pietà church in 1760.
• Vivaldi composed at least six violin concerti for her.
• Student and successor of Anna Maria dal Violin, who is the only Ospedale musician who owned her own book of concerto solo parts, which still survives today.
• Physical description: "young and rather overweight"

Pelegrina dall'oboe: oboe and recorder soloist, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà in 1678.
• Appointed a novice member of the music ensemble at age twelve.
• Renowned as oboist and recorder player, alongside another oboist named Susanna (b. 1688).
• Also able to play string instruments, such as violin and violone.
• Served as a music teacher for almost thirty years, teaching both orphans at the Pietà and several girls from local Venetian families.
• Skilled in herbal medicine, treating many of her colleagues and earning additional income.

Santa Tasca: mezzo soprano and international diva, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà in 1715.
• Excelled as a singer in her early training.
• Caught sneaking out of the Pietà with a man at age 19 and sentenced to prison.
• To avoid scandal, she was forced to marry that man (Mr. Antonio Tasca)
• Pursued a successful career as an opera singer across Europe, despite the Pietà's usual ban on such activities for its alumnae.
• Sang in operas with a famous prima donna named Francesca Cuzzoni, as well as with the famous castrato named Farinelli.

Anna Maria dal Violin: the most famous violinist, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà in 1696.
• Was so talented at playing the violin that new instruments were purchased for her use. One of these violins was bought for her by the composer Antonio Vivaldi.
• Also performed the theorbo, viola d'amore, lute, mandolin, and keyboard instruments.
• Taught many other talented women at the Pietà, including Fortunata Cantora, Chiara dal Violin, and Bernardina dal Violin.
• Antonio Vivaldi composed at least 25 violin concerti for her. She received many other concerti from other composers too.
• The only woman at the Pietà to have had her own special, gold-leaf decorated book that contained all her solo parts.
• Physical description: "very beautiful but lacking vanity" "blond hair, rosy cheeks, snow-white breast, eyes on fire" but also (same writer) "ugly"

Maddalena Lombardini Sirmen: composer, violinist, and singer, trained at the Ospedale dei Mendicanti

• Born to a Venetian family in 1745.
• Entered the Mendicanti to sing and play in their music ensembles when she was eight years old.
• Excelled on violin and allowed to travel to Padua to take lessons from renowned violinist Giuseppe Tartini.
• Married violinist and composer Lodovico Sirmen at age 21 and then left the Mendicanti.
• Toured Europe with her husband, performing music in Italy, France, and England.
• Composed six violin concerti, a few of which were praised as "beautiful" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's father.

Anna Bon: composer and violinist, trained at the Ospedale della Pietà

• Born a daughter of a Venetian painter named Girolamo Bon and opera singer Rosa Ruvinetti.
• Entered the Pietà in 1743, at age four, to study music with Candida dalla Viola.
• Returned to her parents and traveled to perform music with them in Russia and Germany by the time she was a teenager.
• Served as a musician to noble families in Germany and Austria for most of her life.
• Composed at least six sonatas for flute, six sonatas for harpsichord, and a few other works.
• Joseph Haydn wrote several opera parts for Anna's mother when they were working together in Austria.

Fortunata Cantora: soprano vocalist and music teacher, Ospedale della Pietà

• Abandoned in 1710, at six months old, with only old and torn rags.
• Became a novice musician to train in the music ensembles when she was ten years old.
• Got in trouble for writing scandalous and insolent poetry about Lucietta Organista when she was twenty years old. She was assigned to sewing, forbidden from performing music for six months, as a punishment.
• Received dozens of solo parts written specially for her by many composers, including Antonio Vivaldi and Andrea Bernasconi.
• Known for her extreme vocal virtuosity and agility in singing difficult solos.
• Improvised her own solos, some of which are written down in her surviving music parts.
• Became a music teacher for young girls who were training to become singers for noble Austrian courts.
• Physical description: "young and still maturing, but will never reach fulfillment" "though not ugly, she's not an adornment"

Adriana dalla Tiorba: theorbo player and music instructor, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà around the year 1663.
• When she was a teenager, learned to play the theorbo, which was an important plucked-string bass instrument that was used to accompany singers.
• Taught music for five years at a religious convent near Treviso when she was in her thirties.
• A new change in rules forbade the women at the convent to play instruments, so she returned to the Pietà for the rest of her life.
• Became a successful music instructor at the Pietà, earning enough money to become self-sufficient.
• Several of her music students were daughters of noble Venetian families.

Madalena Rossa Erdmann: player of theorbo, lute, and violin, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà in 1674.
• Became a novice member of the music ensembles when she was thirteen years old.
• Received her own special violin bow from Antonio Vivaldi when she was twenty-eight years old.
• Fell in love with the Pietà's master of oboe, Ludwig Erdmann, and married him when she was thirty-six years old.
• To get married, her future husband had to join the Catholic church and get permission from the Grand Duke of Tuscany.
• Travelled with her husband to play music for the noble court in Florence, Italy, where she lived the rest of her life.

Lucieta Organista: organist, violinist, and Prioress, Ospedale della Pietà
• Abandoned as an infant at the Pietà around the year 1677.
• Studied a variety of musical instruments, including organ and violin, during her teens.
• Became a successful music teacher when she was in her thirties. Also served as a music copyist, like Agata Cantora.
• When she was fifty-three years old, in 1730, she was appointed Prioress, which is the title for the lead woman who supervised all daily activities at the Pietà.
• Was a very strict Prioress, searching the belongings of the younger women for banned objects, like fancy clothing or jewelry.
• Fortunata Cantora got into trouble for writing mean poems about Lucieta.
• Possibly composed at least one hymn for the Pietà, titled *Tantum ergo*, but none of the music survives today.

Santina dal Violoncello: violinist, violist, and violoncello player, Ospedale della Pietà
• Born around 1722, although the record of her abandonment is now lost
• Studied and excelled on string instruments, including the violin, viola, and violoncello; a student of Anna Maria dal Violin
• Succeeded Anna Maria dal Violin as one of the top string instrument soloists
• Performed many of the violin solos that were originally composed for Anna Maria

- Peer and friend of Chiara dal Violin, as they performed together for much of their lives
- Her own books of violoncello parts still survive today in Venice; she often wrote her name on her parts
- Wrote down musical exercises to practice on a cello in her part book, so she might have been a teacher as well

Physical descriptions of other women not on our list – these can be adopted for women on the list for whom we don't have any descriptions.

Maria la Bolognese: a popular singer with a high voice "over 20 years of age, but not by much" "skinny, dark-haired" "she's not ugly, really" and she has "admiring, fawning fans galore, some so stupid, vulgar and even crazy to suggest they've met the French disease before" (the French disease refers to syphilis, which was very common at the time)

Giulietta: a soprano singer "a young and tiny youth, witty and most charming to speak with, healthy-looking, with a nice mouth, though her eyes can truly bewitch"

Ambrosina: an alto with a thunderous voice, who sounds like a tenor "probably some 20 years of age, brunette, intense, ferocious"

Marianna: an alto singer "little, with a narrow chest, thin" "young and tall, attractive, charming, witty, quick and clever"

Bianca Maria: soprano with a "full-bodied voice, like brass" " the greatest organ player"

Geltruda: "antique"

Michielina: "a woeful walking fortress"

Bernardina: violinist, studied with Anna Maria "30 or a little older, tall and fair, with a nose that is quite grotesque and bulbous"

Santinetta: violinist, also studied with Anna Maria "young and pretty"

Tonina: organist "liveliest of girls, has just one eye"

An account by Jean Jacques Rousseau of a lunch that he had with some of the women:

"When we entered the salon which confined these longed-for beauties, I felt an amorous trembling, which I had never before experienced. M. le Blond presented these famous singers to me one after the other, whose names and voices were all that I knew about them. Come, Sophie…she was a horrible

Edited 7/18/2025

fright. Come, Cattina…she had but one eye. Come, Bettina…she was disfigured by smallpox. **Scarcely one of them was without some striking defect.** Two or three, however, appeared passable; they only sang in the chorus. I was in despair…Ugliness does not exclude certain graces; they could not sing so delightfully without soul; they must possess one. “At last, the feeling with which I regarded them was so altered that I left the room almost in love with all these ugly creatures. I continued to find their singing delicious, and their voices lent such a fictitious charm to their faces that, as long as they were singing, I persisted in thinking them beautiful, in spite of my eyes.”

Edited 7/18/2025