

Conference Report:
'Music, *italianità* and the nineteenth-century global imagination'
(University of Cambridge, 15-17 September 2016)

The inaugural conference of the Leverhulme-funded network 'Re-imagining *italianità*: opera and musical culture in transnational perspective' took place at the University of Cambridge on 16-17 September 2016. The conference set out to explore different facets—geographical, historical, artistic and theoretical—of the relationship between music and *italianità* in global and transnational contexts during the 'long' nineteenth century. It brought together a diverse mixture of over forty scholars from a variety of continents, disciplines and stages in their careers. It was preceded by two reading groups—one on the topic of 'borders', and another centred around three pre-circulated papers—on the 15th, which set up a friendly and productive environment for the subsequent debates.

The conference opened on Friday 16th with a roundtable, chaired by Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg (Brown University, Italian studies and Comparative Literature). Five speakers gave short presentations on the relationship(s) between three concepts: '*italianità*', 'space', 'agency'. Katherine Butler-Schofield (KCL, ethnomusicology), Fabio Camilletti (Warwick, Italian studies), Kate Ferris (St Andrews, history) Emanuele Senici (Rome-La Sapienza, musicology) and Alessandro Talevi (stage director) covered a wide array of topics: from British perceptions of Indian courtesans during the colonial period as mediated through experiences of Italian opera singers, to the historiographical challenges posed by attempts to periodise the Italian 18th and 19th centuries; from the notion of partially-overlapping spatial 'scales' (the individual, the home, the street, etc.) as an alternative paradigm to theorising local/national/transnational relationships, to *italianità* as fundamentally rooted in the act of performance (i.e., in a repetitive, theatricalised, as well as metatheatrical, gaze); from the packaging of *italianità* (and Italian opera) for foreign markets, to Italian audiences' differing responses to staging 'experiments' according to locations and repertoire. Many of the themes and questions raised in the roundtable re-emerged later in the conference, and indeed constituted stimulating threads of discussion throughout many of the panels.

The first session of papers examined 18th- and 19th-century myths of Italy associated with music and musicians. Valeria Lucentini (Universität Bern) gave an overview of historical travel writings from different national and literary traditions that featured Italy as Land of Music, while Jonathan Durrant (University of South Wales) offered an account of an irrational, 'ghostly' imagination of Italy that haunted northern Europeans in the wake of contemporary mythologising of Tartini and Paganini—and their supposed pacts with the devil. Iara Luzia Fadel Rodriguez (Universidade Estadual de Campinas) opened a session entitled 'Encounters, Parodies and Translations' with a paper about 19th-century parodies of Italian opera in Spain. Emilio Sala (Università degli Studi di Milano) moved the discussion from opera to song by looking at Gustave Nadaud's 'Le Soldat de Marsala' (1872), which he examined within its contemporary historical context from a cross-cultural (French/Italian) perspective. Daniele Conversi (University of the Basque Country, *in absentia*) shared with the participants his comparative research on *canzone napoletana* and flamenco, two musical genres through which local, national and cosmopolitan identities have long been negotiated. Finally,

Jens Hesselager (University of Copenhagen) closed the day with a presentation on a forthcoming collaborative project—featuring workshops at Stockholm, Copenhagen and Oslo in 2016-17—entitled ‘Shared Histories of Italian Opera in the Nordic Countries: Migration, Cultural Transfer and Urban Spaces (18th-19th Centuries)’.

On Saturday 17th, the morning featured five papers about ‘Italian opera abroad’. Eric Schneeman (The University of Texas at San Antonio) reassessed critical discourses about Meyerbeer in the early 19th-century German press by focusing on the composer’s Italian operas and career, and the mixed responses they aroused; Artemis Ignatidou (Brunel University London) examined the threats to both moral values and local cultural traditions which Italian opera posed when it was introduced in mid 19th-century Athens (where it came to stand for ‘European art music’ *tout court*). Within a non-European context, Rashna Nicholson (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München) traced the ‘indigenization’ of Italian opera in Bombay starting around 1870, when the first Indian opera was performed at the local Grant Road Theatre. Moving to the close of the century, Harry Stopes (UCL) discussed the premiere of Puccini’s *The Bohemians* (*La bohème*) in Manchester in 1897 from the perspective of a social and cultural historian of the city, while Aníbal Enrique Cetrangolo (Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia) gave a wide-ranging account of meanings and musical practices associated with 19th-century bands in Italy and Argentina.

The final conference session—‘(Inter)national Exhibitions’—took a closer glance at two turn-of-the-century Italian cities: Palermo and Milan. Alberto Napoli (Universität Bern) examined musical activities and discourses in Palermo during the 1891-92 National Exhibition in the Sicilian city, posed as they were between pursuing local and cosmopolitan concerns; Ditlev Rindom (University of Cambridge) explored the spatial experiences associated with the 1906 Milan Universal Exhibition, raising questions as to the implications such experiences might have had for operatic spectatorship in the city at the time (particularly at performances of *La Traviata* at La Scala, one of the very first productions that restored the opera to its original 1840s setting).

Throughout the sessions, many stimulating debates took off from the contributions offered by a little army of respondents, who commented on the papers from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds—musicology, history, Italian studies and comparative literature. It is no surprise that, only a few weeks on from the end of the conference, a number of new scholarly exchanges and friendships are (we hear say) already firmly on course. With yet more promises of such fruitful interactions, one can’t help looking forward to the next ‘Re-imagining *italianità*’ event: Brown 2017.