

States, as well as an expansive range of choreographies, from the ensemble rehearsal of US pre-recruits via online multiplayer war games to the dialogic potential of *bharata natyam* after the Sri Lankan civil war (a 'new old war'). Giersdorf and Morris also propose this as a means not to presume relationships between dance and politics, but to discover them anew (which happens in a nuanced way for the most part, excluding one unfortunate comparison between dancer and soldier on the basis of risk).

Certain themes recur and intersect – among others, almost a third of the chapters engage with the embodiment of the soldier or guard, another substantial group investigate what a choreographic lens can reveal about recent conflict and post-conflict zones, and a third family of essays begins from concert dances whose representations of wars may offer new theoretical and social interventions. With no division by themes or sections, the book suggests that these must all be taken together as part of a larger picture.

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Richard Begam and Matthew Wilson Smith, ed.

### Modernism and Opera

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As Richard Begam and Matthew Wilson Smith acknowledge in their introduction to this provocative volume of essays, opera's theatricality and excess suggests an inherent distance from the 'detached and abstracted' aesthetic of modernism. Yet the apparently 'vexed' relationship between opera and modernism is refigured here in an illuminating consideration of works from Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* (1882) to Kaija Saariaho's *L'Amour de loin* (2000).

This extended chronological range reflects the tenets of new modernist studies, which expands modernism's reach over both a broader time-span

and conceptual frame: hence the unusual positioning of the above two operas alongside more immediately recognizable modernist works such as Berg's *Wozzeck* (1922; first performed 1925) and Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* (1932, unfinished). Key to the volume's exploration of modernism's significance in opera history is how the 'intermediality that characterized so much of modernist praxis is most memorably realized in the synthetic genius of opera – in its ability to bring together the literary, dramatic, visual, and musical in a single aesthetic expression'.

The twelve essays by a distinguished line-up of authors from separate disciplines probe opera's nexus of intermedial encounters in different political, cultural, and social contexts, teasing out the nuances between various national musical approaches to modernism and offering insights on questions of gender and ethnicity. The result is a volume that reveals composers' efforts to re-work opera in contemporary guise: to find ways of putting opera's synthesis of arts at the service of the present, rather than in thrall to the past.

What is striking, however, is that all but one of the librettos in these works draw on historically based narratives: medieval religiosity in *Parsifal* and *Saint François d'Assise* (Messiaen), mythology and fairy-tale in *Die ägyptische Helena* (Strauss) and *Bluebeard's Castle* (Bartók), or biblical sources in *Moses und Aron* (Schoenberg), to name but a few. Even the exception, *The Makropulos Case* (Janáček, 1926), although set in modern Prague, fields a heroine born in the sixteenth century. This distrust of narratives rooted in contemporary experience by composers otherwise committed to the 'modern' implies a curious reliance on opera's traditional use of history, mythology, and fantasy as a prism through which to perceive the new.

In short, this stimulating and stylishly written volume makes a fascinating contribution to our understanding of both opera and modernism. It will surely appeal to readers from opera specialists to theatre, literature, art, and cultural historians.

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