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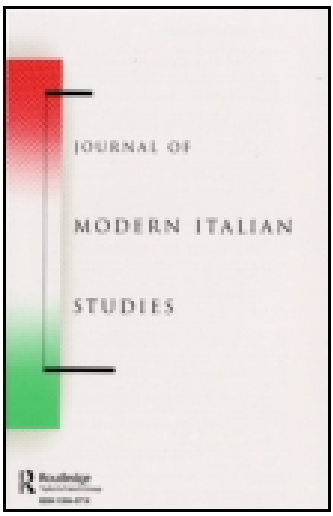

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Verdi and the Germans. From Unification to the Third Reich

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composed after the formal recognition of American independence, opera became socially more inclusive and was used to anticipate the social change expected to take place in Europe. Chapter 8 looks in particular at challenges to gender roles. In Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi's *La quakera spirituosa*, an American Quaker girl rejects a pre-arranged marriage and proposes to a Neapolitan vineyard worker, not bothered by the fact that he himself feels more attracted to men. The name of the *quakera*, Vertunna, alludes to a God who changed her sex from male to female in order to seduce a nymph. Americans did not want their role to be defined by external factors such as gender. *La quakera spirituosa*, in a production by Mozart's librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, was one of the many operas on America performed at the national court theater of Joseph II in Vienna, a theater that, very much within the spirit of the enlightenment, had been created as 'an instrument of social policy'. These operas linked democratic reform to economic prosperity, a connection that, according to Polzonetti, inspired Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*: not anticipating the French Revolution (in Hegelian-teleological fashion), but commenting on the American Revolution (as *Realpolitik*). No wonder that Da Ponte, once he got into financial trouble, looked for new fortunes across the Atlantic.

America allowed European composers to turn the world upside down. Operas on America were as revolutionary as America itself. Moreover, American operas helped to transform European high culture into global culture.

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Gundula Kreuzer (2010) *Verdi and the Germans. From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 384 pp., ISBN 9780521519199, £58.00, hard cover

Transnational approaches increasingly inform the study of nineteenth-century music and opera, presenting an alternative to works on music's alleged patriotic intentions or national meanings. Music and opera served to foster national identities, but they also undermined the age of nationalism with cosmopolitan values. Historians of music have pointed to the remarkable internationalization of the repertoire during the second half of the nineteenth century, looking at the foreign success of the French opera or phenomena such as European Wagnerism. Questioning national categories and stereotypes can lead to surprising results. The 1884 *Esposizione Italiana* in Turin was conceived as a showcase of the Italian nation. However, its musical programme included works by Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz and Wagner, but no works by Italy's *compositore nazionale* Giuseppe Verdi. Meanwhile, the most-often-performed opera composer of Nazi Germany was not Wagner but Verdi, as Gundula Kreuzer demonstrates in her fascinating book on German responses to Verdi, covering the period from the 1840s to the aftermath of the Second World War. Contrary to what ideological prejudice might have us believe, German composers never dominated the operatic repertoire of the German lands; and Italian opera played a crucial role in undermining any hegemonic ambitions.

National ideology often played a crucial part in debates about music; but there is more to German or Italian music than the creation of a German or Italian self. Often it was debates about 'foreign' music which helped to affirm national identities. What came to signify German style in music – a category questionable in itself – emerged partly in opposition to anti-Italian clichés. In the aftermath of the European Rossini fever, the alleged principles behind Italian and German music seemed simply irreconcilable, with Beethoven becoming a key figure in the ideological battles. However, German audiences were able to question the stereotypes invented by their own music critics. Kreuzer notes 'a widening rift between public and critical perceptions' (p. 34). It seems that even by the time of Verdi's death the critics failed to understand the phenomenon, with the *Frankfurter Zeitung* arguing that the composer's legacy was unlikely to last.

Verdi's *Requiem* played a key role in the German Verdi reception. After 1874, it became the country's most widely circulated religious composition. Meanwhile, Verdi entered the German operatic canon. Over time, Germany's appropriation of Verdi's works through their performances changed as much as the historical image of the composer. Even the critics now recognized Verdi's 'feel for theatrically effective situations' and 'melodic characterisation' (p. 143). The Verdi–Wagner anniversary of 1913 was the beginning of a Verdi renaissance in Germany. Increasingly, Verdi stood for universal and modern ethical, political and artistic qualities. The years around the publication of Franz Werfel's Verdi novel in 1924 were marked by a constant string of new stagings, translations and adaptations by both aesthetic modernists as well as conservatives. The Nazis were unable to reverse this trend and integrated Verdi into their own ideological repertoire of reactionary modernism.

Rather than focussing exclusively on the territory of the German Reich, Kreuzer examines responses to Verdi in the German-speaking lands, including parts of the Austrian crownlands and their successor states. The book takes a roughly chronological approach. The introduction starts with a review of nineteenth-century debates about music's supposed national characteristics. These debates were driven by the emerging middle classes, which were keen to identify differences between German and Italian music, whereas French cosmopolitanism seemed less central to their argument (adding an interesting aspect to Norbert Elias's line of argument). Bellini and Donizetti (who became Viennese court composer in 1842) often fared better with German critics than Rossini. These early nineteenth-century encounters with Italian opera set the scene for the German reception of Verdi between 1843 and 1870, when the composer became very popular also in smaller German theaters. Chapter 2 traces the German fortunes of Verdi's *Requiem* in relation to post-unification debates about the relationship between religious and national identity. German performances by far outnumbered performances of the work in Italy. While Hans von Bülow (celebrated as a star in Italy) dismissed Verdi's *Requiem*, Brahms considered it the work of a genius. His own *Deutsches Requiem* never enjoyed the same success. In 1875, Emperor Franz Joseph attended a total of three performances in Vienna and also held a private reception for Verdi. Was this the same composer whose *Va pensiero* had sparked off the Milanese uprising against the Austrians? They better had told the Emperor! As a matter of fact, in 1843 Verdi had been invited to conduct *Nabucco* in Vienna in front of the Austrian court. They must have missed what some Verdi scholars still take for granted today, that it was an anti-Austrian piece of propaganda about national liberation. Chapter 3 looks at German mediations of Verdi as a figure of international fame, starting out as an Italian *maestro* to be crowned as a *Meister*. The construction of this image, driven by an interest in the Italian's physiognomy and

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character, set the scene for the German response to his late operas, *Otello* (understood as an Italian *Tristan*) and the 'aristocratic' *Falstaff*. Verdi had reached beyond what previous commentators had understood as Italian operatic conventions, although some critics were still keen to detect German and Wagnerian influences on Verdi. Chapter 4 analyses Verdi's posthumous reception, in particular the culturally progressive era of the Weimar years. Verdi became a humane anti-Wagner. Previously less-well-known operas, like *La forza del destino* and *Don Carlos*, gave Verdi a place in German debates on universal values. Surprisingly, much of this innovative contextualization of Verdi survived the rise of the Nazis, discussed in the book's fifth chapter. While the National-Socialist (NS) regime tried to emphasize the composer's own *volkish* roots and instrumentalized him for its military alliance with fascist Italy, Verdi had long become a central aspect of Germany's operatic canon and its cultural self-image. Meanwhile, Germany's Verdi renaissance also reached back into Italy. It was the German anti-fascist Carl Ebert who revived *Nabucco* at the first *Maggio Musicale* in 1933. Julius Kapp's 1937 *Nabucco* 'de-Judaised' the opera, with the Hebrews made into Egyptians worshipping their sun-God. The theme of Kreuzer's epilogue would almost deserve a book in its own right: the Verdi reception in East and West Germany after 1945. The German *Kulturnation*, on both sides of the Iron curtain, still needed Verdi. Similar to its appropriation of Wagner, the East now suggested socialist readings of his major works, including *Nabucco*. As Kreuzer argues, for Germans the composer's *italianità* ceased to matter after the war.

The historical context of *Verdi and the Germans* is impressively well researched and informed by the full range of recent debates on national identity, transnational approaches and the spatial turn in historiography. While this is a book about Germany, much of it is directly relevant to Italian debates, as the example above of Verdi in Vienna demonstrates. Perhaps it would have gone beyond the scope of this book to look at how ideas on musical drama travelled forward and backward in Italo-German intellectual history. An obvious point of connection between Germany and Verdi is the history of the German Shakespeare renaissance since Wieland, which forms an important basis for Germany's response to Verdi. Verdi's own interest in Shakespeare went beyond finding historical plots for his operas, offering opportunities to develop the psychological conception of his characters in an almost modernist fashion. While Germans as well as Italians passionately discussed the extent to which Verdi was influenced by Wagner, his conceptual thinking on music theater also reflected upon August Wilhelm Schlegel's lectures on drama. Although Kreuzer discusses the German response to Verdi's Schiller operas, it is not clear whether they were aware of the composer's own interest in German literature, his exchange with his librettist and translator of Schiller, Andrea Maffei.

Kreuzer makes a persuasive case that we need reliable sources of reception in order to reconstruct the meaning of opera. While most musicologists are fully aware of this fact, some historians have a surprisingly relaxed attitude to methodology when it comes to opera or art. Kreuzer's book is the result of an impressive amount of research based on newspapers and musical periodicals, but also administrative sources from political and theater archives. Kreuzer's book sets a high standard for any future argument on connections between music and politics. It is one of several recent books by musicologists which historians of both Germany and Italy need to read (although most historians will reject her claim that Friedrich Meinecke was a political scientist). Perhaps the book's main point of interest for historians is the fact that it demonstrates how the meaning of a work of art changes according to the cultural and historical context in

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which it is presented. In 1944, a series of performances of Verdi's *Requiem* took place at the camp-ghetto of Theresienstadt. The choir was replaced twice; then the remaining musicians were transported to Auschwitz.

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Alexandra Wilson (2007) *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 336 pp., ISBN 9780521856881, £64.00, hard cover

In what sense and why is the operatic output of the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini to be understood as a problem? The British musicologist Alexandra Wilson proposes to provide an analysis of the role of Puccinian opera through just this lens: as a problem and one that she perceives to be structured around three central issues that coexist and overlap to a certain extent, but follow each other in chronological order. The first of these issues pertains to the question of Puccini's status as a national composer in a country that had only recently become independent and whose unification had evinced strains in the project of making a national culture. The second set of problems Wilson locates in the tensions between Puccini's compositional nationalism and internationalism and therefore the question whether he was a traditionalist or modernist. And finally – and this is only briefly discussed in the book's Epilogue – Wilson detects a third aspect of the Puccini problem, one that belongs to the current scholarship on the Italian composer: how to study Puccini today?

Wilson approaches these three sets of questions less through an analysis of Puccini's operatic output; the book contains no musical examples, and there is little by way of interpretive work of the music and the libretti. Instead, her emphasis is on the reception of Puccini and on the historical contexts in which his music was heard and performed. In this sense, Wilson's book is more a history of Puccini criticism and than a history of Puccini opera. As she remarks in her Introduction, her book 'concerns itself not so much with the aesthetic worth of Puccini's music *per se* . . . as with the ideologies that shaped the many divergent responses to it in Puccini's own time' (p. 7). Wilson thus proposes to place Puccini into a broader national context and into a series of debates about what being Italian means and how one may actually achieve such *italianità*. She does this by invoking an impressive number of contemporary observers of post-unification Italy which makes for a very interesting reading of Puccini, even if at times her analysis of her chosen authors tends to be too rapid and therefore more confirming than deconstructive of stereotypes.

In 1893, Puccini's first nationally successful opera, *Manon Lescaut*, and Verdi's last opera, *Falstaff*, premiered within one week of each other. While Verdi would die only in 1901, the question of his successor as Italy's foremost national opera composer was already in the 1890s a central one. As Wilson notes, the naming of a crown prince was of primary concern to the degree that it was opera that many Italian cultural critics saw as vital to the process of national unification. If Verdi was considered the 'bard of the Risorgimento', then his successor needed to function as a bard of the new nation, giving