

# FROM HINDUSTAN TO BRABANT: MEYERBEER'S *AFRICANA* AND MUNICIPAL COSMOPOLITANISM IN POST-UNIFICATION ITALY<sup>1</sup>

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## *Transnational Cosmopolitanism*

The Prussian father of French *grand opéra*; a Jewish Kapellmeister and director of music at the Prussian court; a highly regarded member of Berlin's social elite; a composer celebrated all over Europe, Meyerbeer's life and work stands for an idea of European culture that does not easily fit the concept of an Age of Nationalism. The influential Austrian-Bohemian music critic Eduard Hanslick admired the cosmopolitan language of a composer, who had started out in Berlin, learned from Italian beauty during his travels, and made the greatest success of his career in the Paris of the Second Empire.<sup>2</sup> Many of Hanslick's contemporaries, including many Italians commenting on their first experience of *grand opéra*, perceived Meyerbeer's music as a synthesis of styles, which had the powerful capacity to communicate across national boundaries.<sup>3</sup> Others – most famously Wagner and Schumann – rejected Meyerbeer's cosmopolitanism as untimely for an age of national romanticism. Anti-

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful for comments I received during workshops organised at King's College London as well as Villa Vigoni. In particular I would like to express my gratitude to Fabrizio della Seta, Anselm Gerhard, Roger Parker, Laura Protano-Biggs and Anna Tedesco.

<sup>2</sup> Eduard Hanslick, 'Meyerbeer', in: idem., *Die modern Oper. Kritiken und Studien* (Berlin, 1875), 138-173.

<sup>3</sup> For Italian comments on international elements influencing Meyerbeer's style see for instance *Monitore di Bologna*, 10 November 1869. The article reviews a performance of *Les Huguenots*.

Semitism was a recurrent motif of the critique of Meyerbeer's cosmopolitanism, long before Wagner compiled his tirades of hatred.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this criticism, Meyerbeer's *grands opéras* remained the works most frequently performed on the stages of nineteenth-century Europe, leaving a lasting legacy in terms of techniques of orchestration, dramatic form and the art of conducting. Their place in the European repertoire invites us to examine the relationship between a period of history frequently described as an Age of Nationalism and the appeal of an operatic genre widely appreciated for its cosmopolitan language. The Italian prima of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* – a year after the composer's death and four years after the country's Unification, at a time when Italy sought to assert its national identity with the help of cultural politics – offers a number of keys to help investigate this connection between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Reducing nineteenth-century opera to expressions of national culture risks overlooking this relationship.

Emphasising awareness of transnational cosmopolitanism in nineteenth-century European culture does not mean ignoring nationalist tensions. Meyerbeer himself was conscious not only of personal attacks against him, often based on his Jewish origins, but also of the rising tension between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. During the second half of the nineteenth century he observed how political change caused transnational concepts of European culture to be superseded by nationalist rivalries. In December 1863, while completing his 30-year opera project on Vasco da

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<sup>4</sup> Sabine Henze-Döhring / Sieghart Döhring, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. Der Meister der Grand Opéra* (München, 2014), 143 sq, 209 ff.

Gama, Meyerbeer wrote a melancholy letter to his wife in Berlin, stating that the new year was unlikely to bring peace.<sup>5</sup> With the experience of 1848 still fresh in his mind, nationalism was leading to bloodshed in every corner of the world. The standoff between Prussia and Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein was making way for another European war. The world was mesmerized by the events of the American Civil War, where members of the same nation were killing each other in hundreds of thousands. There was a civil war in Mexico; and civil war still overshadowed the Unification of Italy in the South, where thousands paid for 'liberation' with their lives.<sup>6</sup> In this sinister atmosphere, in May 1864, the composer died, leaving his greatest operatic project incomplete. 'Music is without its master', the *Ménestrel* of Paris commented, a master who had succeeded 'in writing cosmopolitan art'.<sup>7</sup>

Thousands of people attended the procession from Meyerbeer's home on the Champs-Élysées to the Gare du Nord, where his body was transferred onto a train, which would bring him home to Berlin.<sup>8</sup> Black horses pulled the carriage, accompanied by the National Guards and their *corps de musique*. Heading the cortège were the Prussian ambassador Robert Heinrich Ludwig von der Goltz, Marshall Jean-Baptiste Philibert Vaillant representing the French Emperor, Daniel

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Reiner Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. Eine Biografie nach Dokumenten* (Berlin, 1998), 319.

<sup>6</sup> For a transnational perspective on the Italian and American civil wars see Enrico Dal Lago, *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour. Comparative Perspectives on nineteenth-century American and Italian Nation-Building* (New York, 2015), chpt 5.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Zimmermann (see n. 4), 321.

<sup>8</sup> For a document-based description of the funeral see Heinz Becker, ed., *Giacomo Meyerbeer in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbeck, 1980), 131 ff.

Auber as director of the Conservatoire, and Émile Perrin, director of the Opéra. The Gare du Nord, the building still incomplete, was covered in black draperies, decorated with the composer's initials. Extracts from his operas were played and the chief rabbi of Paris spoke. On its arrival in Berlin, Prince Georg von Preußen (admittedly a minor Prince of the Hohenzollern, but with literary and musical inclinations) greeted the railway carriage. The Prussian King and future German Emperor Wilhelm I and the Queen, together with other members of the royal household, headed a procession to the opera house *Unter den Linden* and from there to the Jewish cemetery in Schönhauser Allee. Similar to the scenes in Paris a few days earlier, the streets were flocked with mourners.

Within months of the composer's death, the French Emperor and the Empress attended the premiere of Meyerbeer's last incomplete opera *L'Africaine*, in the presence of many German dignitaries, as well as the composers Franz Liszt, Giuseppe Verdi, Charles Gounod, Anton Rubinstein, and many more. After the last act, the theatre's curtains went up once more to reveal a generously decorated bust of Meyerbeer. The audience honoured the composer with fifteen minutes silence - not an easy undertaking after having sat through a monumental opera in five acts. The event became the last great cultural manifestation of the Second Empire, which was to disappear five years later in the Franco-Prussian War. It was also one of the last European manifestations of a truly cosmopolitan understanding of operatic culture, a manifestation that stood above national rivalries.

The arrangements for Meyerbeer's funeral in Berlin and the subsequent première of *L'Africaine* in Paris are directly relevant to our understanding of the Italian prima of

*L'Africana*, not only because the preceding events were followed closely in the Italian press. The opera's first Italian performance came so shortly after the composer's death and its French premiere that Italians read their *prima* in close connection with this remarkable moment of cosmopolitan sentiment shared across nations, commented upon by almost all the contemporary sources. The future French Prime Minister Émile Ollivier wrote in the *Revue et Gazette Musicale* that Meyerbeer had created a 'harmonic connection' between France and Germany, an ever-lasting bond between 'sister nations'.<sup>9</sup> While Ollivier's assertion regarding the harmonic connection between France and Germany was to be proved wrong by political events, for some time at least this bond between sister-nations seemed to last. When Bologna decided to be the first city in Italy to stage *L'Africaine*, this was not simply an act of operatic programming: it was a conscious decision on part of the city's cultural and political elites to take part in this cosmopolitan moment of European culture associated with Meyerbeer's death.

Sources quoted throughout this article testify to this claim of a deeply felt cosmopolitanism associated with Meyerbeer's music and his death. However, the comment by a particularly prominent Italian contemporary of Meyerbeer, though less influential in musical than in political matters, will help to launch this argument by providing insights into the 'experience' of Meyerbeer's music during the mid-1860s. The correspondence of Italy's most famous political exile, Giuseppe Mazzini, offers unfailing evidence of his appreciation of Meyerbeer, his 'favourite composer' as he said in a letter to his mother; an appreciation reflecting his general partisan interest in European letters as well as his amateur musicianship and frequent visits to the

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Heinz and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer. A Life in Letters* (London, 1989), 14.

opera house, which resulted in a solid acquaintance with the international repertoire.<sup>10</sup> While Mazzini never showed much interest in Verdi, despite their common connection with Genoa, Meyerbeer appears over and over again in his writings and correspondence. Three years after Meyerbeer's death, in 1867, Mazzini prepared a note on the composer to be added to a translation of his *Filosofia della musica* of 1836, now revised for an English edition of his selected writings.<sup>11</sup>

Outlining the composer's aesthetic development from *Robert* to *Les Huguenots*, Mazzini's note explains why, according to his own reading, Meyerbeer's attempt to bridge Italian and German styles created 'the Music of the Future':

'In the *Huguenots* [...] the struggle [of good and evil] is intertwined with the whole musical conception. [...] The joining, the blending of the two elements which will constitute the Music of the future – Italian melody and German harmony – has gone

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<sup>10</sup> On *Dinorah* see Mazzini to Matilda Biggs, 24 July 1862, in Giuseppe Mazzini, *Edizione nazionale: Scritti editi ed inediti di Giuseppe Mazzini* (Mario Menghini, ed.), vols.1-106 (Imola, 1906-43), Vol.73, 3-7, 6. On *L'Africaine* Mazzini to Emilie Ashurst Venturi, Tuesday [June 1864], *ibid.*, vol.78, 246-247; the letter must be misdated, because the work was not performed in London until 22 July 1865. For the above-mentioned letter to his mother and other comments on Meyerbeer see the letters quoted in Giuseppe Mazzini, *Philosophy of Music (1836). Envisioning a Social Opera* (Franco Sciannameo, ed.; transl. Emilie Ashurst Venturi. *Studies in the history and interpretation of music*, vol.103) (Lewiston NY, 2004), 19 f. Mazzini received some of his Covent Garden tickets from the successful Italian tenor Enrico Tamberlick, who regularly performed in London. Tamberlick's correspondence contains numerous letters from political activists, including Louis Blanc, Alexandre-Auguste Ledru-Rollin, Aurelio Saffi. Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles. Catalogue général des manuscrits. 1290: Album d'autographes d'Enrico Tamberlick.

<sup>11</sup> *Filosofia della musica* was originally drafted towards the end of 1835 and published in the summer of 1836. For the work's editorial history see Marcello de Angelis, 'Introduction', in Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica* (Firenze, 1977), 7-32.

one step forward. [...] The melody rises on the harmonic substratum: the one not to be singled out from the other. Meyerbeer is the highest artist of a transition period, in which the High-Priest cannot yet appear. He has given the outline of the musical Drama, and created musical *individualities*, which remind one of Shakespeare. [...] And he has, as I said, moralised the Drama, making it an echo of the world and its eternal vital problem. He is not a votary of the *l'Art pour l'Art* music; he is the prophet of the music with a mission, the music standing immediately below Religion. [...] One would say that he was given to us as a symbol of the future union, a link between the two worlds, the harmonising of which will constitute the highest musical expression of the future.<sup>12</sup>

This note from a letter to Emilie Ashurst Venturi differs slightly from the final English version of his *Philosophy of Music* and arguably makes an even stronger statement in favour of Meyerbeer's musical and dramatic achievement. The official English version of the text remains a translation, authorised by Mazzini, but essentially re-drafted by his translator at a time when Mazzini's health was declining, severely delaying the publication of his writings in English. Contrary to the official English edition, Mazzini's letter to Emilie Ashurst Venturi is Mazzini's only direct and more analytical statement on Meyerbeer, and therefore stands as the most reliable source on his views.<sup>13</sup> For Mazzini, Meyerbeer's compositional technique directly reflects the

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<sup>12</sup> Mazzini to Emilie Ashurst Venturi, 21 May 1867, *Edizione nazionale* (see n.9), vol.85, 44-47, 45 ff.

Ashurst Venturi was in charge of the English edition of Mazzini's writings. At the time of writing his letter to Venturi he would not have known Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*, which was premiered in Paris in February 1836, some months before his forced departure from Switzerland to London. This chronology explains the importance of his retrospective addition on Meyerbeer.

<sup>13</sup> For the official English edition in the translation of Ashurst Venturi see Joseph Mazzini, 'The Philosophy of Music' in idem, *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini*. Vol.IV: Critical and Literary

composer's dramatic intentions, where 'the struggle [of good and evil] is intertwined with the whole musical conception', reflecting his idea that drama has to overcome the isolation of art from social and political reality. In Mazzini's reading the composer's cosmopolitan style and his distinctive contribution to the future of music consists in blending Italian melody and German harmony.

As a note added to the work's English translation, there is no evidence that Mazzini's view of Meyerbeer was in any way influential among Italian patriots or music critics. Historians keen to establish a connection between opera and politics have tended to exaggerate the importance of Mazzini's *Filosofia della musica*, a work rarely quoted during the nineteenth century and not available in most libraries. Therefore, in the context of this article, Mazzini's reflection on Meyerbeer has to be read as an individual statement reflecting an educated non-expert interest in Meyerbeer. What interests us here is not so much the importance the Italian leader of democratic nationalism accords to a non-Italian composer, reflecting claims he also made, for instance, in relation to Schiller and Goethe.<sup>14</sup> Instead it is Mazzini's assertion that Meyerbeer bridged national boundaries of musical styles, thus creating music for a new age, "music of the future". At a time when versions of Wagner's 1849 essay *Artwork of the future* were widely discussed in Europe, Mazzini makes a conscious

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(London, 1867), 1-55, here 52-55. See the 'translator's note' at the beginning of the volume as well as the introduction to Mazzini, *Philosophy of Music* (see n.9). As many of Mazzini's friends in London Ashurst Venturi was linked to University College through her painting teacher Whistler.

<sup>14</sup> As for Mazzini's literary interests see Carlotta Sorba, "'Comunicare con il popolo": Novel, Drama, and Music in Mazzini's Work', in C.A. Bayly and Eugenio F. Biagini, eds, *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism 1830-1920*. Proceedings of the British Academy, 152 (Oxford, 2008), 75-92.



decision to relate this concept to Meyerbeer.<sup>15</sup> What is more, Mazzini does not simply echo general emotions evoked by the composer's death, but makes his argument in relation to an earlier work by Meyerbeer. Using techniques similar to those of the 'professional' music critics of his time, he fosters his assessment through a remarkably close reading of the score.

### *The aesthetic challenges of managing Italy's political transition*

Far from suggesting that Mazzini's evaluation of Meyerbeer directly influenced Italian views at the time, his analysis corresponds closely to the ways Italians (and Europeans more generally) read the composer's work around the time of his death. It therefore provides us with an interesting insight into the experience of his music during the 1860s. For Meyerbeer's Italian supporters the 1865 staging of *L'Africana* represents a commitment to the idea of a truly European art. For Bologna it was as a political choice taken at the expense of a number of possible alternatives regarding the theatre's repertoire. The article's following section discusses the opera's first Italian staging within the specific context of Bologna's transformation from a still

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<sup>15</sup> On the reception of Wagner in Italy see Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, *Tristano, mio Tristano: gli scrittori e il caso Wagner*. Bologna, 1988. Ute Jung, *Die Rezeption der Kunst Richard Wagners in Italien* (Regensburg, 1974). Giorgio Manera and Giuseppe Pugliese, eds, *Wagner in Italia* (Venezia, 1982). Marion S. Miller, 'Wagnerism, Wagnerians and Italian Identity', in David C. Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics* (Ithaca and London, 1984), 167-197. Axel Körner, *Politics of culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York, 2009), chpt.7.

remarkably backward provincial city – regarding its social and political developments - to one of the cultural centres of the new Italian nation state.<sup>16</sup>

Beyond its political dimension, the staging of *L'Africaine* helped Bologna's Teatro Comunale to open up new aesthetic horizons, away from the established preference for *bel canto* towards the internationalisation of the repertoire, presenting an important stepping-stone towards the staging of the Italian prima of Wagner's *Lohengrin*, six years later, in 1871. For an audience mostly used to Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini – and which still had difficulties appreciating Verdi - Meyerbeer and Wagner represented milestones.<sup>17</sup> The role played by Meyerbeer in confronting Italian audiences with new aesthetic challenges is evidenced by newspaper reviews, dating from the time when his works first arrived on local stages: 'To our audience, used to judging music with the heart rather than the mind [...] this heavy and philosophical music, all study, all harmony, cannot leave an immediate impression', the correspondent for the *Monitore* wrote about the local prima of *Le prophète*.<sup>18</sup> More time was needed to appreciate the music's beauty. Meanwhile, critics were aware of the increasing thirst of audiences 'for new things, new combinations, wishing to hear strong and innovative counterpoints, to be moved by original and

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<sup>16</sup> On Bologna's social and economic development at the time see Körner (see n.14).

<sup>17</sup> For an early local experience of grand opéra see the 1840 reception of Guillaume Tell: Cormac Newark, "In Italy we don't have the means for illusion": *Grand opéra* in nineteenth-century Bologna", *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 19/3, 199-222. For Italian difficulties with the internationalisation of the operatic repertoire Axel Körner, 'Music of the Future: Italian Theatres and the European Experience of Modernity between Unification and World War One', *European History Quarterly*, 41/2 (April 2011), 189 – 212.

<sup>18</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 19 November 1860

unexpected melodramatic moments'.<sup>19</sup> These quotations suggest an increasing sense of awareness for the perceived change in the semantics of time, associated with the Risorgimento's recent completion and Europe's political turmoil more generally, which translated into a deeply felt need for new aesthetic experiences. The internationalisation of the repertoire responded to this need.

Although Mazzini's wording might give this impression, discussing Meyerbeer as a 'stepping-stone' towards the acceptance of Wagner is not meant to present the Prussian composer as a transitional figure whose achievements can be reduced to having created a model of opera that was needed for Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* to emerge. While Wagner (as well as many other composers) owed his compositional style and his techniques of orchestration to Meyerbeer's form of *grand opéra*, the monumental importance of Meyerbeer in creating a completely new understanding of lyrical drama, which succeeded in dominating the European stages for decades, is unquestionable and cannot be diminished by the fact that later generations of composers responded to his innovations. If in the Italian context Meyerbeer paved the way for the diversification and internationalisation of the repertoire, this process stands as very substantial technical and dramaturgical achievements associated with the performance of his music. Thanks to Meyerbeer, Italian theatres, their *impresari* and the cultural experts involved in municipal administration learned about the challenges involved in staging huge and multi-dimensional works of opera, usually imported from abroad. The press frequently commented on the technical difficulty of performing Meyerbeer, a composer who constantly engaged with the most recent innovations of instrumentation, where each score seemed 'eminently grand, philosophical, and of a stamp and form all particular to Meyerbeer. With his profound

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<sup>19</sup> *Rivista Bolognese di Scienze, Lettere, Arti e Scuole*, vol.II, 1868 (6), 556.

genius, never satisfied, for many years he did not stop modifying, retouching, refining, and in fact, if he had lived for longer, he was determined to completely redo the instrumental part in order to update it according to the most recent improvements introduced by Sax for wood wind and brass instruments.<sup>20</sup> With these words the correspondent for the *Monitore* explained Bologna's elaborate preparations for *L'Africaine*. In Italy not many theatres were up to that challenge. Contrary to Bologna's recognisable efforts, Verdi considered a great theatre such as the San Carlo simply incapable of staging *grand opéra*.<sup>21</sup>

The Comunale's efforts to bring these works alive impressed audiences, but the effect was no different from that created by the performance of other grand works of foreign provenance. In 1864, a year before the city's first *Africaine*, Bologna's press had employed similar arguments when the autumn season opened with Gounod's *Faust*.<sup>22</sup> Reusing, year after year, the same sets that had served a limited number of repertoire operas for decades was no longer possible in this new and diversified ambiance of post-Unification music theatre. Theatres had to convince audiences of the aesthetic merits of staging the much more demanding works of recent French and German opera. A new professional approach to stage direction was required, which only the best *impresari* were able to deliver. Moreover, the municipal authorities were keen on keeping stage workers, theatre painters and tailors in work, for whom these new operas created ample employment. In Bologna, during meetings of the *deputazione degli spettacoli* and of the municipal council, a huge deal of debate concerned the alleged poverty of sets and the need to attract new

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<sup>20</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 5 November 1865.

<sup>21</sup> Henze-Döhning / Döhning (see n. 3), 215.

<sup>22</sup> *Il Monitore di Bologna*, 2 October 1864.

audiences by combining musical quality with new visual impressions, leading the local administration to send a delegation headed by the mayor to witness a performance of *Lohengrin* in Munich before facing the same task at home. This trip's project gives us an idea of the technical demands theatre professionals were facing when confronting the new international repertoire. Writing to Meyerbeer after its performance of *Le prophète* in November 1860, Bologna's *deputazione degli spettacoli* underlined its efforts to stage the work with 'required splendour', efforts duly recognised by Meyerbeer in his correspondence with the local council.<sup>23</sup> Beyond dramaturgical difficulties, there was a new understanding that audience expectations had changed and that going to the opera was about more than a routine pastime for local patricians, who had owned the boxes of their local theatres for generations. It was on this level of dramaturgical and technical demands that performing Meyerbeer presented a steep learning curve for Italian theatres, without which the performance of Wagner would have been difficult to imagine.

Throughout the decades preceding Italian Unification, the former capital of the Papal Legations had only limited exposure to foreign composers, a consequence of the decline of its main theatre during the final stages of the Papal regime. This situation changed dramatically with the pontiff's deposition, which coincided with the arrival of conductor Angelo Mariani at the Comunale in 1859. Beyond doing much to raise the theatre's profile, Mariani is widely recognised as having revolutionised the performance of opera in Italy, a musician heavily sought after by Wagner and Verdi

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<sup>23</sup> Archivio storico comunale di Bologna (ASCB), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1860 II, Deputazione Dei Pubblici Spettacoli, Miscellanea, Tit.III.Rub.a 2.a, Delegati Amministrativi e Provinciali, 26 Nov 1860. On 27 December 1861 the *Monitore di Bologna* published a letter by Meyerbeer to the deputazione, in which he also recommended that Mariani is made director of the city's Liceo musicale.

alike. As a consequence of the collapse of the peninsula's ancient state system, most major Italian theatres entered a period of financial difficulty and artistic decline after Unification. Bologna's Teatro Comunale was controlled by a coalition of box owners and municipal government. Facing financial difficulties after Unification, the city's cultural elites decided to use their theatre to raise the city's profile to one of the cultural centres of the new nation state. During those years after Unification the building itself saw a number of significant aesthetic and technical improvements, while the size of its orchestra, now established as probably the best in Italy, went up to eighty players. It was this transformation of the cultural infrastructure that would allow Bologna to establish itself as the capital of Italian Wagnerism. Therefore, staging Meyerbeer and Wagner was more than the project of courageous conductors and enterprising *impresari*. Enjoying the political and financial support of local government in Bologna, the internationalisation of the repertoire formed part of a political project aimed at freeing the city from its provincial isolation after the end of the Papal regime and at positioning it as one of the leading cultural centres of the new nation state. Reviewing the prima of *Le prophète* in November 1860, the correspondent for the *Monitore di Bologna* wrote that 'the Pontiff's censors, anxious even of the title, would have never allowed performing the work'.<sup>24</sup> Exactly a year later, in November 1861, the same paper's correspondent wrote about *Les Huguenots* that having 'completed *il giro mondiale*', the opera's performance in the city 'satisfies an old desire of the Bolognesi'.<sup>25</sup> There was a strong sense among the city's cultural elites that after the end of the Papal regime Bologna had to catch up with developments in the wider world.

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<sup>24</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 19 November 1860.

<sup>25</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 19 November 1861.

In addition to confronting its audiences with a new opera of foreign provenance, in arranging the Italian prima of *L'Africaine* Bologna's politicians decided to capitalize on the attention Meyerbeer's death had provoked globally, and to associate the city with a remarkable moment of cosmopolitan empathy, in which the world came together to commemorate a truly European composer.<sup>26</sup> In May 1864 Bologna's *Monitore* reprinted in great detail the obituaries for Meyerbeer from the international press, followed a year later by a series of almost sensationalist reports about the 'immense success' of *L'Africaine* in Paris.<sup>27</sup> In November that year Carlo Gardini used the same language when he reviewed the opera's Italian prima, an event that could only be compared to the performance of a new opera by Verdi.<sup>28</sup>

Disregarding performances of Meyerbeer's early Italian operas, before the Italian prima of *L'Africaine* Bologna had enjoyed only limited exposure to the Prussian composer. *Robert* had been staged under exceptional circumstances in 1846, after the election of Pius IX, for the arrival of a new Cardinal. However, at the time the

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<sup>26</sup> On the general context of Meyerbeer's Italian reception see Anna Tedesco, 'Le Prophète in Italy', in Matthias Brzoska, Andreas Jacob and Nicole K. Strohmann, eds, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Le Prophète. Edition – Konzeption – Rezeption*. Bericht zum Internationalen Kongress 13.-16. Mai 2007 Folkwang Hochschule Essen-Werden (Hildesheim, 2009), 565-602. Also Fabrizio della Seta, 'Un aspetto della ricezione di Meyerbeer in Italia: Le traduzioni dei Grands Opéras', in Sieghart Döhring / Arnold Jacobshagen, eds., *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater* (Laaber, 1998), 309-351. Fiamma Nicolodi, 'Les grands opéras de Meyerbeer en Italie (1840-1890)', in Hervé Lacombe, ed., *L'opéra en France et en Italie (1791-1925). Une scène privilégiée d'échanges littéraires et musicaux*. Actes du colloque franco-italien tenu à l'Académie Musicale de Villecroze, 16-18 Octobre 1997 (Paris, 2000), 87-115.

<sup>27</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 5 May 1864 and 1 May 1865.

<sup>28</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 5 November 1865.

city's mostly aristocratic and culturally conservative audience largely rejected the unusual work.<sup>29</sup> The attitude towards foreign works of opera, and towards Meyerbeer more specifically, only changed after the end of the Papal Regime. Angelo Mariani's arrival at the Comunale led to a second staging of *Robert*, this time evoking great enthusiasm, thanks partly to a cast starring Adelaide Borghi-Mamo, a born Bolognese. This success was followed by stagings of *Le Prophète* and *Gli Ugenotti* in 1860 and 1861, *L'Africaine* in 1865, and a complete frenzy of Meyerbeer in 1869, including *Il Profeta*, *Ugenotti* and *Roberto*, all in one season. Other important steps in the same direction were the famous *Don Carlo* of 1867 in *prima italiana* and a local performance of Halévy's *La juive* in 1868, both under Mariani.<sup>30</sup> It was *grand opéra*, which prepared the ground for Bologna's acceptance of *Lohengrin* in 1871.

### *Staging L'Africaine in Bologna*

Performing Meyerbeer at Bologna's Comunale was the project of a rising middle class and the city's emerging cultural elites, against the preferences of the theatre's traditional audiences, consisting mainly of local nobility. Some among the owners of the theatre's prestigious boxes belonged to the political establishment of Bologna's *moderati*, the *destra storica* around Count Cavour, with the future Prime Minister Marco Minghetti as its most prominent local representative. Others identified themselves as legitimists, driven by nostalgia for the ceased Papal government and

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<sup>29</sup> *Teatri, Arte e Letteratura*, quoted in: Francesco Vatielli, *Cinquanta anni di vita musicale a Bologna, 1850-1900* (Bologna, 1921), 14 f.

<sup>30</sup> With two further series of performances in 1887 and 1892, *La juive* remained a relatively minor work in the local repertoire. For Bologna's *Don Carlos* Newark (see n. 17), 208 ff.



opposing the new nation state altogether. Although there were individual exceptions, both groups had in common their resistance to aesthetic innovation in the theatre, which they associated with the rapid social and political change that was taking place around them. When *Gli ugonotti* was staged in 1860, the first reaction of the moderates' principal local newspaper was that its music "is heavy, philosophical, a product of study, all based on harmonies [rather than melody]", although the correspondent was prepared to listen to the work again.<sup>31</sup> Ethnic and racial stereotypes served to justify prejudice against "foreign" music. In the same vein, in 1869, the *Monitore* decried Felix Mendelssohn as 'German and Jewish, a severe figure in the arts [...] one with his tribe, not one of us'.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, and very much to the *palchettisti's* distaste, the mere scale of *grand opéra* did no longer allow for the performance of a separate ballet between the acts of the opera, as has been customary in the theatre since its opening in the 1760s. As a consequence of the ever more common cutting of the ballet, many of the theatre's box owners deserted their places and refused to pay their contractual contribution for the autumn season, causing the impresario a considerable financial loss. Although *Gli Ugonotti* was explicitly defined as *opera-ballo*, for the *palchettisti* ballet scenes integrated into the opera did not count as separate *ballo eroico*.<sup>33</sup> As Fiamma Nicolodi has argued,

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<sup>31</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 19 November 1860. Vatielli (see n.28), 20. Heinz and Gudrun Becker (see n.8), 12. Compare for similar judgements Anna Tedesco, "Queste opere eminentemente sinfoniche e spettacolose": Giacomo Meyerbeer's Influence on Italian Opera Orchestras", in Niels Martin Jensen and Franco Piperno, eds., *The Opera Orchestra in 18th- and 19th-Century Europe*. Vol.II: The Orchestra in the Theatre – Composers, Works, and Performance (Berlin, 2008), 185-227, 187 f.

<sup>32</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 11 June 1869.

<sup>33</sup> ASCB (see n. 22), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1861, Deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli, Miscellanea, Osservazioni al progetto d'Appalto del sig. Ercole Tinti, 31 May 1861. We know that the

describing the ballet scenes in *grand opéra* as *balli analoghi* meant that these were *balli*, which corresponded to the dramatic action of the opera itself and were integrated into the plot. However, the box owners in theatres such as Bologna's Comunale were used to seeing a full *opera seria* as well as an independent ballet on each evening of the autumn season. Under the theatre's new financial regime, after Unification, the Comunale was unable to afford the performance of an *opera seria* and a ballet every single evening of the autumn season; and no impresario was prepared to incur the financial risks involved in these old forms of operatic spectacle.<sup>34</sup>

Given the traditional audience's resistance to innovation, the question of who supported the Comunale's opening up to the international repertoire, and to Meyerbeer in particular, needs further investigation. In Bologna it was mainly representatives of the new middle classes, who favoured the internationalisation of the repertoire, men (and some women) free from nostalgia for the Papal regime, who identified with the new nation state and were often associated with the democratic section of the Risorgimento's national movement, the *sinistra storica*. For them performing Meyerbeer and the European repertoire meant meeting Europe's most progressive nations eye-to-eye. This group also included former political refugees,

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officers of Bologna's regiment did not consider the Ugonotti a sufficient attraction to renew their subscription: ASCB (see n. 22), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1861, Deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli, Miscellanea, Ufficiali del Battaglione di Bologna al Cav. Delegato per i pubblici spettacoli, 8 November 1861. On difficulties with Meyerbeer in Italy also Jung (see n.14), 18.

<sup>34</sup> See for instance ASCB (see n. 22), Atti del Consiglio Comunale 1860-1920, 16 December 1872. Theatre productions became increasingly a commercial activity involving rising costs for impresari: Irene Piazzoni, 'Il governo e la politica per il teatro: tra promozione e censura (1882-1900)', in Carlotta Sorba, ed., *Scene di fine Ottocento. L'Italia fin de siècle a teatro*. (Rome, 2004), 61-100, 64.

Bolognesi who had had experienced the musical tastes of cities such as London and Paris during their years in exile. Occasionally, members of the nobility with a tradition of sponsoring the arts and sharing cosmopolitan ambition joined their ranks. Their chance to influence Bologna's cultural policies – despite representing a minority within the political elite and the local council - arose from the fact that the city's former establishment remained largely disengaged from post-Unification politics. As for their operatic preferences, many among the traditional *palchettisti* never accepted *grand opéra con ballabili* as a compromise for their contractually agreed separate ballet. As a consequence, they stopped paying the annual fees for the use of their boxes and no longer attended the theatre. They also lost several court cases in which they contested their habitual rights.<sup>35</sup>

Responding to these conflicts, professionals and members of the new middle classes increasingly took the decisions regarding the theatre's repertoire; and their aesthetic expectations differed from those of the city's former Papal elites. The main instrument in this process was the municipal *deputazione degli spettacoli*, whose membership dramatically changed during Bologna's political transition, replacing representatives of Bologna's old noble families with elected politicians and cultural experts. Angelo Mariani's growing reputation as the theatre's principal conductor helped to overcome local resistance to the internationalisation of its repertoire. Mariani established Meyerbeer as an integral part of the Comunale's repertoire, convincing the audience by his own professional genius and the continuously improving quality of the productions. Even Bologna's moderate press had to admit that along with the widening of the repertoire the quality of performances had

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<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of the conflicts with the box owners see Körner (see n. 14), chpt.2.

impressively improved.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the Comunale's new focus on foreign works also resonated beyond the theatre itself. From 1861, tunes from Meyerbeer's operas regularly appeared in the programmes of Bologna's municipal band as well as during the local commemorations of the Revolution of 1848, which were still considered controversial events, associated with the radical agenda of the local Republicans.<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm IV's court composer was by no means a revolutionary, at least not in a political sense, but the perceived humanity and historical realism of his operas helped Bologna's democrats to articulate their own cosmopolitan ambition. It was these qualities of Meyerbeer's music that Mazzini praised in the concluding remarks of his *Filosofia della musica*.

Considering the growing popularity of Meyerbeer with Italian audiences, the reason why Bologna, rather than another Italian city, secured the first staging of the composer's great posthumous work, requires further explanation. Bologna's municipal archives and the minutes of the local council offer answers to this question. In advance of any decision in the council, Mariani discussed the idea of staging *L'Africaine* in *prima italiana* with the impresario Scalaberni, with Meyerbeer's Italian publisher Luca and several members of the *deputazione*. They presented the plan to a meeting of the local council. Although most members of the *deputazione* represented the council's moderate majority, they were nominated on the basis of their expertise in musical matters. As a consequence, they often held aesthetically more advanced views than the electorate they had to represent.

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<sup>36</sup> See for instance *Monitore di Bologna*, 19 and 23 November 1861.

<sup>37</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 23 November 1861, 8 August 1862, 4 August 1864.

One of these politically moderate but culturally progressive voices was the local *assessore* Gustavo Sangiorgi, who recently had taken over as publisher of the periodical *L'Arpa*, one of Italy's major theatrical journals, published in Bologna. His views on the role of the theatre in representing the city can be reconstructed with help of the council's minutes. At the time, the general political climate was not favourable to aesthetic experiments. During the summer of 1865, the council's moderate majority had proposed abolishing the Comunale's municipal subsidy. Bologna was going through difficult times, with rising poverty among the urban population and an acute outbreak of cholera caused by the city's notoriously bad waste water management. In this situation the council could easily think of more urgent ways of spending its limited financial means. However, while presenting himself as a moderate partisan, in the crucial council debate Sangiorgi pronounced himself against the abolition of the theatre's *dote*. The *Giunta*, he argued, would itself feel ashamed if the upcoming season was to consist only of the most meagre productions of old repertoire pieces. In that case, he argued, it would be better to keep the theatre shut altogether, avoiding bad publicity for Bologna so shortly after Unification. Instead, if the municipal subsidy was to be awarded, the theatre would be in a position to present the council with a very special programme for the upcoming season, 'to stage the posthumous opera of *maestro* Meyerbeer, *L'Africana*, which has never been presented in Italy and which, for good reasons was a splendid success in Paris, when it was staged for the first time.'<sup>38</sup> An event of that kind would attract the attention of the entire nation, presenting Bologna as one of Italy's leading cultural centres. Aware of Bologna's limited financial means, Sangiorgi proposed combining the theatre's entire annual subsidy for the benefit of the autumn

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<sup>38</sup> ASCB (see n. 22), Atti del Consiglio Comunale 1860-1920, 28 July 1865

season alone, to have one really splendid *stagione*, rather than two underfinanced seasons. At this stage of the debate another moderate councillor with interest in opera joined the debate: Count Carlo Pepli, a future mayor of Bologna, recently returned from exile in London, and as the librettist of Bellini's last opera *I puritani*, widely respected in operatic matters. Pepli was happy to accept Sangiorgi's suggestion, but having seen Her Majesty's splendid theatres in London, the council minutes report that 'he is sorry to note that such an extraordinary performance would be held in a theatre that is so badly illuminated, especially as this genre requires great lightening efforts [...]. He reports rumours, that for the next autumn it might be possible to obtain good gas lighting for the Teatro Comunale as well.'<sup>39</sup> Staging *grand opéra* without proper lighting indeed creates little effect. Only at this point did the leader of the local democrats Camillo Casarini, an enthusiastic supporter of the city's musical rejuvenation and a member of the *deputazione*, join the debate, to explain that a particularly advantageous contract for new lighting could be signed in the event that the *deputazione* received the council's support. Five years later, the same Casarini, now the city's mayor, arranged Bologna's legendary staging of *Lohengrin*, the first Italian performance of a complete opera by Wagner. The *Lohengrin* became the flagship of Casarini's cultural policy as Bologna's first Democratic mayor. It should be noted that the event soon led to his resignation, just weeks after the opera's première, as a consequence of financial irregularities connected to the hugely expensive performance. However, as for the staging of *L'Africaine* the council's debate had started with a proposal to abolish the theatre's *dote* altogether, but ended with the approval of substantial additional means to improve the theatre's general condition.

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<sup>39</sup> Idem.

### *L'Africaine in Bologna's politics of culture*

The prima of *L'Africaine*, on 4 November 1865 and just days before its German premiere in Berlin, was enthusiastically received by the Italian press and described by *Il Monitore* as 'one of the greatest musical events of our time'.<sup>40</sup> This was the same moderate newspaper that had criticized *Gli Ugenotti* as too philosophical, a performance that had caused many *palchettisti* to abandon their boxes. The local success of *L'Africaine* was helped by the popularity of Ludovico Graziani as Vasco, having previously starred in many of Verdi's popular operas, including the creation of Alfredo Germont in *La Traviata*.<sup>41</sup> It is questionable whether in the five years since the local performance of *Gli Ugenotti* the musical tastes of Bologna's establishment had substantially changed. It seems more likely that the general furore generated first by Meyerbeer's funeral and then the Italian prima of his posthumous work influenced those sections of society, which lagged behind the modern tastes of opera audiences in Paris, Berlin and London. Also, the aesthetically less advanced sections of Bologna's elites identified themselves as proud inhabitants of an ancient city, which was keen to make it onto the front pages of the national and international newspapers. The Italian press largely shared the *Monitore's* positive assessment of the performance. For the first time in decades, perhaps in a century, Bologna was making operatic history. The performance of *L'Africaine* was perceived as a turning

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<sup>40</sup> *Monitore di Bologna*, 5 November 1865.

<sup>41</sup> Anna Tedesco, 'Graziani, Ludovico', in: Roberta Montemorra Marvin, ed., *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia* (Cambridge, 2013), 208. In 1860 Graziani had impressed the Bolognesi as Ricardo in the local prima of *Un ballo in maschera*, a performance enthusiastically associated with the events leading to Unification.

point in the Comunale's history: 'Ever since *L'Africaine*, the theatre has been growing in reputation and importance', the local council commented a few years later.<sup>42</sup> An important first step towards a more cosmopolitan opening of the Comunale's repertoire had been achieved, and Bologna was now regularly acclaimed for the remarkable quality of its productions. As Anna Tedesco has shown, there had always been a considerable interval between the French and the Italian premieres of Meyerbeer's operas.<sup>43</sup> Staging *L'Africaine* so shortly after the opera's French premiere showed Bologna's cultural ambition after Unification. The city put itself into a position to directly capitalize on the international media attention Meyerbeer's death and the arrangements for his funeral had generated all over Europe.

A further element played a role in generating local support for the performance of *L'Africaine*. In Italy the politics of municipal culture were often characterised by jealous competition between cities, simulating the country's description as *l'Italia delle cento città*.<sup>44</sup> This tendency towards cultural and political rivalry became even more marked after Unification. The performance of spectacular works of opera has to be seen in the context of Bologna's cultural ambition to be first among Italy's second cities: a bold ambition - not a reality yet - but a powerful motor driving its cultural policies. All of Meyerbeer's previous works had been premiered at the Pergola in Florence, with the exception of *L'Etoile du Nord*, first staged at the

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<sup>42</sup> ASCB (see n. 22), Atti del Consiglio Comunale 1860-1920, 29 February 1872. In 1876 a second performance of *L'Africaine* was again a great success, even more appreciated than Marchetti's Hugo-opera *Ruy Blas* during the same season: ASCB, (see n. 22), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1876, X, 3, 4, 11028, Report of the Deputazione to the mayor on the past autumn season, count Salina, 20 December 1876.

<sup>43</sup> Tedesco (see n. 30).

<sup>44</sup> Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *L'identità italiana* (Bologna, 1998), 37.



Canobbiana in Milan. *L'Africaine* - arguably Meyerbeer's most spectacular work - was premiered in Bologna. Meyerbeer had been the composer *L'Italia musicale* and the Florentine periodicals had been talking about for decades, without Italians having a very good sense of how his music would sound. The theatres performing his works were too few. Bologna's cultural elite was keen to capitalise on the attention paid to his death and to his last opera. In doing so, the city knew that it could hardly make headlines with performances of Bellini and Donizetti, and that it was not in a position to compete with Milan or Naples in this field. Instead, as a committee of local councillors concluded, visitors were attracted by spectacular events like the Italian premiere of Verdi's *Don Carlos* (shortly after *L'Africaine*, in 1867), Gounod's *Faust* and finally, and most substantially, by the works of Wagner.<sup>45</sup> In this field no Italian opera house was in a position to compete with Bologna.

These politics of opera have to be seen alongside the more general picture of the city's revival after the end of the Papal regime, such as the development of a number of remarkable museums and galleries, the revitalisation of its Archiginnasio, which prides itself as the oldest University in Europe, and the organisation of international conferences attracting many famous men of science like the Prussian geneticist Rudolf von Virchow, celebrated by local Democrats as an outspoken opponent of Otto von Bismarck. Within a few years of Unification, the former capital of the Papal Legations was associated with remarkable scientific advances like the translation of the works of Charles Darwin by the local publisher Zanichelli, at a time when even the Anglican Church still fought against evolutionary theory. The theatre, the

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<sup>45</sup> ASCB, (see n. 22), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1871, X, 3, 4, 975. Atti della commissione nominata (...). Also *Il Monitore di Bologna*, 4 November 1865 and 5 January 1870. *Il Resto del Carlino*, 22 December 1885.

University and urban redevelopment were the three anchors of Bologna's cultural politics after Unification – resisted by many of Bologna's noble families, but promoted by the rising professional middle class.

A final reason why people in Bologna considered their city worthy of staging *L'Africaine* was its connection with Rossini. The composer occasionally referred to himself as the '*cignale* [boar] *di Lugo*', pointing to his father's *patria* in the Romagna and countering the cliché of '*il cigno* [swan] *di Pesaro*'. However, Bologna was also keen to claim paternity, based on the fact that the composer had received most of his musical education in the city on the Reno, where he maintained an impressive palace and regularly entertained the city's social elites, including – after 1831 - the officers of the Austrian occupational army.<sup>46</sup> Bologna's claim to Rossini was a highly political issue, at times pursued with a surprising degree of provincial stubbornness. As for the connection with Meyerbeer, Bologna saw Rossini as Meyerbeer's direct predecessor in Paris, and local newspapers were proud to report anecdotes about the men's friendship.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, commentators liked to point out that Meyerbeer's six Italian operas, premiered between 1816 and 1825, were all written in the style of Rossini. Of these works Bologna had seen *Semiramide*, *Margherita d'Anjou* and *Il Crociato*. There was of course some substance to the connection between the two men, which facilitated Meyerbeer's reputation in Italy. Beyond their shared success in the French capital, both composers had received the *ordre pour le mérite* from the Prussian King. During the Paris rehearsals for *L'Africaine* the two composers

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<sup>46</sup> On Bologna's claims see *Monitore di Bologna*, 22 November and 16 December 1868. Also the context of the Guillaume Tell performance: Newark (see n. 17), 206.

<sup>47</sup> On Italian music drama in Paris and connections between the performance of Rossini and Meyerbeer see Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824-1828* (Berkeley, 2002), chpt.8

regularly met; and Meyerbeer remained deeply moved by the first performance of Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle* in March 1864, which he attended against the firm advice of his doctors. After attending a second performance, he wrote to Rossini of this 'sublime creation' and signed off as his 'constant admirer and old friend'.<sup>48</sup> On the day of Meyerbeer's death Rossini had planned to visit his ailing friend, and reportedly fainted when he learned of the tragic event. He composed a '*Chant funèbre*' as 'a brief song of mourning for my poor friend Meyerbeer'.<sup>49</sup> With a good deal of local pride, Bologna's press picked up these anecdotes, constructing an imaginary relationship that linked a still rather provincial city to great events taking place in Paris, London or Berlin, events which moved the entire world.

Like the composer's funeral previously, the French premier of *L'Africaine* had been an event of almost global resonance. The spectacle of the French premiere foreshadowed the importance accorded to the Italian prima. The prima in Bologna not only made big news all over the world, it also helped *L'Africana* to gain immense popularity in Italy, with fifteen productions in the five years to 1870. The first Italian performance after Bologna took place in Parma in December of the same year, followed by stagings at La Scala in 1866, at the San Carlo in 1867 and in 1868 at the Regio of Turin and at La Fenice. Each of these performances pointed back to the event of the original staging in Bologna and helped drawing attention to the city's operatic life.<sup>50</sup> Bologna programmed the work once more in 1876, under Marino Mancinelli, and in 1914. The city received attention for an event which Milan, Florence, Turin had missed out on.

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<sup>48</sup> Meyerbeer to Rossini, Paris, March 15, 1864, in Heinz and Gudrun Becker (see n.8), 180.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 181

<sup>50</sup> Tedesco (see n.25), 569

### *Cosmopolitanism, exoticism, and new musical horizons*

For many in Bologna the cosmopolitan flair associated with Meyerbeer counted for more than the endorsement of a particular operatic genre. As mentioned above, the most important theatre for Italian performances of Meyerbeer had until recently been la Pergola in Florence, under the relatively progressive political regime of the Habsburgs, at a time when censorship limited Meyerbeer's impact elsewhere in Italy.<sup>51</sup> According to Nicolodi, one of the reasons for Florence's predisposition towards Meyerbeer was the fact that the city attracted considerable numbers of foreign visitors, who during their travels simply expected to see operas by Meyerbeer.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, playing on the association between Meyerbeer and La Pergola expressed a certain worldliness. Florence had recently become the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, but *L'Africana* was now premiered in Bologna!

The idea of a composer speaking with a cosmopolitan voice was widely reflected in critics' appreciation of his work. Especially in the early years after Unification, staging Meyerbeer stood for a widespread feeling that Italy had to catch up with European culture, reminding the country and the world of its longing for the cosmopolitan. Part of this narrative was the idea that Italy had been held back by centuries of external domination and despotic political regimes. Moreover, Meyerbeer symbolised the ways in which France gave the Latin nations access to Germanic culture. According

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<sup>51</sup> For the performance of *Il profeta* under Carlo III di Borbone at the Regio di Parma Anna Tedesco made a similar argument, where the choice of the opera reflected a relatively progressive attitude of the ruler: „Il grand opéra e i teatri italiani: un caso emblematico. *Il profeta* a Parma (28 December 1853)“, in *Musica e storia* XI/1, 2003, 139-160.

<sup>52</sup> Nicolodi (see n. 25), 97

to Pierluigi Petrobelli, France was 'la voie la plus directe pour connaître [...] la culture, la littérature et même la musique allemande.'<sup>53</sup> Many Italian composers knew the works of Bach, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven through the French editions of Richault or Durand. The same is true for editions of Wagner's theoretical writings, published in 1861 by Bourdillat, not to mention the many works of German literature read by Italians in French translation. French culture opened the door to a world *d'outre Rhin*. Staging Meyerbeer stood for the binary of French opera and German culture.

Meanwhile, Italy's internationalisation of the operatic repertoire was not uncontroversial. Here, Meyerbeer anticipated debates soon to be associated with Italian Wagnerism. More interesting than the anti-German slander seem the arguments of those who defended Italy's opening towards the European repertoire. A year after Bologna's *Lohengrin* of 1871, the Italian parliament discussed the state of the country's music schools, with some members of parliament voicing their concern about the presumed dominance of German innovation over Italian tradition. In his reply to this attack, Camillo Casarini denounced Italy's 'ecstatic state of contemplative isolationism' in everything regarding music. In his view Italy was out of step with the general progress of modern times. With reference to the '*italianissimi* Rossini and Verdi', he reminded his colleagues that Italy's musical genius had always been inspired by contact with ideas from abroad. Should one really deprive

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<sup>53</sup> Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'De l'alexandrin à l'anapeste chez Verdi. Structure poétique et composition musical dans *Un ballo in maschera*', in Lacombe, ed. (see n. 25), 215-222, 215 f.

Italian students and audiences of Meyerbeer, Beethoven, Gounod or Mozart? Of Haydn's and Händel's oratorios?<sup>54</sup>

For Italians, an important element of Meyerbeer's supposedly cosmopolitan language was the exotic appeal of *L'Africaine*. The colossal success of Meyerbeer's last Italian opera, *Il crociato in Egitto*, premiered decades earlier at La Fenice in 1824, had played a decisive role in establishing orientalism as a determining factor of mid-nineteenth-century musical culture.<sup>55</sup> In addition to reading European travel literature, during his many years of work on *L'Africaine* Meyerbeer had engaged with several recent studies on India and on Portuguese colonial history, and he benefitted from insights gained in debates with his close friend Alexander von Humboldt, one of Europe's most illustrious explorers and geographers.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, Meyerbeer's librettist Scribe had a reputation for thorough historical and anthropological research when drafting his works. The fact that in *L'Africaine*'s final version Hindustan became Madagascar – suggesting perhaps a rather casual attitude towards geographical authenticity - does not contradict the widespread view that Meyerbeer's music had the capacity to describe even the most remote places on the globe.<sup>57</sup> As for its Italian reception, it would be wrong to assume that commentators had an all too casual attitude towards non-European geography. Periodicals of the Risorgimento period

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<sup>54</sup> Camera dei Deputati, 6 February 1873, quoted in Ernesto Masi, *Camillo Casarini. Ricordi contemporanei* (Bologna, 1875), 185-188.

<sup>55</sup> Mark Everist, 'Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto*: *mélodrame*, opera, orientalism', in: idem., *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Aldershot, 2005), 101-140, 108 sq.

<sup>56</sup> Henze-Döhring / Döhring (see n.3), 81-92, 195. For *grand opéra*'s uses of history see Sarah Hibberd, *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>57</sup> Albert Gier, 'L'Africaine und die Ideologie des Kolonialismus', in: Döhring / Jacobshagen, eds. (see n. 25), 134-147, 140 ff.

such as the *Antologia* in Florence or the *Annali di Statistica* and the *Biblioteca Italiana* in Milan reviewed countless volumes on foreign travel, history and geography, including among their authors influential intellectuals like Giandomenico Romagnosi and Carlo Cattaneo, whose writings were full of cross-cultural comparisons.<sup>58</sup> As an opera about Vasco da Gama, popular interest in India remained a prominent context of the opera's Italian reception.

*L'Africaine*'s principal theme is the encounter between different worlds: Vasco, who brings Portuguese culture to India, the encounter between Christianity and Paganism, the meeting of different civilisations, all treated in their own right. Italy looked back on a great tradition of staging similar encounters, mostly through the genre of the *ballo storico*. Examples include Raimondo Fidanza's *Colombo, ossia La Scoperta del Nuovo Mondo* (Genoa, 1802); or *Colombo all'isola di Cuba*, (Milan, 1832 and Turin, 1838).<sup>59</sup> Many of these works remained in the repertoire over decades. Also, the celebrated choreographer Ippolito Monplaisir created a ballet *Colombo* as well as the very popular *Brahma*, which travelled during the mid-nineteenth century to all of the Italian peninsula's most famous stages. In 1861 Monplaisir had presented *L'Isola degli Amori, a ballo fantastico* about Vasco da

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<sup>58</sup> As for Hindustan see for instance Gian Domenico Romagnosi, 'Viaggio nel paese di Voné nella provincia di Nemar nell'Indostan' (1830), in: idem, *Opere* (Alessandro de Giorgi, ed.) (Milano, 1844), vol.2/1, 616-632. Also Guglielmo Robertson, *Ricerche Storiche sull'India Antica. Con note, supplementi ed illustrazioni di Gian Domenico Romagnosi* (1827) (Firenze, 1835).

<sup>59</sup> On Raimondo Fidanza's *Colombo, ossia La Scoperta del Nuovo Mondo* (Genoa, 1802) see Selma Jeanne Cohen, 'Feme di Gelosia! Italian Ballet Librettos, 1766-1865', in *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 67, (November 1963), 555-564, 558. *Colombo all'isola di Cuba*, azione mimica di mezzo carattere in Quattro parti di Antonio Monticini: New York Public Library (NYPL), Walter Toscanini Collection (WTC), Libretti da Ballo (LdB), 332 and 431.

Gama, at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan as well as at the Teatro Apollo in Rome.<sup>60</sup>

The Italian staging of *L'Africana* was able to build on the popularity of these subjects. Italian audiences might have been deprived of *grand opéra*, but representations of foreign civilisations on stage were by no means new to them.

Filippo Filippi was convinced that it was the Meyerbeer's experience of living in Italy that had influenced his symphonic language and orchestration.<sup>61</sup> His techniques formed the basis of his representation of cultural diversity. Meyerbeer helped Italians to critically reflect on their own musical style, the meaning of romanticism, the role of the supernatural, the representation of *couleur local*.<sup>62</sup> Meanwhile, Meyerbeer's works were criticized for offering '*poco canto*';<sup>63</sup> and it was on this basis that a theatre magazine commented that 'a German opera does not go with Italian taste'; that Meyerbeer was 'more philosopher than *maestro*'.<sup>64</sup> Using the same argument,

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<sup>60</sup> Ippolito Monplaisir, *L'Isola degli Amori, ballo fantastico*: NYPL, WTC, LdB (see n.58), n. 785 and 793.

<sup>61</sup> Anselm Gerhard has explored the importance of the symphonic dimension in Meyerbeer's work: 'Religiöse Aura und Militärisches Gepränge: Meyerbeers Ouvertüren und das Problem der rein instrumentalen Form', in: Döhring / Jacobshagen, eds. (see n. 25), 201-230, 218 f

<sup>62</sup> Nicolodi (see n.25). Della Seta analysed the Italian response to Meyerbeer's musical language, focussed in particular on the problems of a Prussian writing French operas, subsequently translated into Italian: della Seta (see n.25).

<sup>63</sup> Abramo Basevi did not share this view, but commented on the opinion of some of his colleagues: Abramo Basevi, 'Il Profeta alla Scala di Milano', *Gazzetta musicale di Firenze*, no.52, 7 June 1855, in: Tedesco (see n. 50), Appendix 1, 588-590.

<sup>64</sup> *Teatri, Arte e Letteratura*, quoted in: Vatielli (see n. 28), 14 f. *Monitore di Bologna*, 24 March and 10 November 1869. Similar debates go back to the 1850s: Alessandro Roccatagliati, 'Opera, Opera-Ballo e "Grand Opéra": Commistioni stilistiche e recezione critica nell'Italia Teatrale di Secondo Ottocento (1860-1870)', *Studi di Musica Veneta. Opera & Libretto*, II (1993), 283-349, 293 ff.



the novelist and journalist Antonio Ghislanzoni, Verdi's librettist, opined that 'the requirements of these scores create unique embarrassments to the theatre companies'.<sup>65</sup> Citing the burdens imposed upon the orchestra, the musicians of Bologna's Comunale in 1861 asked for better working conditions. Decades earlier Meyerbeer had used exactly this argument to ask for improvements to the conditions of his musicians in Berlin.<sup>66</sup> Although most of Bologna's players had regular incomes as professors of the *Liceo musicale* or members of the municipal band, they wished to become a stable orchestra with monthly salaries, reflecting a professionalization of the opera industry that directly followed changes in the repertoire. When the council rejected their request, the orchestra went on strike.<sup>67</sup> This conflict occurred a year after a major industrial dispute with the chorus, which was settled only once the *impresario* increased the singers' wages.<sup>68</sup>

Because staging Meyerbeer presented considerable technical challenges, most Italian performances of his works were subject to substantial cuts, especially regarding *ballabili* and chorus scenes. The orchestration was also frequently changed, which did not help the works' acceptance.<sup>69</sup> Thanks to its *Liceo Musicale*,

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<sup>65</sup> Antonio Ghislanzoni (1866) quoted in: Tedesco (see n.50), 574. On the challenges for the orchestra see also Tedesco (see n. 30), 194 sq.

<sup>66</sup> Zimmermann (see n. 4), 231.

<sup>67</sup> ASCB, (see n. 22), Carteggio Amministrativo, 1861, Tit. XVI, 4, 157, sentence of the commercial court, 28 April 1862.

<sup>68</sup> John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The role of the Impresario* (Cambridge, 1987), 119.

<sup>69</sup> Nicolodi (see n. 25), 109 f. It should be noticed that much the same is true for modern performance practice: Robert I. Letellier, 'History, Myth and Music in a Theme of Exploration: Some Reflections on

however, Bologna was in the comfortable situation of having access to essential instruments other orchestras were unable to find. For instance, for a long time Bologna owned one of only two bass clarinets available in the entire Italian peninsula.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, the sets demanded a standard not every theatre was able to meet. Between the 1840s and the 1860s the quality of Italian stagings of Meyerbeer improved considerably, a development for which Angelo Mariani and the Teatro Comunale played a crucial role. Replacing the *maestro concertatore* with a baton conductor, pioneered in Bologna by Mariani, was part of this process, leaving a lasting legacy for the opera industry as a whole.

### *Social Change and New Music in Bologna's Politics of Culture*

In many respects Bologna provides a prime example for what Arno Mayer famously called the Persistence of the Old Regime.<sup>71</sup> For decades after Unification, the political elites in the former Papal Legations continued to recruit themselves from among the local aristocracy – the Pepoli, Malvezzi, Zucchini, Bevilaqua – names that had determined local and national history for centuries. Even after Italy's parliamentary revolution in 1876, associated with the rise of the democratic Left, the moderate networks of the Destra Storica continued to dominate Bologna's local politics. The representatives of this political establishment were huge landowners, reluctant to modernise a region that was among the most backward in Italy, with

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the Musico-Dramatic Language of L'Africaine', in Döhring / Jacobshagen, eds., (see n. 25), 148-168, 151.

<sup>70</sup> ASCB (see n. 22), Deputazione Dei Pubblici Spettacoli, Miscellanea, 6 December 1861. Also Tedesco (see n. 30), 205.

<sup>71</sup> Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Régime. Europe to the Great War* (London, 1981).

rates of child mortality and illiteracy higher than in the South, reaching 90% in some parts of the Romagna. The nobility's dominant role in society was also reflected in Bologna's musical life, with the concerts of the Società dei Quartetto remaining by invitation only until 1879. It was for this reason that Mariani, the Mancinelli brothers, and later Giuseppe Martucci, supported *Concerti Popolari*, in contrast to Bologna's conventional emphasis on elite entertainment.

At the same time it was in the field of music theatre where the persistence of the Old Regime was first broken up. Like Arno Mayer, Eric Hobsbawm juxtaposed the aristocracy's presumed cosmopolitan tastes with the bourgeoisie's search for national resurgence through the arts.<sup>72</sup> However, the situation in Italian theatres seems more complex, contrasting with Hobsbawm's account. The nobility in their private boxes wanted to stay with Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini, while the middle class quickly moved from Verdi towards the international repertoire, in particular towards the works of French and German composers. After Unification, having lost the Cardinals' financial support, Bologna's Teatro Comunale could no longer be run on the contributions of its box owners alone. The theatre depended on subsidies from the local council, which, due to the moderates' own financial regime of municipal administration, was extremely difficult to sustain. The need for municipal financial support led to a modernisation of the theatre's management and the restructuring of the *deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli*, limiting the role of aristocratic *palchettisti* in determining the theatre's schedules. In turn, this meant less *bel canto* and an opening up of the repertoire to international innovation. The professionalization of the opera industry offered opportunities for new cultural agents, more likely to be from a middle class background and interested in the

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<sup>72</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. 1789-1848* (1962) (London, 1989), 311.

modern, international repertoire. A new generation of enterprising musicians, men like Arrigo Boito, Angelo Mariani, the Mancinellis and Franco Faccio – all active in Bologna - were driven by similar motives. Introducing Bologna's audiences to Meyerbeer was part of that narrative. It prepared the ground for the journey from Hindustan to Brabant.

Abstract:

The article examines the political and cultural circumstances leading to the Italian prima of Giacomo Meyerbeer's posthumous opera *L'Africaine* at Bologna's Teatro Comunale in November 1865. Meyerbeer's death in May 1864 and the French premiere of his last opera the following year became a major moment of transnational cosmopolitan sentiment, building on the composer's reputation for writing music that had the capacity to communicate across national and political boundaries. Shortly after the Unification of Italy, Bologna was keen to capitalize on the emotions related to Meyerbeer's death, using the Italian prima as part of a strategy to position itself as one of the cultural capitals of the new Italian nation state.

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