

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

DU PARC, Anne-Marie-Élisabeth Rossa, dite La Francesina

France ? – Hammersmith brd 20.VII.1778
“Mrs Du Parc”, crayon painter, who exhibited three pastels in 1766, sent from Mr Williamson’s, Princes Street, Leicester Fields, is no doubt the same as the Mrs Du Part who exhibited three (presumably oil) portraits at the Free Society in 1763 (from Mr Gosser’s, Berwick Street, one of the celebrated framers, probably Gideon). Neither can be identified with the genre painter Françoise Duparc (*q.v.*) as has been suggested, but they are most likely to be a reappearance of the Sig.ra Francesini who sent a pastel head to the Society of Artists in 1762 as an honorary exhibitor.

Anna Maria Elisabetta Rossa, or Elisabeth du Parc or Duparc, a French soprano, was trained in Italy, and adopted the stage name of La Francesina (spelt in various ways). (Older sources suggesting that the singer was the granddaughter of the commédienne Anne Duparc who played in Molière’s troupe can be ignored.) She came to London in 1736 and became Handel’s leading soprano over the next decade, continuing to appear on the London stage until 1752. Her portrait (medium unknown) by Knapton was engraved by Faber (1737); lettered “Sign^a Lisabetta Du Parc detta La Francesina”, she holds a score open at “Tu la mia stella sei”, Cleopatra’s aria from Handel’s *Giulio Cesare*. An anonymous double portrait, said to be of her, holding a laurel wreath, with Handel standing, in red chalk, 32.5x40, may have been done c.1745 (repr. J. M. Coopersmith, *Music & letters*, XVI/3, 1935, pp. 172ff); of amateur quality, it is tempting to speculate if the singer herself was responsible (but its authenticity is uncertain).

Her musical career is well documented in standard references, not repeated here (Charles Burney and Mrs Delany were both impressed by her agility and diction); it came to an end in London in 1752. By 1761 a different singer was using the name “La Francesina”.

By 1769 Elisabeth was living in Chiswick, when she was left the painting materials of the pastellist Joseph Goupy (*q.v.*) in his will (“all my Japan Ogres pencils pallatts and easealls which may be usefull to her in painting”): the bequest did not mention materials for pastels. She may well have been his pupil (both had known Handel well). Nine years later she died unmarried and was buried in the cemetery at Hammersmith Chapel (the stone could not be located in 2010).

In her will, written in French (only the English translation has survived, where she appears as “Anna Maria Elisabeth Rossa, otherwise La Francesina”); the name Duparc is absent), she nominated her cousin, Margherita de La Forest, known as Gogo, as her executor (Marguerite De la Forest (–1796) married George Towneley (1706–1786) of the Lancashire Catholic family in Chiswick 2.IX.1780; Towneley’s brother John who lived with him has spent some 30 years in Paris, and been portrayed by Perronneau). Among the beneficiaries were the musical Davies sisters,

Marianne and Cecilia, the former an exponent of Benjamin Franklin’s glass harmonica, the latter performing on the European stage as L’Inglesina. An auction of Elisabeth’s household furniture, advertised in the *Morning chronicle*, 26.VIII.1780, included unspecified “capital Pictures, Drawings, and Prints”.

Further biographical details are found in her mother’s will (made 16.V.1769, proved 9.VIII.1773 after her burial in St Paul’s, Hammersmith, 11.I.1773), of which the English translation is also in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury archives: she was Elisabeth Geneviève de La Fontaine, widow of James Duparc, a surgeon, and she appointed as her executor her “daughter A^a M^a Eth Rossa called La Francesina”. Although no surgeon of this name has been traced in England (it is unlikely that he was the “sieur du Parc maître chirurgien juré de Paris, rue de la Harpe”, recorded in almanachs between 1716 and 1738: his family name may have been Barbelat), the information is confirmed by two deeds of procuration in the Archives nationales (MC/ET/XVIII/660 OF 8.X.1761 and MC/RE/XIII/11 of 26.II.1768, granted by “Anne-Marie-Elisabeth Rossa dite la Francesina fille majeure” and “Elisabeth-Geneviève de La Fontaine, épouse [in 1761, veuve in 1768] Jacques Duparc” appointing to Parisian bankers (Jacques-Paul Wencelius and Paul Sellouf, former banker to the roi de Pologne) to collect moneys and arrears in rentes de la ville de Paris and tontines. (Other parties to this investment were Johann Georg Schweighäuser and Marie Hoffmann, Mme Achilles Leisler, from Basel.) This may explain the reference in Elisabeth-Geneviève’s will to sums “that I may expect from the Lottery in France”.

The failure of these legal documents (including Marguerite de La Forest’s 1781 marriage settlement with Towneley, Lancashire archives) to use the name Duparc suggests that Francesina was Duparc’s stepdaughter and only adopted his name in non-legal contexts. The documents all agree that she was unmarried, and the name “Mrs Duparc” was evidently a courtesy title. Whether her mother had been previously married to a Sgr Rossa has not been determined. (It is possible that she was the “Elisabeth Geneviève de La Fontaine, catholique et native de Paris”, granted admission to the bourgeoisie of Liège in 1715, as a “faiseuse de rabats, porte collets et généralement de tout ce qui concerne l’Église et les ecclésiastiques comme surplus, aubes et autres choses pareilles” – Juliette Rouhart-Chabot & Etienne Hélin, *Admission...1273–1794*, 1962, p. 175. This would have been around the time when it has been suggested that her daughter was likely to have been born, although a somewhat earlier date seems possible.)

Bibliography

Greer 2001; Daniel Lysons, *The environs of London*, 1810, II, p. 268; *New Grove dictionary of music and musicians*; Oxford DNB; Waterhouse 1981, *s.v.* Du Parc, Francesini

Critiques

Anon., “To the Printer of the St James’s Chronicle”, *St James’s chronicle*, 29.V.–1.VI.1762.]

HONORARY EXHIBITION.

216. *A head in Crayons, by Signora Francesini*. – We might have been tempted to praise this Piece, if it had not unfortunately hung so near a *Head in Crayons*, by Mr Cotes.

Pastels

J.2896.101 Gentleman, pstl, Society of Artists 1766, no. 113

J.2896.102 Lady, pstl, Society of Artists 1766, no. 112

J.2896.103 Child, pstl, Society of Artists 1766, no. 114

J.2896.104 A head, pstl, Society of Arts 1762, no. 216, as Signora Francesini

Portraits in unspecified media

Old woman, Free Society 1763, no. 69

Young woman, Free Society 1763, no. 70

Black boy, with a basket of flowers, Free Society 1763, no. 71