

schen, englischen und spanischen Quellen erscheinen überwiegend in italienischer Übersetzung, nur selten werden zentrale Formulierungen zusätzlich auch in der Originalsprache gebracht. Hier zeigt sich, dass das Buch eher ein breites Publikum als eine wissenschaftlich interessierte Leserschaft im Blick hat. Ein gründlicheres Lektorat hätte vielleicht dafür gesorgt, dass nicht allzu viele Fehler (die *Morning Post* wird häufig zur *Morning Post*, um nur eines von vielen Beispielen zu nennen) stehen geblieben wären. Trotz mancher Mängel ist Toddes Buch eine lohnende Lektüre für jeden, der sich für die Geschichte der Oper im 19. Jahrhundert interessiert.

Thomas Seedorf

Michael WALTER, *Oper. Geschichte einer Institution*, Stuttgart: Metzler / Kassel: Bärenreiter 2016, X + 470 S.

In an impressive new book, the Graz based musicologist Michael Walter surveys four hundred years of opera not as music history, but as the history of an institution. The book's aim is not to present readers with another account of opera as a musical genre, but to explain and analyse the different sets of conditions that are behind the performance of staged musical works. This description of the book might sound dry and unappealing, but what Walter produced is a fascinating and thoughtful analysis. Every section of this book is illustrated with historical examples demonstrating the author's wide-ranging knowledge of opera in different parts of the world, and from its origins in the seventeenth century to the present day.

At the centre of Walter's project are four interconnected themes: i) the different forms of producing opera under the impresario system, as court or state opera, or opera as a commercial enterprise; ii) the political and legal framework of producing opera; iii) the role of singers as the protagonists of the staged events, as well as the relatively minor role of librettists and conductors in the production; and finally iv) the audience, without whom opera has no purpose. Walter's thematic emphasis shows how relatively unimportant composers were within the history of the institution. Theatres simply used their works as a material basis to stage productions. The large majority of theatres in most parts of the world produced (and continue to produce) works that were not specifically written for the occasion; and especially today premieres of new works have become an absolute rarity on the schedules of most theatres. Even famous composers who

were employed as directors, like Rossini, Donizetti or Meyerbeer, only occasionally produced their own works. Their principal task was to run rehearsals, to choose casts and to evaluate the works of other composers. Likewise, the institution of the orchestra served a range of different purposes and was not specific to the production of opera. Therefore, Walter argues, opera is principally a theatrical and not a musical genre. For the same reason early commentators in particular attached more importance to the machinery behind the production of opera than to the music itself. Even the writing of the libretti was not considered an art, but a craft, something the poet did alongside other literary activities they usually considered more important. Based on this conceptual framework Walter presents his readers with an exciting narrative that covers four hundred years of opera in transnational, comparative and diachronic perspective.

Early on in his book, Walter's detailed analysis of different currency systems offers a good example of the meticulous research that informs his work. Synthesising highly specialised debates in the history of local and international finance, he explains how even professional brokers were often unable to assess the exact value of coins that circulated in a neighbouring province or city. Since the invention of opera musicians and composers were highly mobile and obtained their pay in currencies of one place but had to convert it into that of another, depending on where they had family or where they performed the following season. For instance, Prussia only allowed the export of *Ducaten* or *Kurant-Thaler*, but these were not necessarily the currencies singers obtained from their agent. Walter describes here a sub-field of opera studies that remains obscure even to specialists working on opera as business history, adding important chapters to existing research by authors like John Rosselli or Fiamma Nicolodi. Other examples of the highly specialised research that contributed to Walter's survey regard the cultural and social history of travel, or his comparative study of the legal age for singers. In every respect, his high standard of bibliographic interdisciplinarity presents a model of scholarship.

His chapters lead readers through the geographical and chronological variations of production praxis, explaining different organisational forms from the commercial rationale of the Italian impresario system to the purposes of running court- and municipal theatres. In most cases these different institutions all produced the same repertoire by the same composers and with the same singers. Walter's approach demonstrates how misleading a history of opera might be that uses the biographies of composers and

descriptions of particular works to write a conventional account of the institution. Only if we understand the conditions under which an opera was produced, do we find a way into its meaning and reception. Walter depicts the relationship between formal conventions associated with different genres and the conditions of production, for example when the commercial Italian opera business led to the formal standardisation of *opera seria*. At the same time, the emergence of new operatic forms, or the abandonment of existing conventions, as we find them in Meyerbeer's or Wagner's works, often were also the consequence of the specific conditions of production in Paris, Munich or Bayreuth. Obviously, there exist specialised monographs explaining these phenomena; but Walter's contribution to the debate is his synthesis of those studies in impressive chronological and geographical breadth. Moreover, his familiarity with the subject allows him to illustrate his arguments with countless quotations from a wide range of primary sources, which often add a very personal dimension to the experiences of impresari, singers, or other members of the profession. This approach demands unavoidable generalisations, describing a world where no theatre works under exactly the same conditions. Any scholar who has studied the complicated contracts of impresari, composers or singers knows of the many exceptions and special conditions behind the production of individual works. Walter shows that it is impossible to tell the history of opera as the history of one system.

Walter's combination of a specific thematic focus with a wide chronological range means that the reader has to accept considerable gaps in the narrative. For instance, in his analysis of the London opera houses the author jumps almost directly from Handel's times at Covent Garden to Michele Costa's Italian opera in 1846. We first learn about the restrictions for municipal theatres in France, before being told about the system of privileges originally introduced under Louis XIV. The rationale behind this organisation of the text is the book's focus on different forms of operatic enterprises, although for the reader it is not always easy to follow these different arguments.

A few examples will help to illustrate Walter's methodological approach. For instance, he explains the emergence of *opéra comique* with the economic and social conditions of the markets in Paris, and through its competition with other forms of theatre. In turn, Italian opera in Paris developed in close exchange with *opéra comique* and the institution of the *Comédie italienne*. The existence of any of these new theatrical forms depended on the willingness of the King or his brothers to grant respective privileges,

a principle that dated back to Perrin's and later Lully's privilege to produce opera at the Académie royale de musique. After the Revolution the fortunes of *opéra comique* were challenged by serious competition in form of the so-called *théâtres secondaires*, which produced different but equally popular forms of music theatre. The *liberté des théâtres*, introduced in 1864, hardly affected the situation of the highly subsidised theatres in Paris, but most provincial theatres could now only survive on the production of light entertainment. Very few provincial cities were in a position to subsidise their theatres; and as a purely commercial enterprise opera always lacked the conditions to survive.

The German lands (including Austria and Prussia), in 1864, had a total of 187 theatres, though many of these lacked the conditions to regularly produce opera; or they produced it badly, with minimally equipped orchestras and choruses. The important number of municipal theatres in Germany stood for a whole range of different organisational forms, from theatres owned by the municipality, or by private share companies, to the numerous estate theatres in the Habsburg monarchy, or theatres that at least nominally stood under the authority of a local prince. As in Italy, the aristocracy often populated these theatres, but in most cases they owned no boxes and therefore had less influence on the repertoire or the management, compared to certain Italian theatres. From the mid-nineteenth century, many of these theatres obtained a municipal subsidy. Altogether very different was the situation of courtly theatres that were financed by their rulers. Here the singers were public employees, and productions were planned and rehearsed long in advance. For the Habsburgs, ever since the early decades of the seventeenth century, producing Italian opera served the important purpose of princely representation, underlining the cultural ambition of a multinational Empire as well as its dynastic connections to Italy. From 1821 to 1828 the impresario of the Kärntnertheater was Domenico Barbaja, who also ran the San Carlo in Naples and the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. From April to June he ran an Italian season, later continued by Bartolomeo Merelli and Carlo Balocchino, who in 1841 engaged Donizetti as musical director. Becoming court composer in 1842, it was Donizetti who in 1843 conducted *Nabucodonosor*, Vienna's first opera by Verdi. The history of the Habsburg Empire is intrinsically linked to Italian opera, but likewise one cannot write the history of Italian opera without reference to its support by the Habsburgs. At a time when many courts in Europe were no longer in a position to finance productions of Italian opera, for the Habsburgs it remained a central part of their dynastic prestige.

In a comprehensive manner Walter also explores the growing field of scholarship on the globalisation of opera, starting from Italian travelling companies during the eighteenth century to larger enterprises expanding into South- and Latin America in the nineteenth century. By 1889 Giulio Ricordi estimated that about a quarter of Milan's foreign opera business was based in South-America. A particular case of opera's expansion into the New World was New Orleans, where performances of *opéra comique* began to be performed in the late eighteenth century. Opera became an important means of keeping French culture in the region alive, involving ambitious productions based on mostly French casts. Soon New Orleans started producing opera elsewhere in North America. Likewise, Italian troupes from Havana successfully produced opera in different parts of the USA. Combined with the productions of travelling troupes based in the US itself, most bigger cities were able to regularly witness a relatively wide range of the repertoire. Rather different was the situation in most British colonies. The operas performed in Australia shared very little with the original works. Arrangements were usually cut short, with different parts being adapted to the conditions of local singers and recitatives being replaced by spoken dialogue. "Home, sweet home" became a fixed part of many performances (still sung by Joan Sutherland as part of her 1990 farewell performance at Sydney). Only during the last decades of the nineteenth century were audiences in Melbourne able to see more ambitious productions of the European repertoire. In Calcutta wealthy British subjects attempted to imitate the principal theatrical forms of their homeland, but lacked the artists to produce opera as it was known in Europe. Until the mid-1830s, the result was simple potpourris of various songs and extracts of popular works adapted to the local conditions of performance. The travelling troupes that subsequently tried to extend the repertoire were often of an inferior quality. For many years the colonial and commercial elites had to endure without regular performances of opera.

The book's middle part provides a detailed section on legal matters, from the courtly or commercial regulation of theatres to issues of censorship, from legal disputes between singers and impresari to the rights of artists and their patrons. The examples Walter quotes demonstrate the great variety of sources available on life behind the curtains. Particularly colourful are his stories of singers put into prison, where their cells were transformed into luxury apartments to accommodate dinners and parties, which sometimes even included members of the court. Walter demystifies commonly held ideas about censorship, explaining how composers and

librettists like Scribe, Auber, Halévy and Thomas supported the institution when it was reintroduced in France in 1849. Rather than seeing themselves as victims of ruthless censors, they shared the rationale that public culture had to follow certain rules. Even if they worked for the police or the minister of the interior, the censors themselves were often literary figures; and the nature of their job almost always meant that they were more concerned with issues of morality than with politics. It was on this basis that words like “dio” or “chiesa” in Italian opera were replaced by the more neutral terms “cielo” and “tempio”. Walter notes correctly that “Verdi’s so-called Risorgimento operas were surprisingly little censored” (262). The censors’ interventions had more to do with the specificity of local conditions than with the contents of the libretti. Moreover, for most of their history operas were constantly adapted to the changing circumstances of production, without particular importance attached to what today we tend to call the ‘autonomy of the work of art’. In most cases the censors’ interventions were relatively minor compared to the many other factors that impacted on a work’s adaptation to changing circumstances. One of the reasons why composers during the nineteenth century were expected to be present during rehearsals of new works was to enable them to make changes to the score, at least if they did not leave this task to the *maestro concertatore*.

In a long and informative section of his book Walter takes account of the changing economic conditions of singers, of the comparatively strong legal position of female singers, and of the relationship between singers and their agents. With reference to Bourdieu, he approaches the topic through an analysis of the different forms of capital that singers were able to acquire, symbolic, social and economic. The money a singer made represented economic as well as symbolic capital, which in itself counted as much as the quality of their voice. In turn, symbolic capital implied that the singer was expected to afford a certain life-style, responding to what the public associated with the life of a prima donna or a famous castrato. For the impresario a singer’s symbolic capital became social capital, demonstrating that he or she was in a position to take on leading singers. Through his detailed analysis Walter provides us with a cultural history of the singers’ lives, from the beginnings of their career, often as part of a bigger family of musicians, to their retirement from the stage, when most of them had to continue making a living by other means for many years to come. Once again, these sections show the author’s impressive command of an extraordinarily wide range of primary sources revealing life behind

the curtains. The section is supported by a comparative study of the income of singers at thirteen eighteenth-century theatres in Europe, followed by further comparative studies for the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries.

The book's final section discusses changing audiences, their use of the theatres, adaptations of the buildings to changing circumstances, and prices for boxes and tickets. Walter pays particular attention to the hierarchies of boxes in different theatres and describes who populated the many other public spaces in the theatre. In a master-piece of source criticism Walter rejects fashionable arguments about nineteenth-century opera houses as hotspots of prostitution. Particularly in London there was a clear difference between the people frequenting the opera house (the King's Theatre or Her Majesty's Theatre) and those attending the more popular playhouses, some of which used prostitution to attract male audiences. The same is true for a comparison between, for instance, the Kärntnertortheater and the Leopoldstädtertheater in Vienna. For prostitutes the accessibility of any theatre in Europe depended on dress code and on the prices of tickets, which excluded them from most theatres that predominantly produced opera. Although Walter quotes examples of shopkeepers and artisans having access to certain productions, he dismisses claims arguing that the audiences at opera houses ever went beyond the societal elites. However, there were less expensive theatres that scheduled opera along with other forms of theatre, or productions of opera at markets or fairs. Moreover, access also depended on the size of the upper balconies or the *loggione*. Walter provides examples of theatres where up to a quarter of tickets were given out to different categories of people for free, often to be sold on at a reduced rate, making them affordable for people on lower incomes. In line with the methods adopted throughout the book, his section on prices includes meticulously compiled comparisons for theatres in different cities and countries over long periods of time, offering what is probably the most detailed transnational analysis presently available in any language.

With just twenty-six pictures this otherwise excellent new book is poorly illustrated. Given its almost 500 pages of small print, as well as its considerable chronological and geographical range, any reader would benefit from additional illustrations. Unlike many German-language academic monographs, Walter writes in a style that is very accessible to a wider readership, including professionals of the theatre industry as well as non-academic lovers of opera. Given the length of the text, the publisher allowed only very few notes and just a rudimentary bibliography, expecting readers to look up additional references on the author's personal

webpage. It is a sad example of making savings in the wrong place. Walter wrote a wonderful book that for decades to come will remain essential reading for anybody keen to find out how opera theatres worked.

Axel Körner

Ingeborg ZECHNER, *Das englische Geschäft mit der Nachtigall. Die italienische Oper im London des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Musikkulturen europäischer Metropolen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, 14), Wien/Köln/Weimar: Böhlau 2017, 404 S. (englische Übersetzung: *The English Trade in Nightingales: Italian Opera in Nineteenth-Century London*, translated by Rosie Ward, 277 p.; frei zugänglich unter: <http://www.oapen.org/search?identifizier=1000566>)

Im Zentrum der vorliegenden Publikation steht die Annahme, dass sich die Interessen des Londoner Opernpublikums des 19. Jahrhunderts auf Sängerinnen und Sänger konzentrierten – und das stimmt sicherlich. Ob das aber ein Alleinstellungsmerkmal der britischen Hauptstadt war, ist fraglich. Haben sich nicht alle Opernpublika seit der Eröffnung von San Cassiano in Venedig 1637 auf die Stimmen konzentriert, und haben sich nicht immer wieder Kritiker darüber echauffiert? Und sind es nicht erst die Verdienste von Wagner und Bayreuth, von Brecht und zeitgenössischen Regisseuren (unter anderem), dass die Sängerinnen und Sänger manchmal eben nicht mehr die Hauptattraktion des Abends sind?

Das vorliegende Buch postuliert also eine Sonderrolle des Londoner Opernlebens im 19. Jahrhundert, doch die Prämisse der Arbeit stimmt so nicht. London mag der Ort gewesen sein, an dem zu bestimmten Zeiten sowohl Operndirektoren als auch Künstlerinnen und Künstler sehr viel Geld mit Oper verdienen konnten – bis es von anderen Städten wie Sankt Petersburg und New York abgelöst wurde. Vielleicht war die Stadt zu Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts auch tatsächlich der «finanzielle Mittelpunkt der europäischen Sängerwelt» (101), aber das müsste erst einmal über Vergleiche mit Wien, Mailand, Paris, Berlin nachgewiesen werden. Ingeborg Zechner hat sich für ihre Doktorarbeit eingehend mit der Londoner Opernszene der Zeit von 1820 bis 1860 beschäftigt, wobei ihr Fokus auf den Sängerinnen und Sängern und deren Rolle innerhalb des Geflechts der Opernindustrie liegt. Dafür hat sie eine Vielzahl von Archivalien ausgewertet, vor allem zeitgenössische Publikationen und Zeitschriften, und Einsicht in Verträge genommen. Kernstück des Buches sind der Abdruck, die Über-