From Carnival Opera to Lenten Opera:

The Politics of Theatrical Time

I. Cultures of Time

Among the many indicators of both cultural stability and cultural change, the least well explored is that of time-keeping. Generally regarded as a matter purely for scientists, mathematicians, and astronomers, time-keeping prior to the industrial revolution proves instead to be both a barometer of political power and a means of securing it. Up to 1800, European rulers realized this. They capitalized on ancient rituals and superstitions associated with particular times of year to intersperse periods of productivity and concentration with those of feasting and levity. The recurrence of such periods was predictable. It was on this basis that contracts for theatrical personnel could be drawn up long in advance, once the era of public opera had been firmly establish. Since Venice had the oldest continuous tradition of public opera, it offers the best test-bed for examining the impact of the rituals of time-keeping on the emergence of new forms of entertainment.

A refined view of seasonal nuances that came to affect dramaturgical genre and aspects of production is presented in *Song and Season: Science, Culture, and Theatrical Time*. Here I the findings of that study in the revolutionary era which followed. Some notable features of the century from 1660 to 1760 were (1) the opening of a winter period for theatrical performance on the feast of St. Stephen's (26 December), (2) the opening of a more lavish Carnival period on an arbitrary date (typically in mid-to-late January) dictated by the Council of Ten, and (3) the prohibition of public performances during Lent. All other details changed slowly over time. As the medium of opera became more popular, activity arose in the autumn, but the works staged were generally simpler than those of the winter and were more plainly staged. The fact that singers worked on contracts that stretched through autumn and winter enabled them to be better prepared for winter performances, when the works were usually longer, the sets and costumes more lavish, and the entr'actes numerous and varied in nature. The subject became progressively more serious up to the start of Lent. Only in the 1720s was a two-week Ascension season introduced to run in parallel with the Ascension Fair. Ascension operas were generally shorter and their subjects more frivolous than in autumn or winter. Contractually, they were separate from the other two seasons. Casts might be young, inexperienced, or foreign.

Each of the several periods during which operas were given had its own flavor of dramaturgical parameters. Through the 18th century, a St. Stephen's work was typically heroic and carefully staged. Carnival works could be even more lavish in terms of the numbers of battle scenes or *balli* they

contained. Autumn works tended to be less formal and less distinctly cast in the mold of the *dramma per musica*. They frequently lacked special *entr'actes*, such as battle scenes or *balli*. Works given in the early autumn might be comic or pastoral, as were works given in the spring (which also admitted a few satirical works). They were effectively shorter works for shorter nights. (Venetian theaters allowed a maximum of four hours for performances. These hours commenced from sunset.)

The theatrical periods, each having originated at a different time for a different reason, necessarily appealed to different audiences. This appeal was tied, in part, to the prestige of the Venetian Republic as a force in the Mediterranean. As long as Venice controlled trade with the Middle East and policed the Adriatic, it attracted princes and condottieri from all over Italy and the center of the continent, especially from Germany. These figures came to Venice in the winter—especially at the start of the legislative year (early December) and for the celebrated festivities of Carnival. Their presence attracted prominent Venetian nobles. Together they made up much of the audience for works given in the St. Andrew's period (discontinued from the early 1680s), St. Stephen's, and Carnival. Operas given at other times of year had to court different audiences. Early autumn performances would not attract noblemen, who were at their villas. Late autumn works might attract them, but this depended on weather and inclination, as they straggled back to town with their winter provisions and took up their posts once again. Spring opera was intended to attract those attending the Ascension fair.

TIME-KEEPING IN VENICE

Until the collapse of the Venetian Republic in May 1797, Venetian time-keeping officially preserved a civic calendar according to which the year began on 1 March.[1] They also recorded daily time in the *ore italiane* that persisted in much of Italy until the late eighteenth century. In *ore italiane*, the day begins one-half hour after sunset, that is when it is almost dark. This was the time of day at which theaters opened. They were permitted to remain open until 4 *ore*. On a modern clock, it was a variable time around 20:00-21:30 in the late autumn and winter, but close to midnight during the Ascension fair. (Astronomical midnight was never coincident with the start of the day. The length of a day was slightly elastic, in that official time, marked by the ringing of bells, was adjusted at intervals of two weeks to accommodate the ever-changing number of hours of daylight.)

Between 1797 and 1866, when the modern Italian state was established, the former Venetian Republic was served by four administrations—two French and two Austrian, in alternation. Both countries had methods of time-keeping which were much closer to the modern clock and calendar than those of Venice. The French marked the day from astronomical noon, the Austrians from astronomical midnight. Both marked the year from midnight.

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1 Since so many operas opened in January and February, a great many works given prior to the fall of the Republic have been ambiguously dated. Accurate modern dates have been determined and reported in my New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660-1760 (Stanford University Press, 2007).

TIME-KEEPING IN FRANCE (AND AUSTRIA)

The French revolution (1789) engendered a reassessment of the Christian liturgical calendar which had long served the kingdom of France. It was one of many initiatives to secularize the new state. A committee including poets and dramatists as well as mathematicians and astronomers devised a new calendar, which was adopted on 22 September 1793. (Unwittingly it resembled pre-Christian calendars.) It contained 12 months, each of 30 days, with a complex system of accommodations for planetary motion. Months were divided into three "weeks" of 10 days each. The day was divided into 10 decimal hours, each of which contained 100 minutes. The months were named after natural objects, such as fruits and flowers, characteristic (in France) with the designated time of year. A so-called *Shepherds' Almanac* assigned names to the 360 regular days of the year. A leap day was to be called a *fΛte du revolution*. The year should begin at midnight immediately preceding the autumn equinox.

The French Republican calendar was never popular. Laborers detested the ten-day week Accountants found the system extremely cumbersome. Traders complained that it was difficult to communicate with those outside French rule. In 1799, Napoleon (then first consul) consented to lift the new calendar from Rome in order to appease the pope, but it was maintained in most lands under French control until 1805. In order to be crowned king by the pope, Napoleon had to repeal the Republican calendar and permitted the restoration of Catholicism in France and its territories. (One of these holding was Austria, xx-yy.) Despite the brevity of this foray into decimal time-keeping, it destabilized long-standing principles of temporal organization in which strands of governmental and ecclesiastical protocols, patriotic celebrations, and agrarian feasts had long been intertwined.

2. From the Republic of Venice to the Republic of Italy

THE FIRST FRENCH OCCUPATION (1797)

The Venetian aristocracy had been abolished by default when the French on 9 May had demanded the declaration of a municipality. After ratifying their own vote on the measure (12 May), the Maggior Consiglio resigned. The treaty of Milan (16 May) brought peace between the Republic and France at the price of allowing a host of its cultural treasures (20 paintings, 500 mss) to be taken by the conquerors.[2] On 26 May the new municipality decreed that it was inappropriate to display the Lion of St. Mark as a sign of the new state.[3] Ascension fell on the following day. There was no *sposalizio*, nor

2 The most famous of the paintings was Paolo Veronese's Wedding Feast at Cana (taken from San Giorgio Maggiore). The manuscripts were primarily very early ones from the library of Cardinal Bessarion. For their part, the Austrians pillaged the library of the doge Marco Foscarini (1762-63), ostensibly to take their due for taxes not forthcoming from his descendants. Its contents went to the Imperial (later Austrian National) Library. Eventually much of the jeweled treasure of San Marco was disassembled to permit assessments of the value of individual jewels (later confiscated) to be made.

3 The Lion's proud tablet ("Pax tibi Marce, evangelista mea") soon read, "Diritto e doveri dell'uomo e del cittadino."

any display of the Bucintoro. Minor civic ceremonies were held ten days later, on Pentecost. On 22 July the street saying "Viva San Marco" was outlawed. Opera libretti were now dated according to the French Republic calendar.

Inevitably, the change in calendars and the nullification of both Christian and state symbols within the former Republic nullified the principles by which the theatrical calendar had been regulated. There was no Ascension, thus no market fair or theatrical period labeled as such. Other moveable feasts and penitential seasons tied to Easter (i.e., Advent and Lent) were similarly muted. Fixed feasts of the church similarly disappeared from public view. In principle, people were free to attend the theater any day of the year. However, no theater had ever provided works for more than a few months of the year. Venice was impoverished by its occupation.

In the treaty signed on 17 October between France and Austria at Campoformio,[4] one provision was that Venice (for which Napoleon had little love) would be handed over to the Austrians. However, the French troops remained long enough to add to their collection of relics of the former Republic the four bronze horses of San Marco, which were shipped to Paris together with the Lion statue from the saint's column on the *molo*. On 9 January 1798 French looters raided the Arsenal and took axes to the Bucintoro, the ship of state that had carried the doge to the Lido, where he renewed Venice's "marriage vows" to the Adriatic Sea, annually since the year 1000.

THE FIRST AUSTRIAN OCCUPATION (1798-1805)

On 16 January 1798 the Austrians officially took possession of Venice. The former Republic was now a province of the Hapsburg empire. On 23 February 900 ex-noblemen assembled in the Doge's Palace to reinstitute the aristocracy. They would belong to a body now called the Congregazione Delegata. It was not to be a happy administration. The city suffered from financial hardships causes by looting, dislocation, an influx of vagabonds as well as epidemics of illness (notably typhoid, instigated in 1802 by the importation of infected meat).

The death of Pope Pius VI on 29 August 1799 gave the French an opportunity to further advance their cause of suppressing the papacy. (They had physically removed the pope to their homeland in 1798, after declaring Rome a Republic.) To the dismay of the French, the emperor authorized 33 cardinals to convene a conclave in the abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore in December 1799. On 14 March 1800 it was announced that the bishop of Imola would forthwith take office as Pope Pius VII.

The Austrian administration was lackluster. The Venetians were unhappy, but they had plenty of company, as one by one the former duchies and papal lands of the Italian peninsula succumbed to the ever-changes dictates of their would-be conqueror, Napoleon.

4 The village closest to the villa (Passariano) of the last doge, Lodovico Manin.

THE SECOND FRENCH ADMINISTRATION (1806-1815)

In December 1805 Napoleon's forces (68,000 strong) defeated the Austrians at Austerlitz, in Moravia. On the 26th (formerly the feast of Santo Stefano) the treaty of Pressburg (Bratislava) returned to the French the Venetian territories recently under Austrian control. They took possession three weeks later, and on 3 February the French emperor's stepson, Eugène de Beauharnais, arrived as viceroy of the newly formed Kingdom of Italy. The following summer the French administration closed 34 convents and monasteries, including those (such as San Giorgio) on islands of the lagoon. An almost equally large number of religious institutions—including some of the very largest (SS. Giovanni e Paolo, S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari)—were suppressed. Many parishes were also now defunct, and several churches had been razed. Hundreds of *scuole*—both the mercants' *scuole grandi* and the tradesmens' *scuole piccolo*—were suppressed and looted of their cultural treasures.

The emperor paid his first and only visit to Venice late in the year 1807. His visit—lasting from 29 November to 8 December—happens to have coincided with the former period time, around the start of Advent, when the new Venetian government would have been seated. His stepson had taken over the former Procuratie Nuove as his royal palace, and it was there that Buonaparte stayed. After some perfunctory audiences with ranking members of the current government, a mass at San Marco, a tour of the recently built *murazzi* built along the Lido to protect the city from high tides, Napoleon reached the dramatic climax of his visit with a gala performance at the Teatro la Fenice. Being the work of the architect Gianantonio Selva, a personal favorite of the emperor, Napoleon seems to have relished this event above the others of his hurried stay. The lasting outcomes of his visit were a generous gift to the Marciana Library for new acquisitions, the construction of the public gardens near Sant'Elena, the conversion of the former *scuola grande* Santa Maria della Carità to the Accademia di Belli Arti, and the establishment of a free port on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore. There were many negative consequences as well, most notably the destruction of several churches and monasteries to make way for Selva's new projects, and, in keeping with those plans, the conversion of many canals to *rii terra*. He refused to visit either the church of San Marco or the Ducal Palace, as both symbolized the former Republic, which he held in low regard. After meeting the patriarch he did, however, consent to designating San Marco the cathedral of the city.[5]

On the evening of 1 December Napoleon attended a gala performance at the Teatro La Fenice of *La Giustizia dell'Amore*, a laudatory work written in the emperor's honor by Lauro Corniano degli Algarotti. Napoleonic eagles supported a green velvet canopy hung over the royal box. It is doubtful

5 It had previously been San Pietro di Castello, to which the ducal seminary was attached.

that on the basis of such a brief visit in such artificial circumstances he could possibly have anticipated the effect that his reign would have on the conduct of opera.[6]

The remaining years between Napoleon's visit and the Congress of Vienna in 1815 were relatively calm, though the plunder of Venetian artifacts continued. The regime in France began to falter in 1813, when French forces were defeated at Leipzig. Early in 1814 he went into voluntary exile on Elba. Is escape in March 1815 came just soon enough for him to lead his forces to defeat at Waterloo.

THE SECOND AUSTRIAN OCCUPATION (1815-1848)

In their own way, the Austrians, who now regained administrative control of Venice, were great believers in rules, hierarchies, and jurisdictions. Upon resuming control of the former Veneto, they made it part of the imperial province called Venetia-Lombardy. The province ostensibly had capitals at Venice and Milan. The governor was supposed to divide his time between them. (In the actual event, he spent nearly all of his time in Milan.) Under the Austrians, taxation was increased, and rigorous censorship was imposed. The sitting emperor for the first 20 years of the Austrian administration was Francis I. Upon his death (1835) and the succession of his half-witted son Ferdinand, another ominous change threatened Venice through the effective regency of Prince Metternich.

Quite apart from the ministrations of the Austrians, Venice began to be affected by certain aspects of the industrial revolution in the 1840s. The opening of a railway bridge between the city and Mestre in 1842 rapidly refocused the perspective of Venice from sea to land. The Austrians of the early eighteenth century had been tireless builders of roads and bridges. Even under the Austrians, Venice remaining the training post for sailors. The overthrow of Metternich in Vienna early in 1848 encouraged many Italian locales under Austrian rule to demand greater autonomy. The emperor agreed in principle, but before details were discussed street fighting broke out in Venice and a few Austrian administrators were murdered. A new Republic was declared but it was destined to survive for little more than a year.

THE THIRD AUSTRIAN ADMINISTRATION (1849-1866)

The Venice that survived the short-lived revolution was a sadly dispirited place, ever more aware of the changing nature of life elsewhere and its own disenfranchisement. Venetians boycotted Austrian social and musical occasions, Austrian businesses, and all other symbols of Austrian culture. It was impoverished and racked from time to time by disease. Only with the unification of Italy did Venice suddenly demonstrate that it could still be a city of living inhabitants. Seeing their rule about to end, the Austrians gutted the Arsenal of its munitions, a great many palaces of their furnishings and paintings, and the archives of all documents pertaining in any way to Germany or Austria.

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6 This account of Napoleon's visit is based on John Julius Norwich, Paradise of Cities: Venice in the Nineteenth Century (New York, 2003), pp. 1-49. Norwich credits as his main source I dieci giorni di Napoleone a Venezia by Ugo Fugagnollo (without bibliographical details).

The visit of Victor Emmanuel, king of Savoy, to Venice in November 1866 for the handing over ceremony became an occasion for great jubilation, culminating in the raising of the Italian standard in the Piazza. The king was greeted by all of nobility of Venice and the mainland at the Teatro La Fenice, where on a subsequent evening a masking ball was held. True to the tradition of early times, a festive regatta was held the following Sunday. Thus ended the foreign domination of Venice that had begun in 1797.

Upon their arrival, the French attempted to impose their new calendar (in which, locally, 1798 was the Revolutionary Year One) and set about to deconsecrate churches across the Veneto. Prior restrictions on activities during Advent and Lent were nullified. Although the Austrians soon rolled back some of these changes, the cat was out of the bag: theatrical entertainments could be given at any time year.

Particularly under the French, political expedient trumped all principles of the ordering of time and the efficacy of one or another dramatic genre. When Josephine Bonaparte appeared at the nine-year-old Teatro La Fenice on 12 September 1797, she was treated the way a rock star might be treated in a television interview today. The house was lighted up in celebration of her arrival. It was filled with spectators eager to see the wife of "the greatest man of this era," according to the *Gazzetta urbana veneta*.[7] On the 14th, it reported, she "assisted in the singing" of the patriotic "hymn" written by Citizen [*Cittadino*] Sografi, set by Citizen Cavos, and performed by Citizen Babbini at La Fenice. The following evening there was a *festa di ballo* in the theater on her behalf with refreshments. It was held in the Casino d'Orfeo.

Sografi was a made-to-order dramatist for the new regimes. He penned such works as *Alberto I L'Austriaco*, for performance at Sant'Angelo on 24 January 1798 and *Il sogno del principe Carlo d'Austria* at San Giovanni Grisostomo in the same season.

3. Impacts of Political Change on Theatrical Organization

Between 1760 and 1797 some of the outlines of Venice's theatrical periods changed, primarily in response to (1) the decline of the *dramma per musica,* which had the staple of winter works, and (2) the steadily greater emphasis on the Ascension fair and its parallel theatrical season, particularly with the opening of the Teatro La Fenice in 1792. There was steadily less winter opera, especially in the ten days following Christmas, for Carnival now opened early in January. The social composition of audiences were somewhat less well correlated with specific periods as people of different social strata gravitated towards (or were courted by) specific theaters. In the last years of the Venetian Republic, La Fenice so greatly appealed to the nobility that its predecessor, San Benedetto, was progressively enfeebled. San Moisè, in contrast, began to cater in the 1790s explicitly to the middle class. The

7 Roberto Verti in ?? Passadore e Rossi, Il teatro San Benedetto a Venezia: Cronologia degli spettacoli, 1755-1810 (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 2003), p. xxix.

prohibition of opera during Lent remained firm, however, and no public opera was ever given during the summer up to the fall of Republic.

The associations of genre and audience with time-of-year were foreign to the Napoleonic troops who took control of Venice on 4 May 1797, and to the Austrians who succeeded to the administration of Venice the following year. Napoleon himself, apart from a subsequent liaison with a *prima donna* in Milan, was completely indifferent to opera.

Liberating the Calendar of Venetian Opera

Since Venice succumbed to Napoleon while the Republican calendar was in use in France, and since the thrust of Napoleon's reign was, up to 1805 (when he was forced to marry Josephine in order to be crowned emperor by the Pope), disposed to reduce the influence of the church wherever possible, an immediate effect of the demise of the Republic was to eliminate all proscriptions against the opening of theaters on religious feasts or during liturgical seasons. For one year only, the three theaters that survived—San Moisè, San Benedetto, and La Fenice—were encouraged to present works of some kind throughout the year. While attempting to fill their stages week after week, however, the theaters also discovered that they had to vary the nature of the works they presented. Operas (both serious and comic) came to be interleaved with prose comedies, recitals, and concerts of music better suited to the new political image of Napoleonic Venice than to the values of the past.

By the year 1800 the Venetian theaters had discovered that staging works year-round was expensive. It required far more planning than had been the case up to 1797. To mitigate the expense, summer calendars were filled (if they were filled at all) with spoken works. Random nights might offer independent ballets. Works were kept short; one-act farces (which helped to mitigate expenses) outnumbered all other works for quite a few years.

Responses of Individual Theaters

Each theater accommodated new mandates in different ways.

A. San Moisè

San Moisè seemed at first to fare well under the new scheme, partly because the new society promoted works intended to appeal to *cittadini*. This announcement gives the flavor of the time:

> Autumn 1808
>
> Liberty Virtue Equality
>
> Notice concerning the theater of San Moisè
>
> Citizens!
>
> Circumstances and times traverse the measures of citizen-class *impresari* the moment of opening the … theater with a complete spectacle. They [the *impresari*] will present on Saturday, 23 September a farce never before seen in Venice by the celebrated Cimarosa

entitled *Il duello per complimento*, another farce entitled *Il secreto* with entirely new music and text by the citizen-class composers Foppa and Maier [Mayr], and a brand new ballet. These *impresari* hasten to assure you that with any regard for the expense or labor involved, they will provide you in short order with a second farce containing entirely new text and music, and another new ballet.[8] Their concern not to leave you without theatrical entertainment and this promise behoove you to honor their generous compassion.

The transfer of the theater's ownership from one branch of the Giustiniani family to another in 1793 had led to a total concentration on *opere buffe*, which suited middle-class tastes. Though two-act works had prevailed in recent years, all the works given during 1797 and 1798 were one-acts. The largest number of wholly new works at San Moisè was produced in 1804-5 and 1810-11. Until its permanent closure in 1818, San Moisè mounted a common "Carnival" season from St. Stephen's Day (26 December) until (at least) Shrove Tuesday except in 1803 and 1804 and in 1815/16, when its winter season did not open until 17 January. In the interim it offered five days of physics exhibitions (31 December-4 January!) under the direction of M. Chalon.[9] Scientific demonstrations were becoming theater!

In the first years of the nineteenth century, a ticket for an *opera buffa* at San Moisè fetched 12 *lire* if it included *balli*, 10 *lire* if it did not. A *comèdie française* (these flourished in off-periods for opera) could be seen for 6 *lire*. As in the days of the Republic, prices were doubled for first performances and special events.[10] At San Moisè the rent charged the impresario had almost tripled (from £8,000 to £22,000) between 1793-94 and 1797-98. In post-Republican Venice, theater owners refused to accept any financial risk on behalf of theatrical enterprises.[11]4

The aggressiveness with which the old rubrics were discarded was initially conspicuous. A hallowed day on the Venetian calendar had been the feast of Santa Maria della Salute (elsewhere the feast of the Presentation in the Temple). It fell on 21 November and locally commemorated the liberation of Venice from the devastating plague of 1630-31. At San Moisè, an *accacdemia di canti e suoni* was given in the new "democratic municipality" 20 [21] November.[12] Under both the French and the Austrians new commemorations came and went. In January 1805 a memorial concert to mark the death of Haydn was belatedly given at San Moisè.[13]

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8 The last decades of the Republic were marked by an ever increasing proportion of works for which either the text alone or the music and the text were thinly revised from earlier performances. The new state required new compositions.

9 Maggiani, *Rossini,* p. 42.

10 Miggiani, *Rossini*, pp. 42f.

11 Bryant and Miggiani, "Organizzazione," pp. 459f.

12 Miggiani, *Rossini*, p. 37.

13 Miggiani, *Rossini*, pp. 36f.

B. San Benedetto

While San Moisè was poised (at least temporarily) for success in a more democratic age, San Benedetto was not. Founded in 1755 by three noble families intent on preserving the *dramma per musica* preferred by the entrenched nobility, it foundered. It was committed to opening a new work every year on the feast of St. Stephen and remaining open only until the start of Lent. This practice had continued into the 1780s, when, cautiously, San Benedetto began to stage some works started during the Ascension period. As a theater catering for the nobility, San Benedetto had occasionally given private productions for visiting royals. Examples had included Galuppi's *Re pastore* (July 1769) and Bertoni's one-act *Orfeo e Euridice* (3 June 1776, which happened to coincide with the moveable feast of Corpus Christi), the latter paired with the one-act *Aristo e Temira*.

The liberties of 1797 were translated at San Benedetto into a spate of works among which were serious operas on historical subjects (*Il ritorno di Serse*, *Il re Teodoro in Venezia*), *balli* (*I baccanali*), and comedies (*Giannina e Bernardone, Felix ed Urraca*)—all produced between May and November. These were offered in short runs. An attempt in October 1803 to introduce a *stagione* of prose works was not successful. After several years of relative inactivity, the theater was closed in 1810.

C. La Fenice

At its founding in 1792, La Fenice was intended to rival royal theaters such as San Carlo (Naples, 1738), La Scala (Milan, 1778), and the Teatro Regio in Turin (1788). As the most conspicuous survivor of a longer tradition, La Fenice can be seen to have benefited from not having been founded sooner. It was not forced to be a house for comic works (like Ls Scala) nor one for serious music dramas (like San Benedetto). Instead it proved itself able to steer an even course through the shoals of dramaturgical disputes and changing political values. At one time or year or another, it offered something for a range of potential constituencies.

When it came to regulating the calendar in uncertain times, what Miggiani calls "the prestige of non-Venetian models," which prevailed at San Moisè, was not ignored at La Fenice but it was accommodated in different ways. To appreciate how it accomplished this, however, we must consider seasonal models (particularly those bearing on the colonization of Lent as a time for opera, elsewhere.

4. The Rise of Lenten Opera outside Venice

Vienna

Shortly before the French revolution and the rise of Napoleon, Vienna played a forceful, if unwitting role in unhinging the grip of the liturgical calendar on theatrical productions. When, during the reign of Joseph II (xx-yy), permission to give theatrical works was first extended into the early part of Lent, John Rosselli observed, it coincidentally deprived Mozart of a valuable source of income — his earnings for the composition of chamber music which had been in demand during Lent when

alternative entertainments were unavailable.[14] In 1786, when it was decided that plays could be given in public during the first five weeks of Lent, such performances were restricted to Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. [15] Performances in private academies were also permitted (as they long seem to have been in Venice) during Lent. The size of the audience did not affect judgments as to the suitability of such events.

From the late eighteenth century onward, proscriptions against the performance of operas during Lent fell one by one. Early adopters of Lenten opera, which were located in the imperial realm, included the Teatro Reggio in Trieste (Zingarelli's *Artaserse*, 19 March 1789) and the Teatro alla Scala in Milan.[16] More generally, however, the adoption of Lenten opera was more gradual. It was not widely customary until the later half of the nineteenth century. Early adoption was limited to cities with relatively broad appeal to out-of-town visitors (upon whose tastes these inroads into the sanctity of Lent could easily be attributed). Where Lenten opera was adopted, the whole spectrum of genres from the most frivolous to the most serious, previously spanning early autumn to high Carnival, now stretched through the entire spring and sometimes into the summer. Opera was becoming a year-round entertainment.

MILAN: THE TEATRO ALLA SCALA

Milan's Teatro alla Scala was inaugurated in the summer (3 August 1778) with Salieri's *Europa riconosciuta*. Since it had no traditions by which to be guided, it seems to have been indifferent to the expectations which existed elsewhere for audiences and tastes which varied from one time of year to another. La Scala might have been a greater rival to San Benedetto and other established theaters which catered to the aristocracy were it not for the fact that the Milanese house was thoroughly committed to *opera buffa*. It had no legacy commitment to the *dramma per musica* or to any other kind of *opera seria*. Its early repertory more nearly resembled that of San Moisè than of the other two Venetian theaters. Two-act *opere buffe* and one-act farces were the norm. Although La Scala emphasized Carnival, its Carnival works for the period were usually comic.[17] Some sporadic instances of verified Lenten performances included such comic works including Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* (1793) and Paisiello's *La frascatana* (1795), though both were revivals. Verified premieres of new works during Lent came later to La Scala than to some other theaters. Genuine Lenten openings can only be confirmed from 1810, that is, subsequent to French rule.

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[14] Rosselli, *Life of Mozart*, pp. 123f.

[15] Link, *National Court Theater*, p. 79.

[16] The label "Quaresima" [Lent] occurs in libretti for the theater from 1785 onward, but in many cases either the exact date of opening is elusive or contradicts the designation. Most were revivals. Lenten openings can be confirmed from 1810. Premieres of new works during Lent came later to La Scala than to many other theaters.

[17] Opening dates for the first decades of La Scala's operations are difficult to determine because some are unavailable, and among those which are precise, many contradict seasonal designations (such as "Quaresima" [Lent]) given in many libretti.

ROME: THE LENTEN *DRAMMA SACRO* IN ROME

In Florence and Rome, the *dramma sacra* insinuated itself into Lenten entertainment schedule prior to secular opera. Instances are infrequent in Napoleonic times, but they occur just often enough to serve as a reminder of the new liberties of scheduling. Like oratorios, *drammi sacri* were focused on stories from the Old Testament or Apocrypha. A *pasticche* called *Il voto di Jefte* (text by Francesco Gonsella, music originally by Raffaelle Orgitano) was given during Lent 1812 at the Teatro alla Pergola (Florence), where *drammi serii* were otherwise characteristic during both autumn and winter.

Antolini notes the rise of similar fare in Rome at roughly the same time. However, Lenten operas were initially given in private. One example (1810) was *La Gerusalemme distrutta* (text by Sografi, music by Nicola Zingarelli) at the Teatro Valle. Upon its opening on 14 March, it enjoyed rave reviews. These inform us of the motives for the production. According to a report of 24 March in the *Giornale del Campidoglio*

> No such surprising theatrical production as that has been seen at the Teatro Valle for a long time …. A select society of *cavalieri* has underwritten the enterprise of producing a *rappresentazione sacra* during Lent and has truly executed the plan with such magnificence and such splendor that it [Rome] should now enjoy the dignity of being considered the second [most important] city of the empire. The oratorio chosen is *La distruzione di Gerusalemme*, set to music by the celebrated master Zingarelli for performance in Florence, subsequently revised and embellished by him for a theater in the house of Duke Lante, then provided with new pieces made expressly for the *maestro* and with others taken from his most beautiful works, so that now the work provides a perfect model of musical beauty.[18]

The anonymous reporter's observations also allowed that "the profundity of the [composer's] science does not exclude the sweetness of harmony" and that "the rules of art are always in accord with those of taste." He notes that the costumes were provided by the marquises, that the production involved a double choir of *fanciulle*, and that certain numbers stood out. Those he singled out were Carlotta Haeser's *rondeau* with violin obbligato, the cavatina of Rosa Morando, the tenor aria of Nicola Tacchinardi, the duet for the two *donne*, the *finale*, and the quartet (repeated many times in response to universal requests). Many hundreds of persons had to be turned away from the final performance, on 14 April.[19] A company of investors led by Settimio Bischi had been authorized by the governor general on 22 March to offer up to 40 performances by a company of musicians and a company of dancers. The stunning success of the *dramma sacra* did not, however, result in a profit: the sponsors lost 15,000 *franchi* and soon relinquished their lease.[20] (In this respect, it resembled Venetian opera of two hundred years earlier!)

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[18] Bianca Maria Antolini, "Musica e teatro musicale a Roma negli anni della dominazione francese (1809-1814)," *Rivista italiana di musicologia*, xxxviii/2 (2003; 281-380), 330f.

[19] Antolini, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

[20] Antolini, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

It is unclear whether this special effort was prompted by the celebrations which soon followed (22-23 April) for the wedding of Napoleon and his second wife, Maria Luisa of Austria, but one may suspect as much. The event was otherwise marked by a fireworks display, a *festa di ballo* at the Palazzo del Campidoglio involving two orchestras, the exhibition of a "luminous painting" with busts of the monarchs at the Accademia di Francia, a banquet, and an *accademia in musica*.

5. Theatrical Incursions into the Spring in Venice (1797-1815)

Neither under the French not the Austrians was Venice cut from the same mold as important opera centers. Before 1797 decisions concerning the operation of public theater vis-à-vis the calendar had always been the province of the Church and the State. Now that both were disabled, changes were inevitable. Because of the ongoing vacillations of power among its (foreign) administrators, however, Venice was not destined to settle on a new model quickly. The first French regime unleashed chaos. The first Austrians regime brought a measure of stability to theatrical operations insofar as it tightened the language of theatrical announcements[21] and contracts. The latter went so far as to specified precisely when the composer of a new work should be present in Venice, how many rehearsals he should attend, and how many performances should occur. (This contrasted with the long-standing practice of requiring little apart from a score from the composer, not requiring his presence at rehearsals, and leaving the matter of the number of performances to be determined by the popularity of the work.)

Under the second French administration (from May 1806) notaries (rather than *impresarii*) managed contracts for boxes and reservations for seats.[22] (It was to notaries that singers had turned again and again to elicit delinquent pay.) At San Moisè Bortolo Michiele was put in charge of contracts for the autumn season. The formula of works remained the same as under the Austrians: two farces plus a ballet per season. Other farces, the announcement promised, were being prepared entirely from scratch. When on 20 February 1806 Simone Mayr signed a contract with the Teatro La Fenice for the following autumn, it stipulated that by 7 October he would provide the theater with an *opera seria* or *semiseria*, or, alternatively, with an *opera buffa in musica* and *balli*. (This suggests that balli were now considered a natural complement to an opera buffa, whereas previously they had been a natural complement to works of any kind given during the winter.) His contract required that he arrive in Venice by 1 August "in order to begin writing the music, to be involved in the rehearsals, and to be at the keyboard for the first three performances."[23] (It was not rare during the eighteenth century or even the seventeenth for composers to serve at the keyboard or to be present at rehearsals, but the music was

[21] Announcement were required to indicate whether the text and/or the music were new or recycled. Thus, for example, we read that Simone Mayr's farces *Gli opposti caratteri* and *Gli originali* were both to be performed at La Fenice between 13 and 19 April 1805 both "from old scores." See Iris Winkler, xxxx.

[22] [Mayr 3].

[23] [Mayr 4].

often written during the summer preceding a performance, after the text had been made available by the librettist. Many librettists worked in the countryside or at a court. Although many composers developed operas in Venice, there was no requirement to do so.)

During this second period of French supervision exploratory incursions into the Lenten period began, but initially the few works given on a selected nights early in Lent were not operas. They were usually billed as "academies" – recitals of extracts from recent works performed in most cases by teachers and/or instrumental virtuosi.[24] On 8 March 1810 San Moisè provided the "respectable public" with an *accademia vocale e instrumentale* organized by Antonio Paiola, professor of *corno di caccia*. Apart from Paiola's own concerto for his instrument, the program featured three *sinfonie*—one by Mayr, one anonymous, and that of Mozart's *Magic Flute* – as well as a violin concerto composed and performed by Antonio Cammerra (a member of the Grande Ateneo delle Scienze e belle Arti of Paris), two anonymous arias, and the second part of Portogallo's farce *Il filosofo*. Two days later a benefit for Vincenzo Zanon at San Moisè again included the *sinfonie* by Mayr and Mozart,[25] this time with a concerto for *corno di caccia* and bassoon by Paiola and several *cavatine*. Tickets were available only from the theater and the prices were fixed.

San Moisè, which closed for good in 1818, presented a spring (Primavera) season in eleven years between 1800 and 1815. In some cases its spring productions fall squarely into the eighteenth-century Ascension period. However, in a few years (among them 1810, 1811, and 1812) *rappresentazioni straordinari* took place on random evenings about a month before Ascension. Such one-off performances often occurred during the third week in April, giving the impression of a quest for predictability in place of the earlier practice of following moveable feasts. San Moisè also experimented with random *rappresentazioni* (in the form of master classes and recitals) during Lent in 1810, 1812, and 1817.

With respect to genre, its Lenten entertainments were various. On 13 March 1805 a 5-act *tragédie nouvelle en vers* (*Omasis, ou Joseph en Egypte*) by Bahour-Lermain was paired with a one-act *comédie en prose* (Regnard's *Le retour imprevu*). Two weeks later (26 March) two comedies in prose were paired. The first, (M.lle Candeille's *Catherine, ou La belle fermière*), was fitted out with "song, words, and music," while the other (Picard's *Les marionettes, ou Un jeu de la fortune*) was simply recited.

Austrian models of the late eighteenth century are evident in the Lenten *accademie* offered at San Moisè in 1809. One, on 19 March, featured two concertos for guitar and orchestra.[26] By 1812 an Istituto Filarmonica took responsibility for some of the *accademie* and promoted the orchestral

[24] [Mayr 5 and 6].

[25] Be it said that prior to Austrian administration, evidence of the Venetian performance of music by Mozart is scant. Haydn, in contrast, is survived by a long trail of scores in several Venetian libraries.

[26] Miggiani: 122f.

sinfonia. Although there was occasional activity at San Moisè on Ash Wednesday, it was limited to the offerings of *accademie vocali* and *instrumentali*.

From 1798 San Benedetto offered a spring season which sometimes spanned the periods of Eastertide and Ascension. No clear set of genre preferences emerges from its playbills. Eastertide offerings ranged from a *ballo* on the subject of *Riccardo cuor di Lione* (1798) to an allegorical cantata called *Marte e la Fortuna* (1799), while Ascension offerings of the same few years ioncluded such titles as Viganò's comic *ballo* called *Lo sposo sciocco deluso* (1798) and Marinelli's two-act opera *Bajazette*.

By 1807 a spring season had been introduced at La Fenice. In the first instance it generously extended from 11 April to 7 June. On the liturgical calendar this translated to initiation two weeks after Easter, and cessation one month after Ascension. The following year, when Easter fell three weeks later, the "Primavera" at La Fenice embraced a comparable amount of time but it was positioned two weeks later. (A table of dates for Ascension is given at the end of this article.)

What becomes more conspicuous, from 1808, are La Fenice's intrusions into Lent. Although the names of the works performed are not always recorded, there is no clear evidence that the works were necessarily operas. Instead, concerts of instrumental and vocal music as well as ballets were offered singly, on six scattered days in March (the first of which was Shrove Tuesday).

6. The Rise of Lenten Opera in Venice (1816 to 1836)

The 50 years that separated the Congress of Vienna and the establishment of the Italian state in 1866 can be segmented in Venetian theatrical history into three parts. The first (1816-1834) saw a gradual conformance to Austrian protocols. This included the acceptance of a rising sense of imperial ownership of cultural property and of textual censorship aimed at filtering out works containing seditious ideas and provocative text.

1816-1834

At the Teatro La Fenice there was no regular practice of remaining open for a substantial period during Lent until 1823, when activities began regularly to stretch into the third week of March, irrespective of the date of Easter. In 1826, the final performance of what was now usually called the *Carnovale-Quaresima* season took place on 18 March, which happens to have been the night before Palm Sunday. In years with a late Easter, academies (1824) or *recite straordinari* (1833) might be given after the formal hybrid season was terminated. The third week of March became a predictable time for Lenten premieres, for there was no danger to colliding with an early Easter, since the feast could not fall before 22 March.

The timing of productions was hardly the only thing that was changing. The cult of the superstar came to dominate Italian stages, as (in the absence of the French) the needs of *cittadini* and the

"respectable public" receded into the background. Evidences of this change include the establishment of the Teatro La Fenice of an annual *Almanacco galante*, which described works, and more particularly stars, of the preceding year. The *Almanacco* was perennially dedication "to women," an old locution for noblewomen. (Noblewomen had also been the dedicatees of countless operas of the eighteenth century, particularly when male noblemen were not available as individual patrons.)

The politically safe routes of Lenten programming that had been oriented towards sacred dramas and *accademie* were increasingly set aside for reprises of recently popular works (irrespective of their genre) and premieres of tragic operas. Some examples from La Fenice's repertory include Donizetti's *Elisir* and Rossini's *Tancredi* (both 1833). As a Lenten season became both more settled encroached on Holy Week, more works were needed to fill the playbill. The offerings became more diversified.

There was over this period some blurring of seasonal boundaries caused by frequent changes of works. In the 1820s La Fenice often kept several works in repertory, interleaving operas, concert pieces, and ballets, and also (by the middle of the century) presenting excerpts from one work with those of another. While the spring season expanded, its dimensions fluctuated greatly until the 1840s, and even after that they were not consistent from year to year. The Teatro La Fenice's primary emphasis remained fixed on Carnival. Although an important work was often performed on 26 December, it was progressively more common for La Fenice to be closed on all subsequent days of the week preceding the New Year and also on the first three to five days of January.[27] Thus St. Stephen's (the day) became cut off from any designated season including Carnival, to which it was nominally attached. Nonetheless, period accounts give the sense of a public impatiently awaiting the first night of the season.

1835-1848

The next period, and one more settled with respect to the appropriateness of opera during Lent, can be dated from two staggered events—the opening of the Teatro Malibran in 1835 and the fire at the Teatro La Fenice in 1836. For reasons that were in no way political, both changed the landscape of Venetian opera in the nineteenth century.

La Fenice's *Almanac* –restyled as the *Almanacco galante* and dedicated "to women [dame]"—now offered portraits and short biographies of the principal *donne* and *huomini* of the season. The nearby theater San Giovanni Grisostomo was renamed the Malibran, in honor of the premature decease of the rising star three months before the Fenice fire. Malibran had made an extraordinary impression in a Lenten appearance at La Fenice in 1835. She sppeared in Rossini's *Otello*, the work in which she had originally made her Italian debut. The *Almanacco* had written of her appearance on the evening of 27 March 1835 as follows: The evening was "for Venice one of the most beautiful that could ever be desired, especially because the eagerly anticipated arrival of this woman had everyone engaged in

[27] The most exhaustive source is Girardi and Rossi, *La Fenice*, which itemizes dates for individual performances to the extent that they are available.

discussion and consumed by longing finally to hear her….In a spectacle of only a half hour … she triumphed."[28]

Just as theaters had discovered as soon as their calendars were "liberated" in 1797 that freedom to stage work year-round had astounding financial implications, singers came to realize by the 1830s that to accept engagements during Lent and pre-Ascension portions of Lent following on from engagements during the St. Stephen's and Carnival periods was a strain on the voice and one's stamina disporportionate to any financial benefit. They pleaded exploitation. They insisted on special contracts for Lent (much as special contracts had been the norm for the Ascension period). They wanted higher fees per performance than during conventional periods of the theatrical year. (In most venues, they argued, there was still no Lenten opera.) This put them into opposition with composers, who cherished spots on the Lenten programs because they believed them to carry higher status than those of any other theatrical period (see § 7).

The Teatro La Fenice was gutted by a fire on St. Lucy's night (Dec. 13) in 1836, thus causing the cancellation of its entire Carnival-Lenten season in 1837. Dispute about the ordering of works for the same season a year later, when the theater was again ready for operation offer unrivalled insights on the perceptions of theatrical periods and the means by which season conferred rank.

1848-1866

The years following the abortive 1848 revolution in Venice were somewhat colorless. The introduction of a train link from Mestre to Venice in 1842 brought improvements in communication as well as an increase in tourism. The tourists of that time were long-term visitors of means, intent on seeing all the "monuments" of the city and considerable leisure. Of these, the theater was only one and not the strongest draw among Venice's decaying treasurers.

7. Reading Prestige from Seasonal Position

The reorganization of theatrical time in the nineteenth century had a profound effect on composers' assessments of their own works and on audiences' perceptions of the relative importance of works presented within one annual cycle at the same theater. Although this was a natural outgrowth of much that had gone before, it does not explain why revolution and foreign political dominance served to augment tendencies that can be traced back to the seventeenth century (if not earlier). Perhaps it is better explained by the groundswell of romanticism in the wake of revolution.

[28] *Almanacco galante 1838*, pp. 35f., "La sera di 27 marzo 1835 fu per Venezia ua delle più belle che si potessero mai desiderare, perocchè l'arrivo di questa donna I discorsi che di lei si favecano da ogni parte, il desio di finalmente sentirla, occupavano lamente ed il cuore di tutti....lo spettacolo di una mezz'ora sola con la loro presenza. L'Otello era l'opera del primo trionfo della Malibran...."

ROSSINI

Rossini's development as an opera composer offers a representative example of the overall career course a composer whose advancement was marked by his passage from the more peripheral to the more central theatrical periods of the year. It is also representative of his time insofar as we see in it the differing rankings from place to place and the slow transition of "seasonal values" from one time of year to another as the opera year gradually expanded.

Among Rossini's early works, *La cambiale di matrimonio*, which opened at San Moisè on 3 November 1810, suggests the modest expectations for novices, whose first works were often tried out in the St. Luke's season. That is made an unusual favorable impression is mooted by the fact that a year later (8 January 1812) his *L'inganno felice* was staged during more noteworthy St. Stephen's period. On the basis of its initial success, the composer was then commissioned (the day after its opening) to set three new works for the following year. The favorable prognosis for *L'inganno* proved accurate, for it ran until the end of Carnival (11 February). At its final performance its triumph was marked by the release of small doves and canaries in the theater.[29] As so often happened in the nineteenth century, however, feast could quickly turn to famine. The new works commissioned for 1812-13 met with mixed fortunes, so no further works by Rossini were given in Venice until 1819, when San Benedetto produced another of his ill-fated work, *Eduardo e Cristina*, during the uncertain Eastertide period (*Eduardo* opened on 24 April).

The Venetian reception was distinctly different from that in Milan. Prior to 1819 Rossini's works for La Scala had been limited to *La pietra del paragone* (September 1812), *Aureliano in Palmira* (St. Stephen's, 1813), and *La gazza ladra* (Ascension, 1817). A few months later (8 October 1817) La Scala's manager, Angelo Petracchi, wrote to the composer, "I am offering you the first opera of Carnival 1818-19. This is the most important and honorable [position] I can make available to you."[30] Accordingly, *Bianca e Falliero* opened at La Scala, though not until the 1819-20 season. It opened on St. Stephen's Day (1819).

Rossini's fortunes in Venice in the 1820s indicate how deepening impacts of Austrian administration. The Austrians introduced a harsher, more arbitrary kind of textual censorship than anything the Council of Ten had ever contemplated. The inaugural opera for Carnival 1823 at La Fenice was to have been Rossini's *Zelmira*, which had had its premiere in Naples the preceding February. Its proposed performance was ultimately prohibited at La Fenice, however, on the grounds that the work had also previously been staged — not (here) in Naples but in Venice, at San Benedetto. Rossini rushed to produce as a substitute a revised version of *Maometto II* (first given in Naples in 1820). It was poorly received at its Venetian opening on 26 December 1822 because (it was said) the

[29] Rossini, *Lettere*, I, 31f. The practice of releasing birds in the theater on festive occasions was known more than a century earlier.

[30] Rossini, *Lettere*, I, 259.

work was under-rehearsed, the singers were exhausted, and one of the principals was ill. The production closed after just a few performances. The Austrian head of the Venetian police, Ludwig Baron Kübeck, complained (as was his habit) of "the continual repetition of the same motives" in Rossini's music.[31] He said, however, that it would be a pity to "let La Fenice languish" and begged the Austrian governor to permit him [Kübeck] to "reinvigorate the resources of prosperity during the Carnival season, when the number of foreigners is so great, since ours are the only theaters in the Veneto available for this kind of entertainment." This statement expresses the same opportunism that can be found in countless calls to commercial action in previous centuries. At the same time, it indicates that the Austrians' best hope of being seen to support opera was invested entirely in Venice, and that traditions of provincial opera that had flourished through much of the Veneto over most of the eighteenth century, were now dormant. Rossini's only subsequent work to be premiered in Venice, the *melodramma tragico Semiramide*, opened several weeks later, on 3 February 1823.[32]

MERCADANTE

While Rossini's ascendancy through the theatrical periods can only be suggested circumstantially, Mercadante's attitudes towards his own progress through them come to life in the *Almanacco* of the Teatro La Fenice. For example, when Mercadante's *Erode* was performed (with Clerico's *ballo tragico* called *Malek-abel*) at the end of 1825 xx, the anonymous correspondent wrote that "That fatality which seems to overpower our great theater on the night of St. Stephen has exercised its sad influence again this year." *Erode*, he said, enjoyed no greater success than his [Mercadante's] *Andronico* [given on] the same night in 1821.[33] In fact *Erode* left such a poor impression that when the second work, *Otello*, opened on 10 January, the correspondent referred to the "ruin of the first spectacle" and of his this had "excited the impatience of the public."[34] This was a public, be it said, which was eager to judge after the first few bars of a work had been heard, for as soon as the music began for the third work, Gaetano Rossi's *Il Paria*, on 4 February, the audience is said to have been "bored and disappointed."[35] Mercadante redeemed himself with the last work of the [Carnival 1825] season, *Caritea regina di Spagna*, which opened on 21 February. "It was another evening of St. Stephen's for our theater," the

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[31] Only a month later its artifacts became the subject of a heated intellectual-property dispute between the Viennese publisher Artaria, to whom the score was entrusted, and the Milanese firm of Giovanni Ricordi, which had issued "unauthorized prints" of the sinfonia and arias with keyboard accompaniment (Rossini, *Lettere*, II, 98f).

[32] Rossini, *Lettere*, II, 137-169.

[33] *Almanacco 1827*, p. 25 (with pencil note saying "1825-26, Carnevale"), "Quella fatalità che sembra dominare a danno del nostro gran Teatro la sera di San Stefano [sic], ha esercitata anche in quest'anno la sua Trieste influence…."

[34] *Almanacco 1827*, p. 29.

[35] *Almanacco 1827*, pp. 33f.

correspondent reported, "but with a completely different result….The public was offered a brilliant debut … with the new opera by Mercadante and the new ballet by Clerico [*La Vergine d'Hunderlac*].[36]

For the following year [1826], the *Almanacco* again made much of the sensitive nature of St. Stephen's openings. It said of Gaetano Rossi's *Mitridate* and Galzerani's *ballo tragico* depicting *Maria Stuarda*,

> That usual restless frenzy which annually arises on the evening of St. Stephen's among both Venetians and strangers in the theater…is not absent this year, which, on the contrary, seems to be manifest even more both in the boxes and on the *platea*. Much is always required, even more provided: consequently it can presage mediocrity! Prejudice may alarm blithe and excessively favorable spirits, or unreasonably handicap the results, lead to poor counsel, and cause spectacles to fail.[37]

The verbal excesses of the *Almanacco* seem pale beside the illuminating remarks for particular theatrical periods during the Austrian era as we find them in the correspondence of the peripatetic impresario Alessandro Lanari. Working chiefly in Florence, Venice (at La Fenice), and Lucca, Lanari staggered the scheduling of his most ambitious productions across multiple theatrical periods so that he could move advantageously from venue to venue.[38] Although by the 1830s there were few qualms in Venice about staging significant works during Lent, there was no imperative to do so. There was, however, clear reticence in other locales, where for the most part Lent remained off limits as a time for secular theater. Lanari saw in this discrepancy an opportunity for himself. From 1829, his general plan was to conduct at Florence and Lucca during Carnival, then to move to La Fenice during Lent.

After the fire that gutted La Fenice in December 1836, it took a year to refurbish the premises. When plans for the reopening of the theater (on St. Stephen's 1837) were being made, Lanari's grand design and Mercadante's ambition collided. Mercadante was invited to provide a new work for the opening, but because the opening was to be given on the sometimes ill-dated feast, Mercadante found the invitation demeaning. The incensed composer wrote to the *virtuosa* Giuditta Pasta on 10 April 1837:

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[36] *Almanacco 1827*, p. 37. "La sera del 21 febbraio fu pel nostro Teatro un altra sera di s. Stefano, ma di un risultamento totalmente diverso. Con una misura da niun altri mai praticcata l'Impresa ha offerto al pubblico una prova brillantissima del suo disinteresse, dando in un punto alle scene l'Opera nuova di Mercadante, e il nuovo Ballo di Clerico." "Another evening of St. Stephen's" must here refer to an elaborately prepared work anticipated with high expectations.

[37] *Almanacco 1828*, p. 27 (with hard not saying "1826-27 Carnevale"), "Quella solita inquieta smania, che annualmente accompagna nella sera di s. Stefano e Veneziani e Forastieri al teatro, uni dagli altri sollecitati, non si è tolta alla sua attività in quella dell'anno presente, che anzi più palese pare ache agitasse e pei palchetti e per la platea gli affolati concorrenti. Molto sempre si esige, molto il più delle volte non riesce ad appagare: che dunque presagir dal mediocre! Frattanto la prevenzione allarme gli spiriti begli, e soverchiamente [p. 28] favorevole, o senza ragione svantaggiosa decide anzi tempo, conduce in seguito a irregolari giudizi, e fa cadere gli spettacoli."

[38] He also served the Venetian theater occasionally during the autumn season.

> In eleven years I have never composed a work for [the period of] St. Stephen's. I have rejected contracts for Carnival if my work is not [at least] the second one. I should have thought that the successes of *Emma* and *Il giuramento* would have entitled me to a better billing. Now they have engaged Donizetti.[39]

To gain a higher rung on the ladder of reputation, Mercadante now proposed that his new *Le due illustri rivali* be scheduled as the third work for the winter season. In the end, it was performed as the fifth.[40] *Le due illustre rivali* finally opened during Lent, on 10 March 1838.

Although Lanari's correspondence suggests that one motive for staging Lenten operas was to compensate for financial losses sustained during Carnival, Pasta's financial demands for appearing during Lent at La Fenice proved to be so high that ticket prices had to be raised. Even so, she refused to sing in more than 20 performances over the whole (December-March) season, irrespective of the number of performances the company wished to be given.[41] While such conditions thwarted the intentions behind the extended roster,[42] they also demonstrate how contentious the establishment of Lenten opera had come to be.

Mercadante's complaint about which theatrical period his work properly deserved reveals how much personal prestige rooted in relative temporal position. Just as Italians who had composed instrumental music in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did so in their youth in the hope of eventually becoming a *maestro di cappella*,[43] so too most Italian composers who wrote operas for the autumn and spring periods hoped to gain sufficient recognition from their autumn and spring works to merit invitations to set Carnival and eventually Lenten works. Almost all debuts of opera composers were made during a fringe period, but to remain only a "May and November" composer was considered to amount to critical failure.

Conclusions

Revolutionary movements notwithstanding, Lenten opera was, in the end, primarily pitched to the nobility. As an ideal, Lenten opera for the nobility was a last island of retreat in a rising sea of shorter works with broader appeal to a mass audience. La Fenice's hope that by scheduling a "best work" during Lent it could extend its reach and bolster its profits proved to be in vain. Like all once "new"

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39 De Angelis, *Le carte*, pp. 202f.

40 The first and third works — Lillo's *Rosmunda di Ravenna* [26 December], Donizetti's *Maria de Rudenz* [30 January] — were, like Mercadante's *Due illustri rivali*, premieres. Bellini's *I Puritani* and *Beatrice di Tenda* constituted the second and sixth works. Donizetti was represented by the fourth, *La Parisina*, which had had its premiere as a Lenten work at the Pergola, Florence, on 17 March 1833.

41 Another singer (unnamed) limited her involvement to 38 performances and stipulated clearly that they had to occur between 5 January and 15 February.

42 De Angelis, *Le carte*, pp. 61, 200-4, 240-65.

43 In the latter capacity they would compose only choral and concerted music.

theatrical periods, the absorption of Lenten opera into the overall calendar did serve, however, to flatten the profile of the others proportionally.

The Lanari-Mercadante-Pasta dispute represents the petty dramas of a transition which otherwise seems to have gone on quietly, one city and one theater at a time. Works which might have seemed suitable for a St. Stephen's opening in the seventeenth century or a Carnival opening in the eighteenth were, by the middle of the nineteenth, generally opening in Venice in mid-March. They were usually serious, sometimes tragic works. They were distinctly different in their appeal from that of the recently popular one-act farces offered to *cittadini*. Works premiered at the Teatro La Fenice during Lent included Bellini's *Beatrice in Tenda* (16 March 1833), Mercadante's *La solitaria delle Asturie* (12 March 1840), and three titles by Verdi — *Ernani* (9 March 1844), *Attila* (17 March 1846), and *Simone Boccanegra* (12 March 1857).[44] These were hardly works to cheer on a liberated citizenry other than through voyeurism, for most focused on either the establishment or the abuse of political power in a royal (or otherwise highly exalted) setting. Only the ethnic flavor — Milanese, Galician, Catalan, Venetian, or Genovese — varied. Only the absence of heroes from Greek or Roman antiquity set the seriousness of such works apart from those of Venetian operas in the seventeenth century. (*Attila* was surely the most ironic, for it was, according to legend, Attila who was inadvertently responsible for the formation of the Venetian Republic by refugees from his terrible wrath.)

In the 1850s, the concept of dramatic genre was eclipsed by the fashion of a theatrical "program," such that in one program of Carnival-Lent 1858 at the Teatro La Fenice could combine the first act of Verdi's *Macbeth* with by one scene from Act Three and all of Act Four of his *Aroldo*.[45] Juke-box operas were soon joined by juke-box theatrical concerts. A *recita straordinaria* at the Teatro La Fenice in Carnival-Lent 1866 featured Mercadante's *Gran Sinfonia*, Rossini's *Stabat Mater*, the third act of Gounod's *Faust*, and Hertel's ballet *Flik-Flok*. This, then, is the model that the new Italian state inherited upon its formation in 1866. Theatrical patterns were not radically reformed, but the practice of changing works from night to night proceeded apace. The Lenten period survived in the new Italian Republic, while the spring season withered. By 1890 it was extinct.

In the newly amalgamated Republic of Italy, "Carnival" opera repurposed as Lenten opera was one of the few vestiges of cultural continuity that lingered from the days of the old Venetian Republic. Intact works in a serious or tragic vein, though they were few, preserved the dramaturgical stance of the earlier festive period. Their performance during Lent gave a quiet nod to the brief but traumatic French occupation, which liberated the theatrical calendar from both its civic and liturgical fetters, and also to the rigors of the Austrian one, which had newly restrained the theater was aggressive

[44] Verdi's *Macbeth,* which opened at the Teatro alla Pergola, Florence, on 9 March 1844, was also a Lenten opera.

[45] An incidental change of the same era was the insertion of the Austrian National Anthem in programs organized at La Fenice by Civico Municipio. In 18 August 1855 the theater was illuminated on the inside for a spectacle thus preceded. This practice was a sign of growing civic (and national) pride rather than a specifically Austrian initiative, for it had many parallels in other jurisdictions.

censorship and greed for intellectual ownership of the works which succeeded. Italy was left to seek a new composite identity as best it could.

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