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978-1-107-00426-9 - Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century

Karen Henson

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OPERA ACTS

Opera Acts explores a wealth of new historical material about singers in the late nineteenth century and challenges the idea that this was a period of decline for the opera singer. In detailed case studies of four figures – the late Verdi baritone Victor Maurel; Bizet’s first Carmen, Célestine Galli-Marié; Massenet’s muse of the 1880s and ’90s, Sibyl Sanderson; and the early Wagner star Jean de Reszke – Karen Henson argues that singers in the late nineteenth century continued to be important, but in ways that were not conventionally “vocal.” Instead they enjoyed a freedom and creativity based on their ability to express text, act and communicate physically, and exploit the era’s media. By these and other means, singers played a crucial role in the creation of opera up to the end of the nineteenth century.

KAREN HENSON is Associate Professor at the Frost School of Music, University of Miami. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century opera, singers and opera performance, and opera and technology. She trained at the University of Oxford and in Paris, and her work has been supported by fellowships and awards from The British Academy, the Stanford Humanities Center, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University. She has been a regular guest speaker for the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, and the BBC.

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for my parents, Pat and Ray Henson, and for Roger

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quel plaisir d'être . . . joué . . . c'est là, notre récompense

Jules Massenet

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NOTE AND ABBREVIATIONS

In this book I explore the voices and performance styles of four singers and eight “Supporting cast” members active in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Although these singers would have heard of the new technology of sound recording when it was first invented in 1877, most were too old to take advantage of it when it began to be exploited for opera, in the early 1900s. The important sources for these singers are therefore what music historians sometimes describe as “silent”: written accounts of performances in newspapers and reviews and visual, and in particular photographic, representations. *Opera Acts* draws above all on the at times slightly opaque and at times simply poor-quality writing of the late nineteenth-century press. I have tried in the main body of the book to translate this writing as idiomatically as possible and to provide ample original-language material. Where necessary, I have also emended modern translations.

Working on singers in any period requires a degree of archival excavation, and I have been fortunate enough to be able to work with materials at a range of libraries and archives, the abbreviations for which (along with abbreviations for the very regularly cited secondary sources) are below. In order not to clutter the text, I have provided only dates of birth and death for the four main singers and the Supporting cast. All websites were consulted on or before January 1, 2013.

Busch, <i>Falstaff</i>	<i>Verdi's "Falstaff" in Letters and Contemporary Reviews</i> , ed. and trans. Hans Busch (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997)
Busch, <i>Otello</i>	<i>Verdi's "Otello" and "Simon Boccanegra" (Revised Version) in Letters and Documents</i> , ed. and trans. Hans Busch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 2 vols.
F-Pan	Archives nationales, Paris
F-Pbh	Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris
F-Pn Estampes	Département des Estampes et de la Photographie, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
F-Pn Musique	Département de la Musique, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
F-Pn Spectacles	Département des Arts du Spectacle, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
F-Po	Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra, Paris

GB-Lv Theatre	Theatre and Performance Collections, Victoria & Albert Museum Archives, London
GMO	Grove Music Online at www.oxfordmusiconline.com : includes entries on singers from <i>The Grove Book of Opera Singers</i> , ed. Laura Macy (Oxford University Press, 2008), <i>The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians</i> , ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (2nd edn., London: Macmillan, 2001), and <i>The New Grove Dictionary of Opera</i> , ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992)
GSL	K. J. Kutsch and Leo Riemens, with Hansjörg Rost, <i>Großes Sängerlexikon</i> (4th revised and enlarged edn., Munich: K.G. Saur, 2012), 7 vols.
PW	<i>Richard Wagner's Prose Works</i> , ed. and trans. William Ashton Ellis (2nd edn., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892–9), 8 vols.
US-AUS	Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin
US-NH HSR	The Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Laurence C. Witten II, Yale Collection of Historical Sound Recordings, Yale Music Library, Yale University
US-NYmo	The Metropolitan Opera Archives
US-NYp	The Music Division, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
US-NYpm	The Morgan Library & Museum, New York
US-NYpr	Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts
US-SFpalm	San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum
Wright, <i>Carmen</i>	<i>Georges Bizet, "Carmen": Dossier de presse parisienne (1875)</i> , ed. Lesley Wright (Weinsberg: Lucie Galland, 2001)