



Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2013
doi:10.1017/S1478570612000437

PIERPAOLO POLZONETTI

ITALIAN OPERA IN THE AGE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011

pp. xix + 376, ISBN 978 0 521 89708 2

Despite having recently attracted the attention of the *New York Times* (7 May 2012) for an older paper on Verdi ('Feasting and Fasting in Verdi's Operas', *Studi verdiani* 14 (1999), 69–106), Pierpaolo Polzonetti has here drawn on his core work on eighteenth-century music – his first book, *Tartini e la musica secondo natura* (Lucca: LIM, 2001), his co-editorship with Anthony R. DelDonna of *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), as well as various papers on Piccinni, Mozart and Haydn – to inform the preparation of his latest book. His title might surprise: at first sight 'Italian Opera' and 'the Age of the American Revolution' seem to have little in common. If Polzonetti proposed a historical account of the arrival of Italian opera in America, the reader would have been less surprised, but this book is not really interested in Italian opera in the New World: the geographical space explored remains old Europe. In fact, as he announces in the Introduction with the phrase 'The American Revolution through opera glasses' (2), Polzonetti attempts nothing less than the linking of American philosophical and political revolutionary debate with the European cultural milieu in general, and Italian opera in particular; such a challenge is not for the faint of heart.

The core repertory of Polzonetti's investigation includes fourteen operas based on American subjects and composed between 1768 and 1792 by Niccolò Piccinni, Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf, Valentino Fioravanti, Giuseppe Scarlatti, Pasquale Anfossi, Luigi Carusio, Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi, Giovanni Valentini, Giovanni Paisiello, Fiedrich Gestewitz and Giacomo Tritto. All are 'set in America and/or feature American characters from the territory corresponding to today's United States' (6). But the field of research was not limited to the fourteen operas mentioned. In fact, Polzonetti incorporates other related works, emphasizes comparisons between this restricted corpus and the whole repertory of *opere buffe* and, at the same time, pays special attention to the music of Haydn and of Mozart. Indeed, this wider context is as important as the core subject matter – perhaps even more so – to Polzonetti's overall approach.

As such it is not surprising that the book devotes chapters 1 and 2 to *Il mondo della luna*, a libretto by Carlo Goldoni set to music by both Galuppi (Venice, 1750) and Haydn (Eszterháza, 1777) as well as others. Although *Il mondo della luna* is not explicitly based on revolutionary subject matter, Polzonetti explains that 'the moon represents an imaginary place where utopia and revolution collide' (29). He goes on to examine the evolution of the symbolic meaning of the moon from the seventeenth-century sources for Goldoni's libretto (Nolant de Fatouville's *Arlequin empereur dans la lune*, 1684) to Haydn's version: the moon, seen as an impossible dystopia in Goldoni's work, had become a utopian representation by the time of the anonymously modified 1777 libretto; in the meantime, it also became a metaphor for America. Polzonetti subtly analyses Haydn's setting, focusing on the aria 'Ragion nell'alma siede' as a communication of Platonic political theory as absorbed by Haydn and by the Eszterháza court.

Another case study is *Montezuma* (chapter 3), performed in Berlin in 1755 and in 1771. The French libretto was written by Frederick the Great, translated by the Italian poet Giampiero Tagliazucchi and set to music by Carl Heinrich Graun. This work reflects Frederick's personality and cultural entourage. Francesco Algarotti, who maintained close relations with the Prussian king during the 1740s, described Montezuma as an ideal operatic subject in his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (Venice, 1755). A letter that Frederick wrote to the Italian polymath, also author of the socially progressive pamphlet *Il Newtonianismo per le dame* (Naples, 1737), suggests that the king chose the American subject independently (see *Oeuvres de Frédéric le Grand*, volume 18, ed. Johann D. E. Preuss (Berlin: Decker, 1851), 102, digitized as part of the *Works of Frederick the Great* project at the University of Trier; see <<http://friedrich.uni-trier.de/de/oeuvres/18/102/text>> (12 September 2012)). Polzonetti emphasizes the 'inverted exoticism' of Frederick's



Montezuma, in which Spanish savagery is set against the comparative civilization of the native population of Central America. The *ballo* in particular summarizes this opposition between the barbaric Spanish ('barbaric' from the Greek βάρβαρος, foreign) and the civilized Aztecs. Similar concepts of the 'Barbarians' and 'savage' were also discussed, incidentally, by Larry Wolff (*Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 284–331), whom Polzonetti does not mention.

In chapters 4 and 5 Polzonetti examines two of Piccinni's operas, *I napoletani in America* (Naples, 1768) and *L'americano* (Rome, 1772). As the titles of these chapters imply ('Cecchina Goes to America' and 'A Californian Goes to Europe'), the two operas propose a specular regard of America by Europeans (and vice versa). The differences are transcended by a common sensibility represented by the principal romantic entanglements in the two operas: Giacomina – a lower-class European of noble heart – and the American noble savage Zalmiro in *I napoletani*, and the simple shepherdess Silvia and the American savage Villotto in *L'americano*. In both cases, the love interests portray a universalist conception of human nature which is more important than cultural differences. Again Polzonetti chooses to analyse one particular aria from each opera ('Quell'anima innocente' from Act 1 Scene 7 of *I napoletani in America* and 'Per pietà Signora mia' from Act 1 Scene 9 of *L'americano*) in detail, here placing Piccinni's music in the context of the 'nature versus art' debate.

Nunziato Porta's libretto for *L'americano in Olanda* (Venice, 1778) and Giovanni Bertati's for *L'orfanella americana* (Venice, 1787), both set to music by Pasquale Anfossi, have previously been neglected by scholars despite the fact that both contain tragic *introduzioni* and finales similar to those in *Don Giovanni* (chapter 6, 'Americans in the Storm'). Polzonetti stresses the points of contact between Anfossi's operas and *Don Giovanni* (and also *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan tutte*), and his subtle observations contribute to our knowledge of Mozart.

The last two chapters of the book (chapter 7, 'The Good Quaker and His Slaves', and chapter 8, 'Quakers with Guns') explore an increasingly popular figure in late eighteenth-century opera, the Quaker. Ranieri Calzabigi was the first poet to introduce a Quaker character into an opera (*Amiti e Ontario*, set to music by Giuseppe Scarlatti and produced in Sleppe in 1772). As Polzonetti points out, 'the varied representation of American Quakers, even if we take into account only opera buffa, prevents us from identifying a single, cohesive "Quaker" stereotype. In fact, the essence of the operatic Quaker is precisely its novelty and eccentricity, the fluidity of its characterization from opera to opera and even within the same opera, and its ability to elude typical or traditional behaviors and social conformity' (229). *Amiti e Ontario* and the operas *Le gare generose* (Giuseppe Palomba/Giovanni Paisiello; Naples, 1786), *L'americana in Olanda* (Nunziato Porta/Pasquale Anfossi; Venice, 1778) and *La quakera spiritosa* (Giuseppe Palomba/Pietro Alessandro Guglielmi; Naples, 1783) all confirm that Quakers remained 'fluid characters'. Polzonetti focuses on Paisiello's *Le gare generose*, the libretto of which is an adaptation of *Amiti e Ontario*. The new text was considerably altered 'to serve different practical and ideological functions' (247); the plot is concerned largely with the new place occupied by financial transactions in a capitalist society (see Mary Hunter, 'Bourgeois Values in Opera Buffa in 1780s Vienna', in *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, ed. Mary Hunter and James Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 170–185). Furthermore, *Le gare generose* was again adapted for Vienna several months after the Neapolitan premiere, with Da Ponte probably in charge of the modifications. Chronologically very close, the Neapolitan and Viennese productions differ because of the different audience context; such local trends are illuminated by Polzonetti's analysis of the aria 'Deh Padron' and its Viennese replacement 'Perché volgi altrove il guardo', a rondò.

Mozart's ghost has been wandering through this book, and he appears once more in the epilogue ('Figaro's Transatlantic Crossings'). The author reminds the reader that Beaumarchais was a secret agent for Louis XVI (and Louis XV) and spread American revolutionary ideas. Polzonetti is convinced of the link between the most popular of Beaumarchais' characters, Figaro, and the Revolution; yet, crucially, 'the revolutionary ideology in *Le nozze di Figaro* is based on the American Revolution, not on revolutions that happened later in Europe' (330). While this suggestive idea of Polzonetti's is of obvious attraction from within the American



academic milieu, it unfortunately lacks proof. Replacing French Revolution with American Revolution does not alter the core of the problem: do *Le mariage de Figaro* firstly and *Le nozze* secondly emanate from any revolutionary ideology? A possible connection between these works, positively received by both the French and the Viennese courts, and the political context has yet to be demonstrated.

Nevertheless, Polzonetti's entire discussion is designed to lead the reader towards acceptance of his fundamental premise, that European cultural and political debates were influenced by American revolutionary ideas and, as a result, that Europe began to leave its hegemonic autarchy. Consequently, in order to understand Mozart and his world we must look well beyond the confines of Vienna. The operas Polzonetti examines thus form part of his proposed remedy against 'the "Roman syndrome" . . . caused by the pre-conception that Vienna, as the capital of the Holy Roman Empire, was the point of *emanation* for culture'; 'Thanks to its international appeal and mobility and to its stylistic dynamism, Italian opera in the age of the American Revolution became part of and contributed to the formation of Atlantic culture, paving the way to globalism' (330).

Polzonetti does not try to propose his corpus of works on American subjects as propaganda operas. He situates the operas studied in a larger context including philosophy, literature, politics and fine arts, and uses 'eclectic' methods, as he says (6), to explore the entire 'hyper-system' of the eighteenth century. He has been able to gather together numerous primary musical sources, and throws light on these textual materials thanks to a wide range of contextual documents (and vice versa). This mirror effect between opera and ambient reality, and the various and rich sources used, makes Polzonetti's investigation fascinating, even if his explanation of Mozart is not always convincing. Some may also regret that the discussion considers France to have been of secondary importance: Polzonetti stresses the role of the *philosophes* (Voltaire, Rousseau and Marmontel) and the writers, but he should have paid more attention to music too, especially in relation to two of its major topics (firstly the 'savage' and exoticism in general, frequently exploited by the *opéra-ballet*, and secondly the storm, a popular French opera topic from Marin Marais onwards). He would have found a good example of 'inverted exoticism', for example, in the *entrée* of Rameau's *Les Indes galantes*, entitled 'Les sauvages'. These observations aside, Polzonetti's book remains a stimulating contribution to our understanding of eighteenth-century music and of the wider musical and political contexts from which core canonic works emerged.

ALESSANDRO DI PROFIO
 <di.profio@univ-tours.fr>



Eighteenth-Century Music © Cambridge University Press, 2013
 doi:10.1017/S1478570612000449

STEPHEN RUMPH
MOZART AND ENLIGHTENMENT SEMIOTICS
 Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012
 pp. xvi + 265, ISBN 978 0 520 26086 3

The Enlightenment project was vast and multifarious. Although the concept of the Enlightenment did not become a generic tag until the time of the French Revolution, it was the product of decades-long developments in philosophy, economics, politics, aesthetics and epistemology fanning out across Europe from France (Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); see in particular chapters 1 and 2). Stephen Rumph here traces how music during this period, and Mozart's music specifically, resonated with these broader intellectual and societal currents, especially in the shifts registered narratologically in the movement from imitation to expression. His is a daunting task, yet one he accomplishes admirably. Anyone wishing to understand musical developments across the eighteenth