

# Reimagining Italianità: Opera and Voices on the Move

University of Campinas

13-15 September



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*Third conference of the Leverhulme-funded International Network:*

**Re-imagining *italianità*: opera and musical culture in  
transnational perspective**



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'Re-imagining italianità' is an international research network financed by the Leverhulme Trust and based at the UCL Centre for Transnational History, with collaborators in Cambridge, Italy, Brown University (US) and Campinas (Brazil). Over a period of three years, starting in February 2016, the project has been investigating nineteenth century Italian opera on a global scale in order to critically assess existing ideas on the relationship between music and national identity. Based on a cross-disciplinary collaboration, the network has analysed nineteenth-century discourse on music and national character; trace the global circulation of people, ideas and goods associated with the Italian opera industry; and examine particular cities and institutions as sites of cultural encounters.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/centre-transnational-history/research-andpublications/re-imagining-ita>

Twitter: @reimagining\_ita

## Thursday 13 September (GRADUATE WORKSHOP)

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**09:30 - 10:00: WELCOME**

**10:00 – 13:00: READINGS (Graduate Panel):**

Graduate Panel: Maria Rubia Andreta, Fernando Barreto, Melody Chapin, Isaac Kerr, Alessandra Jones, Guilhermina Lopes, Francesco Milella, and Kim Sauberlich

Claude Levi-Strauss, readings from *Tristes Tropiques*: chapters 28 ‘A Writing Lesson’ & 37 ‘The Apotheosis of Augustus’; Aamir Mufti, ‘The Aura of Authenticity’; and Roberto Schwartz, ‘Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination’

**13:00 – 14:30: LUNCH**

**14:30 – 17:30: Pre-circulated Papers**

Paulo Kühl (University of Campinas): Opera singers and their images in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Rio de Janeiro (*Response: Axel Körner*)

Francesca Vella (University of Cambridge): *Aida*, Media, and Temporal Politics, ca. 1871-72 (*Response: Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg*)

Maria Alice Volpe (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro): Indianismo in Brazilian Romantic Opera: Shifting Ideologies of National Foundation (*Responses: Benjamin Walton*)

**19:00: DINNER**

## Friday 14 September

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**10:00 - 10:45: WELCOME (Paulo Kühl)**

**INTRODUCTION (Axel Körner)**

**10:45– 13:00: SESSION 1, International Encounters (Chair: Alexander Kolassa)**

Luisa Cymbron (Universidade Nova, Lisbon): Portugal viewed from Brazil and Brazil viewed from Portugal: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century national opera in a transnational perspective

*Response: Kim Sauberlich (University of California Berkeley)*

Fernando Berçot (Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica Celso Suckow da Fonseca): Italian soloists and the operatic scene in Rio de Janeiro, 1822-1831

*Response: Benjamin Walton (University of Cambridge)*

Alexandra van Leeuwen (University of Campinas): Female voices and *castrati*: dialogues in the Luso-brazilian performance of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries

*Response: Francesca Vella (University of Cambridge)*

**13:00 – 14:45: LUNCH**

**14:45 – 16:30: SESSION 2, Transnational Voices (Chair: Francesca Vella)**

Carolin Krahn (University of Vienna): “They sense an emptiness, which makes them worry about applause...” Italian Voices vs. Italian Opera in the German-speaking World around 1800

*Response: Adriana Kayama (University of Campinas)*

Achille Picchi (Sao Paulo State University): “Pover Bambola”: Carol Gomes, Artson and L’Italianità

*Response: José Manuel Izquierdo (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile)*

**18:30: DINNER**

## Saturday 15 September

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### 9:00 – 10:30: SESSION 3, Italy and Germany (Chair: Axel Körner)

Richard Erkens (German Historical Institute Rome): Italian Operas on German Myths: The Reception of Franchetti's "Germania" (1902) and Leoncavallo's "Der Roland von Berlin" (1904) in Germany

*Response: Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg (Brown University)*

Katherine Hambridge (University of Durham): 'Sounds that waft over us from the days of our ancestors': Italian Opera and Nostalgia in Berlin, 1800-1815

*Response: Mario Videira (University of Sao Paulo)*

### 10:30-10:45: COFFEE

### 10:45 – 12:15: SESSION 4, Italian Opera and the Habsburgs (Chair: Richard Erkens)

Alessandra Jones (University of California Berkeley): Rossini, La Fenice, and the Limits of the Opera House in the 1850s

*Response: Paulo Kühn (University of Campinas)*

Claudio Vellutini (University of British Columbia, Vancouver): Donizetti's *Italianità* and Viennese Publishers

*Response: Maria Alice Volpe (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)*

### 12:15 – 14:00: LUNCH

### 14:00 – 15:30, SESSION 5: Italian Opera in Brazil (Chair: Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg)

Denise Avelino Corrêa (Universidade Federal de São Paulo): The use of grand drapes in Brazilian Opera Houses

*Response: Francesco Milella (University of Cambridge)*

Rosie McMahon (University of Oxford): Manaus and the Operatic Atlantic

*Response: Charlotte Bentley (University of Cambridge)*

### 15:45 – 17:00: ROUNDTABLE

### 17:00-18:30: CONCERT **(more info to come)**

## **Italian soloists and the operatic scene in Rio de Janeiro, 1822-1831**

*Fernando Berçot (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro)*

In the 1820s, a stable company of Italian singers was in charge of the operatic spectacles staged at the Imperial Theatre in Rio de Janeiro. Working together with a French ballet troupe, those artists joined forces to present their repertoire before a heterogeneous audience. Works by Rossini and his contemporaries were sung in the original language, subscriptions were sold to annual seasons, and Italian masterpieces crowned the theatrical festivities offered to the emperor and his family. This paper aims to examine some reasons behind the attraction of foreign singers to a recently independent country, and how those artists were able to pursue success reinventing their careers in a totally different milieu, living among landowners, tradesmen, and slaves in a city that offered good chances and great challenges to newcomers. Dealing with patrons and financial interests, this small group of Italian soloists paid by a local impresario had the mission of making opera a viable business in an imperial court that was proud of its connections with Europe, but struggled with constant economic difficulties and political instability. Always important as a vehicle of information about the theatre, the local press assumed a central role in the relationship between artists and their audience after the appearance of the first articles on theatrical criticism. Those reviews, written by editors and dilettantes from 1826 onwards, reveal the growing interest in opera and in the virtues of its exponents, serving as valuable sources to our research.

## **The use of grand drapes in Brazilian Opera Houses**

*Denise Avelino Corrêa (Universidade Federal de São Paulo)*

The Allegory of the Republic is a canvas painted by Chrispim do Amaral, an afro-Brazilian painter, for the theater stage of the Theatro da Paz, an opera house located in Belém, State of Pará. A work of art of great importance, completed in the first Brazilian Republican year and little known by authors who write of this specific period in history. This scenic element, called grand drape, is a painted canvas located on what would be the fourth wall of the theater stage. The Theatro da Paz Allegory of the Republic can be recognized as one of the first representations of the Brazilian republic, since it was inaugurated on August 15, 1890, in the first year of operation of the new political regime. The other national works that represented the figure of the republic were executed later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This study was the first endeavor to accomplish a detailed analysis of the Allegory of the Republic grand drape. For this analysis it was fundamental to investigate a little of the construction history of this theater, to show the tradition of making grand drapes in Brazil, as well, to understand the political functions that these scenic elements had at the time, it was also important to reveal the troubled hiring of the artist Chrispim do Amaral for the realization of this grand drape allegory.

## **Portugal viewed from Brazil and Brazil viewed from Portugal: 19<sup>th</sup>-Century national opera in a transnational perspective**

*Luisa Cymbron (Universidade Nova, Lisbon)*

In 1857, Francisco de Sá Noronha (1820-1881), a Portuguese violinist and composer based in Brazil, decided to compose an opera on a Portuguese historical and literary theme, inspired by *Um auto de Gil Vicente*, a theatrical play by Almeida Garrett, the father of Portuguese Romanticism. The initiative, despite having many points in common with the experiments that were being pursued in Rio de Janeiro, notably with the efforts of De Simone and Adolf Maersch as well as the group of the Imperial Academia de Música e Ópera Nacional, was only reported in the newspapers of the city of Porto, in Portugal,

where, incidentally, the opera (*Beatriz de Portugal*) would have its premiere six years later. In 1870, after a period of ten years living in his homeland and having already assumed a certain status as a composer of "national opera", Noronha decided to choose a Brazilian theme for his third opera (based on the novel by Pinheiro Chagas *A virgem guaraciaba*). What were the reasons for these choices? How were these operas received in Portugal? What was the Brazilian reaction to the use of a so-called "national theme" by a Portuguese composer? This paper aims at analyzing the cultural issues underlying *Beatriz de Portugal* and *Tagir*, among them the strategies of the Portuguese community in 19th-century Rio, the liberal anticlericalism that dominated Portuguese contemporary intellectual circles, or the romantic idea of the enthronement of the Indian as the national symbol of Brazil. I will also analyze the composer's dramaturgical and musical options, which exemplify well the processes of cross-referencing between European operatic models, namely Verdi and French references, and various genres of popular music, namely the Brazilian ones.

### **Italian Operas on German Myths: The Critical Reception of Franchetti's "Germania" (1902) and Leoncavallo's "Der Roland von Berlin" (1904) in Germany**

*Richard Erkens (German Historical Institute Rome, Musikabteilung)*

During the course of the nineteenth century, Italian opera increased its treatment of non-traditional Italian subjects and representations of the exotic in historical and geographical terms (like *Il Guarany* by Carlos Gomes or *Iris* by Pietro Mascagni). With this, the crucial question arose about the specific impact on reception when such Italian operas were «on the move» and performed right before an audience that belonged to or felt part of the culture represented on stage. In these cases, the semantic notions of *italianità* abroad were strongly connected with questions of national identity; even more so if the opera's subject dealt with national myths of the portrayed nation. Regarding the late nations of Italy and Germany, two operas of such a «hybrid character» are at hand: Franchetti's greatest success, *Germania*, written primarily for the Italian opera market and premiered at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan (1902), and Leoncavallo's *Der Roland von Berlin*, commissioned by the German Emperor Wilhelm II for the celebrations of the dynasty of the Hohenzollern in Berlin in 1901.

Starting with a brief summary of the operas' origins and their subject matters, the paper discusses these examples through the signs of *italianità*. Firstly, concerning their musical dramaturgy, it proves that even *italianità* itself became a fragile concept within the works. Secondly, during the public discourse after their performances in Germany, it turns out that critics tended to consider a generic meaning of *italianità* as a concept of the enemy and a threat to their national self-understanding. The performances provoked one of the harshest and most hostile counter-reactions of German opera criticism against Italian composers in the years before the First World War. Carried out openly, the conflict over cultural hegemony could be assumed to be subliminally present also elsewhere.

### **'Sounds that waft over us from the days of our ancestors': Italian Opera and Nostalgia in Berlin, 1800-1815**

*Katherine Hambridge (University of Durham)*

Berlin is the site of famous face-offs between the Italian and the German in the early nineteenth century: Weber's *Freischütz* premiere and hostility to Spontini; A. B. Marx's anti-Rossini, anti-Sonntag diatribes. Such phenomena have been built into the narrative of the hunt for a national opera amidst growing musical nationalism, and if correctives or cautionary notes have been issued—Celia Applegate's 1998 plea to attend to alternative political or religious affiliations, for example — it has yet to be superseded.

In this paper, however, I will argue that in Berlin, the construction of a specifically Prussian musical past was equally prominent, and this sometimes conflicted with the more familiar discourse of the 'German'. It was through German language performances of eighteenth-century Italian opera at the Berlin Nationaltheater, for example, that nostalgia for the *ancien régime*, and particularly for the mythologized Frederick the Great, manifested itself most strongly in the theatre; parts of the original Italian libretto were even performed alongside its German version, to offer a glimpse of a work 'as Frederick had heard it'. Taking in the problems of translation, and the status of the few Italian singers left in the royal ensemble, I explore a moment in which cosmopolitan art music of the sort that for the rest of the century would be cast as the antithesis of German values temporarily became a symbol for an urban Prussian identity.

### **Rossini, La Fenice, and the Limits of the Opera House in the 1850s**

*Alessandra Jones (University of California, Berkeley)*

My paper considers an example in which the mobility of opera at mid-century collided with entrenched local culture. First heard at the Paris Opéra in 1829, Gioachino Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* acquired surprising new inflections when it was finally performed in Venice in 1856. *Tell* premiered in a recently renovated Teatro La Fenice during the height of the summer bathing season, the time of year in which invalids and the elderly populated the city. Although it was twenty-seven years since the work's Parisian premiere, the Venetian premiere was meant as a celebration of both the Italian composer's most lauded piece and the loosening of the strict censorship that had prevented its performance. However, the actual execution of the piece is difficult to judge given that, as one critic said, "Even if it carries a French label, this is a sublime and Italian production; let us venerate it and not give to the world the scandal of a mother who cruelly disowns and abuses her own creation." Italians not only needed to navigate local issues of time and aging that were in part inflicted by tourists and Austrians alike, but also of accepting as Italian a work with such a rich foreign prehistory.

If in its circulation Italian opera and therefore Italian identity was defined from the outside, we also need to understand how this constructed identity was received by Italians once it returned "home." Venice's particular cosmopolitan context--as both Habsburg port and international tourist destination--suggests it as a microcosm of the global, yet the often conflicting definitions of progress held by the Austrians and the Venetians remind us that within these liberal concepts there still exists a power structure. In examining this local context, I show how the global consumption of Italian opera could overwrite *italianità* even as it extended its reach.

### **"They sense an emptiness, which makes them worry about applause..." Italian Voices vs. Italian Opera in the German-speaking World around 1800**

*Carolin Krahn (University of Vienna)*

"They sense an emptiness, which makes them worry about applause, and [...] thus our singers try desperately to fill the emptiness of their languid being through cadences and ornaments of all kinds" – this was the diagnosis of a certain tendency among unstable singers to "italianize" their art as related in a well received treatise on the art of singing from around 1800. Titled *Briefe an Natalie über den Gesang*, this collection of 31 fictitious letters, authored by the German writer Nina d'Aubigny von Engelbrunner, was first published in Leipzig in 1803, then later in a second edition in 1824, and circulated among both critics and composers.

The contents of this source range from the systematic education of the human (primarily female) voice to vocal music as a general social and cultural activity, with special attention given to operatic singing at times. The subject matter is discussed through parallels drawn between musical life in Germany and



in Italy, while referring to long-established topoi that can be traced back to German treatises of the 18th century. In this context, central concepts such as virtuosity, the craving for admiration, or vanity, have all been attributed to singers from both Germany and Italy performing Italian songs and arias. Moreover, such phenomena have been associated with psychological problems and contextualized as anthropological and sociological phenomena in the polemical debate seeking to establish a Germanic idea of “Tonkunst.” Occasionally, particular singing techniques in France, the Netherlands and England are discussed, too, in order to differentiate the German- and Italian speaking musical worlds.

In this context, several historiographic and topographic dimensions for interpreting the human voice come to light. Thus, I will explore the most prominent features of the concept of “voice” at stake in my paper; secondly, my aim is to discuss observations from *Briefe an Natalie* against the background of a broader musical discourse addressing the relationship of the human voice to Italian opera. Earlier theoretical treatises serve as critical sources for understanding subsequent perspectives on singing “the Italian way”, both on and off stage. At the center of my approach is the question of how the idea of the “Italian voice” around 1800 constituted a construct within the German-speaking world closely related to operatic discourse, yet by no means restricted to it.

### **Female voices and *castrati*: dialogues in the Luso-brazilian performances of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries**

*Alexandra van Leeuwen (University of Campinas)*

The significant presence of mulatto women in the music of Colonial Brazil and her professional activity in contrast to participation of *castrati* in the Lusitanian scene inspired us to propose this specific study. Therefore, this research looks into the women in Rio de Janeiro’s lyrical-musical environment in order to identify the particularities of their presence according to the information contained in the musical manuscripts of the period. We contextualized the female presence as well as the *castrati* in the arts, taking into consideration an interdisciplinary reading. In the light of social and gender studies, it is possible to get a better comprehension of the presence of mulatto women in the Colonial musical practice. As the presence of *castrati* in the public scene of Portugal is opposed to the situation at the colony, the understanding of the embodiment representation is fundamental to our considerations regarding to the related repertory. Between the late eighteenth and mostly the early nineteenth century, we believe that the presence of mulatto women on the Carioca stage is not restricted to a coadjutant paper, but rather represents a way to establish the musical aesthetic in the Colony at the period. We also refer to Luso-Brazilian dramatic music manuscripts in colonial lands belonging to the Ducal Palace’s Library at Vila Viçosa (Portugal). This material – possibly deposited in Bragança family’s palace after the return of D. João VI to the Lusitanian lands in 1821 – includes Italian operas, music comedies, *entremeses/farças* and other occasional works, presenting unique information related to its performance on the Carioca stage and the influence of the Neapolitan music.

### **Manaus and the Operatic Atlantic**

*Rosie McMahon (University of Oxford)*

*Italianità* was in some ways just one of many international ingredients in the recipe for fin-de-siècle Manaus. The city – at that time a wealthy centre of the Amazon rubber boom – also attracted large numbers of immigrants and accompanying cultural influences from Portugal, France, Spain, Germany, and England. The Italian ingredient, however, proved to be particularly potent. In response to the influx of wealth from the rubber trade, an Italianate opera house was accordingly built: the Teatro Amazonas. After opening on New Year’s Eve 1896, the Teatro was swiftly filled with Italian voices singing Italian operas.

Based on archival study, this paper considers the six opera seasons put on at the Teatro Amazonas during its first decade of operation (1897-1907). The first four seasons were performed by companies sourced in Italy by Brazilian impresarios; conversely, the last two companies brought over in 1906 and 1907 were French and performed French repertoire. I examine this intriguing shift from Italian to French culture (the latter already influenced fashion, architecture, and literature in Manaus) in operatic terms, probing what light it can shed on Amazonian attitudes towards *italianità*. I do so primarily through one case study: that of the Teatro's 1907 world premiere of the French-language translation of Carlos Gomes' opera *Il Guarany*. I argue both that this premiere provided a means for Manaus to sift and combine foreign influences in order to forward local aggrandisement, and also that the personal transatlantic networks established by Brazilian impresarios were particularly influential in shaping Amazonian attitudes towards Italian (and French) operatic culture.

### **“Pover Bambola”: Carlos Gomes, Artsong and L’Italianità**

*Achille Picchi (University of São Paulo)*

In the first place I will examine the situation of art song in Italy during the XIX<sup>th</sup>-century romanticism and beyond. After that, how *italianità* fits in on this subject. Then I will show that the idea of a “aria-laboratory” perpasses Carlos Gomes' output in artsong, specially those composed in Italy. As an exemplification I will present an analysis of the song “Povera Bambola”, written in 1885/90 to a text of his own. First I will provide a summary of my analytical methodology developed specifically for art songs; and then proceed to analysis, where I will draw some conclusions to prove both the “aria-laboratory” preoccupation of the composer and extract the ideas that will groundedly assure the *italianità* of them. Finally I will discuss the absorption of something we name as *italianità* by a Brazilian native composer (an afrodescendent by the way) within certain social conditions in the XIX<sup>th</sup>-century Brazil; and how come he achieved such a successful career as an important and well-known opera composer on the *scapigliatura* and *verismo* Italy of his time; and why, on the contrary, the art song composer continues to be so unknown, in Italy and Brazil in the afterward of his death. Until the present days.

### **Donizetti's *Italianità* and Viennese Publishers**

*Claudio Vellutini (University of British Columbia, Vancouver)*

How did changing conceptions of *Italianità* affect Donizetti's reputation in Vienna between the 1830s and 1840s? How was his image as an Italian opera composer mediated? And how did the composer's presence in the city change this perception? My paper addresses these questions by investigating the role of Viennese music publishers in the shaping of Donizetti's image in the city. After a brief overview of the features (and prejudices) associated with Italy and *Italianità* in Viennese operatic discourse, I discuss how critical assumptions about Donizetti's *Italianità* were gradually put into question as his international exposure and openness to cultural stimuli of different origins was debated in the press. By the time Donizetti wrote his operas for Vienna, these elements were considered typically “Viennese” rather than Italian. Viennese music publishers contributed to these changing paradigms. They published the complete vocal scores of some of Donizetti's operas reflecting variants specific to performances at the Kärntnertortheater, which contributed to the gradual overshadowing of the composer's perceived *Italianità*. Ultimately, these scores serve as an indicator of the extent to which Donizetti's operas were integrated into the cultural fabric of the city—as well as of the cultural legitimacy and visibility that Donizetti's position at Court had brought to him. They also remind us how the ideological underpinnings of operatic discourses affected the dissemination of Italian operas in Vienna and the very meaning of what it meant to be “Italian” in the capital of the Habsburg Empire.

