Introduction

In March 1908 the *Corriere della sera* – Milan's most prominent newspaper, and a regular purveyor of operatic news – published a report on the year's major operatic developments. Entitled 'The seasonal emigration of Italian artists to Latin America', the article reported on the imminent opening of the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires and outlined the possible impact on Italy's own cultural life:

> Italian music is a commodity happily exported. If it weren't so, composers, editors and above all our artists would not be able to derive from their virtuosity such great earnings, which reach quite unbelievable heights. This constitutes, it's true, the most beautiful triumph of Italian lyric art, and national pride can feel itself justly satisfied. But every medal has a reverse, and in this case, it resides in the fact that the stages of the peninsula are being depopulated of the best artists, and worse still, real battles will have to be fought, because it's not certain that famous conductors won't also desert the director's seats of the best theatres in Italy.[1]

As the article went on to suggest, the threat of an operatic exodus did not come from Paris, Vienna or London, but from cities across the Atlantic:

> North America, as we know, is our greatest enemy. The recent episode of the acquisition of Toscanini and Gatti Casazza, who for some ten years presided brilliantly over the destiny of La Scala, has served to reaffirm the inequality in . . . the arms of battle. But the danger doesn't just come from the North. If at this time in South America they are not overwhelmed by heat, and people find that they have nothing better to do than lock themselves up in the boxes at their capacious theatres, then the catastrophe of Italian art in its homeland could be inevitable.[2]

Arturo Toscanini and Giulio Gatti-Casazza, music director and general manager at Milan's Teatro alla Scala from 1898 until 1908, had been lured away to run New York's Metropolitan Opera House the previous season; and the imminent opening of the Colón risked a further, possibly fatal

[1] 'Emigrazione temporanea nell'America Latina di artisti italiani', *Corriere della sera*, 18 March 1908.
[2] Ibid.

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blow.[3] As the article outlined, Buenos Aires had already been hosting brilliant opera seasons for at least thirty years, with the new Colón joining the Teatro de la Ópera and the Politeama as a major venue for Italian repertory. Even from the outside, the Colón offered an impression of 'exceptional grandeur', while the interior was larger than either La Scala or Naples's Teatro di San Carlo, and the entrance no less opulent than the Palais Garnier.[4] Not that the planned repertoire was exclusively Italian. In line with the offerings in New York, Wagner, Massenet, Gounod and Strauss were all on the programme for the Colón's opening season. But around half of the titles were by Italian composers and, unlike in New York, all works were performed in Italian, by an Italian ensemble assembled especially for the season by Italian-born, Argentina-based impresario Cesare Ciacchi. The article's title added a further note of anxiety. The 'emigration' of Italian artists hinted at the link between Italian operatic troupes and the seasonal migrant workers who would leave Italy for the summer (or winter) before returning home several months later. In so doing, the article evoked (without explicitly addressing) a broader nexus of concerns about the impact of emigration on Italy's cultural and economic strength: not least around those same emigrants, operatic or otherwise, who might choose never to return home and instead build Italian communities abroad. In other words, rather than offering a rich economic opportunity, as it might have done decades earlier, operatic dissemination by this account increasingly threatened the foundations of the country's own cultural life.

The concerns outlined in this article can serve to introduce several of the key themes of this book. *In Search of Italy* investigates the changing operatic relations between Italy and the Americas in the decades between 1870 and 1922, and it considers the extent to which ideas and practices of Italian opera were defined outside Italy. Modern associations between Italian opera and Italian identity, I argue, were in crucial respects forged in – and via – the Americas during this period: shaped by changing economic relations, transatlantic emigration and new technological media for operatic production and consumption. At the same time, the operatic importance of the Americas also challenged easy connections between Italian opera and Italy itself, during a period in which opera played a vital role in the nation's self-image. At once the key destinations for Italian

[3] Toscanini was appointed alongside Gatti-Casazza in 1898 and was music director until 1903, returning in 1906 until his departure for New York.

[4] 'Emigrazione temporanea nell'America Latina'.

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emigrants – shaped by their increased economic importance from the 1870s onwards – and newly global centres for Italian opera, the United States and Argentina were central to defining links between Italian opera and an imagined Italianness, while complicating any easy equation of opera and Italian identity with Italy alone.

In Search of Italy thus offers an explicitly transnational study of Italian opera, providing an Italian-focused contribution to recent explorations of operatic mobility in the long nineteenth century.[5] Concentrating on the competing operatic centres of Milan, New York and Buenos Aires, it draws together histories of performance, technology and migration to consider how associations between Italian opera and Italianness (or *italianità*) were remade through multiple forms of transcontinental circulation. At its heart, this book tells a multilayered story in which definitions of Italian identity and opera – and the relations between these ideas – were debated and reshaped by major global centres of Italian culture. Milan, New York and Buenos Aires were of course in many respects exceptional, and all enjoyed ambivalent relationships with their host nations. But these material encounters between cities also co-existed (and interacted) with older ideas surrounding 'Italy' and 'America' that had enduring cultural force and had specific bearings on Italian opera during this period. Both real and imagined geographies, Italy and the Americas could function as stand-ins for wider discussions about the Old World and the New: about the relationship between an imagined past and the technological and socio-political developments that defined urban modernity during the Second Industrial Revolution. These discourses were also shifting significantly in tone from the late nineteenth century onwards as US and South American economies grew, in ways that increasingly overturned competing older perceptions of American barbarism.[6] If New York and Buenos Aires were framed as examples of American progress – economically, politically and culturally – the shifting transatlantic dynamics positioned Milan, Italy and even its storied operatic tradition as in decline.[7] But American ideas of

[5] See Charlotte Bentley, *New Orleans and the Creation of Transatlantic Opera, 1819–1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022); José Manuel Izquierdo König, *Kickstarting Italian Opera in the Andes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023); Jens Hesselager, ed., *Grand Opera outside Paris: Opera on the Move in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London: Routledge, 2019); and Benjamin Walton, *The Invention of Global Opera* (forthcoming).

[6] On the longer history of this debate, see Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010; first edition 1973).

[7] See, most recently, Luca Cottini, *The Rise of Americanism in Italy, 1888–1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2025). Axel Körner, *America in Italy: The United States in the*

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Italian decadence also fuelled Milan's urban and musical development in the decades after Italian unification, as ideas of modernity were identified with America itself. And tropes surrounding Italy's antiquated culture could also correspond with long-standing ideas that identified Italy as uniquely linked to the (operatic) voice.

Opera's status as a quintessentially Italian artform has long been investigated by scholars, yet primarily from within the perspective of Italy's borders. Major studies have examined Italian opera's role in nation-building before and after Italian unification, highlighting its crucial (if highly contested) part in shaping a national consciousness during the long nineteenth century.[8] Recent studies have also begun to demonstrate Italian opera's complex position in nation-building outside Italy, urging a reconceptualisation of its operatic history. In particular, Axel Körner and Paulo Kühl have drawn attention to the multiple ways in which Italian opera and its relationship to ideas of *italianità* were reconceived in a global context throughout the nineteenth century, highlighting the latter's importance as a fluid discursive concept rather than a stable category, and the role of non-Italian agents in defining and reimagining links between Italian opera and a perceived Italianness.[9] Yet the Americas have remained surprisingly peripheral to histories of Italian opera in the decades after Italian unification, notwithstanding their prominence in biographies of celebrity singers and conductors such as Enrico Caruso and in selected studies of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* (1910). New York and Buenos Aires have tended instead to be examined from largely local or national perspectives, and especially in relation to emerging US and Argentine repertoire.[10] Nor have previous studies addressed

Political Thought and Imagination of the Risorgimento, 1763–1865 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017) examines Italian perceptions of the United States in an earlier period, including anxieties over slavery and political violence reflected in works including Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* (1859); on operatic depictions in an earlier period, see Pierpaolo Polzonetti, *Italian Opera in the Age of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[8] For a recent overview, see Mary Ann Smart, *Waiting for Verdi: Opera and Political Opinion in Nineteenth-Century Italy, 1815–1848* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018); on the post-unification period, see Laura Basini, 'Cults of Sacred Memory: Parma and the Verdi Centennial Celebrations of 1913', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13/2 (2001), 141–61.

[9] Axel Körner & Paulo M. Kühl, eds., *Italian Opera in Global and Transnational Perspective: Reimagining Italianità in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). On the post-1870 period, see also Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Lorenzo Frassà & Michela Niccolai, eds., *Verdi Reception* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

[10] On US opera, see Elise K. Kirk, *American Opera* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); and Carolyn Guzski, 'American Opera at the Metropolitan, 1910–1935: A Contextual History and Critical Survey of Selected Works' (PhD dissertation, City University of New York, 2001).

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the significant competition between North and South American cities in their efforts to become Italian (and global) operatic capitals. As a consequence, the transnational dimensions of Italy's relationship with opera and the operatic voice have until recently typically receded into the background: addressed either in the broadest of terms or via studies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries focused on figures such as De Stäel and Goethe or the trauma of the Napoleonic occupation.

In Search of Italy, then, is in important respects a book about movement. Mobility is, famously, an elusive object of study, one that raises challenging questions over both agency and the limits of historical inquiry even as it has become a central theme in much recent work in the humanities.[11] As a scholarly approach it also requires careful handling of a broad range of historical environments and disciplinary debates, for which reason the rest of this introduction first addresses Milan before considering New York and Buenos Aires. In terms of focus, however, the main chapters do not aim to provide a chronicle of performances, nor to dwell at length on economic data, however vital such information has been in establishing the book's historical framework. Their goal instead is to re-orientate familiar ideas of the role of Italian opera in shaping (but also challenging) conceptions of a broader exportable Italianness. Indeed, Italian opera could function as both an enduring tool of modernisation and as a crucial agent of cultural continuity during a period of rapid urban change, in ways that could also question the idea of opera as a quintessentially Italian artform. At once a venerable symbol of Italy's musical supremacy yet deeply embedded in modern industrial developments, opera was continually re-fashioned and susceptible to multiple re-imaginings. Rather than standing still, in fact, opera, Italy and *italianità* were on the move.

Milan and the Globe: Opera, Emigration and *Italianità*

The time frame covered in this book places it firmly within Italy's Liberal Era (1861/70–1922), the musical culture of which has become the subject of

On Argentine opera, see Malena Kuss, 'Nativistic Strains in Argentine Operas Premiered at the Teatro Colón (1908–1972)' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1976); Enzo Valenti Ferro, *Historia de la ópera argentina* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Artes Gaglianone, 1997); and Vera Wolkowicz, *Inca Music Reimagined: Indigenist Discourses in Latin American Art Music, 1910–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

[11] John Urry, *Mobilities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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growing scholarly investigation.[12] In part, this turn reflects a flourishing interest in relations between opera and urban culture: an area in which Italy is exceptionally well-placed to attract attention.[13] But it also reflects more long-standing interests in music's relationship with nineteenth-century nationalism, and efforts to reconsider this period away from the dual shadows of the Risorgimento and post-war Fascism. The period immediately following Italian unification emerges as one in which local and national self-representations co-existed in frequently awkward tension: regional identities (and divisions) competed with official government rhetoric as both Italy and its municipal councils sought to restructure the peninsula's economic and social model.

As numerous historians have noted, the unification of Italy (1815–1861/70) was far from a coherent process. In its wake, liberal economic policies were extended from the North to the South, in ways that ironically deepened pre-existing divisions. Italy's eventual entrance into the Triple Alliance in 1882 reflected broader efforts to play catch-up with Northern European countries, particularly in Northern Italian cities; the colonial wars that followed in Ethiopia, Libya and Eritrea were a bloody successor. Against this background of regional division, efforts to generate a sense of national consciousness were widespread, with monuments quickly erected to Garibaldi and Cavour, streets renamed and expositions staged in Northern Italian cities by the 1880s to celebrate Italy's industrial progress. Municipal governments were also keen to assert civic identities within this shifting political environment, with cultural policy a crucial means. Aristocratic elites continued to exert power in local government but members of the educated middle classes began to influence cultural institutions, encouraging a breakdown of class hierarchies as well as the emergence of a self-consciously educated bourgeoisie.[14] If local urban identities remained the fundamental social unit within Italian society following unification, they could also function as a vantage point from which to orientate broader national and transnational relations.

[12] On the Liberal Era, see Alberto Mario Banti, *Storia della borghesia italiana: l'età liberale* (Rome: Donzelli, 1996); on opera in the immediate post-unification period, see Francesca Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022). The Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed on 17 March 1861 but Rome was not captured until 1870, with the city officially declared the capital (succeeding Florence) in June 1871.

[13] For an overview, see Suzanne Aspden, ed., *Operatic Geographies: The Place of Opera and the Opera House* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[14] Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–79, 163–96.

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Milan would never be the Italian capital, yet by the 1870s its reputation as the nation's economic and moral centre – the 'capitale morale' – was one that local elites carefully sought to fashion. Liberal economic policies were identified with the spiritual character of the city, characterised above all by hard work, industrialisation and concepts of progress: an explicitly modern, secular counterpart and rival to the official capital of Rome.[15] As the centre of several major industries and home to an especially developed transport network, these claims had some basis; and its historic links to the Hapsburg empire positioned it as an obvious brokerage point for Italy's Northern European relations. Milan, in turn, was the nation's publishing centre and home to a major conservatory as well as several important theatres, and it could credibly claim to be at the forefront of what Luca Cottini has dubbed the 'imperfect modernisation' of Italy: a period when Italy boasted some of the highest university attendance rates in Europe and a growing industrial base but also among the lowest levels of literacy.[16] The 1860s and 1870s witnessed major urban redevelopment, as older buildings were demolished and streets widened to create space for new institutions, and the city's population boomed.

Italian music was an integral part of these processes. Verdi was quickly incorporated into the pantheon of national heroes alongside Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, and the newly revived 'ancient' music of Palestrina and Monteverdi. Nowhere was this clearer than in Milan, the city in which many of Verdi's operas received their Italian premieres from the 1860s onwards.[17] After 1861, responsibility for financing opera houses had been handed over to local governments, and La Scala – like other Italian theatres – had to restructure its finances to avoid financial disaster.[18] Accusations of decline beset the theatre, as new works failed to win public and critical favour, and the delicate financial relationship between the municipality, boxholders and box office became increasingly unstable. Yet La Scala remained central to the city's self-image, as the most

[15] Giovanna Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale: letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra Otto e Novecento* (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1982).

[16] Luca Cottini, *The Art of Objects: The Birth of Italian Industrial Culture, 1878–1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

[17] *Don Carlo* (1867) received its Italian premiere in Bologna in 1867 but the revised four-act version premiered in Milan in 1884, as did the revised version of *Simon Boccanegra* (1857) in 1881; *Aida* (1871) arrived at La Scala in 1872, while *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893) both received their world premieres at the theatre.

[18] Jutta Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt: Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009).

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internationally renowned theatre in Italy.[19] Founded in 1778 alongside the Teatro alla Cannobbiana, La Scala had recently also positioned itself as the epicentre of new operatic technologies such as electric lighting.[20] No wonder, therefore, that a major speech by publisher Ricordi praising the theatre's economic industry was reprinted in music critic and administrator Pompeo Cambiasi's history of the theatre in 1889.[21] Arguing for La Scala's continued artistic and financial productivity, and locating it at the centre of a lucrative global industry benefitting the wider city and nation, Ricordi aimed to assert an operatic future for Milan as glorious as its imagined past.

In this context, pressure on young composers was unsurprisingly intense. Recent studies have powerfully outlined the extent to which Italian operatic works during the 1880s and 1890s – in Milan and elsewhere – were saddled with the need to be 'modern': to participate in a broader discourse of cultural progress and urbanisation, defined musically by an awareness of German and French trends (in particular a focus on organicism and greater orchestral complexity), while retaining an identifiable sense of *italianità* (here typically equated with melody.[22] Efforts to move on from Italy's musical past also played out in more obvious ways. Following the introduction of Meyerbeer and Wagner's works in Bologna in the late 1860 and 1870s, operatic repertoire at La Scala became more international. Opera was also performed at a significant range of other venues, most notably the Teatro dal Verme (opened 1872), the Teatro Carcano and Teatro Manzoni, with the Cannobbiana being taken over by the Sonzogno firm in 1894 and being renamed the Teatro Lirico Internazionale.

If Milan's urban and musical culture was preoccupied with progress, these local and national self-representations existed in complex dialogue with equally powerful (and more long-standing) perceptions of Italy's identity and national character. This was rooted in an Enlightenment tradition (extending back to Montesquieu, Rousseau and De Stäel), in

[19] La Scala seasons have been taken from Carlo Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala nella storia e nell'arte, 1778–1963* (Milan: La Scala, 1964).

[20] Laura Protano-Biggs, 'Mille e mille calme fiamelle: Illuminating the Teatro alla Scala at the fine secolo', *Studi verdiani* 23 (2013), 146–67.

[21] Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1889: Note storiche e statistiche* (Milan: Ricordi, 1889).

[22] Emanuele Senici, 'Verdi's "Falstaff" at Italy's Fin de Siècle', *The Musical Quarterly* 85/2 (2001), 274–310; Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Arman Schwartz, *Puccini's Soundscapes: Realism and Modernity in Italian Opera* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2016).

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which Italy was imagined as a uniquely musical site: a culturally rich region responsible for the origins of European culture, but now economically and politically diminished; a pastoral and innately musical – above all vocal – landscape persisting within a nascent modernity characterised by rationality, progress and even writing itself.[23] These perceptions were firmly in place by the early nineteenth century, in Italy and abroad (even if nuanced by other viewpoints); and they continued to be articulated throughout the post-unification period by a variety of commentators.[24] 'I wondered, for my own part, where I had seen it all before – the pink-walled villas gleaming through their shrubberies of orange and oleander, the mountains shimmering in the hazy light like so many breasts of doves, the constant presence of the melodious Italian voice' remarked Henry James in 1909, after a visit to Lombardy's Lake Como. 'Where indeed but at the Opera when the manager has been more than usually regardless of expense?'[25] The Boston-born James enjoyed a self-consciously cosmopolitan profile as the most 'European' of New World writers, yet he still registered Italy through an explicitly foreign and exoticising gaze: the operatic landscape of Italy a seductive contrast to modern American urbanisation.

At one level, such images offered an obvious basis for constructing a national imaginary. Claims of Verdi's operas' intimate involvement with the Risorgimento – an idea well established by the 1870s and 1880s – rested precisely on this notion: operatic singing as an innately Italian activity that could shape national consciousness, and it was a trope that was repeatedly invoked to justify municipal funding for La Scala. Yet such a romantic (even orientalist) image was precisely one that the *capitale morale* myth sought to move away from, by asserting Milan's parity with other modern cities. Turning opera into 'operosità' – a form of productive labour to match industrial activity – was one rhetorical (and material) solution to the problem.[26] But other views continued to be voiced inside and outside Italy, that both reinforced older perceptions of Italian culture, and repositioned them in relation to other political geographies. As the *Corriere della*

[23] On De Staël, see Robert Casillo, *The Empire of Stereotypes: Germaine de Staël and the Idea of Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); more broadly, see Joseph Luzzi, *Romantic Europe and the Ghost of Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

[24] On the early nineteenth century, see also Ellen Lockhart, *Animation, Plasticity, and Music in Italy, 1770–1830* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 85–111.

[25] Henry James, *Italian Hours* (Boston: Houghton, 1909), 132.

[26] 'Operosità' (industriousness) was one of the goals explicitly sought for La Scala's public image when it set up its commissione artistica in 1872. See Laura Protano-Biggs, 'Musical Materialities in Milan and Liberal Italy at the fine secolo' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2014), 4–5.

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sera's 1908 article makes clear, by the early twentieth century the key centres for Italian operatic and cultural activity were increasingly felt to have moved across the Atlantic: the relationship between Italy and the Americas imagined as a pitched battle for pre-eminence, and New York and Buenos Aires less exciting operatic markets than prospective world centres of Italian cultural activity.

The tendency of musical studies of Italy's Liberal Era to look inward is in many respects entirely understandable. This period has long been overlooked in favour of the romance of the Risorgimento, and figures such as Puccini and Mascagni have been slow to enter the musicological canon – dismissed by an earlier generation of scholars as insufficiently modernist. Yet as musicologists have investigated the Liberal Era further, the need for a more transnational perspective on the intersections between Italian opera, Italy and *italianità* has become obvious – one that would moreover underline the Liberal Era as a distinctive period in Italy's musical history. The economic importance of the Americas for Italian opera troupes in the post-unification era was outlined decades ago, while scholars inside and outside the Anglo-American academy have highlighted this repertory's wide dissemination and cultural prestige during an age of colonial and post-colonial expansion.[27] A broader move in the humanities towards global history and cultural mobility has also highlighted the extent to which Italy's political and economic developments throughout the nineteenth century were shaped by transnational encounters and exchanges that were mutually informative.[28] The decades around 1900 have been identified as crucial ones in the history of globalisation: even 'the great acceleration' in Christopher Bayly's assessment.[29] High-speed steamships reduced transatlantic travel to two weeks by the 1880s and department stores and world's fairs provided exposure to international goods, while the transatlantic telegram delivered messages with unprecedented rapidity. These developments also encouraged new perceptions of collective temporal experience rooted in expanded perceptions of geography, a development in which

[27] On American opportunities see John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); on Italian opera outside Europe, see for example Anna Laura Bellina, ed., *Il teatro dei due mondi: L'opera italiana nei paesi di lingua iberica* (Treviso: Diastema, 2000).

[28] Particularly relevant are Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); and Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[29] Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, 451–87. See also Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting: 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

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experiences of time itself became newly complex; as Stephen Kern has argued, the present 'thickened temporally with retentions and protentions of past and future' and 'most important, expanded spatially to create the vast, shared experience of simultaneity.'[30] Massive global migrations also fundamentally changed the demographics of countries such as the United States and Argentina: 55 million people left Europe for the Americas and Australia between 1850 and 1914, in response to improved transport links, labour shortages, booming New World economies, colonial expansion, domestic famines and overpopulation.[31]

These developments unmistakably shaped economic and cultural activity in Liberal Italy, and particularly in Milan.[32] Milan was already well-connected to other Western European capitals by 1861, with British and French culture strongly present throughout the Liberal Era. The gradual industrialisation of Northern Italy (and pockets of the South) also encouraged international trade, and foreign goods began entering the Italian marketplace in greater numbers. Italian products were also sent across the Atlantic and even as far as Australia – particularly in Italian emigrant heartlands. As the nation's publishing heartland, Milan also set the standard for foreign reporting within Italy. Alongside *Corriere della sera* (founded in 1876), a wide range of newspapers and specialist periodicals were produced – notably *Il secolo* (founded 1870), soon Italy's bestselling newspaper – exposing readers to foreign news and cultural activities. Foreign newspapers were available in public libraries and private clubs, and a wide range of new cultural institutions and museums gave access to international culture.

More than any other development, however, it was Italy's part in the mass European emigration of the period that radically reshaped Italy's relationship with the rest of the world – and with itself. Between 1870 and 1914, around 14 million Italians left the country, in one of the greatest migrations in human history.[33] Nearly half of these emigrants

[30] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 314.

[31] Timothy J. Hatton & Jeffrey G. Williamson, *The Age of Mass Migration: Causes and Economic Impact* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 32–58.

[32] Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy*, particularly 133–67. More broadly, see Harold James & Kevin H. O'Rourke, 'Italy and the First Age of Globalization, 1861–1940', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Italian Economy Since Unification*, ed. Gianni Toniolo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37–68.

[33] Emilio Franzina, *L'immaginario degli emigranti: Miti e raffigurazioni dell'esperienza italiana all'estero fra due secoli* (Paese: PAGUS, 1992) and Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

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would travel to the Americas, with migration rates radically increasing from 1880 onwards; Brazil was initially a popular South American choice alongside Argentina, but emigration there sharply declined after 1902 when the Italian government banned sponsored Brazilian emigration (via the Prinetti decree) due to large-scale exploitation.[34] Emigration to the Americas was predominantly from the South, but Genoa was one of two major departure points alongside Naples, and emigration was endlessly discussed in the Milanese press. Many emigrants would eventually return home or pursue careers as seasonal workers, contributing further to a transatlantic human flow while nuancing perceptions of the Americas as lands of opportunity. But many remained and established families and businesses, giving rise to explicitly Italian-American identities and enduring cultural links. As with other contemporary mass migrations, the Italian diaspora was driven by a complex mix of reduced travel time, economic opportunity abroad, and unique domestic difficulties.[35] But the scale of Italian departure was extraordinary and perceived by many on both sides of the Atlantic to reflect intractable problems with Italy's own economy – even if, in reality, the situation was more complex. Emigration shaped Italy's own economy and society in significant ways, as transatlantic exodus gave rise to a range of cultural institutions to sustain links between emigrants and their homeland, a move that projected domestic nation-building efforts outwards.[36] The net effect was twofold. A sense of Italian national belonging was at times more clearly defined outside of Italy, while efforts to maintain cultural (and commercial) ties with emigrants could also sharpen a national imaginary within Italy. Declarations of innate links between Italy and *italianità* nevertheless had to contend with competing constructions (and uses) of Italian culture by English and Spanish-language communities across the Atlantic – a shifting configuration of images against which Italy's future was defined.

In all these transatlantic connections, opera played a significant role. Italian opera may have 'globalised early', in Jürgen Osterhammel's words – travelling across the Atlantic and to the Far East by the 1830s – but the

[34] See Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870–1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); and Fernando Devoto & Gianfausto Rosoli, eds., *La Inmigración Italiana en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblos, 1985).

[35] Marco Soresina, 'Italian Migration Policy during the Great Migration Age, 1888–1919: The Interaction of Emigration and Foreign Policy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21/5 (2016), 723–46.

[36] Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

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decades around 1900 witnessed an explosion of operatic activity.[37] Italian mass emigration generated substantial new audiences for opera, including emigrants from rural areas who might not previously have attended an artform predominantly associated with the bourgeoisie, and opera became a focal point for efforts both to sustain a diasporic Italian identity and to improve the public image of Italy within the Americas.[38] Emigration also encouraged visiting Italian troupes to cross the Atlantic, further fuelling the emergence of home-grown operatic performers and administrators. Celebrity singers, conductors and composers were lured on tour in ways unimaginable a generation earlier: Puccini, Mascagni and Leoncavallo all visited and premiered works in the Americas, whereas Verdi, Boito and Ponchielli never did. Entire new operatic productions – such as Verdi's *Otello* (1887) and Montemezzi's *L'amore dei tre re* (1913), including key members of their original cast – also began to be transported from La Scala and elsewhere to New York and Buenos Aires. And developments in communication technologies enabled operatic news to travel swiftly in both directions, with operatic reports from New York and Buenos Aires regularly printed in Italian musical periodicals and newspapers, alongside a stream of travel accounts, news summaries and personal communications. If these decades witnessed new levels of transatlantic integration, they were also ones in which industrialisation shaped new transatlantic power relations. Distinctions between operatic centre and periphery were radically in flux: the 'New World' also represented a possible Italian operatic future.

The American Century: Buenos Aires and New York

Such a claim would surely have come as a surprise to the first Italian operatic troupes that crossed the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. The profound impact of transatlantic activity on Liberal Italy's operatic culture was a direct consequence of epochal transformations in the musical and cultural life of both the United States and Argentina at this time. By the 1880s, Buenos Aires and New York alike could look back upon a gradual transformation of their musical life, as a period of itinerant performances and disruptions was followed by the construction of permanent major

[37] Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 28.

[38] Nicolò Palazzetti, Andrew Holden & Massimo Zicari, eds., 'Italian Musical Migration to London', special issue of *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 26/1 (2021).

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opera houses. Following over a decade of civil war in Argentina, the first Teatro Colón had opened in 1857 with a performance of Verdi's *La traviata* (1853) starring tenor Enrico Tamberlick as Alfredo, and quickly established itself as one of the major venues for operatic performance in South America.[39] At over 2500 seats, and located on the central Plaza de Mayo, it was also the largest, easily eclipsing in stature the older Teatro Victoria and Teatro Coliseo in Buenos Aires. In New York a series of small theatres had hosted Italian opera alongside other entertainments following the García troupe's residency in the 1820s, but the financial panic of 1837 hit theatrical life hard, and most performances remained in English. By mid century, things were shifting, as the Havana company introduced many of Verdi's operas to East Coast audiences and offered a musical standard previously unencountered by New York audiences.[40] New York's Academy of Music eventually opened in 1854, the inaugural performance of *Norma* starring tenor Giovanni Mario and soprano Giulia Grisi (Adalgisa in the La Scala world premiere) placing New York firmly on the global operatic map.

The construction of the Teatro Colón and the Academy of Music also reflected a broader shift in the two cities' economic and cultural life that would foreshadow the mass Italian emigration and explosion of touring companies that transformed the cities' operatic life. Under Spanish colonial rule (1516–1816), Buenos Aires had been a relatively unimportant provincial city and even following independence the interior provinces remained largely independent from Buenos Aires, prompting decades of domestic military conflict. Following the overthrow of dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas in 1852, the country gradually moved towards being a fully-fledged nation state; in 1880 Buenos Aires was declared the federal capital and a new era of political and economic stability was ushered in. A largely neocolonial economy emerged, in which (as David Rock has argued) local elites worked with foreign investors – particularly British – to maintain control over national exports. Exports could be shifted quickly from the interior to the port and factories of Buenos Aires, and a series of export booms took place: wool (from the 1860s); wheat and other cereals (from

[39] On the early nineteenth century, see Mariano G. Bosch, *Historia de la Ópera en Buenos Aires: Origen del canto y la música: Las primeras compañías y los primeros cantantes* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta el comercio, 1905), 80–130; Alfredo Taullard, *Historia de nuestros viejos teatros* (Buenos Aires: Imprenta López, 1932); and Benjamin Walton, 'Italian Operatic Fantasies in Latin America', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012), 460–71.

[40] George W. Martin, *Verdi in America: "Oberto" through "Rigoletto"* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

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the 1880s); and cattle, which after 1900 could be chilled or frozen for export via steamships. A desire to participate in a broader European project of modernisation drove local and national government policy across multiple levels, with the Partido Autonomista Nacional remaining almost exclusively in power between 1874 and 1914 – their views reflected in newspapers such as *La Nación* and *La Prensa*. Rather than being an isolated former colony, Argentina would claim its position as a major Western superpower.

Already in the 1820s, Italian opera had been linked to ideas of European civilisation and cultural progress, and such ideas would continue throughout the following decades – particularly following the 'Conquest of the Desert' military campaign in the 1870s, when the remaining indigenous communities were exterminated and land ownership handed over to Buenos Aires elites. By the 1870s, Argentina was emerging as a regular early stop for new Italian operas, with impresarios responding to reduced finances available to theatres within Italy and capitalising on the difference in hemisphere between Italy and Argentina for the lucrative winter seasons; Buenos Aires was often a starting point for a 'Southern Cone' tour extending across Uruguay and Brazil.[41] *Aida* received its first non-Italian and non-Egyptian performances in Buenos Aires in October 1873; New York followed only a month later, while Berlin, Vienna, Madrid, Paris and London all waited until 1874–1876.[42] The old Teatro Colón was complimented by a number of smaller theatres, and by the late 1880s the city could offer multiple performances of the same repertoire on a single evening: the 'night of the three *Rigolettos*' in May 1910 became legendary.[43] The range of theatres also catered for different audiences and funding models.[44] The Colón was funded by a combination of box holders, ticket

[41] Susana Salgado, *The Teatro Solís: 150 Years of Opera, Concert and Ballet in Montevideo* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2003); Cristina Magaldi, *Music in Imperial Rio de Janeiro: European Culture in a Tropical Milieu* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 35–64.

[42] A similar pattern played out with *La forza del destino* (1862; revised version 1869) and Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* (1876), both operas appearing in Buenos Aires and New York early in their international careers. By contrast, *Il trovatore* (1853) and *La traviata* (1853) both appeared in many other European capitals before crossing the Atlantic, and Rio de Janeiro preceded them as the first American city for both operas. Dates are taken from Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera*, 1597–1940 (London: John Calder, 1978; third edition).

[43] César Dillon & Juan A. Sala, *El Teatro Musical en Buenos Aires: Teatro Coliseo 1907–1937/ 1961–1998* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Artes Gagliacone, 1999), vii. The theatres were the Colón, Ópera and Coliseo.

[44] Key surveys are Mariano G. Bosch, *Historia del teatro en Buenos Aires* (Buenos Aires: El Comercio, 1910); Roberto Caamaño, *La historia del Teatro Colón, 1908–1968* (Buenos Aires: Cinetea, 1969); Néstor Echevarría, *El Arte Lírico En La Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Imprima,

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sales and municipal subsidy (especially via tax relief); when the new theatre was commissioned in the mid-1880s, the site was gifted by the local government.[45] While favoured by local elites, tickets at the Colón were also available to the middle classes, and the new theatre's vast size meant it could accommodate a wide range of visitors. During the Colón's closure between 1888 and 1908, its position as the most prestigious theatre was taken over by the Teatro de la Ópera (opened in 1872 with a performance of *Il trovatore*) with management moving from one to the other; celebrity singers during these years included Hariclea Darclée, Rosina Storchio, Gemma Bellincioni, Emma Carelli, Francesco Tamagno and Enrico Caruso.[46] The vast Politeama (opened 1879, and holding up to 4000 spectators) was less financially restrictive, as was the smaller Teatro Doria (opened in 1887; later renamed the Marconi); the latter in particular was favoured by Italian émigrés. The Teatro Nacional (opened in 1882) offered another generous selection of Italian opera, joining the already successful Teatro Victoria that moreover performed a great deal of zarzuela (including French operettas in Spanish translation), and with these smaller theatres making opera available to a wide range of audiences at different price points. The opening of the Teatro Coliseo (1907) would enhance the city's operatic standing yet further. Throughout the period, Italian opera co-existed with French, German, Spanish and Argentine composition, with the latter gradually growing in public prominence by the early 1900s. But Italian repertoire had by far the widest dissemination and the most ingrained history in the city, and it flourished throughout Argentina's boom years as the Italian population soared.

Foreign investment and trade had led to demand for immigration, and from the 1880s emigrants were arriving in extraordinary numbers. Between 1871 and 1914, nearly 6 million people entered Argentina, of whom more than half stayed; over 40% of these came from Italy, with the rest mainly made up by arrivals from Spain, France, Portugal and Russia. Buenos Aires's population accordingly ballooned. In 1869 it had been only

1979); César Dillon & Juan A. Sala, *El Teatro Musical en Buenos Aires: Teatro Doria – Teatro Marconi* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones de Artes Gagliacone, 1997); and Dillon & Sala, *Teatro Coliseo*.

[45] John E. Hodge, 'The Construction of the Teatro Colón', *The Americas* 36/2 (1979), 235–55.

[46] Seasons at the Teatro de la Ópera and original Teatro Colón have largely been reconstructed via historical newspapers; seasons at the new Colón from 1908 are outlined in Caamaño, *La historia del Teatro Colón*. The recently launched IMLA-RIIA database 'L'opera migrante' offers a rich resource of information related to opera professionals in this period, albeit with some significant gaps: https://pric.unive.it/progetti/lopera-migrante/home.

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177,000 (41,000 were Italian); by 1895 it was nearly 670,000, and by 1914 it was more than 1.5 million; at the outbreak of the First World War, foreign-born men outnumbered native men in the city.[47] The government licensed campaigns to encourage immigrants to travel for work in the 1860s, but land ownership was highly restricted and most immigrants moved to cities. Cultural nationalism became increasingly belligerent after 1900, as anxieties about social fragmentation grew and patriotic symbols began to dominate primary education and civic events.[48] As Samuel Baily has shown, however, the sustained rate of Italian immigration from the 1860s did smooth adjustment processes for new arrivals, in spite of official preference for Northern European immigrants: Italian emigrants to a large extent developed the Argentine middle class, taking up jobs as shopkeepers, tailors, manufacturers, doctors and musicians, as well as working in factories.[49] And immigration was in any case essential to the country's rapid economic development. By 1914, Buenos Aires was not only the largest city in Latin America, but Argentina's per capita income was on a par with Germany: the nation was firmly among the ten wealthiest countries on the planet.

New York's emergence as a major global capital was more gradual, but like Buenos Aires the period from the 1870s onwards marked a major upsurge in the city's economic and cultural position.[50] In spite of the disruption of the American Civil War, by the 1870s the city's economy was again thriving and new city charter moved control of municipal policies into the hands of the Tammany Hall elite, a corrupt Democrat coterie who nonetheless embarked upon a massive programme of public and cultural projects during the so-called Gilded Age (1870–1914). The Metropolitan Museum of Art opened in 1872; Central Park was completed in 1876; Carnegie Hall followed in 1891. The economic divides that characterised the period – symptomatic of the 'incorporation of America' in Alan Trachtenberg's classic formulation – were reflected in urban

[47] David Rock, *Argentina, 1516–1987: From Spanish Colonisation to the Falklands War and Alfonsín* (London: Tauris & Co, 1987), 162–72. On Buenos Aires's cosmopolitanism in this period, see also Adriana J. Bergero, *Intersecting Tango: Cultural Geographies of Buenos Aires, 1900–1930* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

[48] Lilia Ana Bertoni, *Patriotas, cosmopolitas y nacionalistas: La construcción de la nacionalidad argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de cultura económico de Argentina, 2001); and David Rock, *Politics in Argentina, 1890-1930: The Rise and Fall of Radicalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[49] Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*, 91–216.

[50] Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

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geography, as mansions constructed around the park contrasted with densely populated tenement blocks in the south.[51] Immigration from Ireland and Germany had massively enlarged the city from the 1850s onwards, but Italian emigration began to increase substantially from the 1870s, with a modest population of 12,223 in 1880 (1% of New York's population) more than trebling by 1890 (39,351, in a city of around 1.5 million); and reaching 145,344 in 1900 (4.2% of the city's 3.4 million population following the expanded urban boundary in 1898).[52] By the outbreak of the First World War, New York's Italian population had reached 370,000; at the same time, Buenos Aires had 312,000, albeit in a city that was less than half the size in population of New York. Unlike in Buenos Aires, Italian arrivals were free to vote but the more rapid rate of emigration undoubtedly made the adjustment process more difficult; fewer Italian institutions were in place to aid arrivals, and a greater proportion were male, uneducated and from the Italian South than in Argentina. A two-class social system developed, divided between *prominenti* – wealthy immigrants who ran businesses and newspapers, and would support Italian cultural projects and monuments to promote positive images of Italy – and low-paid workers, many of whom would return home. But as in Buenos Aires, New York would become the clear Italian-American capital in its continent; and the Italian émigré press was crucial in shaping diasporic 'imagined communities' and in promoting Italian culture. By 1914 a quarter of all Italian emigrants living in the United States would be in New York; a third of those in Argentina would be in Buenos Aires.

An expanding bourgeois elite had made a new opera house inevitable, and the Metropolitan Opera House eventually opened in 1883 in the heart of Broadway's theatre district.[53] Privately built and financed by box holders and ticket sales, the Met's first season was run by Henry Abbey and offered a mixture of Italian, German and French repertoire (all given in Italian), with star singers including Christine Nilsson and Italo Campanini. Financial pressures induced in part by celebrity Italian singers led to seven seasons of opera in German, before the 1890s witnessed a move to operas increasingly being given in their original languages, and a host of star singers: from Nellie Melba, Sybil Sanderson and Emma Calvé to Jean de

[51] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), especially 101–81.

[52] Statistics throughout this passage cited in Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*, 9–10, 58.

[53] Charles Affron & Mirella Jona Affron, *Grand Opera: The Story of the Met* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014). The Metropolitan Opera seasons can be accessed online: www.metopera.org/discover/archives/.

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Reszke, Victor Maurel and (after 1903) Enrico Caruso. Competition from the Met closed down the Academy of Music's opera season in 1886, but many visiting Italian troupes and English-language companies nonetheless thrived – offering lower-priced productions and in many cases staging local premieres of major new Italian works at venues such as the Casino Theatre. Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House offered a further challenge from 1906, ensuring that the city had an operatic life whose prestige and diversity could strongly challenge those to the East and South; the growth of the gramophone industry offered a further boost, with discs circulating to both Italy and Argentina.

A sense of New York's and Buenos Aires's new-found cultural significance from the 1880s onwards has been a mainstay of previous studies of the two cities' operatic life. These have typically emphasised the richness of the cities' musical cultures – and the desire to match (imagined) European standards of excellence – while highlighting the rise of musical nationalism in both Argentina and the United States. John Rosselli, in a landmark article, highlighted the arrival of Italian opera in Argentina in light of nineteenth-century shipping advances and changing theatrical tastes within Europe, concluding that emerging nationalism during the First World War, economic crises, musical internationalism and the eventual assimilation of the Italian population all resulted in the decline of Italian dominance by the 1920s.[54] Aníbal Cetrangolo has more recently built upon Rosselli's work to argue for a radical paradigm shift in Buenos Aires's operatic life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: from an avidly Italophile culture among the elites in the mid to late nineteenth century to a growing rejection of Italian cultural models in the wake of Italian mass immigration.[55] While these studies have deeply enriched our understanding of Buenos Aires's musical life at this time – notably opera's importance in identity formation among the Italian diaspora and the influence of Italian operatic cartels, a theme explored more recently by Matteo Paoletti – the impact of new forms of operatic production and consumption has been largely overlooked, with binary distinctions between national and diasporic identities a predominant framework.[56]

[54] John Rosselli, 'The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America 1820–1930: The Example of Buenos Aires', *Past and Present* 127/1 (1990), 155–82.

[55] Aníbal E. Cetrangolo, *Ópera, Barcos y Banderas: El Melodrama y la Migración en la Argentina* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2015); Annibale Enrico Cetrangolo, *Dentro e fuori il teatro: Ventura degli italiani e del loro melodramma nel Rio de la Plata* (Isernia: Cosmo Iannone Editore, 2018).

[56] Matteo Paoletti, *A Huge Revolution of Theatrical Commerce: Walter Mocchi and the Italian Musical Theatre Business in South America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

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Similar questions are raised by previous studies of New York's operatic history. These have tended to stress the increasingly elite social position of opera in the city and highlighted the prestige of German repertoire, without investigating the reception of Italian opera in significant detail. Davide Ceriani, Kunio Hara and Stefano Luconi have more recently addressed these issues, examining the career of Giulio Gatti-Casazza in New York (intendant of the Met between 1908 and 1935), as well as some of the patriotic sentiments directed by the Italian diaspora towards opera following Gatti's appointment.[57] Siel Agugliaro has also explored opera's shifting status among the Italian community in Philadelphia, highlighting its newfound importance as a form of ethnic whitening.[58] These studies have revealed much about the Met's internal politics, but they inevitably leave many questions about the broader cultural and performance history of Italian opera in New York unexplored, not least during the crucial years prior to 1908. This earlier period has received more attention from Larry Hamberlin, yet his emphasis on operatic ragtime parodies ultimately leaves the history of operatic performance unaddressed.[59]

This monograph seeks to revise that situation. I uncover a more complicated picture: one in which Italian opera functioned as an agent of continuity as much as a symbol of political conflict, and in which ideas of *italianità* were reshaped and defined through new forms of operatic encounter. As the following chapters suggest, far from being in retreat, Italian opera remained at the centre of these two cities' operatic identities, interacting in complex ways with perceptions of New World modernisation and transcontinental power dynamics. Rhetoric of American ascendancy frequently cast Italy and Italian opera in familiar terms, deploying tropes established by earlier generations of European travellers and intellectuals; but these images co-existed with a distinctly new set of operatic conditions, ones in

[57] Davide Ceriani, 'Italianizing the Metropolitan Opera House: Giulio Gatti-Casazza's Era and the Politics of Opera in New York City, 1908–1935' (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2011); Ceriani, 'Opera as Social Agent: Fostering Italian Identity at the Metropolitan Opera House during the Early Years of Giulio Gatti-Casazza's Management (1908–1910)', in *Music, Longing and Belonging: Articulations of the Self and Other in the Musical Realm*, ed. Magdalena Waligórska (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 114–35; Kunio Hara, "'Per noi emigrati": Nostalgia in the Reception of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* in New York City's Italian-Language Newspapers', *Journal of the Society for American Music* 13/2 (2019), 177–94; Stefano Luconi, 'Opera as a Nationalistic Weapon: The Erection of the Monument to Giuseppe Verdi in New York City', *Italian Americana* 34/1 (2016), 37–64.

[58] Siel Agugliaro, 'Imagining Italy, Surviving America: Opera, Italian Immigrants, and Identity in Philadelphia, 1870–1924' (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2021).

[59] Larry Hamberlin, *Tin Pan Opera: Operatic Novelty Songs in the Ragtime Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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which Italian opera was every bit as innovative as German, French or 'native' repertoire. New modes of industrial production promised an unprecedently integrated operatic world, one that Italian opera significantly helped to shape; Italian operatic repertory was increasingly characterised by its canonicity and even extinction, amid contemporary rhetoric of American modernisation; and the explosion of mass society generated hardening distinctions between 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow' culture, in which Italian opera played a pivotal role.

At first glance, my pairing of New York and Buenos Aires also promises a series of binaries that have been well-studied (and critiqued) by musicologists: between Anglo-Saxon and Latin musical cultures; between German symphonic and Italian operatic repertoire; and between Protestant and Catholic religious traditions.[60] As Maike Thier has argued, by the 1830s and 1840s, perceptions of a marked cultural and racial difference between North and South America had already become pronounced, with formulations in that vein by French intellectuals circulating throughout Europe and Latin America.[61] 'The two branches [of Europe], Latin and German, are reproduced in the New World', argued Michel Chevalier in 1836, while Hegel pondered in his coeval lectures whether 'the centre of gravity of universal history' would soon consist in the struggle between North and South America, hard-working Protestants and confrontational Catholics.[62] Musical contrasts could also be drawn. Buenos Aires certainly had a more extensive operatic culture than New York, as well as a much higher percentage of Italian immigrants, while the latter had more symphonic concerts – there was no direct Argentine equivalent to Carnegie Hall.

But these binaries soon splinter upon closer scrutiny. Anglo-Saxon and German culture were widespread and revered in Argentine elite circles, thanks to the government's economic policies, and Italian emigrants founded many of Buenos Aires's societies for instrumental music. The Sociedad Musical de Mutua Protección would be established in 1894 by local

[60] Nicolas Mathew & Benjamin Walton, eds., *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini: Historiography, Analysis Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[61] Maike Thier, 'A World Apart, a Race Apart?', in *America Imagined: Explaining the United States in Nineteenth-Century Europe and Latin America*, ed. Axel Körner, Nicola Miller, & Adam I. P. Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 161–89.

[62] Michel Chevalier, *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord* (Paris: Ch. Gosselin, 1836), cited in Thier, 'A World Apart, a Race Apart?', 161; and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophie der Geschichte* (1837), cited in Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010; first edition 1973), 435–38.

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musicians, many of Italian descent; and this society would later found the Sociedad Orquestral Bonaerense, the first permanent symphony orchestra in the city, led by violinist Ferruccio Cattelani. Nor can an image of exclusively Beethoven- and Wagner-loving New Yorkers be sustained any more than it can for citizens of Bismarck's Germany, notwithstanding the well-known enthusiasm for German instrumental music among many of New York's prominent critics. Henry Abbey's one-week residency of Italian opera at the Met in spring 1887 took $70,000 at the box office compared with $137,000 for the entire German season of 61 performances that year.[63] '[To] Americans, why should the patriotism of Germany have more charm than the patriotism of Italy?' asked *The Theatre* after the residency ended.[64] Both Italian- and English-language publications in New York noted the richness of Argentina's operatic life, as well as a network of Italian cultural institutions that far surpassed in scale that of the United States. And the Argentine press similarly expressed admiration for the Met's operatic seasons, during a period in which the United States also sought to extend its influence over Central and South America through the application of the Monroe Doctrine. While the operatic troupes that had circulated between North, Central and South America earlier in the century were in sharp decline by the 1880s – hastened by the turn to English-language performances in many US theatres in response to widening class divisions and the high prices of Italian singers – operatic performers continued to move between New York and Buenos Aires, and the theatrical standards of the cities moved in tandem. The case of the Mancinelli brothers is emblematic: Marino Mancinelli (1842–1894) conducted seasons in Argentina and Brazil throughout the 1880s and 1890s, while Luigi Mancinelli (1848–1921) was musical director at the Met from 1893 to 1903, later conducting the opening night performance of *Aida* at the Teatro Colón in 1908. In what follows, New York and Buenos Aires are remarkable as much for their similarities as for their differences; set against Italy, they also looked to one another.

Transatlantic Crossings

The following chapters proceed in a series of interlinked pairs across three parts and comprise a series of broadly chronological case studies, each

[63] Martin Mayer, *The Met: One Hundred Years of Grand Opera* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 63.

[64] David Gamut, 'Critics-Librettos', *The Theatre*, 25 April 1887.

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focusing on interactions between Milan and Buenos Aires or Milan and New York. The work of global historians such as Sebastian Conrad has been influential here, but this braided approach might also be compared with the parallel plot lines of a nineteenth-century novel: a *histoire croisée* tracing the shifting, interweaving relations between the three cities to challenge a single focal point and reveal interconnections between the axes.[65] At the same time, this methodology aims to expose the multiple forms of operatic discourse within a given moment, shaped by the changing cultural, technological and artistic landscape across these decades. The first two chapters focus on the 1880s and 1890s, addressing the arrival of feted Italian works in the Americas against the emergence of mass emigration and new media and the varied appropriations of Italian opera by different agents. The central pair move into the early twentieth century, considering how changing transcontinental dynamics shaped Italian cultural production – from literary and musical writings, and particularly operatic works focused on the United States – and examining the reconceptualisation of Italian musical history by Argentine and US musical establishments. The final two chapters address the 1910s, exploring works premiered or highly acclaimed in the Americas during a period of emerging musical nationalism and discussions over the Italian musical future. The attractions of focusing on seminal operatic moments are strong when grappling with the challenges of mobility, as well as of examining archival sources across three continents and languages – difficulties amplified by the fragmentary condition of many Argentine theatrical and municipal archives. But one of this book's key goals is also to recapture a sense of lived operatic experience: a period when, among other things, new Italian works *did* successfully manage to enter the repertory, even as anxieties about operatic tradition were bound up with Italy's changing global position. Focusing on works also offers an opportunity to dismantle binaries between 'text' and 'reception' that have undergirded much opera scholarship during the last two decades, and to consider what new light the expansion of disciplinary approaches can shed on both beloved and forgotten operas. Issues of migration, technology and shifting transcontinental power dynamics appear in different configurations across the book, united by a focus on operatic works and

[65] On this historical model, see Michael Werner & Bénédicte Zimmermann, 'Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity', *History and Theory* 45 (2006), 30–50. See also Sebastian Conrad's *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the American Century* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2010).

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performances as crucial focal points for articulating understandings of Italy and *italianità*.

Chapter 1 examines the first Argentine productions of Verdi's *Otello*, including one starring tenor Francesco Tamagno. As Verdi's first Italian operatic premiere since *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), the Milan *Otello* (1887) was the object of intense media scrutiny and prompted a wealth of accounts of the bonds between Verdi, Milan and Italy. The production was also the basis of an unprecedentedly detailed staging manual, which aimed to preserve many of the most important elements of the production. *Otello* travelled to Buenos Aires in advance of many European capitals and received a series of productions that in various ways sought to recapture the original Milanese staging. Expectations were heightened by regular telegram news reports, which pointed to new experiences of simultaneity and mechanical reproduction by the late 1880s: attitudes intensified by the rapid urban development of Buenos Aires at this time. Band performances, domestic arrangements, newspaper satire and the advent of professional music criticism all contributed to an exceptional interest in Verdi's latest work, as well as scrutiny of the shifting layers of cultural, geographical and technological distance between Argentina and Italy.

Tamagno's Otello emerged as a sticking point in many reviews, however: an element considered fundamental to Verdi's conception, yet the tenor's powerful voice appeared to resist future reproduction. The material complexities of *Otello* as a work in performance and the opera's depiction of a flawed military hero ultimately intersected in the figure of Tamagno-Otello: a figure poised between a heroic Italian past and a mechanical future, crystallising wider debates over operatic mediation in the Argentine capital. Turning to later accounts, I consider how Argentine perceptions of Tamagno's uniqueness and of Verdi's Italian status were internalised within Italy, pointing to the intertwining of national mythologies with new technological media. The continued fascination with Tamagno-Otello, I suggest, should be framed as an effort to recover an embodied notion of *italianità* within a new mediascape and a new set of political geographies.

Chapter 2 turns to the double bill of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890) and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (1892) – a pairing first presented at the Metropolitan Opera in December 1893. Mascagni's one-act opera had been a huge critical and public success at its Roman world premiere and capitalised on a widespread interest in the economically impoverished Italian South on the part of Northern and Central Italian audiences. Discussions of the *mezzogiorno* received further impetus from the waves

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of Italian emigration from the 1880s onwards, prompting widespread discussion in both Italy and the United States. *Cavalleria* soon received numerous English and Italian-language performances in New York and following *Pagliacci*'s world premiere in Milan the operas were quickly paired together at New York's Garden Theatre in October 1893, becoming a staple of New York's operatic life. Venues ranged from the Met to smaller auditoriums such as the Casino Theatre as well as formats including street music, ragtime parody and even tableau vivant, significantly preceding the operas' popularisation via gramophone disc by singers such as Enrico Caruso.

In the context of Italian immigration, these operas became a focal point for wider discussions about Italian identity, and about Italian opera's position within the entrenched cultural hierarchies of the time: ones in which distinctions between highbrow and lowbrow were being negotiated, and Italian opera shifted between social allegiances and degrees of cultural (and racial) capital. As I show, however, interpreting the operas' reception solely in terms of emigrant politics or social prestige risks simplifying the social and aesthetic complexities of operatic experience at this time. By tracing the operas' ongoing critical reception and performance history in New York, I indicate how the operas fluctuated between contemporary politics and aesthetic escape: a symbol both of urban change and of alluring continuity. Turning to recent work in the history of the emotions, I finally argue for the formulation of *italianità* as much as an expressive mode as a cultural category, during a period of emerging interest in (and monetisation of) human psychology and emotional behaviour. Within Milan, such ideas would be strongly challenged by competing definitions; but American ideas of Southern *italianità* became especially powerful in subsequent decades as *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* were finally paired at La Scala.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Milan Exposition of 1906, considering its musical and more broadly cultural activities in relation to contemporary fascination with Argentina. The first international exposition in Italy, the 1906 event was of major local, national and international significance and intended to highlight the progress Milan (and Italy) had made since unification. It was notable, too, for its focus on Latin America and the Italian emigrant community. The exposition featured specially commissioned pavilions dedicated to both, as well as the renaming of key streets. Musical highlights included a series of orchestral concerts conducted by Italian-Argentine conductor Ettore Panizza alongside a celebrated revival of Verdi's classic *La traviata* (1853) at La Scala. First staged a few months earlier to mark the fifth anniversary of Verdi's death, the *Traviata*

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production was the first Italian staging of Verdi's Parisian-set opera in period costume and featured a creative team including soprano Rosina Storchio and conductor Leopoldo Mugnone. This pairing was by then famous for their performances in Latin America.

I examine the musical and cultural displays at the exposition – particularly the journalistic preoccupation with the global reputation of the Italian voice – before exploring the relationship between the Milan exposition and the La Scala production further. If the exposition sought to reflect a specifically Milanese idea of 'global' space, operatic productions could at times operate in strikingly similar ways, offering complex configurations of the past, present and future. In the context of shifting power relations between Italy and Argentina, operatic staging can therefore be understood as a significant discursive site for negotiating transatlantic relations, as operatic production became a vehicle of urban renewal. The similarities between the exposition and the *Traviata* production ultimately suggest the crucial role of Argentina in shaping Milanese perceptions of their own Italian identity, while inviting a revised account of early operatic staging experiments: one focused less exclusively on a break with an ossified past than on a newly globalised repertory.

Chapter 4 focuses on Puccini's 1907 tour to New York. Invited by the Met for a festival of his operas, Puccini's visit followed the disastrous premiere of *Madama Butterfly* (1904) at La Scala and reflected a longer engagement with US culture on the composer's part: from his early triumph *Manon Lescaut* (1893) to his latest work based on a one-act play by David Belasco (premiered in New York in 1900) – an opera famously concerned with encounters between the New World and the Old. For New York critics, meanwhile, Puccini's status as a living Italian operatic composer was fetishized during a period of heightened tourism and cultural interchange between the United States and Italy. If Puccini could embody a lineage of now vanished Italian composers, the reception of his operas was shaped too by wider gendered understandings of Italian opera and sentimentality – ones that even informed the composer's own media persona.

At the same time, however, the emergence of gramophone opera recordings offered an alternative model of transatlantic encounter, as Italian operatic voices were increasingly mediated through American technology. At one level, gramophone discs promised new forms of operatic consumption, as celebrity singers could be enjoyed in the home. Recordings by the Victor Talking Machine Company typically favoured singers from the Metropolitan Opera and were marketed on the basis of their acoustic

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fidelity, even as their status as separate artistic texts was fiercely defended. Yet opera discs also promised a specifically American form of operatic experience, one that was the source of considerable cultural and legal controversy between US companies and Italian composers – an issue that came to a head during Puccini's tour. Examined in that context – in what constitutes the book's most extended section of musical analysis – *Madama Butterfly*'s plot and opposing sound worlds can be heard as a meditation on broader Italian–American tensions, shaped by contemporary discourses around Italian vocality and American materialism. *Madama Butterfly* emerges at the centre of a changing auditory culture in the early twentieth century, one explicitly imagined along national lines and in which Puccini's musicalized Japan has suggestive echoes of Italy.

Chapter 5 considers constructions of the Argentine operatic canon in the years immediately preceding the First World War, focusing on Mascagni's *Isabeau* (1911). Premiered at Buenos Aires's Teatro Coliseo as part of a widely publicised tour by the composer to Argentina, *Isabeau* received a mixed response from local critics but enjoyed extraordinary levels of media attention. The opera continued to be revived at a time of growing interest in defining an Argentine national music, while swiftly being performed in neighbouring South American countries. The reception of *Isabeau* was shaped equally by the success of Mascagni's earlier operas – above all *Cavalleria rusticana* – and by more recent efforts to promote Argentine operatic compositions, with works such as Arturo Berutti's *Yupanki* (1899) – premiered with Caruso – and Ettore Panizza's *Aurora* (1908) receiving high-profile premieres. While Argentine musical nationalism was increasingly debated and some right-wing critics reacted against the popularity of verismo operas, *Isabeau* instead offered an ambiguous path forward from Italian traditions, at a time when Argentine nationalism remained a largely verbal (rather than stylistic) endeavour.

In this context, I show, the reception of Mascagni's opera outlined competing efforts by critics and managements to shape a specifically Italian-Argentine operatic canon: one that could stand in for local compositions while moving away from the conventions of *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*. These ambitions were shaped in turn by concerns over the integration of Italian immigrants, that echoed North American anxieties while being inflected by the immigrant population's significantly greater size in Argentina. Turning to *Isabeau*'s Italian reception, I examine the competing strategies by which critics engaged with the challenge posed by foreign premieres, at a time of heightened interest in Italy's own musical history. From an Italian perspective, these operas' foreign profiles

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intersected with broader questions of citizenship, nationhood and affective belonging that played out within both political and musicological discussions during a period when dual citizenship was legally impossible. Ultimately, the nationalist drives at work during the 1910s influenced the operatic canons we still draw on today, affecting critical attitudes towards non-Italian and emigrant composers alike.

Chapter 6 examines the transatlantic career of Italo Montemezzi in light of New York and Milan's symbolic positions around 1914, and in particular via his opera *L'amore dei tre re* (1913). Premiered at La Scala in early 1913, Montemezzi's work enjoyed a modest success and helped to secure his position in Ricordi's publishing stable at a time when a successor to Puccini was actively sought. The Italian reception of *L'amore* was swiftly overshadowed, however, by the work's sensational acclaim when it arrived at the Metropolitan Opera, where it was hailed as the finest Italian opera written since the death of Verdi. The recent world premiere of Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* had appeared to both North American and Italian audiences as a frustrating mismatch between American and Italian identities. Montemezzi's work instead seemed to point to a specifically North American triumph: a situation confirmed by the opera's revival in many following seasons and the (unfulfilled) request for a world premiere by Montemezzi at the Met.

At one level, the orchestral sophistication and overt symbolism of Montemezzi's work appeared to blur familiar stylistic distinctions between Italian and German opera, in ways that harked back to older idealist conceptions of romantic opera. Yet the insistent rhythms and breakneck pace of *L'amore dei tre re* also chimed with wider rhetoric of New York urbanism in the 1910s, at a time when musical modernism seemingly lagged behind the visual and literary arts. Unlike Mascagni's *Isabeau*, however, the foreign success of *L'amore* immediately aided the composer's career within Italy and led to the commission of *La nave* (1918) at La Scala. In the wake of the war, operatic criticism within Italy also became newly militarised as Italian opera thrived across transatlantic stages, with efforts made to coordinate seasons between La Scala, Rome and the Colón. While *La nave* failed to satisfy the immense ambitions placed upon it, it marked the climax of efforts to frame Italian opera's transatlantic reach as political power against waning geopolitical influence; an Adriatic postlude to *Otello*'s earlier success. Montemezzi's American triumph was briefly enjoyed as the birth of a successful Italian opera after Puccini.

Ultimately, this book argues for the durability of long-standing ideas of *italianità* in this period but also explores their reinvention, a process in

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which local and national identities were continually redefined. It was not only the Italian past that could be considered a foreign country, to borrow a phrase: considered from a more literal geographical perspective, the Italian present was also deeply connected with foreign lands; and, in turning towards the Western horizon, Italian inhabitants might even have a vision of Italy's own operatic future. As I explore in the epilogue – including via some recent operatic stagings – this period has ultimately bequeathed many of our most powerful ideas about Italy, Italian opera and Italian identity. Yet it also stands as an era now firmly in the past: a time when opera could be central to national and urban discourse, and the American century was only just beginning.

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