

## Canadian University Music Review Revue de musique des universités canadiennes

David Kimbell. *Italian Opera. National Traditions of Opera, no. 2.* General editor: John Warrack. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xviii, 684 pp. ISBN 0-521-46643-1 (softcover)

Paul F. Rice

Volume 17, numéro 2, 1997

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1014795ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014795ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

Canadian University Music Society / Société de musique des universités canadiennes

### ISSN

0710-0353 (imprimé)

2291-2436 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Rice, P. F. (1997). Compte rendu de [David Kimbell. *Italian Opera. National Traditions of Opera, no. 2.* General editor: John Warrack. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xviii, 684 pp. ISBN 0-521-46643-1 (softcover)]. *Canadian University Music Review / Revue de musique des universités canadiennes*, 17(2), 112–115. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1014795ar>

he does makes some interesting points about the bittersweet endings of many great comedies, like *Le nozze di Figaro* or *Così fan tutte*).

Beckett's second chapter, "*Die Meistersinger*: naïve or sentimental art?," interprets *Die Meistersinger* as a "secondary epic," a largely sentimental, reflective, and reflexive work. Although she does clearly allude to Schiller's use of *sentimentalisch*, she is never quite clear about its opposite, naïve, although it is employed in the chapter's title.<sup>9</sup> This view of the work as a secondary epic is paralleled with Carl Dahlhaus's idea of "secondary diatonicism," and the phenomenal songs (that is, those sections of the work heard as music by the fictional characters on stage — Walter's songs, for example) of the work are examined in some detail. Towards the end of the chapter, she tries to recuperate aspects of the naïve into her interpretation, so that *Die Meistersinger* is seen, finally, as a synthesis of both, but her reluctance to define "naïve" makes this critical move rather hard to accept, since until the final two pages she has been primarily concerned with the sentimental.

As already noted, there is very little mention about the anti-Semitic content of the work: Millington's work is nowhere cited, and the possible implications of modelling Beckmesser after Eduard Hanslick are not explored. The handbook is also reticent about the work's later history in the Third Reich. In fact, Patrick Carnegy's interesting chapter on the stage history of *Die Meistersinger* is the only one to mention it in any detail. Warrack's reluctance to explore the issue of anti-Semitism and his resistance to a critical interpretation of the work which encompasses the intervening 130-some years are disappointing. It may be symptomatic of the overall old-fashionedness of approach that the bibliography is not current; it omits both Ray Komow's award-winning dissertation on Wagner's sketches and drafts for the work, and William Kinderman's recent article on the *Schusterlied*.<sup>10</sup>

Stephen McClatchie

David Kimbell. *Italian Opera*. National Traditions of Opera, no. 2. General editor: John Warrack. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. xviii, 684 pp. ISBN 0-521-46643-1 (softcover).

Nearly four years after its initial release in hardcover, David Kimbell's imposing study on the traditions of Italian opera has now been released in paperback. This fact alone represents something of an accomplishment for its publisher, especially given the bulk of the book. Although its contents remain unchanged, the publisher has requested a series of new reviews. What follows, then, represents some philosophical musings concerning a book which may already be familiar to some readers.

<sup>9</sup>Nor does she actually give a source for Schiller's distinction, which may be found in his "On Naive and Sentimental Poetry" (*Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* [1795]), translated by Julius A. Elias (New York: Ungar, 1966).

<sup>10</sup>Ray Komow, "The Genesis and Tone of 'Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg'" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1991); William Kinderman, "Hans Sachs's 'Cobbler's Song,' *Tristan*, and the 'Bitter Cry of the Resigned Man'," *Journal of Musicological Research* 13 (1993): 161–84. Komow's research won a prestigious AMS-50 Fellowship from the American Musicological Society.

The stated aims of this series devoted to *National Traditions of Opera* is to study the development of opera in various European countries. The first volume of the series investigated the traditions of Czech opera, and subsequent volumes will cover those of France, Russia, and Germany. One wonders if the scope of the series will ever be extended to include Great Britain and North America. Certainly, it would be valuable to have non-continental traditions of opera explored in such depth as well. Each author in the series has been given great latitude in approaching the selection and organization of the material to be examined, as long as the result shows "the manner in which each country's opera has reflected its character, history and culture" (p. iii).

One can appreciate that the task facing Kimbell was daunting given the long and rich traditions of Italian opera. Even in a book of over seven hundred pages, it would be difficult to survey nearly four hundred years of Italian opera in close detail. The author's response to this problem was to largely restrict his study to opera on the Italian peninsula. Thus, this book is not about Italian opera in general, but about opera in Italy. The difference is significant. Kimbell states that composers such as Handel working in London and Mozart working Vienna had little impact on the operatic practices of Italy. As a result, their music is mentioned only in passing in his narrative. Furthermore, the book ends with Puccini, thus eliminating three-quarters of the present century's history of opera in Italy. Had Kimbell been more consistent in his approach, I would have greater sympathy for his first editorial decision. Of the second, his comment that "it is difficult to feel that anything that could properly be described as an Italian operatic tradition survived much beyond the First World War" rings rather hollow (p. xiv). If the book is really about the development of opera on the Italian peninsula, how then can one arbitrarily impose closure when the genre continues to flourish there?

The book is divided into six major sections: "The Origins of Opera," "The Venetian Hegemony," "*Opera seria*," "The Tradition of Comedy," "Romantic Opera," and "Cosmopolitanism and Decadence." Each of the resulting thirty-two chapters is further sub-divided and clearly labelled. This is a real service to the reader for it enables specific topics to be located easily within the chapters. It would have been an even greater service, however, if the Table of Contents had included these subheadings. A further benefit is the use of parenthetical citations, which has greatly reduced the number of endnotes in the book. Indeed, one might wish for a greater use of such citations, for Kimbell has largely restricted their use to direct quotes. Following the narrative text, Kimbell wisely includes ten pages of *Personalia* (pp. 635–45). Here, names, birth and death dates, and capsule commentaries are provided for performers and composers who figure in the text. This is of particular help when searching for information concerning minor figures. An extensive bibliography is included in the volume which is organized in an author/date system so as to facilitate the use of the parenthetical citations (pp. 658–72). The omission of any publication data, however, is regrettable. Furthermore, if dissertation materials do figure in this bibliography, they cannot be distinguished from published sources.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> It does not appear that dissertations were consulted. For example, while Gordana Lazarevich's

The author cast his research net widely, and he has been successful in bringing the full range of the operatic experience to life. In addition to the expected discussion of musical matters, Kimbell examines such issues as censorship, the orchestra, administration, theatre design, set design, acting and singing, libretto construction, life in the company, repertoire, etc. There may be little that is new here, but it is gratifying to see in one volume the wide range of topics that has been examined. Nor are musical matters given short shrift, and the publisher is to be congratulated for permitting the many music examples in piano/vocal score to be incorporated in the text. The choice of which music to be examined has been restricted to “operas that are — as far as possible — accessible in score and/or recording, and which have shown a lasting vitality in theatre performances” (p. xiv). This is a defensible decision, especially when a general readership is necessary to boost sales of books. Scholars, however, may wish that some less well-trodden paths had been explored as well. Within the stated limitation, however, the examples have been well chosen and are relevant to the narrative. Some of these examples are quite extended, and all are presented in a size large enough to be read easily. One might only wish that there had been greater consistency in the use of instrumental designations in the piano accompaniments.

I believe that the book’s greatest strengths rest in the chapters dealing with the seventeenth century and the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century (constituting almost four hundred pages of text). Although the exclusion of Handel and Mozart from the discussion will upset some, it can hardly be said that there is a dearth of information about the works of these particular composers.<sup>2</sup> The subsequent chapters, however, suffer more from the editorial decisions about what materials to include and exclude. While it is gratifying to see the extended references in the index to the works of Paisiello, Pergolesi, and Mercadante — composers whose works are not encountered on a regular basis in opera houses today — the single, passing reference to Sacchini (in a quotation) and the complete lack of any mention of Cherubini must surely be anomalous.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, there appears to be a whole generation of Italian operatic composers whose music and influence is under-represented in this book. These are the composers who followed Gluck to Paris during the reign of Louis XVI. The works of such composers came to dominate the repertoire of the Paris Opéra during the late years of the *ancien régime* and its aftermath.

While it is true that such composers spent significant parts of their careers off the Italian peninsula, their music was heard there and it had a significant impact on the development of Italian opera in the nineteenth century. To omit serious discussion of this repertoire not only further restricts the scope of the

---

1971 article on the Neapolitan intermezzo is cited, there is no mention of either her dissertation or her published editions of intermezzi.

<sup>2</sup>The same may not be true in the case of other composers whose work was primarily centred off the Italian peninsula.

<sup>3</sup>While it is true that Cherubini’s later works do not appear to have been known in Italy, he did compose Italian operas (such as the 1788 *Ifigenia in Aulide*) which were played in different centres in Italy. The omission of Sacchini in Kimbell’s commentary is even more puzzling. Sacchini’s Italian operas were well known in Italy, and continued to be performed there until the end of the century.

book, but it also obscures the lines of influence that resulted from the cross fertilization of French and Italian traditions. For example, the Neapolitan impresario Domenico Barbaia introduced Italian versions of Spontini's *La vestale* (1807) in 1811 and Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* (1774) in 1812. Such was the success of these offerings that when, in 1813, Barbaia offered a contract to Johann Simon Mayr for a new opera on the Medea legend, it stipulated that "the work should be composed in 'the French manner,' which all of us have taken as our model."<sup>4</sup> Thus, I perceive a rather serious lacuna in Kimbell's history of the genre when he attempts to pass from the works of Paisiello to those of Rossini without assessing the influence of the intervening generation of composers simply because they were not resident in Italy.

In spite of the *caveats* raised above, I believe that Kimbell's study has much to recommend it to both the general and specialist reader, especially since Kimbell's prose is both insightful and entertaining. The book will prove to be useful to university students, although it will need to be supplemented in the areas discussed above. Perhaps the problems of the book could have been avoided had the publisher allowed its author the opportunity to undertake the study in two volumes. Certainly, its scope would have warranted such an expansion into two volumes, even if the rest of the series was restricted to single-volume studies. I hope that Cambridge University Press will give this idea careful consideration. It would be possible then to present a study which could truly embrace all aspects of Italian opera.

Paul F. Rice

Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre. *Jean Vallerand et la vie musicale du Québec, 1915–1994*. Montréal : Éditions du Méridien, 1996. 109 p. ISBN 2-89415-170-5.

C'est un fait notoire qu'il existe extrêmement peu de monographies consacrées aux compositeurs québécois récents. Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre contribue à rendre accessible une tranche d'histoire musicale du Québec par cet ouvrage où elle nous introduit à l'une de ses figures importantes, Jean Vallerand. Ce dernier a étudié la composition auprès de Claude Champagne, mais sa formation est avant tout journalistique et littéraire. Il a mené une importante carrière de critique, entre autres aux quotidiens *Le Canada*, *Montréal-Matin*, *Le Devoir*, *Nouveau Journal* et *La Presse*. Ce compositeur a également été conférencier, écrivain et animateur radiophonique. Parallèlement, il a occupé divers postes d'administrateur, dont celui de secrétaire général du Conservatoire de musique et d'art dramatique du Québec à Montréal et conseiller culturel auprès de la Délégation générale du Québec à Paris. Il a été professeur d'orchestration au Conservatoire de musique du Québec à Montréal, d'histoire et d'orchestration à la Faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal, en plus d'avoir dirigé

---

<sup>4</sup>Heinrich Bauer, trans. Newell Jenkins and S.W. Bennett, notes accompanying the recording of Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* (Vanguard VCS-10087/8/9).