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# Between cosmopolitanism and nationhood: Italian opera in the early nineteenth century

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The revival of interest in music evident in recent historiography has led to an investigation of the specifically transnational nature of musical languages and practices. This article explores the possibility of re-reading in a transnational perspective the classical theme of the relationship between the Risorgimento and opera. It focuses on two different points of view: on the one hand, the construction of the librettos as a delicate balance between European romantic narratives and dramatic themes evoking nationalistic sentiments; on the other, the fact that ideas and practices of the theatre as a vehicle of political mobilisation developed in a broad international context where Mazzini and many other nationalists found inspiration in multinational political experiences and discourses. The article concludes by saying that the meanings of terms such as cosmopolitanism and nationalism need to be carefully weighed when we look at nineteenth-century opera production. Only in the closing decades of the century did genuine competition between national traditions arise, which led in Italy to a veritable 'obsession' with 'Italianness' in music.

**Keywords:** music; opera; Risorgimento; political and theatrical activism

## Music and 'transnationality'

The revival of interest in music evident in recent historiography – atoning thereby for the long neglect by social and cultural historians of this domain of human experience – has led to an investigation of the specifically transnational nature of musical languages and practices. The need to rethink in an other than merely national key the trajectories of cultural products – their production, circulation and appropriation – is now an urgent preoccupation of scholarly study. Indeed, the research already undertaken with this objective in mind has convincingly demonstrated just how much a shift in point of view and the taking into account of additional, mutually interacting levels of territoriality (local, national, transnational) entails for the most part a significant alteration in the object of study itself.[1] The gradual shift in the history of cultural phenomena towards a transnational dimension was first apparent in research into literary creation, where the question of translation became a crucial pivot of the investigation (Casanova 1999; Sapiro 2009). The domain of music, however, possesses peculiar features of its own, which make of it a quite specific field of enquiry. The structural mobility it manifests from the outset is linked indeed both to its particular, non-linguistic nature (which all but eliminates the problem of translation), and to the fact that music only exists in so far as it is interpreted at a specific time and

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in a specific place (at any rate until the crucial technological innovations in the technical reproduction of sound, but even, it could be argued, beyond this). The virtually international character of music has thus not needed to be highlighted and has instead risked being taken for granted, without our troubling to reconstruct the causes of it, or the systems involved.

Recent studies have, however, begun to address the question more directly. As Celia Applegate (2005, 2011) has so convincingly shown in the case of Brahms and Mendelssohn, a musician's life involved being perpetually 'on the move', that of an interpreter as much or perhaps more so (Rosselli 1995). Such mobility on the part of the actors, exceeding even that of texts, allowed a constant transmission of knowledge (practical, theoretical, even institutional) and favoured an interchange affecting the stylistic and textual level as well as musical experience in general. This is one reason why a transnational perspective is nowadays very much in evidence in the context of those studies which might be placed under the heading of the 'cultural history of music', a multidisciplinary field that engages growing numbers of historians, sociologists and musicologists interested in an approach to the musical fact that sets its different dimensions into fruitful interaction, ranging from the institutional aspect (organisational and productive systems) and the social practices (listening and reception) to the production of meanings through music.[2]

Amongst the many interesting fields explored in recent years, particularly in the area of art music, one of the most fruitful has been precisely that of European musical interchanges and of the gradual constitution through them of a highly interconnected musical world, which consisted less and less of courts and religious communities, and more and more of national communities which in one respect developed, refined and strove to promote their own musical schools and in another tended rather to share widespread tastes, canons and formats. In a fine study of the great transformation in musical taste at the turn of the eighteenth century, William Weber has analysed how the musical practices we know so well (first and foremost the concerto form) crystallised and in their turn gave shape to a transnational space which is ever more recognisable the further one advances into the nineteenth century: a structurally cosmopolitan 'musical world' in which both musicians and interpreters were very much on the move, put their own reputations on the line and obtained to a greater or lesser degree their own consecration (Weber 2004, 2008). In the construction of that world, an important part was, for example, played – though it is only one of the elements we might mention – by the interaction between the German and the English worlds at the end of the eighteenth century, that is, at the foundational moment of the institutions, practices and repertoires of modern symphonic music.

The re-reading in this transnational perspective of the eminently classical theme of the relationships between the Risorgimento and opera is therefore an urgent task imposed upon scholars not only by recent studies of the Risorgimento experience, as this special issue demonstrates, but also by those concerned with nineteenth-century developments in musical systems, which reflect the perennial balancing act between cosmopolitanism and nationhood. Only a transnational analysis can bring out the complexity of this relationship, and my analysis reflects this fact. More specifically, I focus on two aspects of the production process: on the one hand, the composition of romantic opera and its relationship to contemporary literature and, on the other, the theory and practice of theatre as a space for political action.

## Italian opera as a nomadic genre

The opera world was perhaps more deeply affected, and from an earlier date, by this constant mobility than was the case with instrumental music. Lyric opera is a genre with a clearly defined date and place of birth – Florence, 1590 – and from the very start it assumed the guise of a

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nomadic and transnational phenomenon which prevailed in the succeeding century in every European country, Catholic and Protestant, and became an indispensable ingredient of court life and also a source of entertainment for a paying public (Bianconi 1992; Parker 1994). By the mid-eighteenth century one can argue that a cultural world of international scope had been constituted around Italian opera, so that from Naples to St Petersburg, from Lisbon to Vienna, a single language, Italian of course, was spoken: a world dominated by Italian or Italian-trained composers, by itinerant troupes mostly of Italian origin, by set- and costume-designers and even by theatre managers coming, as often as not, from Italy. The extraordinary diffusion of the genre in the course of the eighteenth century corresponded for the most part with that of an architectonic model, the so-called *sala all'italiana* of the Baroque theatre in grand theatres frequently designed by Italian architects which fanned out across Europe and beyond, accompanying the domination of *opera seria* over aristocratic culture and the European courts (Forsith 1985). Italian opera thus represented a genre that composers and interpreters who were not Italian might readily approach; and in the context of opera productions it was the cosmopolitan genre par excellence.[3] Only in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the advance of an intense process of nationalisation leading to the emergence of different national musical schools, did the Italian school itself become one of the possible national variations in the opera genre.[4]

While Italian instrumental music suffered a parlous decline at the end of the eighteenth century, and Italian speech theatre, notwithstanding the achievements of Vittorio Alfieri, was not held in high regard in Europe, either by the literary world or by the wider public,[5] Italian cultural hegemony over the opera world was for its part uncontested. Its position was enhanced, moreover, by the crisis through which French opera was passing in these same decades, lambasted as French opera had been by those Enlightenment critics who saw in it the genre most representative of the artificiality and pretence of the aristocratic world. It is plausible therefore to argue that Italian opera continued to be a very good cultural product for export, which at the start of the nineteenth century was still sold on the other side of the Alps and kept a huge workforce busy. This hegemony was, however, not directly sustained or managed by the state authorities, as was in fact the case with French opera, the production of which was overseen to a marked degree by the monarchy, and so much so that it ended up being identified with it. How, then, are we to account for this thoroughgoing colonisation of the international lyric theatres by Italian opera between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century?[6] Musicological studies tend to place the emphasis upon the intertwining of different elements, while systematic enquiries, some of them involving quantitative analyses of circulation, have been initiated in recent years. Various explanations have been advanced, among them the early consolidation in Italy of a dynamic productive and distributive structure, based upon the mobility of the impresarios and troupes at both the national and the international level; the rapid codification of literary and musical conventions which served to stabilise easily recognisable forms both textual and musical, and to allow partial adaptations when faced with new situations and different horizons of expectation; a markedly spectacular dimension (the centrality of scenery, stage sets and costumes), of a kind which was not in evidence before the end of the eighteenth century in speech theatre and which prefigured the development of the modern spectacle (Moindrot 2006); the existence in Italy of a venerable tradition of dramatic poetry set to music; and, finally, a sort of peculiar predisposition on the part of this musical genre to be transplanted, due to its versatility and capacity to adapt itself to markedly different social and cultural contexts.

Whatever the causes may have been, the fact remains that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when a steady extension of the market and the audience began, opportunities for diffusion likewise proliferated, and Italian opera underwent a further, yet more remarkable diffusion, first

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through the so called "Rossinimania", which took the European theatres by storm, and then through the Romantic vogue for works by Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi, all of which in different ways were performed on a supranational scale. While in the great European metropolises there were theatres exclusively devoted to Italian opera, in all the major cities the repertoires of the larger theatres always featured a number of works, in an intertwining of local and international music that would seem to have been very much the rule rather than the exception (Weber 2011).

Already in the first half of the century Italian opera was fanning out across the other continents, and especially America. The first New York Italian Opera House opened its doors in 1833, and then from 1847 onwards numerous itinerant companies began to traverse the different states of the Union (Dizikes 1993; Preston 2001). In Latin America the opera cult was embraced with particular fervour, drawing new sustenance from the post-'48 waves of emigration, and was perceived as a European phenomenon, bringing progress, Romantic culture and patriotic ideals in its wake.[7] On the other hand Europe, and subsequently the wider world, served Italian composers as an important source of personal legitimisation and fame, not to speak of financial backing. Rossini moved after 1823 to Paris and staged his latest operas there, up to *Guglielmo Tell* in 1829. From 1835 onwards, and indeed throughout the 1840s, Donizetti would divide his time between Paris and Vienna, where he was particularly successful. Verdi launched his international career in 1847 when he staged the *Masnadieri* in London; in the following decade, during which he lived a large part of the year in Paris, he would become the biggest international star upon whom Italy might call. The Italian opera market could moreover exploit – and this was one of its peculiar characteristics – circuits that were well integrated in their various parts, through which a well-consolidated transnational dimension combined with a national circulation which maintained significant hubs in small-to-middling centres until the middle of the nineteenth century. Consider the fact that premieres of Verdi's operas might by then be staged both at Rimini, for the inauguration of the new grand theatre (as happened with *Aroldo* in 1857), and in St Petersburg, where the premiere of *La Forza del destino* was mounted in 1862.

Finally, as Italian opera pervaded the European and then the global market between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was constantly subjected to both adaptations and national appropriations, in an intense exchange of musical ideas, plots, images and characters that typified the opera world even as it was becoming ever more national. On the one hand the great Italian composers adapted their own compositions to suit the taste and customs of the audience for whom they happened to be writing, as is borne out by their correspondence, and on the other hand the genre of opera did itself develop and flourish even in newly created states for which the international repertoire of Italian opera was an obligatory reference point.[8] According to Annibale Cetrangolo, who has studied this phenomenon in depth in relation to Latin America, it should be borne in mind that amongst the ranks of the Mazzinian political émigrés who had arrived there in force, especially after the 1848 revolution, there also featured a good number of composers and performers, so much so that lyric opera swiftly became synonymous on that continent with republican liberalism. Both in Argentina and in Chile we thus encounter forms of naturalisation of Italian opera, devised to emulate the role it had played in its country of origin, rehearsing episodes drawn from pre-Columbian history or from native mythology that would serve as crucial agencies of cultural nationalisation (Cetrangolo 1996).

## Opera and Risorgimento in transnational perspective

If this is the broader context to which we should refer, it is hard to see how the relationship between opera and the Risorgimento could be investigated without taking the transnational

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perspective into account. I will now try to examine, at any rate in broad outline, two different points of view, which would ultimately require a deeper investigation than I am able to undertake here: the first is associated with composers and texts; the second has to do with reception. In the first case, I concentrate on the choice of subjects for opera, where composers and librettists have to choose from texts, protagonists and events usually associated with recent European literature; in the second, I consider the experience of the theatre as a space for political mobilisation, an idea that was theorised and practised in many European countries between the 1790s and 1848. In both cases it is possible to recognise the complex and almost inextricable intertwining of national and transnational perspectives, a phenomenon, according to Anne-Marie Thiesse (1999), that is peculiarly characteristic of this historical phase.

Our point of departure should be the fact that in the first half of the nineteenth century opera participated in a sort of expressive hyper-system that indubitably had a European dimension (Della Seta 1993). In other words, opera formed part of a narrative fabric that transcended the traditional classifications of the arts and of genres, whereby one and the same plot, assuming it had been a success with the public, would be recast in different literary or dramatic forms and would swiftly become a theme that was readily recognisable and recognised by different audiences. The early nineteenth century saw an extraordinary porosity between genres and narrative forms, and as a consequence there were constant adaptations and re-appropriations of plots and characters. Such a process, affecting the bestsellers of the day, was all too evident in the case of Alexandre Soumet's *Norma*, a prose drama first staged in Paris at the Théatre de l'Odéon in April 1831 but premiered in Milan at the Scala in Bellini's opera version in December of that same year, in a rapidly executed adaptation that proved wildly successful. Yet it was not merely a question of immediate celebrity. Consider, for example, a very well known novel such as Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor*. In the two decades after its first publication, in 1819, the novel was adapted for the stage in many different ways, a success reinforced perhaps by the highly theatrical nature of the theme of madness (Pittock 2006; Irace and Pedullà 2012). It thus became a ballet-pantomime in Milan, a prose melodrama in Paris, and a lyric opera in at least five different versions. Prior to the composition of Donizetti's opera (Naples, September 1835), the story of Lucia and Edgar had in fact been set to music by Michele Carafa in Paris in 1829, by Luigi Riesk in 1831, by Frederick Bredal at Copenhagen in 1832 and by Alberto Mazzuccato at Padua in 1834. The transfer to the stage of the plots from hit novels was a commonplace in this period, and readily permitted in, for example, France, where the capacity of plays to reach a far wider audience meant that their authors were granted special privileges of a sort. Those writing for the theatre were in other words in some sense pressed, and not merely given licence, to adapt hit novels for the stage in order that everyone might get to know them. It was once again at the beginning of the 1830s that Balzac, for example, bewailed the fact that he had failed to get a new book out in time, that a literary invention of his own had immediately become a play, and that this process was undermining his book sales. This actually led writers in France to mobilise during that same decade around the call both for a new law on authors' rights extending them to the stage, and for a more general recognition of the idea of plagiarism.[9]

Where Italy in particular was concerned, the strong link in this expressive hypersystem was indubitably represented by opera, which would become the principal means of access to European literature. Verdi, to a far greater degree than his predecessors, cultivated a narrative and dramaturgical repertoire that was much more European than it was national. Consider just the years that extend from 1844 to 1847, those immediately preceding the revolution of 1848. The opera *Ernani* (1844) was drawn from Victor Hugo; *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845) from Schiller; *Alzira* (1845) from Voltaire, *Attila* (1846) from Zacharias Werner, and *Macbeth* (1847) from Shakespeare, albeit the Shakespeare rediscovered and reread by the Romantics. As Giorgio

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Pestelli has observed, 'the quest for a new libretto, where Verdi was concerned, always entailed immersing himself in European literature' (Pestelli 1990, 772). Furthermore, Clara Maffei's Milanese salon, attended by many composers and writers during these years, was a veritable hothouse of Europeanism and a laboratory for translating from other national literatures. Of the 26 librettos wholly set to music by Verdi, 24 are based on foreign subjects that belong to better-known European Romantic literature. Indeed, the picture would be no less startling if we were also to consider the many subjects Verdi considered, or else suggested to his own librettists, that were not in the end set to music. The commonest source is French literature (11 librettos, amongst which there feature, apart from the already mentioned Voltaire and Hugo, genuine celebrities of the theatre such as Scribe and Dumas, but also minor contemporary authors with whose work Italian men of letters and even Verdi himself were all too familiar). The hegemony of the French dramatic repertoire over the choice of subjects for Italian opera was uncontested in this phase, and it may certainly be in part accounted for by Italian writers' solid knowledge of French. The nineteenth-century Italian literary scene was moreover dominated by French influences, as recent quantitative surveys of the world of publishing on a national scale clearly show (Muller 2011; Perozzo 2013). The second most important source for Verdian subjects was English literature, with five librettos (though it should be noted that the translations from Shakespeare were for the most part mediated by the French versions), and German literature also, which featured as often. Finally, three librettos derived from Spanish authors. Only two Italian authors served as Verdian sources, namely the Venetian novelist Antonio Piazza, who was active at the end of the eighteenth century and responsible for *Oberto, conte di San Bonifacio*, his first work, and the Manzonian Tommaso Grossi, who wrote *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*.

How did this circumstance come about? Was Verdi particularly interested in European culture, and in themes and characters that were not Italian? This was probably not entirely the case. Rather, European literature served him as a storehouse of plots and dramatic devices endowed with great theatricality and with passion, not to speak of those *coups de théâtre* that impart sudden twists to texts and leave the audience with their hearts in their mouths. Verdi's choices may perhaps have been motivated at least in part by the fact that such themes and plots were well known on the other side of the Alps and therefore easy to sell even to a foreign audience (and, conversely, by the awareness that the contemporary Italian speech theatre was not guaranteed a rapturous reception on the Continent). But what really tipped the balance, as Verdi noted time and time again in his correspondence, and what often – indeed, almost always – drew him to the latest productions on the foreign stage was the dramatic potential of the texts themselves, which plainly was sorely lacking in Italian dramatic literature (Jeuland-Meynaud 1991). What a composer looked for in his subjects, as Verdi informed Cammarano in 1848, was 'strongly drawn characters, passion, movement, a great deal of pathos and, above all, grandeur and spectacle, without which I do not believe that a success is possible in a grand theatre'.[10] Evidently Verdi found a mixture of these ingredients in European Romantic literature, and therefore when staging *Don Carlos* he turned to Schiller rather than to Alfieri, even though the latter had himself written a tragedy about the relationship between Philip II of Spain and his son, Carlos.

The attitude of Verdi and his librettists, whose collaboration was, as is well known, very close, towards the subjects themselves was a very different matter. Here there prevailed, as was customary and certainly not exceptional in this period, a decidedly casual attitude towards the original text, the appearance of the characters, the setting, and even towards its overall meaning. Sometimes authors would take umbrage, as was the case with Hugo over the operatic version of his *Hernani*, but it does not seem to have been a major problem, to judge by the lack of, for example, pedantic controversies arising as a consequence. It was a generally acknowledged fact

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that the text would need to be adjusted to fit the audience to which it was presented, the company that would sing it and the censor that would subject it to pre-emptive checks (Sorba 2006). It was treated as a material that might be twisted, turned and stretched to the utmost, so as to assume at times somewhat surprising variations. It was within this highly elastic space that the interaction between European subjects and national sensitivities took place. We can see this process at work in, for example, 1844, when Verdi embraced Temistocle Solera's proposal that he set to music a treatment devoted to the story of Joan of Arc, an eminently canonical figure within French patriotic discourse, yet drawn in this case from the play by Schiller (already set to music, however, by Vaccaj in 1827 and by Pacini in 1830). In the outline of the plot he gave to the composer, the librettist had no hesitation in defining it as 'an entirely original Italian play', that is to say, a wholly national recasting of the Schillerian text. It is anyway a well-known fact that librettists' adaptations, perhaps to avoid brushes with the censor, might involve sometimes paradoxical variations: Scribe's Sweden, just to mention the most famous shift of locale, becomes Boston in the Verdian *Ballo in maschera* (see the classic interpretation by Lavagetto 2003).

So casual an attitude towards the subjects that were chosen to be set to music likewise permitted the drastic updating of episodes from the distant past. Yet in reality this was a not an unusual approach to adopt, at any rate in this period, towards historical subjects, common not only in fiction but also in historical narratives, and authors did not hesitate to depict the barbarian and communal Middle Ages or Renaissance Italy (easy prey as Italy had been in these periods to foreign powers), as the mirror-image of contemporary Austrian domination. Indeed, it was precisely through this close interaction between past and present that the coherent master narrative of national destiny underlying the Risorgimento movement took shape.[11] The opera *Attila* was based on a play by the German dramatist Zacharias Werner but Verdi came to it by way of his reading of Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. The synopsis featured in this latter was what inspired him when he came to write to the librettist Francesco Piave urging him to read the original text and to turn it into a drama to be set to music. It is a compelling subject, Verdi writes, and amongst the elements that most captivated him was the possibility of a highly effective incipit: one could raise the curtain to reveal Aquileia burnt to the ground, and two choruses, or two peoples, one of which – the Aquilensians – was praying, while the other – the invading Huns – was goading the humbled enemy, and issuing threats (Greenwald 2009). What Verdi saw in this obscure Romantic play with its barbarian subject was the possibility of depicting once again the classic counterposing of two peoples that had proved so successful in some of his previous works, thereby reviving a perspective dear to Romantic sensibilities. The libretto, which was in the end fleshed out by Temistocle Solera rather than by Piave, would place still more emphasis upon Italian national history, so as to break free altogether from the original text. Ildegonda, a Burgundian princess and the protagonist of Werner's play, thus becomes Odabella, a Roman princess but a figure who is in the same breath, and so as to dispel any ambiguity, defined as an 'intrepida donna italica'. She is flanked by a tenor, a character by the name of Foresto, who is wholly absent from Werner's text, and who delivers one of the arias most imbued, at any rate by implication, with Risorgimento values.

Cara patria
già madre e reina
di possenti magnanimi figli.
Or macerie deserto e ruina
su cui regna silenzio e squallor
(Dearest homeland,
Once mother and queen

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Of mighty and great-hearted sons.
Now rubble, desert and ruin
Over which silence and squalor reign)

Solera also took the decision to insert into the opera a scene, though there was no precedent for it in Werner's original text, treating the founding of Venice by those who, according to the well-known myth, had escaped from Aquileia.

What precisely was it that determined the balance in these opera texts between, on the one hand, the readiness of composers and librettists to stick to an indubitably European narrative and, on the other, their propensity to cleave to dramatic themes and nuances that tended to call to mind national-patriotic discourse? It is altogether clear that between these two sensibilities there was no friction as such. Doubtless, it is we today who suppose there to be a tension between the two elements, having internalised the idea that there are clearly distinct and separate national cultural heritages. It is moreover worth pointing out that we are dealing here with a production that was by no means set in stone, conceived as it was for the market. We are concerned with the construction of stage settings that were, in contemporary parlance, a 'grande spectacle', in other words, featuring powerful images, a pronounced historical colouring in the locations, and characters burdened with pathos. At the heart of this delicate balance there would seem to be once again the audience (at once national and international), its predilections and its horizon of expectation. It was to entertain it, to thrill it and to earn applause that these plots were constructed, on the basis of the most diverse pressures.

When all is said and done, the market had a decisive role to play in the eventual turn of European Romanticism towards the discourses of the nation. The involvement in these circumstances of a writer who sympathised with the cause of Italian independence, as Temistocle Solera certainly did, is merely one of the elements in play, relevant though it indubitably was to the fashioning of a text that would later lend itself to national-patriotic interpretations. In analysing the relationship between opera and the Risorgimento, a topic that even today remains surprisingly controversial, a number of different dimensions of analysis need to be taken into account, and far more emphasis should be placed upon the complexity of their reciprocal interrelationship than upon their singularity.

## Political and theatrical activism: a transnational approach

This brings me to the second aspect I wish to address, namely, the politicisation of the theatres, and this same politicisation as one of the possible forms of mobilisation characteristic of political activism in this period (Stamatov 2002). This theme is currently the focus of a significant re-reading, and it too requires the adoption of a transnational perspective, a perspective that takes into account the European dimension in which not only composers but also intellectuals and activists were obliged to act and interact.

The irruption of politics into the theatres had been a pronounced and widespread feature in the last decade of the eighteenth century. It had a far greater impact upon the theatre as a site, and upon its capacity for collective agitation, than upon specific genres in music or in prose as the case may be. Initially, of course, in revolutionary France, but then in all the major European countries, the years on the cusp between the two centuries witnessed an intense politicisation of the stage, though one compatible, obviously enough, with the prevailing political circumstances in each country.[12] At the same time we observe, even in Italy, experiments involving the throwing open of the theatres to a public which had up until then been excluded. The practice of staging free performances, already a feature under the *ancien régime* when there was particular cause for monarchical celebration,

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became in this albeit short-lived phase a way of opening up the grand theatres to an entirely new audience. Enlightenment critics had discerned in the theatre a vehicle well suited, on account of its capacity to speak at once to the reason and to the heart of the spectators, to raising their political awareness and, by so doing, to getting them to act.[13] From this perspective too we are concerned with a period that was characterised by an intense international circulation of experiments: at the end of the eighteenth century, indeed, we note a marked emphasis, in the discourse of intellectuals (but in some circumstances also in political practice), upon the role of the theatre as a school of public virtue, which it was incumbent upon the authorities to foster and to fund. Very short-lived though this phase was, and already purged in the Napoleonic period of its more strictly political features, traces were highly visible in Restoration Europe, above all if one thinks of the dissemination of theatres across the national territory, of the proliferation of theatrical activities and of the enlivening of the theatrical market itself. The very idea of the theatre as a vehicle of mobilisation was revived and tested in various ways between the early years of the century and the 1840s by political movements at odds with the established order. Georgian England thus witnessed ructions at Covent Garden, and similar episodes were known in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars, in the republican upheavals in France in the 1820s and 1830s, and in Belgium in 1830 (Corbin 1985; Baer 1992; Kroen 2000; Granata 2008). In all such cases, the theatre became a space in which challenges of various sorts to the established order could readily be mounted.

Mazzinian reflection on the relationships between the theatre, music and politics developed, not by chance, in an international milieu defined by the predicament of exile and therefore particularly attuned to such a perspective. Consider, for example, the attention paid by the Saint-Simonian movement, to which Mazzini himself was in those years very close, to the social and political role of art, and particularly to the performing arts. The language of music and of the theatre – according to Léon Halévy, a disciple and collaborator of Saint-Simon – should guarantee politics an extraordinary communicative impact and an 'electrical' influence upon its own renewed audience.[14] From the international stalls, where Mazzini found himself from 1831 onwards, one could very clearly discern the fact that lyric opera was the best-known, most cherished and also most widely sold product, both at a national and at an international level, of Italian culture. When, therefore, in the course of the 1830s, Mazzini laid stress in his writings on the role that artistic languages might play in a profound renewal of political communication in Italy, the theatre was at the very heart of his argument; lyric theatre, which according to him played the role in Italy that great speech theatre had performed in the German world, would become in his view the most effective means for rousing souls and inciting them to action. Between 1835 and 1836 two important texts on the civic role of the theatre, drafted by Mazzini himself and by Gustavo Modena, the celebrated actor who was also in exile for political reasons, graced the pages of *L'Italiano*, a new periodical defined by Niccolò Tommaseo as 'literary through and through', founded in Paris and inaugurated by a lengthy essay by Mazzini on the future of literature in Europe.[15] We are concerned here with a new journalistic project designed to reunite groups of patriots in exile in France and in Switzerland (amongst them Nicolò Tommaseo, Terenzio Mamiani, the Ruffini brothers, Pietro Giannone, Guglielmo Libri and other less well-known figures) after the tragic failure of a series of expeditions that had been meant to precipitate insurrections across the length and breadth of the peninsula.

Eighteen thirty-five in Paris, when Mazzini wrote his pamphlet dedicated to the *Filosofia della musica*, was no ordinary conjuncture. It was the year in which the Théatre des Italiens presented, in the space of a few months, the premières of works by the two composers most in vogue at the time, namely Bellini's *I Puritani* and Donizetti's *Marino Faliero*. The milieu of the Italian exiles, who were then very numerous in the French capital, was directly involved in both

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events, since Carlo Pepoli had written the libretto for Bellini's opera, drawn from a historical drama by Jean-François Ancelot, while Agostino Ruffini undertook a major revision of the libretto drafted for Donizetti. It was thus in this milieu of exiles, in constant contact with one another despite the capillary police surveillance, that there took shape a democratic discourse on theatre at once of morality and of action which would constitute a kind of backdrop to the practices of patriotic reception in evidence in Italy in the following decade.[16] Theatre and music were in fact at the centre of this world of exiles, many of whom wrote for the stage: plays of an Alfierian flavour which they strove in vain to publish (such as Ghiglione's *Alessandro de' Medici*), or more usefully opera librettos from which they managed to scrape a living.[17]

The repercussions of this particular Parisian season for the relations between opera and the Risorgimento may then be sought in two different directions. On the one hand, it inspired Mazzini to write his famous pamphlet on the *Filosofia della musica*, up to then the only genuine theoretical reflection by an Italian publicist dedicated to the political role that opera theatre might play. On the other hand it led to the canonisation of Bellini as a patriot musician, one of the first instances of a political use of opera, which would recur subsequently, especially in the years 1846–1849. The composer, who had frequented the circles of exiles when in Paris during these months, and in particular the salon of Cristina di Belgioioso, died suddenly in September 1835, aged only 34, and was buried in the cemetery of Père Lachaise. In the milieu of patriots, whether in places of exile or at home, the commemorations of the composer thus left a decidedly exaggerated impression, far exceeding his actual political commitment when alive, of the civic elements involved in his artistic work, and promoted an image of him as a thoroughgoing patriot. Although it is hard to be certain, there is a strong probability that this circumstance owed something to Mazzini's recent text devoted to music, in which he championed a new sort of opera in a lofty civic vein. In a poem published in London after the composer's death, Carlo Pepoli (the librettist of *I Puritani*) imagined an encounter with the shadow of the Sicilian composer. The latter there confessed to him what the real purpose of his musical creations had been, namely, 'to rouse the people through stirring songs of war in order to rid our lands of slavery' (Pepoli 1836). In the same fashion, the commemorative discourse delivered at Messina by Giuseppe La Farina likened Bellini's music to 'a canticle of sorrow on the fate of peoples oppressed by overweening power' (La Farina 1835, 10).[18]

Ten or so years later, in 1847, it would once again be in a pro-Italian context abroad, probably the salon of Mrs Milner-Gibson in London, that the only recorded encounter between Mazzini and Verdi took place. The first of these two very well-known figures had then been in London for some time and tireless in his proselytising and organising on behalf of the Italian national cause; the second had just arrived in the English metropolis for the international premiere of the *Masnadieri*, which was to be staged at Her Majesty's Theatre on 22 July, the day that Parliament went into summer recess, and which featured a stellar cast including the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind. Sympathies between the two men did not run deep, as can be gathered from the all too laconic references to the encounter that feature in Mazzini's letters, and in his alone (Sorba 2012b). Yet the dialogue broached between the composer and the world of political activism would have as its chief outcome the commissioning by Mazzini of a hymn based on a text by Goffredo Mameli. It was intended to be a sort of Italian Marseillaise to be sung on the battlefields of 1848, and it was to bear the title 'Sound the trumpet', thereby echoing the words of the most famous piece from Bellini's final opera. Verdi sent it to Mazzini in the autumn of 1848, too late, indeed, since the war against Austria was by then effectively lost. The hymn was plainly not high on Verdi's agenda, and Mazzini's coolness towards the composer on this, as on other occasions, was no doubt due to this delay. [19]

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## Conclusions

The meaning of terms such as cosmopolitanism and nationalism needs to be carefully weighed when we have in mind the world of the arts and of entertainment. This point is of yet greater importance when we address the specific field of music, since these same terms did in fact have markedly different meanings and interrelationships in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Weber 2011). Only in the closing decades of the nineteenth century did genuine competition between national opera traditions arise, and only then was it that the genre itself of 'national opera' became entrenched (Ther 2011). In Italy itself these decades were characterised, as is well known, by a conspicuous internationalisation of the opera repertoire (Korner 2011) and at the same time by the spread in public debate of a sort of artistic chauvinism (Piazzoni 2001). The desire to react to what was perceived to be an invasion of foreign composers led to a veritable 'obsession' with 'Italianness' in music (Piccardi 1998).

In the first half of the nineteenth century, however, as we have seen in the case of Verdi, composers and librettists negotiated with consummate ease the complexities of a narrative system whose national borders were by no means sharply defined. Moreover, the frequent slippage from texts and episodes peculiar to a foreign cultural tradition to themes more consonant with their own national sensibility appears to have been habitual and in no way problematic.

In their reflections on the theatre and on music as in other respects, Mazzini and his followers, for their part, placed a high value upon their close links with European political culture. Though no more than a sample, the experiences touched upon here do nonetheless allow us to take our bearings and to grasp some of the meanings attached to an interpretive activism that saw in the theatre an important locus of politicisation. Furthermore, they show how it was often from abroad and in contact with other international political experiences that, even where communicative and mobilising strategies were concerned, themes, hints and modes of action that would make up the variegated panorama of the Risorgimento were developed. In the light of our consolidated knowledge of such developments, we are now obliged to adopt a European (if not a global) perspective on the Risorgimento.

But the interesting point to note is that, in so doing, we almost invariably end up transcending the opposition permeating the recent historiography between interpretations focused more on economic and social factors (for example, intellectual unemployment as one of the main causes accounting for the development of the patriotic movement) and those exclusively concerned with cultural, discursive and communicative aspects. As the reader will have glimpsed in the foregoing pages, the often unexpected interweavings, interactions and superimpositions between these two planes demand that we attempt a more rounded account, even when approaching the question from the specific, yet in no sense marginal perspective afforded by the world of theatre.

## Notes on contributor

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## Notes

1. For an important attempt to engage in a collective project researching into and reflecting upon the implications of adopting a transnational perspective when studying cultural phenomena, see Boschetti (2010). See Iriye and Saunier (2009) for an overview of the transnational turn in history, an approach interested in the links and flows of people, goods, ideas and processes that stretched over national borders.

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2. A synthesis of this phase of scholarly research may be found in a collective volume (Fulcher 2011); for recent relations between music and history see also Jackson and Pelkey (2010); Muller (2010); Sorba (2012c).
3. For a definition of cosmopolitanism in a musical context see Weber (2011). He underlines how cosmopolitan repertory and taste have played a central role in musical life throughout the Western world since at least the late Middle Ages.
4. On the nationalisation of opera in the course of the nineteenth century as an essentially European phenomenon, and as a product of increasing cultural transfers, see Ther (2011).
5. The attitude of German Romantics towards Italian speech theatre was profoundly critical (Kapp 1991). Indeed, even Madame de Staël (1807) herself wrote, in *Corinne ou l'Italie*, that 'il n'y a pas plus en Italie de comédie que de tragédie ... le seul genre qui appartienne vraiment à l'Italie, ce sont les arlequinades', De Staël vol. 1, 333.
6. For a magisterial investigation of French speech theatre in the latter half of the nineteenth century, an indubitably different case, but one just as deeply marked by the hegemony of the international theatre, see Charle (2010).
7. On the globalisation of Italian opera from 1830 onward see Walton (2012); Annibale Cetrangolo describes a genuine passion for opera in the countries of Latin America, especially in milieux intrigued by, and attuned to, European cultural phenomena (Cetrangolo 1996, 663).
8. The cases of Greece and Brazil, studied by Kiosoupoulos (2008) – where the creation of a 'national' opera occurred in the context of a constant play of mirrors between it and the international repertoire of Italian opera – are of particular significance in this regard.
9. Marie Pierre Le Hir (1992) has produced a very illuminating reconstruction of the complicated trajectories whereby a twofold recognition of author's rights, for novelists on the one hand and for dramatists on the other, was achieved.
10. Letter of Verdi to Cammarano, November 23, 1848, *Carteggio Verdi-Cammarano* 83.
11. Recent years have seen the publication of a significant number of studies devoted to the modalities of construction of national narratives and to the crucial role played in them by the production of fictions. On the different forms of national narrative, see Berger, Eriksonas and Mycok, eds. (2008); on Italian historiography, see the recent essay by Moretti and Porciani (2011); on the concept of national master narrative see Thijs (2008).
12. The English case too, as well as the French, has been the object of interesting investigations into the massive politicisation to which the stage was subject at the turn of the eighteenth century; see for example Barrell (1998) and Worrall (2007).
13. On the complex debate regarding the citizen-spectator in Enlightenment France, I refer the reader to Sorba (2009).
14. Locke (1986, 67ff). On the central role of art and the artist in Saint-Simonian doctrine, see, in particular, Bénichou (1977). On the markedly Saint-Simonian residues in Mazzinian thought, see Levis-Sullam (2007).
15. Its essentially literary character was meant to enable it, amongst other things, to circulate freely even in Italy; see the account of the project given by Tommaseo in *N. Tommaseo a G. Capponi*, 387.
16. We lack as yet any accurate survey of the occasions upon which opera performances, and indeed theatre performances in general, provoked reactions of a political nature, above all in the period 1846–1849, still less a comparative enquiry into the agencies responsible for fomenting them. Interpretations of such events remain highly diverse – for the two contrasting points of view, see Smart (2012); Sorba (2009).
17. And the theatre is often at the heart of their letters (see the one by Tommaseo cited above) and subsequently of their memoirs. See, for example, Ricciardi (1857).
18. For the construction of the political myth of Bellini see Sawall (2004).
19. 'The London group is mad about Verdi's hymn – he wrote to his friend Scipione Pistrucci, a militant republican – but I don't know the tune so I can't comment on it', in Mazzini, *Scritti editi e inediti*, vol. XXXVII, quoted in Sorba (2012).

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