
Omero Lengrini, 'The secret son' of Maria Callas – A Postscript

In *Maria Callas Magazine* No. 49 – November 2006, I published a two-part article entitled *Omero Lengrini, 'The secret son' of Maria Callas*. The first part was written by Brigitte Pantis with the subtitle 'Facts, or Fiction: that is the question', and the second part was by me and had the subtitle 'And the answer is: Facts, no Fiction'.

Members, interested in this part of Callas' dramatic life story, who may have missed or who are not sure about the matter of the baby boy Omero Lengrini who was born on 30 March 1960 and died the same day, are recommended to read the said article in the November 2006 Magazine or on one of the websites www.callas-intclub.com or divinarecords.com for a better understanding of this 'Postscript'.

It all began when Nicholas Gage's book *Greek Fire – The Love Affair of Maria Callas and Aristotle Onassis*, was first published, in English, by Alfred A. Knopf in New York, 2000. I will not elaborate again on the pros and cons of this book and the reviews of it, but concentrate on the Lengrini article as written in 2006 and any information gathered later.

During the years one noticed that many biographers had accepted the baby as a fact or understandably, regarding this delicate and confusing matter, did not mention it at all. But surely not Lyndsy Spence in her book *Cast a Diva* (The History Press, Cheltenham, 2021), who refers to Gage and his book only in one note and hardly reacts to his arguments at all. She also gives not the slightest indication that she had read the article as published in the November 2006 Magazine. See my review of Spence's book Magazine No. 93 – July 2021, p.30-33.

Instead, Spence writes that Callas conceived a child in early 1960 and suffered a miscarriage after her cancelled concert on 21 July 1960 in Ostend. Further, she writes (referring to Giovanna Lomazzi) that Callas went to a clinic in Milan for an abortion, or another way to end her pregnancy. For these assertions Spence gives no proof at all while at the same time completely avoiding any attempt to refute any facts or fiction in Gage's book and in the article in the November 2006 Magazine! For these

Karl H. van Zoggel

reasons Spence can be eliminated as a serious commentator.

I had not intended to return to the issue of the baby were it not for the fact that two books (by Eva Gesine Baur and Helge Klausener, see the reviews on the next pages) have recently been published. Klausener dismisses the matter simply as being rumours, but Baur approaches it, in cooperation with Brigitte Pantis, seriously and writes about it in some detail in chapter 21 ('Digression into the world of the alternative truth').

Topics which are discussed in this chapter for which alternative truths could be possible are Callas' clothing at the time, Bruna's interview, medical issues of a caesarean section and the visibility versus invisibility of the scar.

After having read Gage's book in 2000 I initially did not believe what he wrote about the baby and had many doubts. But later on I received from some Club members messages that the matter had indeed occurred. Further details and confirmations came from Nicos Haralabopoulos and Tom Volf who have had frequent personal contact with Bruna and Ferruccio. Tom emphasizes that Bruna never gave any interview, least of all to *OGGI*.

Next to details in Gage's book and members' confirmations, the following events and occurrences reinforced the burden of proof that the case was a reality:

- Why would Gage risk his reputation as a serious author and historian by publishing the story in his book if he did not have any real suspicion of the seriousness of the matter, based only on a photograph (that Bruna admitted that she took) of the baby from the estate of Vasso Devetzi. I intend to publish an article about Vasso Devetzi in the December Magazine.
- The typed documents about Lengrini's birth and death on 30 March 1960 from the Civil Service Department of the Municipality of Milan, reproduced by Gage, and further the handwritten documents

that I acquired during my visit on 12 October 2006, show that Lengrini as a person is a historical fact.

- I was able to speak at the clinic with members of the staff of Clinica Dezza in Milan who confirmed the caesarean section by Dr. Carlo Palmieri (working at the clinic and according to Meneghini, Callas' gynaecologist) and provided me with further information including about the baptism. If the Lengrini case had not taken place, why would I have been allowed by the clinic's management to be informed about this by its staff?

- Lengrini's photo was developed at the firm Ottica Zeta, near Callas' home.

- But, in my opinion, the most important factor to evidence in this historical event is an interview (reproduced on the next two pages) that Bruna Lupoli (apparently) gave to the journalist Giangavino Sulas from the *OGGI* magazine and that I only recently received from Stephen Hastings who also kindly translated it for me. This interview was published on 27 September 2000 and was Bruna's reaction to the publication of Gage's book in Italy. The interview was surely edited for publication by Sulas but that the interview took place and its contents speak for themselves. It is very much to be regretted that in 2006 I (and Brigitte Pantis) were not aware of this interview as I would have acted and written otherwise.

- Apart from comments and discussions in a few biographies there has not appeared in the 23 years after publication of Gage's book any official, unofficial or scientific document which provided irrefutable evidence of what exactly happened. Until such a document appears we have only the present facts, (counter-)arguments, alternative truths and uncertainties, which all constitute the basis on which anyone can make up their own mind.

- Of course, I cannot have any exact and definitive answers to all the alternative truths raised in Baur's book. Regarding the matter of the presumed not-visible scar from the caesarean section on certain photographs I can only imagine that the (small) scar lies on the bikini line or beneath.

EXCLUSIVE – The housekeeper sheds light on the most dramatic secret of La Divina

“That’s enough, I will tell you the truth about the son of Callas and Onassis”

“Yes, madame had a baby”, confirms Bruna Lupoli who was by her side for 25 years – “He was born on 30 March 1960 and died 8 hours later” – “I knew it, as did her most trusted friends: one of them must have betrayed the promise to remain silent” – And in the documents we found...

By our correspondent **Giangavino Sulas**

Feltre (Belluno), September

It was a great, tragic secret that was meant to remain buried forever in Maria Callas’ cinerary urn. And for forty years it remained hidden, known only by some of her most trusted friends, those to whom ‘the nightingale of the Peloponnese’ had revealed the truth.

“But what secret! But what mystery! It was an open secret. Many of Maria Callas’ true friends, especially in Milan, knew of her dramatic experience of maternity, knew of this son, the forbidden fruit of her love for Aristotle Onassis.”

Bruna Lupoli is a beautiful 81-year-old lady who dedicated 25 years of her life entirely and devotedly to Maria Callas. She was her housekeeper, but certainly also something more, her trusted friend, her confidante, perhaps even her adviser, almost an older sister, from 1953 to 16 September 1977, the day Maria Callas died in her arms in the bedroom of the Parisian apartment in Avenue Georges Mandel.

And now that the news of La Divina’s secret son has come out, she who for 40

years faithfully kept silent finally agrees to break the secret by exclusively telling *OGGI* the whole truth. “Her friends knew that ‘la Maria’, as they called her confidentially, had given birth to a son and that, once again, fate had turned against her. All her life, in fact, she had wanted to bear a child, and she bitterly regretted not having become a mother. Many, among those who knew and frequented her, knew that that little boy, born on 30 March 1960 at the Dezza Clinic in Milan, had died a few hours later. A dramatic event, almost incalculable in its impact,

revelation. I do not know him, I have never met him, and I have not even replied to written questions that he allegedly sent me. All that was made up. I have never betrayed.”

After the death of Callas, Bruna Lupoli was the ‘housekeeper’ of the diva’s memory. She returned to Travagola di Pedavena, in the Belluno area, her native village, to live in solitude in a large white house on the hill. And she never wanted to talk. A perfect housekeeper and confidante. Many have knocked on her door over the past twenty years in



from which she never recovered. A drama that remained closed in her heart, about which her friends were asked to maintain a silence that was not complicit, but painfully human. Everyone respected it for forty years. And it should have continued to remain a secret. Forever. That is why I am baffled and deeply saddened. This news was not meant to be revealed. Someone betrayed the pact. Someone has betrayed the memory of Maria Callas. I am outraged that it should be thought that I was the one to do so. It is not true. I have never talked to anyone. Certainly not with this Nicholas Gage who wrote the recent biography and who made this

search of a memorial, a diary, a scoop, photographs. She never opened it. Only for *OGGI* has Bruna Lupoli suddenly decided to break her long silence, so as to be able to respond to the insinuations and news arriving from the United States where the writer Nicholas Gage has just published a biography of Maria Callas in which for the first time he reveals that the great opera singer had a secret child, son of Aristotle Onassis. Nicholas Gage tells the story in detail, claiming that many biographers have revealed that the Greek singer was forced by Onassis to have an abortion in 1966. According to Gage, however, Callas had a child

by Onassis in 1960. He was born on 30 March in the Dezza Clinic in Milan. And he died immediately. The pregnancy was kept hidden from everyone, also because the two became lovers while married to other people. Furthermore, Onassis was not happy, he wanted her to terminate the pregnancy, but Callas refused to listen and interrupt the gestation period. For several months the singer suspended her career, appeared very rarely in public, always wearing clothes that concealed her physique. Maria Callas had been married since 1949 to Giovanni Battista Meneghini, her impresario. Onassis, on the other hand, was the husband of Tina Livanos, sister of another very wealthy Greek shipowner, with whom he had two children.

According to the American writer, the child was born by means of a caesarean section at eight in the morning on 30 March 1960. Callas was assisted by her trusted gynecologist, Dr Palmieri, who died in 1992. At birth, the baby immediately had breathing difficulties. The Dezza Clinic was not equipped to deal with them and it was decided to transfer him to a larger hospital. The baby died on the way, at four in the afternoon, eight hours after birth, after being baptized by a nurse with the name chosen by the mother, Omero (a clear reference to the singer's homeland) Lengrini, almost certainly the false surname under which Callas had been admitted.

Of this sensational revelation, in addition to the testimony of Bruna Lupoli, we have found more than one official confirmation. In the municipal registry offices of Milan, in via Larga, there is in fact both a birth certificate and a death certificate with the name of Omero Lengrini. And the date of 30 March 1960 also corresponds.

Perhaps the most disconcerting detail is that the child is identified as the "son of N.N." Neither the father nor the mother recognized him. Evidently Maria Callas was forced by Onassis not to officially

recognize her son. We have discovered through our research that little Omero Lengrini was buried in the Bruzzano cemetery, in the hinterland of Milan, in campo 10, giardino 297. But today in that location in the Bruzzano cemetery, the

in another cemetery. On this point the former housekeeper neither confirms nor denies: "I cannot and I do not want to make his existence a matter of public speculation. They are my memories, they are my life. Research must be done at the Maria Callas Foundation, in Athens."

Gage claims that, after having tried in vain to get Ferruccio, the singer's trusted chauffeur, to speak, he turned to Bruna Lupoli, through an intermediary, and sent her written questions, to which she gave exhaustive answers.

"That is what offends me," she retorts, furious. "It is not true. The American made it all up. Before this interview with *OGGI* I never agreed to speak to a reporter. The news of Maria Callas' dramatic motherhood came from another source. I do not know who could have broken this pact that was established 40 years ago, but I assure you that there were many who knew about this son: it remained a secret only because he died. But if fate had not been cruel, certainly Callas would have recognized the child. And she would have forced Onassis to do the same. In later years she often spoke, bitterly, of the lack of a child. She would have wished to have many children, poor madame."

Photo captions

"Aristotle did not want it"

London, 1959. Aristotle Onassis kisses Maria Callas' hand during a premiere at Covent Garden: they had been lovers for two years.

So she hid her pregnancy

Milan, December 1959. Two images that confirm the secret pregnancy of Maria Callas: in the large photo and in the one above. La Divina, who wears very loose clothes, holds

her hands on her lap, as if to conceal the fact that she is expecting. In the photo on the left, the birth certificate of little Omero Lengrini: his death is also documented on the certificate.

Insertion

"If the child had lived, she would have forced Onassis to recognize him"

114 • OGGI

► *continuazione della pag. 112*

nica Dezza di Milano, era morto poche ore dopo. Un dramma, forse qualcosa di più e di peggio, dal quale non si è più ripresa. Un dramma che ha chiuso nel suo cuore chiedendo agli amici un silenzio non complice, ma penosamente umano. Tutti lo hanno rispettato per quarant'anni. E doveva continuare a rimanere un segreto. Per sempre. Ecco perché sono sconcertata e profondamente addolorata. Questa notizia non doveva essere rivelata. Qualcuno ha rotto il patto. Qualcuno ha tradito la memoria di Maria Callas. Sono indignata perché si pensa che sia stata io. Non è vero. Non ho mai parlato con nessuno. Tantomeno con questo Nicholas Gage che ha scritto l'ultima biografia e che ha fatto questa rivelazione. Io non lo conosco, non l'ho mai incontrato, e non ho neppure risposto a domande scritte che lui mi avrebbe inviato. Tutto inventato. Io non ho mai tradito».

Dopo la morte della Callas, Bruna Lupoli è stata la «governante della memoria» della diva. Era tornata a Travogola di Pedavena, nel Bellunese, il suo paese di origine, a vivere in solitudine in una grande casa bianca sulla collina. E non aveva mai voluto parlare. Una governante e una confidente perfetta. In molti hanno bussato alla sua porta in questi vent'anni alla ricerca di un memoriale, di un diario, di uno scoop, di fotografie. Non ha mai aperto. Con *OGGI* Bruna Lupoli ha improvvisamente deciso di rompere il suo lungo silenzio anche per reagire alle insinuazioni e alle notizie che giungono dagli Stati Uniti dove lo scrittore Nicholas Gage ha appena dato alle stampe una biografia di Maria Callas, nella quale per la prima volta rivela che la grande cantante lirica ha avuto un bambino segreto, figlio di Aristotele Onassis. Nicholas Gage racconta la storia nei dettagli, sostenendo che molti biografi hanno rivelato che la cantante greca fu costretta da

Onassis ad abortire nel 1966. Secondo Gage, invece, la Callas, ebbe un bambino da Onassis nel 1960. Nacque il 30 marzo nella clinica Dezza di Milano. E morì subito. La gravidanza fu tenuta nascosta a tutti, anche perché i due erano amanti, essendo entrambi sposati. Onassis, inoltre, non era contento, voleva che lei interrompesse la gravidanza, ma la Callas non ne volle sapere e la portò a termine. Per diversi mesi la cantante sospese la carriera, si fece vedere pochissimo in giro, sempre con abiti che nascondevano le sue forme.

Maria Callas era sposata dal '49 con Giovanni Battista Meneghini, il suo impresario. Onassis, invece, era il marito di Tina Livanos, sorella di un altro ricchissimo armatore greco, dalla quale ebbe due figli.

Secondo lo scrittore americano, il bambino sarebbe nato con un parto cesareo, alle otto del mattino del 30 marzo '60. La Callas era assistita dal suo ginecologo di fiducia, il dottor Palmieri, morto nel 1992. Alla nascita il piccolo ebbe subito difficoltà respiratorie. La clinica Dezza non era attrezzata e fu deciso di trasferirlo in un ospedale più grande. Il bimbo sarebbe morto durante il tragitto, alle quattro del pomeriggio, a otto ore dalla nascita, dopo essere stato battezzato da un'infermiera con il nome scelto dalla madre, Omero (chiaro riferimento alla patria della cantante) Lengrini, quasi certamente il cognome falso sotto il quale la Callas si era fatta ricoverare.

A questa clamorosa rivelazione, oltre alla testimonianza di Bruna Lupoli, abbiamo trovato più di una conferma ufficiale. Negli uffici comunali dell'anagrafe di Milano, in via Larga, risulta infatti sia un certificato di nascita sia uno di morte con il nome di Omero Lengrini. E corrisponde anche la data del 30 marzo 1960.

Il particolare forse più sconcertante è che il

bambino risulta «figlio di N.N.». Né il padre né la madre lo hanno riconosciuto. Evidentemente Maria Callas fu costretta da Onassis a non riconoscere il figlio. Abbiamo ricostruito che il piccolo Omero Lengrini venne sepolto al cimitero di Bruzzano, nell'hinterland di Milano, al campo 10, giardino 297. Ma oggi al cimitero di Bruzzano, in questa posizione la salma di Omero Lengrini non c'è più. È stata riesumata e trasferita in un altro cimitero. Oppure, non essendo mai stata rinnovata la concessione cimiteriale, anche perché ufficialmente il bimbo non aveva parenti, potrebbe essere finito nell'ossario.

A meno che qualcuno vicino alla Callas non abbia provveduto a dargli nuova sepoltura in un altro cimitero. Su questo punto l'ex governante né conferma né smentisce: «Non posso e non voglio mettere in piazza la sua vita. Sono i miei ricordi, è la mia vita. Le ricerche bisogna farle alla Fondazione Maria Callas, ad Atene».

Gage sostiene che, dopo aver invano cercato di far parlare Ferruccio, il fidatissimo autista della cantante, si sarebbe rivolto a Bruna Lupoli, attraverso un intermediario e le avrebbe inviato delle domande scritte, alle quali lei avrebbe dato esaurienti risposte.

«È questo che mi offende», ribatte infuriandosi lei. «Non è vero. L'americano si è inventato tutto. Prima di parlare con *OGGI*, io non avevo mai accettato di parlare con un giornalista. La notizia della drammatica maternità di Maria Callas l'ha avuta da un'altra fonte. Non so chi possa aver rotto questo patto che era stato stabilito 40 anni fa, ma le assicuro che erano in molti a sapere di questo figlio, rimasto segreto solo perché è morto. Ma se il destino non fosse stato così crudele, certamente la Callas lo avrebbe riconosciuto. E avrebbe costretto Onassis a fare la stessa cosa. Negli ultimi anni parlava spesso, con amarezza, della mancanza di un figlio. Ne avrebbe desiderati tanti, povera signora».

Giangavino Sulas

«Se il bimbo fosse vissuto, avrebbe costretto Onassis a riconoscerlo»

remains of Omero Lengrini are no longer to be found. They were exhumed and moved to another cemetery. Or, since the cemetery concession has never been renewed, also because officially the child had no relatives, he could have ended up in the ossuary.

Or possibly someone close to Callas has taken steps to give him a new burial