

**Third Conference: “Re-Imagining italianità: Opera and Voices on the Move”,
University of Campinas (Brazil), September 13-15, 2018**

The third and final conference of the Leverhulme-funded *Re-imagining italianità* network, organised by Paulo Kühn (University of Campinas), Alexander Kolassa and Axel Körner (both UCL), concluded the project’s three-year exploration of nineteenth-century Italian opera in transnational and global perspective. The University of Campinas is a major centre of research excellence in the Latin American world and the opera network capitalised on this setting in bringing together a considerable number of experts from the wider region with researchers based in Europe and North America. In order to develop new channels of academic dialogue, the organisers combined the presentation of each paper with a response by a delegate from a different academic and/or national background. This emphasis on transnational academic exchange set the tone for the conference as whole.

Following the format of the project’s earlier conferences, ‘Opera and voices on the move’ began with a graduate workshop orientated around a discussion of selected readings led by graduate students affiliated with the network. Viviane Kubo Munari, Guilhermina Lopes, and Isaac Kerr represented the University of Campinas. Joining them were Melody Chapin (Brown University), Alessandra Jones and Kim Sauberlich (University of California, Berkeley), and Francesco Milella (University of Cambridge). Discussing chapters from Claude Levi-Strauss’ anthropological memoir *Tristes Tropiques*, as well as Aamir Mufti’s article ‘The Aura of Authenticity’ and Roberto Schwarz’s ‘Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination’, the panel refracted these texts’ relevance to the conference’s thematic and geographical setting through a wide spectrum of pressing social and political concerns, in the academy and beyond. The group’s discussion showed how various disciplinary backgrounds, as well as generational change, impacted on the understanding of these texts, while also reflecting different national traditions of scholarship. The afternoon’s debate, based on pre-circulated work-in-progress papers, as well as a set of responses, applied several of these insights directly to the transnational study of opera. Paulo Kühn’s (University of Campinas) work discussed the emerging media debate on opera in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, with particular emphasis on visual representations of singers in the local periodical press, leading Axel Körner to critically reflect on different sources for the study of *italianità* as well on a closer engagement with the methodologies of media studies. Francesca Vella (University of Cambridge) considered the technological horizon of temporal and spatial notions in Verdi’s *Aida*, to which Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg (Brown University) replied with references to the work’s temporal

and spatial context of production. Maria Alice Volpe (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro) analysed the Italian soundings of Brazilian operatic *Indianismo*, generating a response focussed on different methodological approaches by Benjamin Walton (University of Cambridge).

Following the intense debates during the graduate workshop, the conference commenced the next day with a welcome by Paulo Kühn and an introduction to the network's research project by Axel Körner. The first session entitled 'International Encounters' was chaired by Alexander Kolassa. Luisa Cymbron (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) examined mutual operatic influences between Brazil and Portugal, as a counterpoint to the conventional emphasis on the role of Italian and other European models. Kim Sauberlich replied to her paper. Fernando Berçot (Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica Celso Suckow da Fonseca) gave a detailed account of networks of Italian singers travelling to Rio de Janeiro in the 1820s, to which Benjamin Walton's comment (Cambridge) added a critical dimension looking at issues of race and class in the production of opera. Alexandra van Leeuwen (University of Campinas) then gave comparative perspectives of the role of women and Castrati in Brazil and Portugal during the latter part of the eighteenth century (reply Francesca Vella). The second session on 'Transnational Voices' was chaired by Francesca Vella. Carolin Krahn (University of Vienna) used the 'voice' as the wedge to examine ideas of 'italianness' in German-language music criticism around 1800, to which Adriana Kayama (University of Campinas) replied. In order to support the meeting's cross-disciplinary dimension, André Tavares (Sao Paulo) then compared the impact of Italian and Portuguese baroque art in Brazil, with particular emphasis on the role of institutions like libraries, academies and the Church (comment Axel Körner). The first day of proceedings concluded with an impressive concert by students of the local music department, introducing delegates to internationally little-known aspects of the oeuvre of Brazilian born composer Antonio Carlos Gomes (1836-1896). Gomes, who was born in Campinas, would go on to have extraordinary success as an opera composer in Italy between the 'eras' of Verdi and Puccini—an exemplary figure for the many attempts to produce operatic *italianità* by non-Italian means.

Day two of the conference continued with a session on 'Italy and Germany', chaired by Axel Körner. A paper by Richard Erkens (German Historical Institute Rome) looked at the vexed German reception of musical 'italianità' in two Italian operas on German mythic themes at the turn of the twentieth century: Alberto Franchetti's *Germania* (1902) and Leoncavallo's *Der Roland von Berlin* (1904) (response Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, Brown University). Katherine Hambridge (Durham University) examined the reception of Italian music in a context of early German nation building during the Napoleonic era. Mario Videira (University of Sao Paulo) replied. A session called 'Italian Opera and the Habsburgs' followed with Alessandra Jones (University of California Berkeley), discussing issues of identity and conflict around performances of Rossini in Habsburg Venice during the 1850s, to which Paulo Kühn replied. Claudio Vellutini (University of British Columbia, Vancouver) investigated Donizetti's reception

in Vienna in the 1830s and 1840s, emphasising the crucial role played by musical publishers (reply Maria Alice Volpe). The final session, 'Italian Opera in Brazil' was chaired and introduced by Suzanne Stewart Steinberg. Denise Avelino Correia (Federal University of São Paulo) looked at unique surviving traditions of Brazilian Opera Houses' grand drapes (and specifically, the 'Allegory of the Republic' from 1890 in Manaus), to which Francesco Milella replied. Finally, Rosie McMahon (University of Oxford) revealed the ways in which, for a short period towards the end of the nineteenth century, Manaus and Amazonian Brazil entered global networks of the operatic Atlantic, to which Charlotte Bentley added her experience of studying opera in French-speaking Louisiana.

The conference was brought to a close with a final roundtable moderated by Paulo Köhl and looking in particular at the different conceptual and methodological insights gained over the past two days. During this discussion *italianità* emerged principally as a representational category; or as a cultural practice reflecting a range of behavioural forms. In the performance of *italianità* opera occupies a prominent role along with other cultural forms like literature, architecture or the arts. Our project's global dimension also helped to underline the concept's increasing autonomy, and its independence from its original national context.

Within its operatic context *italianità* expresses subjectivity predominantly through bodies and voices. At the same time the transnational and global context of *italianità*'s operatic performance makes it compete with other national traditions, as the conference has demonstrated with emphasis on the role of Portuguese and Spanish musical practices in the Western hemisphere, including their impact on the production of Italian opera. Within this context of transnational exchanges, *italianità* is often performed by agents that have only limited direct exposure to Italian culture. Italian opera therefore often stands for a cultural form and practice that can no longer be reduced to its national meaning. Instead, it becomes a much broader reference point to European culture and its global impact. As a consequence, producing Italian opera is almost always a transnational practice, even in Italy itself. While Italian opera originally described a particular technical practice, it becomes transnational as soon as it leaves its Italian context of production and interacts with a wider range of national and transnational musical practices.

An on-going necessity of any such explorations has to be the identification of new narratives of *italianità* on a global scale and the investigation of their changing meanings. Cross-disciplinary approaches to the topic, but in particular international cooperation in research is indispensable to this exercise, enabling us to study new and constantly changing practices of *italianità* with the aim of revealing the increasing autonomy of the concept's semantic content. The conference ended on a rather gloomy note, reflecting the growing difficulties posed to international research cooperation due to recent political developments. Britain and Brazil seem to constitute two particularly problematic examples that put the continuity of international research collaboration in the humanities at risk.