

WORKSHOP

Opera smascherata – Opera between the lines: An intergeneric approach to opera production in Italy between 1860 and 1890

University of Bern, Institute of Musicology

Date: 1-2 July 2021

ROOM: 120 (Mittelstraße 43) ZOOM: <https://unibe.ch.zoom.us/j/69012672556>

A workshop in affiliation with the project “Between Grandeur and Derision: the Evolution of Musical Dramaturgy in Unified Italy”, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

Guillaume Castella (guillaume.castella@musik.unibe.ch)

Laura Moeckli (laura.moeckli@musik.unibe.ch)

Description

Musicological research on opera in the first decades after the unification of Italy has so far been considered in a highly compartmentalized way according to concepts of genre and literary register. Seen through this lens, the serious genre obtained a privileged position in the cultural panorama of the new Kingdom of Italy, while comic works, absent from the big theatres, were perceived as anecdotal. Some works of the canonical repertoire, notably the operas of Giuseppe Verdi, have raised questions about the distinction between serious and light works, as suggested by Piero Weiss in his study of the “fusion of genres”. In addition to such dramatic hybridity, the comic genres played a fundamental role in the aesthetic, conceptual and socio-political reflection of Unified Italy. This workshop aims to explore and transcend the notion of “fusion of genres” through an intergeneric approach. Their goal is to determine the way in which local and foreign repertoires participated in the construction of a national culture in Italy between 1860 and 1890 across geographical and generic borders.

La recherche musicologique a porté un regard cloisonné selon les concepts de genres et de registres littéraires sur l’opéra des premières décennies de l’Italie unifiée. Sous ce prisme, le genre sérieux prend une position privilégiée dans le panorama culturel de la Péninsule. Absentes des grands théâtres, les œuvres comiques ne relèvent alors plus que de l’anecdote. Certaines œuvres du répertoire, notamment la production opératique de Giuseppe Verdi a permis de remettre en question la distinction entre œuvres sérieuses et légères, par sa « fusion des genres » telle que la définit Piero Weiss. Outre ces singularités dramatiques du répertoire, le genre comique a joué un rôle fondamental dans la réflexion esthétique, conceptuelle et identitaire de l’Italie unifiée. Ce workshop a pour objectif d’explorer et de transcender la notion de « fusion de genres » par une approche intergénérique afin de déterminer la manière dont les répertoires nationaux et étrangers ont participé à la construction d’une culture nationale en Italie entre 1860 et 1890 par-delà des frontières géographiques et génériques.

Programme

Thursday/Jeudi 1.7.2021

- 13:30 INTRODUCTION
- 13:45 **“Sul gran teatro del Vaticano”: operatic parodies and satirical iconography in newly unified Italy** ALESSANDRA PALIDDA
(Resp: VINCENZINA OTTOMANO)
- 15:00 **WORKSHOP I : L’opéra, ses espaces et son public : interactions sociales entre genres sérieux et légers**
- 15:45 PAUSE
- 16:15 **Opéra comique and the Casa Sonzogno’s construction of Italian opera** MATTHEW FRANKE
(Resp: ALESSANDRA PALIDDA)
- 17:15 **WORKSHOP II : La figure type et les typologies vocales**
- 18:00 CONCLUSION

Friday/Vendredi 2.7.2021

- 10:15 **Return tickets around the Mediterranean: Italian operetta companies in Spain at the end of the 19th century** ENRIQUE MEJÍAS GARCÍA
(Resp: EMILIO SALA)
- 11:15 **WORKSHOP III : De l’affirmation à la négation : l’opéra et la parodie**
- 12:00 LUNCH
- 13:30 **WORKSHOP IV : Les interprètes entre spécialisation et flexibilité intergénérique**
- 14:15 **Operetta and the Sense of Loss: The Case of Italian Music Critics** ELENA OLIVA
(Resp: VALERIA DE LUCCA)
- 15:30 PAUSE
- 16:00 **Operatic Interplay in Post-Unification Milan** BIANCA DE MARIO, CARLO LANFOSSI & EMILIO SALA
(Resp: ANSELM GERHARD)
- 17:00 CONCLUSION

Participants

Guillaume Castella (Universität Bern)
Valeria De Lucca (University of Southampton)
Bianca De Mario (Università degli Studi di Milano)
Matthew Franke (Howard University in Washington)
Enrique Mejías García (SGAE - Madrid)
Anselm Gerhard (Universität Bern)
Carlo Lanfossi (Università degli Studi di Milano)
Laura Moeckli (Universität Bern)
Elena Oliva (Università di Firenze)
Vincenzina Ottomano (Universität Bern)
Alessandra Palidda (Oxford Brooks University)
Emilio Sala (Università degli Studi di Milano)

Abstracts/Présentations

ALESSANDRA PALIDDA

“*Sul gran teatro del Vaticano*”: operatic parodies and satirical iconography in newly unified Italy

In the aftermath of the Unifications of 1861 and 1871, Italy lived through years of intense social and political turmoil that deeply affected all levels of cultural production. One of the most intense tensions pervading the newborn Kingdom of Italy was that between the liberal ranks of the new politically active class, and the conservatism exercised by the Catholic Church; this tension, exemplified by the disastrous figure of Pope Pius IX, generated an intense debate that strongly affected cultural networks and products.

A key platform for the articulation of this tension was that of the periodical press, which also experienced an exponential growth in the decades surrounding the Independence Wars. Within many periodicals of the time, iconography played a particularly important role in engaging the masses and overcoming regional/dialectal boundaries, becoming a paramount medium for commenting on coeval events and directing public opinion.

Starting from this rich framework and drawing on a plurality of archival sources, the paper will discuss the extraordinary experience represented by some of the periodicals directly or indirectly controlled by Edoardo Sonzogno (1836-1920), the Milanese musical theatre enthusiast and impresario at the head of the biggest publishing empire of his time who exerted a tremendous, yet still largely unexplored impact on the cultural and musical markets of the newly unified State. The operatic parodies and satirical caricatures contained in periodicals such as *L'uomo di pietra* and *Lo spirito folletto*, where political debate was infused with a rich array of operatic references, will represent a primary tool of reflection on the role of opera in the collective imagery, as well as an already established tool of political and social commentary and a commercially successful product.

MATTHEW FRANKE

***Opéra comique* and the Casa Sonzogno's construction of Italian opera**

No investigation of comic opera in Italy in the decades after unification is complete without exploring the Casa Sonzogno's importation of French opera. *Opéra comique* was important to Sonzogno's construction of Italian opera, particularly when adapted to the conventions of the Italian stage. While nationalist in function, Sonzogno's approach was pluralistic—including comic, foreign, and mixed-genre works, in addition to the (largely tragic) canonic Italian operas. Successful or popular foreign musicians—such as Georges Bizet or Jules Massenet—were declared “honorary Italians,” thus eliding the division between native-born and foreign opera composers. Thanks to Sonzogno's efforts, several French operas of mixed genre—such as *Mignon*, *Carmen*, and *Manon*—became repertory works in Italy, and helped to define the firm's brand.

ENRIQUE MEJÍAS GARCÍA

Return tickets around the Mediterranean: Italian operetta companies in Spain at the end of the 19th century

From the 1870s until well into the 20th century, numerous Italian operetta companies circulated throughout Spain. These were permanent ensembles - often family-run - which, apart from enjoying enormous success for their impeccable stagings and performances, always displayed a very adventurous approach to their repertoires. Their programmes were nourished equally by translations of French, Viennese, of course Italian, but also Spanish and even English operettas. So for decades these companies brought to Spain such varied premieres as *La figlia del tamburo maggiore* (Offenbach), *Una notte a Venezia* (Strauss II), *Il mikado* (Sullivan), *I granatieri* (Valente) or *Il duetto dell'Africana* (Fernández Caballero).

In my presentation I will deepen our knowledge of some of these companies, nowadays unknown, from the point of view of their business model, their geographical mobility, their staging, etc. I will analyse some of their repertoires over the years, paying special attention to aspects of their reception. What I intend, in short, is to reflect on and discuss generic labels such as *opéra-bouffe*, *Wiener Operette*, *Savoy Opera* or *zarzuela*, undeniably loaded with a certain nationalist aftertaste in more conventional, popularised musicological historiography.

ELENA OLIVA

Operetta e senso di perdita: il caso della critica musicale italiana

L'arrivo dell'operetta di Offenbach nell'Italia post-unitaria e la sua prolungata presenza sulle scene nazionali ebbero anche l'effetto di riaccendere il dibattito critico intorno alla crisi e al destino dell'opera buffa. Parte della critica di stampo conservatore (tra cui figurano Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi, Francesco D'Arcais e successivamente Gino Monaldi) non vide di buon occhio Offenbach, considerandolo, al pari di Wagner, una minaccia per il teatro musicale italiano. A preoccupare maggiormente questi critici fu poi la proliferazione di nuove forme spettacolari ispirate al modello offenbachiano, fenomeno che investirà diverse città italiane a partire dalla seconda metà degli anni Settanta.

L'intervento mira a ricostruire i termini di un dibattito che si protrasse per oltre un decennio tra quotidiani e riviste specializzate, ponendo l'accento su particolari formazioni discorsive e processi emotivi che rievocano lo schema di un lutto irrisolto per una percepita e presunta scomparsa dell'opera buffa italianamente intesa.

BIANCA DE MARIO, CARLO LANFOSSI & EMILIO SALA

Operatic Interplay in Post-Unification Milan

As "powerful repositories of the cultural memory" (Carlson 2003, p. 144), nineteenth-century opera houses are the architectural legacy of nationalist cultural policies: the demand for local

theatrical traditions and the glorification of an illustrious operatic past resulted in the rise of secondary venues, a tendency which at the same time highlighted the dichotomy with institutional opera houses while blurring the boundaries of theatrical cultures.

In the early years after the Unification (1861), the proximity of several venues for musical and prose theatre was a rather new phenomenon for the city of Milan, where the dominant role of the Teatro alla Scala was constantly questioned and even parodied both in the local press and in theatres.

Our panel will focus on three inter-theatrical declinations between the 1860s and the 1870s to highlight the porosity of operatic dramaturgy and its reverberations not only across theatrical subgenres, but also between different venues and instrumental forces. The first case will zoom in on the 1866-67 season, which displayed a large number of parodies and cross-reference performances of operatic titles such as *La traviata*, *Crispino e la comare*, and *L'africaine*.

The second one will focus on a puppet adaptation of *I promessi sposi* using pre-existing materials taken from different sources – among them the opera by Petrella based on the novel of the same name by Manzoni (the Italian novel *par excellence*) and performed at the Teatro Carcano in 1871.

The third case will consider a peculiar production by the Teatro Milanese: *Annada in umid* (1872), a revue by Cletto Arrighi, forerunner of the Scapigliatura movement, which is a parody of the whole theatrical system in those years and employs pre-existing music from opera and other different genres.

Our research is part of the Project of national interest (PRIN 2017) “Mapping Musical Life: Urban Culture and the Local Press in Post-Unification Italy (MML)” which aims to reconstruct several aspects of musical life in the main urban centres of post-Unification Italy, analyzed and visualized through digital mapping (GIS).

Workshops

I. L'opéra, ses espaces et son public : interactions sociales entre genres sérieux et légers

La nouvelle organisation du système de production de l'opéra en Italie à partir de l'unification a une répercussion sur la programmation et la pratique sociale du divertissement ou du spectacle dramatique. Dans une construction hiérarchisée du panorama théâtral, les salles jouissent d'une réputation qui les contraint à une certaine identité afin de répondre aux exigences du public et d'une presse de plus en plus critique. Dans ce contexte, se pose la question du lien entre l'implantation sociale d'une salle de théâtre et la conception des genres dramatiques. Plusieurs interrogations peuvent alors émerger : y a-t-il une distinction claire et évidente entre les publics des salles de première, de seconde et de tierce importance ? est-ce que le grand opéra peut être considéré comme un genre de la haute bourgeoisie et la légèreté comique l'apanage d'une classe sociale inférieure ? les spectacles sont-ils cloisonnés ou au contraire en constante interaction ? Cette thématique cherche à questionner la manière dont différents genres se développent en vertu de leur fonction sociale à l'intérieur – et au-delà – de l'espace urbain et de l'environnement des théâtres italiens.

Opera, its spaces and its audience: social interactions between serious and light genres

The new organization of the opera production systems in Italy after unification had important repercussions on the repertoire and on the social practice of dramatic entertainment. In a hierarchical view of the emerging theatrical panorama, theatres acquire a reputation that forces them to a certain identity in order to meet the demands of the public and of an increasingly critical press. In this context, the link between the social context of a theatre institution and the dramatic genres it presents is to be rethought. Several questions may then emerge: is there a clear and obvious distinction between the repertoires and audiences of different theatre venues? Can grand opera be considered as a genre of the upper middle class and comic lightness the prerogative of a lower social class? Are performances as compartmentalized as sometimes construed, or rather in constant interaction? This discussion seeks to question how different genres develop by virtue of their social function within (and beyond) the urban space and the environment of Italian theatres.

II. Les figures types et les typologies vocales

L'une des réflexions fondamentales de la critique de l'Italie unifiée concerne l'utilisation des stéréotypes dramatiques et des anciennes conventions de l'opéra. Qu'il s'agisse de l'opposition entre « *forma* » et « *formula* » ou de la menace de la tradition vocale du « *bel canto* » par le « *canto drammatico* » à connotation outre-alpine, la question de l'utilisation des figures types s'impose dans la réflexion concernant l'identité du théâtre en musique. À travers cette thématique, nous souhaitons questionner la vision des compositeurs, des librettistes ou de la réception concernant l'exploitation des ressorts comiques et dramatiques conventionnels allant des anciens masques de la *commedia dell'arte* à la typologie vocale hiérarchisée de la tradition opératique, et ce par une réflexion sur l'interaction entre genres sérieux et légers.

Dramatic types and vocal typologies

One of the fundamental critical reflections in unified Italy revolves around the use of dramatic stereotypes and conventional typologies of opera. Whether in the opposition between “forma” and “formula”, or the perceived cross-Alpine threat of “canto drammatico” to the vocal tradition of “bel canto”, the questions of the types and typologies underlies many reflections concerning the identity of music theatre. With this theme, we wish to examine the approaches of composers, librettists and audiences concerning the perception of conventional means of comic and dramatic creation, from the ancient masks of the *commedia dell'arte* to the hierarchical vocal typologies of the operatic tradition, in the interaction between serious and light genres.

III. De l'affirmation à la négation : l'opéra et la parodie

Dans les années 1860, l'émergence de l'opérette, nommée « *opera-parodia* » par Ghislanzoni, accompagne d'autres phénomènes parodiques locaux dans l'Italie unifiée. Qu'il s'agisse des *opérettes* à la Offenbach proposées au Teatro Milanese ou des parodies napolitaines du « grand répertoire », plus qu'un épiphénomène la parodie joue un rôle de premier plan dans la

construction culturelle de la péninsule. En plus de reconsidérer la définition même du genre parodique, qui va de la simple réécriture à la dérision critique, le but de cette thématique est de questionner la manière d’appréhender ce type de répertoire d’un point de vue historiographique et esthétique. Dans une perspective intergénérique, quel est l’impact de la parodie sur le développement du genre sérieux ou « canonique » ? D’autre part, la parodie est-elle une simple remise en question des codes et des formes de l’*opera buffa*, ou la construction d’un nouvel humour qui émerge dans le genre de la comédie ?

From affirmation to negation: opera and parody

In the 1860s, the emergence of the operetta, labelled “opera-parodia” by Ghislanzoni, occurred alongside local parodic phenomena in various areas of unified Italy. Rather than an epiphenomenon, creations such as the Offenbachian *operette* proposed at the Teatro Milanese or the Neapolitan parodies of the “grand repertoire” played a leading role in cultural construction on the peninsula. In this discussion, we question the very definition of the parodic genre ranging from simple rewriting to critical derision, as well as the ways of apprehending this type of repertoire from a historiographic or aesthetic point of view. From an intergeneric perspective, what is the impact of parody on the development of serious or “canonical” genres? Furthermore does parody function as a simple questioning of the codes and forms of *opera buffa*, or does it enable the construction of a new humour that permeates into the genres of comedy?

IV. Les interprètes entre spécialisation et flexibilité intergénérique

Si la question de l’identité d’un genre se pose tant d’un point de vue esthétique que d’un point de vue social, elle touche également la question des interprètes et producteurs. Le musicien, la troupe itinérante, le metteur en scène ou encore la compagnie d’opéra sont fondamentalement impliqués dans la diffusion du répertoire. Qu’il s’agisse de la perte d’importance de certains genres en raison du manque de personnel qualifié ou des succès d’œuvres destinées aux interprètes chevronnés et à des mises en scène grandioses, les qualités des interprètes impactent la construction identitaire du panorama opératique italien. En sus, la proximité des répertoires dans certains centres dramatiques a-t-elle conduit les acteurs du monde théâtral à se diversifier en touchant indifféremment à une pluralité de genres opératiques ? ou au contraire, est-ce que l’affirmation de genres contrastants est conditionnée par la spécialisation des interprètes ? Cette thématique ouvre des champs tels que l’étude historique de la formation des interprètes, l’observation du mouvement national et international des chanteurs et l’analyse des différentes représentations.

Performers between specialization and intergeneric flexibility

If the question of generic identity involves many aesthetic and social dimensions, it also essentially concerns the conditions, networks, identities and activities of the performers and producers of opera. Musicians, itinerant troupes, stage directors and opera companies are fundamentally involved in the diffusion and categorisation of repertoire. Whether it is the loss

of importance of certain genres due to the lack of qualified personnel or the success of works intended for seasoned performers and grandiose stagings, the characteristics of the performers impact the construction of operatic identity. We question whether the proximity of repertoires in some dramatic centres led the agents of the theatrical world to diversify, touching a plurality of operatic genres? Or on the contrary, is the affirmation of contrasting genres conditioned by the specialization of the interpreters? This theme opens up fields such as the historiographical study of the training of performers, the observation of the national and international networks and circulations of musicians, and the comparison of performances through space and time.

Participants

Guillaume Castella est doctorant à l'Université de Berne. Il travaille actuellement sur la dialectique entre le genre comique et le genre sérieux dans les premières décennies de l'Italie unifiée dans le cadre du projet de recherche « Entre grandeur et dérision : l'évolution de la dramaturgie musicale dans l'Italie unifiée » financé par le FNS.

Valeria De Lucca is Associate Professor at the University of Southampton. She completed her PhD at Princeton University, specializing in seventeenth-century music and culture, patronage and systems of production. More recently, she has been working on nineteenth-century operetta, and in particular the reception of foreign music-theatrical genres in Italy and Great Britain.

Bianca De Mario è assegnista presso l'Università degli Studi di Milano con una ricerca legata al PRIN *Mapping Musical Life: Urban Culture and Local Press in Post-Unification Italy*. I suoi più recenti contributi a conferenze e seminari riguardano trailer, video d'opera e opera alla televisione. Ha pubblicato saggi su allestimenti contemporanei di opere e oratori.

Matthew Franke is a Master Instructor at Howard University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina with a dissertation on “The Impact of Jules Massenet’s Operas in Milan” (2014). He has published several contributions in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* and *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* and chapters in *Carmen Abroad* (Smith & Rowden, 2020) and *Massenet and the Mediterranean World* (Ciolfi, 2015).

PhD, musicologist and editor, **Enrique Mejías García** works in the historical archive of SGAE. In his thesis (soon to be published) he restudies the productive and aesthetic systems of zarzuela during the second half of the 19th century, based on analysis of the Spanish adaptations of Offenbach's operettas.

Anselm Gerhard, geboren 1958 in Heidelberg, arbeitet seit 1994 als ordentlicher Professor für Musikwissenschaft an der Universität Bern. Zu seinen Forschungsschwerpunkten gehört das europäische Musiktheater, insbesondere des 19. Jahrhunderts. Seit 2016 ist er Herausgeber der neu gegründeten Zeitschrift *verdiperspektiven*.

Carlo Lanfossi is Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Milan. His research focuses on Italian opera, specifically on issues of historiography and listening practices, at the intersection

of performance and critical theory. He has published an article on operatic hauntologies in the *Journal of Musicology* and the Italian translation of Dolar's and Žižek's *Opera's Second Death*.

Laura Moeckli is SNSF postdoctoral researcher at the University of Bern currently working on transnational comic opera circulation in unified Italy 1865-1885. Her doctoral thesis examined recitative and declamation in mid-nineteenth-century German and French language opera. Further projects include *Bootleg Opera* and *Temporalities in Music Theater*.

Elena Oliva is Postdoctoral Scholar at the University of Florence, as part of Research Project of National Interest (PRIN 2017) titled *Mapping Musical Life: Urban Culture and the Local Press in Post-Unification Italy* (MML). Her research concentrates on nineteenth century music theater production and reception; she recently published the book *L'operetta parigina a Milano, Firenze e Napoli (1860-1890)*.

Vincenzina C. Ottomano is Postdoctoral Research Assistant at the University of Bern. Her PhD was dedicated to *The Impact of Russian Opera in France and Italy*. Her publications include *Claudio Abbado alla Scala* (with Angela Ida De Benedictis; 2008) and *Luciano Berio. Interviste e colloqui* (2017). She is also editor of the journals «verdiperspektiven» and «Swiss Journal of Musicology».

Alessandra Palidda trained as a singer and musicologist in Milan before moving to Cardiff University, where she obtained her doctorate on the musical environment of late-Habsburg and Napoleonic Milan. She is Senior Lecturer at Oxford Brookes University and is also active in projects focusing on music and print culture, especially on the Sonzogno publishing house.

Emilio Sala is associate professor of musicology at the University of Milan. He has published many books as author and editor, among them *The Sounds of Paris in Verdi's "La traviata"* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). Since 2020, together with Giorgio Biancorosso, he has been founding co-editor of the peer-reviewed journal *Sound Stage Screen*, published in English by the University of Milan.