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OPERA



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Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body



Jelena Novak

POSTOPERA: REINVENTING THE VOICE-BODY

ASHGATE INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES IN OPERA

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The *Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera* series provides a centralized and prominent forum for the presentation of cutting-edge scholarship that draws on numerous disciplinary approaches to a wide range of subjects associated with the creation, performance, and reception of opera (and related genres) in various historical and social contexts. There is great need for a broader approach to scholarship about opera. In recent years, the course of study has developed significantly, going beyond traditional musicological approaches to reflect new perspectives from literary criticism and comparative literature, cultural history, philosophy, art history, theatre history, gender studies, film studies, political science, philology, psycho-analysis, and medicine. The new brands of scholarship have allowed a more comprehensive interrogation of the complex nexus of means of artistic expression operative in opera, one that has meaningfully challenged prevalent historicist and formalist musical approaches. The *Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera* series continues to move this important trend forward by including essay collections and monographs that reflect the ever-increasing interest in opera in non-musical contexts. Books in the series are linked by their emphasis on the study of a single genre—opera—yet are distinguished by their individualized and novel approaches by scholars from various disciplines/fields of inquiry. The remit of the series welcomes studies of seventeenth century to contemporary opera from all geographical locations, including non-Western topics.

Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body

JELENA NOVAK

New University of Lisbon, Portugal

ASHGATE

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*For my boys, Luka, Pavle and Dejan,
and in memory of my grandfather, Vlastimir*

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Series Editor's Preface

Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera provides a centralized and prominent forum for the presentation of cutting-edge scholarship that draws on numerous disciplinary approaches on a wide range of subjects associated with the creation, performance, dissemination, and reception of opera and related genres in various historical and social contexts. The series includes topics from the seventeenth century to the present and from all geographical locations, including non-Western traditions.

In recent years, the field of opera studies has not only come into its own but has developed significantly, going beyond traditional musicological approaches to reflect new perspectives from literary criticism and comparative literature, cultural history, philosophy, art history, theater history, gender studies, film studies, political science, philology, psycho-analysis, and even medicine. The new brands of scholarship have allowed a more comprehensive and intensive interrogation of the complex nexus of means of artistic expression operative in opera, one that has meaningfully challenged prevalent historicist and formalist musical approaches. Today, interdisciplinary, or as some prefer cross-disciplinary, opera studies are receiving increasingly widespread attention, and the ways in which scholars, practitioners, and the public think about the artform known as opera continue to change and expand. *Ashgate Interdisciplinary Studies in Opera* seeks to move this important trend forward by including essay collections and monographs that reflect the ever-increasing interest in opera in non-musical contexts.

In *Postopera: Reinventing the Voice-Body*, Jelena Novak addresses the relationship between the operatic singing body and its reinvention in recent operatic works, “postoperas” as she calls them. Engaging with a body of musical works that is highly varied musically, dramatically, with regard to production design, and in terms of what is “asked” of the voice in relation to the body, the author structures her illuminating cultural analysis both in and through opera, a site in which she shows how various discourses are encoded. Each chapter introduces a separate issue regarding body and voice, based on varying types of theoretical matrices, and illuminates the musical consequences in the repertory discussed. The author thereby illustrates the multi-dimensional reality of both postopera and the voice/body relationship and unpacks how that relationship works in the aural and the visual, the musical and the verbal. This wide-ranging and theoretically grounded study is strikingly original and remarkably distinctive, thereby promising to contribute in significant ways to the field of opera studies.

Roberta Montemorra Marvin

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Foreword

Sometime in the early 2000s I was teaching young composers and musicologists in Poland. I think it was in Radziejowice. On the last morning I collected my stuff to go back to Amsterdam and could not find the scores and recordings of my opera *Writing to Vermeer*. At that moment Jelena Novak entered the room with all the things I missed. She said she had studied (and copied) the score the whole night.

The first thing I thought was: she has the Right Spirit.

The book shows that she developed over the following years into somebody who has very profound thoughts about composition and theatre theory and practice. It triggers important discussions on postopera, music and theatre.

It is very sharp and elegant. I learned a lot from it myself.

Louis Andriessen, March 2015

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Acknowledgments

Belgrade, Amsterdam, Lisbon: these are the cities that outlined my life in large measure during the years in which this book was emerging. I cannot think about this research process without connecting it to these three different contexts within which it was embedded. It was all there: strained, curious and seductive Belgrade, energetic and floating Amsterdam, and luminous and unfathomable Lisbon. It would be strange to express my gratitude to the cities. Nevertheless, I am confident that my work on this book owes a lot to all three of them.

My special thanks go to the University of Amsterdam and Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, which provided an institutional framework for my research, and especially to Rokus de Groot, whose advice was invaluable. I am very grateful to Nuffic, which supported me for the second time with a Huygens grant in 2007–8. In 2013 I became a FCT-funded postdoc research fellow of the Research Center for Studies of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music (CESEM) in Lisbon, and the support that I have there, especially from colleagues Mário Vieira de Carvalho and João Pedro Cachopo, means a lot.

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My parents Mirjana and Tomislav, and my brother Ivan, always respected my choices, and never failed to encourage me to explore. Dejan is the one who cherished this research daily at all kinds of levels, and without his support it would have looked very different. Our sons Luka and Pavle are the most beautiful

research companions that I could ever have wished for. I can only hope that at least some of their immense curiosity, love of play, bright voices, and irresistible charm encouraged me to make this book more interesting for readers. Thank you, boys!

My wonderful grandfather Col Vlastimir Stojanović supported me in all kinds of ways since I was born. It was maybe back then when I was one year old, and when he started tape recording my first words, poems, and songs, that my interest in the power of the voice begun. My grandfather is probably the most devoted reader that I will ever have. My way of sharing this special moment with him is to dedicate this book to his memory.

PART I
Focusing on Body Singing