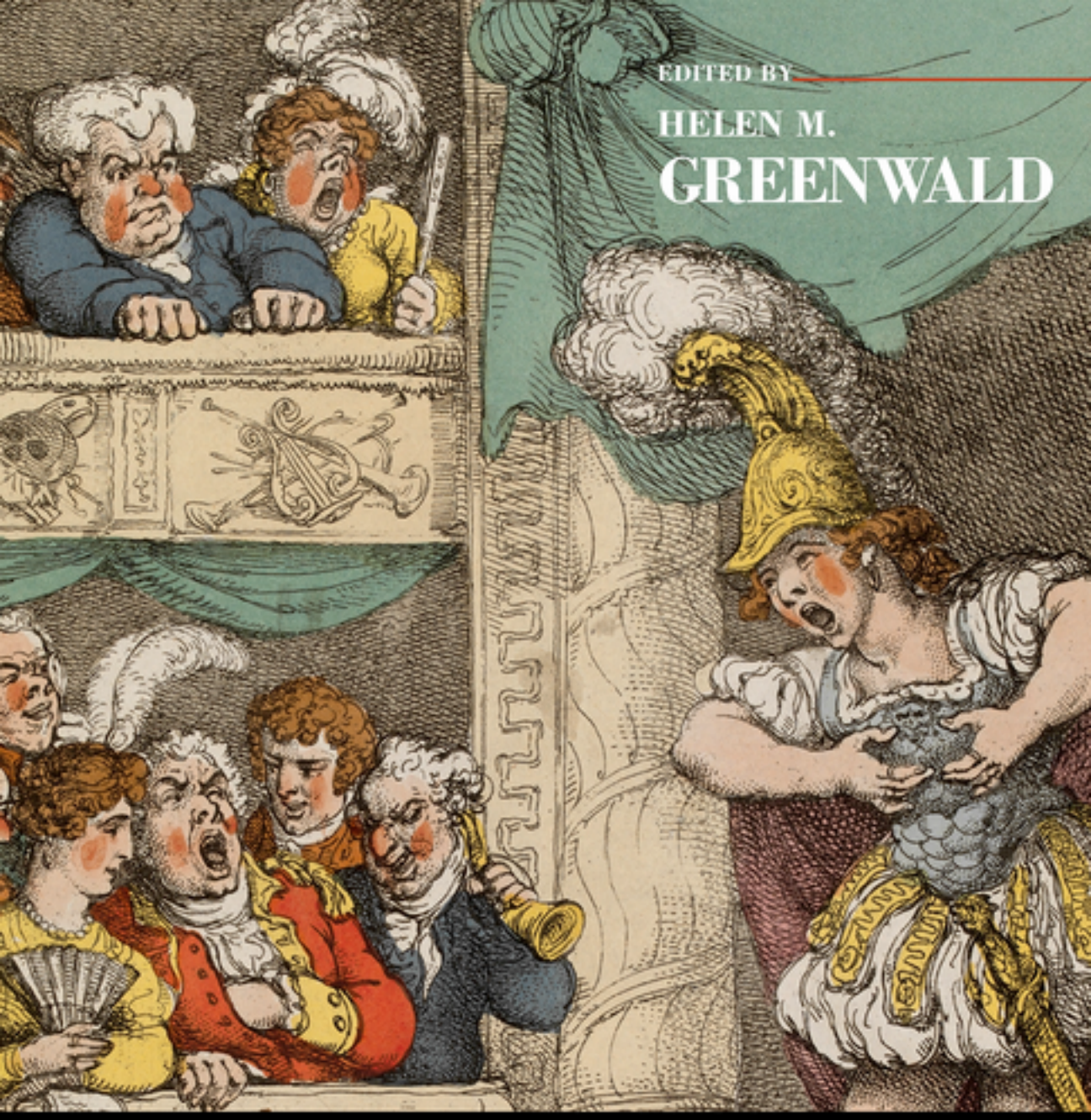

EDITED BY

HELEN M.

GREENWALD

The Oxford Handbook *of*

OPERA

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Contents

Humanism, Verisimilitude, and Voice

PART III PERFORMANCE AND PRODUCTION

PART IV OPERA AND SOCIETY

PART V TRANSMISSION AND RECEPTION

PART VI OPERA ON THE EDGE

EPILOGUE

List of Figures

List of Music Examples

List of Tables

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A Note about Translations and Music Examples

Unless otherwise indicated, authors have made their own translations. In such cases, the original texts are included in footnotes or in the main text. Where contributors quote published translations by others, the translator is credited and the original text provided only when context requires it or when the text may not be easily accessed through print and electronic sources.

Albert Oppenheimer prepared the music examples for Chapters 10, 32, and 50. All other music examples were prepared by individual contributors.

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF

OPERA

INTRODUCTION

HELEN M. GREENWALD

Arguing about Opera

Opera was born into the aristocratic courts, but that didn't prevent it from becoming one of the first of the performing arts to cultivate and maintain a devoted audience among the public at large. With the opening of the first opera house to a paying audience in Venice (1637), opera soon acquired some of the characteristics of such modern sporting entertainments as baseball and soccer: star players, home runs, errors, and, throughout its history, additional innings and penalty kicks. And here is where the viscera come in: as opera lovers of all stripes know well, it doesn't take a college degree to experience the sheer thrill of the singing voice. It is precisely this "spectator sport" aspect of opera, its penchant for dramatic extremes—in essence, what we love most about it—that contributed to the rather late acceptance of opera as a legitimate topic of discourse in the scholarly arena. That is not to say that there were no opera critics until modern times—hardly the case. Opera became a topic for debate even as it was being "invented" by a late-sixteenth-century "think tank" looking to promote an agenda about words and music. But the issues that vexed the Florentine *Camerata* only set the fuse on an argument that continued for centuries as opera lovers and opera loathers found more things to argue about. Early theorists, composers, and librettists thought deeply about the relationship between words and music, how text should be set, whether their ideas conformed to classical ideals (see Chapter 12, "Opera between the Ancients and the Moderns," by Wendy Heller), and still more important, whether or not a story that was sung could be accepted as at all plausible. Opera *had* to contain some aspect of truth (Chapter 13 by Thomas Betzwieser, "Verisimilitude," and Chapter 1 by Tim Carter, "What Is Opera?"): What kinds of characters could or would sing such truths and in what manner (Chapter 15, "Characterization," by Julian Rushton)? For the contemporary scholar, the problem of words and music is equally challenging. A central issue, debated at length in the second half of Part II of the *Oxford Handbook of*

Opera, is the concept of "voice" (see Chapters 13, 14, 15, and 16 by Thomas Betzwieser, Michal Grover-Friedlander, Julian Rushton, and Lawrence Kramer, respectively). What do we mean by "voice"? The obvious response is: the sound that comes out of singers' mouths. But opera contains other "voices"—the composer's voice, heavenly voices, voices living and dead, multiple levels of vocal discourse—the voice that sings arias, but also that "other" voice that sings dialogue. There is also the choral voice (Chapter 21, by Ryan Minor, "The Chorus"), reflecting group sentiments as well as political and national ones, while raising questions about the verisimilitude of crowd-speak. And there is the orchestral voice, which, as Alessandro Di Profio observes in Chapter 22 ("The Orchestra"), evolved over time from a local phenomenon to an international body that could accommodate continuously expanding repertoires, adapt to new instrumentation, and thereby enhance its role in governing movement on stage, from acting (Chapter 20 by Simon Williams) to both the decorative and dramatic roles of dance (Chapter 23 by Linda Tomko). Documents have a voice as well. Katherine Syer, in Chapter 24 ("Production Aesthetics and Materials"), demonstrates that surviving records not only reveal how an opera was mounted, but also mirror the artistic and cultural context of a work. Mark Everist, in Chapter 19 ("Rehearsal Practices"), uncovers a whole world of documents that reveal some of the ways that singers in nineteenth-century Paris prepared for and were coached in their roles. And what of the musical score? William Drabkin (Chapter 11, "Analysis") and the many other scholars in this volume who refer generously to opera scores offer multifaceted views of these primary documents, concluding that beyond their function as a set of instructions *for* performance and a record *of* rehearsal and performance, scores also transmit a type of social history-in-code that reveals much about taste, composers, singers, conductors, commerce, and even politics (see, for example, Chapter 32, "Politics," by Marc A. Weiner).

If we speak of operatic strategies, that is, how composers and librettists fit words to music (or the other way around) in order to tell a story, must we always presume that the words have the last word, or does the music have an equally forceful and independent life (see Chapter 8, "Musical Dramaturgy," by Damien Colas)? Moreover, as Marina Frolova-Walker shows in Chapter 7 ("The Language of National Style"), language is at the very core of collective expression on the opera stage. The idea of a correct and essential mode of verbal communication raises other questions about language, not least: Does opera in translation really work, or is the relationship between verbal and musical cadence and message so closely knit as to be disrupted in a text other than the original one (see Chapter 9, "Versification," by Andreas Giger)? But what constitutes a good text for opera? Traditionally, that would be a story unfolded in verses intended to be sung. Those verses could support conventional musical forms, as was the practice of the Italian *primo ottocento*, or imply new, more open structures, as was Wagner's intention. Opera's near past finds composers and librettists experimenting with all kinds of texts, setting to music, for example, original (and hence, "un-libretticized") versions of spoken drama. These so-called *Literaturopern* include Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (after Maurice Maeterlinck), Strauss's *Salome* (after Oscar Wilde), and Berg's *Wozzeck*

(after Georg Büchner). In Chapter 49 ("After the Canon"), Robert Fink takes the issue of composers' and librettists' textual choices into the present day with a close look at John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*.

All of these topics have remained on the table in a continuous cycle of reforms that have frequently addressed and continue to address many of the same problems that chafed at opera's originators (see Chapter 1, "What Is Opera?" by Tim Carter), including the relationship between words and music: Are there too many syllables, not enough notes? Too many notes, not enough syllables? *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (as Antonio Salieri put it in the title of his 1786 opera and which Richard Strauss later debated in his 1942 *Capriccio*)? What are the consequences of one way or the other? If there are too many notes and not enough syllables, then words are obscured, and emphasis is redirected to the singing voice and ultimately to the singer. A new can of worms is opened: the cult of celebrity. Singers inspire composers and audiences, but they also enrage, well, composers and audiences, elevating or cheapening the art form, as critics complain about it or praise it. Growing technologies of stagecraft also intruded on the high-minded ideals that drove opera in its first decades (and forever after, it would seem), inviting negative critical commentary on the ways that sheer spectacle overwhelmed performance. Outstanding in the pantheon of polemicists is eighteenth-century critic Benedetto Marcello (1686–1739), whose often hilarious *Il teatro alla moda* (1720) offers a litany of sarcastic "dos" (most of which mock artistic priorities) to composers, librettists, impresarios, and just about every individual associated with opera production. Here's one telling example: "The librettist should not worry about the ability of the performers, but so much more about whether the impresario has at his disposal a good bear or lion, an able nightingale, genuine-looking bolts of lightning, earthquakes, storms, etc." (Marcello [1720] 1948/1949: 373, trans. Pauly).

Most influential among so-called reformers were composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787) and critic Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764), who argued for a return to the simplicity of earlier opera, which, viewed from the eighteenth-century perspective, was the guardian of an ideal form in which words, music, and all aspects of production would serve the drama. Remarkably, from that very ideal arose the "Beast in the Room," who has loomed large from the middle of the nineteenth century until the present day: Wagner. No composer before or after Wagner wrote as much or more *about* opera, and whether or not he actually practiced what he preached fades into the background, as his music exerted game-changing influence on the very sonority of opera. Wagner altered poetic forms, large-scale musical structures, relationships between singers, singers and orchestra, and production elements from lighting to the buildings that house performance. Joy H. Calico, in Chapter 48 ("1900–1945"), shows that Wagner's continued influence has shaped scholarly discourse on opera well into the twentieth century.

But we shouldn't give Wagner too much credit. He was not solely responsible for the major changes that overtook opera in the nineteenth century and spilled into the next. Rather, Wagner entered a musical game-in-progress that was kneading such global

issues as genre classification, emotional expression, realism (a relative term), and the possibilities for staging that technical advances in lighting and machines had to offer. The consequences were profound, leading to new narrative modes that eschewed arias and ensembles for continuity, closed musical forms for open ones. Open forms, moreover, required that dissonance, the fundamental tool that governs musical motion, also had a new role to play that would ultimately impinge on the most essential ingredients of opera, melody and "vocality," or *vocalità,* the bedrock of *bel canto*.

Despite the seriousness of reform, however, the one thing that opera has always done is laugh at itself, as evidenced by works that feature mute actors, cross-dressing singers, gender-bending vocal casting, and plots that heap scorn on egotistical performers and impresarios, and even opera's own performance practices. Comedy, more than other genres, relies on context, recognition of the target and all of its absurdities, and, hence, resisted for much longer the musical changes that affected more serious works (see Hunter 1999). In some ways it is this very conservativeness that precipitated the decline of comic opera, as it became increasingly associated with more popular forms that retained the older styles, and in particular the closed musical numbers that continued to flourish in Italian strongholds such as Naples (see Izzo 2013). The few major works that did enter the canon, say, post–*Don Pasquale* (1843)—*Die Meistersinger, Falstaff, Ariadne auf Naxos*—consider as plot and/or musical points the dilemmas of operatic composition and, again, performance practice.

Performance Practice, *Werk-Treue*, or: What Is an Opera, Anyway?

Performance practice, meaning everything that affects the execution and presentation of a work—voices, instruments, pitch, venue, acting, and even *what* is being performed—is an issue deeply connected to the definition of the work itself (see Gossett 2006, especially chapters 7 and 8). If modern productions don't follow the practices of the era in which an opera was composed (at least insofar as they are known), does that make a performance something less than authentic (see Chapter 27, "Historically Informed Performance," by Mary Hunter)?

The *Oxford Handbook of Opera* begins with what would seem to be an easy question: What is opera? *Everyone* knows what opera is, right? The five scholars who address this apparently simple matter make clear enough that definitions can't be so readily offered up or left un-parsed, especially since that very question was at the heart of opera's "planning" stage. In short, the issues are nomenclature (Chapter 1, "What Is Opera?" by Tim Carter), the apparent disjuncture between the idea of invention and the prescription for convention (Chapter 2, "Genre," by Emanuele Senici), the slippery distinction(s) between the traditions of popular musical theater and opera (Chapter 3, "Musical Theater[s]," by Derek B. Scott), the question of whether performance

practice can obscure the lines between received definitions, say, of opera versus oratorio (Chapter 4, "Operatorio?" by Monika Hennemann), and finally opera as a *contested* art form that actually arose from acts of argument or competition (Chapter 5, "The Concept of Opera," by Lydia Goehr).

As many of the chapters of this handbook reiterate, opera remains, as it was for much of its history, a fluid entity. Philosophically, that much could be said about many different kinds of musical works whose composers tinkered endlessly with them (Liszt comes to mind here). But opera is a special case where changes can be more extreme, major revisions notwithstanding (consider, for example, three Verdian operatic complexes: *I Lombardi alla prima crociata/Jérusalem* and *Stiffelio/Aroldo*, much less the fraught journey of *Un ballo in maschera* [see Gossett 2006]). Particular to opera is that its "fluidity" is played out in public, as singers substituted arias (see Poriss 2009), music was and still is transposed (Greenwald 1998), pieces cut and added (Gossett 2006, chapter 8), and even endings changed (as in the case of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; see Parakilas 1990). Are all revisions of equal weight (Lawton and Rosen 1974), and is there a "final" version of an opera, not subject to constant adaptation to its environment (see Chapter 38, "How Opera Traveled," by Louise K. Stein; von Dadelsen 1961; and Greenwald 1998)? How much gets lost in transmission, is just "lost," or is never completed (Chapter 45, "Reconstructions," by Charles S. Brauner), requiring an editor's intervention (Chapter 46, "Editing Opera," by Patricia B. Brauner)? What kinds of sources remain to testify to opera's past (Chapter 44, "Sources," by Linda B. Fairtile)? Operatic "environments" are by definition chameleon-like, subject to singers' availability and ability, audience demand, composers' revisions, concert practice, and above all, taste (see Chapter 30, "Audiences," by Georgia Cowart; Poriss 2009). Moreover, as Philip Gossett (Chapter 47, "Writing the History of Opera"), Charles S. Brauner, Patricia B. Brauner, and Linda B. Fairtile collectively make clear in Part V of this handbook, the reality of the operatic work, at least insofar as scholars can ascertain it, lies buried somewhere in the vast amount of material that composers leave behind: sketches, revisions, new pieces, discarded pieces, the collective detritus of a life (the work's, that is) lived long and hard.

As any editor of an operatic critical edition knows, autograph scores, perhaps more than any other kind of musical document, travel great distances, pass through many hands, suffer cuts, pin-prickings, invasions by foreign inks, and multilingual additions. These personal "touches" constitute the inherent humanity of the scientific and intellectual processes of editorial work of this kind. Handlers—meaning conductors, copyists, singers, orchestra musicians—sometimes imprint their personalities on composers' autographs with a doodle or a ditty as they study or rehearse from a score or a part. Here are some amusing examples: one previous owner of Verdi's *Attila* autograph added cardboard covers to bind each act, decorating the Act I cover with an amateurish sketch of what might be an opera character, while users of one of the many copyists' manuscripts for the same work added all kinds of marginalia, including cartoons (New York Public Libraries, the Research Libraries JOF 80-41; see Greenwald 2012b). But even composers often see fit to comment on their own work through non-musical additions to their scores: consider Puccini, who drew a skull and crossbones next to the point in

his *La bohème* autograph where Mimì dies (Greenwald 2012a), or Rossini, who scribbled a somewhat cryptic remark at the end of his *Zelmira* manuscript: "Scusate se vi sbruffo." The essence of it is: "pardon me if I give you the raspberries" (Greenwald 2005a; Reto Müller believes the meaning is a bit more akin to an expression in Wienerisch: "Tuat ma läid, i schäiss ouf aich" [2006: 31]). Whether Rossini intended raspberries or worse is beside the point: it's not an entirely farfetched exit line for the work that marked the end of Rossini's career in Naples. He packed up, left for Vienna, got married to soprano Isabella Colbran along the way, and didn't look back (see Greenwald 2005b: xxi–xxvii). Rossini's second wife and widow Olympe Péllisier eventually passed along the *Zelmira* autograph to her personal physician—Dr. Frémy—in exchange for medical services, and that doctor ceded it to a Mr. Donmartin, who then sold it to the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire de Musique (the holdings of which are now part of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France; see Greenwald 2005a: 15).

Rarely, however, do we know exactly how many hands a composer's autograph may have passed through, as is the case with Verdi's *Attila*; it's impossible to pinpoint exactly when or to whom Verdi ceded his manuscript for this work. Somewhere along the way it became the property of "F. Goring," who lived in Florence and might have been the exuberant artist who added the cardboard covers to the autograph. Later on, the elusive Josef Coen acquired it and then sold it to the British Library (Museum). The British Library, near the end of its fiscal cycle in January 1898, had a few pounds left in its budget, and possibly invoking the principle of "use it or lose it," spent £50 to have in its collection the only Verdi opera manuscript ever to leave the Continent (Greenwald 2012). Such dealings are common practice in the antiquarian marketplace, as Daniela Macchione explains in Chapter 31 ("Autographs, Memorabilia, and the Aesthetics of Collecting"). While the second Madame Rossini might not have placed such a high price on her late husband's material legacy, the vast number of collectors and traders of opera relics who operate beneath the radar attests to both the human and commercial value of such objects.

A work's ownership and performance history can reveal the most human side of the operatic cosmos. As Louise K. Stein shows in Chapter 38 ("How Opera Traveled"), early operatic travels were often politically motivated; a work would adapt and re-adapt to each new environment, and not least if its patron imagined the work of art to be a personal legacy (see Chapter 29, "Patronage," by Valeria De Lucca). It is thus possible to justify the interventions of modern performance as an extension of a historically legitimate process. But audiences of the past did not have as much information or the same kind of information about works that modern record keeping of every variety has offered to fans and scholars. A well-transmitted version of an opera thus stands as a challenge to the idea of "adaptation" and can become obscured in modern performance, as Ulrich Müller discusses in Chapter 26 ("*Regietheater*/Director's Theater"). Are all the components of an opera legitimately "subject to change," or are they as inviolable as the notes in a Beethoven symphony? (See Latham and Parker 2001.) How and when did the producers of opera gain such power—or did they always have it? Is it all right if Tosca doesn't put the candelabra beside Scarpia's corpse (as in the current Metropolitan Opera

production)? Can we "read" Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in a way in which it makes any sense at all if Don Giovanni sings Leporello's opening lines and Leporello does not (as in the 2006 Salzburg production)? Perhaps no other issue has raised as much spleen in the discussion of contemporary opera production as *Werktreue*.

Recurring Motives and a Few Statistics

As the *Oxford Handbook of Opera* reveals, contemporary opera scholars relish the sociological and popular aspects of opera: the topics of finance and reception resonate throughout the volume alongside such classically important areas for study as genre (Chapter 2 by Emanuele Senici), source studies (Chapter 44 by Linda B. Fairtile), editions (Chapter 46 by Patricia B. Brauner), and music analysis (Chapter 11 by William Drabkin). Recurring themes include identity and money, and connected to both of these, power: who sings, who composes and in what style, how opera has addressed ethnicity (Chapter 7 by Marina Frolova-Walker), politics (Chapter 32 by Marc A. Weiner), religion (Chapter 33 by Jesse Rosenberg), race and racism (Chapter 34 by John Graziano), gender (Chapter 35 by Alexandra Wilson), and anybody who might be "different" from "us," and hence "exotic" (Chapter 36 by W. Anthony Sheppard) or, perhaps even "irrational," as Tim Carter puts it (Chapter 1, "What Is Opera?"). Even the visual aspects of opera—staging manuals (Chapter 24 by Katherine Syer), costumes (Chapter 25 by Veronica Isaac), staging (Chapter 26 by Ulrich Müller), and public image (Chapter 43 by Helen M. Greenwald)—are shown to be extensions of the human condition. What does opera cost, who pays for it, how much, and does financial backing extend rights over content to the backer (Chapters 1, 29, and 50 by Tim Carter, Valeria De Lucca, and Jake Heggie)? How is opera advertised and marketed (Chapter 43 by Helen M. Greenwald)? What role does government play (Chapter 37 by Francesco Izzo)? Does opera take a political stance, teach a lesson, preach ideology, conform to rules, make moral and ethical judgments, speak for a nation? Essays about visual media (Chapter 42 by Marcia J. Citron), commerce and patronage (Chapter 29 by Valeria De Lucca), singers (Chapter 17 by Hilary Poriss and Chapter 18 by Martha Feldman), criticism (Chapter 40 by Paul Watt), and the many transcriptions and arrangements that inundate the marketplace (Chapter 41, "Soundings Offstage," by Thomas Christensen), moreover, bring the subject of opera into the mainstream conversation about the performing arts and claim a rare opportunity to make an accessible and intelligent link between the ivory tower and the opera house. Contemporary opera weaves in and out of the volume, as authors reconfirm the continued relevance of opera's own history.

Contributors to *The Oxford Handbook of Opera* were given a keyword and instructed, more or less, to build their own sandboxes and have some fun. They were asked to define issues, discuss important research, and then focus on a problem in some detail. The yield from this mandate includes many surprises, not least the vast range of composers and works that have been indexed at the back of this volume. Here are some observations:

with twenty-eight works cited (about 50 percent of his output), Handel is the statistical winner by sheer numbers, while Wagner, with all of his operatic works (fourteen) referenced, wins by percentage. Numbers become fuzzy when the question of genre is argued, but here are the runners-up: Verdi—twenty-seven (practically all), Mozart—fourteen (about three-quarters), Strauss—ten (two-thirds), Puccini—nine (two-thirds), Lully—nine (more than half), Rossini—twenty (about half), Cavalli—seventeen (less than half), Donizetti—seventeen (a little less than 25 percent). The least familiar works in the list? For me, any number of the numerous "Ariadne" operas (Chapter 6, "Oft-Told Tales," by Vincent Giroud), all of the works of Poissl (now much less foreign, thanks to John Warrack's discussion in Chapter 10 of the German libretto), and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's cantata trilogy *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* (see Chapter 4, "Operatorio?" and Chapter 34, "Race and Racism"). These numbers don't mean much on their own—they are raw data. But they do reveal that Italian opera is still foremost in the minds of a slice of the scholarly community, and not just those scholars whose specialty is Italian opera. Efforts to hold the number of Italianists in this volume in check did not prevent (nor should they) scholars of every aspect of opera from turning to Italian opera and its conventions over and again. Italian opera has infiltrated every corner of the world, and repertoire in all the major opera houses today reveals a distinct resistance to unseat that domination. Italy produced more operas than any other country, and that has to do with a number of factors, not least a constant demand for the new—first at court and later in the theater—and an operatic industry that dominated all of Europe. The system of transmission in Italy in the nineteenth century, wherein copyists would work furiously to produce scores that could be used elsewhere, insured timely dissemination of new operas, while piano-vocal scores reached the market soon after the last echo died out in the opera house. No surprise, as James Parakilas points out in Chapter 39, "The Operatic Canon," that the audience, in its desire for repetition—of something pleasurable—will keep works alive and profitable.

What's missing from the index of works at the end of this volume? Every reader will have a different response to this question. Still, it was a bit surprising not to see any mention of Samuel Barber (now added because of this discussion), especially since his *Antony and Cleopatra* opened the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center on September 16, 1966, and we observed his centenary in 2010. But *Antony and Cleopatra* was not well received at its premiere, and, according to Barber biographer Barbara Heyman, "The commission that was one of the greatest tributes to Barber's whole career turned out, ironically, to be his nemesis" (Heyman 1992: 428). The opera was, apparently, a victim of disagreement between composer and librettist/production designer/director Franco Zeffirelli, and, despite a revision with the help of Gian Carlo Menotti and re-launch in 1975 at the Juilliard Opera Theater, it never entered "the repertory." Heyman suggests that *Antony and Cleopatra* became lost in emerging interest in music that explored more diverse compositional techniques, against which Barber's music must have seemed "ultraconservative" (1992: 455). Barber, who had enjoyed moderate success with *Vanessa* (1956–1957), became with *Antony and Cleopatra* a member of a different kind of club—successful composers who tried and failed at opera, Schumann

and Liszt, for example—or managed a single success, as did Otto Nicolai, who never caught the brass ring on the operatic carousel (despite much effort), and died soon after his single "hit," *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (see Greenwald 2005c). As Marianne Betz observes in Chapter 28 ("Opera Composition and Cultural Environment"), outside factors have exerted tremendous influence on composers, and some social domains are not culturally attuned to opera, including Boston, the "Athens of America," which has to date been unable to sustain a major opera company.

The idea of recurring motives leads us to yet another distinctly human phenomenon, which is that people like to hear, read, and see the same stories told over and again. Repetition is comforting, as is experiencing the satisfaction of justice served, or perhaps even the hope that somehow—"this time"—tragedy will be averted. John Russell (1993: 445–491) reports over two hundred performances of numerous operatic versions of the Don Juan story between 1669 and 1800. But Mozart didn't enter the Don Juan opera sweepstakes until 1787, and the record of performances from that year to 1800 reveals that his take on this overwhelmingly popular story was actually not repeated very often in that time period. The composer whose name appears most frequently in Russell's post-1787 list is someone credited with around fifty operas, Giuseppe Gazzaniga (1743–1818), who, with prolific librettist Giovanni Bertati (1735–1815; best known for the libretto of Cimarosa's 1792 *Il matrimonio segreto*), composed *Don Giovanni Tenorio, o sia il convitato di pietra*, which premiered at the Teatro San Moisè in Venice on February 5, 1787, just months before Mozart and Da Ponte's version appeared on October 29 in Prague. Given the number of performances that Gazzaniga and Bertati's *Don Giovanni* enjoyed, its makers undoubtedly went to their just rewards believing they had finally landed a place in posterity. Gazzaniga's opera, however tuneful and often adroit, is studied more often today for its libretto, which Lorenzo Da Ponte surely followed (perhaps too closely), most conspicuously in the opening scene. We wouldn't have to look very hard to find numerous renderings of the story of Orfeo either, and it is not difficult to see why a tale of tragic love featuring the character of a musician would attract so many opera composers. Moreover, as Vincent Giroud shows in Chapter 6 ("Oft-Told Tales"), one of the most revisited stories on the opera stage has been that of Ariadne, surely for her most human plight. But *Artaserse*? Metastasio's (b. Pietro Antonio Domenico Trapassi, 1698–1782) libretto for *Artaserse* inspired at least eighty different versions, solid testimony to the popularity of violent subjects on the premodern stage.

The Opera of the Future (Meaning Now, after the So-Called Golden Age, and Beyond)

Most music history texts report a catastrophe that took place around 1900: the tonal system "dissolved," the dissonance "emancipated"—old news, but news, nonetheless, and

very important for opera. With compositional experimentation that encroached upon the most basic components of opera—melody and voice—where was opera to turn? In the middle of this crisis, Richard Strauss composed *Salome* (1905) and *Elektra* (1909), both of which captured the modern essentials of continuous drama, large orchestra, and vocal writing that extended the Wagnerian idea and successfully challenged the notion of vocal melody. But even Strauss was not able to maintain his modernistic flush, and the stubborn question, "What is opera?" began to reassert itself.

Only two chapters in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera* address opera in a chronological framework: Chapter 48, "1900–1945," by Joy H. Calico, and Chapter 49, "After the Canon," by Robert Fink. The reason for this exception in a volume that generally avoids "period" essays is that the extreme diversity of post-tonal operatic production cannot be assessed through "schools" of composition, national style, or the work of a single trend-setting composer. Together, Calico's and Fink's chapters constitute Part VI, "Opera on the Edge." The meaning of the word "edge" in the section title is deliberately ambiguous: Does it refer to the edge of a precipice and hence a catastrophe (see the final chapter of Abbate and Parker 2012)? Or could "edge" be, to borrow a familiar phrase, "the start of something new"? The turn of the twentieth century and the end of World War II have served too long and too well as historical signposts to be overlooked; it's useful to get a global view of that half century and how scholars have thought about it. Calico identifies three interrelated themes for this era that engage Wagner, Hitler, and the ongoing question of genre. In Chapter 49 ("After the Canon"), Robert Fink revives and explores an old question—*prima la musica e poi le parole?*—on new terms. Through a detailed case study of John Adams's *Doctor Atomic*, Fink shows that while historical texts and important *documents* may record a real dramatic event and provide vivid source material for operatic storytelling (consider *Boris Godunov, Don Carlos*, and a host of other historically based operas), their actual words are not only by definition un-dramatic, but also unsuitable "poetry" for a libretto. Composer Jake Heggie has the final word in Chapter 50, providing us with the opportunity to be a fly on the wall in his studio as he offers a candid view of his work process in lively response to the question that opens this collection, revised here for contemporary users: "Now, what is opera?"

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PART I

WHAT IS OPERA?

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS OPERA?

TIM CARTER

It was a sad day for opera aficionados when the great Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti died (on September 6, 2007). It was also headline news. In scenes reminiscent of another great singer's funeral—Nelly Melba's in Melbourne, Australia, on February 26, 1931—the cameras showed the crowds outside Modena cathedral applauding Pavarotti's coffin as it was carried into the nave: thousands then passed through the church to pay their respects. The eulogies on US and UK television covered his career: an Italian baker's son who found a voice at the age of four, sang in a church choir, starred at a Welsh Eisteddfod, then hit the operatic stage for an illustrious career that spanned several decades and included most of the great tenor roles of Italian opera (but never Wagner) with all the eminent divas. These eulogies each reached their climax at precisely the same point: that breathtaking moment when Pavarotti sang "Nessun dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot* as part of the "Three Tenors" concert (with José Carreras and Plácido Domingo), first on the eve of the final soccer match of the 1990 World Cup in Rome, then for the finals in Los Angeles (1994), Paris (1998), and Yokohama (2002). His audiences went wild. What is opera?—one might ask. Surely not this; but then again . . .

Great singers have always been celebrated as larger-than-life individuals (often quite literally) with seemingly superhuman powers, doing gladiatorial battle with themselves, and with each other, on the stage. *Vincerò—Vin-CE . . . -rò* ("I will be victorious"): Puccini's music sets the personal challenges that singers must overcome if they are not to be booed off the stage in ignominy. Operatic characters and the performers who bring them to life become conflated in complex metonymies: we set a premium on, and have paid through the nose for, Plácido Domingo's Rodolfo, Renée Fleming's Lucia, or Jon Vickers's Peter Grimes, although we then argue his pros and cons versus the singer for whom Benjamin Britten originally wrote that last role: Peter Pears. For many, these warbling throats are indeed what opera is all about.

Composers and librettists might not agree: after all, without their music and words, singers would have no stage to display their vocal prowess. Of course, many composers have had close connections with singers for whom they have wisely crafted their

music: there is scant point in writing something that a singer cannot, or will not, sing. Mozart was by no means alone in being very reluctant to write an aria until he knew the voice that would perform it—he temporized by writing recitatives and ensembles—and in exploiting the best characteristics of that voice when doing so: just trace the path of the young Anna Gottlieb from Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786; Gottlieb was twelve) to Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte* (1791). Likewise, there is some merit in recognizing the voice of baritone Felice Varesi in Donizetti's music for Antonio in *Linda di Chamounix* (1842) and in Verdi's for the title roles in *Macbeth* (1847) and *Rigoletto* (1851), and for Giorgio Germont in *La traviata* (1853). The corollary—that singers taking on a role not written for them can plausibly expect some accommodation within it either by the original composer, by some other composer, or just by importing their favorite arias—had significant force through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries; it also leads to some curious quandaries (should we prefer Mozart's 1786 *Le nozze di Figaro* or his 1789 one?). The counterargument is the well-known story of Handel threatening to throw a recalcitrant soprano, Francesca Cuzzoni, out of a window for refusing to sing her first aria as Teofane in his *Ottone* (1723)—though Handel learned his lesson and went on to write a series of major roles for her.

Many scholars also have problems with singers. At least until recently, we have preferred to study works, not their performances, and works are fixed in texts both verbal (librettos) and musical (scores). For example, analyzing the treatment of leitmotifs in Wagner's *Ring*, or the handling of serial techniques in Berg's *Lulu*, focuses the attention on the printed page, and on compositional process, which therefore forces a consequent downplaying of performative contingencies. Thus we have tended to worry more about, say, Monteverdi's musical symbolism in *Orfeo* than what it took to get that work on the stage. This has the advantage of being straightforward and even comfortable; it also runs the risk of perceived irrelevance to the operatic enterprise, and also to its experience. Even here, however, we cannot always decide where to start: should it be from the libretto (where most composers began) or from the music (where they ended up)? Treating an opera as, in effect, a symphony with words may seem to have impeccable Wagnerian credentials, but it forces a formalist approach that ignores, or conflicts with, the theatrical world (Abbate and Parker 1989); it also marginalizes the much larger number of works that seemingly fail to meet the high standards of formalism by being either too conventional, and therefore uninteresting, or too wayward, and therefore unmanageable.

Opera is by definition messy, both for those producing and experiencing it, and for the critic observing it from a scholarly distance: not for nothing did musicology once privilege other, more "abstract" genres. But the discipline has shifted in the past decades as canonic operas have found their place in the scholarly canon, embracing the gamut from much-needed critical editions (Gossett 2006) to no-less-needed critical theory (Koestenbaum 1993). Messiness—or if you prefer, plural multiplicities—has become the liberating norm in this postmodern age, and as has always been the case with opera, it might even be viewed as cause for celebration.

What's in a Word?

The entry "Opera" in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* also directs the reader to a bewilderingly large number of other subject entries by genre: *azione teatrale*, ballad opera, *ballet de cour*, *ballet-héroïque*, burlesque, *burletta*, chamber opera, *comédie-ballet*, *divertissement*, *drame lyrique*, *dramma giocoso*, *dramma per musica*, *entrée*, *extravaganza*, *farsa*, *favola in musica*, *festa teatrale*, film musical, *grand opéra*, *intermède*, *intermedio*, *intermezzo*, *Lehrstück*, libretto, *Liederspiel*, madrigal comedy, *Märchenoper*, masque, medieval drama, melodrama, *melodramma*, monodrama, musical, music drama, music theatre, number opera, *opéra-ballet*, *opéra bouffon*, *opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *opéra-féerie*, *opera semiseria*, *opera seria*, operetta, pantomime, *pasticcio*, pastoral, *pastorale-héroïque*, *Posse*, puppet opera, puppet theatre, *rappresentazione sacra*, rescue opera, *sainete*, *Schuldrama*, *Schuloper*, semi-opera, *sepolcro*, *serenata*, *Singspiel*, *Spieloper*, *tonadilla*, tourney, *tragédie en musique*, *vaudeville*, *verismo*, *zarzuela*, *Zauberoper*, *Zeitoper*. Of these sixty-nine entries, nineteen use Italian words, fifteen French, ten German, three Spanish—which is a fairly representative distribution of the genre itself, save for eastern Europe—and twenty-two English (*New Grove* is, after all, an Anglo-Saxon encyclopedia), although most of the last are not necessarily English-specific and have their foreign-language equivalents. Only twenty of these terms have "opera" (*opera*, *opéra*, *Oper*, or their cognates) in the heading (three Italian, five French, five German, seven English). Some identify national genres (*zarzuela*) or subgenres (*opera seria*, *opéra comique*, *Märchenoper*); some suggest generic mixtures (*comédie-ballet*, masque); some are function-specific (*entrée*, *Lehrstück*, *Schuloper*); and a significant number place more emphasis on the theater than does the simple word "opera" (*azione* or *festa teatrale*, *rappresentazione sacra*, music theatre), or on drama (*dramma giocoso*, *dramma per musica*, *favola in musica*, *melodramma*, *drame lyrique*, *tragédie en musique*, *Singspiel*, music drama, and others). Clearly, we are in a terminological minefield. Even the *New Grove*'s opening definition of "opera" ("Most narrowly conceived, the word 'opera' signifies a drama in which the actors sing throughout…") admits "so many" exceptions—Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* and Beethoven's *Fidelio* would not be operas by this reckoning—as to force revision ("…the word should be more generically defined as a drama in which the actors sing some or all of their parts"). But even this broader definition still remains problematic: So Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* is an opera?

Anglo-Saxon usage is, as usual, imprecise and confusing. In Paris one might just as well see *drames lyriques* or *opéras comiques*, while the statutes of the Teatro alla Scala in Milan refer to its mission to perform *spettacoli lirici* (although the preferred Italian term for opera is *melodramma*). If one goes to the "opera" in France or Germany, one goes to a place such as the Paris Opéra (whether at the Palais Garnier or the Bastille) or the Deutsche Staatsoper, unless one is a Wagner fanatic lucky enough to procure tickets to the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. At the opera house, one attends a performance by a resident

or visiting opera company, but in Continental Europe what one sees there can have, at least for an educated audience, a number of more nuanced generic labels that would be resisted at, say, the Royal Opera House or the Met. However, the apparent absurdity caused by elliptical English (and still more, American) usage—one goes to the opera to see the opera perform an opera—does serve one useful purpose in terms of revealing the complex intermingling of space, agency, and outcome embedded within the term. Even its etymology (the plural of the Latin *opus* taken over as a singular noun) carries a suggestion of multiple "works" while also exposing a dual meaning: work as action and the "work" as its result. Opera is essentially a collaborative venture that focuses in the end on the event of performance; this is what makes it so intriguing—and so difficult—to study. Moreover, what defines an opera as "opera" can sometimes be as much about where it is done, and by and for whom, as its generic proprieties or innate qualities. This is particularly true of works that cross between the worlds of opera and of musical theater. While the Met is unlikely to perform Jonathan Larson's *Rent* (which opened on Broadway in 1996) alongside its model, Puccini's *La bohème*, or Elton John and Tim Rice's *Aida* (2000) alongside Verdi, Leonard Bernstein nevertheless recorded (1985) his *West Side Story* (1957) with a set of opera stars including Kiri Te Kanawa, José Carreras, Tatiana Troyanos, and Marilyn Horne—with somewhat unfortunate results, it must be said. More experimental approaches to the musical stage have always produced still more problems of definition, as in the case of Debussy's *Le martyre de St. Sébastien* and the Brecht-Weill collaborations of the late 1920s, while Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* has always posed special challenges since its premiere on Broadway (at the Alvin Theatre) in 1935.

Operatic Operations

One place to start untangling this operatic messiness might well be the business of opera (Agid and Tarondeau 2010). According to its 2007–2008 *Annual Review*, London's Royal Opera House (ROH), Covent Garden, more or less broke even, with a total expenditure that year of £90.1 million against an income of £90.4 million provided by government grants (£26.3 million), box-office receipts (£35.6 million), donations, legacies and the like (£15.3 million), and other income from commercial operations, touring, and so on (£13.2 million). The New York Metropolitan Opera's 2006–2007 *Annual Report* lists much higher operating expenses at $239.6 million against revenues of $138.5 million (with $90.5 million from box office receipts), the "loss" being covered by contributions and bequests ($133.8 million) and investment returns ($24 million), such that net assets increased over the year from $378.9 million to $410.4 million. In both cases, the proportion of expenditure covered by box office receipts—39.5 percent for the ROH and 37.8 percent for the Met—was close to the rule-of-thumb 40 percent for high-end arts-promoting organizations, which usually need to find at least three-fifths of their annual budgets from other sources. The striking differences between the ROH and the

Met are, of course, the ROH's reliance on government grants (mostly from Arts Council England), covering 29.2 percent of total expenditure, and the relative importance of their donor income and investment returns (for the ROH, covering 17 percent of expenditure; for the Met, 65.9 percent). This reflects different funding regimes on the one hand (with government subsidies for the arts being more common in Europe), and on the other, the importance in the United States of philanthropy, encouraged by an enabling tax system. The ROH seems to be running chiefly on a year-to-year basis; the Met appears to have healthier reserves, although it is worth noting that its endowment investment valued at $336.2 million as of July 31, 2007 (again, according to the 2006–2007 report) would normally be expected to generate (at a 5 percent return, by another rule of thumb) an annual income of only $16.8 million, which will, of course, decrease in lean economic times. From that point of view, both the ROH and the Met seem to live precariously.

Comparison with the spoken theater is also instructive. For 2007–2008 (the period discussed for the ROH, above), the *Annual Report* of London's Royal National Theatre (RNT) notes an income of £49 million against expenditures of £47.5 million, that is, just over half of the ROH, a difference that is all the more striking given that the RNT ran productions in three house theaters (if with a total seating capacity, at 2,450, only some 200 more than the ROH, at 2,256). Box-office receipts were £15.4 million (31.4 percent of income); government grants amounted to £18.4 million (covering 38.7 percent of expenditure); and £4.9 million was gained by fundraising (10.3 percent of expenditure). At the risk of crass generalization, the RNT made proportionally less money from selling tickets (top-price tickets at its main stage cost about one-fifth of those at the ROH); it gained more in UK government grants (opera is widely regarded as elitist and therefore less worthy of state support); and it had a harder time fundraising (rich donors are more willing to give to opera).

Opera costs money, and it cannot normally be expected to generate a profit. The earliest court operas were essentially paid from princely coffers with little or no regard for any return on large expenditures: Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (widely regarded as the first "opera" to survive complete) and Giulio Caccini's *Il rapimento di Cefalo* were both performed during the festivities in Florence celebrating the wedding of Maria de' Medici to King Henri IV of France in October 1600 (though this was not the first staging of *Euridice*), and save where Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici persuaded others to pick up at least part of the tab (as seems to have occurred in part with *Euridice*, sponsored by the Florentine patron Jacopo Corsi), he would have regarded their cost simply as the price of entertaining his guests in an appropriately sumptuous manner. Later in the seventeenth century, some Italian courts operated what one might call a "mixed-mode" system for opera, contracting with impresarios who could charge for tickets but would also receive guarantees against loss (Duke Francesco II d'Este in Modena is a good example). Other monarchs, princes, and prelates could regularly be accused—at least when times were bad—of squandering their treasury on frivolous entertainment: the charge was leveled against the Barberini family in Rome in the early 1640s (immediately after the death of Maffeo Barberini, Pope Urban VIII), and periodically against King Louis XIV of France, although it was usually answered by some combination of *noblesse oblige*, on

the one hand, and the necessary prestige to be granted by conspicuous consumption, on the other.

A different model was established in Venice in 1637 with "public" or "commercial" opera, as it is often called. This necessarily lacked princely support—Venice was a proud republic—marking a fundamental shift in the mechanisms of opera production in favor of market forces and a ticket-buying public (Glixon and Glixon 2006). But it still benefited from financial backing by individual or collective patrons, whether or not as investors hoping to turn a profit. The pattern also held true for opera in Handel's London in the 1720s (with support from one or other member of the extended British royal family) or in Mozart's Vienna in the 1780s (from Habsburg Emperor Joseph II). In the nineteenth century, princely patronage gradually changed in favor of state funding—what in one context has been called the "urbanization of opera" (Gerhard 1998)—although more slowly than some might expect: even Wagner was beholden to King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who from 1864 paid him a large annual stipend of 4,000 *gulden*, and who made possible the construction of the Bayreuth theater. The Paris Opéra has in effect received national funding (from royal, republican, or imperial coffers, depending on the regime in place at the time) from its founding in 1671, while the shift from German court theaters (Hoftheater) to civic ones supported by the local or regional tax base depended on changing political circumstances, and even Covent Garden still retains a vestige of its status as one of London's "royal" theaters. In most European or European-influenced countries (including North and South America), an opera house and the company associated with it have come to be seen as a matter of civic pride and responsibility, although arguments inevitably persist over the prices worth paying for it, and the compromises needed to assure them.

The Venetian model was brought into action remarkably quickly, presumably because it drew at least in part on mechanisms already in place for the spoken theater. It also established models for what soon became an opera industry supported by complex interactions between theater owners, impresarios, and independent entrepreneurs (poets, composers, singers, instrumentalists, dancing masters, stage designers, costume manufacturers, and so on and so forth down the line) selling their services at a price. The impact was immediate. In the Italian courts, opera had been relatively infrequent, and not always popular. In Venice, however, five new operas appeared in the three seasons following the opening of the Teatro San Cassiano in 1637 (soon followed by three other opera houses in the city), and by the end of the 1646–1647 season, some thirty-three new works and six revivals had been staged there. Regardless of profit or loss, output was enormous. To judge by Claudio Sartori's catalogue of printed Italian librettos to 1800, the number of seventeenth-century operas stretches into four figures, even accepting that not every surviving libretto represents a different opera. In effect, composers operated on a production line. There are thirty operas securely attributed to Francesco Cavalli (1602–1676), and perhaps another ten by him, while Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725) wrote some thirty-five operas before 1700, and another thirty or so after. Lully's output of *tragédies en musique*, protected as he was by a court position, pales in comparison (fourteen, at a rather leisurely rate of one per year from 1673 to 1687). These numbers are

not unusual for later periods: Handel wrote forty-six operas, Mozart twenty, Cimarosa almost sixty, Paisiello eighty or so, Rossini thirty-nine, Donizetti some sixty-five, and Verdi twenty-eight. Add to those the countless works by lesser (we assume) composers and it becomes clear that with only a few obvious exceptions, opera was very largely a disposable commodity. A huge number of works lie unperformed, unstudied, and therefore unknown.

Although the Venetian model favored constant innovation in order not to jade the palate, it also fostered the notion of a repertory, something hitherto lacking within the genre wherein operas were essentially one-off events. Tried-and-tested operas could be revived in successive seasons in order to mitigate the risk of new works becoming flops, and could also be taken on tour by independent companies operating on the model of the *commedia dell'arte*. One early example is the rather amorphous group known as the Febiarmonici, with performances of operas such as Francesco Sacrati's *La finta pazza* and Cavalli's *Didone*, *Egisto*, and *Giasone* in smaller centers across northern Italy before members associated with the troupe settled in Naples, where they revived works by Cavalli and also Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. In the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, independent touring companies provided the main access to opera in significant urban centers, as with Manuel García's company that brought Italian operas to New York City in the 1820s, and Fortune T. Gallo's San Carlo Opera Company that toured from 1913 to 1951. Even now, in the UK and elsewhere, regional opera companies will often have some touring obligations as part of their grant-earning requirements.

Like any industry, opera needs both to cultivate a market and to find the skilled personnel needed to sustain its output. The most obvious are the singers, who inevitably come at a premium—they are often paid very well indeed—and can make or break a performance. As opera burgeoned in the seventeenth century, the infrastructure to train its prized workers was fairly quickly put into place, as music conservatoires were established, particularly in Venice and Naples, and curricula were created to identify and nurture the talent demanded by the genre (Rosselli 1992). Even more special treatment was offered to the type of singer most in demand until the early nineteenth century—the castrato—because of the sacrifices required to achieve that exalted, and relatively rare, status. These conservatoires quickly achieved a hegemony over Europe—matching the hegemony of Italian opera in general, save in certain specific countries (notably, France)—also creating myths that still endure today about what it takes to be an opera star. As is typical of any industry, too, its chief workers became highly specialized in terms both of voice types and their subdivisions (viz., the German *Fächer*) and, at least at the highest level, of repertory, although there have always been exceptions (i.e., singers able and willing to take on a wide variety of roles), and the profession is changing in part in response to new aesthetic preferences (singers who can also act) and economic circumstances.

As for the market, it may seem small and relatively narrow, but it exists and, contrary to popular belief, may even be expanding. Ticket prices may seem exorbitantly high in most Western houses (they are often much less so in former Communist Europe, for

obvious reasons), but in New York City, at least, their range is not so different from a Broadway musical save perhaps at the top end (often aimed at corporate entertainment), and claims that opera is elitist do not square with the fact that on a good day one can buy three cheap tickets for the Metropolitan Opera for the cost of one for *Wicked* or *The Lion King*. The Met's 2006–2007 report records playing to 84 percent capacity—which is on a par with the more successful commercial theaters—and sold-out performances are a norm, at least in the first-class houses: try getting a ticket for the Wiener Staatsoper sometime, although one can queue to stand at the back of the stalls for next to nothing. Opera's reach was broadened by way of publishing (printed collections of favorite arias for domestic consumption), radio (the Met's legendary Saturday afternoon broadcasts from 1933 on), and then, if less successfully, television, and it has gained significant new energies from film and DVD releases (Citron 2000), and still more from live broadcasts to cinemas, stadiums, and other outdoor locations; these have also garnered younger audiences that have surprisingly little resistance to the genre's rather fantastical mixing of the audio and the visual, perhaps because of their exposure to music videos. Yet opera houses have also had to adjust to global economies of scale, for example by way of the increasingly common practice of sharing product lines (i.e., productions). Save the relative rarities produced by enterprising opera festivals, on the one hand, and record labels, on the other, choices of repertory also tend to play on the side of safety: innovation is usually achieved within the context of the familiar rather than the new, save for the occasional token commission, or the unknown old.

There is a strong tendency for the major houses to favor Italian opera, then German, then French, then opera from other countries (Russian, Czech, etc.). If one can trust the endlessly fascinating online *Operabase*, from January 1 to December 31, 2008, there were 524 performances of Puccini's *Tosca* in eighty-seven cities worldwide from Albuquerque to Zürich, with thirteen new productions (other top favorites included Verdi's *La traviata* with 516 performances and Puccini's *La bohème* with 512, each in eighty-two cities), and only seven of Berg's *Lulu* in one. The statistics of 2008 performances by a relatively haphazard selection of composers still reveal clearly the opera industry's fairly narrow orientation: Verdi (2,373), Puccini (2,108), Mozart (1,760), Rossini (805), Wagner (721), Richard Strauss (508), Handel (342), Tchaikovsky (329), Janáček (184), Gounod (162), Massenet (159), and Monteverdi (111). Our modernist friend Berg had 58 performances and our Baroque one Cavalli had 42, which beats Lully (23) and at least competes well enough with Hans Werner Henze (44), John Adams (37), Philip Glass (34), Kaija Saariaho (19), and Helmut Lachenmann (1).*

A more recent set of *Operabase* statistics might prompt a less jaded picture over the longer term. Over the five seasons from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010, there were more than 100,000 performances of 2,156 different operas by just over a thousand composers, over

* These figures were available on the public version of the *Operabase* site when accessed on May 14, 2009, but have since been removed and replaced by more generic statistics (accessed January 16, 2012) that cannot always be reconciled with the ones given above given that the parameters appear to have changed.

half of whom were still living. Of the total number of performances by country in the 2009–2010 season (about 23,000), almost a third occurred in Germany (7,315)—reflecting the importance of civic opera houses there—followed a long way behind by the United States (1,979), Austria (1,361), France (1,275), Italy (1,182), and the UK (1,076). In terms of the number of performances of individual operas from 2005–2006 to 2009–2010, however, the canon continued to rule the roost (and those living composers came way down the list): the top four were Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (a surprise), Verdi's *La traviata*, Bizet's *Carmen*, and Puccini's *La bohème*, with Wagner only making an entrance (with *Der fliegende Holländer*) at place twenty-five.

The conservatism and biases of the repertory are probably not so different from other spheres of so-called classical music. However, over the past half century they have encouraged the phenomenon of so-called *Regietheater* and its Anglo-American equivalents, with star directors and designers achieving their own cult status, and with familiar works needing to be done in new ways (Levin 2007). As with spoken theater, opera productions must negotiate a path between "traditional" stagings and those "updated" in pursuit of relevance, in some cases motivated also by Brechtian notions of alienation. Well-known controversial examples include, among many others, Patrice Chéreau's centennial *Ring* cycle at Bayreuth in 1976 (an anti-capitalist, Marxist reading, with the Rhinemaidens as whores and the gods as industrialist oppressors), Jonathan Miller's *Rigoletto* in the mafia underworld of 1950s New York (English National Opera, 1982), Peter Sellars's Mozart trilogy at the PepsiCo Summerfare in Purchase, NY, in 1989 (with *Le nozze di Figaro*, for example, set in Trump Tower), and Calixto Bieito's toilet-themed *Un ballo in maschera* (Barcelona, 2001). The willingness of audiences to accept such interpretations will vary from country to country, and house to house, but they often provoke some kind of scandal.

Despite periodic attempts to remove opera from the pantheons of high art and into more experimental theatrical (and even non-theatrical) performance spaces, it remains a highly specialized activity limited to specific performance environments. But while its patrons may be open to ridicule, the genre itself is often treated with respect and even affection, as the Marx Brothers' hilarious movie *A Night at the Opera* (1935) reveals. Other Hollywood films that bring operatic performances squarely into their frame also suggest how they can offer a key to social mobility (*Moonstruck*), to self-awareness (*Pretty Woman*), to spiritual transformation (*The Shawshank Redemption*), and even to transcendent consolation (*Philadelphia*). These are powerful moments that reveal an endless fascination with what opera as drama, or even opera as not-drama, can do.

Dramma per Musica

The tendency of non-English operatic terms to introduce some notion of drama into the reckoning (*melodramma, tragédie lyrique, Singspiel*) poses aesthetic dilemmas as well as historiographical ones. Although the libretto tends to come first when composing an

opera, it tends to diminish thereafter within the operatic reckoning. *Prima la musica e poi le parole* (first the music, and then the words) was a catchphrase enshrined in the title of a satirical *divertimento teatrale* by Antonio Salieri (1786)—it was also addressed by Richard Strauss in *Capriccio* (1942)—but it finds its resonances within opera audiences, on the one hand, and in the scholarly literature, on the other.

One problem for English-speaking audiences is, of course, the simple fact that opera is often in languages that they do not readily understand (Robinson 2002): a Russian listening to Tchaikovsky, or a Spanish-speaker to de Falla, will have a far richer time of it. Surtitles help but in the end are fairly crude, and singing opera in translation raises difficulties not just in terms of perceived "dumbing down" but also because a composer's musical accents will often be language specific—Mozart writes very differently when setting Italian texts compared with German ones—such that the "wrong" language can often seem, well, wrong. Nor are singers always prized for their diction, especially when they have learned their parts phonetically, while musical setting can tend to interfere with verbal understanding. The resulting difficulties have led even to the oddity of opera in English for English-speaking audiences with English surtitles. On the whole, however, the presumption with opera has often been that once one has the gist of the plot (usually from a prior reading of a synopsis), one can just leave the melody to carry things along. For that matter, one hardly goes to the opera house expecting to see Shakespeare, Corneille, Goethe, or Ibsen, or if one does, it will be radically shortened: in the case of Verdi's *Otello*, to a libretto by Arrigo Boito, Act IV, scene 3 (where Desdemona dies), takes up forty lines in total, whereas Shakespeare has twenty-two lines of wonderful iambic pentameters ("It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul…") just to get to the point where Desdemona first speaks to her husband. Boito and Verdi cut those lines completely in favor of a long orchestral introduction to the scene, with a very detailed stage direction, where the music and action are presumed to stand in for the speech.

In fact, many librettos of *Otello* published for Anglo-Saxon readers will make those forty lines appear almost double in number because their editors are unaware of, or disregard, one simple fact: at least until the late nineteenth century, and often beyond, texts for opera in almost all languages are written in some kind of poetry, not in prose. In the case of Boito's *Otello*, for example, Act IV, scene 3, is in free-rhymed eleven-syllable lines (in Italian the eleven-syllable line has a similar classical status to the iambic pentameter in English, or the alexandrine in French, and its characteristic stress patterns are readily identifiable). The principle that texts for musical setting must be in verse extends back long before the beginnings of opera: on the one hand, it reflects the notion that poetry is itself "musical" by virtue of its meter and rhyme, as well as its elevated language; on the other, poetic meters have strong musical implications in terms of melodic patterns and phrase structures, further influenced by whether line-endings are feminine (ending on a weak syllable) or masculine (on a strong one).

In effect, the librettist's poetry directs the composer in terms of what should happen musically at any given moment in terms of form and articulation. The very first Italian opera librettos by Ottavio Rinuccini (*Dafne*, first performed in 1598, and *Euridice* of 1600) followed the precedent of plays in verse: Rinuccini has the action take place in

versi sciolti, that is, free-rhyming seven- and eleven-syllable lines (*settenari* and *endecasillabi*); such lines can also be divided between two or more characters in order to create a sense of flow. Formal moments of lyrical expression for one or more characters, or for a chorus, will be distinguished from the *versi sciolti* by one or more of regular rhymes, stanzaic structures, and other line-lengths (e.g., four-, five-, and eight-syllable lines; in Italian, six-, nine-, and ten-syllable lines are also possible). This creates a clear poetic distinction between musical "speech" and song. Very roughly speaking, the "speech" is where action occurs (things happen, characters interact, etc.) and the song is where characters fix the circumstances or consequences of that action, reflect upon it, or establish a position that will determine the action to come. This distinction was very soon formalized in musical terms as one between recitative and aria, which in turn has become characterized (though somewhat wrongly) as a contrast between dramatic action and emotional expression. Thus a typical Handel opera, say, will have passages in *recitativo semplice* (sometimes called *secco*—"dry"—recitative) in a fast-flowing speech-like style for voice and continuo accompaniment, and more elaborate arias for voice and orchestra, with the occasional use of *recitativo stromentato* (a more intense form of recitative with orchestral accompaniment) at moments of high drama, somewhat in the manner of the soliloquy. As was established by Rinuccini, Handel's recitative texts will be in seven- and eleven-syllable *versi sciolti*. On the other hand, arias will usually have texts in two stanzas, the second of which mirrors the first in terms of the number of lines (usually four), their meter, and their rhyme scheme. Aria texts will often, but not always, be in single line-length other than the mixed *settenari* and *endecasillabi* used for recitative (*quinari*, *senari*, and *ottonari* are common), and this two-stanza format becomes set musically in the ternary form typical of the "da capo" aria, that is, A (stanza 1)–B (stanza 2)–A (stanza 1).

Similar poetic principles apply in later eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian librettos that introduce action-ensembles (duets, trios, quartets, etc.) and two- or three-tempo numbers that seek to encapsulate some kind of dramatic progression (as in the *cantabile–tempo di mezzo–cabaletta* sequence), as well as in operas where the orchestra plays throughout and therefore seemingly softens any clear textural distinction between recitative and aria. These principles also apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to librettos in other languages: their verse will exploit different types and degrees of poetic formality in terms of meter, rhyme, and stanzaic organization so as to shift the dramatic focus to, from, or within a given combination of action and expression. Reading an opera libretto on its own—and in its original language—can be very instructive indeed, not just for its content, but also for the way in which it maps out the musical design of the work.

Does this matter? Certainly yes, if one wants to understand why opera composers do what they do when they do it. The issue becomes still more important when a composer seemingly contradicts a librettist's instruction. Take, for example, the rare cases where Mozart goes against Lorenzo Da Ponte's poetic choices, as at Donna Elvira's first entrance in *Don Giovanni* ("Ah chi mi dice mai," which Da Ponte cast as an aria but which Mozart turned into a trio by bringing Don Giovanni and Leporello's succeeding recitative into the

musical number); another case is the "letter" quintet in Act I of *Così fan tutte* ("Di scrivermi ogni giorno"), which Da Ponte designed as recitative. These are very revealing of Mozart's handling of a character (Why is Donna Elvira denied a proper entrance aria?) or of a situation (Is he taking the "letter" quintet too seriously, or is he overexaggerating the moment for ironic effect?). Likewise, presumably it is worth knowing that in Act II, scene 6, of *La traviata*, Verdi took a line of verse that his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, simply intended as the first of a closing rhyming couplet in *endecasillabi* (Violetta's "Amami, Alfredo, quant'io t'amo! Addio!"—"Love me, Alfredo, as much as I love you! Farewell!") and turned it into a moment of glorious lyrical expansion that also became thematic for the opera as a whole (Violetta's melody dominates the opera's orchestral prelude).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, these standard poetic structures within opera librettos started to break down in the search for a more naturalistic verbal, and therefore musical, expression. However, the connection is not quite as direct as one might think. While Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* are usually hailed as masterpieces of the new *verismo*—opera that was somehow "true" to life—in poetic terms their librettos differ little, if at all, from their predecessors. The trend in the early twentieth century in favor of so-called *Literaturoper* (using a spoken play directly as an opera's text) necessarily forced a different approach depending on the source-play's use of language, ranging from Maeterlinck's prose-like but elevated *vers libres* (in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) through Oscar Wilde's prose-based *Salome* (Richard Strauss) to Georg Büchner's wholly prosaic *Woyzeck* (set by Berg). The impulse also derived from Wagner, whose arguments in favor of a free-flowing musical drama gained significant influence, even if his self-authored librettos are still in verse, and indeed still often fall into sections with identifiable beginnings and endings. However, the loss of poetry was not necessarily music's gain, and even Berg, in his *Wozzeck*, seeks to find a range of musical means to restore a sense of form and balance denied him by Büchner's forceful but unstructured text.

It is commonly argued that "great" poetry is too powerful to be set to music but must be left to stand alone. However, there is no logic to the corollary, that poetry for music must, by definition, be second-rate, even if it usually must, in the end, be different, and although there are good librettists and bad, their work usually deserves greater recognition than is often the case. Lully's librettist Philippe Quinault may not have been a Racine or Molière, but he certainly knew what he was doing and did it well; Lorenzo Da Ponte, Francesco Maria Piave, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal are worthy of similar credit. A significant number of opera librettos merit high literary status, and some certainly gained it within the canon: Pietro Metastasio's *Artaserse* was set either in its original or in some revised form by eighty composers, ranging from Leonardo Vinci's opera of 1730 to Charles Lucas's of 1840, and his *Didone abbandonata* by sixty between 1724 (Domenico Sarro) and 1824 (Karl Gottlieb Reissiger). Whether or not in collaboration with a composer, a librettist will identify or create a plot, pace the drama within (or sometimes outside) the genre-based conventions of the day, accommodate the requirements of staging, decide who sings what and where, and even, if the composer is lucky, come up with words worthy of taking wings of song.

Dramma in Musica

The term *dramma per musica* places the emphasis not just on drama, but also on what exists prior to the composer's handling of it. But a drama "for" music will not necessarily produce a drama "in" music, unless one uses the term just to signify an object and not some kind of action or result. While the terms *dramma per musica* and *dramma in musica* were more or less interchangeable in Italian opera in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—save where they served to distinguish a libretto from its particular setting—they open up a debate that has recurred constantly in operatic history. Although that debate has usually been cast in terms of the relative priorities of word and music, the more fundamental question is whether opera can or should be dramatic in the first place. It may seem an odd one to ask, given that the genre has often sought to vindicate itself by some appeal to its dramatic pretensions. However, it has not always been thus: there are plenty of accounts of eighteenth-century onlookers yawning (talking, drinking, gambling, flirting…) through the recitatives of an *opera seria*, returning their attention to the stage only when their favorite singer began an aria. And while some patterns of audience behavior may have changed since then, those operatic moments that focus the attention may not. The notion that opera indissolubly melds music and drama in some superior heightened experience has often been a convenient fiction for the genre, its protagonists, and its advocates, but it is a dangerous strategy for works that inevitably, and perhaps even necessarily, fail to meet such elevated expectations (Kivy 1988).

It depends, of course, on how one defines "drama." If one is talking about larger-than-life characters and situations engaging monumental existential issues, or about grand settings and pageantry, then a good many operas fit one or other bill. Cozier domestic comedies would seem, on the face of it, less well suited to the operatic stage, although they were a trend in the *opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, and *Singspiel* traditions of the second half of the eighteenth century, and one that regained some favor during the neoclassical revival in the mid-twentieth. It would probably be unreasonable to expect operas to have complex plots—although some can certainly appear confusing—working their way to subtle conclusions, and their pacing will usually be more variable than in spoken plays, with greater pause for reflection and commentary. Operas that aspire to naturalism or realism have a harder time of it than those that do not, at least without some redefinition of what might be "natural" or "real": the genre handles Stanislavski's theories less well than it does Brecht's.

A sure sign of the tensions within and between these different notions of what might constitute the "drama" in opera is the periodic call for reform, based on the claim that a supposedly "pure" art form has become corrupted by forces working from within but essentially out of control, be they empty-headed librettists, foolish composers, or vainglorious singers. Purge the genre of these contaminations, so the argument goes, and all will be right with the world. Gluck made the point in and through his "reform" operas

of the 1760s and 1770s, with the preface to his *Alceste* (1767), written by librettist Ranieri de' Calzabigi but signed by the composer, serving as his manifesto. Wagner did much the same thing: his manifesto was *Oper und Drama* (1850–1851). It is revealing that neither Gluck nor Wagner were Italians—Italian opera being, of course, one *bête noire*—although Wagner had not much good to say about earlier German opera, while his view of the French soured still more after the disastrous reception accorded his *Tannhäuser* in Paris in 1861. It is also revealing that both were, of course, composers: even when the argument was in favor of drama gaining the upper hand, the musician needed to stay in charge. These and other reform movements often harked back to the Utopian age when opera emerged from the pure, literary ideals of the Florentines who invented the genre, and further still to the roots that they also claimed as their own: ancient Greece. For the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hellenism had its own special resonances in terms of nobility, severity, and purity, as well—for Wagner, at least—as republicanism. In the early twentieth century, the thrust could be against Wagner, against Puccini, or against Romantic opera in general. The main point, however, was to restore a degenerate art to one or other kind of former glory, an issue that often went beyond the aesthetic to the political.

What composers say and what they do need not always be the same thing; for that matter, if composers always did what they said, the musical results might not be very successful. Gluck's preface to *Alceste* and Wagner's *Oper und Drama* are powerful documents, albeit a bit muddleheaded in places, and reading these and similar polemics promulgated throughout the history of opera forces the consideration of issues that may not be uppermost in one's mind during the immediate operatic experience. These issues also direct—some might claim, divert—the discussion of opera in the scholarly literature, whether that discussion involves attempts to rescue late Baroque opera from the accusation of being merely a concert in costume; to demonstrate how Mozart exploits the potentials of contemporary musical forms and syntaxes to establish dramatic conflict and resolution; to argue that Rossinian coloratura serves also to illustrate character and purpose; to show that in Wagner's music dramas the orchestra can, by way of its leitmotifs, present a complex narrative independent of, and supplemental to, what is in fact happening on the stage; or even to defend a seemingly outmoded genre in these modernist and postmodernist times.

While music can delineate characters both separately and, within limits, simultaneously, it cannot fairly represent their interactions, save in the broadest terms. Even in the best-written ensembles—as, for example, the Act III sextet from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*—characters tend to polarize in musical groups, albeit in shifting alliances (which is in part the point), and dramatic tensions get played out in a fairly obvious manner. For all its subtlety in other ways, music tends to paint emotions with a broad brush, even if its very wordlessness offers the sense that it is plumbing pre-rational, and therefore more intense, emotional depths. And whatever music can reveal about a character's inner feelings—allowing the expression of what cannot be said—it would probably be foolish to claim that the result smacks of any psychological sophistication. Indeed, what more often grabs the attention in the opera house is precisely the lack of any such

sophistication when a raw emotion delivers a punch to the stomach. Add to that one's innate pleasure in the visual and aural spectacle of performance, plus the aesthetic contemplation of the musically beautiful, and drama, as it were, tends to go out the window. At that point, opera needs neither defense nor apology, save an appeal to accept it for what it is, rather than what we might wish it to be.

Exotic and Irrational?

A drama "in music" would seem to be an odd concept anyway. In principle, it is no stranger than a drama in iambic pentameters (unless you happen to believe that Julius Caesar did indeed address Mark Antony in five-feet lines), or for that matter, one in Elizabethan English purporting to represent life in ancient Rome. Of course, Shakespeare has conditioned most of us to accept the convention with nary a question, and a willing "suspension of disbelief" is part of the contract required to gain admission to the theater. But while we can believe—or at least, temporarily agree not to disbelieve—in pentameters, music may seem one step too far.

The issue hinges on verisimilitude, which is one subtext of Dr. Johnson's well-known characterization of opera as "an exotic and irrational entertainment." This was a somewhat throwaway, and anti-Italian, remark in Johnson's *Life of Hughes* (one of his set of biographical sketches of English poets written between 1777 and 1781); for his famous dictionary, Johnson instead borrowed the more reasonable definition of the genre from Dryden's preface to *Albion and Albanus* (1685) as "a poetical tale or fiction, represented by vocal and instrumental musick, adorned with scenes, machines, and dancing." Suspicion of, yet delight in, the exotic and the irrational have always animated the history of opera since it emerged in Florence at the end of the sixteenth century (Tomlinson 1999). Jacopo Peri and Ottavio Rinuccini sought to solve the problem in two ways. They deliberately placed their *favole in musica* in the context of a revival of the putative performance practices of ancient drama, a matter of some debate in the course of the Renaissance but which provided a hallowed precedent. Their choice of subject matter was also significant. The hero of *Euridice* is, of course, Orpheus, the greatest musician of classical myth; the work is also set in a pastoral Arcadia, a land of milk and honey where shepherds and shepherdesses could plausibly carry out their day-to-day lives in song. Likewise, in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), Orpheus sings a highly virtuosic aria to charm the powers of Hades to grant him access to rescue his beloved Eurydice from death. Earlier in the same opera, he also performs songs about his joy on his wedding day, while his pastoral companions sing and dance in praise of the happy couple. These songs are inherently lifelike (some would call them diegetic, although the term is problematic): People sing at weddings, and by report, Orpheus sang at the gates of the Inferno, so such songs can plausibly be heard as onstage performances. The same would apply to other non-deities who use the voice by profession, be it a troubadour, a would-be Meistersinger, or even a singing barber. In other words, operas commonly veer between

two types of music—with complex shades between—one presented as verisimilar in the narrow sense of the term, and the other not.

Opera has customarily attempted to meet at least some principles of verisimilitude by providing occasions for music that is, to use Carolyn Abbate's term, phenomenal, as distinct from the noumenal music to which operatic characters usually appear deaf (Abbate 1991: 119). (A third possible category—where the music invokes natural sounds audible to those onstage such as birdsong or a storm—is a very special case.) The use of "real" music on the stage—that is, performances that characters can themselves be reckoned to hear—usually provides an excuse for a lyric interlude that may or may not have a dramatic point (Cherubino's "Voi che sapete" in Act II of *Le nozze di Figaro*, with Susanna "playing" her guitar to accompany him; Alfredo's *brindisi* toward the beginning of *La traviata*; Musetta's waltz in Act II of *La bohème*; the tenor who suddenly appears in Act I of *Der Rosenkavalier*). Likewise, representing actual music-making and dancing with or without onstage musicians has become a virtuoso (for the composer) cliché, and Mozart's ingenious dance music in the Act I finale of *Don Giovanni*—providing a background to onstage action—had a strong influence on the opening of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, also fixing a trope that echoes through Act III, scene 3 of his *Un ballo in maschera*, the tavern scene in Berg's *Wozzeck* (II.4), and even the "Jazzbo Brown" opening to Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Similar motives underpin hunters' or sailors' songs, military marches, spinning songs, and lullabies, for which excuses can usually readily be found, assuming the right subject matter.

Moving away from the phenomenal, but still plausibly within its boundaries, are standard set-pieces with which "real" music conventionally becomes associated, such as prayer-scenes (Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen*, Act III, scene 5; Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*, Act IV, scene 2) on the one hand, and magical incantations on the other (Alcina's "Ombre pallide" in Handel's eponymous opera; the "Wolf's Glen" scene in Weber's *Der Freischütz*), given that music is often associated with heightened invocation. The principle may extend to exhortations, whether in person (the choruses of prisoners in Beethoven's *Fidelio* or Verdi's *Nabucco*) or by letter (Tatyana in Tchaikovsky's *Yevgeny Onegin* is the obvious example), and also to "mad"-scenes (Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*) where the recourse to music further gains verisimilitude by virtue of the situation (sane people do not normally hear flutes twittering in the air around them). Exhortation and madness usually also combine in another typical set-piece, the lament, although there was some debate, at least in the seventeenth century, over whether laments are better framed as musical speeches (so, in an impassioned recitative, as in the only surviving part of Monteverdi's *Arianna*) or as formal arias (the heroine in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, over her famous ground bass).

These tropes or their derivatives can usually be found to some degree woven by librettists and composers in any opera, even those that seemingly eschew conventional set-pieces to seek a more "natural" form of musical drama. Other conventions include the "I"-songs in which characters introduce or explain themselves to each other or to the audience (Leporello's "Notte e giorno faticar" at the beginning of *Don Giovanni*; "A Wand'ring Minstrel I" in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*; Rodolfo's "Chi son?

Sono un poeta" in *La bohème*); narrative songs in which a character offers an account of prior events that provide the backstory necessary to understand the action (Senta's ballad in Act II of Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*); or songs that simply set a time and a place (Clara's "Summertime" in *Porgy and Bess*). A special form of the "I"-song is the monologue where the character alone on stage muses on matters of life or death, somewhat in the manner of the formal soliloquy in spoken plays. One might also add other song-types to this list, such as the revenge aria, love duet, and so forth. While all such settings are rarely phenomenal, strictly speaking, they tend to have a formality that makes them appear nearly so, while also setting them somehow apart from the other dramatic and musical action.

Of course, this leaves a great deal of operatic music unexplained, at which point the argument tends to return once more to notions of emotional truth or psychological penetration. But how a given opera moves between episodes of greater or lesser verisimilitude—or if you prefer, different versions of verisimilitude—can be very revealing. So, too, is the tendency to play on whether the characters hear only each others' words or also their music. Much depends on the subject matter: mythical deities (whether Greek, Roman, or Norse), Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses, ancient Egyptian rulers, and exotic non-Western Others pose fewer problems than characters from European history (whether Julius Caesar or Richard Nixon) or from "real life" contemporary to the opera. Much also depends on the period in terms of whether opera is just accepted as a theatrical norm (as it was for the most part in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries) or requires some manner of special pleading. However, the genre can often appear skittish about its *raison d'être*. Early operas often had prologues to justify their aesthetic premises, and the technique returned in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the genre once more came under suspicion: thus Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* has the protagonist Tonio first appear as the "Prologo" to emphasize the claims of *verismo*, and Busoni's *Doktor Faustus* uses a spoken prologue to explain the composer's choice of subject. Similar is the use of other framing devices that somehow distance the plot from the lives it represents: whether by establishing it as a lesson-bearing exemplar (the power of Amor in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*; the "school for lovers" in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*), as the telling of a "story" (Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* and *Billy Budd*), or as part of an overtly theatrical exercise (the circus-master in Berg's *Lulu*, the theater director in Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias*, and the Choregos in Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*) or debate (the beginning of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*).

The technique has been extended still further to the rather self-conscious trick of making an opera be "about" opera: Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* and *Capriccio*, and Berio's *Un re in ascolto*, are different cases in point. Such narrower self-reflexivity, which can also extend to a rather knowing self-parody, seemingly stands in contrast to more grandiose claims for opera's universality embodied in Wagnerian music drama and its modernist successors (such as Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and Stockhausen's *Licht* cycle), although they are, in the end, two sides of the same coin. Opera composers

may have variously sought in different ways, times, and places to prove the eminent Dr. Johnson wholly wrong, but we all know, deep down, that he was exactly right.

See also: Genre, Musical Theater(s), Operatorio? The Concept of Opera, Verisimilitude

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CHAPTER **2**

GENRE

EMANUELE SENICI

When considered from the point of view of genre, opera's reputation for improbability and paradox seems spectacularly confirmed. On the one hand, opera counts among the very few genres in the history of artistic creation in which theory came before practice: rather than being recognized as a genre after it had been in existence for some time, as usually happens, opera was famously "invented." On the other hand, perhaps no other genre relies on convention as heavily as opera: its production involves so many individuals with such a diverse array of abilities and duties that the repetition of many different kinds of actions constitutes a fundamental requirement for its existence. If what is necessary for the successful realization of an opera were not highly predictable, it would be impossible to go beyond a few extremely labor-intensive and prohibitively expensive occasional performances. This applies to all sorts of different roles, from theatrical architect to urban planner, from librettist to composer, from impresario to singer, from orchestral player to costume maker, from financial manager to usher, and from spectator to critic. In other words, in the world of opera convention reigns supreme. But convention also lies at the very core of genre. Generic features and considerations, therefore, have played a more relevant part in the composition, performance, fruition, and discussion of opera than is the case for most other genres, be they theatrical, musical, or more generally artistic. How could such a complex genre be "invented," then?

Attempting to answer this question helps bring into focus a few issues crucial for understanding opera as a genre, and therefore the first part of this chapter is devoted to such an attempt. The second part concentrates instead on the ways in which the category of genre has been employed in the aesthetic and historiographical discourse on opera. More specifically, it investigates how the relationship between a given opera and its possible generic contexts has been conceived in the last two centuries, given that current understandings of this relationship began to emerge around 1800.

The Genrification of Opera

Much recent genre theory, while insisting on the communicative and rhetorical aspects of genre, tends to maintain a separation, often implicit but no less deep-rooted, between works, on the one hand, and discourses—authorial, critical, spectatorial, and so on—on the other (for an application of this theoretical orientation to the study of opera, see Senici 2004: 625). Some theorists, however, have argued in favor of obliterating this distinction altogether, and seeing genres as discursive fields shaped by different kinds of utterances, regardless of whether they emanate from works, authors, critics, or audiences broadly meant. According to literary critic Adena Rosmarin, a radical proponent of this position, "genre is not, as is commonly thought, a class, but, rather, a classifying statement. It is therefore itself a text" (Rosmarin 1985: 46). This theory has emerged most forcefully in the context of literary studies, has been conceived for literary genres, and is therefore predicated on the fact that works of literature and works of literary criticism share the same communicative mode, verbal language. A more flexible version, one perhaps more useful for our purposes, has been elaborated by film theorists and historians. Discussing *film noir*, James Naremore has recently stated: "If we want to understand it, or to make sense of genres or art-historical categories in general, we need to recognize that [it] belongs to the history of ideas as much as to the history of cinema; it has less to do with a group of artifacts than with a discourse—a loose, evolving system of arguments and readings, helping to shape commercial strategies and aesthetic ideologies" (Naremore 2008: 10–11).

An approach to genres that focuses on discourse, process, and ideology, and that sidelines, at least at a theoretical level, any distinction between works and the words surrounding them, seems better suited to the case of opera. In particular, it has the notable advantage of offering a more convincing perspective on the thorny question of the "invention" of the genre than has hitherto been the case (for a critique of current historiographical positions on the "birth" of opera, see Leopold 2003). When artifacts are kept at the center of generic thinking, the coming into being of a new artistic genre is always conceptualized theoretically and narrated historically as the retrospective naming of a group of works as belonging to a new genre. But this model does not function well for opera, which was discussed, imagined, and invoked well before works recognized as eventually instantiating the genre were actually performed. The inevitable question arises of how opera could be conceived of—even if not explicitly named as such—in the absence of actual works whose generic allegiance could be reconfigured in terms of the newly emerging genre.

A thoroughly discursive perspective on the "birth" of opera helps circumvent this theoretical impasse, changing the terms in which the question has traditionally been cast. If, from a production-centered point of view, "either one says that opera began in Florence in 1600, or one says that operatic theatre began in Venice in 1637" (Bianconi 1987: 162), from a discourse-oriented position one will probably say that opera first

appeared in Italian intellectual and courtly circles in the final third of the sixteenth century, slowly gained ground over the course of the following decades, and finally found a stable generic identity in the mid-seventeenth century. Far from suddenly appearing in a specific year, then, opera took almost a century to emerge, as seems to befit such a complex artistic manifestation.

Such a long process of genrification necessarily entailed a multiplication of overlapping but also at times contrasting discursive positions, which highlight different aspects of the process itself, and therefore of the genre in the making. It seems worth emphasizing that, in the words of film theorist Rick Altman, "no isolated part of this process actually *is* the genre; instead, the genre lies somewhere in the overall circulation of meaning constitutive of the process." Equally crucial, however, is acknowledging "the extent to which genres appear to be initiated, stabilized and protected by a series of institutions essential to the very existence of genres" (Altman 1999: 84–85). Identifying different discursive positions is not enough; they should also be placed within the institutions—meant in the broadest sense of the term—that make them possible. Moreover, account should be taken of the roles played within such institutions by individuals or groups from which the positions themselves originate.

Institutional Discourses

In the case of opera, the institutions that made crucial contributions to its genrification include academies and groups of intellectuals, courts and aristocratic circles, networks of musicians, theaters and their promoters, and different types of audiences. Obviously, different people could participate in more than one kind of institution, and therefore the discourses that originated from them could respond to multiple strategic positions. Librettists, for example, could, and in fact normally would, be associated with intellectual groups as well as courtly circles, and therefore their role in the process of opera's genrification would depend on their position within both institutions. What is more, their contributions could take different textual forms, from the actual libretto of an opera to its paratexts (generic indicator, for example, or prefatory letter, if in fact penned by librettists), and from correspondence with a composer or courtly official to theoretical tracts. Finally, each text enacts specific rhetorical strategies, which have an impact not only on the formulation of generic discourse, but also on its content, and therefore on the ways in which it participates in the process of genrification.

The numerous treatises from the final decades of the sixteenth century that performed a role in the process of opera's genrification, for example, belong to several different disciplinary discourses, and originated in different institutional spaces. To focus on one case, Angelo Ingegneri's *Della poesia rappresentativa o del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (1598) resonantly endorsed pastoral drama over tragedy and comedy, and therefore contributed to creating a favorable climate for this "third genre," whose proximity to opera is well known. Ingegneri's extended discussion of theatrical genres

places his treatise in the context of sixteenth-century debates on literary genres, which had flourished since Aristotle's *Poetics* had become more widely available and sparked the first commentaries in the 1540s. Thus, *Della poesia rappresentativa* conforms to a set of assumptions and positions specific to sixteenth-century literary theory, building on previous suggestions such as Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio's defense of the "tragedy with a happy ending" (for the relevance of this defense to opera, see Gerbino and Fenlon 2006: 477). Ingegneri dedicated his treatise, published in Ferrara, to Cesare d'Este, duke of Modena. Although the author was not directly dependent on the Estes, his endorsement of pastoral drama also belongs to the institutional space of the Este court (recently forced to cede Ferrara to the Pope and retreat to Modena), since it was precisely in this space that the genre had long been favored—one of its foremost representatives, Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (performed 1573, published 1580) was promoted, set, and performed there. Finally, Ingegneri was also a theatrical practitioner, famously in charge of staging Sophocles' *Edipo re* (with Andrea Gabrieli's musical setting of the choruses) for the inauguration of Vicenza's Teatro Olimpico in 1585, and *Della poesia rappresentativa* stems in no small part from its author's direct experience of theatrical performance. The theater constitutes therefore a third institutional space to which Ingegneri's treatise belongs, and from which, with its emphasis on generic mixture and the affective power of performance, it contributes to a discursive climate in which opera could grow.

After having identified the main institutional spaces in which and through which opera became a genre, the next question that a discursive approach foregrounds is "for what purpose?" This is not the place to attempt even a cursory answer, given the complexity of the issue. What is more immediately relevant is to observe how the "why" influenced the "how." The struggle on the part of intellectuals to find satisfactory and broadly shared solutions to the blatant contrast between "classic" literary theory (i.e., mainly Aristotle), generally perceived as rule-binding, and unruly contemporary theatrical practices highlighted issues of verisimilitude on the one hand, and spectatorial pleasure and emotional involvement on the other. According to this discourse—which would accompany opera all along its history up to the present—opera was the genre of pleasurable and emotional artificiality, to be praised or, more frequently, bemoaned.

Conversely, what sixteenth-century courts needed and cared about was an ever more magnificent theatricalization of their rituals, made necessary by the challenges of the gradual but inexorable transition from feudal to early modern models of princely authority and, more generally, political power (see Adamson 1999 and, for a recent musical perspective, Borghetti 2008). In this context, the discourse of opera revolved around the unprecedented and awe-inspiring wonder afforded by the genre, or, better, afforded by the prince for the entertainment of courtiers and the renown of himself and his family. It should be noted that opera was by no means the only kind of theatrical entertainment devoted to this purpose, with or without music, and therefore the contribution of courtly discourse to its genrification focused not on what has traditionally been taken as its most genre-defining characteristic, that is, the musical setting of dialogue and action. If music is mentioned at all, it is in order to highlight the added dimension of splendor and pleasure brought about by its continuous presence. In this sense, it is instructive

to compare contemporary official descriptions of the musical *intermedi* performed between the acts of a play as part of wedding festivities at the court of Florence in 1589, and of the performance of Rinuccini's and Peri's *Euridice*, which we now consider the first extant opera, for a similar occasion and for the same court in 1600: they hardly differ (Weiss 2002: 1–7, 11–12).

Different still are the concerns exhibited in the institutional space of the musicians' network, which emerge most clearly in the prefaces to the published scores of the earliest operas, signed—if perhaps not always actually written—by composers. While these texts do not belong exclusively to such a space—both intellectual and courtly interests are also evident—they contribute in specific ways to opera's genrification, focusing as they do on the technical novelty of solo singing and *stile recitativo*, and on the crucial importance of skilled performers to its execution. Singer Vittoria Archilei, for example, receives effusive praise from all three composers whose "musical tales" were published in the year 1600, Peri's and Caccini's *Euridice*s and Cavalieri's *Rappresentazione di Anima e di Corpo* (Weiss 2002: 12–23).

Singing Genre, Naming Opera

Individual works naturally contributed in crucial ways to the process of opera's genrification, especially given the heightened generic self-consciousness that characterizes them—as tends to be the case for all early representatives of a genre in the making. Their texts abound in cues alerting readers/listeners to their new generic dimensions. Since, in John Frow's words, these cues are "the ways in which texts seek to situate themselves rhetorically, to define and delimit their uptake by a reader," such "aspects of the text which . . . stand out as being also, reflexively, *about* the text and how to use it" are crucial for texts whose conventions of usage have not yet been established, and whose uptake therefore needs explicit definition and delimitation (Frow 2006: 115). The earliest operas are famously introduced by prologues sung by such characters as the poets Ovid (*Dafne*, 1598) and Ariosto (*L'isola di Alcina*, 1626), the personifications of Tragedy (*Euridice*, 1600) and Music (*Orfeo*, 1607), the god Apollo (*Arianna*, 1608), and so on. Their function is typically both to make explicit the celebratory occasion of the performance, and to direct the audience's reception of the work about to be performed in terms of genre, typically by claiming, with varying degrees of emphasis, that the work itself is not a tragedy but a mixed kind of entertainment with a happy ending, set in a mythological and pastoral ambience, and in which music plays a crucial part.

Music also participates in this self-reflective discourse, starting precisely with the prologues. Their strophic form, with each stanza connected by a ritornello, can be heard as spotlighting music as a rhetorically powerful structural device, one that makes possible the sort of pleasurable emotional intensification about to be experienced in the main body of the opera, to which the words of such prologues usually call attention. Moreover, early opera's well-known penchant for characters who are renowned

musicians (Orpheus, Apollo) and who perform superior feats of musical prowess, usually taken to be a ploy to avert charges of lack of verisimilitude from the new genre, can be understood, from a generic point of view, as a way of pointing toward the crucial role played by music in opera—a way of emphasizing the novelty of music's presence and its rhetorical and affective power, rather than apologizing for it. In this sense, librettist Alessandro Striggio's choice to assign the prologue of his *Orfeo* to the personification of Music seems to acknowledge, or anticipate, the fundamental function of Monteverdi's music for the overall effect of the performance. The contribution of this prologue to the genrification of opera is therefore rather different from that of Rinuccini's *Euridice*, with which *Orfeo* shares the same subject matter. Whereas *Euridice*'s Tragedy proclaims "this is not a tragedy as you, ladies and gentlemen, normally know it, but a new kind of play," *Orfeo*'s Music sings "I, Music, am the crucial factor in the intense emotional impact that the forthcoming play about Orpheus, a famous singer, is going to have on you, dear public. Listen out!"

Perhaps the weakest contribution to the genrification of opera comes from the discursive space where genre is normally explicitly named, that is, the generic indicator on published librettos or scores. We find neither any agreement on one or few locutions, nor any significant discontinuity between what we now call operas and earlier forms of entertainment such as *intermedi*, pastoral plays, and so on. A plethora of terms circulated freely, from *favola* to *rappresentazione*, from *dramma* to *tragedia*, and from *azione* to *opera*, each term often followed by such qualifiers as *pastorale*, *in musica*, *rappresentata in musica*, *musicale*, *regia*, and so on. This is far from surprising: Generic indicators functioning as, in Gérard Genette's word, "paratexts" (that is, actually appearing on the same object where the texts are "contained," be they librettos, scores, audio or video recordings, and so on) are generally the discursive space most resistant to a process of genrification. More interesting are the rhetorical strategies of such acts of naming, and the kinds of transactions that such terms are meant to accomplish (Genette 1997). Calling a work "tragedy" means placing it squarely in the context of Aristotelian theory and its controversial sixteenth-century reception, and claiming for it arguably the most elevated position in the hierarchy of theatrical genres—despite the many challenges thrown at such hierarchy by theorists. But it also means immediately needing help from a fictional authority in the prologue to qualify that eye-catching term: Apollo in Rinuccini's *Arianna* saying that the play is going to be about love rather than war and death, but that, even so, perhaps it will revive the glories of ancient drama; or Ariosto in Testi's *L'isola di Alcina* reassuring everybody that no-one is going to die, but hopefully love's sorrows will be equally moving.

Paratextual indicators of genre stabilized only after the process of opera's genrification had come to some sort of completion, which it famously did first in Venice in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. From the abundance of terms mentioned above, *dramma*, in turn *per musica*, *musicale*, *rappresentato in musica*, and so on, emerged as by far the most popular generic subtitle. It is interesting in this respect to compare Venice with Rome, another city that saw a sustained activity of a kind that we would now call "operatic" throughout the seventeenth century. In Venice, between 1637, the year when

the first public opera theater opened, and 1650, 44 percent of libretti were designated with any one version of the locution *dramma per musica*; between 1651 and 1675, this percentage had risen to 90. In the papal capital, however, the same percentage stood at 42 between 1626 and 1650, but in the following quarter-century had climbed only to 58 (Di Giuseppe 1996). The difference between Venice and Rome is that, whereas in the former opera had become a public spectacle frequently repeated in purpose-built theaters for a paying audience, in the latter it was still tied to the courtly-academic model.

Why Venice?

The commercialization of opera in Venice has generally been seen as the crucial final step in the process of its genrification. In the words of Ellen Rosand, "opera essentially defined itself as a genre in Venice. There, and only there, three conditions existed that proved crucial for its permanent establishment: regular demand, dependable financial backing, and a broad and predictable audience" (Rosand 1991: 1). But what were the profound reasons for such regularity of demand, dependability of financial backing, and breadth and predictability of audiences? Historians have invoked, with differing emphasis, rivalry among Venetian aristocratic families; competition on the part of Venice, a "republican" state, with the princely courts of Italy; the need to give ever more magnificent, and therefore musical, representation to the self-aggrandizing ideology of the "Most Serene Republic" of Venice; an intellectual politics of subversion that found in opera's carnivalesque aesthetics an ideal artistic ground (operas were performed during the Venetian carnival, already a tourist attraction); and the desire on the part of the Venetian aristocracy—the class for which opera was performed in the first place, and that backed it financially—to see and hear represented on stage "a new, more reflective, interior sense of self" generated by the profound changes undergone by this social group at the time, one that music was particularly suited to express (Romano 2006: 407; see also, among others, Bianconi 1987; Rosand 1991; Heller 2003; Muir 2007).

For our purposes, these complementary rather than contrasting hypotheses are remarkable because they invoke a wide spectrum of institutions, and therefore discursive spaces. In a specific sense, all these spaces were peculiar to mid-seventeenth-century Venice. From a more general perspective, however, at least some of the ideologies articulated here were common to other sociopolitical contexts, or would become so over the course of the following century. It could be said, then, that it was the richness of intersecting discourses in favor of opera in mid-seventeenth-century Venice that gave it the final genrifying push it needed, and at the same time guaranteed that at least some of this force would be present somewhere else. The ground was prepared for opera's dissemination to other cities and states.

Finally, to return to Rosand's words, speaking of "regular demand, dependable financial backing, and a broad and predictable audience" means acknowledging the fundamental role of repetition in the process of genrification. This is especially the case for

such a complex artistic manifestation as opera, since, as mentioned above, its production is so complex that repeatability constitutes a fundamental requirement for it to have any hope of ever becoming a genre. This need for repetition was eventually met by a modern system of commercial production, a mechanism that, in its turn, demanded repetition at all levels in order to function. The modern market can exist only through repetition, and the same is particularly true of opera, more so than in the case of most other artistic genres. It was only when opera and the market met in Venice in the 1630s that the former found the institution fully capable of meeting its specific generic needs. At the same time, perhaps the market bound opera to repetition, and therefore convention, for the centuries to come, even more durably than the genre demanded. As early as 1650, a librettist complained that the Venetian public, having seen more than fifty operas in the span of only a few years, was "nauseated," and the desire for novelty was intense (cited in Rosand 1991: 155). In the centuries to come, opera would be characterized by a constant tension between convention and innovation, unique in its complexity as well as its self-consciousness.

Beyond Venice

Over the course of the seventeenth century, opera spread to many Italian cities and traveled further abroad. Changed contexts meant evolving generic discourses and practices, with some centers adapting the Venetian model, others welcoming the genre but changing it in order to suit local circumstances better, and others rejecting it altogether. Generally speaking, however, in the second half of the seventeenth century, each center where opera was performed knew only one kind of it. While paratextual generic indicators could be varied, broader discursive practices testify to awareness of a single genre. Outside Italy, its Italian origins were part of its identity, as the spread of terms derived from the Italian word "opera" proves: *opera* in English, *opéra* in French, *Oper* in German. Conversely, "opera" appeared infrequently in Italian, probably because it was considered too generic and imprecise (Trovato 1994: 22–29; LESMU 2007: entry "opera"). It was only over the course of the following century that this single genre splintered into sub-genres.

This statement immediately needs to be qualified in institutional and geographical terms. Intellectuals who wrote on opera were perfectly well aware already at the beginning of the eighteenth century of the existence of several different "national" traditions; the French in particular kept comparing their own to the Italian. But in the 1680s, for example, opera goers in Venice or Vienna knew only the Italian kind, *dramma per musica*; in Paris only the French one, *tragédie en musique*; and in Hamburg only the German one, *Oper* or *Singspiel*. A century later, however, in Venice they could choose between *opera seria*, *opera buffa*, and a third incipient genre sometimes called *dramma eroicomico*; in Vienna between Italian *seria* and *buffa*, and German *Singspiel*; in Paris between *tragédie en musique*, *opéra comique*, and the occasional performance of Italian

works; in London between the Italian genres and opera (mostly comic) in English; in Madrid between, again, the Italian genres and Spanish *tonadillas*; and so on.

The reasons for the emergence of different operatic genres in the eighteenth century are varied and complex, and cannot be discussed here. For the serious genres, especially *opera seria*, intellectuals tended to couch them in terms of "reform," while for the comic or "vernacular" ones (*opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *Singspiel*) the link with evolving social structures was more readily acknowledged. In any case, the category of genre itself was not questioned, even by reform-minded intellectuals. This does not mean that novelty was not praised, nor that what were considered the more deleterious consequences of convention, such as the lowering of creative and performative standards into routine, were not bemoaned. But the relationship between individual works and their genre was not generally construed in oppositional terms. The closing decades of the eighteenth century and the initial ones of the nineteenth, however, brought about a fundamental shift in the idea of genre as theorized and practiced in opera, a shift whose legacy is still strongly felt.

The Modern Rhetoric of Genre

It will not come as a surprise that the voice that has expressed most eloquently the new conception of genre in opera is Richard Wagner's. His short essay "Über die Benennung 'Musikdrama' (On the Term 'Music Drama')," first published in 1872, is devoted to the task of rejecting the generic descriptor that was beginning to be attached to his most recent operas, precisely that of "music drama," on both critical-aesthetic and historical grounds. The critical-aesthetic argument rests on the claim that his operas were totally and irreconcilably different from the rest of contemporary operatic production, and leads to an openly acknowledged fear of domestication and colonization of this utterly "other" terrain on the part of the operatic world. "The less I have felt disposed to accept [this term], the more have I perceived an inclination in other quarters to adopt the name for a presumably new art-genre, which would appear to have been bound to evolve in answer to the temper and tendencies of the day, even without my intervention, and now to lie ready as a cozy nest for everyone to hatch his musical eggs in"—hence Wagner's strongly worded suggestion that his "professional competitors" stick to the word "opera" for their works "intended for the present theatre" (Wagner [1872] 1896: 299, 302).

From a historical point of view, Wagner observes that works going "beyond their kind and custom" have retained their exceptional status across the ages: "Never has a *genre* arisen thence, a genre in which, once given its proper name, the extra-ordinary lay ready for the common use of every fumbler" (Wagner [1872] 1896: 303; original emphasis). Wagner's strategy, therefore, could not be other than "handing [my works] to the theatres without any designation of their genre at all; by this device I also think of abiding for just as long as I have to do with our theatres, which rightly recognize no other genre than 'Opera', and, let one give them . . . a 'music-drama', would make of it an 'opera'

notwithstanding." Only Bayreuth will bring salvation from "our theatres," but "the thing" shall remain, in Wagner's concluding words, "an unnamed deed of art" (Wagner [1872] 1896: 304).

The Wagnerian genealogy of modern historiographical and critical attitudes toward opera has been repeatedly remarked upon, more often than not in order to decry its pernicious influence, especially on critical assessments of non-Germanic operatic traditions. This does not mean, however, that Wagnerian undertones have completely disappeared from current discourse. This is nowhere more evident than in the treatment of the relationship between famous works and their generic contexts, where the standard maneuver consists of arguing that these works went against or at least beyond the genres in which they were initially located. This is Wagner's strategy in "Über die Benennung 'Musikdrama,'" where the rejection of the term "music drama" voices resistance to a generic definition for works supposed to go beyond the very notion of genre. This attitude does not begin with Wagner, however, even if he expressed it in characteristically strong terms, not only in the essay on the term "music drama," but throughout his writings. Rather, as I have mentioned above, it slowly emerged between the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries as part of a much larger shift in attitudes toward the notion of genre, most frequently explored in connection with literary Romanticism.

Romanticizing Genre

Romantic aesthetic theory introduced a historicist view of literary genres, promoting as a goal of contemporary literature the creation of works beyond traditional genres, often by means of some sort of fusion among them. Among the champions of this conception were the brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel (especially in August Wilhelm's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, 1809–1811, translated into French in 1813, into English in 1815, and into Italian in 1817), Friedrich Schiller (*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 1800), Stendhal (*Racine and Shakespeare*, 1823), Victor Hugo (preface to *Cromwell*, 1827; preface to *Odes et Ballades*, 1828), the Milanese intellectuals gathered around the journal *Il conciliatore*, and Alessandro Manzoni (*Letter to M. Chauvet*, 1823) (see respectively Schlegel [1809–1811] 1879; Schiller [1800] 1966; Stendhal [1823] 2006; Hugo [1827] 1971; Hugo [1828] 1980; *Manifesti* 1968; Manzoni [1823] 2008). The literature of the past was re-conceived in terms of the new aesthetic, promoting writers whose works seemed to correspond to its tenets, such as Cervantes, Calderón, Corneille, and above all Shakespeare, while demoting those who appeared blindingly to obey what were increasingly considered the shackles of literary genres. What made a literary text worthy of aesthetic appreciation and critical attention was its individuality, its uniqueness: in the words of Friedrich Schlegel, "every work is its own genre" (Schlegel 1957: 116, cited in Frow 2006: 26).

The resistance to genre that emerged with Romantic literary theory intersected with a number of interrelated discourses that gathered force or underwent profound changes

at around the same time. Among the most important is nationalism: Romantic ideas of genre were crucially, if often implicitly, inflected by ideas of the nation; specifically, each text was meant to contribute in its unique way to the "progress" of a national literature that found its *raison d'être* in its supposedly direct links with the nation's "spirit" or "essence." Awareness of the continuous expansion of literary and artistic markets also shaped Romantic genre theory. The eighteenth century saw the rise of what Jürgen Habermas ([1962] 1989) has famously called "the public sphere," the site where, among other things, the middle classes could acquire generalized aesthetic tastes. This sociocultural entity was an important factor in the formation of the Romantic anti-generic stance, which reacted precisely against such generalized, widely shared, and therefore supposedly devalued tastes. The eighteenth-century middle-class "public sphere" would then give way to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century lower-class "mass," in the process ensuring the survival of Romantic ideas of art, which not only were to contribute crucially to various twentieth-century modernisms, but would in fact come to stand for cultural modernity *tout court*.

In this sense, it is interesting to note that in English the word "genre" has been widely used to indicate kinds of artifacts, and most specifically literary texts, only from the nineteenth century. In the words of Steve Neale, the term "emerges with industrialization, mass production, new technologies, new capital, new means of distribution . . . the formation of a relatively large literate (or semi-literate) population—and hence a potential market—at a point of profound transformation in the conditions governing cultural production and the discourses and debates with which it was accompanied" (Neale 2000: 22–23). It is in this context that the adjective "generic" acquired the negative connotations that it still retains in most cases (but not in the present chapter, needless to say). If, as Terry Threadgold has put it, "before Romanticism what was Generic was Literature" (with a capital "L," that is to say, "high" literary activity), afterward "Literature" was characterized precisely by its supposed rejection of genre, which became instead a defining and negative attribute of "low," "popular" texts and other kinds of cultural products (Threadgold 1989: 121).

The Romantic aesthetics of genre, although primarily elaborated in the field of literature, had a significant impact on opera; indeed, opera contributed to it in important ways. This encounter rests on an essential contradiction, however, seldom acknowledged explicitly yet a source of endless tension. As I have said above, in the world of opera convention reigns supreme, and convention lies at the very core of the idea of genre. How could an anti-generic aesthetic such as the Romantic one be applied to an arch-generic art form such as opera? As Wagner sourly realized, one could well give theaters "music dramas," and they would turn them into "operas" no matter what. His solution was to have the *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth built. Over the course of the past two centuries, many opera composers have indeed expressed a desire for their own theater, over which to exercise total control. Since only Wagner has succeeded thus far, however, the history of opera from the early nineteenth century has often been told as a story of uneasy tension between centripetal generic forces and centrifugal authorial opposition to them.

This tale, rhetorically satisfying as it may sound, tends to sideline that the discourse of opera had become highly composite and multivoiced, certainly much more so than at the genre's inception. Perhaps the main change is to be located in the rise of the periodical press—both general newspapers and specialized music journals and magazines—which brought about the figure of the professional critic. On one hand, journalists contributed crucially to the formation of those generalized, widely shared aesthetic tastes mentioned above, against which the Romantics reacted. On the other, many critical voices worked hard to propagate the Romantic idea of genre—which we should call simply "modern" from now on—or at least a watered-down version of it. This situation, whose paradoxical character should not go unnoticed, was among the causes of the recurring trope of "the artwork of the future," an artwork that was supposed to go against the conventions of its genre and the expectations of the public with such force that its time was not the present, but the future, when its "timeless," or at least "prophetic" qualities would eventually be recognized.

That "the artwork of the future" is Wagner's expression suggests the importance newly accorded to another discursive position, that of the composer. Composers contributed ever more substantially to opera's generic discourse, for two main reasons. First, they could now take advantage of the periodical press as a forum to present their ideas and from which to shape the reception of their own works as well as others'. Second, great attention was paid to their voices because they had become the authors of operas, which were now "theirs"—as opposed to librettists' works for which they had supplied the music. Given the widely shared orientation toward resistance to genre, more often than not composers tried to direct the reception of their operas precisely in these terms. Wagner's "artwork of the future" is only the most quoted among many different pronouncements by composers trying to place their works within the rhetoric of the resistance to genre.

National Service

The trope of "the artwork of the future" generated its own share of problems, however, among them its uneasy interaction with the nation-building work to which all the arts, including opera, were supposed to contribute. The nation needed to be built in the present, or at the very least in the near future, but the future of the modern artwork often looked rather distant. Moreover, the artwork itself was supposed to be not only unique, but also a challenge to the generalized tastes of that most nation-building of classes, the bourgeoisie. While the resulting tension emerges in all national discourses on operas, it is particularly acute in the case of the German-speaking lands, for at least five reasons. First, the drive to build a nation was stronger there than in France, Great Britain, Spain, or Russia, where a nation already existed. Second, an operatic tradition that could be constructed as national, that is to say, a tradition of opera in German, was considerably weaker and younger than in Italy and France. Third, Italian operas performed in Italian

constituted a prominent presence in the operatic landscape of several German-speaking cities. Fourth, many of the works performed in German in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were translations and adaptations of Italian and especially French titles. Fifth, the Romantic conception of genre was elaborated and disseminated in the German-speaking lands particularly early and forcefully.

One of the ways in which German critics tried to come to terms with such a multilayered network of potentially contradictory forces was by emphasizing the virtues of generic mixture. Fusing current genres, especially those of Italian and French opera, into a higher synthesis that would be new (since it left convention behind) and at the same time not *too* new (since it took from Italian and French opera what was supposed best to suit the "German spirit") became the most widely acknowledged way in which operas in German could become true "German operas." This fusion had to be continually renewed, however, in order to avoid its ossification into yet another genre—a tall order indeed for authors and audiences alike, who struggled with it throughout the nineteenth century and beyond (for recent discussions of the various aspects of the German discourse on opera as genre and genres in opera at the turn of the nineteenth century, see the essays in Lippe 2007).

Generic mixture was by no means exclusive to the German discourse on opera, however. The idea of a convergence or fusion of genres was common to other national operatic traditions, notably the French and Italian ones, from the late eighteenth century onward. A distinction must be made, however, between the notion of a convergence of genres as a process of genrification, and a fusion of genres understood as the aesthetic goal of a single composer or even a single opera. The former was at work in both the Italian and French contexts. South of the Alps it presided over the emergence of late eighteenth-century "sentimental" opera and early nineteenth-century *opera semiseria*, both closely tied to developments in the generic landscape of French spoken theatre and *mélodrame* (Castelvecchi 1996; Jacobshagen 2005). In France it resounded in the discourse on the genrification of *grand opéra* in the second quarter of the nineteenth century (De Van 1996; Lacombe 2001: 226–251). The idea of a fusion of genres as a composer's aesthetic goal has been forcefully explored in the case of Verdi, for example, most often in terms of a gradual approximation to the Shakespearean dramatic ideal, as divulged particularly by the Schlegels, Stendhal, and Hugo, and best represented by *Macbeth* and especially *Rigoletto* (Weiss 1982). This said, the discourses of convergence and fusion of genres often overlap both historically and critically, and, despite the genrifying role of the former, rhetorically belong to the modern resistance to genre.

The Times of Genre

Besides nation-building and the expansion of artistic markets, this resistance also intersected with other developments specific to music and opera but general to all centers of operatic activity, those of repertory and canon. It seems difficult to ascertain any kind of

direct causal connection between the evolution of genre discourse, on the one hand, and the development of repertory and canon on the other, or vice versa. There is no doubt, however, that a link can be established between the dramatic increase in the life span of a number of operas, the claim of superior artistic quality for several among them (plus others that were canonized even if they were not part of the repertory), and the idea that they had gone against or beyond the genre into which they were originally located. As I have argued above, this idea contributed to the trope of the artwork of the future, a "timeless" entity. Thus, operas were acclaimed as timeless precisely as they entered time—performative, critical, and historiographical.

The discursive codification of the resistance to genre happened in different ways and at different times in different operatic centers and cultures, but over the course of the nineteenth century it slowly yet powerfully solidified into a trope common to all such centers and cultures. Its force was such that its influence is still strongly felt: As I have suggested above, saying that an opera went against or at least beyond the genre in which it initially participated remains the standard maneuver to promote its critical shares. The continuing currency of this trope should not come as a surprise, given that the social conditions, cultural formations, and ideological orientations that favored its spread are still at work. To mention only some of those more specific to opera, since the forces of repertory and canon still powerfully shape its production and consumption, the modern rhetoric of genre, which accompanied the formation of an operatic repertory and canon, lives on with them. A brief exploration of the modern critical traditions of a few operas of particular historiographical significance from the viewpoint of their treatment of genre demonstrates that, while the recurring theme of the breaking free from generic shackles is modulated in different tones and serves a variety of specific purposes, it ultimately both shapes and serves critical and aesthetic judgment.

Don Giovanni, Carmen, Fidelio

The first and perhaps most obvious case is that of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The generic discourse surrounding this opera in the last two centuries constitutes a striking example of the promotion of a work perceived as masterpiece in terms of its supposed stance beyond generic conventions. This trend started very early: According to the critic Friedrich Rochlitz, writing in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in 1799, *Don Giovanni* was the example to follow for German operas in its innovative mixture of comic and serious, since this brought it closer to reality (Betzwieser 2007: 30–31; see also Henze-Döhring 1986). What is of interest here is not whether *Don Giovanni* does indeed go beyond its genre, but the critical commonplace that considers it as an operatic masterpiece *because* it does so. This maneuver emerges most obviously in the debate about its generic definition. The libretto's generic descriptor, "dramma giocoso per musica," has often been taken as an indication of the unusually "dramatic," that is to say, serious, character of the plot. Exceptional status has been granted to a term that is simply one of

the "official" names of comic opera, a paratextual indicator for the object that was commonly known as *opera buffa*. Perhaps paradoxically, this critical claim can be related to the uninterrupted presence of *Don Giovanni* in the repertory of opera houses since its premiere. The generic definition became a problem in the first half of the nineteenth century, once the original generic context had been lost. Witness, for example, the standard term for *Don Giovanni* in nineteenth-century Italy, *opera semiseria*: this term evidently tries to account for what may have seemed an unusual degree of "seriousness" from a nineteenth-century point of view, one that *dramma giocoso* no longer covered. In short, claiming that in 1787 *dramma giocoso* meant something unusual and innovative is a critical move that belongs squarely to the modern rhetoric of the resistance to genre.

The case of Bizet's *Carmen* brings to the fore another aspect of this rhetoric. The supposed fiasco of the opera's premiere at the Opéra-Comique in 1875 (in reality, more a lukewarm reception than an outright failure) has been repeatedly attributed to the gap between, on one hand, the expectations of that theater's audience and the coordinates of the genre of *opéra comique* and, on the other, the serious, dramatic character of the work, especially its tragic ending. Therefore, *Carmen* initially failed because it went beyond the boundaries of the genre to which it officially belongs. The success that soon came, not by chance initially outside Paris, was due at least in part to the opera's removal from its original generic context and its transformation into an unambiguously tragic work, thanks also to the substitution of sung recitatives for spoken dialogues. From this point of view, the trend of the last few decades to restore *Carmen* to its "authentic" text, with spoken dialogues, could be implicated in an attempt to recuperate its generic originality, presumably evident from the clash between its serious tone and style (for example, in its use of recurring themes) and the interruption of musical continuity by the spoken parts. Moreover, it seems justified to suspect that in this case the rhetoric of generic subversion has also served a further ideological purpose: to keep in the background some of the other possible reasons that *Carmen* was initially unsuccessful, namely its treatment of gender, race, and class (McClary 1992).

An interesting comparison can be made between *Carmen* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. In the German-language operatic landscape of the early nineteenth century, genre was a less stable category than in mid- to late-century France. In other words, *Carmen*'s immediate generic context is unarguably that of *opéra comique*, while *Fidelio*'s is less easily identified. This creates a potential problem from the point of view of the modern aesthetic of genre. Beethoven's opera must be a masterpiece, since it is by the most famous composer of Western music. What is more, this opera failed not once, but at least twice, and was not exactly an overwhelming success in its third version. There must be no question, then, that this masterpiece went against or beyond its genre. The problem is that this genre seems rather hard to define. What to do? I would suggest that the currency gained by the notion of "rescue opera" over the course of the twentieth century is due in significant part to the need to have a genre for *Fidelio* to transcend. In 1810s Vienna, the term *Befreieungsgeschichte* (story of liberation) was often used to indicate a type of plot, culminating with the rescue of one of the protagonists, common to various types of theatrical entertainments popular at the time, and of which *Fidelio*

was considered a prime example (Rice 2007: 318–319). The concept, however, seems not to have entered operatic historiography for about a century, apparently reappearing as *Rettungs- oder Befreiungstück* (play of rescue or liberation) in Karl Maria Klob's *Die Oper von Gluck bis Wagner*, published in 1913; although the immediate context is a discussion of Cherubini's *Lodoïska*, the sentence in which the term appears includes references to *Fidelio* (Klob 1913: 281; Longyear 1959: 49). *Rettungsstück* was then translated into English as "rescue opera," and French as *pièce à sauvetage* (it is worth noting how in Italian the French term is invariably used, no doubt because it sounds so "authentic"). As David Charlton and Sieghart Döhring have demonstrated, "rescue opera" has been most often invoked, directly or indirectly, in the context of discussions of *Fidelio*, generally in order to point out how Beethoven's work transcends the traditional elements of this genre (Döhring 1989; Charlton 1992). The strategy at work here is the reverse of Wagner's discussed above. Whereas for him it was the rejection of a generic definition that supported his claim to generic subversion, in *Fidelio*'s case it is the invention of a new genre that allows us to bestow extraordinary status on the masterpiece in question.

Wagnerian Genealogies

Despite this fundamental difference, *Fidelio* performs a crucial role in the imposing genealogy that Wagner constructed for his own music drama. Wagner's strategy, especially evident in the first part of *Opera and Drama* (1851), consisted in writing a history of opera that promoted composers and works that could be drafted into the chosen group of fighters against genre, especially Gluck, Mozart, and Weber (not by chance all "Germans") among the former, and *Don Giovanni* among the latter. Wagner wrote not only the history of opera, but also his own artistic biography, in order to prove that he was able to draw inspiration from *all* operatic genres, that music drama represented a move beyond the *entirety* of nineteenth-century musical theater. *Die Feen* became a first attempt at fantastic German romantic opera. *Das Liebesverbot* followed as an ingenious fusion of serious and comic Italian style, a pleasurable excursion south of the Alps. *Rienzi* was then French *grand opéra*, thus suitably completing Wagner's initial survey of Europe's operatic landscape. Back to the fatherland, in his so-called Romantic operas, the composer put on stage allegorically the tension among the various generic tendencies of German opera, for example in *The Flying Dutchman*, a fusion as well as an overcoming of *Fidelio* and Weber's *Der Freischütz* (Wagner [1851] 1893: 12–115; see also Groos 1995–1996).

In the context of this Wagnerian rhetoric, the music drama that had to be created is *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. This opera stages the battle of genres no longer in allegorical terms, but in literal ones. In this sense, not only the comic moments of the plot, but also the very wide stylistic variety that characterizes the score represented by synecdoche operatic traditions and genres. In other words, *Die Meistersinger* promotes itself as the apex of the history and practice of operatic genres, reaffirming explicitly

that music drama comprehends and at the same goes beyond all operatic schools and genres. The essay "On the Term 'Music Drama' " appeared three years after the premiere of *Die Meistersinger*, acting as a literary postlude to the meta-operatic debate staged in this work.

The construction of music drama as a "non-genre," as going beyond the very notion of genre, resonated throughout the twentieth century, contributing to the widespread notion of Wagner as the progenitor of modernism in music. As mentioned above, resistance to genre, which originated at the turn of the nineteenth century, constituted one of the central tenets of twentieth-century modernisms, but with one crucial difference in the case of opera. Whereas in the nineteenth century resistance was to operatic sub-genres (*seria* and *buffa*, *grand* and *comique*, and so on) and national traditions, in the twentieth the genre to be resisted was opera itself (including Wagnerian music drama). This shift is connected to the progressive aging of both repertory and canon, with the vast majority of new works failing to get a foot in the former and to be admitted to the latter. In this context, opera resembled ever more a Fafner-like giant, guarding the entrance to the riches of music-theatrical resources. A reaction against this situation led to the rise of "music theater," generally defined not by what it is, but by what it is not, namely opera: in W. Anthony Sheppard's words, "music theater" is "a loosely defined definition for a genre of staged works developed in opposition to the styles, structures, and social functions of nineteenth-century opera" (Sheppard 2001: xi).

New or Old?

"Music theater" offers a revealing final perspective on the idea of genre in opera in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Music-theatrical works that explicitly posited themselves in opposition to opera appeared with considerable frequency in the 1910s and 1920s, from Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* to Stravinsky's *Histoire du soldat* and *Oedipus Rex*, and from Falla's *El retablo de maese Pedro* to Walton's *Façade*. A significant number of common traits soon emerged, well beyond these works' initial oppositional stance. This stance was perceived as the defining characteristic of the emerging genre to such a degree, however, that all the discursive components of "music theater" rallied together to preserve it and avoid any talk of genrification. The 1960s and 1970s saw this happen all over again, only even more markedly, given the much greater number of "music theater" works composed and performed. Nor does this trend show any sign of abating, if a recent book, tellingly titled *The* New *Music Theater* (emphasis added), purports to treat this by now long-emerged genre as a "still-emerging art form" (Salzman and Desi 2008: dust jacket description).

As the case of "music theater" shows, present-day discourse on genre in and around opera is still by and large dominated by the rhetoric of the resistance to genre. In the case of nineteenth- and twentieth-century operas, it could be claimed that this rhetoric is in some ways "authentic," justified precisely because it treats these operas according

to the critical discourse from which they originally emerged. What is more, as I have said above, this rhetoric can be called "authentic" not only in a historical perspective, but also in a contemporary one. Since the forces of repertory and canon still powerfully shape present-day production and consumption of opera, the discursive codification of the resistance to genre, which accompanied the formation of an operatic repertory and canon, lives on with them. The situation is rather different, however, when it comes to works from the first two centuries of opera. In historically aware critical discourse, their relationship to their putative genre is less frequently discussed than it was the case up to a couple of decades ago, since, on one hand, it would be historically inaccurate to frame it in terms of resistance, at least explicitly, but, on the other, no alternative widely shared critical model is available. Promoting works because they fulfill generic expectations, because they remain within the boundaries of their genres, or criticizing others because they go against such expectations and break such boundaries sounds preposterous, or at the very least provocative. And yet, there is no denying that, given its particularly strong genericity, opera suffers the most from a rhetoric of generic resistance, as proven by its aesthetic misfortunes over the last two centuries vis-à-vis other genres of music and theater. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the issues raised by looking at opera from the point of view of genre seem as complex and problematic as ever.

See also: What Is Opera? Operatorio? The Concept of Opera

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CHAPTER 3

MUSICAL THEATER(S)

DEREK B. SCOTT

What Makes an Opera an Opera?

Tempting as it is to look for defining structural features, my contention is that what marks out a musical stage work as an opera is more a question of musical style and, in particular, the presence or absence of musical styles associated with commerce or entertainment. I am classifying such music in this chapter as the "Third Type" in order to help clarify a category, distinct from classical or folk music, that in other countries is known by such labels as *Unterhaltungsmusik*, *variétés*, *musica leggiera*, and λαϊκή μουσική. In the eighteenth century, popular styles could be incorporated into opera, as in *Die Zauberflöte*, without creating the same definitional problems that occur following the development of a music industry. The use or adaptation of later popular styles, as in *Die Dreigroschenoper*, becomes problematic. Significantly, this stage work ran very successfully on Broadway as *The Threepenny Opera*, but it is not in the regular repertory of any major opera company.

Strong contenders among musicals for the label "opera" in the first half of the twentieth century were Jerome Kern's *Show Boat* (1927), George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935), Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* (1947), and Leonard Bernstein's *Candide* and *West Side Story* (both 1956). Then came a gap of some years, which may be put down to the impact of the rock revolution. After 1960, the musical faced a new situation: its musical style related less and less to the current mainstream popular style. Some critics make much of this. Joseph Swain calls it a "significant disjunction between the principal expressive tools of the theater and the most popular musical style of the surrounding culture" (Swain 1990: 360). Yet, although the rock style of the 1960s may have caused the musical to sound outmoded, this could scarcely have had much impact on the desire to emulate an already outmoded genre like opera. Besides, had not a similar situation arisen previously in the 1920s with jazz? An anti-opera turn could have been taken in the 1920s, when revues were challenging operettas in the popularity

stakes, but in the next decade musical comedies won out (Block 2002: 85). All the same, there have surely been no more successful jazz musicals than there have been rock musicals.

Opera, being part of the classical tradition, took on the ideological values of that tradition as they were formulated in the nineteenth century, and embraced the ideas of moving forward, progressing, and "pushing the boundaries." Thus, a twentieth-century opera was expected to position itself in some way that related to the legacy of Wagner and late Verdi. One of the major problems faced by twentieth-century opera composers was the lack of any clear path forward after *Parsifal*. Yet still the idea prevailed that no return to the old "number opera" (made up of compartmentalized arias, duets, ensembles, and choruses) was possible. This problem did not exist for the musical, but it remains a reason that an important factor in the estimation of a musical as opera-like is that it does not contain too many obviously self-contained numbers. The features that will make a musical seem like an opera may be grouped into two categories. First, there are those associated with a high-status "serious" musical style: dissonant harmony, angular melody, and irregular rhythm or meter. Special care in avoiding dance patterns, except in a parodic, ironic, sour, or bitter context, will enhance the sense of high style. Second, there are historic conventions, especially those of the nineteenth century, that are widely seen as typifying opera: love duets, revenge arias, prayer arias, mad scenes, concerted ensembles, and dramatic recitatives.

In addition, the less spoken dialogue there is, the more the piece is likely to be found operatic. Opera is not defined by its being through-composed, but it is typified by being so. Some of the most dramatic effects in opera are achieved by having a character unexpectedly speak (for instance, Violetta on her death bed in *La traviata*). John Snelson holds that the less integrated a number is in a musical, the more it weakens an operatic comparison (2004: 101). Ironically, a typical way in which the musical differs from opera came about as a consequence of moves to integrate dance (a development often associated with *Oklahoma!* and *West Side Story*). Although many operas, especially French operas, have a ballet sequence, it is often self-contained and of little dramatic import (unlike the dream sequence in *Oklahoma!*). It may well be, however, that the musical's operatic aspirations were nurtured by the critical acclaim given to musicals that followed the integrated song and dance model. Generally, musicals make fewer demands on singers, and require more in the way of acting skill—and sometimes other performance skills, such as dance, acrobatics (Coleman's *Barnum*), or roller skating (Lloyd Webber's *Starlight Express*). Critics often trace the delight in spectacle back to French *grand opéra*, but it was also a feature of nineteenth-century popular theater, especially melodrama, which often employed startling stage effects and lots of traps. Even Gilbert and Sullivan went in for such things at times—the lighted wings of the fairies in *Iolanthe* and the living portraits scene in *Ruddigore*—and the American spectacle revues of the early twentieth century should not be forgotten. Harold Prince's spectacular production was a significant factor in the success of *Phantom of the Opera*: Few forgot the falling chandelier, or the boat crossing the underground lake among rising candelabras.

Form, Style, and Status: Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*

What, in the end, defines an opera is not its form. *Die Zauberflöte* and *Carmen* cannot be distinguished as operas and *Show Boat* and *West Side Story* as musicals with reference to form alone. The crucial question is: Are they characterized predominantly by music of the Third Type? I have argued elsewhere that what happened in nineteenth-century London, Paris, New York, and Vienna changed perceptions completely about the nature of popular music and its perceived value (Scott 2008). After the revolution in popular music production in the nineteenth century, new styles developed in commercial urban environments that could not be accommodated satisfactorily within the categories of either "serious music" or "folk music." When composers wrote in popular commercial styles, they often opposed and offended the values of those who defended high art, whereas when Mozart wrote in a popular or folk-like style, it did not contradict the aesthetic values of his other music (Scott 2008: 6). However, in response to the work of Jacques Offenbach, Johann Strauss Jr., and Arthur Sullivan, the diminutive term "operetta" became the accepted label for opera that incorporated music of the Third Type. The Broadway musical differs from nineteenth-century operetta in that it mixes European music of the Third Type with American music of the Third Type, especially by assimilating African-American elements (as in the bluesy "Fish gotta swim" from Act II, scene 4, of *Show Boat*); the more it does so, the more it distinguishes itself from operetta. The first music heard as distinctly American, rather than European, had been found in blackface minstrelsy. This was an entertainment that did not call for an operatic voice, and in minstrel shows opera was frequently the subject of parody. Black musicals on Broadway in the 1890s, ragtime songs, syncopated dance music, and, a little later, blues and jazz all fed into the musical and revue, but were resisted by operetta composers. The sole example of an African-American influence in Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe* (1904) is a cakewalk, but it avoids the syncopation normally associated with that dance. Thus, to return to the inadequacy of distinctions made by reference to formal structure, Friml's *Rose-Marie* and Romberg's *The Desert Song* are more readily distinguished from *Show Boat* because of their European popular style rather than their form. Hence, it is no surprise that Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* has attracted the description "operetta," because of its European setting and extensive use of waltzes.

Stephen Citron also rejects arguments based on structure, but insists that the difference between a musical and an opera "lies in the expectations of the audience" (2001: 361). If a musical is performed by an opera company, he believes that the audience is led to think of it as opera. This is underlined by seeing singer-actors rather than actor-singers, and also by the style of singing: "Whether Lloyd Webber writes in through-sung fashion or Sondheim writes a fifteen-minute concerted number followed by dialogue is immaterial" (Citron 2001: 361). There is, indeed, a difference between operatic singers and musical theater singers, and a big problem for many lovers of opera

who turn their ears to the musical is the kind of voice and vocal technique they encounter there. It can seem exaggerated and crude in its characterization of roles. It can also be perceived as unpleasant in timbre. These reactions stem from familiarity with the operatic voice and a consequent rejection of what would be inappropriate or ugly in a traditional operatic context. For that reason, the notion that vocal skill is neglected or unimportant to the musical needs to be countered by stressing that the musical brings its own vocal demands, which are various. For example, in Jo [Josephine] Estill's method of vocal training for musical theater (developed in the late 1980s), six voice qualities are specified, determined by the position of the larynx: speech (in which air pressure on the vocal folds is high), falsetto (vocal folds raised), cry (lifted larynx—as if about to moan), twang (nasal sound), opera, and belt (lifted larynx—as if about to scream) (see Estill 1997; Klimek 2005; and Kayes 2004: 154).

The issue of vulgarity of style, of course, remains. It has been suggested that, by employing the pseudonym Vernon Duke for his Broadway songs ("April in Paris" was his big hit of 1932, lyrics by E. Y. Harburg), composer Vladimir Dukelsky was able to "write songs uncomplicated by the highbrow modernism of the classical composer, while Dukelsky's music could remain undefiled by lowbrow show tunes" (Ziegel 2008: 106). The word "undefiled" here is instructive: the Third Type leaves a stain. This has been true since the days of the Strauss family in nineteenth-century Vienna (Riethmüller 1995: 1–17; Scott 2008: 88–89). Somewhat unexpectedly, however, the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" became subject to increasing erosion shortly after a last sustained attempt was made to pin down their social meanings in Pierre Bourdieu's aesthetic critique *Distinction* (1979), and this was bound to affect artistic production. Thus, Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* appeared at an interesting moment when cultural categories were beginning to shift. It is not easy to classify the show tune elements in *Sweeney* as "lowbrow"—and that is only partly because of their often ironic function in the drama. For this reason alone, the debate about whether it is an opera or a musical is sure to continue. Swain suggests that Sondheim's domination of the Broadway stage in the 1970s and 1980s is "best described, perhaps, as a triumph of integrity over commercial interest, marked by an unflagging seriousness of purpose and an astounding dramatic range" (Swain 1990: 319). The key features of high-status artistic endorsement are here: integrity versus commerce, seriousness versus entertainment, and wide range versus narrowness (or repetitiveness). Few of Sondheim's works have made profits on Broadway, and that helps in terms of status.

With its almost through-composed structure, *Sweeney Todd* (1979) is regularly found by critics to approach opera more closely than his other stage works. After seeing Christopher Bond's play about the murderous barber, Sondheim had thoughts about turning it into an opera, and consulted John Dexter, a director of the Metropolitan Opera, who assured him it was suited to operatic treatment (Sondheim 1980: 3–14). Hugh Wheeler adapted Bond's play (itself based on a mid-nineteenth-century drama by George Dibdin Pitt) into a book for Sondheim to work from and create lyrics and music. There is a complicated plot and a lot of narrative, but the overriding theme of the work, for Sondheim, was obsession: "I was using the story as a metaphor for any

kind of obsession" (see Zadan 1986: 245). Todd's obsession is revenge, and Sondheim succeeds in sustaining a particular mood or atmosphere throughout. This is obtained more by the use of leitmotifs than reprises. The ostinato pattern from the opening ballad returns, for example, in Todd's song "There Was a Barber and His Wife." Swain claims that Sondheim's leitmotifs are used in a Wagnerian way, but that is open to dispute. There is no sign of Wagner's ability to develop a leitmotif: consider the transformation of the "Rheingold" motif to depict the gloominess of the opening scene in *Die Götterdämmerung*, while maintaining a connection with the cause of the gloom. The timbre of a Sondheim score is the work of his regular orchestrator Jonathan Tunick. Tunick has commented that Sondheim is thorough in detailing harmony, melody, and rhythm in his piano scores, but neglectful of instrumentation (Rockwell 1983: 218). Sondheim's musical skill is not untutored; at one point he enrolled for lessons in composition with the arch-modernist Milton Babbitt at Princeton University. The prologue of *Sweeney Todd* is reminiscent of the style of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, with its use of ostinato and the oratorio-like intervention of the "company" as choral commentators. Pedal points and ostinati take the place of functional harmony in propelling the music forward. Diatonic dissonances are important (here, the ninth especially), and so, too, is quartal harmony, which works well with modal melodies because they do not demand functional harmony.

There are set pieces in *Sweeney*, such as the love duet and revenge aria so familiar from the operatic tradition. There are also references to popular genres, as in "By the Sea" for Todd and Mrs. Lovett, which takes up the unlikely rhythm (for nineteenth-century London) of the mambo. The opening ballad makes reference to the ancient melody of the *Dies irae*, a stock feature of the horror film. Likewise, the prologue's dissonant "Gothic organ" as signifier of the demonic is so familiar that it functions in the manner of a quotation. It is not so much the demonic it signifies, but the *use* of this device to signify the demonic—in other words, there is an expectation that it will be heard as a well-worn device, just as happens in the opening credits of a Wallace and Gromit animated film of 2005 when the title *The Curse of the Were-Rabbit* flashes onto the screen. The shock effect of the screaming factory whistle at the beginning of *Sweeney* is also a melodramatic gesture. Like the "Gothic organ," it comes with ready-made associations, and those associations are readily accepted rather than thwarted. The factory whistle serves no other purpose than to shock and, later on, its screaming sound accompanies the slashing of throats. This may be contrasted with Bartók's use of the piercing interval of the semitone to indicate the presence of blood behind each door in his opera *Bluebeard's Castle*. It is a sound that leads the drama, rather than merely accompanying Bluebeard's new wife's reactions. Nevertheless, the shock devices suit the melodramatic content of Sondheim's musical: Todd's recognition of having killed his wife is another shock—though since the music has never given any emotional depth to his relationship with his wife, a shock is all it is. At the close, the company starts pointing around the theater looking for Todd, when suddenly Todd and Mrs. Lovett rise from the grave. Again, it is horror film stuff—one thinks of Carrie's hand rising from the grave at the end of Brian de Palma's 1976 film *Carrie*.

It seems that we are not supposed to become emotionally engaged with any of the two-dimensional characters who populate this piece; instead, we witness a Brechtian rejection of illusionistic theater. Brecht wanted to make an audience critically aware of the social and political consequences of the actions of characters. The chorus interjections, the self-conscious melodrama, the moment when Todd breaks frame during his "epiphany" and turns on the audience, even the caricatures of Todd and Lovett used as the logo for the show—all may be taken as Brechtian devices for preventing an audience from slipping into passive reception. But what exactly is Sondheim trying to make us critically aware of in *Sweeney*? Is it anything beyond a warning not to be vengeful, otherwise we will hurt those we love? The *Sweeney* film of 2007 introduces more dialogue and tries to achieve more "realism." Thus, the choral commentary presents a problem, and the opening ballad is omitted. But *verismo* is not what *Sweeney* needs; it only puts it more firmly into the Vincent Price "camp horror" league. We already recognize a mixture of melodrama and camp horror when Todd holds his open razor up to the light and declares, "At last my arm is complete again."

Two of those who have made a case for regarding *Sweeney Todd* as an opera are John Rockwell (1983: 209–220) and Carey Blyton (1984). For Rockwell, the score is "Sondheim's most organically far-reaching to date," and the key features that make it deserving of being called an opera are: "its mosaic construction, rapidly shifting moods, recurrent leitmotifs and complex ensembles" (1983: 217). An example of a complex ensemble in *Sweeney* occurs in Act II, scene 2, when Todd, Anthony, and Johanna express simultaneously their differing feelings. Note that Rockwell's argument rests almost entirely on formal considerations. Blyton also puts forward the argument from design: "If anything gives full weight to the description of the work as an opera, it is the way in which the music is unified and given dramatic cohesion from song to song, and from act to act, by a host of technical means" (1984: 24). Rockwell maintains that it "belongs on the operatic stage far more deservedly than most of the new operas that jostle for position there" (Rockwell 1983: 217). It has, of course, been performed by opera companies in Chicago, Cologne, Helsinki, Leeds, New York, and elsewhere. Stephen Banfield remarks that it is not just in this case that the distinctions between musicals and operas "are becoming, or being, blurred," but he suggests that this may actually signal the need for "careful redefinition" (Banfield 1993: 287). Sondheim, himself, has suggested that *Sweeney* "is really an operetta, it requires operetta voices," voices he regards as capable of technical demands that fall somewhere above those required of Broadway singers, but below those required in opera (see Herbert 1989: 210, cited in Banfield 1993: 290). Tell that to the soprano who has to sing the Csárdás from *Die Fledermaus*!

Sondheim has compared his score to movie underscores, which could indicate that this may have been more of a reason for its musical continuity than any desire to emulate through-composed operas: it offered a solution to the need to maintain tension (Banfield 1993: 290). Banfield lights on another factor in the equation: *Sweeney Todd* is melodrama, and that genre relied in the past on the heightening of emotions via a

musical underscore. He notes that *Sweeney* has the pace of melodrama, a pace more akin to spoken drama than to opera (Banfield 1993: 291). Banfield singles out "Green Finch and Linnet Bird" as "really operatic," but argues that this is an exception in a score that is still firmly rooted in musical theater in both the verbal style of the lyrics and the musical genres underpinning many of its numbers—patter songs, ballads, waltzes, and such (291). The role of Mrs. Lovett certainly calls for a non-operatic voice.

Blyton remarks: "From a purely musical point of view, the most interesting thing about *Sweeney Todd* is that Sondheim reveals in it that he is very much aware of what has been going on in 'serious' music since the turn of the century" (Blyton 1984: 20). Why is this the *most interesting thing* about the music? This is not a "purely musical" point; it is an ideologically loaded point, informed by notions of serious and trivial musical styles. It merely indicates that the writer approves of Sondheim's use of features associated with musical modernism. Because Blyton finds devices reminiscent of Britten and Stravinsky, it is all the more deserving of the label "opera"—Rodgers and Hammerstein have already been dismissed, by comparison, as "cosy family entertainment" (1984: 20). Blyton explains that the work's run of only a few months at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, was because it was "heard by the wrong audience," commenting that "[o]pera audiences are clearly prepared to accept much 'tougher' stories for musical treatments than those which support musicals" (1984: 26).

A few examples will present a flavor of its musical style, which is best described as eclectic. The Beadle's "Ladies in Their Sensitivities" is Britten-like, but the sequential treatment is too obvious for Britten. The Judge, in Todd's barber's chair, sings a ballad-opera-like tune ("You See, Sir, a Man Infatuate with Love"). Tobias's "Nothing's Gonna Harm You" is a typical Tin Pan Alley thirty-two-measure ABAB structure (it is actually thirty-four bars because of a two-measure transition added after the first AB). Anthony's love song to Johanna, "I Feel You Johanna," has lots of added ninths in the harmonic accompaniment; but adding a ninth to lend extra pungency to a chord has been around in musicals for some time: you can hear it in the first chord of "The Hills Are Alive" from *The Sound of Music*. There is an ironic use of waltz rhythm for Todd's and Mrs. Lovett's "little priest" duet that closes Act I, as Sweeney and Mrs. Lovett sing about the taste of various individuals once they have been turned into pies. The demonic waltz goes back to Liszt, but late-nineteenth-century Parisian cabaret knew *grotesquerie* such as this: for example, Maurice Mac-Nab's waltz song "Les Fœtus" (Scott 2008: 205–206). Sondheim's lyrics are at his most witty and inventive here. Sondheim has enjoyed much acclaim as a lyricist, from the time when he wrote lyrics for others (for example, *West Side Story*), to the period when he began writing both music and lyrics. Jim Lovensheimer describes Todd's "Epiphany" as "some of the angriest and most disturbing music ever written for the musical theatre" (Lovensheimer 2002: 188). Perhaps, but it remains within the category of the Third Type. A decade before *Sweeney*, there was a stage work concerning a character not unlike Todd, which contained some of the angriest and most disturbing music composed for the opera house; I am thinking of Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy* (1968).

The Megamusical and the Meganovel: *Les Misérables*

I now turn to two musicals that have claims to be considered operatic, but that are also characterized by the label "megamusical." Sternfeld describes the megamusical as epic and romantic, set in the past but dealing with broad human issues, sung throughout, and spectacular (2006: 1–3). Paul Prece and William Everett argue that "the concept of the megamusical constitutes a reinvigoration of nineteenth-century French grand opera" (2002: 246), and describe megamusicals as romantic sung-through musicals on themes of human suffering (often involving a sociopolitical message), whose impact is enhanced by dazzling stage effects. They compare the spectacle of the barricade in *Les Misérables* with the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (Prece and Everett 2002: 246). It may be an oversimplification, but it is true that the set designs by John Napier are important to the effect of *Les Misérables*, especially the revolving floor (allowing the audience to see both sides of the barricade). Ironically, such things contributed to making initial reviewers wary and negative, with the critic of the London *Times*, Irving Wardle, suggesting that it was seduction by spectacle (cited in Sternfeld 2006: 186).

Les Misérables, music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, libretto Alain Boublil (1980/1989), was originally a concept album released in 1980 (orchestrated by John Cameron). Record sales enabled it to be performed in a version arranged for the arena of the Palais des Sports, Paris, in September 1980. Cameron Mackintosh, who heard the album in 1982, collaborated with the Royal Shakespeare Company and director Trevor Nunn to produce an English version at the Barbican Theatre, London, in October 1985. Herbert Kretzmer provided loose translations of Boublil's lyrics, as well as adding some of his own, such those in the song "Stars," which give depth to Javert's character (see Hugo [1862] 1995: I: 388 for a description of Javert's mindset: "infinite depth, authority, reason, *res judicata*, legal conscience, public prosecution, all the stars").[1] Valjean's role was changed from baritone to tenor to suit the performer Colm Wilkinson (Sternfeld 2006: 183). Courageously showing faith in the audience's reaction rather than that of the critics, Mackintosh moved it to the Palace Theatre in December. The first New York production premiered on March 12, 1987. At the tenth-anniversary concert in the Albert Hall in 1995, seventeen singers who had played the role of Jean Valjean in productions around the world made an appearance, each singing in the language of his own country. As I write, this musical has run continuously in London for twenty-six years (in 2004 it moved to the Queen's Theatre; see Figure 3.1). This may seem astonishing, since *Les Misérables* is a tragedy; but it is one that holds out hope, rather than engendering despair.

A difficulty for *Les Misérables* is that it is based on a canonic work of literature. On the one hand, this encourages awe, but, on the other, there are problems a reader now experiences with the tone of the original Victor Hugo novel. High on the list is the sometimes

FIGURE **3.1** *Les Misérables*, "the world's longest running musical," at the Queen's Theatre, London, January 2009. Photo Derek B. Scott.

unabashed sentimentality of the work, for instance, the description of Fantine on her deathbed: "Her whole body trembled with a kind of spreading of wings that were ready to carry her away, which you felt to be quivering but did not see"[2] (Hugo [1862] 1995: I: 380). Hugo's novel was, even in its day, accused by some critical voices of containing excessive sentimentality (Behr 1989: 21). Is the supposed sentimentalizing in the musical so much worse? It is neither my intention nor my wish to put the novel and the musical on an equal footing artistically; the cumulative effect of Hugo's panoramic vision is certainly not one of sentimentality, and at times he employs understatement to powerful emotional effect, as in Eponine's dying confession to Marius, "I think I was in love with you a little"[3] (II: 511). I do want to point out that, elsewhere, we make some allowances for the novel (we historicize it aesthetically), and we also need to make some allowances for the musical, which is as firmly situated in the context of the late-twentieth-century megamusical as Hugo's novel is in the conventions of the mid-nineteenth-century meganovel, such as Alexandre Dumas's *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* (1846).

The transformation of the French working class into Cockneys might strike some people as corny, but Hugo himself makes such a connection: "Jean Valjean had stolen a loaf of bread. An English statistic notes that in London four out of five thefts have hunger as their immediate cause"[4] (Hugo [1862] 1995: I: 140). Hugo also claims that Paris had its own Cockneys: its Cockney is called *le gandin*[5] (1: 749). However, the English version of the musical does subject Hugo's work to a more substantial revision that aligns

it with Dickensian Cockneys. Thénardier, in his "Master of the House" song, is closer to one of Dickens's villainous rogues than to Hugo's mean and vicious creation (to observe how revisions have been made, compare the character in Hugo ([1862] 1995: I: 497–499). Some scenes in the novel do offer themselves up readily as subjects suited to musical treatment. The following words, for example, almost act as a cue for what becomes Fantine's "I Dreamed a Dream" in the musical: "[I]n the workshop . . . she often turned away to wipe a tear. It was during the moments when she thought [the French word *songer*, here, also means to dream] of her child; perhaps also of the man whom she had loved"[6] (I: 250).

In an influential text, *Opera as Drama*, Kerman articulated his "central creed" that "in opera the dramatist is the *composer*" ([1956] 1988: xiii). What is crucial, for Kerman, is the way the composer interprets the action, narration, and drama in *music*. If the music does not function in this way, he suggests avoiding the term "opera." Kerman is not alone in emphasizing the primary role of music and, indeed, he cites Edward T. Cone's contention that a crucial principle of music drama is that "every important motivation must at some point be translated into musical terms" (Cone 1954: 119, cited in Kerman 1988: xv). There is a lot to be said in criticism of Kerman's theoretical framework, which rests on a rejection of matters relating to historical and cultural context, and accepts unproblematically the notion of a single, correct aesthetic truth (asserted by means of *ex cathedra* pronouncements about values). Yet if we go along with Kerman's idea of composer as dramatist, we should ask what the music tells us about character, about psychological states, and whether or not it reveals unspoken thoughts or makes unspoken (or unsung) dramatic connections.

While the plot links together the various ramifications of the drama, the solution to the problem of musical coherence over the time span of an opera or musical has to be sought elsewhere. The leitmotif has been a successful means of achieving this, but the musical has generally looked, instead, to the use of the reprise. There is, for instance, an effective use of reprise to convey dramatic irony of situation when the music of Valjean's reaction to the Bishop's forgiveness ("Yet why did I allow that man / To touch my soul and teach me love") reappears and adds psychological depth to Javert's soliloquy (which directly leads to his suicide): "How can I now allow this man / To hold dominion over me?" This is music carrying the drama, not just enhancing it. "I Dreamed a Dream" is effectively reprised when Valjean promises Fantine he will look after her little daughter Cosette. A more tenuous link is made with earlier music in Marius's song about his lost comrades, "Empty Chairs at Empty Tables"; it is part of a poignant scene not taken from the novel and was, indeed, added for the UK production. It is based on music from the scene between Valjean and the Bishop, at the latter's words "And remember this, my brother." So, the idea of remembering provides a rather thin justification for a reprise. Sternfeld suggests that when Fantine's death scene music returns as Eponine's song "On My Own," it links the two characters (Sternfeld 2006: 201). The music for Fantine's death, however, was actually a reprise of her own song "L'air de la misère," which featured only on the original French concept album. This song was given new lyrics and became Eponine's song of loneliness in the English production. A reprise can have

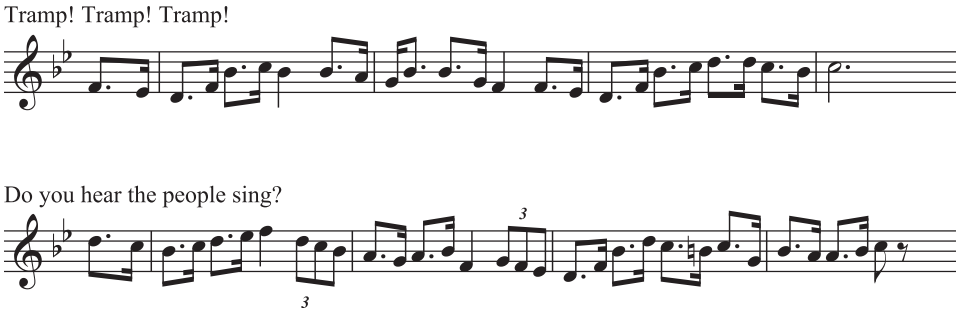
the disadvantage of eating away at character building, especially if the music is associated with more than one character; it is also less likely to be developed or transformed. Fantine and Eponine are not the only characters to share music, and the excuse that dramatic connections are being made wears thin.

Swain argues: "The most signal link of the Broadway tradition with European Romantic opera is its dependence on the reprise for incisive dramatic effect. The reprise, of course, is Broadway's answer to the leitmotif" (Swain 1990: 358). Two things are conflated here: reprise and leitmotif. But they are different devices. Many operas show an interest in the psychological and dramatic possibilities of leitmotifs, and some operas certainly make use of reprise: Dido toward the end of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* and Otello at the end of Verdi's opera of that name are both given scenes in which the poignancy of their changed circumstances is enhanced by the effective use of reprise ("Adieu, fière cité," *Les Troyens*, Act V, scene 2, and "Un bacio . . . un bacio ancora," *Otello*, Act IV). The musical, on the other hand, inherits more of the operetta's penchant for reprising a good tune for the simple pleasure of hearing it repeated. This is a feature that occurs in the earliest examples: for instance, the catchy tune of the *fable* is reprised at the end of Offenbach's *Le financier et le savatier* (1856) for no compelling dramatic reason. It is not common to find redundant reprises in opera, although the various reprises of "In the Gipsy's Life" in Balfe's *Bohemian Girl* certainly seem to fit that description.

Commenting on the musical style of Schönberg-Boublil musicals, Prece and Everett claim that they "have their musical basis in folk-like melodies that are given a lavish treatment, largely through orchestration" (2002: 247). This is only half true of *Les Misérables*, and the orchestration is often unsubtle. Cosette's song "Castle on a Cloud" has a French character, but is unusual in its alternating measures of 3/4 and 2/4. The gamin Gavroche is given a folk-like air with cheeky, Artful Dodger–type lyrics that replace the former words based on his song in Hugo's novel, "C'est la faute à Voltaire" (II: 597–599). At other times, it is not the folk tradition that is referenced but, rather, older forms of commercial popular song. The revolutionary chorus "Do You Hear the People Sing?" is reminiscent of the verse section of George Root's American Civil War ballad "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" (see Music Example 3.1).

Other popular styles used have a feel of British and American pop of the 1960s, but also French chanson of that time. Insincerity is effectively represented in the "Waltz of Treachery" for the Thénardiers (another example of the use of waltz rhythm for ironic effect). Thénardier, the landlord, is well characterized musically, and the snaking chromaticisms found in the waltz are also used to represent his sleaziness and hypocrisy in "Master of the House," a song that treads the line between cabaret and vaudeville. There is evidence that Lloyd Webber is not alone in being influenced by Puccini, since Schönberg's music for the song "Bring Him Home," which was added to the English version, bears a striking similarity to the humming chorus from *Madama Butterfly*. Some elements of modernism are present in the score—for instance, the opening of the "Red and Black" ensemble—but they are few and far between. Although much of the music was composed by Schönberg before Boublil added words, the composer's work did

MUSIC EXAMPLE 3.1 Melody of "Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!" (George Root, 1864) and that of "Do You Hear the People Sing?" (*Les Misérables*, Act II). The latter has been put in the same key as the former in order to aid comparison.



not end there. The Act I Finale, "One Day More," involving solo, ensemble, and chorus, reaches a peak of complexity with its allusions to previous themes intertwined in a contrapuntal mesh (see the lengthy excerpt given in Sternfeld 2006: 207–213; Javert's tune is new). There is subtle musical characterization within the ensemble, a technique indebted to the operatic legacy of Mozart, Donizetti, and Verdi. The music, in general, moves on constantly throughout *Les Misérables*, mixing recitative-like sections, songs, and ensembles, with barely a pause for applause. In the love scene between Cosette and Marius, one number moves into another, rather than there being a sustained love duet; it is entitled a "love montage" and includes interjections from Eponine (also in love with Marius).

Operatic Phantoms: Lloyd Weber and Hart's *The Phantom of the Opera*

The Phantom of the Opera, music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, lyrics by Charles Hart (with additional lyrics by Richard Stilgoe), is also based on a French novel—though one on a considerably smaller scale than *Les Misérables*. It opened in London at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1986 and in New York two years later. The location of the action is the Paris Opéra in 1881. The musical is intentionally more ghostly and mysterious than Gaston Leroux's novel: it concerns "a mystery never fully explained," according to the auctioneer in the prologue, whereas Leroux ensures that everything is amenable to rational explanation. The musical increases the melodrama and avoids moments of bathos, such as the Phantom's confession, "I'm neither an angel, nor genius, nor phantom . . . I'm Erik!"[7] (Leroux [1910] 1926: 161). The Phantom is more of a romantic figure, more of an "angel of music" than he is in the novel, where it is clear that it is the fault of Christine's father for putting such ideas into his daughter's head: "Her father claimed that all great

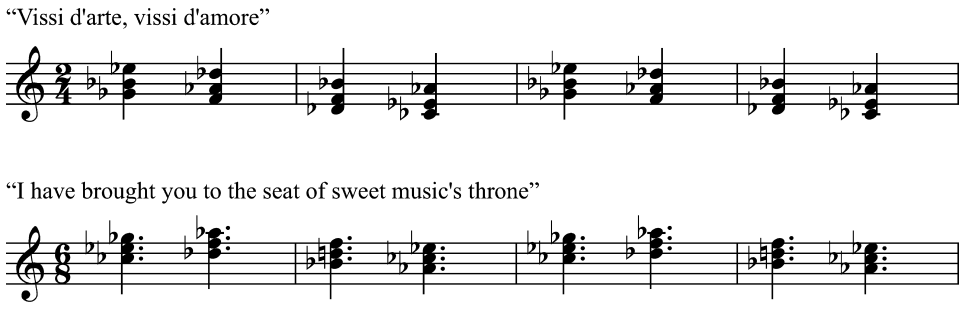
musicians, all great artists receive, at least once in their lifetime, a visit from the Angel of Music"[8] (Leroux [1910]1926: 65).

Although Lloyd Webber has worked with political themes—*Evita* (1978), *The Beautiful Game* (2000)—he has often focused on the sufferings of individuals and their search for release. Whatever may be the operatic aspirations of *Phantom*, they should not be taken as evidence of a general desire to emulate opera on Lloyd Webber's part, since many of his best-known works (*Cats*, for example) are a long way from opera, and deliberately so. However, his output has rarely been governed by the normal expectations of musical theater. Snelson has argued that his work "has challenged the identity of the musical and forced reappraisal of the genre" (2004: 190). He claims that *Phantom* "questions the boundaries of musical and opera," and asks: "Is this a popular opera or an operatic musical?" He concludes that it is neither, and that "the cross-fertilization between the various forms of lyric theatre and between classical and pop music have given the work its own identity" (Snelson 2004: 122). But what does this actually mean? Is it unique? Is it a hybrid? It cannot be categorized? Sternfeld is more specific: for her, what makes *Phantom* operatic is the paucity of spoken dialogue, the presence of operatic voices (Carlotta the diva, and Piangi the tenor), the running together of scenes, the use of motifs and recurring themes (such as the "angel of music" theme), the building of ensembles with increasing numbers of characters singing different texts, and the perception by critics of Lloyd Webber's gain in sophistication and seriousness in this work (Sternfeld 2006: 234–235).

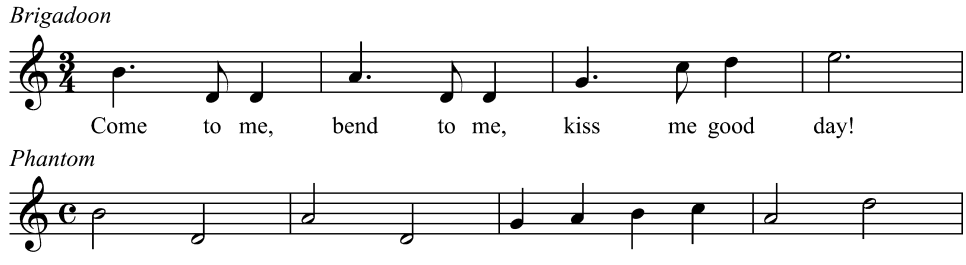
Phantom opens with a prologue (set in the present), and then has a flashback in time, as does *Sweeney Todd*. The signifiers of evil are as familiar as those in *Sweeney*: the "Gothic organ," low minor chords, dissonance, and chromaticism prominent among them (consider the music that the Phantom plays on the organ during the opening of Act I, scene 6). In Act II, scene 8, the Phantom's words "Hounded out by everyone" are accompanied by snatches of the *Dies irae*. There are also allusions to operatic styles throughout, although the predominant style of *Phantom* is still very much linked to musical theater. Sometimes a style associated with opera and another associated with musical theater are juxtaposed: for example, the vocal introduction to "Music of the Night" recollects in slightly varied form the harmonies of Tosca's "Vissi d'arte" (see Music Example 3.2), but when the song proper begins, it resembles "Come to Me, Bend to Me" from *Brigadoon* (lyrics by Alan Jay Lerner, music by Frederick Loewe, 1947) (see Music Example 3.3). Interestingly, Lloyd Webber had originally hoped to work with Lerner on *Phantom*. My intention here, I should emphasize, is to locate stylistic legacies rather than to suggest musical plagiarism.

The mixture of styles goes further, since Lloyd Webber, like Sullivan, has a wide range of stylistic references at his fingertips. Puccini often hovers in the background whenever Lloyd Webber is composing lyrical melody (from Evita's "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina" onward). Snelson offers some examples of motivic connections between Puccini and that of *Phantom* (2004: 178–180). In Act I, scene 8, the managers' duet "What a Way to Run a Business" is a number reminiscent of Gilbert and Sullivan. In contrast, the love duet for Raoul and Christine, "All I Ask of You," demonstrates, for those who doubt, that Lloyd Webber possesses a characterful melodic style of his own when he wishes. The

MUSIC EXAMPLE 3.2 Harmonies in "Vissi d'arte," *Tosca*, Act II, and "The Point of No Return," *Phantom*, Act II. The latter has been raised a tone to aid comparison.



MUSIC EXAMPLE 3.3 Melody of "Come to Me, Bend to Me," *Brigadoon*, Act I, and "Music of the Night," *Phantom*, Act I.



falling ninths in the refrain are an effective and distinctive feature. Such melodic dissonance does present problems for harmonization; unsurprisingly, "All I Ask of You" has more in the way of octave doubling than the harmonizing one would expect of an operatic love duet. However, the duet for Christine and the Phantom, "In Sleep He Sang to Me," also lacks harmonizing of voices, and here the excuse cannot be the quantity of dissonant melodic notes. The reason for so much unison and octave doubling is a mystery. After all, in Act I, scene 8, there is an ensemble for Carlotta, Raoul, and the managers in which they all express themselves simultaneously in diverse ways. The ensemble "Prima Donna" also reveals a variety of characterization.

The duet for Christine and the Phantom, "In Sleep He Sang to Me," also illustrates Lloyd Webber's insensitivity to vocal register. The low *tessitura* of the first part of the duet calls for the ominous (and sonorous) tones of the chest register of the contralto. But, the effect is weak, since the voice required to cope with the punishingly high *tessitura* of the closing section of the duet is not one that possesses any power among these low As and Gs. The problem can, to some extent, be remedied by amplification, but that will merely make a voice louder without making its timbre richer. Compare Jerome Kern's music to "Old Man River" for an idiomatic treatment of vocal register across a wide compass. In the duet under discussion, the Phantom enters a fourth higher for his verse, the music

having modulated from D minor to G minor; then there is a modulation down to E minor for Christine's next verse, and a modulation up to F minor for the last verse. The shifting tonality may increase the tension, but it is not enhanced by ever-rising pitch: the highest verse comes second. It concludes with what is meant to signify "operatic display" on the part of Christine, ending on E *in alt*. High *tessitura* and *melisma*, rather than rapid *coloratura*, are Lloyd Webber's signifiers for opera in this work. It is not just Christine who suffers: Why is the *tessitura* so high that it necessitates *falsetto* for the Phantom's "I Gave You My Music" at the end of Act I?

Lloyd Webber distinguishes stylistically the three fictional operas quoted within *Phantom*. *Hannibal* by Chalumeau represents French grand opera, *Il muto* by Albrizzio is Italian *opera buffa*, and the Phantom's own *Don Juan Triumphant* makes gestures toward modernism in its use of dissonance and whole-tone scales. It is not good use of time to debate the extent of parody in *Hannibal* or *Il muto*, because they are characterized only loosely. Characterization of *Hannibal* is so vague that a pop-inflected ballad "Think of Me" is presented as an unlikely aria from Act III. Ironically, the audience will no doubt prefer Christine's less operatic voice to that of the diva Carlotta, whom she is supposedly replacing. The song is lowered in pitch to reduce the operatic association of the high voice, but ends with a vocal cadenza on "ah," a gesture that is pointless as word painting but important as a signifier of opera. Snelson remarks that the onstage opera *Hannibal* is there to play to the "musical theatre audience's prejudice of opera, playing upon stereotypes," making the rest of *Phantom* appear more natural, despite its dialogue being sung rather than spoken (Snelson 2004: 108). Here is evidence, then, of a musical theater audience subject position, rather than that of an operatic audience. The awkward modernism of the music of *Don Juan Triumphant* in Act II can either be seen as inadequacy of technique on Lloyd Webber's part, or as a deliberate attempt to suggest such inadequacy on the Phantom's part. Once the Phantom makes his appearance in his own opera, the music loses its parodic elements; yet the duet "Past the Point of No Return" (the verse section of which uses the same music as that which introduced "Music of the Night") is supposed to be part of his opera.

Are Lloyd Webber's motifs and reprises ever developed? It is debatable. The Phantom's motif of descending chords may not develop, but Sternfeld holds that there are some less immediately memorable motifs that do mutate imaginatively, one such being what she labels the "story motif" (Sternfeld 2006: 245–247, and 381–385, which includes a list of recurring musical material in *Phantom*). But is that not because this is really more of a flexible melodic figure rather than a motif? Would one call a typical cadential formula in a recitative a motif? And what do the "story motif" transformations have to offer beyond lending cohesion to the work? Elsewhere, similar questions arise: What is the dramatic purpose of the reprise of the music-box "Masquerade" theme at "I must go—they'll wonder where I am" in Act I, scene 10? Why is Raoul singing the Phantom's music in this same scene? Why has Lloyd Webber decided to reprise the "Phantom of the Opera" tune here, as well as the introduction to "Music of the Night" (here sung by Christine)? It is difficult to find any more specific reason than that Raoul and Christine are talking about the Phantom.

The opening music of Act II makes use of reprises merely to remind people of the tunes they have heard—it has nothing to do with preparing for the first scene. In Act II, scene 3, the reprises from "She's the One" onward are of no significance except that this musical material previously served for a scene of disputation (in Act I, scene 8). However, when Raoul sings "Christine, Christine, don't think that I don't care" to the tune of "Prima donna," it could be a recognition of Christine's having just been given the opportunity of being the prima donna in the Phantom's opera *Don Juan Triumphant*. Many of the reprises add to the general cohesion of the score, but do not serve any particular dramatic or psychological purpose. That is why one is led to ask so often, "What's the point?"

Conclusion: Idiomatic Distinctions

I want to explore, in conclusion, some of the arguments set forth by Verdino-Süllwold (1990), since they relate closely to my concerns in this chapter and therefore allow me to revisit some of my arguments. She lists the "boundaries traditionally considered to separate opera from operetta and the musical" (1990: 32). The first is the supposed seriousness of the libretto, which she notes scarcely bears scrutiny in the case of some operas—she calls *Il trovatore* a "hodgepodge" (1990: 32). Moreover, this ignores the seriousness of subject matter in a number of musicals, beginning with *Show Boat* (1927). She asks: "Who can name a text in better control of such complex source material than that of *Les Misérables*?" (1990: 33). And, as another example, she adds, "if opera must explore epic passions and mythic legends, what of *Phantom*, which is truly a timeless re-telling of the beauty and the beast fable?" (1990: 33).

The second distinction she takes issue with is that operas are completely sung. This is not so, she remarks, while noting that *Les Misérables* fits this definition, as do, for the most part, *Sweeney Todd* and *Phantom of the Opera*. The third distinction is dance, although ballet was a feature of French opera. Nevertheless, in a musical it is common for the chorus and soloists to dance, too. Here, again, opera has its exceptions: Verdino-Süllwold cites Salome's dance in Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*, and the dance of the chorus in Arnold Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (1990: 34). The fourth distinction is the difference in vocal writing. Once more, there are exceptions: some operatic arias are direct and undecorated, while some operettas have vocally taxing roles—she mentions Cunégonde in Bernstein's *Candide* (1990: 34). But here there is confusion, because she has not taken account of distinctions between operetta and the musical; nor has she considered the full range of vocal techniques employed in musicals. This is where the concept of a Third Type helps to clarify matters; however, there is no recognition in this essay of popular styles of music that possess their own individual features and techniques. The "Broadway Belt" is not, for Verdino-Süllwold, a technique to be evaluated on its own terms, but merely a way in which performers with untrained voices have learned to cope with "scores made more complex than their natural

equipment can deliver" (1990: 36). An example she offers to demonstrate that vocal demands in the musical can equal that of opera is Christine's almost three-octave span in *Phantom*, which she asserts "should silence complaints that Lloyd Webber's music is shallow and uncomplicated." Unfortunately, it does not succeed in doing so, because, as I have argued earlier, there is little evidence of any idiomatic feeling for the different registers of the voice and their tonal possibilities—it is, rather, as if the voice is being treated in the manner of a piano keyboard. Lloyd Webber has a tendency to wander into an uncomfortable vocal register without apparent regard for dramatic characterization or the singer's comfort. "Memory" from *Cats* provides another example: What is the reason for the low-pitched middle section? If you know the effect that different vocal registers can have on sung words, then you can use registers to great expressive effect. That is what Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini understood, and their operas provide many examples of such knowledge being put into practice.

The fifth distinction is orchestration: the thinking being that a large orchestra and a complex arrangement will strengthen links between the musical and opera. However, noting that David Cullen helped Lloyd Webber with the orchestration of *Phantom*, and that Jonathan Tunick has provided similar services to Sondheim, Verdino-Süllwold asks: "Does the use of an orchestrator separate the musical composer from the operatic genius?" (1990: 36). She sidesteps the issue by insisting that an artistic work should stand "on its own artistic merits" (1990: 36). Agreed, but using an orchestrator surely means that the original music is composed with a much less precise attention to timbre and the idiomatic capabilities of instruments. Composing for violin, for instance, is not the same as composing for piano: It is not just a matter of staying within the instrument's range; it is knowing what is characteristic of the instrument and the technique needed to play it (you cannot, for example, make a distinction between *pizzicato*, *spiccato*, and *staccato* on piano). Furthermore, orchestrating it is not solely about timbre, but also figuration and counterpoint: For example, did the composer or the orchestrator add the instrumental countermelody to the first appearance of the words "Softly, deftly" in "Music of the Night"?

Toward the end of her article, Verdino-Süllwold (1990: 40) comes to what she calls the "trump card," the argument about the quality that "separated high art from low art." Indeed, this is not just a trump card, it is what ensures that the game is lost before it has even begun. She recognizes that Lloyd Webber's and Sondheim's stage works fail to achieve the accolade of "great art" because they are "show business" (1990: 41). Exactly so. However, her counterargument relies on dubious comparisons with the "glitzy" character of many operas and their productions. That misses the point. The music of the composers she mentions—Meyerbeer, Verdi, Puccini—related far more directly to the high art tradition than to the new popular forms of music for the nineteenth-century stage, such as music hall, minstrelsy, and vaudeville. It is not "largely an issue of contemporary taste," an idea she supports by saying "Verdi and Puccini were popular in their day" (1990: 41). The music of these composers was popular in the sense of "liked by many people" but not popular, or rarely so, in terms of possessing the same features that were to be found in music for the popular stage (including operetta). The musical is born

of the Third Type, and this is difficult to recognize only because the Anglo-American term "popular" is so vague. I must emphasize, however, that I am not using this argument in an attempt to prove that none of the works I have discussed is an opera. Instead, I am trying to explain what the problems are in categorizing them as operas.

Swain points out that there is now a musical theater repertoire, and that this has undergone a "process of classification" (1990: 8). Yet though we might speak of a canon, even a "golden age," status problems remain, such as those that surface in the "is it an opera?" debate. Rockwell puts forward an analogy that has appealing simplicity as well as an apparent logic, but remains misguided: "There was a clear precedent for making opera out of popular musical theater: Mozart himself had done something similar with the German vaudeville *Singspiel* in *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *The Magic Flute*" (1983: 210). Neither Mozart's style, nor that of the popular airs of his day, was music of the Third Type. In contrast, Sondheim's music is immersed in styles associated with the entertainment business: Rockwell remarks that his musical idiom involves "styles and procedures from every corner of the American popular song repertory" as well as opera (Rockwell 1983: 216). The composers of my other case studies are also steeped in the idioms of popular entertainment music. This, I stress, is the crucial point. What is more, contempt for consumers of the Third Type of music was scarcely any different in late 1980s New York to that felt in 1830s Vienna: "The semi-educated middle-class world loves Andrew Lloyd Webber," wrote Michael Feingold after the premiere of *Phantom*, with the same obvious distaste as the Viennese critic who announced in 1833, "A just indignation must seize everyone who, when Strauss plays, hears the names 'art and artist' desecrated by such frivolous stuff"[9] (Feingold 1988, quoted in Schönherr and Rienhöhl 1954: 100).

See also: What Is Opera? Operatorio? Genre, The Concept of Opera

Notes

1. "une profondeur infinie, l'autorité, la raison, la chose jugée, la conscience légale, la vindicte publique, toutes les étoiles."
2. "Toute sa personne tremblait de je ne sait quel déploiement d'ailes prêtes à s'entr'ouvrir et à l'emporter, qu'on sentait frémir, mais qu'on ne voyait pas."
3. "je crois que j'étais un peu amoureuse de vous."
4. "Jean Valjean avait volé un pain. Une statistique anglaise constate qu'à Londres quatre vols sur cinq ont pour cause immédiate la faim."
5. The term carried suggestions of a swank, dandy, or nut, which may not be thought to sum up the Cockney, but are part of the stereotype.
6. "dans l'atelier . . . elle se détournait souvent pour essuyer une larme. C'étaient les moments où elle songeait à son enfant; peut-être aussi à l'homme qu'elle avait aimé."
7. "Je ne suis ni ange, ni génie, ni fantôme. . . . Je suis Erik !"
8. "Le père Daaé prétendait que tous les grands musiciens, tous les grands artistes reçoivent, au moins une fois dans leur vie, la visite de l'Ange de la musique."
9. "Ein gerechter Unwille muß jeden ergreifen, der, wenn Strauß spielt, die Namen 'Kunst und Künstler' solcherart frivol entweihen hört."

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CHAPTER 4

OPERATORIO?

MONIKA HENNEMANN

Visualizing Drama

Standard genre distinctions between opera and oratorio insist that the former is staged and the latter is not; opera is secular, oratorio is sacred. Yet there are numerous works, from secular oratorios to oratorio-like operas, that challenge these facile formulas—as does the remarkably prevalent practice of putting oratorios directly onto the stage. This chapter addresses "crossover" works and "crossover" productions: pieces and practices that might expand or even call into question our ideas of what operas and oratorios actually are, or ought to be.

The supposedly increasing desire for visual stimulus is a well-worn cliché of the modern age. Theater directors seem to regard Handel operas as unperformable without a plethora of fussy stage business to distract the audience from the unheavenly lengths of the *da capo* arias, and vast expenditure on visual effects has long since constituted the largest part of the price tag of many a Hollywood film. As early as 1929, the competition with film was the driving force behind C. T. Fairbairn's London stagings of choral works. As Harvey Grace has noted, "It is not that people are less fond of music, but that the taste of today, influenced by the cinema and by profusely illustrated daily journals, demands something with movement, drama, and colour" (Grace 1929: 689). These developments have naturally been deplored by those who regard them as a harmful distraction from the supposedly core expressive media of the art forms concerned—music in the case of opera, characterization and narrative in the case of film. Yet a fascination with the visual has been at the heart of dramatic theory since the time of the ancient Greeks, in a manner that affected musical performance long before Wagner coined his famously self-serving definition of music drama as "deeds of music made visible"[1] (Wagner [1872] 2004: 306). A few decades later, an even more crucial importance was attributed to these visual elements by another multidisciplinary artist, the Austrian expressionist Oskar Kokoschka. He claimed that "the act of seeing forms the basis of human awareness in certain cultural circles"[2] (Kokoschka [1947] 1956: 362).

In Aristotle's *Poetics*, drama was the *mimesis* (imitation) of an action, a direct re-enactment that was usefully contrasted to *diegesis*, the narrative retelling of an event (2008: 1–6). Although the two categories are to some extent related in that diegesis could be considered a subcategory of mimesis, an epic poem such as Homer's *Iliad* might confine itself to the latter, while Greek tragic drama had its fair share of both modes of presentation—the chorus would routinely narrate the historical background to the dramatic actions that the audience was presently to witness, or would comment upon those that had already been seen. Some actions—for example, the bloody murders that seemed to be such a tiresome part of life for Agamemnon, Electra, and other members of the house of Atreus—were regarded as altogether too horrific for mimesis, or even potentially blasphemous, given the religious nature of Greek dramatic festivals. They were accordingly never directly staged, but rather recounted by a messenger, accompanied by the sight of the victim's mangled corpse wheeled out on a trolley—less to provide proof that the gory deed had really taken place than to offer an arresting visual image on which the messenger's speech could elaborate.

But the comfortable theoretical contrast between mimesis and diegesis can also be somewhat misleading, at least as it might affect our assumptions about the actual performance of Greek epic and dramatic poetry. The Homeric poems were not primarily written texts to be meditated upon in private, but oral works intended for presentation before an audience. It seems highly unlikely that effective performers would have completely eschewed mimetic techniques in their delivery, especially in the long reported speeches that are such a prominent feature of the narrative. In a similar fashion, the tragic chorus did not simply recite its lines—it sang and danced as well, presumably in a manner that supported the verbal imagery. Visual stimulus linked to music was, therefore, rarely absent (a point not lost on Wagner when he forged his theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*), even if its extent was inevitably limited by the technical means available—no atmospheric lighting, elaborate scene changes, or revolving stages here.

In the same way that we might lose sight of the historical realities of classical Greek drama production by focusing too exclusively on abstract theories concerning its nature, we may also misunderstand certain trends in the history of musical performance by a too rigid attitude toward distinctions of genre. All music making before the age of recording involved a visual aspect unavoidable when performance was necessarily live. Disembodied sound, so routine to us, was largely confined to the enchanting Aeolian harp, or the haunting strains captured from afar so beloved of the Romantics—witness Berlioz's shepherds' piping "offstage" in the *Symphonie fantastique*, or Schumann's fondness for effects "wie aus der Ferne" ("as if from a distance"). Only with the advent of recorded sound did it suddenly become possible to detach completely the aural aspects of music production from the visual. Before this, an audience inevitably saw as well as heard music being performed. As a result, many treatises, from C. P. E. Bach's celebrated *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* onward, emphasized the need for players and singers to look the part, to underline the expression of the music with certain mimetic gestures and a suitable demeanor—or at the very least not to undermine the effect they were seeking to create by inappropriate appearance and actions. From the

point of view of this aesthetic, a musician is himself an actor who, to quote C. P. E. Bach's adaptation of the Roman poet Horace, "cannot move others unless he himself is moved"[3] ([1753] 2008: I: 122).

Opera was only the most prominent of the musical genres that sought to provide a coherent dramatic framework to unite the unavoidably visual elements of music making with the aural. Just as its birth was directly linked to theories of Girolamo Mei and the members of the Florentine *Camerata* concerning the "re-creation" of Greek tragedy, the subsequent course of its life was also characterized by extensive aesthetic discussions, most notably in reams of prolix prose by Wagner (influenced, among others, by Adolf Bernhard Marx [1826], who in his later years insisted on the importance of extra-musical representation and drama for opera, and the pictorial powers of music in general). Yet theoretical disquisitions on what opera is, or should be, have also often had the effect of artificially isolating it from other genres—extolling it as the ultimate expression of visualized drama set to music—and of sidelining works that don't quite seem to be "proper" operas, although they may undeniably be dramas with music (see Robinson 1986; Kivy 1999; Scruton 1999).

Much-maligned crossover genres include the masque, the dramatic cantata, and the dramatic oratorio. The latter two—"sexless operatic embryos" ("geschlechtslose Opernembryonen"), to cite Wagner's scathing comment—are traditionally distinguished from opera mainly by the fact that they are not staged (1850: 102). Their only visual aspects should supposedly be the act of music making itself. They therefore confine themselves to Aristotle's *diegesis*, to the narration rather than the direct presentation of events, and thus avoid straying into the *mimesis* that is characteristic of genuine opera. It is the purpose of the central part of this chapter to argue that such a distinction is impossible to sustain historically. (Relevant recent treatments of genre distinctions include Lippe 2007; Mungen 2006; and Redepenning and Steinheuer, 2011. From the side of the oratorio, the foundational works in English are Smither 2000 and 1979–1980.)

Oratorio as Opera

The tendency to abominate rather than applaud stage settings of oratorios and cantatas is solidly entrenched in the literature. Nineteenth-century Handel pioneer Friedrich Chrysander castigated them as a "musical mishmash" (Chrysander 1870: 131) and for the musicologist Alfred Einstein they were, ludicrously, the "source of all evil" (1950: 206). The discomfort was understandable, even if the foaming phraseology was not. The staging of oratorios cuts extensively across convenient historical categories, especially after the genre had been pigeonholed as a "fit compromise between church and opera" ("treffliche Mittelgattung zwischen Kirche und Oper") by influential musical writers such as Friedrich Rochlitz (1832: IV: 77). The standard genre distinctions left no room for undesired experimentations, for if oratorios can be regularly presented on the stage like operas, what was the actual difference between an opera and an oratorio to

be? A sacred subject—at least "sacred" in the sense of being based on a biblical source? Barely, as there are obviously operas on sacred subjects (such as Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto*, deemed in the libretto *Azione tragico-sacra*), just as there are secular oratorios, not the least Schumann's *Das Paradies und die Peri* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. Works hovering inconveniently between genres include Anton Rubinstein's *Der Thurm zu Babel* (1869) and *Die Maccabäer* (1882), or Camille Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877) (see also further discussion below). Even Handel's own favorite among his oratorios—*Theodora*—is a setting of a story for which one would search the Bible in vain. Perhaps the extensive use of the chorus might surely differentiate an oratorio from an opera? Here the specter of the long-neglected French *grand opéra* of Meyerbeer once more raises its inconvenient head. The chorus is certainly one of the principal players in many French *grand opéras*, and in those sister works influenced by the French fashion for elaborate choral numbers—so much so, in fact, that it was relatively straightforward for Wieland Wagner in 1950s Bayreuth to create a production of *Lohengrin* "in the oratorio style" simply by placing the chorus in static blocks on either side of the stage (see Carnegy 2006: 300–301).

But we do not have to wait for Wieland Wagner's consciously revisionist "new Bayreuth" to come across such a style of operatic staging. Aside from such imaginative pioneers, a static treatment of the chorus, and indeed the solo singers, has also been the default for stage directors with little idea what else to do. This was, to take just one example, a criticism leveled at Pierre Audi's staging at the Metropolitan Opera of Verdi's *Attila* in 2010 (see Audi 2010). A similar mindset can be clearly seen in current reviews of the English National Opera's production of John Adams's opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*, where several critics complained that the piece was "closer to oratorio than opera," which allegedly "robs the work of a real dramatic spine" (Clements 2012).

Almost a century before Wieland Wagner, Anton Rubinstein had conceived his now largely forgotten "spiritual operas" for a stage divided into two halves—one representing heaven, the other hell. Both halves were supplied with the requisite chorus (Rubinstein 1882: 46–54). Rubinstein even advocated the idea of constructing "churches of art," in other words, a Bayreuth-style dedicated theater for the performance of "sacred opera" (see Taylor 2007: 182–183; Täuschel 2001: 139–140; Schering [1911] 1988: 470). Another much better-known example of an attempt to make opera more static by conception is Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, a so-called opera-oratorio, which premiered in 1928. But from the oratorio side of what might soon seem like an imaginary Berlin Wall separating genres, attempts to breathe dramatic life into oratorios through staged performances have taken place far more frequently than is usually acknowledged. So, does the opera/oratorio opposition, as so often presented in historiography, actually matter? We might simply consider naïve the expectation—so common in music history textbooks—that genre divisions should be black and white instead of gray. Nevertheless, this is to underestimate the ghetto-effect of our historical categories on works and performance practices that uncomfortably straddle familiar boundaries. Rubinstein's "spiritual operas" may well be forgotten today for better reasons than just that of ambiguous genre, but

the fact remains that musicology has tended to ignore even once-popular works such as Félicien David's "Ode-Symphonie" *Le désert* (1844), Coleridge-Taylor's formerly famous *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* (1899), or even at one point Berlioz's uncomfortably heterogeneous *Romeo and Juliet* and *Damnation of Faust* (on David's work, see Locke 1986 and Greenwald 2009 [especially 269–271], who alerts us to possible influences of not only David's *Le désert*, but also Haydn's *Creation*, on Verdi's *Attila*). Without the name of a major composer like Berlioz to back them up, even once-celebrated crossover pieces tended to fall into more than usually deep oblivion, occasionally to resurface in historical discussion as an example of the weird or exotic.

My contention in this chapter is that crossover works and performance practices, however despised or neglected by purists, were so common as to effectively constitute a part of the theatrical mainstream for the last three hundred years or so, throwing into question clear distinctions between opera and oratorio. Both genres were kindred ways of "visualizing drama." Staged performances of supposedly "undramatic" oratorios and cantatas appeared very frequently, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They were not, in other words, especially unusual, no more in fact than the opposite approach of "un-staging" operas for concert performances.

But this should, perhaps, not be a surprise. The practice of staging oratorios and related works was bound up with the very birth of the genre, and continues to the present day in major venues throughout the world. In 1985, for instance, the Royal Opera House in London, in conjunction with the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, chose to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of Handel's birth not with one of the composer's many operas, but with a staging of the oratorio *Samson*. Even Handel's *Messiah*, surely one of the least "dramatic" of all his oratorios, was produced by the English National Opera in 2009. (Other staged performances include those in West Berlin [1985] and Utrecht [2000], as well as by the American Opera Theater [2007], the Theater an der Wien [2009], and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra [2011].)

Staging oratorios and cantatas seems to have been a particular specialty of the Metropolitan Opera throughout much of its history. It has carried on the practice in recent years with an operatic version of Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* in the 2008–2009 season, notably advertised under the heading "opera." There seem to be no limits to what falls under that category: even Mozart's *Requiem*—in combination with the specially commissioned play "In der Schlangengrube" by Armin Petras and Jan Kauenhowe, based on interviews with dying patients at a Berlin hospice—found itself on the stage at the city's *Komische Oper* production by Sebastian Baumgarten in the very same season.

Ironically, the genre of Handelian oratorio initially took its familiar unstaged form for lack of anything better. As is well known, *Esther*, normally considered his first oratorio, was probably a reworking of an earlier masque of the same name. Handel's attempt to stage this revised *Esther* in 1732 came to nothing, owing to a ban on theatrical performances on sacred subjects by Edmund Gibson, the bishop of London (for a discussion, see Lang 1966: 278–280 and Burrows 2012: 214–215). Nevertheless, *Esther* was still performed in the King's Theatre, even if in rather restricted circumstances. The original advertisement in the *London Daily Journal* of April 19, 1732, for the forthcoming

performance announced, "The Sacred Story of Esther, an Oratorio in English, formerly composed by Mr Handel, and now revised by him, with several additions, and to be performed with a great number of the best voices and instruments." A "nota bene" below this gives details of the typically British performance compromise that had been thrashed out following the bishop's ban: "there will be no action on the stage, but the theatre will be fitted out in a decent manner for the audience. The music to be disposed after the manner of the coronation service" (*LDJ* 1732: 288–289). The slightly embarrassed "but" after the admission of no action on stage would tell us, even if other aspects of the historical background were not known, that this manner of static staging without costumes, scenery, and action was hardly the first choice. It was, however, a surprising success, which Handel wasted no time in following up.

The lack of stage action in the first Handel oratorio was, therefore, a possible concession to circumstances rather than an active choice. The subsequent performance-practice history of the oratorio genre as a whole shows a similar vacillation over exactly how theatrical an oratorio could or should be. But it was later in the nineteenth century that examples of the "dramatic" performance of oratorios increased equally dramatically in number. Attempts to inject some extra interest into a potentially static genre ranged from the addition of a few pieces of stage business in concert performances to full-scale operatic presentations. In the 1880s the *Musical Times* commented with some disdain on partially dramatized performances of Haydn's *Creation* that had taken place in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1883, and in Paris in 1888, calling them a "violation of the sacred character" of the work. Quoting a local US journal, the *Musical Times* gave some details of the antics in the former that had excited its disapproval:

> In the beginning the audience-room was in literal chaos and darkness, and at the words "Let there be light," the electric lights flashed forth with such effective brilliancy that the audience were near breaking forth into wild demonstrations and deafening applause. (*MT* 1883: 439)

Of course, dispelling the darkness in such a dazzling fashion relied on Edison's recently invented electric technology, and would have been more difficult to achieve in former times, but it was just one of the many ways that an oratorio or cantata could be made more exciting. Haydn himself had taken great care for the premiere of the *Creation* that the selfsame passage should produce an exceptional effect, permitting not even his patron and translator of the text, Baron von Swieten, to see a copy of the score beforehand in order not to spoil the surprise (Temperley 1991: 35–36). Yet the producers of the Ohio *Creation* performance had an additional surprise in store. Again according to the *Musical Times*, "the climax was reached at the conclusion of the Oratorio, when *Eve* came forth and sang 'Home, sweet home,' accompanying herself on the piano" (*MT* 1883: 439).

Other notable attempts at dramatizing oratorios and cantatas included a fully staged production in 1860 of Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* in Karlsruhe, undertaken by the composer's close friend Eduard Devrient. According to Devrient's memoirs, even Mendelssohn himself—normally regarded as a "purist" in many other aspects

FIGURE **4.1** Joseph Urban. Costume drawings for a staged performance of Mendelssohn's *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* at the Boston Opera, 1910. Joseph Urban Archive, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

of performance practice—was not against the idea of staging this work (Devrient 1872: 156), and the Devrient production proved to be one of several that subsequently took place in musical centers throughout Europe, including Vienna and Paris (see Cooper 2010: 190). A detailed account of a performance in Leipzig in 1862 was given by Wagner- and Liszt-advocate Richard Pohl, who fundamentally objected to staged productions of concerted works in principal (see Pohl 1862: 165–167). The trend reached American shores around 1910, when no less a figure than Joseph Urban—the renowned Viennese architect, children's book illustrator, and stage designer for the Vienna Opera House, the Boston Opera Company (between 1912 and 1914), the New York *Ziegfield Follies*, and the Metropolitan Opera (between 1917 and 1933)—took it upon himself to design the handsome stage sets for the American stage premiere. Figure 4.1 (from a portfolio of Urban's sketches in the library of Columbia University) gives a vivid idea of the lavish attention devoted to the costumes and sets.

But Mendelssohn was himself actively involved in other dramatic musical visualizations. He had played the piano for an 1833 private performance at the Academy of the Arts in Düsseldorf of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with four *tableaux vivants* (Todd 2003: 286). His own oratorio *St. Paul* became the subject of such treatment in the same

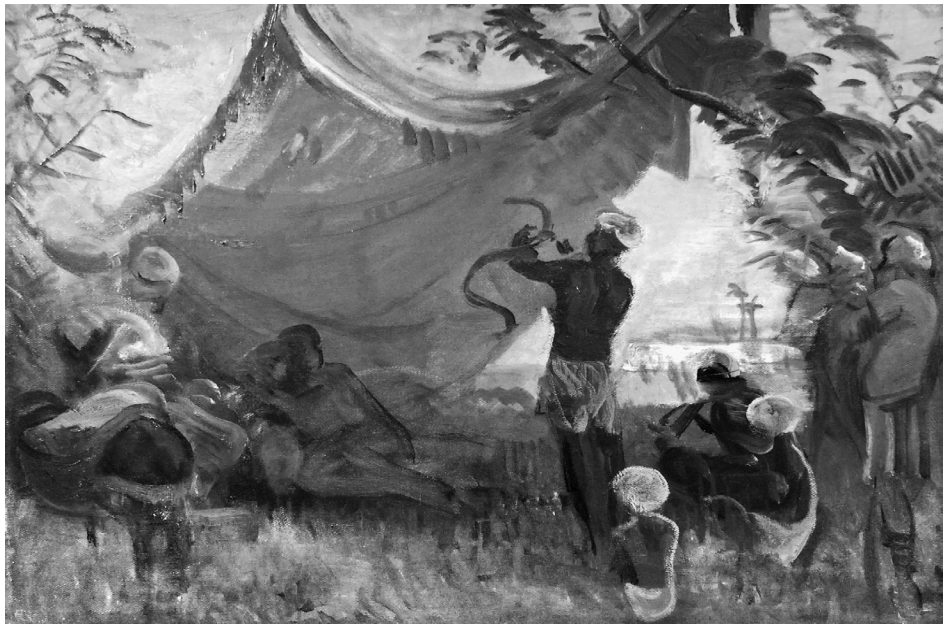

FIGURE **4.2** Oskar Achenbach, "Ananias." Painting for a dramatized performance of Mendelssohn's *Paulus* in Düsseldorf, 1870, using *tableaux vivants*. Theaterwissenschaftliche Sammlung Universität zu Köln.

city in 1870. To celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the town's *Künstlerliedertafel*, the oratorio was accompanied by dramatized *tableaux vivants* to assist the audience's attempts to follow the story. (The employment of *tableaux vivants* was by no means restricted to oratorios. Mendelssohn himself attended a performance of ten of his Lieder together with *tableaux vivants* in Frankfurt in 1839. See Seaton 2001: 693 and also Mendelssohn's letter of July 3, 1839, in Mendelssohn and Mendelssohn 1863: 161–162.)

For the *St. Paul* performance, the painter Oskar Achenbach was commissioned to provide the stage settings (see Figure 4.2); the choir and orchestra were placed in the stalls before the stage. After the overture, the curtain went up to reveal an Oriental landscape to illustrate the first scene.

The fact that this exotic picture was bizarrely accompanied by a distinctly non-exotic Lutheran chorale excited the particular disapproval of the well-known German musicologist Friedrich Chrysander. He made his relentlessly negative views known that same year in a long article entitled "Das Oratorium auf der Bühne" in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (Chrysander 1870). Yet the production that Chrysander so abominated was judged a success by many critics of a less Puritanical bent. Wolfgang Müller of the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* waxed especially enthusiastic:

> If I were asked to describe my impression of the whole performance, I could say nothing but that I found it new and original, and that all expectations I had about this

> audacious attempt were wildly exceeded. […] I believe that a performance on larger stages, such as the opera houses in Vienna, Berlin, and Munich would lead to incomparably better results.[4] (Müller in Chrysander 1870: 130–132)

In fact, pictorial assistance seems to have been especially prized in Düsseldorf. Even Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony was performed with such an accompaniment, turning it almost into the forerunner of a film score (see Smither 2000: 58; a similar performance of the *Pastoral* Symphony took place in mid-nineteenth-century London; see *MT* 1883: 439). One is reminded that a similar presentation, with diorama pictures to be commissioned from Buonaventura Genelli, was initially considered by Liszt for his *Dante* Symphony, before he decided that the torments of hell were better left to the imagination (Walker 1993: 50).

Chrysander, however, had no doubts about whom to blame for this unwelcome trend towards intrusion of opera into oratorio:

> Deep down, this whole enterprise to make an oratorio interesting through a staged performance, is owing to a taste over-stimulated by the modern operas [i.e., of Meyerbeer and Wagner], which can only be excited by unnaturally sharp spices that can be damaging for the organism.[5] (Chrysander 1870: 132)

He also turned his attack to other crossover genres, especially Anton Rubinstein's first "spiritual opera," which for Chrysander was a bastard child of opera and oratorio just as ridiculous as a staged *St. Paul*:

> In the meantime, [Rubinstein] has composed a "sacred opera" and has recently performed it in Königsberg and Vienna, to make the madness complete—in concert! A "sacred opera, consisting of solos and choirs," as the announcement claims. This musical gobbledygook, in which all concepts stumble against each other, suits the title of the chosen sacred opera like no other—"the tower of Babel"! May the undertaking end like that story. And certainly, that's how it will end.[6] (Chrysander 1870: 132)

Chrysander's contempt might have been all the greater had he known the genesis of Rubinstein's offending genre transgression. The Russian virtuoso's first successful oratorio, *Das verlorene Paradies* (1855), had in fact been conceived as an oratorio plain and simple. It was even premiered as such under Liszt in Weimar. Only in 1872 was it transformed into a "spiritual opera" as part of an attempted *Gattungsreform*, which was designed as a blow against what its composer saw as the unhealthy (even corrupt) dominance of Wagner over the operatic scene. Rubinstein did not advertise widely that the alterations needed to transform an oratorio into a "spiritual opera" were hardly extensive. In fact, they demonstrate once more the porous nature of genre divisions in the nineteenth century. The words "And God spake" were simply omitted from three of the chorus openings, thus turning the narrator's reported speech into a supposedly more thrillingly direct dramatic form (see Schering 1988: 469). From such tiny changes—from *diegesis* to *mimesis* in sixty seconds—was the entirely new genre

of "spiritual opera" created. *Der Thurm zu Babel* underwent a similar transformation. However, Rubinstein's attempts to create a "Bayreuth for 'sacred operas' " through these compositions, his theoretical writings on the topic (Rubinstein 1882), and naturally by special theaters to be created for their performance did not ultimately fail owing to the insufficient excitement of direct speech; they failed because the music offered little of interest. More sustained success was achieved by another work that straddled the genre boundaries—Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* (1877), first conceived as an oratorio, but produced alternately as an opera (for a detailed account of the opera's origins, see Ratner 1985 and Locke 1991: especially 274). Saint-Saëns had composed an opening chorus in 1857 and had begun work on an oratorio on the subject in 1867, but was convinced by his librettist, Ferdinand Lemaire, that the story would be better suited to an opera). Here the music was simply stronger, rendering less important nagging questions about exactly what sort of piece *Samson et Dalila* actually should be.

Such questions, too, became less relevant as the practice of staging oratorios and cantatas gradually became a part of the theater mainstream, albeit a part often ignored in musicological scholarship. Though the custom was not without its critics—Chrysander was hardly a lone voice—the popularity of such productions proved to be a more than sufficient counterweight to aesthetic objections.

Mendelssohn's "New *Elijah*"

Although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw notable stagings of a considerable number of oratorios, including Handel's *Jephtha* and even the little-known *Alexander Balus*, two works in particular have especially rich production histories: Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Liszt's *St. Elizabeth* (for a somewhat dated list of stage revivals of Handel's oratorios, see Dean 1959: 662–664, who notes that the most popular work for staging was *Acis and Galatea*). Staged versions of these pieces seem to have been especially enticing because they could constitute an acceptable substitute for the mature operas that their respective composers had failed to complete. Mendelssohn's long-awaited *Lorelei* had remained a torso on his death in 1847, while Liszt's much-heralded *Sardanapale*, an opera based on Byron's play *Sardanapalus*, had eventually been abandoned only a few years later in 1851. While it is likely that Mendelssohn would have gone on to complete his work (he rarely failed to complete pieces that had reached such an advanced stage), Liszt was evidently unhappy with both the libretto of *Sardanapale* and his own sketches for the music. He never seriously considered writing another opera, turning instead to dramatic oratorio (see Hennemann 2004 and Hamilton 1996).

Dramatizations of *Elijah* included productions of (possibly) 1860, 1912, and 1920 in London, 1912 in New York, 1912 in Liverpool, 1932 in Southampton, and 1935 in Sheffield. (Unfortunately, the only source that mentions the 1860 performance without providing any specifics is Kurzhals-Reuter 1978: 226; for more on Sheffield, see Mackerness 1974.) For the latter, "modern stagecraft" was designed to provide not only

"Mendelssohn's vivid music, but wonderful scenes of oriental splendour" in a performance that employed around eight hundred participants (Mackerness 1974: 140). A few years before, the *Musical Times* of November 1920 had referred to the "extraordinary effect of Mendelssohn's Elijah as transferred to the stage" by the Moody-Manners opera company, a staging that was not only a staple of the company's repertoire, but also served as a model for the New York performances a little later (*MT* 1920: 761). Their highly successful financial model (unfortunately not transferred to the United States) was based on a calculated loss in London, balanced by a respectable profit in the "provinces"—Southampton and Liverpool, in this case. One of the performances' goals was to "attract singers, especially young singers, who have little desire to join the usual Choral Societies, but who will gladly take part in spectacular productions, to study standard choral works" (Mackerness 1974: 140). A separately printed libretto booklet was provided for the Moody-Manners production (see Figure 4.3), of which possibly only one copy survives today, in the British Library (Shelfmark Northcott M). The press lauded the "magic of the stage," which apparently made for "excellent entertainment" by giving "vividness and reality to the story, which cannot be made impressive [...] with soloists and chorus in evening dress and with book in hand." One critic of *The Musical Herald*

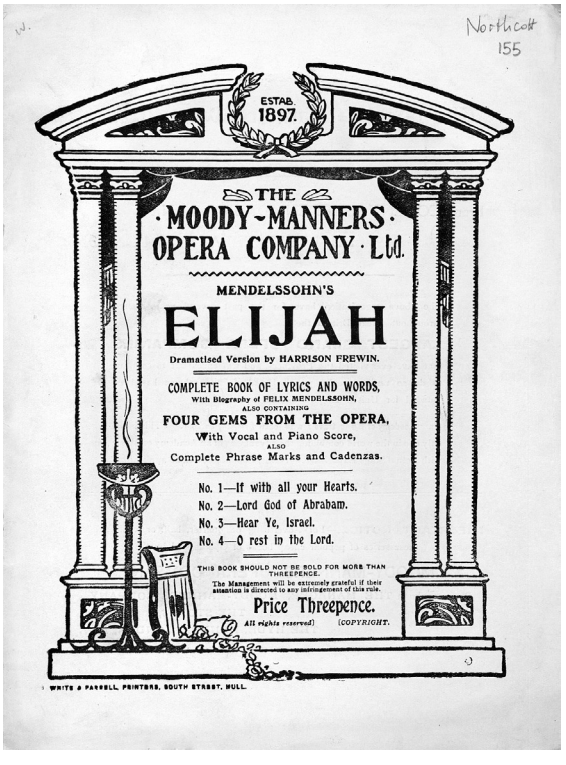

FIGURE 4.3 Front page of libretto booklet for a dramatized production of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* by the Moody-Manners Opera Company in London, 1920. The British Library, Northcott 155.