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Review Article
Verdi Beyond Verdi

George Martin, *Verdi in America: From Oberto to Rigoletto*. Rochester and Suffolk: University of Rochester Press and Boydell & Brewer, 2011.

Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From the Unification to the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

In the aftermath of the 2001 Verdi anniversary, a wave of new titles about the composer flooded the book market. Reflecting on the academic literature issued at the time, Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart remarked that 'a powerful impression left by the 2001 "industry" [...] is that the history of Verdi reception, the vicissitudes of his music over time, has now become much more prominent – and more interesting – than it used to be'.[1] While the wake of the 2013 anniversary will reveal whether this statement still holds true, few would deny that reception studies have played a pivotal role in shaping recent Verdi scholarship, as the two books under consideration confirm.

The background to the current musicological focus on reception is familiar enough. In the wake of the 'cultural turn' in the humanities and social sciences, historiographical approaches gradually moved beyond the study both of the relationships between musical works and composers' biography and of formalist analysis. The blossoming of reception studies formed part of this trend. Understanding how the meaning of a work could be constructed in different cultural contexts, meanwhile, could reshape the ways in which we measure its historical significance – no longer a by-product of its intrinsic aesthetic qualities, but the result of cultural, social, ideological and political circumstances.[2] Aesthetic value judgements still merit scrutiny as cultural constructions participating in such a network, but they no longer function as unquestioned premises that justify scholarly inquiry. Similarly, while musical canons – and in particular the German musical canon – have lost their normative status, canon formation has itself become one of the subjects of reception history.[3] In the field of Italian opera studies, the situation evolved more slowly, mostly owing to the peripheral position the field occupied within academia until the 1970s. Among Italian opera composers, however, Verdi has long enjoyed an undisputed – indeed, canonical – status, both as a national icon of Italian cultural identity and as an international celebrity. As Gundula Kreuzer points out at the beginning of *Verdi and the Germans*, the composer was

[1] Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart, 'Verdi, 2001 and Us', *Studi Verdiani* 18 (2004), 295–312, at 297–8.

[2] Central to this change of perspective has been Hans-Robert Jauss's influential notion of 'horizon of expectations', a historically determined network of cultural conventions, values, norms and assumptions that condition the ways a work of art is read, viewed, or listened to. Hans-Robert Jauss originally formulated this notion in his *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (Konstanz, 1967). An English translation of the essay is included in Hans-Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982).

[3] See Mark Everist, 'Reception Theories, Canonic Discourses, and Musical Value', in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford and New York, 1999), 379. It is perhaps no surprise that some of the earliest studies about musical reception focused on the canonical composer par excellence of Western culture, Ludwig van Beethoven: see, for instance, Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Zur Geschichte der Beethoven-Rezeption* (Mainz, 1972).

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'one of the most famous Italian citizens in history, and he is a figure of national pride precisely because of his *inter*national esteem' (2, emphasis in the original). On the one hand, Verdi's purported 'Italian-ness' prompted scholars' interest in the construction of the composer's image as it resonated with ideas of the so-called Italian *Risorgimento*;[4] on the other hand, his international success set the ground for investigations into the dissemination of Verdi's operas abroad and their relevance to foreign cultures.

The monographs by Gundula Kreuzer and George Martin belong to the latter category. They provide two possible approaches to the question of how Verdi's operas produced cultural work within non-Italian cultural frames. The titles of the two books, however, already highlight their divergences. Martin emphasises the geographical focus of his investigation, while Kreuzer sets up a dialogue between different cultures: the 'Germans' to whom her title alludes are not merely the population within precisely demarcated geographical borders, but rather 'the German-language intellectual community at large', with its 'differences between north and south, Prussia and Austria, Protestant and Catholic milieux' (xiii). Such differences foreshadow two very differently structured books. Martin's monograph is a work-centred study with each chapter dedicated to a separate opera. His focus is not on patterns of reception that reveal how Verdi's works interacted with various aspects of American culture, but rather on the circumstances in which each opera was performed and on the reactions it produced. Kreuzer organises her discussion by issues, focusing on distinctive moments of Verdi reception in relation to changing historical, political and cultural circumstances. Her choice reflects her claim that her book 'is *not* about Verdi's works' (xiii, emphasis in the original) but explores instead the various ways in which the discourse on Verdi's operas in German-speaking countries intersected with changing definitions of German cultural identity. As this brief sketch suggests, the two authors hence offer two very different models for the study of Verdi reception outside Italy.

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According to its preface, Martin's study has three main goals. The first and most obvious aims at tracing 'the differing receptions in the United States of the first seventeen of Verdi's operas, *Oberto* through *Rigoletto*' (xv), only one of which, *Ernani*, proved successful from its earliest performances. Consequently, the second purpose of the book is to trace how the critical reception (or, as Martin somewhat ambiguously dubs it, 'the public opinion') of these works has changed over time. Finally, he relates their production and dissemination across the United States to the development of the operatic marketplace in the country and to shifting aesthetic outlooks on the genre. The book might stir high expectations of readers interested in the reception history of Verdi's operas, but the structure of the monograph and the ways in which Martin confronts his subject are not conducive to such objectives. To be sure, *Verdi in America* is informative and filled with engaging materials and useful data, but as the book progresses, the questions outlined in the preface do not quite align with the answers provided.

[4] For two different approaches to this matter, see Roger Parker, *'Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati': The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s* (Parma, 1997), and Philip Gossett, '"Edizioni distrutte" and the Significance of Operatic Choruses during the Risorgimento', in *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge, 2007), 181–242. Surveys of recent scholarly literature on this issue are provided by Francesca Vella's review article 'A Passion for Italy', *this journal* 23/3 (2012), 191–200; and by Mary Ann Smart, 'Magical Thinking: Reason and Emotion in Some Recent Literature on Verdi and Politics', *Journal of Modern Italian Sutdies* 17/4 (2012), 437–47.

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Each chapter provides a self-contained presentation of the productions of Verdi's early operas in the United States, from their premiere to the present. They are organised into three larger sections reflecting different stages of the development of American operatic life. The first section covers the years 1847–50, when the tours of the Italian company from the Gran Teatro de Tacón in Havana introduced some of Verdi's earliest operas in the United States. The second section corresponds to the years in which other early Verdi works were performed by the first American resident companies (1850–60). The third part discusses the operas that received their American premieres only in the twentieth century and in particular after the Second World War. The last two sections open with chapters providing a useful overview of the way changing historical conditions affected the gradual dissemination of opera, and determined the social stratification of different modes of operatic productions (performances in translation vs. performances in the original language, arrangements for a small ensemble vs. productions featuring a full orchestra, and so forth). One wonders, however, why such an introductory chapter is lacking at the beginning of the first section. As Martin notes, when the first Verdi operas crossed the Atlantic, American critics frequently set up unfavourable comparisons between them and those of his Italian predecessors, Bellini in particular. But he tells us very little about how Italian opera was disseminated in the United States *prior* to Verdi, how it influenced local composers, and how these works were seen, heard and talked about in different contexts. In other words, readers are not offered a broader sense of the background needed for approaching the American reception of Verdi's operas from a cultural perspective. Instead, the first six chapters of the book repeat pieces of information about the Havana company tours in the United States, conductor Max Maretzek's entrepreneurial activities, and more recent companies that are mentioned periodically in Martin's book for having performed Verdi operas with some regularity. Such redundancy betrays the original nature of the chapters as stand-alone journal articles. A more cohesive arrangement of these pieces of information and a different organisation of the chapters would have helped the reader navigate this study in a more productive way. The book thus comes out less as a historical narrative of Verdi's reception in the United States than as a sort of encyclopedia or handbook, in which each chapter constitutes a separate entry.

Verdi's operas reached the United States at the end of the 1840s. Three of them – *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, *Ernani* and *I due Foscari* – received their American premieres in 1847. *Nabucco* followed one year later, while *Attila* and *Macbeth* were performed in 1850. With the exception of *I Lombardi*, premiered by an Italian *troupe* led by the singer Antonio Sanquirico, all the other operas were introduced by the Cuban touring company from the Gran Teatro Tacón. At first, these works stirred mixed reactions: while their gripping, passionate force profoundly impressed some critics, others disapproved of them on ethical grounds. In fact, attempts to prevent productions of operas based on morally questionable subjects affected the American dissemination of Verdi's operas for some time: *Rigoletto* became the case of a trial in 1866, and performances of *La traviata* were forbidden in Brooklyn in 1861. Yet, although in the early nineteenth century the only permanent American opera company resided in New Orleans, 'the future of opera in the United States lay more in the northeast, particularly in New York' (2). As the economic importance of the city grew, its operatic life also gained prominence: a large opera house was built in the mid-1850s, and professional orchestras were founded. Such growth, however, was related to the increasing number of German immigrants who reached the United States in the mid-century. Their music culture became highly influential, and, as will be discussed below, the German sense of cultural heritage conditioned the view of Verdi's

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operas as popular entertainment rather than as highbrow artworks. Several of his works circulated widely, and a few of them even became staples of opera companies across the country, but they were mostly produced in English translation and in heavily reworked arrangements – a contributing factor both to their dissemination and to their purported lower-rank status.

At the turn of the twentieth century, another flow of immigrants, this time from Italy, created a new audience for Verdi's works, paving the way for their critical reappraisal. The Metropolitan Opera Company in New York, by then already acknowledged as the leading company in the United States, regularly offered Verdi's most successful works with the most celebrated singers of the time. Yet, while this contributed to the canonisation of Verdi as an opera composer, his early works were now by and large considered old fashioned, and only few of them were revived at the Met. During the Gatti-Casazza management (1908–35), *Rigoletto* was by far the most successful among the operas discussed in Martin's book, totalling 101 performances; *Ernani* was given fifteen times, but *Luisa Miller* only five. The surge of interest in the other early operas came in the aftermath of the so-called 'Verdi Renaissance', which, according to Martin, 'began to seep into the country as early as the 1930s, gathered force during the 1940s with American editions of [Franz] Werfel's works, [Francis] Toye's biography, and a stunning production of the hitherto neglected *Macbeth*, and then after 1950 flooded the public with books and articles about the composer' (235). Seven early works by Verdi received their American premiere in the second half of the century: *Oberto*, *Un giorno di regno*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *Alzira*, *Il corsaro*, *La battaglia di Legnano* and *Stiffelio*. Most of them were performed in smaller venues or in a concert setting, yet occasionally they made their way into the seasons of the most important opera houses of the country. Sometimes they were still adapted and sung in English, while on other occasions newly published critical editions were adopted. Frequently, lesser-known musicians were in charge of the performances, but at times these works caught the interest of prominent singers and conductors. Several companies staged traditional productions, but occasionally they preferred more inventive *mises en scène*. Reactions to these productions were as diverse as the circumstances in which they were produced. Yet, throughout the book, Martin seems to overlook the myriad of diverse contexts from which the American Verdi reception originates – contexts that made (and still make) America such a proverbially diversified social and cultural environment.

Issues of cultural diversity, in fact, surface regularly in the book. In the introductory chapter of the second part of the study, for instance, Martin provides a wealth of details about how different religious beliefs in different areas created barriers against opera. Of course, this is nothing new in the history of Western culture. Yet what Martin's discussion hints at, but does not fully explore, is the variety of reasons that led to the formation of such prejudices. While Quaker communities rejected music and theatre on ethical grounds, in New Orleans, a former French and Spanish urban centre, loose morals were associated not so much with music and opera per se, but with spectators' behaviour, which authorities were at pains to discipline (148–9). On a similar note, while Martin mentions that the rise of German music culture in mid-nineteenth-century America worked against the dissemination of Italian opera, there is no discussion of whether musical discourses nourished by traditional 'national' opposition (Italian, German, but also French) at this point became a means through which each community used national sentiment to construct, or to try to transplant, its identity on the American soil.[5]

[5] For a recent discussion of these issues, albeit in a later period, see Davide Ceriani, 'Italianizing the Metropolitan Opera House: Giulio Gatti-Casazza's Era and the Politics of Opera in New York, 1908–1935' (Harvard University, 2011).

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Throughout the book, Martin overlooks certain issues of contextualisation that are relevant, if not crucial, to the study of reception. While he discusses at length the practical conditions in which each opera was performed and received, he does not provide information on the critics reviewing them, or outline basic features of the audience attending these performances. The chapter on *Un giorno di regno*, Verdi's second opera, provides a telling example. The work did not cross the Atlantic before 1960, when it received its American premiere in New York in an English adaptation by the Amato Opera Company. Two other New York productions followed in 1972 and 1974, the second one in Italian but with piano accompaniment only. The opera then moved westwards, reaching San Francisco in 1975. The location of the first local performance was a restaurant of dubious Italian pedigree, the Old Spaghetti Factory, and the work was again presented in a very free translation by Donald Pippin, the future artistic director of a local opera company named Pocket Opera. Pippin also adapted the score for a chamber ensemble whose name, New Ravioli Philharmonic, was presumably an ironic homage to the location of the performance.

The production was widely covered in the local press, and three years later Pippin chose the opera as one of the titles of his first season at the head of Pocket Opera, reviving it during the course of six seasons between 1981 and 1999. Albeit in a radically modified version, there is little doubt that, as Martin states, 'in San Francisco, for the twentieth-century's final quarter, *Un giorno di regno* became a repertory work' (258). Elsewhere, however, other productions failed to arouse as much interest as Pippin's had. Given this situation, which unique social, economic and cultural conditions determined such remarkable exceptions within larger trends of the reception of the opera? Martin quotes reviews suggesting that Pippin's translation and his witty performance as a narrator played major roles in the success of the performance. A critic went so far as to claim that 'Pippin himself is at least half of the show' and that '*Un giorno di regno* à la Pippin could run for months' (quoted on 256). Yet these passages raise a number of questions that remained unexamined: What were the modifications of Pippin's translation? Who was being addressed? Did he change his text over time? What was the interplay between Pippin's performances and his audiences? And how does such interplay relate to larger American cultural trends? For Martin, the Pippin production thus ends up less as a window on a peculiar facet of the American reception of Verdi's operas (or at least of this opera in particular) than as a mere recipe for the work's commercial outcome, one that 'can give back an enjoyable evening in the theater' (260). Considering how this version came to be, however, not only might one justly doubt that such a recipe would suit all tastes, but also that Martin's conclusions are aligned with the methodological assumptions of a study in reception history. Indeed, in this and in several other cases in the book, Martin's assertions seem to voice more the personal tastes (and biases) of a music critic than a historian's attempt at making sense of factual evidence by shedding light on its context.

This attitude appears particularly counterproductive when related to one of the most relevant and debated aspects of present-day operatic life – that of 'radical', interpretative *mise en scène*. Martin makes no secret of his distaste for productions that depart from the directions provided by the libretto. Discussing the New York Metropolitan performances of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* during the 1993–4 season, he notes grudgingly that 'questionable artistic decisions chiefly concerned the scenery, costumes, and stage direction, which seemed often to fight with the score and Verdi's direction for the settings' (44). On the one hand, such a diatribe against directors that 'ignore the composer's clear intent' (44) fails to explain the cultural roots of these productions, what anxieties they might voice

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today, what their aesthetic and political aims might be. Indeed, as with reverence for authorial intentions, 'radical' stagings represent a fundamental aspect of how contemporary culture re-imagines Verdi's operas – an aspect that cannot be reduced to mere ignorance.[6] On the other, Martin's attitude reveals one of the major methodological shortcomings of the book: his attempt to ground a study in reception history on the notion of 'work' as an immutable entity supposedly speaking to everybody in the same way, while disregarding the processes through which different agents reshaped its meaning in different cultural contexts. This holds true for Pippin's adaptation of *Un giorno di regno* just as for a provocative staging of *I Lombardi*. Martin overlooks the former, however, and rails against the latter. Or, as in the case of early American vicissitudes of *Luisa Miller*, sometimes he merely complains that '[n]o one apparently was willing to let its music tell its tale unassisted' (194). But can 'music do its work' (142) without performers making interpretative decisions, and without audiences and critics reshaping its meaning over time? One can be legitimately interested, as Martin is, in understanding how a composer interpreted his own work, and Verdi scholars have been enormously active in this field. They have also shown, though, that the composer's intentions are not immune from modifications over time, and, furthermore, that his viewpoint is by no means the only possible one. Verdi had no control over the reception of his early operas in America; the ways in which his works have been performed and discussed in the United States are shaped by historical, social, political and cultural conditions that are very different from those the composer encountered in Europe. If the many modifications Verdi's operas underwent are the result of this difference, a scholar of musical reception history should attempt at explaining them as such, instead of worrying about how they might stray from a transcendent aesthetic ideal (the musical work), which itself participates in reception history. In short, in order to explore the manifold dimensions that shaped the American reception of Verdi's works, Martin should not just have looked at the performances of Verdi's operas in America, but also at Verdi and the Americans.

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This is the task that, *mutatis mutandis*, Gundula Kreuzer takes up at the very beginning of *Verdi and Germans*. Rather than discussing how each Verdi opera was received in German-speaking countries, she offers 'a "thick description" of discourses surrounding Verdi, bringing various musical and extra-musical contexts to bear on selected moments in the composer's German-language reception history' (xiii). These discursive trends reveal the extent to which Italian opera – and Verdi's works in particular – contributed to the construction and re-definition of German national identity over time. By focusing on 'the importance of Italian music in defining what it meant to be German' (3), *Verdi and the Germans* explores how a foreign culture crossed the paths through which Germans asserted their own image as a people and as a nation.

This ambitious project is carried out over the course of six richly documented, lively chapters. They present an impressive array of materials showing how complex – and at times unpredictable – patterns of reception can be: not only reviews and publications on music (both general and specialist), but also archival and administrative documents, portraits, school textbooks, sketches for set designs, and even colourful collectors' cards printed and distributed by a popular brand of concentrated beef stock.

[6] On the cultural conditions from which 'conceptual' operatic productions emerged, see David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinksy* (Chicago and London, 2007), 18–30.

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The first chapter accomplishes multiple tasks. First, it provides an overview of how nineteenth-century ideas about German music originated as prime vessels for promoting notions of German-ness in the field of cultural production; how this idea has been discussed on the backdrop of recent historiographical approaches to the issue of nationalism; and how it contributed to the formation of a musical canon that still looms large. Second, the chapter traces the presence of Italian opera in German-speaking lands prior to German Unification in 1871, emphasising the increasing tensions between its popular success and critical resistance. Third, the chapter evaluates the repercussions of these tensions in the contemporary German discourse on Italian opera and in its ramifications for music historiography. In the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna, the German States, like most of Europe, were overtaken by the 'Rossini fever', which interfered with the growing prestige and institutionalisation of German music repertories. Music discourse polarised around Italian opera and Rossini on one side, and German symphonic music and Beethoven on the other, as exemplified by the Viennese music historian Raphael Kiesewetter's influential definition of his time as 'the epoch of Beethoven and Rossini'.[7] Aesthetic binaries – such as shallowness vs. originality, superficiality vs. depth, etc. – became widespread tropes, soon followed by German-speaking music historians trying to assert German cultural hegemony. At first, Verdi was no more and no less than a follower of Rossini, one of the many representatives of a declining Italian school who had 'substituted quantity for quality' (33) becoming part of a system that produced operas as on an assembly line. But, as several of Verdi's works met the approval of audiences and maintained a dominant position in the repertory of German opera houses, critics' reactions diversified. It was only after the political unification of Germany, however, that the discourse about Verdi and his *oeuvre* ostensibly changed gear, marking his 'gradual entry into more sophisticated musical debates [...] as a reindividualisation of Italian opera in the eyes of German-language writers' (39).

The German dissemination of the *Messa da Requiem*, the subject of the book's second chapter, aptly illustrates a situation in which contrasting ideas on Verdi coexisted. Starting from the Viennese performance in 1875, the appearance of Verdi's first major non-operatic work marked a shift in how Germans viewed the composer. Critical tropes about the *Requiem* revealed the disorientating effects of Verdi's triumphal new work, especially in terms of its generic features and artistic qualities. Hans von Bülow's oft-quoted definition of the work as an 'opera in ecclesiastical robes', for instance, expressed resistant attitudes towards an opera composer extending his reach to other genres. Yet though many critics were far from convinced by the spiritual character of the work – it was too passionate, too flamboyant, too 'dramatic' – they nonetheless exhibited a genuine intellectual interest in it. Verdi's adoption of fugal counterpoint, for instance, while often criticised on technical grounds, was widely lauded as an attempt to engage with 'serious' composition, as if the Italian composer 'had capitulated to German ideals' (70). At the same time, Kreuzer argues, the swift dissemination of the work also represented the threat of a 'foreign intruder into the "temple" of German culture' (72). Moreover, attitudes towards the *Requiem* intersected with hotly debated religious matters. As political unification led to the formation of a 'small Germany' (*Kleindeutschland*), tensions escalated between Protestants, who represented about two-thirds of the population of the new Empire, and the Catholic minority. Although Verdi's work did not appeal to all Catholic circles (supporters of the Caecilian

[7] See the last chapter of Raphael Kiesewetter, *Geschichte der europäisch-abenländischen oder unsrer heutigen Musik* (Leipzig, 1834), 97–100.

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movement, for instance, vehemently opposed it), its reception took on political overtones: 'the *Requiem* was [. . .] held up in Catholic areas as a cultural icon: a symbol of religious autonomy, regional identity and artistic competence' (76). Thus, the multifarious early reception of the work in Germany resonated with broader tensions across the young nation: it created a sort of cultural shock that not only disconcerted Germans in their expectations of an Italian author of crowd-pleasing operas, but also revealed how little settled the very notion of German-ness was at the time.

No matter how contentious, the German reception of the *Requiem* paved the way for a reconsideration of Verdi's persona. The third chapter of the book, '*Maestro* to *Meister*', traces the gradual inclusion of Verdi in the German music pantheon. Kreuzer first looks at how constructed images of 'Verdi the man' (to paraphrase Frank Walker's seminal biography) related to changes in German culture – from the growing reach of mass media to the emergence of the cult of personality – and second by considering how these images were set in dialogue with the critical reception of Verdi's last operas: *Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Before the German dissemination of Verdi's *Requiem*, the image of the composer was essentially that of an artisan, a well-versed expert of his craft working on commission unconcerned with issues of originality. The composer's personality was either irrelevant or impenetrable – he was by and large a dehumanised composer. It didn't help Verdi's reputation that, before conducting the *Requiem* in Vienna in 1875, he himself had barely set foot in German-speaking lands.[8] The situation changed course when he repeatedly crossed the Alps to supervise and conduct his sacred work:

> Verdi [. . .] far exceeded the expectations of most commentators. They were astounded by his calm and dignified demeanour off the podium, his charisma, benign smile, 'mild' and friendly looks, politeness, kindness and solemn modesty – aspects sometimes contrasted approvingly with Wagner's pretentions. (95)

Visual illustrations of Verdi's face also followed the same trend, revealing the far-reaching influence of theories of physiognomy. While, on the one hand, such interest favoured the success of the *Requiem*, on the other, it reveals the extent to which the new cult of personality had already taken root in popular bourgeois culture, as 'middle classes began to look for human models and moral values among themselves' (101). Verdi's biographical episodes – his retreat into the countryside, his success as rural entrepreneur – aptly nourished the appetites of the general market for exemplary stories promoting bourgeois values, and Verdi himself skilfully cultivated a self-image that could satisfy bourgeois expectations.

Verdi's canonisation as a 'great man' also allowed him to be gradually accepted in Germany as a 'great composer'. The German reception of *Aida*, for instance, 'conjured words otherwise associated with German music and bourgeois mores' (111), securing the work a broad recognition as the harbinger of a 'new Verdi', one that, in the eyes of the many, paid due respect to German art. But, surprisingly, with *Otello* and *Falstaff* the games opened again. While outside of German-speaking lands the two works were often acknowledged as Verdi's personal solution to 'the opera of the future', overcoming Italian operatic conventions without embracing Wagner's system of motivic relations, among Teutonic critics 'the ingrained idea of German supremacy impeded their perception of a non-Wagnerian path into the operatic future even though, in theory, they required it' (123). Responses to *Falstaff*, however, reveal the extent to which images of Verdi the Man were at play.

[8] In 1843 Verdi conducted the Viennese premiere of *Nabucco* at the Kärntnertortheater upon invitation of the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli. Merelli, who at the time was the manager of both La Scala in Milan and of the Kärntnertortheater, had commissioned the opera to Verdi the previous year. See Christian Springer, 'Verdi in Wien', in his *Verdi-Studien* (Vienna, 2005), 15–24.

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Praises of the opera's elegance and tastefulness (despite a generally noted lack of emotional drive) resonate with discourses on the composer's persona, pointing at intriguing connections between 'popular' culture and professional music criticism.

Verdi's death in 1901 initiated another critical turn – one that moves the focus of *Verdi and the Germans* to issues of posthumous reception. The fourth chapter is dedicated to one of the most important phenomena of twentieth-century German reception of Verdi, the so-called 'Verdi Renaissance', initiated by Franz Werfel in the 1920s. Kreuzer argues, however, that the very notion of a renaissance is misleading, since it has 'obscure[d] historical continuities and socio-cultural contexts for the revival' (139). Rather than representing a moment of rupture, Werfel's turn to Verdi was the result of the collapse of aesthetic values and established notions of identity following the fall of both German and Austrian empires. New ideas about the role of opera in society and, therefore, a shift in audiences' expectations, characterised the new cultural climate during the Weimar Republic. Yet, unlike Handel's operas, which in the very same years did indeed undergo a veritable renaissance, Verdi's works had never disappeared from German stages. Their cultural function simply changed: they ceased to define German identity by representing what it was *not*. Instead, 'Verdi's unmarked Otherness itself was now appreciated and appropriated, providing a space in which new ideas for German identity could be rehearsed: ideas that derived not from opposition to but from identification with those traits associated with the composer' (190). By resituating the so-called 'Verdi Renaissance' in this cultural context, Kreuzer calls for a more nuanced historical understanding of this pivotal period in Verdi's German reception. She argues that, to an even greater extent than reducing German responses to the *Requiem* to Bülow's one-sided and decontextualised definition, the very concept of a Renaissance appears simplistic, as it was rooted in well-established discourses about the composer. Its hold on scholarly narratives, however, derives from both the idealisation of the characteristic of cultural climate of the Weimar Republic and the gradual canonisation of Verdi as a 'great composer'. Kreuzer's discussion of the 'Verdi Renaissance', thus, brings forth a crucial historiographical point, showing that reception tropes and processes of myth-making are frequently two sides of the same coin.

Such interest in Verdi, however, was not extinguished after the fall of the Weimar Republic. In the fifth chapter of her study, Kreuzer points out that scholars have overlooked the protracted cultural effects of the 'Verdi Renaissance' during the Third Reich. Indeed, as she argues, '[t]he Nazi era in fact sustained – even intensified – earlier efforts to domesticate the composer' (192). Political considerations lurked behind this choice: as the axis between Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy proved the only solution through which the two countries could escape international isolation, cultural exchanges became an appropriate vehicle to cement this alliance. Performances of Verdi's works were produced at steady pace, outnumbering Wagner productions during the early 1940s, and discussions of Verdi's persona and of his output were tuned according to Nazi ideological agenda. Verdi was either idealised as the personification of the spirit of his *Volk*, or as an exemplary foreigner bearing 'biological and intellectual bonds with Germany' (202). His works thus became a model for a new type of *Volksoper*, which Nazi strategists tried to elaborate – 'a type of serious opera that could still be understood by everyone' (212). Yet, in order to function as such, several Verdi operas underwent radical alterations in form, content and visual appearance: librettos were newly translated according to Nazi rhetoric and lexicon, plots were altered, and productions were conceived to eliminate anything unrealistic. Thus, for instance, in the 1937 Munich production of *Don Carlo*, the Voice from Above became the voice of a participant in the Inquisition.

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By looking at what – until now – has been a void within histories of Verdi's German reception, Kreuzer dismantles previous attempts at linking the ubiquitous presence of Verdi's operas in post-war era to nostalgia for the cultural vibrancy of the Weimar Republic and its 'Verdi Renaissance'. Instead, she highlights the extent to which continuities characterise the Verdi reception history in twentieth-century Germany. Likewise, her Epilogue shows how German intellectuals' chameleonic attitude towards Verdi resulted in a smooth transition from the Nazi to the post-war eras. Because of his very foreignness, his reputation did not seem in thrall to official Nazi ideology. Yet the creation of two German states also created a discursive bifurcation that had far-reaching consequences in the following decades. In Eastern Germany, Verdi's image as a central figure in Italian Risorgimento 'chimed with the perceived socialist liberation from fascist tyranny' (255) and his operas, not unlikely the previous period, provided 'a model for topical (*zeitnah*) libretti of humanistic and democratic ethos and for "elemental-popular music theatre"' (256). The avant-gardist turn of Western Germany's musical culture, instead, prevented Verdi's operas from contributing to innovative musical trends. On both sides of the Wall, however, the composer's national origin and his constructed contraposition to 'German-ness' ceased to condition political interpretations of Verdi and his *oeuvre*. As Kreuzer argues, during the latter decades of the twentieth century 'the erstwhile antagonism between Italian and German music had crumbled' (260).

Verdi and the Germans critically examines issues of reception in order to provide a coherent, insightful and fascinating narrative on the construction of German national identity. It also opens relevant methodological questions that might prove fruitful both within and outside musicology. First, it brings to attention one important and often overlooked aspect about process of construction of collective identities: the fundamental contribution that images of the Other provide in shaping and reshaping the Self, a contribution that at times is articulated through opposition, at times through acceptance and appropriation. Second, it provides a reflection on what reception studies can offer to historical disciplines. In Kreuzer's words, her approach

> challenges commonly held ideas of radical historical breaks, of focusing on one's 'own' repertories when looking at music involvement's with nationalism, and of relying on seemingly dominant trends from which to assess the development of musical cultures. History does not, after all, proceed in single file, driven by central forces. It takes shape at multiple speed and levels, feeding on diverse sources. The history of reception, for instance, may unfold more slowly than that of composition; but it engages wide – possible wider – socio-political fields. Similarly, music's role in the formation of national consciousness engages a host of transnational factors. (264)

Although she acknowledges that in the future even this 'fascination [...] with transnational musical reception' (265) might be discussed as the result of specific cultural and intellectual conditions, for now *Verdi and the Germans* stands out in the field of Verdi scholarship, bridging several disciplinary fields. And if the 2013 Verdi bicentennial does indeed confirm the vitality of studies on the composer's reception history,[9] this book will likely offer an influential and inspiring methodological reference point, reminding us that, if Verdi has held such a powerful grip for two hundred years, it is because his works have not just spoken for themselves, but also in the audiences' own various languages. And they continue to do so today.

Claudio Vellutini

[9] As this review was going to press, the publication of a new volume containing fourteen case studies on Verdi reception was announced: Lorenzo Frassà and Michela Niccolai, eds., *Verdi Reception* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013).

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