1 | Staging manuals and the public

> The audience is not so much a mere congregation of people as a body of thought and desire. It does not exist before the play but is *initiated* or *precipitated* by it; it is not an entity to begin with but a consciousness constructed. The audience is what *happens* when, performing the signs and passwords of a play, something postulates itself and unfolds in response. That is a matter of subjectivity but also of historical process.[1]

OPERA MEDIATIZED

> As a starting point for this exploration I propose that historically the live is actually an effect of mediatization, not the other way around. It was the development of recording technologies that made it possible to perceive existing representations as "live." . . . Far from being encroached upon, contaminated, or threatened by mediation, live performance is always already inscribed with traces of the possibility of technical mediation (i.e., mediatization) that defines it as live.[2]

If read in relation to today's widespread dissemination of opera via digital technology (from video streaming to HD live broadcast, and the already obsolete DVD), Auslander's reflection has the undoubted merit of freeing these fruitions from the stain of preempted aesthetic experiences, of mere second-hand thrills for opera collectors. More than that, in my view, it forces opera scholars and viewers to look back at live performance not (only) as an original experience of presence but as an effect of digital audio-visual technologies that leave multiple traces on the performance – from the camera-ready acting and set design, to singing techniques and sound design. And yet, Auslander's repeated appeals for the emancipation of the mediatized from the "live" might be carried further. His argument programmatically coalesces mediatization with technology of reproduction, as if the former was instantiated only by recording devices. Conversely, the realm of the "live," no matter how tainted by "technical mediation," is defined by opposition to reproduction technology, and thus in its pristine promise of directness, of pure experiential presence. This book starts from the assumption that there is no such thing as unmediatedness on the stage, and even less on the opera stage.[3] At a most basic level, for instance, it is well known that

[1] Herbert Blau, *The Audience* (Baltimore, 1990), 25.
[2] Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd edn. (London, 2008), 56.
[3] Thus the reclamation of unmediated live performance cannot be but a statement of poetics, a manifesto of a certain kind of theatre or performance art, an historically and culturally specific experiment aimed at effacing the semiotics of the stage. The obvious example is the theatre of resistance and subversion advocated by Peggy Phelan and discussed by Auslander immediately after the passage quoted above.

opera theatres for over four hundred years have been consistently predisposed to adopt new techniques and technologies, on and off stage (stage machineries and lighting devices, theatre acoustics and orchestra sound, to name a few). More than that, medium in opera can be historicized as a function acquired by many of opera's forms and devices (for instance singing technique and perspective painting, or even the cabaletta and *da capo* form). However, rather than settling for the generalizing claim that opera is always already "technically mediated," even before or without being enmeshed with reproduction technologies, this book more specifically argues that a group of works produced in Italy at the turn of the twentieth century bring to the fore the very issue of the medium of opera. In relation to this specific historical juncture therefore opera is mediatized insofar as the adoption of ambitious techniques and devices, both theatrical and musical, coincides with a reflection on their communicative and aesthetic powers.[4]

The sample discussed here of four operas and a silent film manifests similar concerns for their medial status and consequently for their capacity to engage with the audience and to participate in a broader movement of industrialization of culture. They foreground by different means the attempt to redefine their own capacity to affect by calling into question the interaction of music and acting, viewing and narrative unity, stagecraft and seeing the invisible, or the performative power of music (by an opera composer) when associated with an imagetrack. Symptomatic of these concerns for medium is the contemporary output of staging manuals, the *disposizioni sceniche*, booklets of instructions for the *mise-en-scène* printed by the publishing house Ricordi during the second half of the nineteenth century.[5] The following pages outline the way in which these documents are

See Peggy Phelan, "The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction," in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London, 1996).

Relevant to the present claim is a discussion of mediation in the context of theatre studies: Roger Copeland, "The Presence of Mediation," *The Drama Review* 34/4 (1990), 28–44; now reprinted in *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literature and Cultural Studies*, Philip Auslander, ed., vol. IV (London, 2003), 306–22.

[4] In recent research in communication and media studies the term "mediatization" has been amply defined. One of the most influential theorizations is that of Friedrich Krotz, who speaks of mediatization "as a historical ongoing, long-term process in which more and more media emerge and are institutionalized. *Mediatization* describes the process whereby communication refers to media and uses media so that media in the long run increasingly become relevant for the social construction of everyday life, society, and culture as a whole"; Friedrich Krotz, "Mediatization: A Concept with which to Grasp Media and Societal Change," in *Mediatization: Concepts, Changes, Consequences*, Knut Lundby, ed. (New York, 2009), 21–40, here 24.

[5] For a list of most of the existing *disposizioni* see Michaela Peterseil, "Die 'Disposizioni sceniche' des Verlags Ricordi: ihre Publikation und Ihr Zielpublikum," *Studi verdiani* 12 (1997), 133–55. The series was inaugurated in 1856 by Verdi's *Giovanna de Guzman* (a censored version of *Les Vêpres siciliennes*), and seven of the existing *disposizioni sceniche* are for Verdi's operas: *Un ballo in maschera*, 1859; *La forza del destino*, 1863; *Don Carlo*, 1867 and 1886; *Aida*, 1873; *Simon Boccanegra*, 1883; *Otello*, 1888. These sources were rediscovered in the late 1960s by David Rosen; see David Rosen, "The Staging of Verdi's Operas: An Introduction to the Ricordi *Disposizioni sceniche*," in *International Musicological Society, Report of the Twelfth Congress, Berkeley, 1977*, Daniel Heartz and Bonnie Wade, eds. (Kassel, 1981), 444–53; and

connected to larger changes in the production of culture, changes related to a new role of the publisher who acts as intermediary between the composer and the public.

Similarly to the Parisian *livrets de mise en scène*, a long-running and larger series of instruction booklets printed in Paris, the *disposizioni sceniche* were meant to be rented or sold by the publisher to opera houses together with the score and the orchestral parts, thereby providing guidelines for the operas' subsequent stagings.[6] They consist, in general, of a combination of diagrams and verbal descriptions, the former to illustrate the organization of stage space, position of props, wings and backdrops, and the movement of the actors. The more or less extensive verbal commentaries explain the diagrams, specifying the temporal order of events, coordinating the actors' entrances, exits, and gestures, as well as mapping the time of the stage action onto the time of the music by explicit references to the score, or more often, to the sung text. Occasionally, these sections directly address the singers with instructions about their character's emotions and motivations, and how to render them through gesture, facial expression, and tone of voice. The status of these manuals is therefore rather complex: placed between the traditional operatic text (score and libretto) and its performance, they are both descriptions of a performance and prescriptions for subsequent ones. Accordingly these texts have been discussed for their way of delimiting the opera text – for example in relation to critical editions – and questioned for their authority over contemporary stagings – thus for their usefulness to generate stage renditions of the operas.[7]

It is their appearance and above all the commercial enterprise of compiling and printing these booklets that in my view deserve attention, in that they signal the mutated conditions of opera production and performance within a more complex cultural market. As intermediaries between the author(s) and subsequent performances, these manuals allow opera to approximate an autonomous product, a reproducible

David Rosen, "La disposizione scenica per il *Ballo in maschera* di Verdi. Studio critico," in *"Un ballo in maschera" di Giuseppe Verdi*, David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi, eds. (Milan, 2002).

[6] For a survey of the French stage manuals, see H. Robert Cohen and Marie-Odile Gigou, *Cent Ans de mise en scène lyrique en France (env. 1830–1930)* (New York, 1986); H. Robert Cohen, "A Survey of French Sources for the Staging of Verdi's Operas: *Livrets de mise en scène*, Annotated Scores and Annotated Libretti in Two Parisian Collections," *Studi verdiani* 3 (1985), 11–44; *livrets* in facsimile are published in two volumes edited by H. Robert Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières* (Stuyvesant, 1990) and *The Original Staging Manuals for Ten Parisian Operatic Premières, 1824–1843* (Stuyvesant, 1998). For a discussion of the textual status of the French stage manuals, see Roger Parker, "Reading the *Livrets*, or the Chimera of 'Authentic' Staging," in *Leonora's Last Act* (Princeton, 1997), 126–48.

[7] See the essays collected in the volume *Verdi in Performance*, and especially: James Hepokoski's "Staging Verdi's Operas: The Single, 'Correct' Performance," and David Rosen, "On Staging that Matters," in *Verdi in Performance*, Alison Latham and Roger Parker, eds. (Oxford, 2001). Some of the manuals have been reprinted by Ricordi with the addition of critical commentaries: Verdi's *Otello*, James Hepokoski and Mercedes Viale Ferrero, eds. (Milan, 1990); *Simon Boccanegra*, Marcello Conati and Natalia Grilli, eds. (Milan, 1993); and *Un ballo in maschera*, David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi, eds. (Milan, 2002); and Arrigo Boito's *Mefistofele*, William Ashbrook and Gerardo Guccini, eds. (Milan, 1998). See also Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago, 2006), 450–61.

commodity. Thus on the one hand they supplement the opera texts with a guide for reenactment that is validated by the composer and by the rest of the creative team – that is to say, they add the stamp of conformity to authorial vision in the way of surplus value. On the other hand, the manuals supposedly allow for these opera texts to become independent of the author(s), to travel on their own while still carrying the composer's imprint. For instance, the title pages of the *disposizioni sceniche* for Verdi operas published in the 1880s (*Simon Boccanegra*, *Otello*) immediately after the title and composer's name specify that they are "compiled and arranged by Giulio Ricordi according to the staging of La Scala theatre" – that is, a staging overseen by the composer.[8] The publisher was the one to take responsibility for the notation, transmission, and dissemination of the authorial project, shaping the cultural and commercial enterprise in terms of originality of poetic vision. By supplementing the scores and librettos with these instruction booklets Casa Ricordi presented on the market an all-inclusive product branded with its own promise of authenticity: scores and parts could travel far and wide and still deliver the effect of proximity to their creator, the effect of coming from a single artistic agency.

By the 1880s, through the leadership of Tito Ricordi and then of his son Giulio, Casa Ricordi had acquired extraordinary influence over the European opera market and the Italian publishing industry, and it had become a powerful operator in the shaping of culture politics for the new nation. In an essay from 1983, still one of the few devoted to the history of Ricordi, the musicologist Francesco Degrada ended his survey by remarking how in the course of the century Ricordi had taken over a role of intermediary between the composers and the system of production:

> The beneficiaries were above all the renowned and well-established authors, for whom the publisher assumed more and more the role as a fiduciary in the management and dissemination of their works, both nationally and internationally. That was the case for Bellini, Donizetti, and above all Verdi, who published his whole opus with Ricordi (with the exception of *Attila*, *I Masnadieri*, and *Il Corsaro* published by Lucca) . . . The function of impresarios and theatre managers, starting approximately between 1850 and 1860, would be reduced to the simple groundwork and local arrangements. Instead it was the publisher who, together with the authors, was in charge of the more complex cultural and economic policy. Besides the preparation of the orchestral and vocal scores, of the parts and of all kinds of adaptations and transcriptions, which favored an approximate but diffused fruition of the operas, their policy presumed a more ambitious cultural project, in dialogue with contemporary culture, . . . involving the response to and formation of taste, by exercising a constant pressure on the opinion and the power of the

[8] "Compilata e regolata secondo la messa in scena del Teatro alla Scala da Giulio Ricordi"; while for *Mefistofele* the title changes to "according to the instructions of the author" and for *Don Carlo* "According to the *mise en scène* of the Imperial Opera theatre in Paris."

public, both locally and nationally, for the recognition of the social and cultural primacy of music.[9]

Casa Ricordi was probably the first music publisher in Italy to take over the job that once belonged to the impresario but was not the only one. In the last decade of the century its competitor Edoardo Sonzogno succeeded in obtaining control over La Scala for a few seasons, restored and ran another opera theatre in Milan, the Canobbiana, and eventually settled on the Costanzi Theatre in Rome.[10]

As John Rosselli pointed out in several studies, this encroachment of the publisher on matters of commissions, seasons, casting, and staging is directly connected to the increasing tendency to stage repertoire operas, which translated into a higher demand for the rental of scores and parts.[11] It must be pointed out, moreover, that both Ricordi's and Sonzogno's operations included the press: both owned and directed prominent periodicals, including, for Sonzogno, the daily *Il secolo*, the highest-circulation newspaper in Italy during those years.[12] Music publishers' ability to regulate the opera industry depended on an integrated production system that, in addition to the press, was still founded on the ownership, printing, and management of the scores. At this time Ricordi in particular was lobbying for copyright regulations appropriate to the new administrative and geopolitical structure of the nation. In April 1882, in Milan, a group of prominent artists, journalists, musicians and writers established the terms of these regulations in the statute of the first national society for the tutelage of creative and intellectual labor (SIA, the Italian Society of Authors, later renamed SIAE, Italian Society of Authors and Publishers).[13]

While creative and artistic production had already been recognized as intellectual property in the modern sense for almost a century, thus solidifying the author's legal

[9] Francesco Degrada, "Il segno e il suono: storia di un editore e del suo mondo," in *Musica musicisti editoria: 175 anni di Casa Ricordi 1808–1983* (Milan, 1983). On Casa Ricordi's economic history see the recent study by Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti d'opera: storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan, 2011).

[10] On Sonzogno see in particular Silvia Valisa's ongoing research, and her recent essay "Casa Editrice Sonzogno: mediazione culturale, circuiti del sapere ed innovazione tecnologica nell'Italia unificata (1861–1887)," in *The Printed Media in Fin-de-Siècle Italy: Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani, and Jennifer Burns, eds. (London, 2011), 90–106. For a more novelistic if informed account of music publishing at the end of the century, see Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera from Verismo to Modernism, 1890–1915* (Boston, 2007), 208–24.

[11] John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi* (Cambridge, 1984), 175.

[12] Ricordi owned *La gazzetta musicale di Milano*, one of the oldest periodicals dedicated to music. Moreover, in 1889 the Milanese publisher opened the Officine Grafiche, a lithographic laboratory for the composition and printing of posters and playbills. Since the late 1860s Sonzogno, besides the successful daily *Il secolo*, had launched a number of illustrated magazines devoted to the popularization of literature and the arts, such as *L'illustrazione universale*, *Il teatro illustrato*, *La musica popolare*, *Il romanziere illustrato*, *L'emporio pittoresco*. On this see Valisa, "Casa Editrice Sonzogno," 93–7.

[13] See www.siae.it/Siae.asp?click_level=0100.0200&link_page=Siae_Storia.htm; for a detailed chronicle see Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, istituzioni e società nell'Italia postunitaria (1860–1882)* (Rome, 2001), 372 and ff.

and social status, the function of the author was also changing, shared more and more with the publisher, and not only in the context of the opera industry. A famous example is the case of Edmondo De Amicis's novel for young readers *Cuore*, published by Treves in Milan in 1886. In a study of the processes that formed the Italian culture industry after unification, Fausto Colombo points out how it was the publisher Emilio Treves who contributed to the shaping of the novel into a mass-cultural event.[14] Treves coordinated a marketing campaign on the pages of his magazines (*L'illustrazione italiana* was one of them) just before the book was published, with previews, critical recognition, and teasers. Then, on the date of the publication, contractually established for October 15, the beginning of the school year, he flooded bookstores throughout Italy with copies of the novel. During the ensuing weeks he published reviews and commentaries on the pages of his periodicals, and, a year later, the novel's first parody. In 1886–7 alone, De Amicis's *Cuore* reached forty editions; no wonder its sentimental Catholicism and middle-brow morality affected several subsequent generations of Italians.[15] This kind of concerted control of the market is well known to historians of Italian opera: it is reminiscent of the media operation devised by Ricordi around Verdi and Boito's *Otello* in 1887, or even, a few years later, of Ricordi's and Sonzogno's efforts to create and brand an heir to Verdi by promoting and managing the careers of Puccini and Mascagni. Thus the limited interest manifested by traditional historiography of Italian nineteenth-century opera towards print industry and cultural policy is an effect of its continued focus on the composers, with Giulio Ricordi and Eduardo Sonzogno as fundamental but nonetheless background figures.

The industrial aspect of Ricordi's policy is instead the main concern of an 1881 essay by the critic Filippo Filippi. Writing on music and musical institutions in Milan in a book published for the National Exhibition of Industry and Art of the same year, Filippi describes the workings of the Ricordi establishment in terms of control over the product, thus connecting publishing to staging:

> Today the directives determining the fate of a production, the hiring of an artist, or the fortunes of a score originate from the Ricordi factory led by *Commendator* Giulio, a man of great intelligence and iron will. Owner of almost all the operas by Verdi and by other renowned composers, he does not let any theatre, either of a capital or provincial city, rent them unless he first approves their means of execution in every detail; that is: singers, chorus, orchestra and staging. It is the logic of *summum jus summa injuria* applied on a large scale to the vast art world of our times. It is easy to imagine how this influence or better interference of the publisher . . . might annoy several people, and those who have to suffer it call it an

[14] Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile: media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni novanta* (Milan, 2009), 71–4.

[15] On this see for example Franco Cambi, *Collodi, De Amicis, Rodari: tre immagini d'infanzia* (Bari, 1985), 79–116. On De Amicis's relevance for the political history of Italian identity, see the sophisticated study by Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians, 1860–1920* (Chicago, 2007).

> intolerable tyranny and a violation of the most sacrosanct of properties, the intellectual one . . . And yet, it is a fact that every time the publisher has imposed his will and, more than that, he has taken charge of overseeing the rehearsals and the so called *mise-en-scène* of an important opera, we had perfect musical executions and splendid stagings. In Milan, where Ricordi takes care of this himself with meticulous care, we have had exemplary productions of Verdi's and Ponchielli's last operas, very different from those that ignorant and stingy impresarios imposed on us, under the system of licenses.[16]

Filippi's career started within the Ricordi firm: he was hired in the 1850s by Tito as a correspondent from Venice and then as a columnist and editor of Milan's *Gazzetta musicale*. By 1881, however, he was one of the most powerful and influential names in Italian journalism, director of a weekly art magazine and music critic for the daily *La perseveranza*. And yet his description of Ricordi's policy as *summum jus summa injuria* ("supreme justice, supreme injustice"), as critical as it may sound, is hardly a manifestation of dissent. His report ends up justifying the lamented monopoly as a minor matter when compared to the advantages: better *mise-en-scènes*, in the interest of the producer/author, rather than in favor of the short-term economic advantages of an impresario.

Therefore the appearance of the staging manuals in Italy, especially the longer and more complex ones compiled by Giulio Ricordi in the 1880s, coincides with broader and crucial changes in the production of culture, changes that media historians have recently identified as marking the beginning of an Italian culture industry. Responding to the need to control and textualize performance, the compilation and printing of the manuals foreground and redefine the medium of opera. This late nineteenth-century episode of mediatization assumes the outline of a two-pronged process. On the one hand, it includes the author as the validation of opera's artistic aspirations. The stage manuals, by representing the composer's and librettist's vision of the performance, enable the publisher to distribute a complete package and control the end-product for a broader market. Consequently, on the other hand, opera mediatized by way of the manuals aims at reaching the status of a cultural commodity that can be reactivated regularly and predictably at every performance, even at a spatial and temporal remove from the creators. The manuals then endow an opera with autonomy from the author(s) precisely by including an "author effect" into the staging. Connected to all this is of course an acute regard for the audience, or what contemporary commentaries repeatedly refer to as "the public."

FACING THE PUBLIC

On March 6, 1881, *La gazzetta musicale*, the prestigious Milanese weekly published by Casa Ricordi, reported on the new production of *Der Freischütz* opening at La Scala the

[16] Filippo Filippi, "La musica a Milano," in *Milano 1881* (Milan, 1881).

night before.[17] The reviewer, Salvatore Farina, who first heard the opera in the same theatre in the spring of 1872, begins by exalting its continued capacity to move and enchant:

> Weber's masterpiece has once again inspired in us that sense of wonder with which it had impressed us several years ago. In thinking of the long time that had gone by between the two productions we naively commented: "this archer does not age at all." Introduced for the first time when it was already more than fifty years old, it still looked like a spring chicken; today it is sixty years old, and does not show a wrinkle. Everything that was imagined, developed and expanded since then on the stage can be found already in embryo in this really prodigious opera.[18]

For the reviewer it is not so much the status of the work and of the composer and their cultural capital that sanctions the opera's modernity and continued relevance. Instead it is the opera's own continuous capacity to "inspire a sense of wonder," its aesthetic potential, that confirms its place in the repertoire. And yet, this apologia is followed by a sudden shift, both in tone and in focus:

> We are forced to add with some regret that the public at La Scala in these carnival days is not in the disposition to enjoy the serene beauty of an opera of this sort; on the contrary, during the opening night we noticed a restlessness, a carelessness typical of spectators caught between parties and dinners. Not daring to protest against the music, also because it had been applauded already several times before, they gave way to their uncontainable desire for laughter during the episode with the specters and with the spoken dialogue of Samiel and Kaspar counting the bullets. Thus while commenting on all those trappings (which by the way were not funny at all because presented with proper stagecraft) they missed that marvelous episode of descriptive music that is the scene of the bullets.[19]

Rather than dwelling on the performance, Farina juxtaposes his own considerations of the opera's timelessness with the reactions of the public, reactions that could attest to the opposite. The Wolf's Glen Scene was incapable of working its magic and the apparitions were presumably seen as risible and ineffective, despite the music. Reasons for this disbelief are found at first in the carnival atmosphere, but then, in another twist to the prose, in the very character of the Italians:

> We Italians are a skeptical people; we have little faith in the fantastic and we easily laugh at the northern legends. Nothing bad with that, but nothing good either. In certain circumstances we can be serious and open the mind to tales and legends when these are conjoined with art. The fantastic subject of *Freischütz* should not detract in the least from the extraordinary value of a music that is all melody, grace, elegance, and artistry.[20]

[17] *La gazzetta musicale di Milano* 36/10 (March 6, 1881), 95–6. [18] *Ibid*., 95. [19] *Ibid*. [20] *Ibid*.

In the space of a mere three paragraphs *Der Freischütz* has become the catalyst for a definition of national character. The Milanese public is taken as representative of Italians, provoked by the opera to manifest disbelief and lack of interest, that were in turn interpreted as a national trait (and perhaps a sign of narrow-minded provincialism). The reviewer, as representative of Casa Ricordi, is therefore ready to exhort the public (hence the Italians) to take seriously the music, no matter how foreign.

These concerns are hardly exceptional, and they are similarly voiced for example by another review of the same production in *Il mondo artistico*, a smaller weekly magazine devoted to the arts. The journalist here opens with a complaint:

> How mutable is the taste and the mood of the public! When *Freyschütz* [sic] was performed several years ago at La Scala, the public was much less knowledgeable and educated than today to appreciate this classic, severe music, and it was reasonable to doubt that they could be capable or willing to enter that ideal musical world, at once tranquil and sublime. Those predictions turned out to be false, because instead the La Scala public was so charmed and mesmerized by the musical atmosphere of *Freyschütz*, was pervaded to such an extent by a sweet peacefulness of true and eternal beauty, that, with no need to know about history or chronologies, they perceived that Weber was everybody's forefather and that in the field of fantastic, poetic music, music inspired by a profound sentiment for nature, Weber was the one who had uttered the Fiat lux. This year, at a reprise of the opera, it was reasonable to think or at least to hope that the public, remembering those first good impressions, and more familiar with certain music, would have seen again with pleasure Weber's masterpiece. But it was not to be. In the theatre on the night of the first performance a gloomy atmosphere of discontent, of prejudice and even of mockery, took over the spectators. *Freyschütz* was heard in an absentminded and restless way, and those who pretend to dictate the outcome of a performance kept saying that the music was impossible, boring, and the score should have been left on the shelves. Not even the relatively good execution, certainly not inferior to that of carnival 1872, helped to stop the negativity of those gentlemen.[21]

Lamenting the unpredictability of the audience's behavior was an old trope, and here it hardly masks the type of attention paid to the spectators: a masterful gaze observing and evaluating their reactions against the artistic value of the opera. Like the previous article, this one also ends with a reassuring note, approvingly reporting that subsequent performances received a better reception.

The similarities of these texts give rise to two sets of observations. First of all, both reviewers take upon themselves the role of witnessing the interaction of *Freischütz* and its audience. In their dismayed descriptions the event of the premiere becomes the

[21] *Il mondo artistico: giornale di musica dei teatri e delle belle arti* 15/10 (March 9, 1881). The rest of the review describes the opera by references to Berlioz's famous commentary on *Der Freischütz*, in words that very closely echo an essay that Filippo Filippi had published in his book a few years earlier: *Musica e musicisti, critiche, biografie, ed escursioni* (Milan, 1876), 100–17. Thus the article, signed simply with "F.," might be by Filippi, the director of the journal, rather than by its editor Alessandro Fano.

contingent interaction of two interdependent performances, of two reenactments: that of the opera and that of the audience. Weber's opera, which of course arrives at the stage of La Scala with complex cultural baggage, has the power to elicit a response, and it is the performance of this response that constitutes the group of spectators as an audience, or better as a public, as in the Italian term "pubblico."[22] This public is then even taken as representative of the whole nation, whereby the manifestations of merry disbelief become a performance of Italianness. Secondly, both journalists appear to write as if from the position of a side box: their analytical gaze is cast as much on the public as on the stage. Not for a moment compromised by identification or empathy with the spectators, the reviews appear to maintain purposefully a professional voice that is duly and carefully separate from that of the public. As historians prying into the theatrical contingencies of more than a century ago we might be tempted to see these reviews as a trace left by that audience. But these writings do not voice the public, they judge it: they measure the audience's capacity to manifest understanding and engagement in view of what is expected of a public – that is, the rightful representative of a nation.

By the 1880s a review of a performance of *Der Freischütz* also came with complex baggage. The opera had already acquired the status of a *locus classicus* of transnational operatic encounters, and as such had been used by other illustrious commentators as a litmus test to evaluate the audience. Hector Berlioz published an essay in the *Journal des débats* a week after the premiere of a new production at the Opéra in June 1841 of a *Freyschütz* in French with his own recitatives. His essay not only champions the opera and in particular the music, but makes sure that the Parisian audience is instructed on how to react, in order to avoid the fiasco of twenty years earlier.[23] Berlioz's influence is still readable in the two Milanese reviews of forty years later, not only for the promotion of Weber's work as a timeless classic, but especially for the attention devoted to the audience's interaction with this German opera. Berlioz starts with an encouraging note that congratulates the Parisian audience, which was able at last to make sense of and appreciate the opera's beauty. His description of notable passages in the score then preempts any possible criticism by insisting on the obvious and unquestionable beauty and efficacy of the work.

[22] The privileging of the term "public" is also consistent with the definition of Christopher Balme in his study of how theatre institutions shape the public sphere: "While 'spectators' and 'audiences' refer to individual or collective bodies inside the building or actively attending the performance . . . the terms 'public' and even more broadly 'the public sphere' refer to a potential audience or perhaps not even that . . . The public is a potential audience to be realized rather than an actualized one." Christopher B. Balme, "Playbills and the Theatrical Public Sphere," in *Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography*, Charlotte M. Canning and Thomas Postlewait, eds. (Iowa City, 2010), 37–62, here 40–1.

[23] *Journal des débats*, June 16, 1841; the article was then included in his collection of essays *À travers chants* (1862) in a shorter version with the title *Le Freyschütz de Weber*.