CHAPTER ELEVEN

Cultural Exchanges and Europeanization

Divergence and Convergence

On the surface, national opera traditions seem to have developed over the course of the nineteenth century by a process of divergence. In addition to the once universal genre of Italian opera and its slightly younger French offshoot, by around 1900, there was German, Russian, Czech, Polish, Hungarian, and Ukrainian opera. And the list could go on, to include the national opera traditions which emerged later on the periphery of the Russian Empire and in some western European countries.

Coincident with this divergence, however, is an element of convergence. Although tradition was “invented” at different times and in many different ways, the results were similar. As the examples of German, Polish, and Czech music theater have shown, discrete national opera traditions were created, which functioned as symbols of civilization to the outside world and as definers of identity to the native public. These traditions were based on “national” schools of music and a number of representative works with which each opera season could be opened.

As well as a large proportion of native operas, the standard central European repertoire included Italian and French and, in Prague and Lemberg, German imports. In Saxony, Czech, and Russian opera were welcome “newcomers.” Prague’s reception of Russian opera was especially enthusiastic and launched it further west. Despite the many differences between Dresden, Lemberg, and Prague, they had more in common with each other than with their Italian and French counterparts.

In Milan and Paris, repertoires were made up almost exclusively of Italian or French pieces, respectively. Until shortly before the turn of the century, the only international aspect of opera in these cities was the lively exchange between
them. The Palais Garnier in Paris presented mostly grand operas, especially works by Meyerbeer. But after France’s defeat by Prussia in 1870–71, it too fell under the spell of purposeful nationalism. Leading French composers formed the Société Nationale de Musique with the aim of promoting French music and an organic music scene to rival Germany’s. In the shadow of cultural protectionism and the conservativism it engendered, Paris slipped from its position as a leading opera center in Europe. Italy was, in broad terms, equally resistant to German opera, though with varying vehemence from town to town. While Bologna proved open to new influences, staging the first Lohengrin on Italian soil, in Milan’s La Scala there was rioting in response to the opera in 1873. But within the space of a generation, public curiosity won out, even in Milan and Paris. Lohengrin was staged again in Milan in 1888—this time without disturbances—and in the Palais Garnier in 1891. The French production was a posthumous triumph for Wagner, launching 50 reprises in the first six months after its premiere and a further 100 in the ensuing years. More Wagner operas soon followed on the stages of Paris: The Valkyrie in 1893, Tannhäuser in 1895, Tristan and Isolde in 1894, and finally the complete Ring cycle in 1909.

Other German and central European composers were eclipsed by Wagner’s tremendous fame. Not one Czech or Polish opera was staged in Paris before 1914, and Strauss was the only German opera composer to gain renown after Wagner. Russian opera found a somewhat more favorable response, partly thanks to the Franco-Russian alliance against Germany. The municipal Théâtre du Chatelet played a key role, taking on the first Russian operas in cooperation with the Ballets Russes on the eve of the First World War. Later, the first Parisian performance of The Bartered Bride was also politically motivated, given to mark the tenth anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia in 1928. Meanwhile, in Milan, Toscanini brought foreign influences into the repertoire, including Wagner and Strauss from 1898 and later also Russian operas.

It is a striking paradox that in those cities where musical nationalism thrived, repertoires were more broadly European. In Dresden, Prague, and Lemberg, Italian and French operas still filled at least 40 percent of the program around the turn of the century. In Dresden (which had much in common with Vienna), moreover, the remainder was not only made up of national works but also several Russian, Czech, and occasionally Polish works.

From the late 1880s, repertoires all over Europe became more international. Even Milan and Paris were no longer bastions of Italian and French opera. Curiously, national operas were crucial to the creation of international repertoires. Classifying works as foreign did not always imply disapproval, such as in Italy’s and France’s initial response to Wagner, but could also signify a form of recognition. By the 1890s, Europe was overcoming its phase of musical chauvinism.
A further important aspect of convergence was the increasing emphasis on “classics,” that is, pieces widely considered to be of timeless value and historical significance. In the early nineteenth century, while Mozart, Gluck, and Lully were acknowledged to have set standards in opera, their works still vied with new pieces for a place on performance schedules and, more often than not, lost the contest. But less innovation in opera in the latter half of the century made cultivating old repertoires a reliable alternative and simultaneously served to establish national traditions. Anniversaries provided a good opportunity to celebrate certain schools or composers, such as the one hundredth anniversary of the world premiere of *Don Giovanni*. Both the Czech National Theater and the New German Theater hosted Mozart cycles to mark this occasion and claim the composer as one of their own. While Schuch followed suit in Dresden, it took somewhat longer for London and New York to embrace composers like Mozart and Gluck. In the US, it was mainly Toscanini who vigorously promoted the opera classics.

A European ideal of civilization was at the heart of this body of classic works. Opera houses in ascendant cities mounted classics partly because it signified their aspirations and was perceived as a sign of cultural maturity. Few opportunities, on the other hand, were given to younger composers to present their work. Richard Strauss managed to get a short cycle of his works staged in Dresden in 1909, but this remained an exception. Such shows of respect were generally reserved for the very famous or, even better, deceased: Verdi in Italy, Wagner in Germany, and Smetana in Bohemia.

Gradually the balance tipped away from world premieres in favor of revivals of older pieces. While Dresden and Vienna were distinctly more focused on novelties for most of the nineteenth century, the public’s enduring love of Wagner—and Verdi in Vienna—ensured that the ratio of old to new works was approximately equal from about 1890. Similar trends emerged in Lemberg and Prague, where the number of first performances per season also dropped.

At the turn of the century, the standard central European repertoire consisted of two or three grand operas—usually Meyerbeer’s *The Prophet* and *The Huguenots*—a number of more recent French works such as *Faust* and *Carmen*, and some operas in the *verismo* style as well as some native national operas. Verdi and Wagner were absolutely obligatory. Every major opera theater had at least three or four operas by these most venerated composers in the repertoire.

Contemporary opera composers, meanwhile, found it increasingly difficult to break through to audiences. Conservative programming was, then, already causing problems in opera before the competition from moving pictures arose on the eve of World War I. The advent of cinema heralded a new segmentation in the entertainment sector. Cinemas eventually became the venue for sensational innovations, as opera theaters once had been, while opera assumed the mantle of sublime, high culture.
Mounting classics called for greater emphasis on production style and turned the public’s attention to stage directing, which came to be acknowledged as an aspect of stage art in its own right. Inspired by its drama section, the Czech National Theater was more willing to experiment with opera productions than the theaters in Dresden and Lemberg.

While performance language diversified, on a visual level, opera productions largely adhered to international norms. Dresden, Prague, Lemberg, and other central European opera theaters mostly used standardized views of mountain ranges, Mediterranean landscapes, medieval towns, castles, or royal banquet halls, as required. Exotic backgrounds, such as for *Aida* and *The Queen of Sheba* (set in the Orient) or *Lakme* (set in India) also followed standard models and were sometimes directly prescribed by the music publishers. Even the sets of national operas were virtually interchangeable. The productions of *Libuše* and *Lohengrin* in Prague’s National Theater in 1883 and 1885, respectively, featured late Gothic townscapes which were almost identical down to the smallest details, but only approximated the early and high medieval periods the operas were set in. Why were sets so alike? One reason is that so many of them were created by a few famous ateliers, the most famous being the Viennese studio of Brioschi, Burghart, and Kautsky, suppliers to the entire Habsburg Monarchy as well as several opera houses in the German Empire in the late nineteenth century.

Figure 16. European landscape by the studio Brioschi, Burghart, and Kautsky.
Local stage designers in Prague were commissioned to create the interior views of the royal chambers for the above-mentioned production of Libuše. They hung them with Balkan tapestries and clothed the main characters in what they imagined to resemble ancient Slavic robes. The result was a pan-Slavic potpourri of various ages and regions rather than an accurate representation of the architecture and clothing of the Přemyslid dynasty. But since no criticisms were recorded by the press, it appears that the public was either unaware of or unconcerned about the designs’ inauthenticity. Above all, stage sets and costumes had to be opulent and rich in detail to please the nineteenth-century public.¹³

In the early 1900s, Alfred Roller and associates in Vienna introduced a less ornate style of stage design. Under Gustav Mahler’s protective aegis, Roller developed abstract and symbolic designs for the royal opera.¹⁴ In Prague, fairy tale operas inspired similarly abstract stage sets. Although the Royal Opera in Dresden was innately more conservative, at the request of Richard Strauss, it commissioned Roller to design the sets for the world premiere of Der Rosenkavalier. But most performances remained what were known as “conductor productions” (Kapellmeister-Inszenierungen) with Schuch in Dresden and Kovařovic in Prague taking general responsibility for the sets as well as the directing. Being eminently more interested in the music than in the visual presentation, despite some cautious changes in imagery, they continued to adhere to the exaggerated realism of earlier set designs.

The rise of the classics added greater relevance to the distinction between opera and operetta. First emerging in Paris in the 1850s, operetta’s popularity rapidly spread throughout Europe. But its critics railed against the titillating plots and sexist dance interludes, unleashing a battle of polemics which continued for decades.¹⁵ Only the Dresden press remained compliant and uncritical, turning a blind eye to the occasional “comic opera” or “musical farce” (Gesangspossen) as they were euphemistically tagged. In Prague, however, operetta was banned from the repertoire of the National Theater from 1883 to 1888, and the Polish Theater in Lemberg was also purged of operetta in 1894.

The Czech and Polish press not only condemned operetta as immoral and decadent but also as foreign and Jewish. The composers Offenbach, Lehár, and Kálmán (who actually had Jewish roots) and even the Jewish public became the targets of their invective. In Lemberg, especially, local Jews were blamed for the popularity of operetta as journalists claimed a particularly large attendance of Jews when Offenbach’s and other light pieces were performed. Some commentators even attributed the alleged decline in taste and culture in general to Jewish influences. Eventually, however, the boycotts of operetta at the Polish Theater in Lemberg and the National Theater in Prague were lifted, not by the resident Jews, but in response to pressure from the middle-class public and to increase ticket sales.
Operetta also elicited xenophobic reactions in Berlin and, to an even greater extent, Vienna. Resistance toward operetta in tandem with greater respect for opera thus became a common characteristic of Central Europe as a cultural region. Although operetta could not be abolished, it could serve to more clearly define opera’s role as a sublime art which was not only entertaining but also edifying and educational. To contrast opera with operetta was to distinguish between highbrow and lowbrow music—categories which did not exist at the beginning of the nineteenth century. More than ever, attending the opera became a means of demonstrating one’s social distinction.

In its heyday, however, operetta represented an important artistic and financial building block for opera. Many soloists launched their careers performing lighter pieces, thus training their voices and gaining valuable experience without the strain of tackling challenging opera parts. Furthermore, including operetta in the program made more effective use of the orchestra and chorus. This was a crucial consideration especially for smaller theaters, such as Lemberg’s, in financing opera.

Operetta to some extent superseded spoken drama. Many patriotic plays, in particular, became irrelevant in the changed political context of the latter nineteenth century. Germany achieved unification in 1871, the Polish nobility in Galicia gained far-reaching rights of autonomy in 1867, and the Czechs continued their inexorable rise to becoming a modern, stratified society. As each country’s elites found their political demands increasingly fulfilled, they sought diversion rather than vindication in the theater. The success of operetta also attests to the Europeanization of audiences. Although the situations portrayed in Jacques Offenbach’s Parisian comedies and social satires barely resembled everyday life in Lemberg or Prague, the public attended them in droves, curious to experience the life of the metropolis that was otherwise so far away. After the show, the central European public could return to life at home, set apart from, but informed of the goings-on in the big city.

Operetta programs reflect audiences’ changing tastes. They show that around the turn of the century social and political topics fell out of fashion while pieces which explored emotional issues and psychological states became the vogue. The outstanding success of operas such as Salome by Richard Strauss is evidence of this.

Comparison of Dresden, Lemberg, Prague, and other opera cities such as Leipzig and Vienna reveals a convergence on several levels. At the start of the period explored here, repertoires were influenced by local trends and differed from region to region. Later, “Rossini fever” and the popularity of grand operas marked the development of a pan-European opera market. While the emergence of national opera initially led to divergence, after the 1890s, even operas in this genre were increasingly exchanged between countries. Finally, musical modernism affected opera in Dresden, Lemberg, and Prague nearly concurrently. Time
not only seemed to pass ever faster, contemporary observers noted, but the clocks of different countries and cities increasingly ticked synchronously.

Around the turn of the century, the programs of most opera theaters in Central Europe were based on a standard repertoire consisting of some native operas, a varying proportion of imported genres and a number of classics. There was also a convergence of visual presentations of opera and performance practice. As more emphasis was laid on plot subtleties, the practice of repeating arias became unacceptable and stage directing more important. Audiences, too, grew more alike in their habits as the tendency spread to concentrate solely on the music.

**Cultural Europeanization**

What explanation can be found for this convergence among opera theaters, despite the fact that they were differently organized, catered for distinct publics, and operated in different urban, regional, and national contexts? In the mid-nineteenth century, years might pass before a piece became known across Europe. After the turn of the century, however, works could be translated and exported within a matter of months. *Der Rosenkavalier* by Richard Strauss is a prime example. The Czech premiere in Prague was staged less than six weeks after the world premiere in Dresden.\(^{17}\) That same year, it was produced in Italian in Milan and in Hungarian in Budapest and the following season in Polish in Lemberg.

As well as scores and libretti, singers, conductors, and composers also circulated around Europe. In contrast to the eighteenth century, when the famous tours of the *castrati* visited Naples, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, and other capital cities, in the late nineteenth century, not only a handful of celebrities but countless performers traveled from theater to theater and to various parts of the continent. Thanks to improvements in rail travel and shipping, cities all over Europe and overseas could now be reached more safely and in immeasurably greater comfort. New means of communication allowed the opera market to extend rapidly beyond Europe. It became common for composers and conductors to accept short- or long-term temporary engagements, even on the other side of the Atlantic. Taking musical activities in the European colonies into account, opera around 1900 can be regarded as the first ever global music genre.\(^{18}\)

A new quality of exchange arose as whole ensembles engaged in touring. It was a guest performance by an Italian ensemble under Bernhard Pollini which gave the Dresden public its first opportunity in many years to hear Italian opera sung in Italian in 1872. The Royal Opera hired Ernst Schuch as conductor, who went on to refute the stereotypical German view of Verdi’s work as hurdy-gurdy music by giving the first performance of his *Messa da Requiem* in a Protestant German city.\(^{19}\) The guest performances by Angelo Neumann’s Traveling Richard Wagner Theater also had an enduring impact on the cultural history of Europe.\(^{20}\)
In the 1880s, Neumann’s theater introduced the *Ring* cycle to Bologna, Turin, Rome, St. Petersburg, and countless other central European cities. The time, effort and money invested to do this—a specially chartered train transported the stage sets and costumes of the first tour plus a cast of 134 in five carriages—was rewarded with receipts of up to 20,000 gold marks per evening. Equally, Smetana owed his discovery outside Bohemia to the National Theater’s appearance in Vienna in 1892. Designs for costumes and stage sets and, of course, scores were circulated even more.

Theater directors, stage directors, and dramaturges were frequent visitors to theaters in other countries. Šubert, director of the Prague National Theater, regularly traveled to Italy to see the latest operas and ballets. Attending world premieres in Vienna was one of the obligatory duties of a central European theater director. Musical pilgrimages to Bayreuth also became customary. The nineteenth century protagonists of music theater traveled more extensively across Europe, including Russia and Ukraine, than is common today.

While box office triumphs, styles, and fashions emerged mainly from Paris, Vienna, and Milan until World War I, singers often moved along an east-west trajectory. For a time, Polish singers were engaged in prominent roles in several Western European theaters. Tenor Jan Reszke (who was usually credited in programs as Jean de Reszke) sang Lohengrin in Paris to great acclaim in 1893 and went on to become as popular in New York as Enrico Caruso after him. In 1902, Salomea Kruszelnicka (Krushel’nits’ka, born in Galicia in 1873) was a sensation as Elsa at Milan’s *La Scala* and contributed to the success of Wagner operas under Toscanini. Polish and Czech singers performed in theaters in Vienna and all over the German Empire. Some of these stars, such as Emmy Destinn (Ema Destinnová), who often concealed their origins behind international pseudonyms, returned to their native countries toward the end of their careers, where they exerted a cosmopolitan influence on the local music scene.

Specialist music journals were also instrumental in forging links between the various opera cities. Even before the 1848 revolution, the *Wiener Allgemeine Theaterzeitung* and the Leipzig *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* each had a Europe-wide network of correspondents at their disposal. They published articles not only about Paris, Vienna, and the new metropolis Berlin, but also about such remote towns as Lemberg, creating a broadly European public which has hitherto been little researched. These two newspapers were explicitly aimed not only at musicians, composers, and other musical experts but also at a wider readership. They document the range of interests of the contemporary music public and hence their mental map of operatic Central Europe.

The specialist journals published in Dresden, Lemberg, and Prague provide insight into the changing processes of cultural exchange in the latter nineteenth century. While the music journal *Der Kunstwart*, for example, ran reports on
several European cities, coverage of developments in Paris and Vienna made up about half the correspondence. Surprisingly little space was devoted to Italy. While Bohemia, Poland, and Russia garnered no interest in the 1880s, in about 1890 the first news and reviews of Russian and Czech music began to appear. In 1895–96, the Bohemian capital was profiled in two articles on the “well-known musical city, Prague.” One year later, an in-depth review of the entire winter season in Prague was published. Czech and Russian opera had, then, become imprinted on the mental map of Saxony’s and Germany’s arts scene.

The Czechs’ musical orbit is best illustrated by the Czech music journal Dalibor. This weekly magazine, launched in 1879, was named after Smetana’s foremost dramatic work and Wagnerian in orientation. In contrast to Der Kunstwart, it ran correspondence from across Europe from its inception, not only covering Paris and Vienna but also all the major opera houses of the Russian Empire. Dalibor, too, reveals a striking shift in focus away from Paris and, within the German-speaking world, from Vienna to Berlin from the 1880s onward. By 1914, almost twice as many articles were published about Berlin than about the capital of the Austrian Empire.

Polish publications, by contrast, reported in depth from the various Polish Partitions and focused on the national arts scene. The same tendency could be observed in Germany, suggesting that big nations are more inclined toward introspection than small nations. Nevertheless, the Lemberg arts and music journals, most of which survived only a few years, and the Warsaw magazine Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne were supported by a considerable network of international correspondents and freelance contributors. They were more focused on musical life in Paris than Der Kunstwart or Dalibor. And their greater interest in Berlin than Vienna after 1900 was partly due to the fact that the composers of the Młoda Polska (“Young Poland”) group had all studied in Berlin. Simultaneously, Polish publications demonstrated a growing interest in Czech composers and writers.

The value of press sources is moderated by the personal bias of correspondents and editors which must always be factored in. In view of this, they cannot provide conclusive evidence of the interests of readers or opera publics. Nevertheless, certain patterns emerge from them. The most striking of these is the Europeanization of correspondence, which was more pronounced in Prague and Lemberg than in Dresden. Even, or perhaps especially, a relatively remote town such as Lemberg wished to be informed about the international music scene. In all three cities considered here, the daily press, too, covered a far broader range than is usual today.

Paris’s importance in the music and opera world diminished as Europe became increasingly multicentered and hence more pluralist in musical tastes and production choices. Reports on a steadily growing range of cities including
Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig, Milan, and St. Petersburg were now published. In view of this plurality, Christoph Charle’s comparison of Paris and Berlin leaves much of Europe’s cultural topography in the late nineteenth century aside.²⁷ New and internationally recognized opera cities emerged in this period. Through supply and demand in opera, a European market was formed which no longer centered round only one or two sources. It is therefore right to speak of a process of Europeanization (without any Euro-constructivism intended) in terms of structural convergence and discourses.

This market developed partly along exchange routes which were subsequently abandoned and forgotten during the Cold War. One important axis of exchange for works, styles, singers, and conductors ran from Hamburg via Leipzig and Dresden, Prague, and Vienna to Budapest. The conductors and composers Gustav Mahler and Arthur Nikisch and the impresarios Angelo Neumann and Bernhard Pollini were among those who moved along this axis. Many singers also worked in a succession of these cities. Czech soloists often began their careers in Prague before proceeding to Hamburg, Dresden, or Budapest and—ideally—arriving at Vienna’s court theater. Although less is known about the singers at the Dresden Royal Theater, records show that in 1889 and 1902, at least a quarter of the soloists came from the Habsburg Monarchy.²⁸

An arc of exchange also existed within the Austrian Empire, populated by many singers, musicians, and theater directors. It began in Ljubljana in Slovenia and stretched over Graz and Linz to Prague, Krakow, and Lemberg. In the nineteenth century, all these cities had German-language theaters run by private leaseholders. Franz Thomé was a typical impresario who made a career in theater along this arc. He directed the Skarbek Theater in Lemberg, the united theaters of Ljubljana, Trieste, and Klagenfurt, the municipal theater in Graz and, briefly, the Riga Theater before reviving Prague’s Estates Theater. His career is remarkable, not least for the range of locations it covered. Another interesting example is Wilhelm Jahn, a native Moravian who went on to become one of the Vienna court opera’s best-known directors of the nineteenth century. He first made his mark as an actor in Temesvar (Timișoara) and gained further theatrical experience in Amsterdam, at the Estates Theater in Prague and in Wiesbaden.²⁹ Jahn’s successor, Gustav Mahler, launched his career—after a stint as an operetta conductor in a spa resort—in Ljubljana. He subsequently worked in Olmütz, Kassel, Prague, Leipzig, Budapest, and Hamburg before finally taking his post at the Vienna court opera.

Some career trajectories ran all the way to the lower Danube. In the early nineteenth century, there were German-language theaters in Budapest, Transylvania, and, for a time, even in Bessarabia. Their heyday was in the run-up to the revolution of 1848, when German drama signified innovation and new departures. One of Thomé’s successors at the Estates Theater in Prague was Eduard Kreibig, whose family history reflects the breadth of this German-speaking
Chapter Eleven

theater landscape. Kreibig’s father was the founder of the German Theater in Bucarest and had also opened a German-language theater in Iassy, commissioned by a Romanian Boyar. Eduard gained stage experience as a young man in Kronstadt (Brașov), Hermannstadt (Sibiu) and Temesvar (Timișoara) before moving to Bohemia. These theaters in remote provinces provided the springboard for the careers of no few potential artists.

The German-language theater landscape described above soon disintegrated after the 1850s, when the various nationalities along the Danube had established independent linguistic standards and theater traditions and no longer relied on German. While German remained the language of culture for educated Jews in the region, it was vital to the majority populations in Bohemia, Galicia, Hungary, and Romania to assert their own languages. Under Metternich, German had become the language of oppression and many intellectuals in Lemberg, Budapest, Prague, and other multilingual cities avoided it as a consequence. The Austrian government’s support of German-language theaters in the neo-absolutist era—as an instrument of Germanization—made it all the more intolerable. The German theater in Krakow closed in 1867, in Lemberg five years later and in Budapest in 1889.

Beyond the German-dominated cultural sphere, there were other axes of communication. One ran from Krakow to Lemberg and Kiev, linked by the strong Ukrainian music culture can be traced along this route. The composer of what is today Ukraine’s national anthem, Mikhaylo Verbitskii (1815–1870), wrote twelve songs based on the drama Karpaccy górale by Józef Korzeniowski. The protagonists of this drama are the Gorals, familiar figures from the operas Halka and Manru, known as Verkhovyncy in Ukrainian. The overture from Moniuszko’s Halka was performed at the inauguration of the Ukrainian Theater in the Ruthenian national house (Narodnii Dim). Some years later, the entire opera was mounted there. This is just one illustration of the affinity between Ukrainian and Polish culture, both of which drew on the same source: the landscapes, social conflicts, and political problems of Galicia. As the Ukrainian national movement gained ground, converse cultural transfers also took place. Operas by Artymowski and Lysenko, for example, which were first performed in Kiev, were later performed in Lemberg by the Ukrainian Theater Society. Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian theaters also employed many musicians from Bohemia, indicating that further networks existed here.

Some arcs of exchange stretched right across the continent, beyond what is now the European Union’s eastern border. Around the turn of the century, for example, Lemberg and Barcelona were linked by one of the Galician capital’s leading conductors. Antoni Ribera had cofounded the local Associacó Wagneriana in his hometown Barcelona before leaving to work at the newly built theater in Lemberg. There, he conducted the first Polish production of The Ring.
of the Nibelung. After the First World War, he returned to Barcelona and joined the Teatru del Liceu, where he continued to focus on Wagner. The starting point of his very European career was a period in Leipzig, where he studied under Hugo Riemann in the 1890s. The Catalans also admired Czech music and theater and the exemplary role the Czechs played in cultural nation-building. Like the National Theater in Prague, Barcelona’s Palau de la Música Catalana, opened in 1908, was financed by public donations.

Bilateral cultural transfers were not the only form of exchange within the diverse networks spanning Europe. Crucially, over the course of the long nineteenth century, continuous and permanent contact between opera theaters was established, giving rise to the multilateral networks and cultural spaces described here. An analysis of these networks can shed light on the intensity of cultural interrelations and the reciprocity of appreciation and communication.

The central European network, encompassing Hamburg, Leipzig, Dresden, (and increasingly Berlin), Prague, Vienna, and Budapest, facilitated an extremely dynamic pace of cultural exchange. The Austrian arc and the lower Danube region lay to the south. Participating in one network did not rule out other reciprocal relations. Prague, for example, was involved in the Austrian, central European, and European networks. In contrast to nation-states and other territorially defined spatial units, such cultural spaces are not fixed constructs. They expand and contract geographically, with some links existing longer than others.

European societies in the late nineteenth century became familiarized with the whole continent through opera. This not only applies to the directors, singers, musicians, and composers who actually traveled across Europe, participating in cultural exchange of an interpersonal nature. The music-loving public also kept in touch with the latest developments in Paris, Vienna, and other cities via specialist magazines and the daily press. This constitutes a form of intertextual exchange. The producers and consumers of music could, then, gain impressions of Europe, its cultural values and centers, in a number of ways. In the late nineteenth century, even overseas cities were marked on this mental map, stretching concepts of European culture beyond a Eurocentric view. Cultural spaces could (and can) touch other parts of the world. The cultural Europeanization which took place in the nineteenth century went hand in hand with a process of globalization which is evidenced by the transfer of the institution and art of opera across the Atlantic.

This process of Europeanization took place on a structural and a discursive level. Opera culture spread across Europe in the course of the nineteenth century, becoming a common feature of European cities. A visitor to Barcelona, Zurich, Prague, or Kiev could be sure to find at least one prominent opera house in the city, with a repertoire of works which conformed to certain expectations and standards. One theater resembled the next, not only architecturally, but also in terms of repertoire. At the turn of the century, a music lover could travel right across
the continent to the Balkan states and the Caucasus and find familiar cultural elements in the furthest flung corners of Europe. Specialist magazines and literature on opera conveyed the operatic Europe to societies throughout the continent. Singers, musicians, critics, and composers gained supranational experiences through their travels. While the extent to which the growth of the opera scene in Europe actually engendered a European consciousness cannot be gauged, it can be asserted that the music culture of European cities bridged the boundaries created by states, encroaching industrialization, and cultural peculiarities. As a consequence, opera was increasingly perceived as a mark of European civilization, especially on Europe’s periphery and overseas.

Seen through the prism of opera, Europe takes on a different shape to the one familiar from political maps. It is subdivided into regions shaped by Italian opera and those which were home to repertoire theaters where music dramas were performed in the local language. Although the national differentiation of opera created new divisions, this “Europe of the opera” was cohesive in a way which is barely imaginable in today’s “unified” Europe. The agents and institutions of music communicated and interacted over long and short distances. Music networks can provide a basis for a mapping of European history that is independent of the territoriality of states. Borders charting territorial entities such as empires, nations, and regions are replaced by lines of communication. Like on a satellite image taken at night, state borders are barely visible. Instead, one sees the lights of the urban centers and the infrastructure linking them.

Despite the undeniable rivalry, opera theaters communicated values and aesthetic ideas which were more unifying than divisive, even via works which were initially sources of controversy, such as Wagner’s operas. Europe’s different nations came to know and appreciate each other in the opera with its specific traditions—no matter that they were invented. At the opera, audiences could experience diversity. To idealize this history of cultural exchange and networks would nevertheless be wrong. Cultural convergence was not welcomed by all. And musical nationalism could in some respects be interpreted as a defensive reaction to opera’s internationalism. It is this duality of communication and conflict that shaped the history of Central Europe, to which the focus will return after these excursions into European cultural history.

Central Europe as a Space of Opera

At first glance, it may seem that operatic stimulus flowed mostly from West to East. It is true that for many years Paris and Vienna set the trends in opera, influencing details of performance even after the turn of the century. But it would be wrong to assume that the relationship between center and periphery was one-sided, as Franco Moretti has suggested in his atlas of the European novel.
Nationalized opera originated in the former periphery and had an enduring impact on the old opera centers. Italian opera, especially, could no longer maintain its universal status, becoming just one national genre among many. This opened the door to Wagner’s (some felt, sinister) success and, by extension, that of German opera. Over time, more national traditions emerged—of Czech, Russian and the initially hampered Polish tradition of opera—which deliberately broke away from German music culture or adapted it in a specific way.37 Between 1815 and 1914, Europe’s cultural topography was, then, not only shaped by the traditional centers in Italy and France but also by what might be labeled the periphery, although the static nature of this term does not do justice to the interrelations between the old and new opera countries.

Poland had an old tradition of high culture. But several obstacles hindered the development of Polish opera: partition by Prussia, Austria and Russia and the oppression of the Polish population after 1830 and again after 1863 as well as institutional difficulties in Posen and Lemberg. This is a negative example of the relevance of the state to music cultures. Czech opera, by contrast, profited from Prague’s unambiguous status as the capital of Bohemia and the central role of the National Theater. Czech theater activists could concentrate almost all their efforts on one site.

The Czechs came to be regarded as paragons of cultural nation-building by the Austro-Slavs, Southern Slavs and Ukrainians. They had propelled a previously negligible opera culture to a position of importance. Czech opera’s rise to preeminence implicitly disproves the paradigms of progress still prevalent in the study of history and musicology. It shows that, if the bulk of the population could be mobilized, “newcomers” such as the Czechs could adapt international cultural forms and outshine traditional cultural nations like the Poles. “Small” nations could even be innovators, especially with respect to modernism, as a comparison of the National Theater and the Semper Opera in the 1890s shows. While German opera remained fixated on national mythology—another of Wagner’s legacies that proved so difficult to overcome—Prague’s composers and authors began experimenting with universal fairy tale material and lyric opera. The influence of art nouveau notwithstanding, one should not overstate the National Theater’s importance as a site of musical avant-gardism. Nor, indeed, is it helpful to revert to rigid time categories in music history or presume that any one place had a direct and steady influence on another. The crucial change that had occurred by the end of the nineteenth century was that Central Europe no longer had just one or two but several productive opera centers, which acknowledged and stimulated each other.

The network spanning Bohemia and Saxony, especially, facilitated an unsurpassed level of exchange. The Dresden Royal Theater’s best known tenor, Karel Burian, and ballet director Augustin Berger came from Prague. Dresden
music critic Ludwig Hartmann was a regular visitor to Prague, where he attended premieres, and Richard Batka, a leading correspondent for Der Kunstwart, came from Bohemia. The Royal Theater also maintained close links with Poland. Despite the deep political conflicts, even imperial Berlin became an important point of reference for Polish composers.

In addition to program similarities, it is this intensity of communication which legitimizes defining Central Europe as a cultural space. It should, however, not be envisaged as a closed container. All the opera theaters within this cultural space continued to look to Paris, receiving little attention in return. But the operas in Prague and Dresden, especially, profited enormously from the diverse influences arriving from Vienna, Italy, France, and Eastern Europe. Cultural transfers with these two cities were a pivotal factor in the emergence of modernism in art, not only in the operatic sphere but also in literature and painting, spearheaded by Kafka and the group of painters known as Die Brücke, respectively.

Prague itself was, moreover, a site of intense intercultural communication. The Czech and German theaters influenced and inspired each other despite their rivalry. In Lemberg, by contrast, the curtailing of cultural activity—by closing the German theater and marginalizing the Jewish population—also had a negative effect on local music theater. But around the turn of the century, Lemberg was in a similar position to Prague in the 1860s, as the rising Ukrainian national movement aspired to build its own national theater. Superficially, Dresden lacked this multinational aspect, although the city traditionally maintained close contact with Bohemia, Austria, France, and Poland.

Any idealization of Central Europe as a cultural space or rose-tinted nostalgia for its cultural heyday would, however, be misplaced. The mobilization of populations in support of public cultural institutions was accompanied by processes of ethnic division and exclusion. In Prague, this led to bitter frontlines being drawn between German and Czech culture. In Lemberg, the Polish intelligentsia and especially the press prevented the Jewish population from participating in the Polish Theater. Modern mass societies defined their rising numbers—and mobilized them for their cultural projects—by identifying those who did not belong. Even in the sphere of opera, where the universal language of music prevails, ethnic and social exclusivity played an increasingly important role.

In the course of cultural nation-building, the urban societies in Dresden, Prague and Lemberg became nationalized along with opera. To an extent, national cultures and opera traditions provided a defense against the outside world and supposed internal enemies. Anti-Semitism was especially virulent in Lemberg but also existed in Dresden and Prague. Modernity and cosmopolitanism—in fact, the very source of operatic life—came under attack. Some Galician intellectuals went even further than Richard Wagner in this respect. In 1893, actor-director Adolf Walewski, who ran the Polish Theater in Lemberg for some
months in 1900, responded to the success of operetta and Parisian comedies by writing: “Away! We shout with all our might, away with the gangrene of the West that only shows us festering Paris . . . Begone! Begone! Begone from the Polish courtyard, our public should call, our mothers and youth. Away with the French dross, muck, and filth!”

In the view of Walewski and many Czech and German music journalists, the antidote to these decadent influences from the West was to produce national dramas and operas with the aura of the authentic. An obsession developed with *Originalstücke*, as native pieces were termed in German, or *původní produkce* in Czech. Naming them such, commentators were implicitly contrasting their superiority with the inauthenticity and inferiority of imported or foreign pieces. But they also explicitly claimed that native music was earnest and profound and contained metaphysical qualities while foreign or Western music—that is, French and Italian—was merely melodious or sensationalist. The music press in Bohemia and Galicia disseminated such opinions, once expressed by Wagner, resulting in an increasing imbalance in the supply of operas in the late nineteenth century in Germany, Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary. Since native composers dealt mostly with earnest and heroic subject matter in the 1880s and 1890s, rarely creating comic operas, the public was offered predominantly *largo* music, stately and solemn. But if native music was coolly received, it was blamed on outsiders—the Italians, French, or Jews—who, to add insult to injury, wrote those hated operettas. An elitist attitude to culture endured throughout the interwar and post-war period in Central Europe and beyond. After World War I, musicals imported from the US replaced operettas as the subject of polemics and research, such as in Adorno’s elitist sociology of music.

Cultural nationalism eventually became an aesthetic impediment to native composers. The honeymoon period ended, in which it gave rise to public institutions and opera was communicated to new strata of society, and national music traditions began to rigidify, as the Prague National Theater’s rejection of Janáček illustrates.

National opera traditions were built in strict opposition to light entertainment and above all to operetta. Society’s increasing tendency to differentiate between art music and popular music reflected how entrenched its individual strata had become. Attempts to communicate opera to broader sections of society were partly successful, especially in Prague. But even here, opera eventually became associated with the bourgeoisie. The utopia of a society liberated from class differences in the theater or concert hall was ultimately abandoned. Opera became high culture in all respects.
Notes

1. On this concept, see the introduction in Hobsbawm and Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*.
2. On the repertoire at the Garnier opera, see Wolff, *L’opéra*, 26–216. In the *Opéra Comique*, too, the core repertoire was made up of a few French pieces. See Wolff, *Un demi-siècle*, 15–82.
7. On this concept, see *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe*, vol. 3, 289–304; here, with special reference to music, 292–93.
8. This was preceded by the Mozart renaissance at the Vienna court opera under Mahler. See Willnauer, *Gustav Mahler*, 47. In 1886, works by Mozart were performed on 23 nights at the Prague National Theater, (see AND, Annual Report 4 (1887): 3–11), much more than the European average.
10. In 1843, for example, there were six first performances and only one new production of a familiar piece. In 1895, by contrast, five works were reprised and five were new. See the relevant journals for 1843 and 1895. On the ratio of new pieces to reprises in the entire German-speaking world, see Langer, *Der Regisseur*, 51–52.
11. Reprises of familiar pieces distinctly outnumbered first performances in the National Theater in Prague.
12. On the changing concept of stage directing around the turn of the century, see Langer, *Der Regisseur*, 9, 50.
13. On the sets for Libuše, see Srba, *Jevištní výprava*.
17. See *Dalibor* 32, no. 16–17, Jan. 27, 1911.
18. See Toelle, *Der Duft*.
21. See Kesting, *Die großen Sänger*, vol. 1, 160–64; vol. 2, 705–707. This reference work makes a number of errors, however, concerning central and eastern European singers.
22. On the European readership of various publications see especially Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*.
24. See *Der Kunstwart* 1 and 2 (1886–87). This journal bore the subtitle *Rundschau über alle Gebiete des Schönen* (“Magazine for All Fields of the Aesthetic”). From 1894, it was printed in Munich with no obvious effect on the authorship or choice of articles.
26. See *Dalibor*, 8, 22, 23, 32.


29. For an overview of Jahn’s career, see *Jubiläumsausstellung*, 74–75.


35. Transfer history has also come to consider regional units of research. See Espagne, Middell, *Von der Elbe*; also Espagne, *Le creuset allemand*.


37. Mussorgsky, for example, wrote about German music: “In Germany we find the best and most convincing example of musical slavery, worship of conservatory wisdom and routine—music, beer, stinking cigars. If one were to force me (not in jest) to sing songs by Mendelssohn I would turn from a respectable person to a peasant oaf, lacking any social propriety.” Quoted in de la Motte-Haber, *Nationalstil*, 47.

38. Walewski, *Teatr u nas*, 32–33. Such tirades against French culture were not rare. See, for example, the description of Paris’s “leprous society” in “Teatr Lwowski,” *Gazeta Narodowa*, Feb. 13, 1889, 2. This article goes on to demand the censorship of operetta.