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'Italian Opera' in 'Central Europe', 1600–1780: Research Trends and the Geographic Imagination

Italijanska opera v Srednji Evropi, 1600–1780: smeri raziskovanja in geografska domišljija

SUMMARY

This brief survey of literature, provided with a bibliography, proposes to critically inform about research carried out over the last 30 years, and to identify research trends regarding subject definition, methodology and epistemology of the apparent duality, 'Italian Opera' and 'Central Europe'. A main question is how researchers have imagined their subject as a geographical space, and what their changing priorities had to do with developing regional concepts in music history.

It is shown how, in the 1960s and 70s, the reception of Italian Opera in Europe was conceptualised as a national and European, not a regional question; how specialisation on mechanisms of production and consumption in the 1980s instigated more socially-oriented research, and how in this context both a nationalist and a universalist direction were being undermined. A renewed focus in the 1990s on small-scale production units such as individual cities, opera companies and travelling individuals enabled researchers to re-categorise Italian opera as a regional and diverse phenomenon. The contribution of such projects as the *Storia dell'Opera Italiana* (ed. Bianconi), the various *Hofkultur* researches in Germany, and the ESF programme *Music in Europe, 1600-1900*, with its study group on *Italian Opera in Central Europe* (Dubowy et al.) have now become influential. International collaboration also beyond 'central' Europe has seemed the most appropriate means of achieving good research results. Central Europe was, at least in ope-

POVZETEK

Kratki pregled literature, opremljen z bibliografijo, kritično informira o raziskavah, ki so nastale v zadnjih tridesetih letih, in identificira trende, ki zadevajo definiranje predmeta, metodologijo in epistemologijo navidezne dvojnosti »italijanska opera« in »Srednja Evropa«. Glavno vprašanje je, kako so si raziskovalci predstavljali svoj predmet raziskave kot geografski prostor, in kaj so njihove spreminjajoče se prioritete imele opraviti z regionalnimi koncepti zgodovine glasbe.

Prikazano je, kako se v 1960. in 1970. recepcija italijanske opere v Evropi konceptualizira kot nacionalno in evropsko, ne regionalno vprašanje; kako specializacija za mehanizme produkcije in porabe v 1980. napeljevala k bolj sociološko naravnane-mu raziskovanju in kako sta pri tem spodkopana oba, tako nacionalistična kot univerzalistična usmeritev. Prenovljeno gledišče v 1990. na zamejene produkcijske enote, kot so mesto, operne družbe in potujoči posamezniki, je omogočilo raziskovalcem ponovno kategorizirati italijansko opero kot regionalen in raznolik pojav. Prispevki projektov, kakršen je *Storia dell'Opera Italiana* (ur. Bianconi), različne raziskave *Hofkultur* v Nemčiji in ESF program *Music in Europe, 1600-1900* s študijsko skupino *Italian Opera in Central Europe* (Dubowy idr.) so postale vplivne. Mednarodno sodelovanje tudi čez meje »srednje« Evrope se je zdelo najbolj ustrezno sredstvo za doseganje dobrih raziskovalnih rezultatov. Srednja Evropa je bila, vsaj po operi, tipizirana po svojem interesu za glasbo 'ne-srednje'

ra, typified by its interest for the music of 'non-central' Italy. The concept of Central Europe in music (as in other matters) is a concept without borders.

Italije. Koncept Srednje Evrope v glasbi (kakor tudi pri drugih rečeh) je koncept brez meja.

This brief survey proposes to critically inform about research carried out over the last 30 years, and to identify research trends regarding subject definition, methodology and epistemology of the apparent duality, 'Italian Opera' and 'Central Europe'. A main question will be if and how researchers have imagined their subject as a geographical space, and what their changing priorities may have had to do with developing regional concepts in music history.

In 1973, Anna Amalie Abert provided a point of departure for our enquiry. The universally-respected Italian opera specialist history filled a geographical-political space (Italy and the 'Holy Roman Empire') and a time-frame (1745–90) with the careers and works of opera composers such as Handel, Hasse and Gluck. Abert's horizon could not be called 'central European', however, because she did not attempt to identify regional structures or practices; Italian opera was implicitly defined by her as an authorial art sponsored by German-speaking courts, a supra-national commodity whose history had happened in Dresden, Vienna or Mannheim as well as in Italy.

Abert's basic approaches were already present in two earlier contributions: Alan Yorke-Long's *Music at Court* of 1954, surveying eighteenth-century opera at the courts of Dresden, Parma, Berlin and Württemberg, and Daniel Hertz's conference paper of 1967, where the relevance of regional differences for style periodisation in music was recognised. Hertz argued that eighteenth-century Italian opera did not conform to general style periodisations but rather developed according to its own genre concept, which was forged in Italy, especially in Naples, in the 1720s. The 'Neapolitan tradition' of opera, and its European unfolding in a 'Metastasian epoch', were narratives floated by German- and American-led musicology in the 1960s. Despite the Italian, 'regionalist' ancestry of the term 'Neapolitan', these narratives maintained an anti-regionalist conceptualisation of Italian opera as a genre.

Nationalism – Europeanism – Localism

Nevertheless, the idea that region or locality influence or even determine a cultural practice – an idea almost never questioned in musical research today – was implied by Abert and Hertz, and in Germany it was then understood in strictly national terms. The Hamburg conference report, *Die frühdeutsche Oper und ihre Beziehungen zu Italien, England und Frankreich* (1981), for example, suggested a relationship with other countries – musicologists in the *Bundesrepublik* were European-minded – but what it emphasised about Hamburg opera was its 'early' German-ness. In the local source research on opera at Hamburg (Zelm, 1978; Marx, 1978), the geographical and cultural framework was German, not 'mitteleuropäisch'.

'European-ness' was admittedly also popular in German and Italian opera research then. The eastern half of Europe was of course not considered. The 'European-

ness' of great composers such as Handel or Vivaldi was addressed in collective volumes, for example those edited by Degrada (1978, 1980), which employed the formula 'famous artist X. from A. to B.', suggesting a supra-regional or European transfer. The formula is still found in volumes on Draghi (2000) and on the Bibiena family (2002).

Local Italian studies of opera strongly increased in the 1980s, often supported by local authorities aiming at tourist business and European community aid. Locally-focused publications have appeared on Venice, Sarti, Vivaldi, Gasparini, Roma, Reggio, Galuppi, Vinci, Scarlatti, Senesino, Naples, Florence, and many similar topics, often drawing on local archival research.

The geographical space as imagined by researchers in the 1980s was local and national – and perhaps tempered by European rhetoric – but not strictly-speaking regional. Austria, however, has no acknowledged national opera tradition, and its splendid opera history has sometimes fared badly when treated as part of 'German opera' (*New Grove*, 1992), whilst major Austrian publications (e.g., Seifert's, 1985) tended to treat Vienna or Habsburg only. The Italianate internationality of Habsburg court culture, or the universality of prominent Italians such as Pietro Metastasio (as shown in Joly, 1978, or Sommer-Mathis, 2000), put Austria's regional artists and central European neighbours in the shadow. Strohm, 1995, sketched a 'central European' framework, with Vienna as its point of gravitation. Seifert, 1996, acknowledged a Habsburgian operatic circuit 'north of the Alps'. A bi-national 'Austro-Italian Baroque' was coined in connection with Fux (White, 1992).

Other locally-focused research, whether on Mannheim (Würtz, 1984; Finscher, 1992), Dresden (Stuede et al., 1978; Landmann, 1995; Marx, 2000), or Munich (Liebscher, 1994), typically originated as institutional history. But it developed from the study of individual 'Hofkapellen' via the comparative view of 'Hofmusik' (Reimer, 1991) to that of 'Hofkultur', ultimately touching cultural, ceremonial and mentality issues. The court-culture approach was compatible with a 'European' outlook, now also discovering countries other than Italy and Germany, for example Russia (Bimberg, 1984), Bohemia (Freeman, 1992) or Poland (Poniatowska and Żórawska-Witkowska, 1995).

The re-valuation of local history also led to the recognition that 'small is beautiful', for example small opera centres and courts (Brusniak, 1992). This interest in the provincial sphere further dispelled notions of international or national stylistic *norms*, to which *variety* of artistic goals and products was being opposed. Taken together, these studies may nevertheless reveal what is not even envisaged by the individual authors: parallels or patterns across the various courts and cities in their practice of dealing with Italian opera.

Specialised Disciplines

In the 1980s, when the notions of author, work and style were being dismantled, musicology benefitted from the influx of specialised sister disciplines and methodologies which had rarely been consulted by earlier opera researchers. Baroque 'per-

formance practice' came first; libretto studies were second, mostly encouraged by splendid new databases such as Sartori's libretto catalogue (1993–4) and more specialised bibliographies. Iconographic evidence, facsimile editions and art history publications increased access to elements of the operatic artefact which were not displayed in the critical edition format of the musical classics. Perhaps most importantly, theatre historians specialised more and more on opera studies (Viale Ferrero, 1988, Sommer-Mathis, 1994). Several other special disciplines or topics, from rhetoric and gesture to dance history and literary studies, pursued their interest in local and regional opera history. The interdisciplinary trend may have helped the replacement of the spatial model 'Germany- Italy-Europe' with a more flexible imagination, which aimed to transcend the Austro-Germanic ghetto, and to explore multi-cultural link-roads.

Production, Consumption, Function

Before these new roads could be opened, a stronger notion of opera as musical *practice* needed to develop, to allow the human agents of the art and their temporal-spatial conditioning to be appreciated. The most important contribution of the 1980s to our discipline besides 'localism' and 'specialism' was a socio-cultural approach best expressed in the title of Bianconi's and Walker's ground-breaking article of 1984, 'Production, consumption and political function of seventeenth-century Italian opera'. Research interest shifted to production systems and performance, to singers, libretto, managers, to local and international politics as a framework for the semantics of opera. The comprehensive new *Storia dell'Opera Italiana*, edited by Bianconi (1987 ff; affectionately dubbed 'StOpIt'), is expected to carry these priorities through all the fields of that history. Only the systematic volumes four to six have so far appeared. In *Volume Two* (typescript submitted in 1990, now under revision), the history of Italian opera in 'central Europe', England, France and Iberia in the period 1600–1800 will be surveyed.

The relevance of these studies to the 'geographic imagination' is their capacity to re-evaluate collective and spatially-defined activities. Usually, 'regionality' is only implied in these studies, as for example when the travels and correspondence of opera practitioners are considered as part of his/her creative activity. 'People studies', however, had already been attempted in sections of the 1984 article by Bianconi-Walker, where certain singers and impresarios are portrayed. The approach was incorporated into 'StOpIt' (for example by Surian). Researchers working on this basis occasionally attempted large-scale sociological theorising, for example Piperno in 'StOpIt' and Reimer in his *Hofmusik* (1991). More often, individual case studies of local production and consumption were successful (as in Freeman, 1992). The trend towards a new spatial image *through* the study of creative and itinerant individuals (a phenomenon later known as 'diaspora') was the most significant. Sartori became a vital resource for 'diaspora' studies, as for example in Weiss (1986) and Mamy (1988; the first publication to use the term).

From Dissemination to Co-operation

In Don Neville's poignant title 'Crosscurrents and the Mainstream of Italian Serious Opera' (1982), the spatial imagination began to invade the history of styles and ideas; the antithesis of Norm und Vielfalt became familiar as a spatial metaphor. The 'dissemination' or 'circulation' paradigm of the 1980s, however, has yielded to studies of travel and diaspora of individuals, whether they be singers, impresarios, composers, critics, diplomats or gentlemen on grand tour. Focusing on people also meant adopting stricter sociological methodologies and entering such areas as religion, gender, family and identity. Unexpected links between regions through the career of travelling artists were revealed in impresarios' careers (Strohm, 1982), singers' and instrumentalists' biographies (Lindgren, 1984; Dubowy, 2001), and studies of itinerant opera companies (Rasch, 1992; King-Willaert, 1993; Strohm, 1999 and 2001).

The idea of a 'central European phenomenon' gained considerably in these studies: neither the institutional study of *Hofkultur* nor the 'reception, circulation and dissemination' paradigms had demonstrated with similar ease how central European cultural centres could function interactively. Inevitably, also bi-lateral links with non-central regions (for example, Italy-Poland, or Austria-Spain) were compared to those *within* the central area.

Co-operative research is familiar today, but it has become essential in opera history, which needs to consider varied disciplines and local practices. Just like opera production, modern historical research needs long-term institutional support for the sake of coherence, but equally it needs ever-renewed input and challenge from diversity and from the outside. The benefit of such diversity for our field is demonstrated, for example, in many collective volumes on Venetian opera, edited by theatre historian Maria Teresa Muraro; in the 'central German' musicological series directed by Friedhelm Brunsniak at Arolsen; and in the Italian-German conferences sponsored by the 'Amici della Musica' (A.M.I.S.) and directed by Alberto Colzani, Norbert Dubowy and others.

The multi-authored series *Storia dell'Opera Italiana*, introduced above, is an ongoing research enterprise which has stimulated others. In a non-conference volume convened by Albert Dunning and edited by Reinhard Strohm, the *Eighteenth-century Diaspora of Italian Music and Musicians* (1991) has been illustrated; new regional accents are set with London, Russia and the Netherlands, and the bi-national view is exemplified with the pair Italy-France.

The largest project so far that focuses entirely on *Italian Opera in Central Europe, 1600–1780*, is a section (Group 1) of the European Science Foundation (ESF) programme *Musical Life in Europe, 1600–1900* (1996–).

The key-word 'central Europe' is no longer another word for 'Germany' or 'Holy Roman Empire' but characterises the outlook itself: a collaboration of scholars of different specialisations and of course from different language backgrounds. Three volumes are forthcoming (2003–5): vol. 1, Melania Bucciarelli, Norbert Dubowy and Reinhard Strohm (eds), *Institutions and Ceremonies*; vol. 2, Andrea Sommer-Mathis and Herbert Seifert (eds), *Italianità in Opera*; vol. 3, Dorothea Schröder and Alina Żorawska-Witkowska (eds), *Opera Subjects and European Relationships*.

Volume One presents the institutional production of Italian operas mostly in central European cities, and the phenomenon of ceremoniality in opera, by interpreting historical source-texts, archival documents, and the libretti and opera repertoires themselves, particularly the less well-known ones. Metoda Kokole reports on Ljubljana, Samantha Owens on Stuttgart, Rudolf Rasch on Amsterdam, Juliane Riepe on Bonn, Reiner Kleinertz on Madrid, Angela Romagnoli on Bohemia, Żórawska-Witkowska on Poland; the better-known centres are addressed by Herbert Seifert (Austria), Martha Feldman (Naples), Andrea Sommer-Mathis (Vienna). Procedures and typologies of opera production are comparatively discussed in Norbert Dubowy's introductory essay; Bärbel Pelker compares the overlapping concepts of 'Hofmusik' and 'Hofoper'. Itinerant opera companies feature in Owens, Rasch, and Riepe, whilst Kokole and Romagnoli describe the operatic patronage of local aristocracy. The majority of results suggests a close analogy between Italian and non-Italian forms and aims of production and consumption.

The volume also reflects recent research on central European *Hofkultur*, *ceremonial* and diplomacy in their relevance for opera history (Fischer, Pelker, Riepe, Schröder, Sommer-Mathis). Some contributions concern the ideology, mentality and cultural anthropology of opera users (Kleinertz, Fischer, Feldman, Streubühr). Opera texts are also investigated to reveal contemporary (and possibly local) approaches to ideology and ceremoniality (Giuntini, Menchelli-Buttini, Strohm).

Towards a Conclusion

Among the thematic orientations in this field of opera studies that seem most promising today, the 'geographic imagination' is present although not the most obvious. Strong contestants are the paradigms of *Hofkultur*, *Ceremoniality*, *Festkultur*, the concern for minority issues, women, alternative voices; the anthropological branch of cultural studies (Feldman, 1995); ideology studies (Strohm, 2002). The last-named approaches might easily extend into comparative studies going beyond opera and, in fact, beyond Europe. What the presently successful co-operative projects seem to promise, is a dynamic attitude to research, an interactive practice without borders and without standard notions. The geographic imagination is always shifting. Opera of this period itself appears as a changing network of bi-lateral and multi-lateral interactions, rather than a sum of defined entities – particularly in the area we now call 'central Europe'. That the diversity which characterised central Europe often came from the outside, from Italy in our case, may be part of a definition of central Europe as well. Central Europe was – and remains, I hope – an area with open borders.

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