

Hesselager, Jens (Hrsg.): *Grand Opera Outside Paris. Opera on the Move in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Abingdon: Routledge 2018. ISBN: 9781138202016; 236 S.

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The opera composer most frequently performed in nineteenth-century Europe was not Giuseppe Verdi, and not Richard Wagner, but Giacomo Meyerbeer, the German-Jewish head of music at the court of Berlin and the principal representative of French *grand opéra* an operatic genre that stands for huge dramatic scale and heavy historical topics, but also for opera's urbanisation when it lost its connection with the European courts to represent the tastes and intellectual preoccupations of Europe's urban middle classes.¹ The success of *grand opéra* was intrinsically linked to the extraordinary means of musical production on offer in Paris, then the world's capital of opera, but also to opera's globalisation, with the music that had emerged in Paris being emulated in most parts of the world. An important condition of this development was the fact that *grand opéra* seemingly spoke an idiom that was able to communicate across national boundaries. It was on this basis that Giuseppe Mazzini thought of Meyerbeer's works (and not of Verdi's or Wagner's) as „music of the future“, a music that through its combination of a transnational musical language with grand historical plots pursued an ethical agenda that had the potential to unite humanity.² When Meyerbeer died in May 1864, the *Ménestrel* of Paris praised him as a master who had succeeded „in writing cosmopolitan art“. ³ It is this idea and its extraordinary role within nineteenth-century global culture that makes *grand opéra* a significant object of study for historians used to reduce the nineteenth-century to an age of nationalism.

Grand opéra was invented in Paris, which remained the principal centre of its production, due to resources that were unparalleled anywhere in the world. The volume under discussion takes the focus away from Paris to demonstrate that *grand opéra* had a meaningful life in places where opera traditionally had played a less important role. Follo-

wing the editor's historiographical introduction, the volume brings together eleven chapters by authors from across Europe. A first section discusses productions of *grand opéra* in places not usually associated with the genre; the second section examines specific works; the third part analyses the local take on particular characters of the repertoire, followed by an assessment of specific national responses. Taken together, the essays cover a broad range of composers, several lesser known works, and examples from Britain, Denmark, Finland, the German lands, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and Switzerland. Noticeable is the exclusion of Central Europe, where opera played a key role in the Habsburgs' imperial politics of culture. Chronologically, the volume starts with the prehistory of *grand opéra* in the eighteenth-century and takes us up to its waning fortunes in the twentieth century.

The principal appeal of Hesselager's volume lies in the move away from the few major hubs of operatic culture capable of staging *grand opéra* according to its composers' original intentions. Instead, it looks at smaller cities that were also attracted to the genre as an expression of their cultural engagement with the wider world. This is significant, because at the time a large majority of audiences experienced opera in ways that were very different from the quality of performance we know from the world's few leading theatres today or from their recordings. In addition to the translation of libretti and the changing quality of casts, substantial cuts to the score or adaptations to local musical means were the rule, as were changes to instrumentation or the replacement of recitati-

¹ On the urbanisation of opera see: Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera. Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago 1998. On the political dimension: Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Dimension*, Cambridge 2009.

² Giuseppe Mazzini to Emilie Ashurst Venturi, 21 May 1867, in: *Edizione nazionale. Scritti editi ed inediti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, edited by Mario Menghini, vols. 1-106, Imola, 1906-43, vol. 85, 44-47, 45 ff. For an analysis of Mazzini's response see Axel Körner, „From Hindustan to Brabant. Meyerbeer's Africana and Municipal Cosmopolitanism in Post-Unification Italy“, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29 (2017) 1, pp. 74-93.

³ Quoted in Reiner Zimmermann / Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Eine Biografie nach Dokumenten*. Berlin 1998, p. 321.

ves with dialogues. In giving meaning to these adaptations, it is important to take into consideration that in most cases critics and audiences would have been aware of the original plots. The chapters by Laura Moeckli on Switzerland and Jens Hesselager's discussion of *Robert le diable* in Copenhagen are good illustrations of the debates arising from staging *grand opéra* outside Paris, generating locally specific responses to the challenge, with a more extreme example being Carlos María Solare's reading of Madrid's popular zarzuelas version of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*. Meanwhile, Karin Hallgren's chapter demonstrates that splendid productions of *grand opéra* were a constant feature of operatic life in a city like Stockholm, hundreds of miles north of Paris, where casts regularly included global stars like Jenny Lind. It was the result of a great operatic tradition reaching back to the eighteenth century, but also of royal support and an enthusiastic middle-class audience that was prepared to cover related costs. But even in Stockholm finding the resources for producing work such as Halévy's *La Juive* presented a challenge, as Owe Ander demonstrates when explaining the over thirty years delay in staging the work.

Despite speaking an international idiom, *grand opéra* also contributed to the development of national operatic styles, as Luísa Cymbron and Emanuele Bonomi argue in relation to Portuguese and Russian examples. Anti-Rossinianism, often associated with German music criticism, remained a powerful aspect of operatic debates in Copenhagen. In Finland, as Ulla-Britta Broman-Kananen shows, imports of *grand opéra* became tools in debates around the country's language question. Furthermore, 1920s Finish responses to Halévy's *La Juive* testify to the power of anti-Semitic stereotypes (Anne Kauppala) associated with *grand opéra*, an issue that occasionally had come up in Switzerland, whereas it did not seem to have arisen in Stockholm. Although historians of opera have to be careful not to read their own interpretations of a plot's political implications into their subject, most examples discussed in this volume show that *grand opéra* remained a contested genre, raising criticism on musical as well as on wider ideological grounds, and often reflecting

unease with the twin-processes of modernisation and globalisation.

The publisher is to be recommended for the inclusion of previously unknown illustrations and numerous musical examples, although not enough care went into the proofs: Rossini is repeatedly referred to as Giacomo instead of Gioac(c)hino; some dates of premieres are incorrect; and the quality of English varies. The chapter on Russia claims that the censors moved the adaptation of Rossini's *Tell* into the fifteenth century to make the topic less offensive, ignoring that the Rütli-legend on which Schiller's play is based dates from exactly that period. The reviewer's copy lost most of its pages during the first read.

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