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## NINETEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN OPERA IN THE CONTEMPORARY PRESS (PART I)

*Papers from Bologna: the Fourteenth Congress of the  
International Musicological Society (1987)*

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Fourteenth Congress of the International Musicological Society was held in Bologna, Italy (with additional sessions in Parma and Ferrara) from 27 August to 1 September 1987. Two congress sessions were organized under the auspices of the Répertoire International de la Presse Musicale by H. Robert Cohen and Marcello Conati. The second, which took place in Parma, in the Sala Verdi of the Conservatorio "Arrigo Boito" on Sunday, 30 August from 11h30 to 13h, offered an extensive demonstration of the computer programs and laser printing techniques developed for the production of RIPM volumes at the Center for Studies in Nineteenth-Century Music of the University of Maryland at College Park. Cohen and Conati presented the system to a large audience, with the assistance of Frank Flynn, RIPM's initial Computer Systems Coordinator.*

*The first RIPM contribution to the Congress was a study session held in Bologna on Friday, 28 August in the Sala Verde of the Pallazo della Cultura e dei Congressi from 9h30 to 12h15. The subject treated—Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera as Depicted in the Contemporary Press—was selected because of its historical significance, its appropriateness for the congress venue, and because the resulting studies would underscore the importance of the nineteenth-century press as a fundamental documentary resource for the music historian. Seven papers were presented at the well-attended session, each focusing on Italian opera in a distinct geographical area. The panel was composed of well-known scholars, active in the field, from six countries: H. Robert Cohen (U.S.A.), Marcello Conati (Italy)—co-chairs of the session—Leanne Langley (Great Britain), Christoph-Hellmut Mahling (West Germany), Imogen Fellingner (West Germany), Zoltan Roman (Canada), and Gerald Seaman (New Zealand).*

*While abstracts of these papers will appear in the Congress Report (following the principle adopted by the congress organizers for the reporting of study sessions), we are pleased to publish the full texts in two special issues of Periodica Musica. The 1988 issue of PM contains the papers presented by Leanne Langley, Christoph-Hellmut Mahling, Zoltan Roman, and Gerald Seaman. The 1989 issue will contain the papers presented by H. Robert Cohen, Marcello Conati, and Imogen Fellingner.*

*H. Robert Cohen  
Marcello Conati*

THE THEATRES.

HER MAJESTY'S.

The great object of attraction is still Verdi's new opera, possessing, as it does, so much additional interest from the fact of its being one of the first operas ever

written for our Anglo-Italian stage. We hope, however, it will not be the last, and that, the example once set, will be frequently followed. It redounds greatly to the credit of the management that this important step in art should have been taken in a season which all prophesied would be one of extraordinary difficulties for Her Majesty's Theatre, and which, on the contrary, will have been one of the most brilliant in its annals. Such performances as that of the "Masnadieri" is



MR. JENNY LIND.

MR. LABLACHE.

VERDI'S NEW OPERA "I MASNADIERI," AT HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE.—SCENE VI.

new opera by the first Italian composer, performed under his superintendance, by such artists as Lind, Gardoni, Cobelli, and Lablache, followed by a ballet like the "Fut des Indes," comprising some of the first dancers in the world—Tagliani, Curcio, and Moscati—each performance as them, we repeat, are indeed calculated to raise the character of the British nation for an enlightened and intellectual patronage of the fine arts.

To proceed to Verdi's Opera. Let it be said, first, that nothing could be more perfect and admirable than the manner in which "I Masnadieri" is got up and performed. All the four artists, gifted with voices rarely equalled, with musical and dramatic skill of the first order, play with an ensemble, spirit, and genius, which brings every point of the libretto, every happy thought of the composer into prominent, while the orchestra and chorus seem as if inspired by one

spirit, and work together in perfection. Nothing could be better done. The Opera itself is an essentially dramatic work. Of pieces which would make an effect in a drawing-room, there are few—fewer, perhaps, than in Verdi's other works; but in return, this produces more alacrity of thought and conception, and the immense superiority of the libretto over that of any other opera Verdi has written, gives great advantage in its favour. Critics have already pronounced



MR. GARDONI.

MR. JENNY LIND.

MR. LABLACHE.

VERDI'S "I MASNADIERI"—SCENE LAST.

Première of Verdi's *I masnadieri* at Her Majesty's Theatre  
Jenny Lind and Luigi Lablache — Scene VI (above)  
Italo Gardoni, Jenny Lind, and Lablache — Scene last (below)

***Italian Opera and the English Press,  
1836-1856***

Leanne Langley  
(London)

According to recent estimates, the number of periodicals published in nineteenth-century Britain exceeds 50,000.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately most of them are not concerned with Italian opera. Even in most of the several hundred London journals devoted to music or the theatre, Italian opera is treated less often than we might expect — chiefly because in nineteenth-century England opera-going remained a pleasure for the few. Still, there is a vast amount of writing about opera in the nineteenth-century English press, which, if sometimes preoccupied with finance, theatrical management and personalities, nevertheless offers a kaleidoscope of keen observation and changing musical opinion, nearly all of it published anonymously. What emerges from this material, a good deal of which can now be attributed to specific authors, is a richer, more colorful picture of Italian opera reception in London than has generally been recognized. We learn, among other things, that Verdi was not uniformly dismissed and misunderstood; that Victorian opera critics were not always motivated by pedantry, prudery and insularity; and that Henry Chorley and J. W. Davison, though perhaps the most conspicuous, were not necessarily the most articulate or respected of London's musical writers. In the following discussion I shall limit myself to the 20 years from 1836 to 1856, a period memorable not only for its nine premières of early Verdi operas, its vigorous rivalry between two Italian opera houses and parade of celebrated singers, but also for its proliferation of informed opera writing in the national press, by 1846 including at least four daily newspapers and five weeklies.

First, let us review the institutions, events and musical highlights of this period in London's opera history.<sup>2</sup> In 1836 Mozart and Rossini were still staple fare at the one theatre where Italian opera was regularly given in Italian, the King's Theatre in the Haymarket — from 1837 called Her Majesty's Theatre. *La sonnambula*, *Norma*, *Anna Bolena* and *L'elisir d'amore* were the more recent favorites, while important new works during the next decade would include Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1838), *Linda di Chamounix* and *Don Pasquale* (both 1843), and Verdi's *Ernani* (1845), *Nabucco* (in a version set in ancient Egypt and renamed

*Nino*) and *I lombardi* (both 1846). Fanny Persiani, Grisi, Mario, Tamburini and Lablache dominated the stage at Her Majesty's, though at the end of 1846, under the influence of the conductor Michael Costa and of Persiani's husband, the composer Giuseppe Persiani, most of the company left Her Majesty's to set up on their own at a completely remodeled Covent Garden Theatre, there becoming known as the "Royal Italian Opera." In 1847 competition between Her Majesty's and Covent Garden gave rise to a flurry of activity, the like of which had not been seen in London since Handel's day. The manager at Her Majesty's, Benjamin Lumley, secured Jenny Lind and mounted Verdi's only opera written for London, *I masnadieri*, besides giving Italian versions of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and Donizetti's *La Fille du régiment* and *La Favorite* (all 1847). Subsequent Verdi premières here were *I due Foscari* (1847), *Attila* (1848) and finally, after a forced three-year closure of the theatre, *La traviata* (1856), with Piccolomini. Meanwhile, Covent Garden capitalized on the Meyerbeer fever with *Gli ugonotti* (1848) and Italian versions of *Le Prophète* (1849) and *L'Étoile du Nord* (1855), also giving *Benvenuto Cellini* (1853; under Berlioz) and the London premières of *Rigoletto* (1853) and *Il trovatore* (1855), the latter with Pauline Viardot-Garcia. Although the management at Covent Garden was unstable until 1851 and the theatre's location seemed unfashionable to some, this opera house was widely considered the better of the two musically. Its orchestra, under Costa, was reputed to be one of the most polished in Europe. After only nine seasons of the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden Theatre burned to the ground, on 5 March 1856.

Now to the press. From the 50,000-odd periodical sources mentioned above, I selected for examination the 16 journals listed below — all published in London, most very well known, and all containing something of relevance to the subject of Italian opera during the period 1836-56.

SELECTED JOURNALS		
Daily	<i>The Morning Chronicle</i>	(1769)
	<i>The Morning Post</i>	(1772)
	<i>The Times</i>	(1785)
	<i>The Daily News</i>	(1846)
Weekly	<i>The Examiner</i>	(1808)
	<i>The Atlas</i>	(1826)
	<i>The Athenæum</i>	(1828)
	<i>The Spectator</i>	(1828)
	<i>The Musical World</i>	(1836)
	<i>The Illustrated London News</i>	(1842)
Monthly	<i>The New Monthly Magazine</i>	(1821)
	<i>Fraser's Magazine</i>	(1830)
	<i>The Analyst</i>	(1834)
	<i>The Monthly Chronicle</i>	(1838)
Quarterly	<i>The British and Foreign Review</i>	(1835)
	<i>The Dublin Review</i>	(1836)

<sup>1</sup> J. Don Vann and Rosemary T. VanArsdel, eds., *Victorian Periodicals: A Guide to Research* (New York, 1978), pp. 3-4. The estimate includes daily newspapers and annual reports but covers only the years 1824-1900.

<sup>2</sup> These can be followed in greater detail in Benjamin Lumley, *Reminiscences of the Opera* (London, 1864) and Harold Rosenthal, *Two Centuries of Opera at Covent Garden* (London, 1958).

Apart from the predominance of nonmusical titles here, one notices immediately the arrangement by interval of publication. This choice represents more than bibliographic convenience: it offers a ready key to the different types of English periodic writing on opera. The dailies and weeklies are of fundamental importance not just because they appeared more frequently, but because these journals devoted space to reviewing current Italian opera productions more or less regularly from March to July every year. As a group the weeklies generally preceded the dailies in doing so, since from their founding they emphasized literature and the arts as much or more than politics and business. By contrast, the monthly magazines and quarterly reviews treated opera affairs—history, personalities, trends—more than individual works, and on a much more occasional basis, the monthly magazines adopting a light, imaginative or even gossipy tone, the quarterlies an almost scholarly one. What we might now refer to as a journal's market profile had a lot to do with how, or even whether, Italian opera was covered in that journal.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the writers themselves, we see a similar range in the following list of names. All these men were professional journalists of one sort or another, though music journalism was the chief occupation of only four of them: Chorley, Davison, Hogarth and Holmes.

WRITERS ON OPERA
William Harrison Ainsworth
Thomas Massa Alsager
Percival Weldon Banks
Morris Barnett
Henry Fothergill Chorley
Charles Cowden Clarke
James William Davison
William Howard Glover
Charles Lewis Gruneisen
George Hogarth
Edward Holmes
Charles Lamb Kenney
Desmond Ryan
Henry Smart
Edward Taylor

All on the list, though contributing to the press anonymously or pseudonymously, can be associated through documentary evidence with at least one of the

<sup>3</sup> This explains why, for example, Italian opera was deliberately neglected in the first 20 years of the *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* (London, 1844- ). It was a journal intended for an audience with little means, little knowledge and little access to opera, its primary purpose being the dissemination of music for use in public singing classes. See Nicholas Temperley, "MT and Music Journalism, 1844," *Musical Times* 110 (1969): 583-86. Italian opera began to be more fully reported in the *Musical Times* under the editorship of Henry Lunn (from 1863).

listed journals for some part of the period. Harrison Ainsworth, for example, the owner and editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, wrote a regular column of Italian opera tidbits from July 1845 to July 1851; P. W. Banks, an Irish pundit connected with *Fraser's Magazine*, wrote rambling, often humorous reports of Italian opera seasons for *Fraser's* between 1844 and 1849; and in 1841 Henry Chorley, in the *British and Foreign Review*, wrote an extended, 60-page article entitled "The Lyric Drama," posing as a book review of two recent opera histories by G. W. Fink and George Hogarth.<sup>4</sup>

Author attributions for columns in the weeklies and dailies are more difficult than those for articles in the monthlies and quarterlies.<sup>5</sup> Apart from the fact that less research has been done generally on nineteenth-century newspapers, this is because there were, quite simply, many good London papers covering opera performance, encouraging a small pool of freelance writers to move about among them — from one paper to another, back and forth between two papers, off and on the same paper, and even (why not?) working for two or perhaps three different papers at the same time. There was nothing sinister in this; it was common practice in what was, after all, an insecure and irregular line of work. Of the opera writers listed above the most mobile were George Hogarth and Edward Holmes. While Hogarth was on staff at the *Morning Chronicle* (1834-ca. 1844) he seems to have contributed briefly to the *Times* (1843). He then moved from the *Morning Chronicle* to the *Illustrated London News* (ca. 1845-at least 1853), possibly contributing to the *Morning Chronicle* again (1855), meanwhile taking up a permanent post on the *Daily News* (1846-66). Simultaneously he edited a short-lived musical journal (the *Musical Herald*, 1846-47) and seems to have contributed opera reviews to the *Examiner* (1846-48) and possibly the *Spectator* (1853-56) as well.<sup>6</sup> Holmes's opera writings are somewhat easier to trace; they appeared successively in the *Atlas*

<sup>4</sup> Full citations for these articles and the evidence for authorship in each case are given in Walter E. Houghton, ed., *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*, 3 vols. (Toronto, 1966-79). The *Wellesley Index* also documents Edward Holmes's contributions on opera to *Fraser's Magazine* (1848-49; 1851-53) and to the *Monthly Chronicle* (1838), as well as George Hogarth's extended article on Italian opera in the *Dublin Review* (1839). For the *Analyst*, see Leanne Langley, "A Descriptive Catalogue of English Periodicals Containing Musical Literature, 1665-1845," *The English Musical Journal in the Early Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1983; UMI no. 84-06923), ii, pp. 560-62.

<sup>5</sup> For the *Examiner*, *Atlas*, *Athenæum*, *Spectator*, and *Musical World* up to 1845, see Langley, "Descriptive Catalogue," pp. 468-585 passim. Among the most important primary sources for authorship of a weekly paper in this period is the marked file of the *Athenæum* held by the City University, London.

<sup>6</sup> Hogarth (1783-1870) was a friend of Walter Scott and the father-in-law of Charles Dickens. See *Dictionary of National*



James William Davison  
(1813-85)

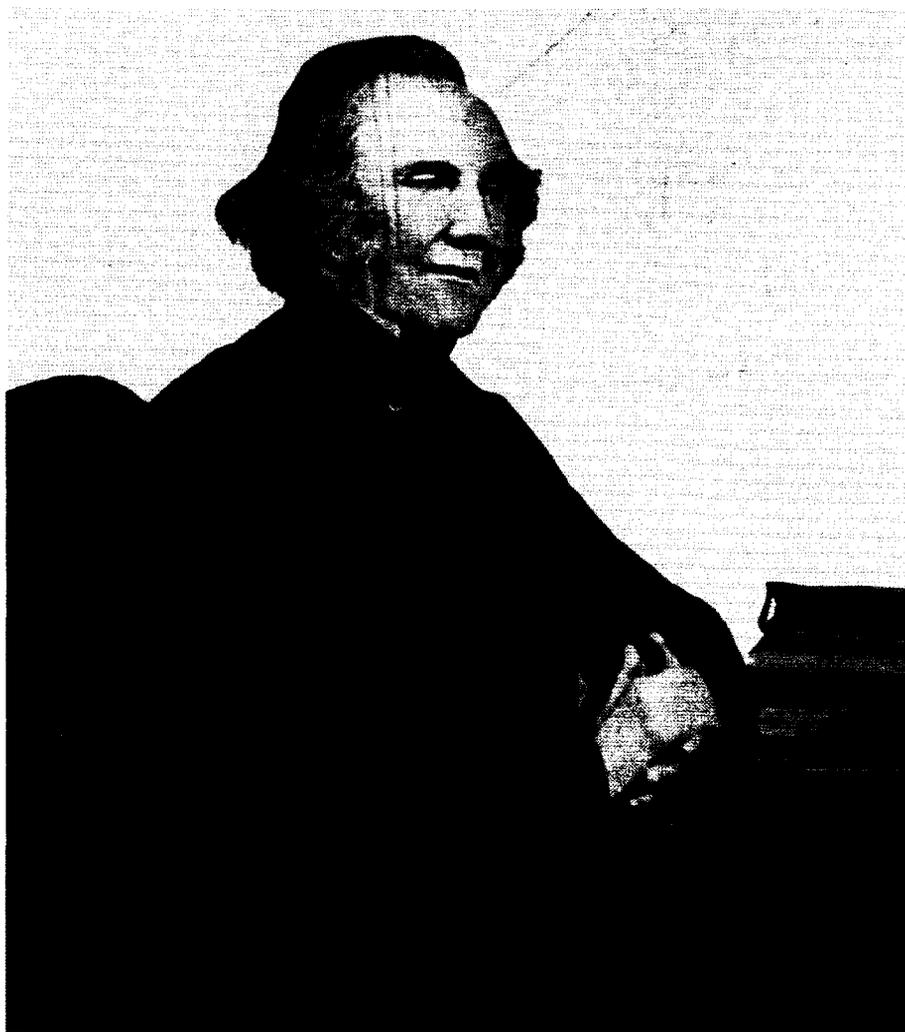
(1826-37), *Monthly Chronicle* (1838), and *Musical World* (which he coedited from 1838 to 1839), then, after a gap, in the *Spectator* (1844-46), and finally the *Atlas* (1846-49; 1851-55) and *Fraser's Magazine* (1848-

*Biography* [hereafter DNB], s.v. "Hogarth, George," and the obituary notice in the *Illustrated London News* (19 Feb. 1870): 211, which speaks of his "extensive literary acquirements, active intellectual faculties [...] large sympathies [...] guileless simplicity of character and never-failing geniality of temper." In the Dickens literature he is often referred to as quiet, intellectual and unobtrusive. My attributions to Hogarth of certain articles in the *Times*, *Examiner* and *Spectator* are tentative, being based on comparisons of internal evidence (words and phrases, musical opinions, use of examples, etc.) with his known writings in the *Morning Chronicle*, *Illustrated London News*, *Daily News*, and his

49; 1851-53).<sup>7</sup> Hogarth and Holmes were certainly among the most sensitive and capable of all the writers under consideration; more self-effacing than most, they

*Memoirs of the Opera in Italy, France, Germany and England*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London, 1851).

<sup>7</sup> Holmes (1799-1859; revised birthdate documented by his application to the Royal Literary Fund, 30 Oct. 1848) was an intimate of the Vincent Novello/Leigh Hunt circle. See DNB, s.v. "Holmes, Edward," the *New Grove*, s.v. "Holmes, Edward": 125-26, where his scholarship, refined taste and modesty are praised, and his contributions to the *Atlas* are said to have given "an impetus and dignity to musical commentary that was acknowledged throughout the profession." Leigh Hunt called Holmes "the best musical critic which this nation has produced" (*The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, London, 1860 [1859], p. 419).



George Hogarth  
(1783-1870)

aimed above all to help the listener, not to pass sentence on the creative artist. Of the other major reviewers, Chorley maintained a lasting, almost exclusive, connection with the *Athenæum* (1834-68), and Davison, besides editing the *Musical World* (1843-85), served on the *Times* for forty years (1845-85). The unusual consistency and length of their attachments to these journals is in fact the main reason modern scholars have tended to grant Chorley and Davison so much authority: their rather dogmatic opinions are well known, often cited and, I would suggest, overemphasized, largely because they are the easiest to look up and identify with certainty.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Both the public careers and the strong musical biases of Chorley (1808-72) and Davison (1813-85) are documented in

No one can possibly do justice to 20 years' writing in a short paper, but a few examples may serve to show the critical content in this material. Clearly a central topic in all English writing about opera is singing: in the 1830s and 1840s especially, London audiences were drawn by the singers, not the music, of Italian opera. Edward Holmes attributed this unfortunate fact, and

personal memoirs. See Henry F. Chorley, *Thirty Years' Musical Recollections* (London, 1862) and Henry G. Hewlett, comp., *Henry Fothergill Chorley: Autobiography, Memoir, and Letters*, 2 vols. (London, 1873); Henry Davison, comp., *Music During the Victorian Era: From Mendelssohn to Wagner, Being the Memoirs of J. W. Davison* (London, 1912). For a modern view of Chorley, see Robert Bledsoe, "Henry Fothergill Chorley and the Reception of Verdi's Early Operas in England," *Victorian Studies* 28 (1984-85): 631-55.

the conservative taste it represented, to English indolence, regretting the indifference of London audiences to new composition.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, he was himself a most engaging writer on opera performers. Whether his subject is the superb ensemble acting of Grisi and Mario in *La Favorite* in 1848, or the overwhelming appeal of Jenny Lind's Maria, Amina or Lucia, his powers of description are unrivaled, making a reader almost see and hear the vanished moment for himself.<sup>10</sup> The importance of executive skill was crucial: it was the undeniable power of Grisi's Norma that finally made Holmes sense the achievement of Bellini. By 1847 he could rank the composer in the class of his own highest operatic models, Gluck and Mozart.<sup>11</sup> Coming from one who only a few years earlier had associated an "over-tragic" Bellini with "far-fetched heroics, stilted solemnity and grandiose declamation"—the very same writer who in 1836 decried most serious modern Italian opera as "a very undisguised pain in the back"<sup>12</sup>—Holmes's later assessment represents not just increased familiarity with *Norma* but, for an English writer at this period, significant insight into the Italian Romantic style.

A writer whose perspective changes with time and a sympathetic performance is one thing, but a group of writers having vastly different views of the same work at the same time is quite another. A case in point concerns the 1846 London première of *I lombardi*. In performance this opera was a decided success—more so than either *Ernani* or *Nino*—since it featured Grisi and Mario and had the benefit of a lavishly spectacular production. Yet where Davison, writing in the *Times*, found everything to praise, including Verdi's here

<sup>9</sup> "For the abstract merits of composition, we are sorry to say, there appears to exist a sad indifference. [...] Execution has been the paramount object with all the listeners, and the older the work the greater the repose and indolence of enjoyment" ("Close of the Opera," *Spectator* [23 Aug. 1845]: 805). Three years later, in a different journal, Holmes made a similar observation: "Meantime there is a growing indifference to composition; and since the Italian Opera has been possessed by Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, no one concerns himself with the special qualities or fine idiosyncrasies of composers" ("The Lyric Drama in 1848," *Fraser's Magazine* 38 [Aug. 1848]: 226).

<sup>10</sup> For *La Favorite* and Lind's début as Lucia, see "Theatres," *Atlas* (27 May 1848): 351-52; for Lind as Maria, see "Her Majesty's Theatre," *ibid.* (29 May 1847): 375; for Amina, "Theatres," *ibid.* (6 May 1848): 304.

<sup>11</sup> For Holmes, Grisi was "the soul of the work." Concerning *Norma* he wrote, "music is but an accessory, as it was in the dramatic system of Gluck; we think comparatively little of the vocal art, compared with the fortunes of the heroine. It is not Madame Grisi, the exquisite and accomplished vocalist, it is Norma who absorbs us. This is the highest praise of the great dramatic singer." And, after praising the dramatic integrity of the work: "Bellini was, indeed, a wild genius—but with an invention that places him in the class of Gluck and Mozart" ("Royal Italian Opera," *Atlas* [12 June 1847]: 408).

<sup>12</sup> See "Theatricals: Italian Opera" in *Atlas* (8 May 1836): 294 and (27 March 1836): 201.

"much more striking melody" and attractive use of an "Eastern style," Chorley in the *Athenæum* launched an unequivocal attack, finding no melody, "tawdry" instrumentation, little stage interest (what he called "no situations") and too many borrowed musical ideas. He admitted to liking three of "those dashing concerted pieces" but made clear his view that under the guise of dramatic passion Verdi was just "bizarre with a vengeance."<sup>13</sup> George Hogarth took a third approach, that of a centrist. He appreciated *I lombardi*'s historical backdrop, strong musical depiction of place and character, and careful management of massed choral sound, but he also found Verdi's melody lacking in distinction and some of the harmony and scoring self-conscious. I believe this was Hogarth's true position in 1846, yet if one thinks about it, steering a middle course also happens to suit a writer contributing to three papers at once. All of Hogarth's *I lombardi* notices<sup>14</sup> are polite and mainly favorable, but they stress slightly different points and use different examples. His report for the popular tabloid, the *Illustrated London News*, brings out the appeal of the colorful medieval setting and of Verdi's aptly descriptive music (Hogarth invoking the image of a Scott novel), while his notice for the erudite *Examiner* is more genuinely critical, praising the opera's libretto yet also explaining why Verdi is not quite, as some say, the "founder of a school."<sup>15</sup> Surely there is a hint here for those wishing to calculate the weight of nineteenth-century English press opinion for and against Verdi or anyone else. Not only are a journalist's views likely to be spread out over time; they might well be spread out among several journals, perhaps with content and tone deliberately shaded to suit a particular reading audience.

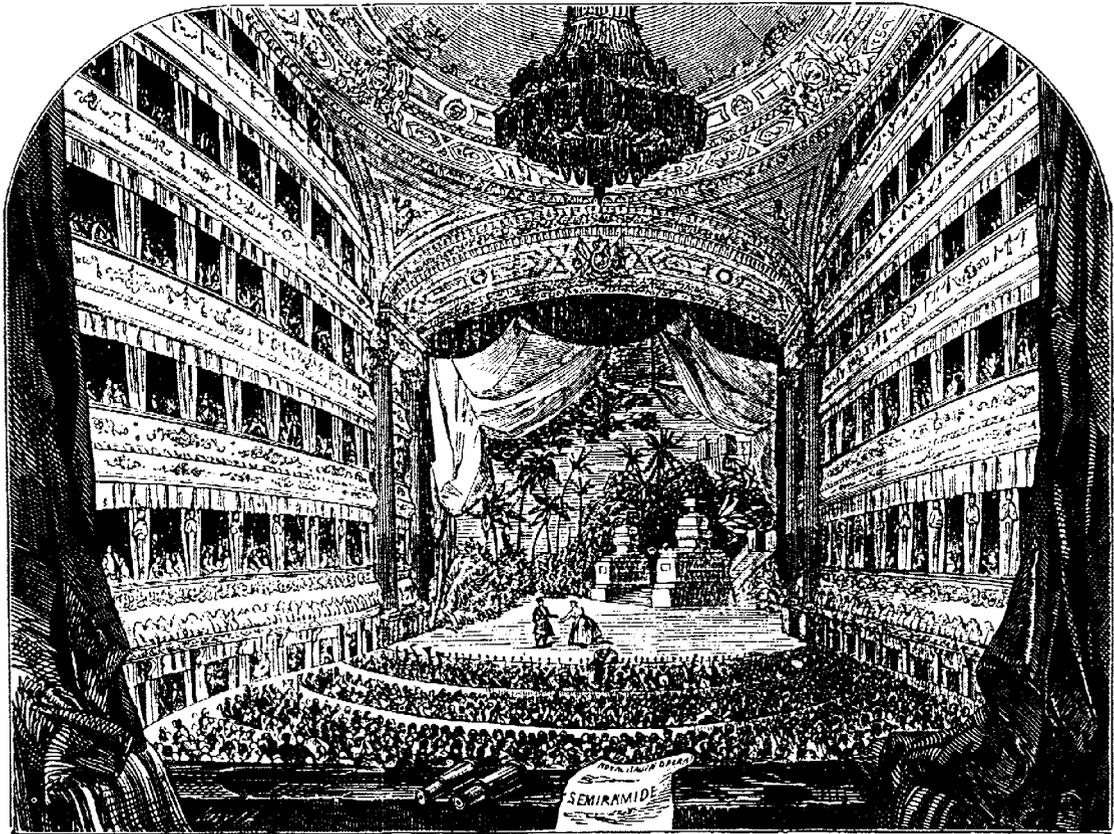
This brings us finally to the subject of critical consensus. Viewing early Verdi over the 12 years from 1845 to 1856, it is possible to see three general stages of English press reaction. The first, embracing *Ernani*, *Nino* and *I lombardi*, may be characterized as mixed but open-minded, and the second, taking in *I masnadieri*, *I due Foscari* and *Attila*, unfavorable. In the third stage, from 1853 to 1856, opinion was more clearly divided into two camps. One was a small but vocal "British Musicians" clique, led by Davison at the *Times* and his protégé Howard Glover at the *Morning Post*, who were unremitting in their hostility towards Verdi.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Compare "Her Majesty's Theatre," *Times* (13 May 1846): 5, and "Her Majesty's Theatre," *Athenæum* (16 May 1846): 506-07. Note, however, that Davison's sedately positive treatment of Verdi in the 1846 *Times* stands in marked contrast to the line taken throughout the 1846 *Musical World*. See note 16 below.

<sup>14</sup> "The Italian Opera," *Daily News* (13 May 1846): 5; "Her Majesty's," *Illustrated London News* (16 May 1846): 327; and "The Theatrical Examiner: Her Majesty's Theatre," *Examiner* (16 May 1846): 308-09.

<sup>15</sup> *Examiner* (16 May 1846): 308.

<sup>16</sup> A pianist and onetime composer himself, Davison helped



Opening of the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden  
Rossini's *Semiramide*  
(10 April 1847)



Scene from Verdi's *I lombardi* at Her Majesty's Theatre  
(23 May 1846)

# THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS



No. 262.—Vol. X.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SATURDAY, MAY 8, 1847.

[SIXPENCE.]

### ENGLISH INFLUENCE.

One of the most remarkable speeches ever delivered by Lord Palmerston was his statement, in reply to the motion of Lord John Manners, on Monday evening, on the affairs of Greece. It was a most effective exposure of the utter worthlessness of what is called "influence" over the Government of another nation, when it is founded only on the miserable cabals and intrigues of diplomatists, instead of the relations of two countries to each other by commercial intercourse. It is a pretty general belief that Lord Palmerston is fond of diplomatic triumphs, and that he will pursue them even to the detriment of the real interests of the country. That, at least, is the fixed opinion of the French journals and French politicians, who regard Lord Palmerston as a State sorcerer, always prepared with some dark spells, some secret and inexplicable devices and plots, all directed against the name, fame, and power of France and its people. These diabolical machinations are secret, or but rarely described, but, when they are, they are ludicrous in the extreme. The report spread by the French papers some time ago, that Lord Palmerston was negotiating the purchase from Mehemet Ali of the sovereignty of Egypt, after the old Pacha's demise, is but one of many similar absurdities. But the mischief of these statements is, that public opinion in France becomes tinged with a belief in them, and the most ordinary act of the Foreign Minister of England is distorted and exaggerated, till the simple pressing a fraudulent Government to pay up an arrear of a debt, or giving the protection of a couple of English ships to English merchants in a revolutionised capital, are magnified into little less than an invasion of France, and a violation of the independence of the Great Nation.

It is the trick of the dynasty that now governs France to divert the attention of the people from internal improvements by the affectation of a brilliant foreign policy. With a commercial code full of glaring and oppressive anomalies—an electoral system that secures the nomination of the Deputies to the Government, and fills the Chamber with placemen—with the public finance exhibiting a perpetual deficiency, and abuses and peculations in more than one public department positively asserted—the journals of France, whether from fear of bringing themselves under the ban of the law, or because they think what is distant is most important, pay a most absurdly disproportionate attention to foreign politics. They, in fact, fight their party battles, not on their own soil, but in Constantinople, Madrid, or Athens. Whether French influence is in the ascendant in the Cabinet cabals of those places is the all important question. And great talents and energies are thus wasted. One half of the passion and earnestness exercised on the "home department" would seem to compel the most stationary

ground in painting Lord Palmerston as an arch fiend, and England as the embodiment of all that is grasping and ambitious, they are letting their own affairs decline in a gradual deterioration. A nation enterprising in its character and industrious will make wealth, and by its wealth it will continually extend its commerce, thus creating for itself an "influence" with all other countries. Diplomacy is the direction and expression of that influence; take away the basis it stands on, and diplomacy becomes mere individual trickery, more or less clever, but, as to real effect, the hollow delusion by which ever men were blinded. Diplomacy is an instrument, not a power. Powerful nations will have their influence, though their diplomacy were the worst in the world—as,

speaking of it as a profession, we believe English diplomacy to be. Napoleon was always a successful negotiator after he had won a battle or got hold of a capital: with power in his hands, he was a first-rate diplomatist. What did diplomacy do for him when power departed from him, and he negotiated, not as victor, but vanquished? All the skill of Talleyrand, could it by a miracle have been enlisted on the losing side, would not have saved him from deposition and exile.

But diplomacy occupies a high place in the opinion of French politicians, and to form a French party in a foreign Court they will sacrifice money and means that might be far better employed. For we believe Lord Palmerston's estimate of the nature of such



Meyerbeer's *Roberto il diavolo* at Her Majesty's Theatre  
Jenny Lind and Joseph Staudigl

The other was a much more heterogeneous group, including Chorley, Hogarth, Holmes and just about everyone else, who, if not enthusiastic, still took Verdi seriously and, for the most part, accepted the resources of his style and tried to remain open, agreeing at least that he was earnest in his attempts at dramatic expression. The basic stumbling blocks for nearly all English writers at some time during this period were two: Verdi's lack of "natural melody," or fresh, memorable tunes constructed in the old way; and what was perceived as a lack of skill, or a willful imbalance, in his orchestration and part-writing.<sup>17</sup> In the end, the moral issues raised by the opera subjects were much less troubling than Verdi's musical reforms, and certainly less objectionable in themselves than the confusing plots, morbidity and sheer gruesomeness associated with *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*.

One of the most perceptive views of early Verdi came from Holmes, who, though at first disappointed by the lack of room Verdi gave to soloists, again showed a readiness to re-think his position and to measure the composer's achievement in light of enlarged artistic aims rather than isolated musical techniques. He first wrote on *Nino* in 1846 in the *Spectator*, and with some authority since he had seen the première of *Nabucco* at La Scala in 1842. But he remained unconvinced, finding the work monotonous.<sup>18</sup> Yet just a year later, in the 1847 *Atlas*, we find Holmes praising *Nino* for its unity of conception and its gusto of musical charac-

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found the Society of British Musicians and saw it as his mission to defend the interests of native musicians against all foreign encroachment; he waged this battle first in the eccentric weekly journal, the *Musical Examiner* (1842-44), and then in the *Musical World*, of which he was the sole editor from April 1843. Here his sneering criticisms of "Young Verdi" were always at home. It was not until 1853 that his hostility began to surface in the *Times*. He was originally seconded by his sub-editor (from ca. 1845) at the *Musical World*, Desmond Ryan, and later, in even more vehement tones, by Glover, an aspiring theatrical composer writing for the *Morning Post* (ca. 1849-65). See Glover's bitter attacks on *Rigoletto* ("Royal Italian Opera" [16 May 1853]: 5) and *Il trovatore* ("Royal Italian Opera: *Il trovatore*" [12 May 1855]: 6).

<sup>17</sup> Summary statements of Verdi's faults range from the polite to the satiric. See Holmes's review of *I due Foscari* in the *Atlas* (26 June 1847): 440, and [Davison, prob.], "How Verdi Composes," *Musical World* (14 May 1853): 305.

<sup>18</sup> "This opera has sufficient originality to interest, many transient inspirations of beauty and feeling, and a remarkable tendency to grandeur of harmonic combination. [...] [but Verdi's strengths] all tend one way, namely, to combination: in real sustained melody he is deficient. [...] Four years have elapsed in the career of this young composer without brightening our anticipations of his future: he may give us wain-loads of harmony and thundering chords, but they will ill replace the natural melody of Bellini or the clear effective instrumentation of Donizetti" ("The Theatres," *Spectator* [7 March 1846]: 228). For the reference to *Nabucco* at La Scala, see "Opening of the Italian Opera," *Spectator* (15 March 1845): 255.

terization.<sup>19</sup> Moving from one journal to another may have facilitated his expression of a changed opinion in this case, but the fact remains that among English periodical writers of his time, Edward Holmes stands almost alone in the intellectual integrity and breadth of his sympathies.

For his part, the ubiquitous George Hogarth could never quite overlook Verdi's "most palpable defects," but one of his *Rigoletto* reviews hints strongly at the temptation: "It is full of plagiarisms and faults, and yet abounds with the most captivating music."<sup>20</sup> Even more telling is Hogarth's frank exposure, in the same review, of a yawning gap in England between Verdi's "terrific castigation" by some sections of the press and his "cat-like vitality" among opera-goers. This anomaly, Hogarth reminds us, is a refreshing sign of the impotence of self-important music critics and above all of the spirit of justice in English audiences.

Throughout this short survey I have used the term "writing on opera" rather than "opera criticism," for I make no claims that even in the informed reviews in these journals we will find searching analytical discussions of nineteenth-century melodramatic structures. To go looking for them here, and then to find English critics wanting, is to misunderstand not only the nature of journalism and how it was produced and read in nineteenth-century Britain, but also the way in which contemporary English listeners responded to Italian opera — what they wanted from it and why. What I propose we will find, if we respect the medium and apply to it the same bibliographic, historical, theoretical and analytical rigor we apply to musical texts, was a whole new world of public discourse on musical culture—including Italian opera—which was in many ways more vital than our own. □

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<sup>19</sup> "This is just what our lyric stage wants. So many operas consist of a fuss about nothing, that when we get a character to excite real interest, it is a matter to be grateful for. [...] Here music and poetry are one and the self-same. [...] Never was a [...] difficult subject more admirably treated in music. Its success in realising the emotions which the composer desired to create is perfect; and whatever Verdi may hereafter do — whatever may be his ultimate position, here at least it must be allowed that he has attained a completeness of effect and an elevation of style unprecedented in the musical productions of modern Italy" ("Her Majesty's Theatre," *Atlas* [6 March 1847]: 179).

<sup>20</sup> "Royal Italian Opera," *Illustrated London News* (21 May 1853): 399.

**Zur Beurteilung der italienischen Oper in der deutschsprachigen Presse zwischen 1815 und 1825**

Christoph-Hellmut Mahling  
(Mainz)

Eine umfassende Beurteilung der italienischen Oper in der deutschsprachigen Presse des 19. Jahrhunderts ist hier nicht zu leisten. Aus diesem Grunde wurde das Thema auf einen Zeitraum von 1815 bis etwa 1825 eingegrenzt. In dieser Zeit findet die Uraufführung des *Freischütz* von Carl-Maria von Weber statt (1821) und es stellt sich die Frage, ob nicht durch die allgemeine und zum Teil heftige Diskussion um die italienische Oper — insbesondere um die Opern Rossinis — der Weg zum Erfolg dieser Oper schon vorbereitet und geebnet war.

In die genannte Zeit fällt, wie schon erwähnt, eine „Blüte“ der Opern Rossinis, die sich immer mehr zu verbreiten und durchzusetzen begannen. Es wird von einem regelrechten „Rossini-Fieber“ oder „Rossini-Rausch“ gesprochen. Während die Opern Spontinis und Cherubinis als Meisterwerke Anerkennung finden und nahezu unumstritten sind, andere Komponisten wie Mercadante eher Ablehnung erfahren, entzündet sich die Diskussion um den Sinn der italienischen Opernmusik an den Werken Rossinis. Sie werden in einer Art „Haß-Liebe“ besprochen und beurteilt.

Die Kritik an Rossini beginnt schon erstaunlich früh. So wird in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung* 1817 anlässlich einer Aufführung der *Italiana in Algeri* der Vorwurf erhoben, Rossini schreibe zu viel: „Nach dem, was uns von diesem jungen, hoffnungsvollen Künstler bekannt ist, wäre zu wünschen, daß er, um mannigfaltiger zu bleiben, weniger und sorgfältiger ausgefeilt schreiben möge.“<sup>1</sup> Die Kritik beschränkt sich aber nicht nur auf den deutschsprachigen Raum, sondern wird auch in Italien selbst laut, so z.B. der Vorwurf des Selbstplagiats bzw. -zitats. 1817 wurde in Mailand der *Barbiere di Siviglia* mit „wenig [...] Glück“ aufgeführt und der Korrespondent bemerkt dazu: „[...] allein unstreitig war auch die Musik Schuld daran; denn Rossini hat sich in dieser Oper zu sehr abcopirt, und es gehört wohl zu den musikalischen Unannehmlichkeiten, in einer neuen Oper immer die alten Opern desselben Meisters zu hören.“<sup>2</sup> Gleiches gilt auch für die Opera seria *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*: „Diese Oper hat allerdings einen schönen Gesang, auch hört man in ihr den *Tancredi*, und andere Opern desselben Meisters; allein sie ist bey all ihrer Schönheit so schön, daß man sanft dabei einschlafen kann, denn sie ist

farben- und charakterlos, wie all Rossini-Opern [...]“<sup>3</sup>

Erst allmählich kommen die Opern Rossinis zu dem erwähnten Erfolg. Zunächst jedoch überwiegt Zurückhaltung, Skepsis und auch Kritik. *Tancred* hat 1818 weder in Berlin noch in Leipzig Erfolg — im Gegensatz zu Wien<sup>4</sup> — und dies wird unter anderem damit begründet, „daß sie ihrem Style nach ein Mittelding zwischen der Opera seria und buffa ist, daß sie höchst incorrect und flach gearbeitet ist und das Vorrecht der italienischen Gattung hat, unter jeden andern Text ebenso gut oder noch besser zu passen, als zu Tancreds Heldenthum, indem sie gegen Costüm, Charakteristik und poetische Wahrheit auf allen Seiten verstösst.“<sup>5</sup> „Die Musik ist in Einzelheiten, ohne Rücksicht auf erweiterte Forderungen an den Componisten, höchst gefällig; aber man wüthet und geht zum Tode in den lustigsten Melodien.“<sup>6</sup> Im Jahre 1819 wird der *Otello* zunächst als „beste Oper“ Rossinis begrüßt, die „den Cherubinisirenden und Spontinisirenden bald den Rang ablaufen“ werde,<sup>7</sup> aber schon wenig später<sup>8</sup> wird der Vorwurf erhoben, die fehlende „Individualisierung der Charaktere“ sei eine Folge des in Italien herrschenden Publikumsgeschmacks, dem sich Rossini zu sehr angepaßt habe. Der gleiche Vorwurf — allerdings unberechtigt und in Verkennung der Tatsache, daß Rossini sich um die Schaffung eines anderen Typus der Oper bemühte — wurde später<sup>9</sup> (1830) im Zusammenhang mit der Aufführung des *Guillaume Tell* erhoben.

Etwa um 1820 nimmt die Auseinandersetzung und Kritik bzgl. der italienischen Oper immer grundsätzlichere Züge an, ja man fühlt sich verpflichtet, daran zu erinnern, daß es auch noch andere erfolgreiche Opernkomponisten wie etwa Simon Mayr, Luigi Cherubini oder François-Adrien Boieldieu, gebe. So heißt es z.B. in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung* 1820:<sup>10</sup> „Der Zeitgeschmack neigt sich unbestreitbar nicht nur in Deutschland, sondern selbst in Frankreich zu der Musik der Italiener seit einer Reihe von Jahren wieder hin. Trotz aller seiner, von Allen anerkannten Fehler,<sup>11</sup> glänzt doch J. Rossini in ganz Europa als der musikalische König seiner Zeit, und droht täglich mehr eine ausschließende Alleinherrschaft zu gewinnen. Dem unbefangenen Beobachter stösst von selbst die Frage auf: Ist es Ursache oder Wirkung davon, daß beynahe

<sup>3</sup> Ebd., Sp. 345.

<sup>4</sup> Vgl. *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1817, Sp. 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1818, Sp. 106-107.

<sup>6</sup> Ebd., Sp. 106.

<sup>7</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1819, Sp. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Ebd., Sp. 289-290.

<sup>9</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Leipzig 1830, Sp. 589-590.

<sup>10</sup> Sp. 676-677.

<sup>11</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Leipzig 1818, Sp. 331.

<sup>1</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1817, Sp. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Ebd., Sp. 344.

alle noch lebende große Genien der Musik in diesem Zeitraume verstummt oder doch nur höchst sparsam mit einzelnen Werken für die Theater ans Licht hervortraten und damit selten ihren frühern Ruhm zu behaupten vermochten? Möge diese Frage recht bald zum Frommen der Kunst beantwortet und die Antwort gründlich erwiesen werden!“ Und die Leipziger *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* setzt sich in einem Bericht, in dem sie sich unter anderem auch mit dem „gegenwärtigen Zustand der Oper in Deutschland“ befaßt, generell mit dem Problem der italienischen Oper, unter anderem auch mit der Frage der Übersetzung, auseinander. Hier heißt es beispielsweise:<sup>12</sup> „Die Uebersättigung an solchem italienischem Ohrenschaus kann niemals lange ausbleiben, und die Geschichte aller ähnlichen Opern läßt darüber keinen Zweifel. Das Geistlose, das Abgeschmackte derselben zeigt sich aber erst in seiner ganzen Blösse bey der Verpflanzung auf deutsche Theater, wo in der Regel gar wenig von jenem Zauber übrig bleibt, wo, wenn auch die eine oder die andere Stimme sich vortheilhaft auszeichnet, doch im Ganzen der zusammenklingende Kehlenwohllaut fehlt, wo eine Sprache hinzukommt, in welcher man durchaus mehr Sinn zu fordern gezwungen ist, oder, wenn gar die italienische bleibt, wie es hie und da geschieht, der sonderbare Umstand eintritt, daß das ganze Haus, Sänger und Zuhörer im großen Durchschnitt genommen, mit wahrer Resignation sich dem vollendeten Unsinn hingeben müssen [...]“ Dies ist aber vor allem auch Schuld der Sänger, die den „Geschmack an diesem Unwesen“ aufgedrungen haben, da sie in der Regel Technik, aber wenig Geist besäßen und ihnen daher die italienische Musik sehr entgegenkomme.

Trotz dieser zunehmend kritischeren Haltung gegenüber der italienischen Oper und insbesondere gegenüber Rossini, erfahren dessen Werke aber weiterhin umfangreiche Besprechungen, die, trotz aller Wiederholungen bekannter Einwände (Gleichförmigkeit, Unkenntnis, Oberflächlichkeit), jedoch nie radikal ablehnend sind. Allerdings erhofft man sich auch eine „Ablösung“ der Rossini-Mode, ohne jedoch genaue Vorstellungen davon zu haben, wie dies geschehen könnte. So heißt es z.B. 1819 in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung*:<sup>13</sup> „[...] Zum Glücke wankt auch das Reich dieses brillanten, lärmenden Genre; selbst der weniger gebildete Theil der Zuhörer erräth Rossini schon; seine eigene Elstern-Natur, mit welcher er sich selbst und andere bestiehlt, wird immer auffallender und bekannter, noch ein Paar neue Opern dieser Art von ihm, und wir sind mit ihm fertig. Wohin sich dann der Nationalgeschmack wenden wird, fallen wir noch tiefer, hier wie in allem andern, oder erwacht endlich die

National-Schwungkraft und reisst uns der Strudel nach Oben zu, wer kann dieß sagen? wer bestimmt es?“ Zugleich wird aber auch der Wunsch ausgedrückt: „[...] hätte doch Rossini etwas mehr musikalische Kenntnisse, und schriebe er mit Musse und Studium für Deutsche oder Franzosen, nicht für Italiener! er müsste Wunderdinge hervorbringen, denn seine Seele ist ein uner-schöpflicher Born schönen Gesanges.“

Wie sich zeigt, stand man allgemein — nicht nur in Berlin, wo die Frage „italienische oder deutsche bzw. französische Oper?“ zugleich ein politisches Problem zwischen Theaterintendanz und Herrscherhaus war — der italienischen Oper um 1820 skeptisch gegenüber, war mit den Opernproduktionen keineswegs immer einverstanden. So hat es den Anschein, daß der Erfolg, den der *Freischütz* Carl-Maria von Webers 1821 erringen konnte, durch die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der italienischen Oper auch bzw. schon publizistisch vorbereitet war.

Diese Oper wird nun, sicher zum Teil auch wieder überpointiert, der italienischen Opernproduktion, insbesondere derjenigen Rossinis, vergleichend gegenüber gestellt. So heißt es in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung* am 10. November 1821 in einem Bericht von der „K.K. Hof-Oper“ unter anderem:

Carl-Maria von Weber's Oper: Der *Freyschütze*, ist nun aufgeführt worden. Die Tiefe dieses trefflichen Tonsetzers ist dem Werke auf die Stirn geprägt und imponirt in einer Zeit, wo die Tonsetzkunst von manchen ganz fabrikmäßig betrieben, und von vielen eben so fabrikmäßig beurtheilt wird, ganz wunderbar. Seine Phantasie strahlt sowohl aus den großen Parthien oft hervor, als auch in den kleinsten, oft bis in's Neckische getriebenen Momenten. Sein Muth beurkundet sich ganz besonders darin, daß er das Komische mit einem freyen kühnen Pinsel behandelt und eine kecke Zusammenstellung der Farben nicht scheut [...] Obgleich der Tonsetzer mit Selbstständigkeit seine Gebilde aus sich schöpft, und seine Formen ihre eigene Physiognomie an sich tragen, so treten sie doch nicht etwa durch allzugroße Willkühr der Individualität aus dem Kreise heraus, welchen man im gesungenen Drama, in den besten Werken vorgezeichnet findet. Es ist also größten Theils mit Besonnenheit auch für die Erfüllung der Postulate gearbeitet, welche Musik überhaupt, Singkunst und Declamation an den schaffenden Meister stellen, und dem Darstellenden ein möglich dankbares Geschäft zu bereiten [...] Unsere Meinung im Allgemeinen ist: Der Eindruck eines solchen in unserer Zeit gleichsam aus den Wolken fallenden Werks kann gar nicht nach einer ersten Aufführung beurtheilt werden —

<sup>12</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Leipzig 1820, Sp. 722 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Sp. 298-299. Besprechung der ersten Aufführung der *Diebischen Elster* im Theater an der Wien.

obgleich er im Ganzen doch günstig zu nennen war.<sup>14</sup>

Und nach der Erfolgsursache des Werkes gefragt fährt der Rezensent fort: „Weil sie das Product eines schaffenden Geistes ist, der zu stolz ist, die Bahn zu wandeln, welche der Modegeschmack ihm vorzeichnete, der aber soviel eigene Kraft in sich trägt, sich selbst eine neue schaffen zu können.“<sup>15</sup>

Die ungewohnte Andersartigkeit des plötzlich in einem verhältnismäßig konventionell-erstarrten Opernbetrieb mit Vorrangigkeit der italienischen Oper erscheinenden Werkes ruft einerseits Erstaunen, ja eine gewisse skeptische Ratlosigkeit hervor, gibt aber andererseits auch den willkommenen Anlaß, die deutschen Komponisten an ihrer Ehre zu packen. So heißt es in einem Bericht des Korrespondenten der Leipziger *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung* aus Wien, ebenfalls vom November 1821:

Wunder über Wunder! In unserer, mit Recht verurufenen Afterkunst-Periode, in einem Zeitpunkte, wo nur musikalische Seiltänzerey, sinnloses Tongewirre und abgedroschene Klingklangstiraden auf Beyfall rechnen zu können scheinen, hat Webers *Freyschütze* einen eminenten Sieg davon getragen, und einen Enthusiasmus hervorgebracht, der bey jeder Wiederholung gleich der ins Thal rollenden Lavine sich vergrößert, und Deutschlands Tonsetzern dadurch das erfreulichste Prognostikon stellt, daß sie nur etwas recht gediegenes zu liefern brauchen, um in ihren Landsleuten das durch italienische Leckerey eingellulte bessere Selbstgefühl, wenn auch etwas gewaltsam, aufzurütteln, und den unverdorbenen Sinn für das einzig Wahre und Schöne aus seinem lethargischen Schlummer zu erwecken.<sup>16</sup>

Und ähnlich äußert sich Franz Stoepel im September 1821 in der *Zeitung für Theater und Musik*:

*Der Freischütz*, als Oper betrachtet, ist, wenn auch nicht die Beste, welche außer Beethovens *Fidelio* seit Mozart geschrieben worden [...], doch unstreitig eine der besten Opern seit jener Zeit; und gewiß, wir haben uns des höchlich zu freuen, da unser Deutschland eben jetzt so arm an Ereignissen solcher Art ist, und darum die Proselitensmacherei für Italienischen Sinn und Geschmack — der an sich ein recht feiner sein mag, nie aber ein Deutscher werden kann — so nachtheilig gewirkt hat. Es entwickelt sich in diesem einen

Kunstwerke Hrn. v. Webers eine Masse echter, rein-romantischer Musik, wie sie in den „Opera omnia“ anderer Komponisten oft vergeblich gesucht werden möchte; — eine Musik, die so klar und dennoch tief, so natürlich und doch so sinnig schön ist, die unter dem Schleier bezaubernder Anmuth schöner, tiefer wirkt, als das betäubende Getöse zahlloser Instrumente.<sup>17</sup>

Letztere Bemerkung ist wieder ein deutlicher Hinweis auf die Musik Rossinis.

Nun wäre es falsch anzunehmen, daß mit dem Erscheinen des *Freischütz* die italienische Oper in „Bedrängnis“ geraten wäre. Die Werke Spontinis beispielsweise werden nach wie vor positiv beurteilt, so etwa 1821 die *Olympie*, da sie nicht nach dem Modegeschmack gearbeitet, sondern aus „Innerstem heraus empfunden“<sup>18</sup> sei. 1824 finden sich ähnliche Bemerkungen in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung* im Zusammenhang mit einer Besprechung von *Nurmahal*: Spontini ist ein „genialer und gewaltiger Zeichner der größten Affecte [...] und wir sehen ihn auf dem Gebiete der Romantik sich mit einer Leichtigkeit, Anmuth und Einfachheit bewegen, welche die Vielseitigkeit seines Genies beweisen.“<sup>19</sup> Die Kritik konzentriert sich weitgehend auf Rossini und seine Opern, doch wird auch hier zum Teil versucht, objektiv die positiven Seiten des Schaffens herauszustellen und, sicher auch beeinflusst durch den Publikumserfolg der Opern, sich mit den Fakten, der Realität abzufinden. In diesem Sinne heißt es z.B. 1821 in der Wiener *Allgemeinen Musikalischen Zeitung*: „Bey Rossini aber findet sich eine so außerordentlich charakteristische Familien-Physiognomie in seinen Geisteskindern, daß man manche für Zwillinge, ja für Drillinge halten möchte. Warum nicht?“<sup>20</sup> Und in der *Zeitung für Theater, Musik und Bildende Künste* wird 1823 in einer Besprechung des *Barbier von Sevilla* (Aufführung in Berlin) sowohl auf die Erwartungen des Publikums, als auch auf die häufig zu schnelle und zu pauschale negative Beurteilung der Werke Rossinis eingegangen:

Bei der Flüchtigkeit, mit welcher Rossini arbeitet, bei der Menge seiner Werke, womit er wahrscheinlich die Güte derselben zu compensiren sucht, bei der Oberflächlichkeit, womit dieser musikalische Lovelace Alles behandelt, was auf seine Kunst Beziehung hat, ist es in der That zu bewundern, daß ein Produkt, wie dieser *Barbier*, aus seiner Phantasie hervorgehen konnte, der, neben vielem Flachen und Seichten, doch auch

<sup>14</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1821, Sp. 710-713.

<sup>15</sup> Ebd., Sp. 760.

<sup>16</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Leipzig 1822, Sp. 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Bericht vom 29. September 1821, Nr. 39.

<sup>18</sup> *Zeitung für Theater, Musik und Bildende Künste* I, Sp. 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> Sp. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Sp. 293.

manches Tiefgedachte und Charakteristische in sich begreift. Mit Paesiello's Musik darf Rossini's freilich nicht verglichen werden, schon darum nicht, weil beide Tonsetzer bei der Composition dieser Oper von ganz verschiedenen Gesichtspunkten ausgingen und jeder einem anderen Geschmache huldigte. Paesiello schrieb für ein Publikum, dem eigentliche dramatische Musik, Charakteristik, und besonders komische, noch etwas galten, das den Gesang als eine leichte und angenehme Hülle betrachtete, in welche der Musiker den Sinn der Worte, den Charakter der Handlung einwickeln konnte; Rossini für eine Generation, welcher der Ohrenkitzel, eine fortwährende Euphonie Hauptsache ist, welche darüber jede andere Kunstforderung völlig vergißt, und welcher dramatische und poetische Wahrheit im eigentlichsten Wortverstande nur bloße Nebendinge sind. So mußten freilich auch zwei an Gehalt ganz verschiedene Erzeugnisse ans Licht treten, und wenn wir überhaupt nicht geneigt sind, über einen Künstler, der im Zeitgeschmache arbeitet, und sich des Zuspruchs auf Dauer oder wohl gar auf Unsterblichkeit dadurch von selbst begiebt, streng zu urtheilen, so können wir auch Rossini's *Barbier* nicht verdammen, gleich denjenigen, die über Alles, was von diesem fruchtbaren Tonsetzer kommt, vornehm die Nase rümpfen, und, das Kind mit dem Bade ausschüttend, ihm jedes höhere Verdienst um die Kunst geradezu absprechen. Die heutige Oper enthält wunderliebliche Melodien, für den Sänger ausnehmend dankbare Gesangstücke, und auch die Charakteristik ist nicht leer ausgegangen, wovon wir mehrere Beispiele anführen könnten, wenn uns hier nicht der Raum dazu fehlte [...] Mit welchem Aerger mögen dies die sogenannten Rigoristen, die Leute vom strengen Styl, angesehen haben, die über eine dem Componisten entschlüpfte Quinten- oder Oktaven-Fortschreitung ein solches Zetergeschrei erheben, als ob dadurch das ganze Gebäu der musikalischen Kunst scandalös über den Haufen geworfen worden wäre! Rossini strebt nach augenblicklichem Effekt; ihm opfert er jede andere Rücksicht, und obschon wir dies nicht ganz billig finden, so können wir ihn doch sein, im vorigen Jahre in Wien geäußertes: „Effetto, effetto!“ nicht so sehr zur Sünde anrechnen, wie es manche Gegner der neuern Italienischen Schule wohl gethan haben. Gluck macht an einem andern Orte dasselbe Bekenntniß, nur mit dem Unterschiede, daß er durch sein Effektsuchen ganz andere Zwecke im Auge hatte. „Ich habe niemals“ — schrieb er in seiner Vorrede zur ersten Original-Ausgabe der *Alceste* — „einen Werth auf die Erfindung von etwas Neuem gelegt, wenn es nicht von der Situa-

tion selbst herbeigeführt und dem Ausdruck angemessen war; kurz, es giebt keine Regel, die ich nicht freudig dem Effekt geopfert hätte.“ — Möchten wir doch wieder ein Mal den *Othello* hören [...] <sup>21</sup>

Es läßt sich also eine zunehmende Differenzierung im Urtheil über die Werke Rossinis feststellen. So wird etwa der *Otello* als „tiefer eindringend, dramatisch wahr und konsequent“ bezeichnet, <sup>22</sup> aber auch herausgestellt, es fehle den Opern „trotz der vielen einzelnen vortrefflichen Züge, doch im Ganzen mehr oder weniger an Tiefe, Reflexion, Consequenz, Gediegenheit [...] aber die gebildete Welt ist mit dem Urtheil über den melodramatischen Flügelmann unserer Zeit im Reinen. Sie genießt die Schönheiten seiner leckeren Muse, ohne sie zu zählen und zu zergliedern.“ <sup>23</sup>

Was bei Rossini fehlte, das glaubte man nun gerade in *Freischütz* zu entdecken: „Wie ganz anders, wie meisterhaft erscheint uns eben deshalb Weber, weil er gegen so dunkle, schauererregende Momente auch so reizende, schöne Lichtpunkte aufzustellen wusste, daß man mit Freude den Übergang des einen zum andern bemerkt [...] Weber aber hat die rechte Mischung der Kraft und Süßigkeit, der Originalität und Popularität in seinem *Freischützen*.“ <sup>24</sup>

Im übrigen fällt auf, daß etwa ab 1823 kaum mehr detaillierte und kritische Besprechungen der Werke Rossinis und anderer italienischer Opern zu finden sind, dafür aber mehr und mehr Urtheile über die sängerischen Leistungen, aber auch Hinweise auf die Anforderungen an Sänger und Instrumentalisten (z.B. Bläser) in den Vordergrund rücken. Nicht ohne Sarkasmus bemerkt in diesem Sinne 1824 die Wiener *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*: „Rossini ist ein Meister der Anwendung der ganzen Pracht der Instrumente; aber eben darum wird auch so mancher, der ein Blasinstrument spielt, seinen Athem früher aushauchen, als die Parze bestimmt hätte.“ <sup>25</sup>

Treffend faßt schließlich eine in der Mainzer *Cäcilia* 1825 erschienene Sentenz von T.W. Jung die Meinung über die Opern Rossinis, die damals überwiegend die „italienische Oper“ repräsentierten, zusammen, wobei zugleich latent wiederum Anerkennung und Kritik sowie der Kontrast zu der deutschen Oper eines Carl-Maria von Weber zu spüren sind:

<sup>21</sup> *Zeitung für Theater, Musik und Bildende Künste* III, Sp. 89-90.

<sup>22</sup> *Cäcilia. Eine Zeitschrift für die Musikalische Welt*, Band 6, Mainz 1827, S. 239.

<sup>23</sup> *Ebda.*, S. 246.

<sup>24</sup> *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, Wien 1824, Sp. 363.

<sup>25</sup> *Ebda.*, Sp. 77f.

R o s s i n i. Was du oft And'ren, ja dir auch, so  
geistvoll und lieblich ent-elstert,  
Krabbelt mir gütlich am Ohr, aber nicht reicht mir's  
ins Herz.<sup>26</sup>

\* \* \*

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Unterhaltung gebildeter, unbefangener Leser. Eine Be-  
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Johannes Gutenberg-Universität

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*Italian Opera Premières and Revivals in  
the Hungarian Press, 1864-1894*

Zoltan Roman  
(Calgary)

In order to deal meaningfully with the subject of Italian opera in Hungary in the nineteenth century, it is essential to gain at least some understanding of the historical background in three areas: the social-political framework; musical nationalism; and the history of opera in Hungary.

For much of her thousand-year history, Hungary was one of the genuinely "peripheral" nation-states in Europe: linguistically unique, and therefore isolated; not unequivocally Western in outlook, yet militantly opposed to the East; geographically well-placed on the trade routes, but in constant peril of invasion and subjugation for the same reason. In the 1860s Hungary was emerging from her latest and longest period of domination by a foreign power. After nearly two hundred years of Austrian rule, the *Ausgleich* (Compromise) of 1867 made her a nominally equal partner in what became known as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The feudal aristocracy, whose nationalistic aspirations were instrumental in Hungary's achieving independence from direct foreign rule, now became the strongest supporters of a partnership that guaranteed their continuing ascendancy in all internal matters, including cultural life. As a true middle class was only emerging at this time, the aristocracy was the chief patron and consumer of all the arts.

In contrast to their counterparts in the traditionally dominant musical countries of Western Europe, the attitudes and affinities of the majority of Hungarian musicians and musical writers were, to a large extent, shaped by the striving for a national identity in music that paralleled the political struggles of the time. For most of the nineteenth century, Hungarian art music had been dominated by the adherents of German romanticism. Aside from the all-pervasive influence of well-placed immigrant musicians, the character of Hungarian musical life in the second half of the nineteenth century was shaped by three composers: Franz Liszt (1811-86), Mihály Mosonyi (1814-70) and Ferenc Erkel (1810-93). Of the three, Erkel was the most widely venerated as the father-figure of musical nationalism. This status was undoubtedly well-earned in light of his splendid national anthem, and by the Hungarian historical subjects of his numerous and popular operas. However insipid and pseudo-Hungarian much of his music may be judged today, in his own lifetime Erkel's influence reached into all walks of musical life. It was strongest at the Royal Hungarian Opera, and was continued there later by his sons.

Until the first third of the nineteenth century, operatic life in Hungary revolved around small resident companies in large aristocratic households, and around itinerant troupes from abroad. The first permanent Hungarian opera company in Budapest was founded in 1837; for the next 47 years it constituted a division of the National Theatre and gave regular performances on its stage.<sup>1</sup> Finally, reflecting the rapid rise of this art form in the social and cultural life of the nation, the splendid new Royal Hungarian Opera House was opened in September 1884.

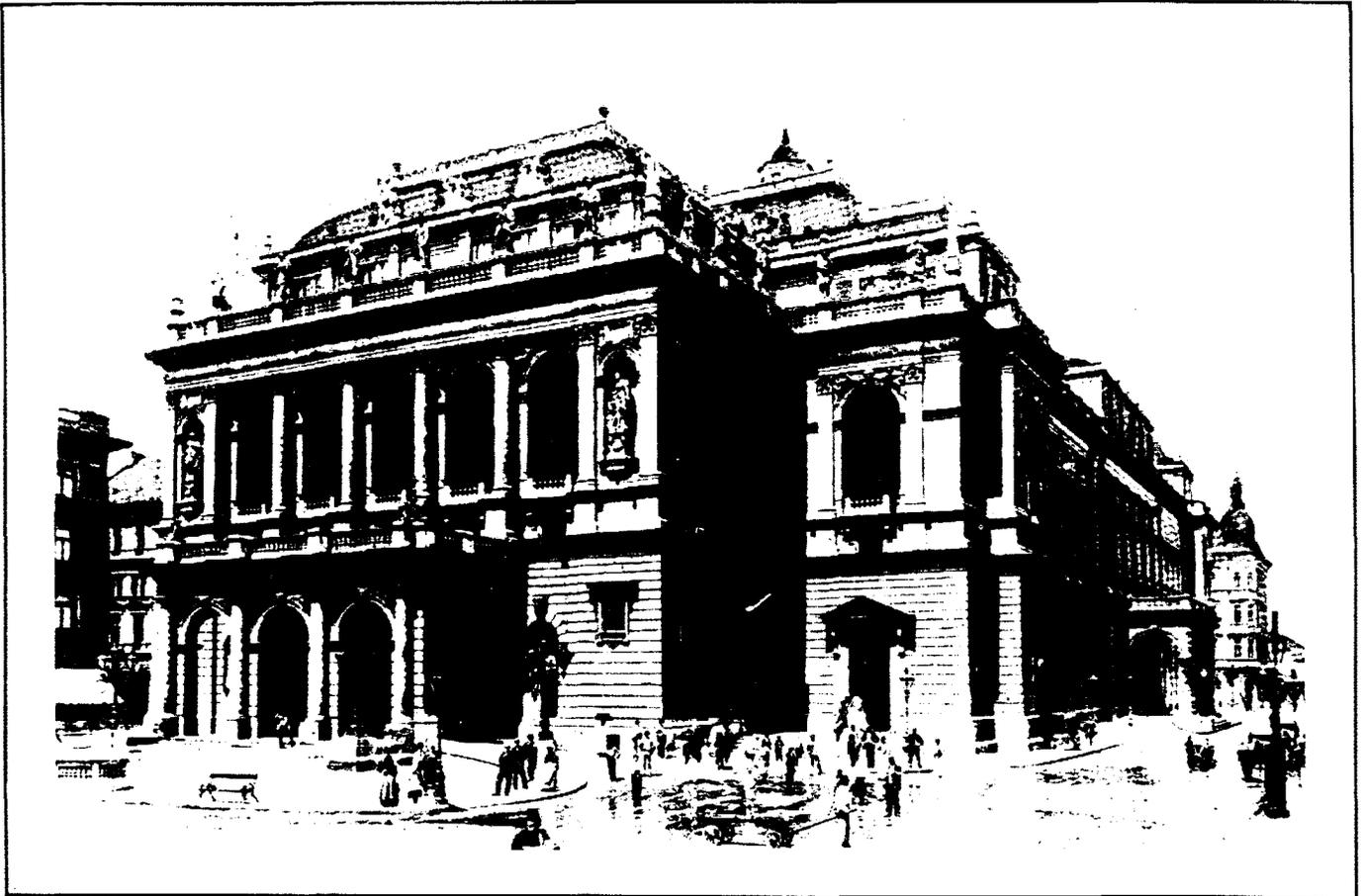
The season's repertoire in the new house provides us with clear and telling insight into the fashions and tastes that characterized opera in Hungary not only in 1884-85, but also in the preceding decade or so. For, although the studios and workshops of the new opera were frantically busy from the start, many of the productions for the first two or three seasons had to be transferred from the National Theatre. Moreover, almost the entire artistic staff of the National Theatre's former opera division was taken over by the new opera house, including its Chief Music Director Ferenc Erkel with his dictatorially rigid, but by and large unquestioningly accepted likes and dislikes.

During the initial 1884-85 season,<sup>2</sup> operatic performances in the new Royal Hungarian Opera break down as follows. Twenty-nine operas were given on 145 occasions. Eleven French works were sung 64 times; Italian opera fared equally well, with ten works performed 45 times. Thus, music from the French and Italian repertoires occupied fully three quarters of the available evenings. Far behind them lagged German and Hungarian operas: five German works were given 19 times, while there were 17 performances of three Hungarian operas (all of them by Erkel). Erkel's strong prejudices, especially against the contemporary German repertoire, are most evident from the Wagner statistics: in 1884, only *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* were in the repertoire of what was then the world's best-equipped opera house!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A subsidiary though at times very important role in Hungarian operatic life was played by the performances given (mostly by visiting companies) at the long-established and active German Theatre, first built in 1812 and, following its destruction by fire in 1847, reopened in 1869. This house also burned down in 1889.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the National Exhibition in 1885, the Opera stayed open through the entire summer of that year. For present purposes, though, the "season" is calculated as approximately eight months, finishing at the end of May.

<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, the first two operas of the *Ring* were first staged in an Hungarian opera house only in 1889, even though the entire cycle had been given already in 1883 in the German Theatre by Angelo Neumann's travelling *Wagner-Theater*. [All performance statistics are taken from *A Magyar [ar] Kir.[ályi] Operaház, 1884-1909*, ed. Dezső Vidor (Budapest, 1909).]



Royal Hungarian Opera, Budapest

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*The Opera House Album* (London: Robson Books Ltd., 1979)

Against this background, then, we shall take a brief look at the press reception in Budapest of six Italian operas over a thirty-year period. Three of them had had their first Hungarian performances at the National Theatre;<sup>4</sup> it is interesting to see what—if any—difference the passage of time, and revival in a new, dedicated opera house, may have made in their reception.

\* \* \*

Music criticism was well-developed in Hungary by the last third of the nineteenth century. In 1888, for example, about half of the two dozen or so daily, weekly and monthly general interest and specialized newspapers and periodicals published criticism regular-

<sup>4</sup> "Hungarian performances" is meant literally: ever since the establishing of the first permanent company at the National Theatre in 1837, insistence on Hungarian-language performances has been a peculiarity of Hungarian operatic life, despite inevitable occurrences of multi-lingual performances involving visiting foreign singers. By the same token, most performances at the German Theatre were given in German.

ly. The nature of the press reflected the reality of the social-political situation. Although not officially bilingual, the capital had a large German-speaking population, and consequently several influential German newspapers. The majority of the critics mirrored the conservatism of the ruling classes; thus, Erkel's anti-Wagnerian attitudes found much support in the press. Also, the arts were one area in which the advocating of overt (and often excessive) nationalism was without the risk of offending the interests of the monarchic power structure. Consequently, a good many writers were uncritical champions of all things Hungarian in some branches of literature, and in art and music. All in all, it is true to say that artistic innovation in any area was nearly always greeted with suspicion and antagonism even if it emanated from otherwise comfortably familiar quarters. A good case in point was Verdi: admired and frequently performed as most of his earlier works had been for many years, the introduction of *The Masked Ball* in Budapest brought no undivided critical or popular success.

*Un ballo in maschera* had the peculiar distinction of receiving two premières in Budapest within a month: in

German at the German Theatre on 18 December 1863, and at the National Theatre in Hungarian (but with Italians as Amalia and Richard!) on 16 January 1864. Perhaps inevitably, every critic compared Verdi's opera with Auber's earlier work on the same subject, mostly to the advantage of the latter. The leading German paper, the *Pester Lloyd*, devoted a full-length *feuilleton* to the opera.<sup>5</sup> After criticizing Verdi's weaknesses in rhythm, harmony and dramatic orchestration (especially in comparison with French composers), and regretting that the work's success would always depend exclusively on the quality of the lead singers, the writer somewhat grudgingly accepted the opera as one of Verdi's best to date. Like the rest of his colleagues, though, he described *Ballo* as "lightweight."

One review of the Hungarian première appeared in the influential musical monthly, *Zenészet* *Lapok*,<sup>6</sup> it was by Kornél Ábrányi senior, an adamant foe of Erkel's policies. He noted the advances in Verdi's craft in the work's ensembles, *arioso* passages, and dramatic use of the orchestra, though he felt that these came at the expense of "his formerly fresh, warm or insinuating" melodies; his highest praise was reserved for the ballet in the third act. Ábrányi's chief complaint was aimed at the "excessive Verdi-cult" that was continuing at the National Theatre, expressly at the expense of Wagner's works. He also commented on the disappointing attendance.

The vastly increased popularity of *Ballo* is clearly reflected in the circumstances of its entry into the new Royal Hungarian Opera House some 20 years later. It was revived in the second full month of the season, ahead of even such a perennial favorite as *Il trovatore*. While most of the reviews were devoted entirely to the production and to individual performances, at least one critic felt moved to describe the work as "after *Aida*, unquestionably the popular Italian opera composer's most valuable, and for us best beloved work."<sup>7</sup>

If even the celebrated and immensely popular Verdi was, to some extent, a pawn in the musical politics of Hungary, it is not surprising that Arrigo Boito, his younger and barely known countryman, should have fared even more roughly at the hands of Hungarian critics. When *Mefistofele* was performed for the first time at the National Theatre on 25 April 1882, it was received with undisguised skepticism by most reviewers, and with open hostility by others. Of course, the subject itself served to expose the opera to attacks more than usually virulent: every literate person (and none more so than a journalist) considered himself an

expert on, and therefore a rightful defender of, that sublime masterpiece, Goethe's *Faust*. Then, Boito had the apparent audacity to enter into competition with Gounod, whose *Faust* was already the single most-performed opera on Hungarian stages. And finally, though readily associated with the aforementioned audacity, the composer in this case was one of the true (and thus detested) "moderns" on the Italian musical scene. Accordingly, the critic of the *Pester Lloyd*, having summed up the work as "a musical witches' sabbath," used it as a platform from which to "register a solemn protest against the art-destroying direction of modern opera which [...] has come to be tolerated by us, too."<sup>8</sup>

It is clear from the reviews that in the case of *Mefistofele* the public disagreed with the majority opinion of the critics. The work was to be given 18 times before the opera division of the National Theatre closed its doors in the spring of 1884, and it was revived already in the summer segment of the initial season in the new house. The *Fővárosi Lapok* which had wondered about the durability of the work in 1882 (even if it *had* published one of the few otherwise positive reviews then) could, on the occasion of the revival, forecast with confidence that it would prove to be one of the most attractive operas of the season. The review also contains interesting remarks on the characteristics of the Royal Opera as they related to the ideal requirements of the art form, as well as of a given work. In the case of *Mefistofele*, the much larger stage, modern technical equipment, and larger acoustic space of the new house decidedly contributed to the effectiveness and intelligibility of both spectacle and music.<sup>9</sup>

The next major Italian opera première provided the critics with ample opportunity to recall Boito. Not only was he the librettist of Amilcare Ponchielli's *Gioconda*, but his *Mefistofele* made for good comparison with this latest example of "modern" Italian opera to arrive in Hungary. *Gioconda* was received even more negatively than Boito's work, and some writers held the two jointly responsible for the overall "decline" of Italian opera! The critic of the *Neues Pester Journal* put it most eloquently:

Yesterday's performance of [*Gioconda*] made it abundantly clear that Italy's operatic glory has fallen on bad times. One is accustomed to dealing leniently with Italian opera in general. One is willing to accept even the most wretched text, if only the melody shows a sign of genius. But even that appears to have run out in Italy. [...] That special Italian art [...], before whose most glittering star Rossini even a Beethoven had to yield

<sup>5</sup> "Amelia, oder der verhängnißvolle Maskenball," *Pester Lloyd* 10, no. 291 (20 December 1863): [2].

<sup>6</sup> *Zenészet* *Lapok* 4, no. 17 (21 January 1864): 135.

<sup>7</sup> *Pesti Hirlap* 6, no. 314 (14 November 1884): 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Pester Lloyd* 29 (Beilage), no. 114 (26 April 1882): [5].

<sup>9</sup> "Mefistofele," *Fővárosi Lapok* 22, no. 134 (9 June 1885): 870.

briefly, is dead. Its funeral song has been sung by Boito and Ponchielli.<sup>10</sup>

Like most of his colleagues, he then went on to enumerate a long list of influences and echoes—among them Verdi's, Meyerbeer's and Wagner's—in this “stylistic conglomerate of all conceivable masters.”

Perhaps because the revival of *Gioconda* in the new Opera took place in less than a year, it fared no better than it had upon its initial introduction in Budapest. Any critic opposed to the hegemony of Italian music at the Royal Opera was able to point gleefully to the “icy silence” in which the sparse audience received most of the work.<sup>11</sup> The senseless perseverance of the Opera's administration is also clear from this case: *Gioconda*, having been rejected by all once before, received a glittering new production on revival! As the critic of the *Pester Lloyd* ruefully remarked, “to be sure, the music is no better in the new house, but the new production at least makes it more bearable.”<sup>12</sup> We also learn from this review that the conductor (one of Erkel's sons) used his red pencil in several places to trim away some of the “crudities” of the score.

If the reception of the next three works—*Cavalleria rusticana*, *I pagliacci* and *Manon Lescaut*—appeared to signal a radical turn-about in the fortunes of “modern” Italian opera in Hungary, this was due largely to three incidental factors. Two of the three works were introduced by two of the greatest conductors of their age, Gustav Mahler and Artur Nikisch.<sup>13</sup> Again, two of the three operas were instant successes wherever they were performed. And finally, the incomparably finer facilities of the new opera house could not but enhance the chances for success of any new work. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that beginning in the late 1880s, the Royal Hungarian Opera was increasingly often among the first houses to mount new operas from abroad—mostly, one might add, with the support of the press.

Not the least of such works was Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, introduced by Mahler on 26 December 1890. The importance of the occasion—due in part to advance notices of the opera, and in part to the young Mahler's already impressive reputation—was clearly shown by the presence of several Viennese critics. While the success of the work itself is hardly surprising, the unstinting praise it received on this occasion appears additionally generous in light of the fact that the première took place amidst a mounting public crisis:



Gustav Mahler

Director of the Royal Hungarian Opera (1888-91)

Mahler was known to be well on the way to a premature departure from the directorship of the Royal Opera. However, even his most unrelenting enemy among the influential critics was forced to declare at the end of his detailed review that “the first performance achieved an artistic summit under Mahler's direction,” while “the repertoire of the Opera grew impressively with this work.”<sup>14</sup>

Although Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* opened in Budapest on 28 March 1893, only some ten months after its first performance in Milan, its creator had already begun to earn a reputation as a worthy competitor for Mascagni as Italy's most exciting new composer. Inevitably then, previews published in the Hungarian press built up expectations by emphasizing similarities in the personalities and careers of the two musicians, while reviews concentrated on comparisons between *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria*. But the most interesting con-

<sup>10</sup> “*Gioconda*, Oper von Ponchielli,” *Neues Pester Journal* 12, no. 339 (10 December 1883): [1].

<sup>11</sup> *Pesti Hirlap* 6, no. 348 (19 December 1884): 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Pester Lloyd* 31, no. 348 (19 December 1884): [6].

<sup>13</sup> Both Mahler and Nikisch directed the Royal Hungarian Opera: Mahler from 1888 to 1891, Nikisch from 1893 to 1895.

<sup>14</sup> “*Parasztecsület*,” *Zenelap*, 10 January 1891, p. 4.

sequence of this première (especially as its impact cumulated with that of *Cavalleria*) was undoubtedly a pronounced shifting of critical favor towards Italian opera in general. August Beer, one of the finest and most influential Hungarian critics of the age, began his review with this declaration: "It cannot be disputed any longer: Italy leads musical Europe once again."<sup>15</sup> And Kornél Ábrányi, now at the end of a very long and turbulent career, went a long way towards reversing the pro-Wagner, anti-Italian sentiments he had expressed on the occasion of *The Masked Ball* of some three decades earlier. The following excerpts are taken from a long, thoughtful and unusually positive review:

[Following Wagner], it was the Italians who solved the problem of furthering dramatic music most ably by reaching into the rich storehouse of their national life and searching it for the true, the only material of drama. For the life of the people remains the inexhaustible spring of poetry forever. [...] But they also solved another problem this way. — To the endlessly drawn out, boring recitation of the German music drama they opposed a dramatic evolution that is founded on the natural melodies of the folk, and is concisely designed. And this is the secret of their effectiveness.<sup>16</sup>

Our final opera was written by Giacomo Puccini, regarded then as yet another of the young "verist" composers from the south. Like the works of Mascagni and Leoncavallo discussed above, *Manon Lescaut* was Puccini's first international success (although not his first opera). Presented in Budapest one year after *Pagliacci*, with its composer already counted as one of the promising new Italians, *Manon* (purchased from Ricordi at a fee that was then a record for the Royal Opera) rightfully created expectations of yet another triumph for the institution. While the audience quickly warmed to the work, the critical reception was cool, with the lion's share of such success as it had, attributed to Nikisch's preparation and conducting of the performance. In this case, the inherent conservatism of the Hungarian critics re-surfaced. Aside from a certain shared discomfort over the "immorality" of the story, all of them felt that the greatest—even debilitating—weakness of the opera lay in its "ineffectual libretto, without continuity, without logic, without any psychological motivation."<sup>17</sup> By and large, Puccini himself was acknowledged as a talented—if eclectic—composer, whose best achievement was seen in his

orchestration. At the same time, he was faulted for his "fragmented" melodic style and "wayward" harmonic language (the critic of the *Journal* even upbraided him for writing parallel fifths and octaves "for their own sake"! ). Perhaps surprisingly, the most perceptive and farsighted comment came from old Ábrányi; he concluded his otherwise ambivalent review thus: "Undoubtedly, Puccini is an outstanding talent among the Italians; for my part at least, I believe that *Manon* will not be his last word."<sup>18</sup>

While Ábrányi did, of course, prove right in his prediction of Puccini's career, the indifferent reception of *Manon* resulted in a hiatus of nine years before another one of his works, *Tosca*, was heard in Budapest. In general, though, the native musicality of Hungarians, and a pronounced temperamental kinship with southern peoples have ensured that the popularity of Italian opera in Hungary has continued unabated even after its fortunes had ceased being prey to internal—musical and non-musical—dissensions. □

University of Calgary



<sup>15</sup> "Der Bajazzo," *Pester Lloyd* 40, no. 75 (29 March 1893): [2].

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<sup>18</sup> "Manon Lescaut," *Pesti Napló*, 18 March 1894, Morning edition, p. 4.

*Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera as  
seen in the Contemporary Russian Press*

Gerald Seaman  
(Auckland)

During the nineteenth century interest in Italian opera in Russia grew to almost epidemic proportions, as is attested by the countless references to Italian singers and operatic productions in the press of St. Petersburg, Moscow and many other Russian cities. Russia became a veritable Mecca for many Italian opera groups and was visited, sometimes for years at a time, by some of the most famous opera singers. If Italian opera held a persistent appeal for the aristocracy and a large body of the general public, however, its very existence was anathema to Slavophiles such as V.V. Stasov, who saw it as a threat to the development of Russian national opera. Indeed, the objections of the Slavophiles were not unjustified, since Russian composers and performers were legally placed at a severe disadvantage in competition with foreign artists. Whereas no financial restrictions were placed on fees paid to foreign composers and performers, this was not the case with Russian artists, who were limited both financially and with regard to the number of performances their works could receive. While large sums of money were lavished on foreign productions, far less financial support was given to works given by the Russian opera, which suffered frequently from antiquated scenery, shabby costumes and poor vocal and instrumental resources. This rivalry found an echo in the contemporary press, with the music critics themselves falling into various ideological camps.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the history of Italian opera in nineteenth-century Russia is the fact that it is so well documented, for not only is much valuable statistical information about repertoire, artists, fees and performances found in works such as the *Chronical of the Petersburg Theatres* by Vol'f,<sup>1</sup> the *Year-books of the Imperial Theatres*<sup>2</sup> and other volumes, but the whole question of musical life in Russia of the period is currently the centre of a major research project being undertaken by the Soviet musicologist Professor Tamar Livanova and her team of assistants. Their work entitled the *Musical Bibliography of the Russian Periodical Press of the Nineteenth Century*<sup>3</sup> consists of a list

<sup>1</sup> A.I. Vol'f, *Hronika peterburgskih teatrov*, parts 1-3 (St. Petersburg, 1877-84).

<sup>2</sup> *Ezegodniki imperatorskih teatrov* (St. Petersburg, 1892-1915).

<sup>3</sup> T. Livanova, comp., *Muzikal'naja bibliografija ruskoj periodiceskoj pečati XIX veka*, vol. 1: 1801-25 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960); vol. 2: 1826-40 (idem, 1963); vol. 3: 1841-50 (idem, 1966); vol. 4: 1851-60, parts 1-2 (idem, 1967-68); vol. 5: 1861-70, parts 1-2 (idem, 1971-72); vol. 6: 1871-80, parts 1-4, (1974-79).

of references to music occurring in many newspapers and periodicals published in Russia and the provinces of the Russian Empire from 1800-1900, including accounts of concerts, operas and general musical life, as well as reports from abroad. To date some six volumes have been published extending as far as the 1880s, comprising over 57,000 entries, of which a surprisingly large number are devoted to Italian opera as performed both by visiting Italian companies and by Russian companies giving works either in Italian or in Russian translation.

During the first years of the nineteenth century, musical life at the Russian court was dominated by French opera, largely due to the fact that Boieldieu was conductor of the Imperial Opera in St. Petersburg from 1804-14. The one city to pay special attention to Italian opera, however, was the wealthy cosmopolitan seaport of Odessa, which maintained a regular Italian opera company from the early part of the nineteenth century until 1917. The various Odessa journals, such as the *Journal d'Odessa*, provide a rich source of information on matters of repertoire, performers, staging and public taste.<sup>4</sup>

During the first four decades of the nineteenth century, much evidence as to the frequent performances of operas by Paisiello, Salieri, Fioravanti and especially Rossini are to be found in the pages of such publications as the *St. Petersburg Gazette*,<sup>5</sup> the *Russian Invalid*,<sup>6</sup> the *Northern Bee*,<sup>7</sup> the *Son of the Fatherland*,<sup>8</sup> *Fatherland Notes*,<sup>9</sup> the *European Messenger*,<sup>10</sup> as well as in French language journals such as *Le Conservateur impartial*<sup>11</sup> and the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*,<sup>12</sup> all of which appeared in the capital, while mention should also be made of the *Moscow Gazette*<sup>13</sup> and the *Moscow Telegraph*,<sup>14</sup> to cite only a few.

The visit to both cities of a group of distinguished Italian singers in 1802, including the young Angelica Catalani, Maggioletti and Sessi, as well as the German Getrud Elisabeth Mara, excited great attention as did

<sup>4</sup> The *Journal d'Odessa* was published in French from its founding in 1821 up to 1827. From 1827 to 1829 it was published in French and Russian, though the contents were by no means identical.

<sup>5</sup> *Sanktpeterburgskie Vedomosti*, founded 1813; from 1816 daily.

<sup>6</sup> *Russkij Invalid*, founded 1813; from 1816 daily.

<sup>7</sup> *Severnaja Pcela*, founded 1825; thrice weekly till 1831.

<sup>8</sup> *Syn Otecestva*, founded 1812; up to 1835 weekly.

<sup>9</sup> *Otecestvennye Zapiski*, founded 1812; from 1829 monthly.

<sup>10</sup> *Vestnik Evropy*, founded 1802.

<sup>11</sup> Founded 1813; two issues a week.

<sup>12</sup> Founded 1825; two (?) issues a week.

<sup>13</sup> *Moskovskie Vedomosti*, founded 1756; twice weekly.

<sup>14</sup> *Moskovkij Telegraf*, founded 1825.

the visit of a strong Italian company to Moscow in 1821. Catalani's appearances in St. Petersburg in 1823 and Moscow in 1825 were rapturously received, while an important event was the two-year stay of an Italian opera company in the capital from 1829-31, whose repertoire included operas by Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. Of interest at this period is an article by the highly cultivated Russian polymath, Prince Vladimir Odoevskij, entitled "The Italian Theatre. *Don Giovannini* — Opera by Mozart [...]," published in 1825, in which he praises the standard of performances and the roles of Luigia Arti and Luigi Zamboni.<sup>15</sup> Other articles by Odoevskij deal with performances of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and Bellini's *Norma* in 1837.<sup>16</sup> Another important writer is Count Ulybyshev, remembered for his *Nouvelle Biographie de Mozart*. One of his articles, published in the *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, deals with the rivalries between the "Mozartophils" and the "Rossiniphils" in Moscow of the period.<sup>17</sup>

No discussion of the attitude towards Italian opera in the contemporary Russian press, however, would be complete without reference to the voluminous writings of Faddej Bulgarin, who for many years wrote eulogistic articles in the journal the *Northern Bee* on Italian opera both in Russia and abroad. Another article in the same journal in 1837, by N.I. Grec, gives an extensive account of the performances of Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini and Lablache on the London stage, at a time when Russia had still not heard of any of the great singers who were to visit at a later date.<sup>18</sup> Outstanding in the years 1840-41 were the concerts by Giuditta Pasta, whose remarkable voice, though past its prime, was the harbinger of the great vocal period that was to follow. Italian opera thus served not only as an inspiration to Russian composers but also provided material for the ever-increasing growth in the 1830s of Russian musical criticism.

In 1843 Russia was visited by Giovanni Battista Rubini, who arrived in St. Petersburg on a short tour, giving concerts and participating in opera performances, among them *Otello* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. In autumn of the same year he returned to the capital with an opera company which included the prima donna

<sup>15</sup> "Ital'janskij teatr. *Don Zuan* — opera Mocarta, 31 janvarija; benefis g-zi Anti" (The Italian Theatre. *Don Giovanni* — opera by Mozart, 31 January; for the benefit of Mme Anti), first published in *Pribavlenie* (Supplement) to *Moskovskij Telegraf*, no. 4 (February 1825): 62-67, signed "V.V."; reprinted in V.F. Odoevskij, *Muzykal'no-literaturnoe nasledie* (Moscow: Musgiz, 1956), pp. 92-95, 537-39.

<sup>16</sup> "Escö o predstavlenii *Normy*" (More on the staging of *Norma*), *Russkij Invalid*, no. 41 (1837).

<sup>17</sup> "Les Deux Parties en musique," *Journal de Saint-Petersbourg*, no. 25 (26 February/10 March 1825).

<sup>18</sup> N.I. Grec, "Putevye pis'ma. Londonskie teatry" (Travel letters. London theatres), *Severnaja Pcela*, no. 137 (22 June 1837).

Pauline Viardot-Garcia, and the baritone Antonio Tamburini, while the following season (1844-45) he appeared with an even stronger company, including Marietta Alboni, Uranue, Nissen, Rovere, Castellan and others. During the 1843-44 season, as Vol'f informs us, 51 performances of ten operas were given<sup>19</sup> and from that time on, Italian opera was thoroughly established on the Russian stage, notwithstanding periodical fluctuations in popularity. The 1845-46 season saw the Russian première of Verdi's *I lombardi*, among the singers being Salvi; the 1847-48 season saw the appearance of Frezzolini; the 1849-50 season a visit by Giulia Grisi and her husband Mario ("le roi des ténors"), 79 performances of 17 operas being given. The 1851-52 season marked the visit of Enrico Tamberlick, who was to remain in Russia for many years. Two other stars were the baritone Georgio Ronconi and the German bass Carl Formes. By the following year the number of performances had risen to 89, with no less than 19 operas being given by performers such as Lagrange, Calzolari, Ronconi, Lablache, Tagliofico, Tamberlick, Debassini and Didot. Verdi's *Il trovatore* and Meyerbeer's *L'Étoile du Nord* were given in 1855-56, with new singers including Angiolina Bosio, whose untimely death in 1859 was mourned throughout Russia and marked by widespread coverage in the press. The popularity of Italian opera in Russia was so great in fact that in 1846 the Russian opera company was despatched to Moscow, where it remained until autumn 1850.

Needless to say, all these events were highlighted in the periodical literature of the time, the accounts ranging in tone from simple reportage of events to wild enthusiasm or open hostility, depending on the viewpoint of individual writers or editorial policy. Of interest are a number of articles attempting to analyse reasons for the success of the Italian opera,<sup>20</sup> which in turn engendered polemical disputes. On a high critical level are the writings of Serov, whose enthusiastic articles on Italian operas (especially those of Rossini and Verdi) appear in the *Musical and Theatrical Messenger*,<sup>21</sup> *Music and Theatre*,<sup>22</sup> *Panteon*,<sup>23</sup> and others in the 1850s – 1860s,<sup>24</sup> while mention should also be made of the writings of such critics as F.M. Tolstoy ("Rostislav"), who wrote regularly for the *Northern Bee*,

<sup>19</sup> Vol'f, *Hronika*, part 2, pp. 104-05.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Bulgarin's article "Zurnal'naja vsjakaja vsjacina" (Journalistic odds and ends), *Severnaja Pcela*, no. 243 (27 October 1845).

<sup>21</sup> *Muzykal'nyj i Teatral'nyj Vestnik*, St. Petersburg, 1856-57; from 1858-60 *Teatral'nyj i Muzykal'nyj Vestnik*.

<sup>22</sup> *Muzyka i Teatr*, St. Petersburg, 1867-68.

<sup>23</sup> *Panteon*, St. Petersburg, 1852-56.

<sup>24</sup> For reprints of Serov's articles see A.N. Serov, *Sobrannye socinenija* (Collected works), vol. 3 (St. Petersburg, 1895); and idem, *Izbrannye stat'i* (Selected articles), vol. 2 (Moscow, 1957).

M. Rappaport, Jurij Arnol'd and V.V. Stasov. Many of the pages of the *Musical and Theatrical Messenger* contain long articles on the contemporary operatic scene, including musical excerpts,<sup>25</sup> musical numbers also being found in the long-lasting journal *Le Nouvelliste*.<sup>26</sup> By the mid-1850s Italian opera was found not only in St. Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa but, as Tamara Livanova points out, appeared from time to time in Warsaw, Tiflis, Vilnius, Niznij-Novgorod, Voronez, Kazan', Penza, Poltava, Simferopol', Simbirsk, Tambov and Har'kov as well.<sup>27</sup> The visit to Russia of Verdi in 1862 to attend the performance of *La forza del destino*, for which opera he was paid 60,000 gold francs in addition to his travelling expenses, created great excitement, though the work itself was poorly received. Typical of the contrasting attitudes towards Italian opera is Odoevskij's article "Russian or Italian Opera," written in 1867, in which he states:

But tell us, putting your hand on your conscience, what use do we have for Italian opera? Even though our wives and daughters will accept several insignificant roudades, then there is very little use in that, except perhaps woe to our ears and musical sense. *Can Italian opera advance our education even a hair's breadth?* The ignorance of the greater part of Italian singers coming to us exceeds all possibilities; they not only don't understand but don't know anything in the musical world, apart from their so-called music, i.e., music that is too delicate, half ill, constantly false, calculated for acrobatics of the voice [...]<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, Odoevskij's criticisms coincided with a period when Italian opera was undergoing a time of decreasing popularity and diminishing receipts, representing a threat to its very existence. As the result of a special commission to examine its feasibility and the appointment of a new Director, Prince Gedeonov, a new Italian company was formed, which included over the following years not only Pauline Lucca, Mario, Calzolari, but also the brilliant soprano Adelina Patti, whose outstanding performance in roles such as Lucia, Violetta, Rosina, Desdemona, Amina, Elvira, Adina, Maria and many others brought the Russian contemporary musical press to fever pitch.<sup>29</sup> Prices rose to unprecedented heights and still greater demands were

made on Russian orangeries to provide floral bouquets to be hurled at the feet of the Italian nightingale by infatuated admirers. The fame of Italian opera spread ever further and just as the periodical press increased both numerically and geographically, so likewise do references to Italian operas, composers and performers.<sup>30</sup> And while Italian opera went from strength to strength, so likewise Russian opera, with its fundamentally different ideological purposes, passed through one of its lowest ebbs.

The resulting split into factional groups either supporting or attacking Italian opera is, of course, strongly reflected in the contemporary press, the pro-Italian party being represented by critics such as Famin cyn, Serov, Teofil Tolstoy and writers such as Belinskij, Sollogub and Turgenev, with other viewpoints being offered by Arnol'd, Kaškin, Kyui, Cajkovskij, Rappaport, Stasov, and Laroš. Nationalist hostility towards Teofil Tolstoy led to him being satirized by Musorgskij in "The Peepshow,"<sup>31</sup> while Famin cyn took Stasov to court.

If one of the major problems in examining periodical literature on the subject in question is that of availability of materials—for many of the journals containing information on Italian opera are bibliographical rarities, often preserved only in the Soviet Union—materials relating to the last part of the nineteenth century are more readily accessible. A wealth of information is contained in such volumes as the *Yearbooks of the Imperial Theatres*, the journals *The Russian Musical Gazette*,<sup>32</sup> *Artist*,<sup>33</sup> *Russlands Musik-Zeitung*<sup>34</sup> and others. To this last period belong the critical writings of Kyui (from 1877 onwards, a regular correspondent to the *St. Petersburg Gazette* and other journals), Osip Levenson, M.M. Ivanov and many others. The first Russian performance of *Aida* in the 1875-76 season; the seasons of Wagner operas given by Italian companies in 1879-80; new singers (Nilsson and Artôt); biographies of Italian composers and singers: all these are faithfully

(Moscow, 1971), which cites 238 articles devoted to Patti from the period August 1862 to 31 December 1870, as well as over 300 other references.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, T. Livanova, op. cit., vol. 5: 1861-70 (Moscow, 1971), which contains materials drawn from 265 Russian, Estonian, Latvian, German and French periodicals published in 192 towns, from the Islands of Saaremaa to Irkutsk and Cita, and from Arhangel'sk to Tiflis and Vladikavkaz. Of these, 109 journals were published in St. Petersburg, 26 in Moscow; 233 are in Russian, six in Latvian, two in Estonian, 20 in German and four in French (see Introduction, p. 8).

<sup>31</sup> Song composed in 1870, words by Mussorgsky, dedicated to V.V. Stasov.

<sup>32</sup> *Russkaja Muzykal'naja Gazeta*, St. Petersburg, 1894-1918.

<sup>33</sup> *Artist*, Moscow, 1889-95.

<sup>34</sup> *Russlands Musik-Zeitung. Illustrierte Zeitschrift für Musik und Theater*, St. Petersburg, 1894-98.

<sup>25</sup> A "Fantaisie sur des motifs favoris de l'opéra *Simon Boccanegra* de Verdi" par Antoine de Kontski, Op. 276 is found in *Muzykal'nij i Teatral'nij Vestnik* 3 (1858).

<sup>26</sup> *Nuvelist/Le Nouvelliste*, St. Petersburg, 1840-1906. For details, see Gerald Seaman, "Nineteenth-Century Russian Music Periodicals: An Annotated Checklist (Part I)," *Periodica Musica* 2 (Spring 1984): 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> T. Livanova, op. cit., vol. 4: 1851-60 (Moscow, 1967), p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> *Moskva* (Moscow), no. 70 (29 March 1867); reprinted in V.F. Odoevskij, *Muzykal'no-literaturnoe nasledie* (Moscow, 1956), pp. 309-15, 620-22.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, T. Livanova, op. cit., vol. 5: 1861-70

reported in the contemporary press. Of all the Italian operas in the period 1843-85, most popular was Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia*, this being given in the capital 201 times, with Verdi's *Il trovatore* in second place with 119 performances. In the same period, Verdi's operas were the most frequently performed, 627 performances being given, followed by Donizetti (348) and Rossini (345).<sup>35</sup> But by 1880 the golden age of Italian opera had passed. The example of the Italian singers and the founding of the Russian conservatories had produced many gifted Russian singers, who not only performed Russian operas but also sang in Italian as well.

Russian operas, too, became more popular, and, as A.A. Gozenpud observes in one of his studies on the Russian Opera Theatre, the repertoire of the Imperial Mariinskij Theatre in the period 1881-89 included not only Russian operas such as *A Life for the Tsar*, *Ruslan and Ljudmila*, *Rusalka*, *Rogneda*, *The Snow-Maiden*, *Eugenij Onegin* and *Boris Godunov* but *Rigoletto*, *Aida*, *Otello* and *Il trovatore* as well.<sup>36</sup> To the ordinary citizen, however, Italian opera never lost its appeal. The lure of the virtuoso singer overrode all other considerations and one cannot help wondering if an account of performances by a touring company published in the *Russian Musical Gazette* in 1895 might not epitomize the general public attitude:

In both theatres there were excellent first soloists and a completely average, if not completely bad, second-grade personnel, a thin, hopelessly out-of-tune chorus, a crude orchestra [...] The public was large. Exclamations of delight, frenetic applause, rolling eyes, raptures [...] Wild unrestrained hurricanes of "bravo" during the *solo* of one celebrity or another, unceremonious laughter and conversations during the singing of the non-celebrities and [...] flowers, flowers, flowers [...]<sup>37</sup>

From the foregoing, therefore, it will be seen that a most considerable body of material on Italian opera exists in the nineteenth-century Russian periodical press. Though valuable introductory work in assembling factual detail has already been accomplished, this is nevertheless only a beginning, and clearly much remains to be done!

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<sup>35</sup> Vol'f, op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 146-47.

<sup>36</sup> A.A. Gozenpud, "Muzyka" in *Russkij opernij teatr XIX veka. 1873-1889* (Russian operatic theatre of the nineteenth century: 1873-1889) (Leningrad, 1973), p. 224.

<sup>37</sup> *Russkaja Muzykal'naja Gazeta*, nos. 5/6 (1895), cols. 368-73.

### A Note from the Editors

*Periodica Musica* — the annual publication of the Répertoire international de la presse musicale (RIPM) — offers an opportunity for scholars, archivists and librarians to disseminate information concerning nineteenth-century periodical literature dealing with music and musical life. It offers a forum for dialogue and a publication through which those working in the field can communicate. It is our hope that *Periodica Musica* will serve as a means for stimulating interest in an area that is of fundamental importance to the development of nineteenth-century studies in musicology.

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