Center Stage

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CHAPTER FIVE

Provincial Opera

In Italy’s Orbit

In the dramatic terms of opera, one might say that from the eighteenth century Lemberg languished under a curse of marginality. Throughout the many territorial changes in Central Europe, the town remained on the periphery. This was true in the Polish Commonwealth, the Habsburg Empire, restored Poland, and the Soviet Union and still holds true for present-day Ukraine. During the 146 years of Austrian rule, Galicia came to be a byword for remoteness and poverty. German-language literature frequently referred to the province as “semi-Asia,” echoing the partition propaganda in which Prussia and Austria portrayed Poland as backward and uncultured to legitimize carving it up.

The extent to which partition obstructed cultural institutions can be gauged by contrasting cultural activity at either end of the long nineteenth century. In its early days, the Warsaw National Theater could match the leading German theaters of the age and Polish opera blossomed. But in the wake of each of the failed uprisings against the partition powers, in 1794, 1830–31, and 1863, the theater was temporarily closed, talented authors and composers were forced into exile, and censorship was tightened. Under these circumstances, it was impossible for Warsaw to maintain the same standards as in Vienna, Berlin, or Dresden. The history of Polish theater is a history of the struggle to overcome the effects of partition and compete with the Western nation-states, at least on a cultural level. It was this goal that also motivated the construction of the second Lemberg Theater in 1842. Its founder, Count Skarbek, was not an anti-German, modern nationalist, but a Polish aristocrat who wanted to raise his homeland out of the doldrums of cultural provincialism to the heights of “European civilization.” Skarbek’s new theater represented a quantum leap for Galicia. In architectural terms it was state-of-the-art, and equipped with the latest technology for creating stage effects. It was spacious enough to accommodate a large orchestra and a great number of
spectators, so that ticket sales could balance the cost of investment in lavish productions. It was on this point, however, that the project foundered. As mentioned above, actors and singers often played to empty houses, their words and song dying away unheard. Lemberg’s new theater placed the town on an equal footing with cultural centers such as Prague and Dresden. But, after a flying start, it landed back where it had come from: in a provincial backwater.

It first fell into decline—parallel to developments in the entire Habsburg Empire and in Saxony—in 1848. In the wake of the counterrevolution, the theater was seized by Austrian bureaucrats who were both artistically and financially inept but intent on restricting the number of Polish-language performances. Modest attendances and ticket sales at the German theater meant that the budget only stretched to paying second-class directors and singers. While the Polish theater had a good reputation, its meager receipts were not able to compensate. The situation did not improve until the arrival of Milaszewski as director. By ensuring that regular salaries were paid, he stabilized the ensemble, convincing the best performers to stay and attracting young talents.

Milaszewski’s dismissal in 1872, however, heralded a renewed period of conflict and decline which had a particularly negative impact on opera. When the actors’ cooperative (Spolka artistów) took over the theater in 1875, it reduced the opera season from twelve to four months as a cost-cutting measure. This made it difficult for local singers, or orchestral musicians, to earn a living at the theater. Since they were forced to seek employment outside Galicia for most of the year, many moved abroad. In fact, it did not even make economic sense, as engaging soloists on short contracts involved greater administrative costs and higher fees. The temporary singers usually came from Italy and could not speak—or sing—Polish. Since conditions were no more favorable in Warsaw, this arrangement by the actors’ cooperative threatened the very existence of Polish opera.

Dobrzański stepped in once more to straighten out the chaos left by his predecessors. He reinstated the full-length opera season and sent the ensemble on tour in the summer. In October 1876, he staged the first sensation of his directorship: the premiere of Aida. The progovernment newspaper Gazeta Lwowska especially admired the sets which new stage designer Düll had created, following the example of the Viennese model: “This is the first time that we in Lemberg have seen an opera that was brilliantly and elegantly designed, with that outward splendor which is an almost indispensable requirement of a drama of this genre.” With its desert setting, ancient Egyptian costumes and pyramids, Aida was performed a record 35 times in one year. Statistically, over half the population of Lemberg must have seen this opera at least once. Even taking second and third viewings into account, this meant more than just the elites. At only 15 kreuzers for the cheapest tickets, Aida was affordable even for servants and apprentices. The tremendous success of this opera heralded a long-lasting passion for Verdi in
Lemberg—from an earlier point than in the German Empire—which did not fade until the turn of the century. With older works by Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti still popular, the Galician capital remained a center of Italian opera.

Music example 3. The clock symbolizing the ticking life of the Polish nation in Moniuszko’s Straszny Dwór.

A few months later, in mid-January 1877, Dobrzyński celebrated an impressive triumph with Straszny Dwór by Stanisław Moniuszko, performed without the abridgements enforced in Warsaw. This opera portrayed the history of pre-partition Poland in such a glowing light that it seemed resurrected and brought to life in Lemberg. The main characters were two knights who sang of the might and
excellence of the fatherland before seducing two pretty maidens, breaking their vows of celibacy. The predictable conclusion did nothing to dampen the audience’s enthusiasm. The critic writing for the National Democratic newspaper Dziennik Polski particularly admired Moniuszko’s hallmark national dances. But it was an aria about the castle clock that most touched the hearts of the nationally minded public. The stopped clock which is wondrously reactivated by the Polish heartbeat symbolized the metaphysical force of the Polish nation. The critic, moved to tears, concluded: “That is not any old clock, that is the genius of our fatherland, which, currently robbed of its physical powers, through the works of great poets, painters, and musicians calls out the warning to the whole world: Poland is not lost yet!” The critic writing for Gazeta Lwowska claimed emphatically that “if Straszny Dwór were performed in the major theaters of the European capitals, in the Vienna or Paris Opera, it would be a great success.” This was only the second popular national opera for Poland after Halka but already Polish critics felt emboldened to compete with old established Europe.

While Straszny Dwór was received with national fervor, the singers performing it actually came from very mixed backgrounds. Two of the four main roles were performed by Italian singers who had learned the Polish libretto. Adalgisa Gabbi sang the role of Hanna, one of the two maidens, and Fernando Tercuzzi sang Zbigniew, one of the knights. To Gazeta Lwowska, these two Italians were “the heroes of the evening.” Tercuzzi received countless ovations after the final curtain. Their performance of some arias from Aida in Polish later that season established them as firm favorites of the public. An American singer named Cathrin Smith, who used the Polish-Italianate stage name Katarzyna Marco, also sang in Polish. Thus Dobrzański succeeded in putting together an entirely Polish-speaking ensemble of soloists, which was crucial for staging other Polish operas.

In April 1877, Dobrzański risked the first performance of a Wagner opera—Lohengrin—in Poland, even before London, Paris, and many other western European opera centers. As with Aida, it was the visual elements which most impressed the public. When Lohengrin appeared on stage with “silvery weapons,” a murmur of astonishment went through the auditorium before thunderous applause broke out. His swan boat presented another feast for the eyes. However, Lohengrin was performed in Italian, as it was in London a short time later. This rendered the plot, which was so important to Wagner, incomprehensible to most of the audience. At a musical level, too, Lohengrin met with a skeptical response. The critic writing for Dziennik Polski, Jan Lam, a descendant of German immigrants, found the music monotonous and complained of the loud brass section drowning the singing: “Well, pity our children if that is the music of the future—but who knows, maybe in future it will be a form of punishment. In any case, one act in the proximity of the bass tuba, a drum and two trombones, intensified by an
enforced day of fasting, should count the same as a month of jail.” Lohengrin was only performed a few more times before being taken out of the repertoire.

With these three major premieres of 1876–77, Dobrzański proved that Lemberg was not doomed to be a cultural backwater. Consequently, he managed to persuade the Galician diet to raise the theater’s subsidy from 12,000 to 15,800 guilders and used the extra money to have the auditorium lavishly renovated in the summer break. News of the popularity of the Italian and American singers who performed in Polish reached Warsaw, and in summer 1878 the Warsaw Opera enticed Gabbi and Marco away from Lemberg with the promise of better payment. To the disappointment of the Lemberg public, they never returned, and Dobrzański’s fortunes declined without them. The Italian singers hired for the next season could not be persuaded to learn the Polish language or stay in Lemberg. Apart from the obligatory production of Halka to open the season and the occasional guest performance, then, Polish opera was abandoned in 1879. Once again, performance practice in Lemberg was characterized by linguistic variety. Stanisław Peplowski notes in his chronicle of the Lemberg Theater that performances often combined Italian, French, and Polish in one evening. During his second term as director, 1883–1886, Dobrzański reestablished a Polish ensemble of soloists. But after his death, the opera scene in Lemberg gravitated toward Italy again. As singers were hired per stagione, there was only limited time for rehearsing new operas. The few new productions which were staged rarely ran for longer than one season, making it difficult to recover the cost of new costumes and stage sets. As a result, the various directors in office between 1886 and 1896 tended to reprise old favorites of grand opera and Italian works. Polish and German operas were rarely performed, partly because the Italian singers engaged for the season—but also local singers who had received their training in Italy—were not familiar with them.

**Polish Opera**

Despite the goodwill of the local public and critics, Polish opera struggled with a number of logistical difficulties. The works produced then are nearly all forgotten today, even in Poland, although some were sensations when they were premiered. The first Polish composer to achieve a major success after the death of Moniuszko was Władysław Żeleński. The world premiere of his Konrad Wallenrod in 1886 was anticipated by the press for more than a week. Articles were published daily in Gazeta Narodowa revealing ever more details of the production. Critics traveled from Warsaw and Krakow to attend and numerous receptions, talks by the composer and other minor events were held in the run-up, ensuring a sustained level of excitement and interest in what promised to be a new national opera.
Music example 4. Dramatic scene from the fourth act of *Konrad Wallenrod*.

All educated Poles would have been familiar with the poem by Mickiewicz on which the opera was based. It described the turbulent life of the Lithuanian Prince Alf, who is abducted as a child by knights of the Teutonic Order. As a young man known as Konrad Wallenrod, he resolves to avenge himself on them from within their own ranks. The brave eponymous hero quickly rises to the highest rank of Teutonic Knights and is eventually elected Grandmaster. His scheme is confounded, however, by Aldona, the main female character, whom Wallenrod
loves. Careless Aldona is taken prisoner by the Teutonic Knights and locked away in a tower (providing a wonderful setting for a number of arias sung by the two lovers). Wallenrod’s devotion to the lady prisoner betrays him; he is exposed by his deputy and, charged with high treason, condemned to death. At the last moment he manages to escape with his beloved but is pursued by his enemies. Wallenrod turns and slays some of the knights before he and Aldona take a draft of deadly poison to avoid capture. The news of his death and his call for resistance quickly spread, ensuring that his endeavors have not been in vain.

This opera, with its interwoven political and personal narrative strands, can be classified as a typical grand opera, the aesthetic of which deeply impressed Żeleński as a youth. Here at last was a specifically Polish, heroic, historical opera, earnest and tragic. It was not as provocative as Moniuszko’s Halka, which contrasted a morally bankrupt aristocracy with the honest peasants it ruled. To the conservatives in Galicia, Konrad Wallenrod provided symbolic justification of their cooperation with the partition powers, suggesting that it was not only tolerable but legitimate as long as it served the higher goal of uniting the nation.

The music, too, was much acclaimed, and critics praised Żeleński for forsaking the obviously national ingredients of Moniuszko’s style. On account of Żeleński’s skilful combination of arias, duets, quartets, quintets, and mass scenes, the critic writing for Gazeta Narodowa applauded Konrad Wallenrod as “a work which inherently links the idea of the nation with a beautiful, one might say pan-European form.” In the fourth act, Wallenrod’s escape from Marienburg castle is accompanied by a musical description of snow storms, and Aldona’s plaintive cries from the tower contrast with the powerful strains of a female choir in a nearby church. The various mass scenes and set changes between Wallenrod’s Lithuanian castle home, Marienburg castle and the snowy winter landscape provided ample visual appeal. The audience applauded jubilantly at the end of every act and showered the composer with bouquets after the final curtain.

No critic dared to spoil this major cultural landmark by expressing open criticism. But at five-and-a-half hours, including intervals, the opera was clearly too long. The poem by Mickiewicz—an elaborate 2000-line Romantic ballad—had been cautiously adapted for the stage by two Galician writers, who did their best to leave it intact but would have been better advised to edit more stringently. Gazeta Narodowa hinted at this by referring to the opera’s “oratorio-like character.” But this was brushed aside at the premiere. At a reception held in honor of the composer, the event was proclaimed a “national day of celebration.” In turn, Żeleński confirmed that he regarded his work as a service to the nation. Thus a patriotic consensus was reached which fired the Polish public’s enthusiasm for opera. Konrad Wallenrod went on to be performed a further nine times and become the biggest success of the 1885–86 season. A year later, Dobrzański spared no expense to present the world premiere of Poland’s next major opera—
Jadwiga—written by Lemberg’s principal conductor Henryk Jarecki. However, the music and historicizing libretto of this opera were weaker than Konrad Wallenrod’s, and only five performances were given.\textsuperscript{21}

In broad terms, the libretti were the Achilles’ heel of Polish opera in the late nineteenth century. Not even Żeleński (1837–1921) managed to remedy this, avoiding topical subjects most of his life. The most distinguished Polish composer of his generation, as a child of eight he had lived through the rabacj\-a—the Galician peasants’ uprising of 1846—in which his father was killed and his mother critically injured. For more than half a decade Żeleński did not write or say a word about these events. He avoided political material in his work and, unlike Moniuszko, refused to address the widespread poverty in Galicia or the increasingly tense relations between the different nationalities. In the era of “organic work,” the rise of the Polish national movement and the mobilization of the peasants might have been an obvious choice of subject matter for a convinced patriot like Żeleński. But using it would have meant confronting the traumatic events of 1846. Like many landowners in Galicia, Żeleński wanted to maintain the status quo. He did not have the same inclination as Moniuszko, who was married to a commoner, or Smetana, toward dealing with contemporary issues.

Żeleński addressed the subject of the nation and its history in dignified, heroic grand operas. Works in the vein of Smetana’s The Bartered Bride or The Two Widows, which could be performed by a small and less costly ensemble, would have provided a more practical vehicle for popularizing Polish opera. But local critics did not entirely approve of comic operas.\textsuperscript{22} The nation was a serious matter and not to be taken lightly—especially not on the stage.

At a technical level, the Lemberg Theater was out of its depth with a bombastic grand opera like Konrad Wallenrod. Żeleński had incorporated an intricate harp part in the overture, but neither the Lemberg Theater nor any theater orchestra in Galicia possessed a harp. The young Ignacy Paderewski had to imitate the sound of a harp on a grand piano. An independently wealthy nobleman, Żeleński obviously did not concern himself with the practicality of his works. In fact, the cost of staging such elaborate works could only be recovered if they were box-office hits, but the grand opera-inspired works of Żeleński and Jarecki were ultimately second best. There were plenty of French and Italian pieces already on the market to satisfy demand. The attempt to adapt this genre to the requirements of Polish national opera proved, then, to be a cultural transfer to the wrong place at the wrong time. From 1886, the shortfall in music theater was mostly made up by operettas, including The Gypsy Baron (Der Zigeunerbaron) by Johann Strauss, which was scheduled for every third evening in late fall of that year.\textsuperscript{23} In addition, old favorites of belcanto opera and—as in Paris—grand opera were performed. Yet these old-fashioned productions only served to highlight the fact that the Lemberg Opera had begun to stagnate, both musically and visually.
At the International Music and Theater Exhibition in Vienna in 1892, it became clear how far the Lemberg opera had fallen behind developments in Dresden, Prague, Budapest, and Vienna. The six-month event was a world’s fair for music and drama, where participating countries and nations showcased their instrument-making traditions and leading composers. Officially opened by Emperor Franz Josef, giving it the monarchy’s seal of approval, the public flocked to see the many performances that constituted a kind of international theater competition. Among the illustrious theaters participating were the Comédie Française and the Deutsche Theater from Berlin.

The Music and Theater Exhibition presented a unique opportunity for the different peoples of the Habsburg Empire to show themselves to the public as cultural nations. The government allowed the Czechs and Poles to manage their own booths in the permanent exhibition. Thus they appeared almost as independent nations, conveying an impression of the empire as an oasis of multicultural tolerance. The German Empire, which had decided against stands for the individual federal states, seemed drearily uniform in comparison.

In Galicia, ambitious plans were forged for the exhibition in Vienna. The De Reszke brothers, who were stars in Paris, Milan, and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and prima donna Marcella Sembrich were to lead a team of internationally famed Polish singers to represent the nation and to show Poland as a fount of talent. But snags in the details caused the organizers to stall. Should these international stars perform Polish operas they were not so familiar with or rather Italian and French operas they had mastered? Who was to cover the travel costs of the performers and the orchestra and the cost of the exhibition in Vienna? The private committee that had seen to collecting original scores, pictures, and old instruments for the permanent exhibition was not willing to pay the estimated 13,000 guilders required for the tour. It was not conclusively decided to send the Polish theater from Lemberg to Vienna until July. A program was then hastily devised, featuring Halka, Straszny Dwór and one act of the lyrical drama Krakowiacy i Górali, to be repeated each evening apart from the last, when Roméo et Juliette, a twenty-five-year-old opera by Gounod, and excerpts from La Traviata and The Huguenots would make up the finale.

In the event, Lemberg’s four-day appearance in Vienna in September 1892 was a disaster. Marcella Sembrich, who was to sing the role of Halka, cancelled at the last minute and no suitable stand-in could be found. In consequence, the program was reduced to Moniuszko and a vocal revue performed by international singers of Polish descent. The orchestra gave its routine performance and the costumes were almost as old as the operas. The presentations elicited an outpouring of derision on Polish opera by the Viennese press. Commenting on Halka, Wiener Tageblatt wrote that Moniuszko’s music was merely superficially national in character and “any talented German composer of the era around 1840
could have written most of the opera.”26 In contrast to the Czech National Theater, which had agreed promptly to participate and had six months to prepare, the Polish Theater was penalized for its hastily put-together, dated program as well as its old-fashioned stage sets.

The Lemberg public reacted to this loss of face by avoiding the theater. *Dziennik Polski* complained: “In truth, we no longer recognize our ‘musical’ Lemberg today. What happened to all those music lovers who, some decades ago—oh, not even so far back; just a few years ago, were able to fill the theater from top to bottom several dozen times over?”27 The ban on operettas of 1894 did not help to improve attendance. Opera’s lighter and more economical cousin, requiring only a small ensemble, was ideally suited to the Lemberg Theater. But it was either branded as foreign and Jewish, or, in the case of Viennese operetta—which had enjoyed great popularity in the 1880s—condemned as too German. Cutting operetta from the repertoire of the Lemberg Theater was, then, not only a strike against light entertainment but also a xenophobic act. Indeed, without operetta, the Polish theater lost contact to the Jewish public, who made up nearly a third of the town’s population. In the past, deliberate attempts had been made to attract a Jewish audience, above all by Adam Miłaszewski. In summer 1871, when the heat threatened to keep the public away, Miłaszewski recast the drama *Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld* by Ludwig Anzengruber in a Jewish setting and titled it *Der Oberrabbiner von Sadagora*. The program was even printed in Yiddish.28 When the German ensemble, who gave this performance, was subsequently dissolved, the Polish ensemble could have tried to win the Jewish public for itself.

But Dobrzański was an avowed anti-Semite. His newspaper frequently portrayed Jews as a plague of exploitative, ungrateful immigrants and allies of Vienna and Moscow.29 In fact, *Gazeta Narodowa*’s anti-Semitic rabble rousing did not stop with Dobrzański’s passing. An article of 1890 headlined “Who in our town arouses anti-Semitism?” complained: “We have expressed regret that the Lemberg Jews still follow a cult of Germanness, that one encounters masses of Jews at every German production, . . . while at all national Polish productions, whether in the theater, at concerts or Polish readings, the Jews are extremely few.”30 If the reverse occurred, though, and a noticeably large number of Jews attended the Polish theater, they faced sneering remarks about their presence and corrupting influence on the repertoire. The anti-Semitic mood not only undermined the strong assimilation movement of the 1880s,31 but it also had repercussions for the theater scene in Lemberg: in the 1890s an independent theater was opened specifically for the Jewish public, offering Yiddish performances.

The rural population also avoided the theater. A regional fair of 1894, entitled *Kościuszkowa* to mark the centenary of the Kościuszko Uprising, demonstrated this with startling clarity. Most of the thousands of visitors this exhibition attracted to Lemberg preferred the amusements of a traveling circus to the theater. A similar
exposition in Prague in 1891, by contrast, attracted record numbers to the National Theater. This discrepancy cannot be explained by Galicia’s often cited backwardness. The Lemberg elites—both the aristocracy and the intelligentsia—had made no effort to win the small-town and village populations for their theater.

**Becoming a Wagnerian City**

When Ludwik Heller took over the Polish theater with the help of an associate in 1896, it was close to collapse. The Warsaw arts periodical *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne* asked provocatively if the “ruin” that was Polish opera in Lemberg should not be demolished altogether rather than trying to revive it yet again. Indeed, on an average opera evening, a substandard orchestra, sometimes assisted by a military band, would accompany second-class performers singing in various languages in front of decades-old stage sets.

In this situation, Heller audaciously took the offensive, staging five opera premieres in the first half of 1897 alone. The first in January was *Goplana*, by Żeleński, and a notable success. It marked the first time that this now sixty-year-old composer abandoned historical themes and the heroic national struggle to set a psychological drama to music. *Goplana* told the story of a woman who commits fratricide and is subsequently plagued by her conscience and failed attempts to find love. It was performed eight times in the first six months of the year.

In early February 1897, the second Lemberg premiere of *Lohengrin*—this time in Polish—was staged, followed by *Tannhäuser* a short time later. Both works were a magnet to audiences thanks to well-cast singers and the Polish libretto. Now that the public was able to follow the action, Wagner was adopted by the Poles—as he was by the Czechs, Catalans and other “small” nations—as one of their own.

In summer 1897, Heller presented *The Bartered Bride*, his fifth premiere as director. *Gazeta Narodowa* had long called for this piece to be performed, partly out of gratitude toward the Czech National Theater, which had previously staged the two Moniuszko operas *Halka* and *Straszny Dwór*. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Polish theater in Lemberg and the Czech National Theater in Prague maintained extremely close contact, sending each other congratulatory telegrams and visiting delegations on various occasions and assisting each other on a number of pieces, guest performances, and stage sets. A group of Lemberg actors even attempted a mixed-language drama performance at the Bohemian Jubilee Exhibition in 1891. In January 1898, Heller produced Smetana’s great tragic work *Dalibor* in Lemberg. *Gazeta Narodowa* applauded Smetana in such glowing terms to make any Polish composer envious, and *Dalibor* went on to be performed a remarkable seven times in the first two months after its premiere. Smetana’s popularity and the new appreciation of Wagner were complementary.
The work of both composers demanded a new way of listening. Both *Lohengrin* and *Dalibor* were continuous compositions using devices such as recurrent motifs rather than the spoken passages of older operas to propel the action. Whoever liked *Dalibor* found it easier to access Wagner’s complex opus.

Heller’s next move was to rehabilitate operetta, staging no less than 188 performances in his first season. Operettas were good for business—takeings were high while costs were low—and contrary to the persistent claims of the Lemberg arts pages, the operetta boom did not hinder the development of Polish opera. Heller followed up the premiere of Żeleński’s *Goplana* with the world premiere of the lyrical ballad *Powrót Taty* by Henryk Jarecki, his first work to remain in the repertoire. Żeleński went on to compose the opera *Janek*, which was performed at the opening of the new Lemberg Theater. This drama about the jealousies and rivalries of a band of thieves in the Tatra Mountains adhered to the aesthetic of *verismo* and was a remarkably contemporary choice of subject matter by Żeleński. But its central appeal was the local color conveyed by the dances and songs, modeled on those of the Górs. *Janek* was kept in the repertoire for several years after the premiere and was also performed in Kiev and elsewhere in Ukraine and Poland.

The new theater’s success culminated in its production of *Manru* by Jan Ignacy Paderewski, who is profiled above in the case study of Dresden. This opera contained not only the blood, romance, and passion of most *verismo* operas, but also a more complex psychological element, as the characters in *Manru* battle chiefly with their own cultural make-up. Musically, too, Paderewski’s opera was up-to-date and propelled the Lemberg Opera into the present day. As in Dresden, Wagner was now the standard by which all composers were measured, though from a standpoint which was peculiar to the region. While in Dresden Paderewski’s eclecticism was regarded as impure, the Lemberg critics admired precisely his combination of Wagner-like chromaticism and leitmotifs with folkloric elements. Eager to match Dresden’s production of the opera, the new municipal theater had costumes and stage sets especially designed to portray the action as realistically as possible. Prague-born August Berger, ballet director in Dresden, was engaged to choreograph the dance scenes and the soloists’ movements. The outcome was Goral and gypsy dances for Lemberg that were developed by a Czech based in Dresden—a colorful instance of how the era’s supposedly authentic national imagery was created across borders. Pawlikowski enlarged the orchestra to 60 musicians and put them through extended rehearsals, sometimes lasting up to twelve hours. After the dress rehearsal had gone without hitch, Paderewski uttered the words that the arts-loving public in Lemberg had been longing to hear: “This is a truly European theater.”
Following this compliment from a man of international renown, the Polish premiere of *Manru* could only be a triumph. Paderewski was inundated with flowers and wreaths and the applause seemed unceasing, lasting even longer than it had in Dresden. Later, the opera’s continued success in New York gave rise to hopes that the composer might become an ambassador for Polish opera and promote the genre internationally. But Paderewski decided to concentrate on his career as a concert pianist. His memoirs do not offer any clear indication of his reasons but financial considerations probably played a role. For the Polish premiere of his opera in Lemberg, Paderewski received a one-off payment of 1,000 crowns plus guaranteed royalties of at least 1,500 crowns. Although 2,500 crowns was far more than the Lemberg Theater usually paid composers, it was only a fraction of what Paderewski would earn playing one concert in the US. At the final count, he would not have been able to maintain his large Galician estate, his villa in Switzerland and his *haute bourgeoise* lifestyle by composing operas for Poland.

From 1901, Polish opera once again fell into decline. Any promising new works soon disappointed and Pawlikowski turned increasingly to spoken drama. After *Manru*, the only opera premieres of note were *The Valkyrie* and *Tosca* in 1903. Puccini’s opera devoured 10,000 crowns, with 5,000 spent on sets and
costumes and 3,000 on Milanese tenor Augusto Dianni who sang the lead role. \(^{42}\) Despite this investment, a section of the audience greeted *Tosca* with the same hostility as it did Pawlikowski’s avant-garde drama repertoire. The staunchly Catholic newspaper *Przegląd*, angered at the production’s theatrical portrayal of a procession of priests and nuns and a bishop giving benediction, headlined its review “Sinfulness in the Municipal Theater.” The newspaper’s critic found the dance of the Roman masses in the churchyard a “second profanation,” and concluded: “Both sinful examples show what an un-Catholic spirit prevails in our theater, that one has already become accustomed to, and that shows disrespect for all the religious and moral principles by which our public generally lead their lives.” \(^{43}\) Pawlikowski could initially ignore these protests, but they were prone to reigniting, having a potentially huge number of sympathizers among the population and a political lobby in parliament in the Peasant Party. \(^{44}\)

The theater’s dented reputation cast doubts among the leaders of the Ukrainian national movement—who were planning to build their own national theater in Lemberg—whether theater was a suitable site for patriotic education. \(^{45}\) At the same time, rural members of parliament and pro-Peasant Party journalists raised objections to the theater’s increasing subsidies, saying they would be better spent on village schools. Thus, under Pawlikowski, the theater became a focus of conflict between the rural and urban populations.

The disagreements over the repertoire reflected the conflicting views of nation and Europe within Galician society. Pawlikowski’s supporters defended him in spite of his mismanagement because he had created a modern European repertoire, but his Catholic critics failed to see the value of this and condemned the cultural influences from the West. \(^{46}\) In essence, the same sociocultural antagonism between an urban, Europe-oriented intelligentsia and a rural population acting as the moral guardians of the fatherland still exists in Poland today.

Ultimately, Pawlikowski proved a tragic figure. He established a sophisticated repertoire of a standard which most major theaters in Poland and Germany did not reach until the interwar period. He introduced a groundbreaking approach to directing in both spoken drama and opera, putting an end to performers standing at the edge of the stage, reeling off their arias, and encouraging them to move about the stage with dramatic reason. Significantly, he introduced the term *inscenyzacja* (opera/play production) on his theater programs. But these achievements were too subtle to be appreciated by more than a small section of the audience. Moreover, Pawlikowski’s artistic abilities were undermined by his complete lack of business sense. It was the final straw when, in 1906, shortly before the director was due for re-election, his lover and favorite actress Konstancja Bednarzewska left him and went over to Ludwik Heller’s camp, \(^{47}\) breaking his heart.

Although Pawlikowski was of noble birth, his term as director cannot be regarded as the continuation of aristocratic patronage after Skarbek. The circum-
stances had changed since Skarbek’s day, to Pawlikowski’s distinct disadvantage. By 1900, the costs involved in running a professional theater far exceeded the resources of any individual aristocrat, unless he was an industrial magnate, such as the financer of La Scala and mentor of Toscanini, Visconti di Modrone. After using up his fortune, Pawlikowski relied on the town of Lemberg to finance the theater. The age of traditional aristocratic patrons was over.

When Ludwik Heller resumed the post of director in 1906, he steered the theater back on to the course he had taken before the turn of the century. Once again, the priorities were putting together an all-Polish singing ensemble and staging spectacular premieres. The high point of his second term as director was the first Polish performance of all four parts of The Ring of the Nibelung in the 1910–11 season. This production of the complete cycle brought the Lemberg Theater up to a level with Paris, where the Ring cycle had been performed just a year earlier in the Palais Garnier. A leading protagonist of Galician Wagnerism was tenor Aleksander Bandrowski. He had built an international career singing Wagner roles before returning in 1907 to his Galician home, where he translated The Ring and wrote a book about Wagnerian myth. Another local Wagnerian named Marian Dienstl claimed Wagner was a Polish patriot on the grounds of his instrumental piece Polonia (1831), inspired by Saxon enthusiasm for Poland, and his purported plans to write an opera about Kościuszko.

As in Prague and Vienna, however, there were also Wagner critics in Lemberg. Klemens Weitz was one, whose description of a performance of The Valkyrie for a satirical publication entitled Lemberg Pearls quipped:

During the second act people could be seen fleeing as if from a burning house; slower ones could be heard snoring so loudly that they almost woke their neighbors who were dozing in their seats; others who had lost all hope of this ever coming to an end, and unable to leave the theater, could be seen searching in all their pockets for arsenic, strychnine or rat poison to put an end to the boredom by suicide . . . The third circle resembled a row of sleepers, all were slumbering, even the doorman and the police guard . . . When to everybody’s surprise the third act actually ended, one could sense a great load being lifted from the Lemberg public, who thronged to the checkroom and left the theater at a gallop as if they suspected they might be ordered to return for a fourth act. Many could not fall asleep at home because they had already had a good sleep in the theater.

Such parodies did not, however, curb the general enthusiasm for Wagner’s work. Lemberg, which only twenty years earlier had oriented all aspects of its operatic practice—singers’ training, performance practice, and repertoire—to toward the Italian example, had now embraced Wagner. A German influence was clearly evident in the most significant Polish opera of the prewar decade, Bolesław Śmialy by Ludomir Różycki. This opera, with a libretto by Bandrowski, dealt with the murder, and murderer, of Saint Stanisław, focusing on the perpetrator’s feelings
of remorse, his escape and death. Musically, it was filled with leitmotifs and pushed the boundaries of conventional harmony, similarly to Strauss’s one-act works. *Gazeta Lwowska* rejoiced in a three-part review that at last an authentic Polish music drama had been created, Polish opera had caught up with Western culture, and the twentieth century was set to bring a renaissance of Polish music theater.\(^5\) Indeed, a number of composers associated with *Młoda Polska*, an informal group of Polish modernists, including Mieczysław Karłowicz and Karol Szymanowski, were garnering international attention, at least in the music world. *Młoda Polska* certainly displayed the same potential in the early twentieth century as the protagonists of the music scene in Prague.\(^5\)

In the years preceding the First World War, more German operas were performed in Lemberg than French or Italian operas, including *Der Rosenkavalier*, which Heller had translated immediately after its premiere in Dresden. But Heller was not fixated on German opera and also looked to Russia in his second term. As well as two works by Tchaikovsky, he even staged *Boris Godunow*, although the “Polish act” it contained was a potential provocation to nationally minded Poles. Heller actively supported young Polish composers, producing 26 new Polish operas between 1906 and 1909 compared to only 17 foreign works premiered, and consistently had all imported works performed in Polish. Within his two terms as director, then, Heller withdrew Lemberg from the *stagione* system and Italy’s cultural orbit. The Galician capital became a typically central European opera town, with a predilection for native opera performed by a permanent ensemble and a clear emphasis on music drama.

**Theater as a School of Democracy**

Any theater needs a degree of stability to be able to build a proficient ensemble and a sophisticated repertoire. It was precisely this, however, that was lacking in Lemberg. Yet Skarbek, Miłaszewski in his first term, Jan Dobrzański, and lastly Ludwik Heller managed to use the intermittent lulls in hostilities to lift the theater up to the level of the Royal Theater in Dresden and the National Theater in Prague. But the 1850s, the first half of the 1870s and the years between 1886 and 1896 were lost time for the theater, in which ensemble members and soloists came and went in quick succession and stage sets and instruments fell into disrepair. As a result, premieres were mediocre, revivals worse, and audience numbers—and receipts—steadily dwindled.

The “theater wars” between Miłaszewski and Dobrzański caused much havoc and Heller’s rejection in favor of Pawlikowski as director of the newly built theater also proved a rash decision. A wiser solution would have been to combine the talents of the two, placing Heller in charge of administration and opera and employing Pawlikowski as artistic director specializing in spoken drama.
The dissolution of the German ensemble in 1872 entailed a loss not only for German but also for Polish culture. For while Polish theater now held a monopoly, there was no longer any call for solving disputes creatively. Moreover, the Polish ensemble was now cut off from artistic developments in the German-language sphere. Lemberg’s long-lasting reliance on the *stagione* system, which was becoming out-dated even in Italy, did nothing to improve the situation. The internationally rising cost of singers made it extremely difficult for Lemberg to engage professional singers for a whole season. But the cost of a three or four-month *stagione* in proportion to the receipts of the same period was far greater than for a permanent ensemble. In view of the constantly changing personnel, new pieces were usually performed for just one season. The seasonal arrangement forced the Lemberg Opera to restrict itself to a small international repertoire of works which the temporary soloists were familiar with. Both the number of premières and attendance dropped as a result.

This situation placed Polish opera at an obvious disadvantage, some intermittent periods of fostering the native repertoire under Adam Miłaszewski, Jan Dobrzański, Ludwik Heller, and Pawlikowski (in the first years of his directorship) notwithstanding. Unfortunately, the two leading Galician opera composers of the late nineteenth century, Żeleński and Jarecki, failed to become architects of a genre with enduring appeal. Both relied on remote historical subjects which the public could not identify with as readily as with contemporary dramas such as Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*. Their music was, moreover, not as compelling as the international competition. Żeleński’s compositions were conventional in structure, influenced by the contrapuntal school of the 1850s, and less expressive than the works of Wagner or Smetana. Jarecki, on the other hand, adhered to the characteristically Polish style of his teacher Moniuszko. Although the national dances he habitually incorporated elicited outbursts of enthusiasm, they did not help to build up dramatic or musical tension. Moniuszko had at least applied this style to pieces with social and political relevance, such as *Halka*. Jarecki’s approach, in contrast, was to set a series of loosely connected moments from Polish history to folkloric music. True, Jarecki and Żeleński also wrote long and tragic grand operas, but these demanded conditions which the theaters in Lemberg and Warsaw could not provide. As the Lemberg ensemble’s guest performances in Warsaw, Krakow and Krynica show, the potential for a Polish *stagione* existed. But Heller had his hands full just in Lemberg.

Training singers in Italy was not without drawbacks, as they often failed to return or could only be persuaded to do so by the promise of high fees. It is no coincidence, then, that many of the most talented young native artists came from Jewish backgrounds, having grown up with the cantors and song of Jewish worship. In the neo-absolutist era, the Lemberg Jews became closely involved in the German theater. In 1853, for example, the Jewish community boys’ choir took
part in the spectacular premiere of Meyerbeer’s *The Prophet*. Later, a number of Galician Jews began their careers at the Polish Theater. Soprano Tereza Arklowa went on to international success, climaxing in appearances at *La Scala*. The tenor Władysław Florjański, born Kohman, went to Prague, where he contributed to the success of the Czech National Theater in the 1890s. Toward the end of the century, the influx of Jewish artists stopped for two main reasons: Vienna had become a training ground for aspiring artists from all over the Habsburg Empire. And the increasing anti-Semitism in Lemberg repelled Jewish artists as well as the Jewish public.

The Polish theater’s repeated crises between 1872 and 1875 and 1886 and 1889 at least proved that Lemberg had a critical public which was not prepared to passively let others impose choices upon them. Unlike in Dresden, the Lemberg public participated in its theater, voicing opinions on the repertoire and the director. The petition against Miłaszewski in 1883 and the Heller versus Pawlikowski electioneering campaign are two impressive examples of democracy in action at a time when political democracy was in its infancy.

The battles fought over the theater led to a gradual transition of power from the conservative high nobility to a broader social basis. These “theater wars” formed a prelude to a more modern political system, based on participation, which was finally introduced in Galicia when the electoral law was reformed in 1913. The strong element of public participation in the opera may have contributed to the popular local image of Lemberg as a musical and “singing town,” which continues to color recollections of the town’s Polish era to this day.

Although old, multicultural Lemberg and Polish Lwów were destroyed by the Holocaust and the ethnic cleansing of the 1940s, the opera house survived. It became an important meeting place for the town’s new, Ukrainian society. In 2000, to mark its centenary, the town had it lavishly restored. The amount this cost could equally have been invested in improving the old town’s water supply or other infrastructure in need of urgent renewal. But just as in the nineteenth century, the appeal of a temple to the arts was too great to resist. Ukrainian L’viv continues to present itself to the world as a European town and a home of music.

Notes

1. See Kłańska, *Galicja w oczach*. See also the recent book by Larry Wolff.
3. On Skarbek’s political views, see Got, *Das österreichische Theater*, vol. 1, 352; and Pepłowski, *Teatr Polski*, 175; also Lasocka, *Teatr Stanisława*, 150–51.
5. See TsDIAU 165/5/16, 54 and Pepłowski, *Teatr Polski*, 363. On the parliamentary debate leading to this resolution, see Spraw. Sten., May 25, 1875, 711–12.
6. The opera season usually lasted from September until the end of May. On the duration of music theater seasons in Lemberg prior to 1914, see Wypych-Gawrońska, *Lwowski Teatr*, 58–59.

8. In 1872 a manual laborer earned between 1.20 guilders (blacksmiths) and 1.80 guilders (bricklayers) and an apprentice roughly 80 kreuzers. At 15 kreuzers, the price of a standing-room ticket was equivalent to that of a kilogram of white bread. See Hossowski, *Ceny*, 80, 144–45, 150.


10. See the first review and the more detailed, three-column review in *Dziennik Polski*, Jan. 20, 1877, 2 and Jan 21, 1877, 1 (each under the heading “Kronika teatralna”).


12. On Moniuszko’s ideas on national opera, and specifically on *Halka*, see Golianek, *Twórczość operowa*.

13. Ibid. See also Pełowski, *Teatr Polski*, 382.

14. Nearly all the Polish operas performed by the Polish theater are considered briefly in Wypych-Gawrońska, *Lwowski teatr*, 80–91. Only a few key productions are discussed here.

15. On Lemberg’s reception of *Lohengrin*, see two extensive reviews in *Gazeta Lwowska*, April 23, 1877, 4; and April 24, 1877, 4.

16. Quoted in *Dziennik Polski*, April 29, 1877, 1. On this production, see the article by Marszałek, *O pierwszej*, 143–44.


18. In 1853, Żeleński saw Meyerbeer’s *Robert, der Teufel (Robert le diable)* in Vienna, which made a lasting impression on the sixteen-year-old. See the excerpt from his memoirs printed in *Wiadomości literackie* 14, no. 30, July 18, 1937, 2.


20. On the accolades bestowed on Żeleński, see “Uczta na część Żeleńskiego,” *Gazeta Narodowa*, March 1, 1885.

21. See the review in *EMTA*, Jan. 11, 1886, 34–37. More information can be found in TsDIAU, 165/5/25, 42–45.

22. See *EMTA*, Jan. 11, 1886, 34, second column.


25. The newspaper *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artistyczne* called for more Polish operas to be staged. See *EMTA*, July 16, 1892, 2.


27. See *Dziennik Polski*, March 19, 1891, 3.

28. See Got, *Das österreichische Theater*, vol. 2, 760.

29. A particularly inflammatory article which repeats these stereotypes is printed in “Żydzi,” *Gazeta Narodowa*, Oct. 25, 1873, 2.

30. See *Gazeta Narodowa*, March 20, 1890, 2.


33. See TsDIAU, 165/5/625, 48.

34. See *Gazeta Narodowa*, March 15, 1893, 2. The *Bartered Bride*, however, came via Vienna as the Polish translation was based on the German version, not the Czech original. See Wypych-Gawrońska, *Lwowski Teatr*, 72.
35. See NA, Fond ND, sign. D 50, o. Bl. (Protokoll des Verwaltungsausschusses vom
11.6.1891) and the memoirs of Lemberg actor Roman Żelazowski in Żelazowski,
Pięćdziesiąt lat teatru, 86–88.
36. See the relevant article in Gazeta Narodowa, “Dodatek do Gazety narodowej z dnia”
Nov. 3, 1897, “Fejleton muzyczny.” The critic mentions Dalibor’s premiere at the Vienna
Court Theater under Mahler.
37. On the Theater Committee’s positive evaluation of this opera, see TsDIAU 165/5/621, 1.
38. For more on Manru, see the previous part on Dresden; also Keym, Zur Problematic, 71–73.
39. See Gazeta Narodowa, June 9, 1901, 2.
40. See EMTA, June 2, 1901, 278. On the Polish premiere see also Kurjer Teatralny 1, no.
41. See Gazeta Narodowa, June 9, 1901, 2.
42. See TsDIAU, 165/5/628, 3.
44. In spring 1901 a number of protests were held against plays performed at the theater,
which were even discussed by the Galician diet. Government support for the theater and
its repertoire was increasingly criticized. See the parliamentary debates of July 1907
and October 1903 in Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z rozpraw galicyjskiego Sejmu kraj-
owego, 15. posiedzenie, 1. sesji VIII peryodu Sejmu galicyjskiego z dnia 11. lipca 1902,
862–865; also Sprawozdanie stenograficzne z rozpraw galicyjskiego Sejmu krajowego,
15. posiedzenie, 1. sesji VIII peryodu Sejmu galicyjskiego z dnia 31. października 1903,
1857–1861.
45. See Lane, The Polish Opera, 160–63.
46. See the parliamentary debate cited above.
47. See Solska, Pamiętnik, 65.
48. Visconti di Modrone’s involvement in La Scala facilitated structural reforms and the
theater’s upswing under Toscanini. See Piazzoni, Dal teatro die palchettisti, 45–46.
49. On Poland’s and especially Galicia’s positive reception of Wagner after the turn of the
century, see Skibińska, Recepcja Twórczości, 42–60.
52. Karłowicz died in 1909 in an avalanche in the Tatra Mountains. For more on Młoda
Polska see Chomińska, Wilkowska-Chomińska, Historia Muzyki Polskiej, vol. 2, 76–
91.
53. See Toelle, Oper als Geschäft; also Roselli, Das Produktionssystem, 124–60.
54. On the reasons for Polish opera’s lack of popularity, see Dziadek, Koncepcja opery, 165–67.
55. The Jewish tenors Olski and Menkes are discussed in Pepłowski, Teatr Polski, 347; the
production of The Prophet by the German theater in 1853 is considered in Got, Das
österreichische Theater, vol. 2, 534.
56. See EMTA, Jan. 4, 1886, 26–27; also Weitz, Lwowskie Perły, 30–33; and the many
memoirs published after the Second World War, discussed in Ther, War vs. Peace.
57. On Polish-Ukrainian relations in the Habsburg era, see Wandycz, The Poles in the
Habsburg Monarchy, 88–89; also Ther, War versus Peace, 252–57. On the ethnic con-
flicts and cleansing in the twentieth century see Mick, Kriegserfahrungen.