**From Hindustan to Brabant: Meyerbeer's *Africana* and Municipal
Cosmopolitanism in Post-Unification Italy**

AXEL KÖRNER

Abstract: This article examines the political and cultural circumstances leading to the Italian premiere 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 combined to produce a striking moment of transnational cosmopolitan sentiment which built 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 capitalise on these emotions and used the Italian premiere strategically in order to position itself as one of the cultural capitals of the new Italian nation state.

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 seems to represent a facet of European culture that does not fit well with common views about the '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 to appreciate Italian musical beauty during his travels, and achieved the greatest success of his career in Second Empire Paris.¹ Many of Hanslick's contemporaries, including numerous Italians commenting on their first experience of grand

¹ Eduard Hanslick, 'Meyerbeer', in *Die moderne Oper: Kritiken und Studien* (Berlin, 1875), 138-73.

opera, meanwhile perceived Meyerbeer's music as a synthesis of styles that had the powerful capacity to communicate across national boundaries.² Still others – most famously Wagner and Schumann – rejected Meyerbeer's cosmopolitanism as inappropriate for an age of national Romanticism; anti-Semitism was a recurrent motif in these critiques of the composer's cosmopolitanism, and started long before Wagner launched his tirades of hatred.³ Amid all this debate, Meyerbeer's *grands opéras* remained the works most frequently performed on the stages of mid-nineteenth-century Europe. It is precisely the central position these works occupied in the European repertoire that 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.

Emphasising awareness of transnational cosmopolitanism in nineteenth-century European culture does not of course entail 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. Indeed, during the second half of the nineteenth century he observed how political change caused commitment to transnational concepts of European culture to be superseded by nationalist rivalries. In December 1863, while completing his thirty-year opera project on Vasco da Gama, Meyerbeer composed a melancholy letter to his wife in Berlin stating that the new year was

² For Italian comments about international elements influencing Meyerbeer's style see for instance *Monitore di Bologna* (10 November 1869). The article reviews a performance of *Les Huguenots*.

³ Sabine Henze-Döhring and Sieghart Döhring, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: der Meister der Grand opéra* (Munich, 2014), 143ff, 209 ff.

unlikely to bring peace.⁴ Writing with the experience of 1848 still in his mind, he understood that nationalism was leading to bloodshed in every corner of the world, and even that the standoff between Prussia and Denmark over Schleswig-Holstein was to result in another European war.⁵ Meanwhile, the world was mesmerised by the events of the American Civil War, where members of the same nation were killing each other in their hundreds of thousands. There was a civil war in Mexico and civil war also overshadowed the Unification of Italy in the South, where thousands paid for ‘liberation’ with their lives.⁶ It was in this troubled context that the composer died in May 1864, leaving his greatest operatic project incomplete. ‘Music is without its master’, the *Ménestrel* of Paris commented: the master who had succeeded ‘in writing cosmopolitan art’.⁷

Thousands of people attended the funeral procession from Meyerbeer’s home on the Champs-Élysées in Paris to the Gare du Nord, where his body was transferred onto a train which would bring him home to Berlin.⁸ Black horses pulled the carriage, accompanied by the National Guard and their *corps de musique*. Heading the cortège were the Prussian

⁴ See Reiner Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: eine Biografie nach Dokumenten* (Berlin, 1998), 319.

⁵ On the implications of the battle of Königgrätz for Europe as a whole see Adam Wandruszka, *Schicksalsjahr 1866* (Graz, 1966).

⁶ For a transnational perspective on the Italian and American civil wars see Enrico Dal Lago, ‘The Spectre of Confederate Secession in Early Post-Unification Italy’, in *The Age of Lincoln and Cavour: Comparative Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century American and Italian Nation-Building* (New York, 2015), 123-40.

⁷ Cited in Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 321.

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

ambassador Robert Heinrich Ludwig von der Goltz, Marshall Jean-Baptiste Philibert Vaillant representing the French Emperor, Daniel Auber as director of the Paris Conservatoire, and Émile Perrin, director of the Paris Opéra. The Gare du Nord, its buildings 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, the railway carriage was greeted by Prince Georg von Preußen (admittedly a minor Prince of the Hohenzollern, but with literary and musical inclinations). The Prussian King and future German emperor Wilhelm I and the Queen, together with other members of the royal household, led a procession to the Königliches Opernhaus on the boulevard Unter den Linden and from there to the Jewish cemetery in Schönhauser Allee. As in Paris a few days earlier, the streets were lined with mourners.

Within months of the composer's death, Meyerbeer's incomplete opera *L'Africaine* was premiered at the Paris Opéra in the presence of the French emperor and empress and various German dignitaries, in addition to 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, and the audience honoured the composer with fifteen minutes of silence—not an easy undertaking having sat through a monumental opera in five acts. The event arguably became the last great cultural manifestation of the Second Empire, which was to come to an end five years later with the Franco-Prussian War. It was also one of the last European demonstrations 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 premiere of *L'Africaine* in Paris are directly relevant to the event around which this article is based: the Italian premiere of *L'africana* at Bologna's Teatro Comunale in 1865, at a moment when

Italians were using cultural politics to assert their national identity in the wake of the peninsula's recent Unification. The events surrounding Meyerbeer's death and the posthumous premiere of *L'Africaine* in Paris were followed keenly in the Italian press; indeed, the opera's first Italian performance came so soon after the composer's death and the French premiere that Italians read their premiere in close connection with the remarkable moment of cosmopolitan sentiment that recent events had fostered. That sentiment had been commented upon by almost all contemporary sources; in 1864 the future French Prime Minister Émile Ollivier even declared in the *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* that Meyerbeer had created a 'harmonic connection' between France and Germany, an everlasting bond between 'sister nations'.⁹ While Ollivier's claim 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. Crucially, when Bologna decided to be the first city in Italy to stage *L'Africaine*, it was not a simple act of operatic programming, but rather a conscious decision on the part of the city's cultural and political elites to participate in the intense cosmopolitanism associated with Meyerbeer's death.

If numerous nineteenth-century commentators associated both Meyerbeer's music and his death with this deeply felt cosmopolitanism, the remarks of one particularly prominent Italian contemporary of Meyerbeer provides special insight into the experience of his music during the mid-1860s. The correspondence of Italy's most famous political exile, Giuseppe Mazzini, offers evidence of his unfailing appreciation of Meyerbeer, his 'favourite composer' as he would describe him in a letter to his mother: an appreciation reflecting his general partisan interest in European culture as well as his amateur musicianship and frequent visits

⁹ Cited in Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: A Life in Letters* (London, 1989), 14.

to the opera house, which resulted in a solid acquaintance with the international repertoire.¹⁰ While Mazzini never showed much interest in Verdi, despite their shared connection with Genoa, Meyerbeer's name appears over and over in his writing and correspondence. When, three years after Meyerbeer's death, Mazzini was preparing an English edition of his own selected writings which included a translation of his 1836 *Filosofia della musica*, he drafted an additional note about the composer, which he first sent to his friend and political disciple Emilie Ashurst Venturi and then revised for the edition.¹¹ Outlining the composer's aesthetic development from *Robert le diable* to *Les Huguenots*, the note to Venturi explains how, in

¹⁰ On Mazzini's reactions to *Dinorah* and *L'Africaine* see, respectively, Mazzini to Matilda Biggs, 24 July 1862, in Giuseppe Mazzini, *Edizione nazionale: Scritti editi ed inediti di Giuseppe Mazzini*, ed. Mario Menghini, 106 vols. (Imola, 1906-43), 73: 3-7, and Mazzini to Emilie Ashurst Venturi, Tuesday [June 1864], 78: 246-7; the letter to Venturi must be misdated, because the work was not performed in London until 22 July 1865. For the above-mentioned letter from Mazzini to his mother and other comments on Meyerbeer see Giuseppe Mazzini, *Philosophy of Music (1836): Envisioning a Social Opera*, ed. Franco Sciannameo and trans. Emilie Ashurst Venturi (Lewiston, NY, 2004), 19ff. 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 and Aurelio Saffi. See Bibliothèque municipale de Versailles. *Catalogue général des manuscrits*, 1290: *Album d'autographes d'Enrico Tamberlick*.

¹¹ Mazzini drafted the *Filosofia della musica* towards the end of 1835 and published it in Summer 1836. On the work's editorial history, see Marcello de Angelis, 'Introduction', in Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica e estetica musicale del primo ottocento* (Florence, 1977), 7-32.

Mazzini's view, Meyerbeer's attempts to bridge Italian and German styles amounted to the creation of the 'music of the future':

In *Les 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 moved one step forward. ... The melody rises from the harmonic substratum: the one not to be distinguished from the other. Meyerbeer is the highest artist of a transitional period, out of 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 disciple of *l'Art pour l'Art*; he is the prophet of 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.¹²

This version sent to Venturi differs slightly from the revised English version of Mazzini's *Filosofia della musica* and indeed makes an even stronger statement in favour of Meyerbeer's

¹² Mazzini to Emilie Ashurst Venturi (21 May 1867). Reproduced in Mazzini, *Edizione nazionale*, 85: 44-7. Ashurst Venturi was in charge of the English edition of Mazzini's writings. At the time of writing his *Filosofia della musica* he would not have known Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*, which 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.

musical and dramatic achievement. The latter after all remains a translation, authorised by Mazzini, but essentially redrafted by his translator at a time when Mazzini's health was declining, severely delaying the publication of his writings in English. Mazzini's letter to Venturi is the more direct and analytical statement on Meyerbeer, providing a better indication of his views.¹³ For Mazzini, Meyerbeer's compositional technique directly captures the composer's dramatic intentions, where 'the struggle [between 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 this reading, Meyerbeer's cosmopolitan style and his distinctive contribution to the future of music consist in the blending of Italian melody and German harmony.

The text in question was never more than a note added to the work's English translation, however, and while historians keen to establish a connection between opera and politics have tended to insist on the importance of Mazzini's *Filosofia della musica*, the work was rarely cited during the nineteenth century and indeed was not even available in most libraries. Put another way, there is no evidence that Mazzini influenced Italians' views of Meyerbeer. For our purposes, however, Mazzini's reflection on Meyerbeer can be read as a nuanced statement which reflects an educated, non-expert, interest in Meyerbeer. What matters to us 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) but rather Mazzini's assertion that Meyerbeer bridged boundaries

¹³ For the official English edition in the translation of Ashurst Venturi see Giuseppe Mazzini, 'The Philosophy of Music', in *Life and Writings of Joseph Mazzini* (London, 1867), 4: 1-55, here 52-5. See also the 'Translator's Note' at the start of this volume (no page numbers given) and 'Introduction', in Mazzini, *Philosophy of Music*, 1-26.

between national musical styles, thus creating music for a new age.¹⁴ At a time when Wagner's 1849 essay *The Artwork of the Future* was widely discussed in Europe, Mazzini made a conscious decision to fold accounts of Meyerbeer into narratives about the 'music of the future'.¹⁵

The aesthetic challenges of managing Italy's political transition

Mazzini's analysis of Meyerbeer can instead be understood to correspond closely to the ways Italians – and Europeans more generally – read the composer's work around the time of his death.¹⁶ As we shall see, for Meyerbeer's Italian supporters the 1865 staging of *L'africana*

¹⁴ On Mazzini's literary interests see Carlotta Sorba, "'Comunicare con il popolo': Novel, Drama, and Music in Mazzini's Work', in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism 1830-1920*, ed. C.A. Bayly and Eugenio F. Biaghi (Oxford, 2008), 75-92.

¹⁵ On the reception of Wagner in Italy see Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, *Tristano, mio Tristano: gli scrittori italiani e il caso Wagner* (Bologna, 1988); Ute Jung-Kaiser, *Die Rezeption der Kunst Richard Wagners in Italien* (Regensburg, 1974); Giorgio Manera and Giuseppe Pugliese, eds., *Wagner in Italia* (Venice, 1982); Marion S. Miller, 'Wagnerism, Wagnerians and Italian Identity', in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca, 1984), 167-97; and Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York, 2009), 221-62.

¹⁶ On the general context of Meyerbeer's Italian reception see Anna Tedesco, 'Le Prophète in Italy', in *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Le Prophète. Edition–Konzeption–Rezeption*, ed. Matthias Brzoska, Andreas Jacob and Nicole K. Strohmann (Hildesheim, 2009), 565-602. See also Fabrizio della Seta, 'Un aspetto della ricezione di Meyerbeer in Italia: Le traduzioni dei *grands opéras*', in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. Sieghart Döhring and

represented a commitment to the idea of a truly European art. For the city of Bologna, which oversaw the Teatro Comunale's affairs, this made it a smart political choice to stage *L'africana* rather than one of the numerous alternative possibilities, and a choice that contributed to its transformation from a still remarkably backward provincial city – regarding its social and political developments – to a prominent cultural centre in the new Italian nation state.¹⁷

In tandem, *L'africana* helped the Comunale extend the aesthetic horizons of its audience from an established preference for *bel canto* and a reluctance even to accept Verdi towards appreciation of a more international repertoire.¹⁸ In this sense, *L'africana* constituted an important stepping-stone towards the first performance of Wagner in Italy, namely the Comunale's performance of *Lohengrin* in 1871. For an audience mostly used to Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini – and which still had difficulties appreciating Verdi – Meyerbeer and Wagner represented milestones. The role played by Meyerbeer in confronting Italian audiences with new aesthetic challenges is evidenced by newspaper reviews dating from the

Arnold Jacobshagen (Laaber, 1998), 309-51, and Fiamma Nicolodi, 'Les grands opéras de Meyerbeer en Italie (1840-1890)', in *L'Opéra en France et en Italie (1791-1925): Une scène privilégiée d'échanges littéraires et musicaux*, ed. Hervé Lacombe (Paris, 2000), 87-115.

¹⁷ On Bologna's social and economic development at the time see Körner, *Politics of Culture*.

¹⁸ On early local experiences of *grand opéra*, and in particular the Bolognese reception of an 1840 production of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, see 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. On Italian concerns about the internationalisation of the operatic repertoire, see Axel Körner, 'Music of the Future: Italian Theatres and the European Experience of Modernity between Unification and World War One', *European History Quarterly* 41 (2011), 189-212.

time 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 di Bologna* would write about the local premiere of *Le Prophète*.¹⁹ 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’ and their ‘wish to hear strong and innovative counterpoint, to be moved by original and unexpected melodramatic moments’.²⁰ These remarks suggest an increasing awareness of 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 that need.

The notion of Meyerbeer as a ‘stepping-stone’ towards acceptance of Wagner should not of course be taken to mean that the Prussian composer was a transitional figure; someone whose achievements served as mere models for Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*. While Wagner (and many other composers) owed much to Meyerbeer’s *grands opéras*, these works were monumental achievements in their own right. If in the Italian context Meyerbeer paved the way for the diversification and internationalisation of the repertoire, this was a substantial feat: 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. No wonder that the press frequently commented on the technical difficulty of performing Meyerbeer, a composer who constantly engaged with the most recent innovations in instrumentation, and whose scores seemed, in the words of one Bolognese critic, ‘eminently grand, philosophical, and of a stamp

¹⁹ *Monitore di Bologna* (19 November 1860).

²⁰ *Rivista bolognese di scienze, lettere, arti e scuole* 6 (1868), 2: 556.

and form all particular to Meyerbeer'.²¹ In Italy few theatres were up to the challenge of performing Meyerbeer: Verdi considered a great theatre such as the San Carlo simply incapable of staging *grand opéra*.²²

The Comunale's efforts to bring works of *grand opéra* alive impressed audiences, even if the effect was no different from that created by the performance of other large-scale works of foreign provenance, as Bologna's press acknowledged the year before *L'Africaine* received its Italian premiere.²³ The challenges of staging large-scale operas were multiple: reusing the 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, while 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. (The municipal authorities were at least keen on keeping stage workers, scene painters and tailors in work, and such an approach furthered this aim). In Bologna, during meetings of the *deputazione degli spettacoli* (a council that consisted of elected politicians and cultural experts) and the municipal council, politicians engaged in heated debate about the alleged poverty of their sets and the need to attract new audiences by combining musical quality with new visual impressions. And it was a combination they did their utmost to realize. Writing to Meyerbeer after the Comunale's performance of *Il profeta* in November 1860, for instance, Bologna's *deputazione* emphasised its efforts to stage the work with 'necessary splendour', efforts duly recognised by Meyerbeer in his correspondence with the local council. The local administration also sent a delegation, headed by the mayor, to a performance of *Lohengrin* in

²¹ *Monitore di Bologna* (5 November 1865).

²² Henze-Döhring and Döhring, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 215.

²³ *Monitore di Bologna* (2 October 1864).

Munich so the attendees would be better prepared to mount the work at home.²⁴ The Comunale's leaders understood that audience expectations had changed and that going to the opera was now more than a routine pastime for local patricians, who had owned the boxes at the local theatre for generations. It would have been difficult for the Comunale to tackle Wagner at all, had it not first learned how to meet the technical and dramaturgical demands of *grand opéra* composers such as Meyerbeer.

That foreign works were staged in Bologna at all at this time was a result of recent political events. Throughout the decades preceding Italian Unification, the former capital of the Papal Legations had only limited exposure to foreign composers as 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. In addition to doing much to raise the theatre's profile, Mariani – who was eagerly sought after by Wagner and Verdi alike – is widely recognised as having revolutionised the performance of opera in Italy, not least because he was one of the first musicians to be hired as a permanent baton conductor at a time when reliance on an older method of dual direction from the violin and keyboard was the norm. In this very moment, 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. Controlled by a coalition of box owners and the municipal government, Bologna's Teatro Comunale also faced financial difficulties after Unification, until the city's cultural elites

²⁴ 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 from Meyerbeer to the *deputazione* in which the composer also recommended that Mariani be made director of the city's *Liceo musicale*.

decided to use the Comunale to establish Bologna as one of the new nation state's cultural centres. In the years that followed Unification the building itself saw a number of significant aesthetic and technical improvements, while the Comunale's orchestra increased in size to eighty players and came to be considered one of the best in Italy. It was this transformation of infrastructure that later allowed Bologna to establish itself as the capital of Italian Wagnerism. But staging Meyerbeer and Wagner was more than the project of courageous conductors and enterprising *impresari*. 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 positioning it as one of the leading cultural centres of the new nation state. The Bolognesi closely associated the performance of Meyerbeer's works with the recent political and constitutional changes in Italy. Reviewing the prima of *Le Prophète* in November 1860, the correspondent for the *Monitore di Bologna* pointed out that 'the Pontiff's censors, anxious even of the title, would have never allowed performing the work'.²⁵ Exactly a year later, in November 1861, the same paper's correspondent wrote of *Les Huguenots* that having 'completed *il giro mondiale*', the opera's performance in the city 'satisfies an old desire of the Bolognesi'.²⁶ There was a strong sense among the city's cultural elites that the end of the Papal regime allowed Bologna to catch up with cultural developments in the wider world.

In addition to confronting audiences with a new opera of foreign provenance, Bologna's politicians capitalised on the attention Meyerbeer's death had provoked globally when they organised the Italian premiere of *L'Africaine*, thereby associating Bologna with a moment of cosmopolitan empathy in which the world came together to commemorate a truly European composer. In May 1864 Bologna's *Monitore* reprinted in great detail the obituaries

²⁵ *Monitore di Bologna* (19 November 1860).

²⁶ *Monitore di Bologna* (19 November 1861).

for Meyerbeer in the international press, and a year later printed a series of near-sensationalist reports about the ‘immense success’ of *L’Africaine* in Paris.²⁷ In November that year Carlo Gardini used similarly overwrought language when he reviewed the opera’s Italian premiere as an event that could only be compared to the performance of a new opera by Verdi.²⁸

With the exception of Meyerbeer’s early Italian operas, Bologna had enjoyed only limited exposure to the Prussian composer before the Italian premiere of *L’africana*. *Roberto il diavolo* had been staged under exceptional circumstances in 1846 after the election of Pius IX, for the arrival of a new Cardinal, but the mostly aristocratic and culturally conservative audience largely rejected the work as strange.²⁹ As mentioned above, attitudes towards foreign opera, and Meyerbeer more specifically, only changed after the end of the Papal Regime. Mariani’s arrival at the Comunale led to a second staging of *Roberto*, this time occasioning great enthusiasm, thanks partly to a cast starring Adelaide Borghi-Mamo, a native Bolognese. This success was followed by stagings of *Il profeta* and *Gli ugonotti* in 1860 and 1861, *L’Africana* in 1865, and a complete frenzy of Meyerbeer in 1869, including *Il profeta*, *Gli Ugonotti* and *Roberto*, all in one season. Other important steps in this direction were the famous *prima italiana* of *Don Carlo* in 1867 and a local performance of Halévy’s *La Juive* in 1868, both under Mariani.³⁰

²⁷ *Monitore di Bologna* (5 May 1864 and 1 May 1865).

²⁸ *Monitore di Bologna* (5 November 1865).

²⁹ *Teatri, arte e letteratura*, quoted in Francesco Vatielli, *Cinquanta anni di vita musicale a Bologna, 1850-1900* (Bologna, 1921), 14.

³⁰ *La Juive* [performed in Italy as *L’ebrea*] remained a relatively minor work in the local repertoire, receiving only two further performance runs (in 1887 and 1892). On Bologna’s *Don Carlo*, see Newark, ‘Grand opéra in Nineteenth-Century Bologna’, 208ff.

L'africana in Bologna

Performing Meyerbeer at Bologna's Comunale was the project of a rising middle class and the city's emerging cultural elites, and was in tension with the preferences of the theatre's traditional audiences, which consisted 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, whose most prominent local representative was the future Prime Minister Marco Minghetti. Others identified themselves as legitimists driven by nostalgia for the former Papal government and opposed the new nation state altogether. Although there were individual exceptions within these groups, both were resistant to aesthetic innovation at the theatre, which they associated with the rapid social and political change taking place around them. Thus when *Gli Ugonotti* was staged in 1860, the correspondent for the moderates' principal local newspaper denounced the music as 'heavy, philosophical, a product of study, all based on harmonies [rather than melody]', although he conceded he would be prepared to listen to the work again.³¹ (Ethnic and racial stereotypes served to justify prejudice against such 'foreign' music: in 1869, the *Monitore di Bologna* for instance described Felix Mendelssohn as 'German and Jewish, a severe figure in the arts ... one with his tribe, not one of us'.)³² More importantly, and very much to the *palchettisti*'s distaste, the mere scale of *grand opéra* no longer allowed for the performance of a separate

³¹ *Monitore di Bologna* (19 November 1860); Vatielli, *Cinquanta anni*, 20; Becker and Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 12. Similar judgments are reproduced in Anna Tedesco, "'Queste opere eminentemente sinfoniche e spettacolose': Giacomo Meyerbeer's Influence on Italian Opera Orchestras", in *The Opera Orchestra in 18th- and 19th-Century Europe*, Vol. 2, *The Orchestra in the Theatre: Composers, Works, and Performance*, ed. Niels Martin Jensen and Franco Piperno (Berlin, 2008), 187.

³² *Monitore di Bologna* (11 June 1869).

ballet between the acts of the opera, as had been customary at the theatre since its opening in the 1760s. Although *Gli Ugonotti* was explicitly defined as *opera-ballo*, for the *palchettisti* ballet scenes integrated into the opera did not count as a separate *ballo eroico*.³³ As Fiamma Nicolodi has pointed out, describing the ballet scenes in *grand opéra* as *balli analoghi* (as the libretti and scores did) defined these as *balli* integrated into the dramatic action of the opera itself, and thus drew attention to the fact that these were not the independent ballets that box owners at the Comunale were accustomed to seeing alongside *opera seria* on a given evening during 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 risk involved with these old forms of spectacle.³⁴ 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

³³ ASCB, Carteggio amministrativo, 1861, Deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli, Miscellanea, Osservazioni al progetto d'appalto del sig. Ercole Tinti, 31 May 1861. We know that the officers of Bologna's regiment did not consider *Gli Ugonotti* a sufficient attraction to renew their subscription: see ASCB, 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 see also Jung-Kaiser, *Die Rezeption der Kunst*, 18.

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

pay their contractual contribution for the autumn season, causing the impresario considerable financial loss.

Given the conservative nature of the Comunale's audience and its resistance to innovation, the question of who supported the theatre's new openness to the international repertoire, and to Meyerbeer in particular, needs further explanation. 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 in many cases the democratic section of the Risorgimento's national movement, the *sinistra storica*. For these Bolognesi, performing Meyerbeer and the European repertoire meant conversing with Europe's most progressive nation, and doing so on their artistic level. This group also included former political refugees: Bolognesi who had experienced the musical culture in cities such as London and Paris during their years in exile. Occasionally, members of the nobility with a similarly cosmopolitan outlook joined their ranks. Their ability to influence Bologna's cultural policies – despite representing a minority within the political elite and the local council – was possible because the former cultural and political elites, under the Papal regime, remained largely disengaged from post-Unification politics. The individuals who ultimately influenced the Comunale's repertoire, however, were members of the municipal *deputazione degli spettacoli*, whose council of elected politicians and cultural experts had replaced Bologna's old noble families during the city's political transition. Most members of the *deputazione* represented the local council's moderate majority, but were nominated on the basis of their expertise in musical matters. As a consequence, they often held views that were aesthetically more progressive than those of the electorate they represented.

Mariani's growing reputation as the Comunale's principal conductor helped considerably to overcome local resistance to the internationalisation of the repertoire. Mariani

established Meyerbeer as an integral part of the theatre's seasons, while Bologna's moderate press had to admit that performances were much improved under Mariani's baton, even as the repertoire expanded.³⁵ Further, the Comunale's new focus on foreign works soon resounded beyond the theatre itself. From 1861 onwards, melodies from Meyerbeer's operas regularly appeared in the programmes of Bologna's municipal band and were also featured in commemorations of the Revolutions of 1848 (which were still considered controversial events, associated with the radical agenda of the local Republicans).³⁶ 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 at large, the fact that Bologna rather than any other city secured the Italian premiere of the composer's great posthumous work requires further explanation. Bologna's municipal archives and the minutes of the local council offer answers, indicating that before the local council decided to undertake the project, Mariani discussed the idea of staging *L'africana* with the impresario Luigi Scalaberni; Meyerbeer's Italian publisher Lucca, and several members of the *deputazione*. The *deputazione degli spettacoli* then presented the plan to a meeting of the local council in 1865.

One of the politically moderate but culturally progressive voices in the *deputazione* was the cultural assessor Gustavo Sangiorgi, who had recently become the publisher of *L'Arpa*, a major Italian theatrical journal published in Bologna. Sangiorgi's views on the role of the theatre in representing the city can be reconstructed with the help of the council's

³⁵ See for instance *Monitore di Bologna* (19 and 23 November 1861).

³⁶ *Monitore di Bologna* (23 November 1861; 8 August 1862, and 4 August 1864).

minutes. At the time, the general political climate was not favourable to aesthetic experiments. 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. When the idea of the *L'africana* premiere was presented to them, the council members had more urgent matters to attend to, and during the summer of 1865 the moderate majority even proposed abolishing the Comunale's municipal subsidy altogether. However, while presenting himself as a moderate partisan, Sangiorgi pronounced himself against the abolition of the theatre's subsidy in a crucial council debate. The council, he argued, would feel ashamed were the upcoming season to consist only of the most meagre productions of old repertoire pieces; should the theatre be reduced to this, he insisted, it would be better to close it altogether, thus avoiding bad publicity for Bologna so soon after Unification. Conversely, he reasoned, were the municipal subsidy to be awarded, the theatre would be in a position to present the council with a very special programme for the forthcoming season: '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'.³⁷ Sangiorgi understood that an event of this kind would attract the attention of the entire nation, presenting Bologna as one of Italy's leading cultural centres. Aware of the city's limited financial means, he proposed devoting the theatre's entire annual subsidy to the autumn season alone in order to have one really splendid *stagione* rather than two underfinanced ones.

At this stage of the debate another moderate councillor with interests in opera joined the debate: Count Carlo Pepoli, a future mayor of Bologna who had recently returned from exile in London and was widely respected in operatic matters, not least because he had written the libretto for Bellini's final opera, *I puritani*. Pepoli welcomed Sangiorgi's

³⁷ ASCB, Atti del consiglio comunale 1860-1920, 28 July 1865.

suggestion that *L'aficana* be staged at the Comunale, but having seen Her Majesty's theatres in London, remarked that he was 'sorry to note that such an extraordinary performance would be held in a theatre ... so badly illuminated, especially as this genre requires great lighting effects'. He went on to report that there were rumours that it might, however, 'be possible to obtain good gas lighting for the Teatro Comunale as well'.³⁸ Only at this point did Camillo Casarini, the leader of the local democrats, an enthusiastic supporter of the city's musical rejuvenation and a member of the *deputazione*, join the conversation, explaining that a contract for new lighting could be signed which would be particularly advantageous for the municipal council should the *deputazione* receive the council's support. *L'aficana* went ahead: the council's debate had started with a proposal to abolish the theatre's subsidy altogether, but ended with an agreement both to stage *L'aficana* and to improve material conditions at the theatre. Five years later, Casarini, as the city's first Democratic mayor, would arrange the legendary staging of *Lohengrin*. The work became the flagship of his cultural policy, even if the event led to his resignation just weeks after the opera's premiere as a consequence of financial irregularities related to the hugely expensive performance.³⁹

L'aficana in Bologna's politics of culture

The premiere of *L'aficana* on 4 November 1865, just days before its German premiere in Berlin, was enthusiastically received by the Italian press and described by the *Monitore di Bologna* as 'one of the greatest musical events of our time'.⁴⁰ This was the same moderate newspaper that in 1860, when a performance of *Gli Ugonotti* had caused many *palchettisti* to abandon their boxes, had declared the opera too philosophical. The local success of

³⁸ ASCB, Atti del consiglio comunale 1860-1920, 28 July 1865.

³⁹ Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, 240f.

⁴⁰ *Monitore di Bologna* (5 November 1865).

L'africana was helped by the popularity of Lodovico Graziani as Vasco: the tenor had created the role of Alfredo in *La traviata* and starred in many more of Verdi's popular operas.⁴¹ The Italian press largely shared the *Monitore*'s positive assessment of the performance. The performance of *L'africana* would even come to be perceived as a turning point in the Comunale's history: 'ever since *L'Africaine*', the local council commented a few years later, 'the theatre has been growing in reputation and importance'.⁴²

It is questionable whether in the five years since the local performance of *Gli Ugonotti* 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 later by the Italian premiere of his posthumous work influenced those sections of society which until then did not share the modern tastes of opera audiences in Paris, Berlin and London. While, as Anna Tedesco has shown, there was usually a considerable interval between the French and the Italian premieres of Meyerbeer's operas, *L'africana* was an exception.⁴³ Staging this work so shortly after the opera's French premiere showed Bologna's cultural ambition after Unification. The city put itself in a position to capitalise directly on the international media attention Meyerbeer's death and the arrangements for his funeral had generated all over

⁴¹ Anna Tedesco, 'Graziani, Lodovico', in *The Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin (Cambridge, 2013), 208. In 1860 Graziani had impressed the Bolognesi as Riccardo in the local premiere of *Un ballo in maschera*.

⁴² ASCB, Atti del consiglio comunale 1860-1920, 29 February 1872. In 1876 *L'Africaine* was staged once more and was also a great success, even more so than the other hit of that season, Filippo Marchetti's *Ruy Blas*. On this, see ASCB, Carteggio amministrativo, 1876, X, 3, 4, 11028, Report of the deputazione to the mayor on the past autumn season, Count Salina, 20 December 1876.

⁴³ Tedesco 'Le Prophète in Italy'.

Europe. Even 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. For the first time in decades, perhaps even in a century, Bologna was making operatic history. An important first step towards a more cosmopolitan opening of the Comunale's repertoire had been achieved; what is more, Bologna would be regularly commended for the remarkable quality of its productions in the years that followed.

A further element played a role in generating local support for *L'africana*. In Italy, the politics of municipal culture were often characterised by jealous competition between cities, occasioning the country's description as *l'Italia delle cento città*: a tendency towards cultural and political rivalry that became even more marked after Unification.⁴⁴ The performance of spectacular operatic works has to be seen in the context of Bologna's cultural ambition to be first among Italy's second cities: if this was not yet a reality, it was a bold ambition and one that drove its cultural policies. All of Meyerbeer's previous works had been premiered at the Pergola in Florence, with the exception of *L'Étoile du Nord*, first staged at the Canobbiana in Milan; yet *L'africana* – arguably Meyerbeer's most spectacular work – premiered in Bologna. When the council had debated whether or not to stage it, they knew that the city would hardly be able to make headlines with performances of Bellini and Donizetti because it was not in a position to compete with Milan or Naples in this field. Instead, visitors would be drawn to impressive events like the Italian premiere of Gounod's *Faust* (1864), *L'Africana* (1865), Verdi's *Don Carlos* (1867) and ultimately the works of

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

Wagner.⁴⁵ In this respect, no other Italian opera house was in a position to compete with Bologna.

These operatic politics have to be seen within the broader picture of the city's revival after the end of the Papal regime, including the development of a number of remarkable museums and galleries, the revitalisation of its Archiginnasio – which prided itself as being the oldest University in Europe – and the organisation of international conferences attracting many famous men of science like the Prussian geneticist Rudolf Virchow, who was 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 notable scientific advances such as local publisher Zanichelli's translation of the work of Charles Darwin, at a time when even the Anglican Church still fought against evolutionary theory. The theatre, the University and urban redevelopment were the three anchors of Bologna's cultural politics after Unification; they were 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, where he maintained an impressive palazzo and regularly entertained the city's social elites,

⁴⁵ ASCB, Carteggio Amministrativo, 1871, X, 3, 4, 975. Atti della commissione nominata. See also *Monitore di Bologna* (4 November 1865 and 5 January 1870), and *Il Resto del Carlino* (22 December 1885).

including – after 1831 – the officers of the Austrian army of occupation.⁴⁶ Bologna's claim to Rossini was a highly political issue, at times pursued with a surprising degree of provincial stubbornness. This all contributed to Bologna's attraction to Meyerbeer, since the city saw Rossini as Meyerbeer's direct predecessor in Paris, and local newspapers were proud to report anecdotes about their friendship.⁴⁷ 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 in Egitto*. There was of course some substance to the connection between the two men: beyond their shared success in the French capital, both composers had received the *Order of Merit* from the Prussian King. During the Paris rehearsals for *L'Africaine* the two composers 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 praised Rossini in writing for his 'sublime creation' and signed off as his 'constant admirer and old friend'.⁴⁸ 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 later composed a '*Chant funèbre*' as 'a brief song of mourning for my poor friend Meyerbeer'.⁴⁹ With a good deal of local pride, Bologna's press

⁴⁶ On Bologna's claims see *Monitore di Bologna* (22 November and 16 December 1868). On the context of the *Guillaume Tell* performance, see Newark, '*Grand opéra* in Nineteenth-Century Bologna', 206.

⁴⁷ On connections between the performance of Rossini and Meyerbeer see Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon, 1824-1828* (Berkeley, 2002).

⁴⁸ Meyerbeer to Rossini, Paris, March 15 1864, in Becker and Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 180.

⁴⁹ Becker and Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 181.

picked up on these anecdotes, constructing an imaginary relationship that linked a still rather provincial city to great events taking place in Paris, London and Berlin; events which moved the entire world.

Much as Meyerbeer's funeral had been an event of almost global resonance, so too had the French premiere of *L'Africaine*: its importance foreshadowed that accorded the Italian premiere. The Bologna premiere not only made headlines all over the world, it also helped *L'africana* to gain immense popularity in Italy, occasioning fifteen productions within five years. The first Italian performance after Bologna took place in Parma in December of the same year; it was followed by stagings at La Scala in 1866, Naples' San Carlo in 1867 and Turin's Teatro Regio and Venice's La Fenice in 1868. Each of these performances referred back to the original staging in Bologna and helped draw attention to the city's operatic life.⁵⁰ The Comunale programmed the work once more in 1876, under conductor Marino Mancinelli, and again in 1914. The city continued to receive attention for an event which neither Milan, nor Florence or Turin could claim as their own.

Cosmopolitanism, exoticism, and new musical horizons

For many in Bologna the interest in Meyerbeer counted for more than the endorsement of a particular operatic genre: it stood for the cosmopolitan flair associated with the composer's music. As mentioned above, the most important theatre for Italian performances of Meyerbeer had until recently been La Pergola in Florence, which had been under the relatively progressive political regime of the Habsburgs at a time when censorship limited Meyerbeer's impact elsewhere in Italy.⁵¹ According to Nicolodi, one of the reasons for

⁵⁰ Tedesco, '*Le Prophète* in Italy', 569.

⁵¹ Anna Tedesco has also advanced the argument that performances of *Il profeta* at the Teatro Regio di Parma reflected the relatively progressive stance of the duchy's Bourbon ruler Duke

Florence's predisposition towards Meyerbeer was that the city attracted considerable numbers of foreign visitors who simply expected to see operas by Meyerbeer during their travels.⁵² Playing on the association between Meyerbeer and La Pergola thus expressed a certain worldliness: Florence may have recently become the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, but the Bolognesi could nonetheless boast the inimitable *L'africana* premiere as theirs alone.

The idea of a composer speaking with a cosmopolitan voice was widely reflected in critics' appreciation of the work. Especially in the early years following Unification, staging Meyerbeer enabled Italians to act on a widespread feeling that Italy had to catch up with European culture and was a reminder to the country and the world of its longing for the cosmopolitan. Bound into this narrative was the idea that Italy had been held back by centuries of external domination and despotic political regimes. In this situation Meyerbeer symbolised the ways in which France gave the Latin nations access to Germanic culture. As Pierluigi Petrobelli has argued, France was 'the most immediate way to get to know the culture, the literature and even the music of Germany'.⁵³ For instance, 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.

Charles III: see Tedesco, 'Il grand opéra e i teatri italiani: un caso emblematico. *Il profeta* a Parma (28 December 1853)', in *Musica e storia* 11 (2003), 139-60.

⁵² Nicolodi, 'Les grands opéras de Meyerbeer', 97.

⁵³ Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'De l'alexandrin à l'anapeste chez Verdi: structure poétique et composition musicale dans *Un ballo in maschera*', in *L'Opéra en France et en Italie (1791-1925)*, ed. Lacombe, 215.

Italy's internationalisation of the operatic repertoire was not, however, uncontroversial. Rather, Meyerbeer anticipated debates that would soon be associated with Italian Wagnerism. More interesting than the anti-German slander that accompanied these debates are the arguments of those who defended Italy's new openness towards the European repertoire. A year after Bologna's *Lohengrin* of 1871, for instance, the Italian parliament discussed the state of the country's music schools, with some members voicing their concern about the elevation of German innovation over Italian tradition. In response to these concerns, Casarini denounced Italy's 'ecstatic state of contemplative isolationism' in everything regarding music. In his view, Italy was out of step with the 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 Italian students and audiences of Meyerbeer, Beethoven, Gounod or Mozart? Or Haydn's and Handel's oratorios?⁵⁴

For Italians, an important element of Meyerbeer's supposedly cosmopolitan language was the exotic appeal of *L'africana*, whose principal theme is the encounter between different worlds: the plot revolves around Vasco, who brings Portuguese culture to India; encounters between Christianity and Paganism, and the meeting of different civilisations. Italy already had a long tradition of staging similar encounters, mostly through the genre of the *ballo storico*: prominent examples include Raimondo Fianza's *Colombo, ossia la scoperta del nuovo mondo* (Genoa, 1802) and *Colombo all'isola di Cuba*, (Milan, 1832 and Turin, 1838).⁵⁵ Many of these works remained in the repertoire for decades. The celebrated

⁵⁴ Camera dei deputati, 6 February 1873. Reproduced in Ernesto Masi, *Camillo Casarini* (Bologna, 1875), 187.

⁵⁵ On Raimondo Fianza'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*

choreographer Ippolito Monplaisir had also 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 Gama, at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan as well as at the Teatro Apollo in Rome.⁵⁶ The colossal success of Meyerbeer's last Italian opera, *Il crociato in Egitto*, premiered at La Fenice in 1824, had also played a decisive role in establishing orientalism as a determining factor in mid-nineteenth-century musical culture.⁵⁷ 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* until now, but representations of foreign civilisations on stage would by no means have been new to them. Further, it would be wrong to assume that commentators had no more than a casual interest in non-European cultures. Periodicals of the Risorgimento period such as the *Antologia* in Florence, the *Annali di statistica* and the *Biblioteca italiana* in Milan reviewed countless volumes on foreign travel, history and geography, and counted among their authors influential intellectuals like Gian Domenico Romagnosi and Carlo Cattaneo, whose writings were full of cross-cultural

New York Public Library 67 (November 1963), 558, and Antonio Monticini's libretto *Colombo all'isola di Cuba; azione mimica di mezzo carattere in quattro parti*, a copy of which is preserved at the New York Public Library (NYPL), Walter Toscanini Collection (WTC), Libretti di ballo (LdB), 332 and 431.

⁵⁶ Ippolito Monplaisir, *L'Isola degli amori, ballo fantastico*: NYPL, WTC, LdB, 785 and 793.

⁵⁷ Mark Everist, 'Meyerbeer's *Il crociato in Egitto*: *mélodrame*, Opera, Orientalism', in *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Aldershot, 2005), 101-40.

comparisons.⁵⁸ As an opera about Vasco da Gama, *L'africana* elicited popular interest in India and this remained a prominent theme in the opera's Italian reception.

The critic Filippo Filippi was convinced that it was Meyerbeer's experience of living in Italy that had influenced his symphonic language and orchestration and that his techniques formed the basis of his representation of cultural diversity.⁵⁹ For him, Meyerbeer helped Italians to reflect critically on their own musical style, the meaning of Romanticism, the role of the supernatural, the representation of *couleur locale*.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Meyerbeer's works were criticised for offering *poco canto*; and it was on this basis that a correspondent for the theatrical periodical *Teatri, arte e letteratura* commented that 'a German opera does not go with Italian taste'; that Meyerbeer was 'more philosopher than *maestro*'.⁶¹ Using the same

⁵⁸ On Hindustan see, for instance, Gian Domenico Romagnosi, 'Viaggio nel paese di Voné nella provincia di Nemar nell'Indostan', in *Opere*, ed. Alessandro de Giorgi (Milan, 1844), 2/1: 616-32, and William Robertson, *Ricerche storiche sull'India antica*, ed. Gian Domenico Romagnosi (Florence, 1835).

⁵⁹ Anselm Gerhard has explored the importance of the symphonic dimension in Meyerbeer's work: see Gerhard, 'Religiöse Aura und militärisches Gepränge: Meyerbeers Ouvertüren und das Problem der rein instrumentalen Form', in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. Döhring and Jacobshagen, 218ff.

⁶⁰ Nicolodi, 'Les grands opéras de Meyerbeer'. Della Seta has analysed the Italian response to Meyerbeer's musical language, focussing in particular on the problems audiences had with a Prussian who wrote French operas which were subsequently translated into Italian: see Della Seta, 'Un aspetto della ricezione di Meyerbeer in Italia'.

⁶¹ The music critic Abramo Basevi did not share the view that Meyerbeer's operas offered 'poco canto', but did comment on the opinion of some of his colleagues: see Basevi, 'Il Profeta alla Scala di Milano', *Gazzetta musicale di Firenze* 52 (7 June 1855), reproduced in

argument, the novelist and journalist Antonio Ghislanzoni, Verdi's librettist for *Aida*, opined in 1866 that 'the requirements of [Meyerbeer's] scores create unique embarrassments to the theatre companies'.⁶² Citing the burdens imposed on 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 in which his musicians worked in Berlin.⁶³ Although most of Bologna's players had regular incomes as professors at the *Liceo musicale* or members of the municipal band, they wished to form a stable orchestra with monthly salaries for all members, reflecting a professionalisation of the opera industry that directly followed changes in the repertoire. When the council rejected their request in 1861, the orchestra went on strike.⁶⁴ This conflict occurred a year after a

Tedesco, 'Le Prophète in Italy', 588-90. The quotation is reproduced in Vatielli, *Cinquanta anni*, 14ff. Sentiments similar to those expressed in the quotation can also be found in: *Monitore di Bologna* (24 March and 10 November 1869). As Alessandro Roccatagliati has noted, debates about the compatibility of German opera with Italian taste can be traced back to the 1850s: see Roccatagliati, 'Opera, opera-ballo e "grand opéra": commistioni stilistiche e recezione critica nell'Italia teatrale di secondo ottocento (1860-1870)', *Opera & Libretto* (Florence, 1993), 2:293.

⁶² Reproduced in Tedesco 'Le Prophète in Italy', 574. On the challenges for the Comunale's orchestra, see also Tedesco, "'Queste opere eminentemente sinfoniche e spettacolose": Giacomo Meyerbeer's Influence on Italian Opera Orchestras', 194ff.

⁶³ Zimmermann, *Giacomo Meyerbeer*, 231.

⁶⁴ ASCB, Carteggio amministrativo, 1861, Tit. XVI, 4, 157, sentence of the commercial court, 28 April 1862.

major industrial dispute with the chorus, which was settled only once the *impresario* increased the singers' wages.⁶⁵

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.⁶⁶ Thanks to its *Liceo musicale*, 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.⁶⁷ Likewise, the sets demanded a standard not every theatre was able to meet. Between the 1840s and the sixties the quality of Italian stagings of Meyerbeer improved considerably, a development for which Mariani and the Teatro Comunale played a crucial role. As mentioned earlier, Mariani's role as the Comunale's first sole baton conductor was part of this process: the model of leadership he provided created a lasting legacy for the opera industry as a whole.

Social change and new music in Bologna's politics of culture

⁶⁵ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge, 1984), 119.

⁶⁶ Nicolodi, 'Les grands opéras de Meyerbeer', 109ff. It should be noted that similar alterations are characteristic of modern performance practice: see Robert I. Letellier, 'History, Myth and Music in a Theme of Exploration: Some Reflections on the Musico-Dramatic Language of *L'Africaine*', in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. Döhring and Jacobshagen, 151.

⁶⁷ ASCB, Deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli, Miscellanea, 6 December 1861, and Tedesco, 'Le Prophète in Italy', 205.

In many respects Bologna provides a prime example of what Arno Mayer famously called the ‘Persistence of the Old Regime’.⁶⁸ For decades after Unification political elites in the former Papal Legations who had determined local and national history for centuries—the Pepoli, Malvezzi, Zucchini and Bevilacqua families—continued to ensure one another’s presence in local aristocracy. Even after Italy’s parliamentary revolution in 1876, which was 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 major landowners reluctant to modernise a region that was among the most backward in Italy, with rates of child mortality and illiteracy higher than even the South (in some parts of the Romagna illiteracy reached ninety percent). The nobility’s dominant role in society was also reflected in Bologna’s musical life, with the concerts of the Società del Quartetto remaining invitation-only events until 1879. It was for this reason that Mariani, Marino Mancinelli and his brother Luigi, and later Giuseppe Martucci supported the *Concerti popolari* series as a counterbalance to this elite entertainment.

At the same time, it was in the field of music theatre where the old regime was undermined. Like Mayer, Eric Hobsbawm has famously juxtaposed the aristocracy’s alleged cosmopolitan tastes with the bourgeoisie’s search for national resurgence through the arts in revolutionary Europe.⁶⁹ However, the situation in Italian theatres is more complex than Hobsbawm’s account allows. Following Unification, the nobility in their private boxes wanted to continue to hear Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini while the middle class first started to accept Verdi and then embraced the international repertoire, in particular the works of French and German composers. Having lost the Cardinals’ financial support, however, the Comunale could no longer be run on the contributions of its box owners alone. The theatre

⁶⁸ Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (London, 1981).

⁶⁹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution, 1789-1848* (London, 1989), 311.

depended on subsidies from the local council which, owing to the moderates' financial regime, became extremely difficult to sustain. The need for municipal financial support thus led to a modernisation of the theatre's management and restructuring of the *deputazione dei pubblici spettacoli*, limiting the role of aristocratic box holders in determining the theatre's schedules. In turn, this meant less *bel canto* and more international fare. What is more, the increasing professionalisation of the opera industry at this time offered opportunities for new cultural agents, more likely to be from a middle class background and interested in the 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 an essential part of their vision. *L'africana* prepared the ground for the journey from Hindustan to Brabant.