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# Introduction

LAURA PROTANO-BIGGS*

For most scholars of music, few genres have seemed so fastened to one institution as *grand opéra*. It was within the stone walls of the Paris Opéra on the rue Lepeletier that most of these works first met their audience, and within its auditorium that these works remain, to an unusual extent, locked in our minds, individual operas ever-associated with the aesthetic and technical demands of the institution.[1]

This fate is somewhat inevitable, to be sure, both because the Opéra exerted supreme control over *grand opéra* in the nineteenth century and because our discipline has long been obsessed with the origins of things. And while the last few decades have seen a decisive turn to reception- rather than production-based histories, these nonetheless have tended to be focused on the moment at which works were first unveiled before an audience. There are exceptions, of course, to this concern with the true premiere.[2] Opera is after all a cultural product, often conceived with circulation in mind, and a marker of its success was – and remains – the extent to which it reached audiences far removed from the location of its premiere. Some of our core historical resources are a testament to this fact – the Verdian production book (or *disposizione scenica*), for instance, can be considered a calculated effort on the part of its publishers to ensure that however distant the author was from the performance of an opera, he seemed to have sanctioned its rendition; that the production unfolded under his indomitable shadow.[3]

* Laura Protano-Biggs, Johns Hopkins University; lprotan1@jhu.edu.
The articles in this special issue circulated in draft form at a conference on the issue's theme. The conference was convened at King's College London under the auspices of Roger Parker's European research Council-funded project, *Music in London, 1800–51*. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their comments on this issue; in addition, I owe a debt of thanks to the conference's coordinator, Angela Waplington; the discussants (Dana Gooley, James Grande, Katherine Hambridge, Jonathan Hicks, Laura Möckli, Francesca Vella, Wiebke Thormählen and Flora Willson), and, above all, to Sarah Hibberd and Roger Parker for their invaluable support as this issue was prepared. I am also deeply indebted to Sarah Hibberd for the sponsorship offered by her Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project *French Opera and the Revolutionary Sublime*.

1 The literature on *grand opéra* at the Paris Opéra is rich and vast. Classic texts about these works at the Paris Opéra include William Crosten, *French Grand Opera: An Art and a Business* (New York, 1948); Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge, 1987); Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1998); and Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2009). Recent important contributions include Mark Everist, ed., *Meyerbeer and* Grand Opéra *from the July Monarchy to the Present* (Turnhout, 2016), which appeared as this issue was being completed.

2 See, for instance, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Thomas Downing, eds., *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* (Aldershot, Burlington VT, 2010); and Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds., *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914* (Chicago, 2009).

3 On this idea, see in particular Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, 2015), 1–14.

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New studies that research how works accumulate cultural associations while in motion, on the various routes they travel, are a much-needed development, but it is nonetheless true that some works have lent themselves more readily to this research than others. It is well understood, for instance, that so-called *bel canto* works were malleable; that arias were routinely cut or substituted, and libretti and scores otherwise modified to suit circumstances.[4] It has not been hard to conceive of these, in turn, as operas to which new ideas were repeatedly fastened over the course of the nineteenth century.

The case of *grand opéra* is altogether different. Consider Giacomo Meyerbeer: his *grands opéras* were mounted and remounted on an international circuit in the decades that followed their premieres and he was, as a result, a redoubtable personality on that circuit, even while ensconced in his home, where news about distant productions would filter in via three-line telegrams and second-hand reports. But however much his operas circulated and were refashioned in the process, we remain invested in a narrative that associates them above all with their celebrated origins, in order to preserve their initial aura.

The sheer scale of works such as *Les Huguenots* (1836), combined with the muscle of the institution that commissioned and sanctioned them, did indeed lend them monumental status. But while this enhanced – and perhaps even secured – their value on worldwide routes, these works often shed much that made them 'monumental' once on the move. *Grands opéras* performed outside the Opéra were commonly shortened, and their material forces scaled back, to the extent that these were at least as malleable as the works of Bellini and Donizetti, if not more so. This leaves us with considerable reconstructive work to undertake, from both journalistic accounts and, where available, archival sources – neither of which, of course, were written with the needs of later historians in mind – to furnish even the most basic details of what sort of operatic object travelled when *grand opéra* moved. The scale of the task and the call of the Opéra as a more appealing frame of reference have tended to mean that accounts of *grand opéra* on the move have neither been abundant nor extensive.[5]

The articles in this special issue cast aside focus on the Opéra, in order to revisit the ways in which *grands opéras* were geographically mobile. London here serves as a foil to Paris. For a while in the nineteenth century, London also tethered the success of its operatic culture to *grand opéra* above all else, with notable results. As a mediator of the works which premiered in Paris, and a centre of press discourse, it also had far more impact on the worldwide travels of these works than we have assumed.

[4] See, for instance, Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago, 2006); and Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance* (Oxford, 2009).

[5] Exceptions appear in the notes to all the articles in this volume, notably including Cormac Newark, '"In Italy We Don't Have the Means for Illusion": Grand Opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19 (2007), 199–222; Anne Sivouja, Owe Ander, Ulla-Britta Broman-Kananen and Jens Hesselager, eds., *Opera on the Move in the Nordic Countries during the Long 19th-Century* (Helsinki, 2012); Christina Fuhrmann, *Foreign Opera at the London Playhouses: From Mozart to Bellini* (Cambridge, 2016); and chapters by Milan Pospíšil, Melanie von Goldbeck and Jennifer C. H. J. Wilson in Everist, ed., *Meyerbeer and* Grand Opéra. A core resource on the circulation of *grand opéra* outside Paris remains 'Part Four: Transformations of Grand Opera', in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge, 2003), 321–422.

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In the first article, for instance, Gabriela Cruz concerns herself with precursors to Londoners' fascination with the genre, demonstrating that a precedent for its tendencies towards total spectacle and an architecture of power can be found in the nautical and horror adventures so popular on the London stage at the outset of the 1800s. Richard Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (1843) emerges in her account as a work whose overwhelming force was rooted in these same entertainments. In this sense, Cruz demonstrates that *grand opéra* had been on the move from the start, stemming as it did from a rich network of theatrical traditions borne of liberal English values.

The next two articles focus on Londoners' promotion of *grand opéra* proper. Tamsin Alexander reveals that stagings of Daniel Auber's *Gustave III* (1833) as *Gustavus the Third* at the Covent Garden theatre later that year involved painstaking attention to the visual dimension of the work and, in particular, to the use of illumination. Challenging the notion that stagings outside the Paris Opéra were necessarily more modest, she demonstrates that illumination in *Gustavus* was almost excessive in its brilliance. Combined with the fact that audience members were invited to be supernumeraries, this created a scenario in which much of the auditorium was reconstituted as a performance space, and one in which audience members were made to think anew about their social status. My article meanwhile considers the marked success of Meyerbeer in 1840s London, with a focus on the 1849 London premiere of *Le Prophète* at the brand-new Royal Italian Opera. I consider how numerous critics were drawn to the most bare and restrained elements in the work, whereas in Paris critics were more focused on moments of sonic and visual abundance and the manner in which these captured the sublime terror so characteristic of the revolutionary age. In the relatively stable English context – and perhaps in compensation of this work's lack of political relevance there – critics instead focused on those elements that enabled them to invest *Le Prophète* with moral and intellectual relevance for Victorian audiences. Listening to Meyerbeer as these critics did, I argue, can heal the division between historical and current-day evaluations of the composer's merits.

London ceases to be the immediate frame of reference in the final two articles, but it nonetheless lurks in the shadows, not least because the city was rarely absent from the transnational cultural imagination. Article four considers the case of the Teatro Comunale in Bologna, where Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* (1865) was mounted within months of the composer's death and the work's Parisian premiere. The notion of cosmopolitan ambition comes into particular focus in this article, as Axel Körner draws attention to the historical actors on the executive board of the theatre, and in the city's local administration, who were conscious that Meyerbeer could boost Bologna's credentials as a cosmopolitan hub within the new Italian nation state. And London remains a distant but important presence in the final article, in which Charlotte Bentley uncovers ways in which the critical discourse that surrounded the New Orleans premieres of Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots* in the 1830s at once afforded anglophone and francophone critics a means to negotiate their

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respective cultures' contested identities following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, and set musical criticism there on an uncharted course.

The articles in this volume do not all share the same intellectual framework; but it is in the breadth of their approaches that they reveal much about the worlds out of which *grand opéra* was formed, and in which it would move. These contributions thus form a collective testament to a fact once obvious: that *grand opéra* commanded attention in all manner of musical cultures, and that its premieres in Paris constitute but one chapter in its nineteenth-century career. It is the sort of stories contained within this special issue that could in the end reveal the most about *grand opéra*'s uncommon hold on the nineteenth-century imagination.

LAURA PROTANO-BIGGS has been a member of the musicology faculty at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University since 2015, and earned her PhD at the University of California, Berkeley in 2014. She is currently completing a book about operatic technologies in late nineteenth-century Italy. Her work has appeared in *Opera Quarterly, Music & Letters, Studi verdiani and Cambridge Opera Journal*.

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