Led by a Franco-Brazilian team of scholars in the humanities, social sciences, arts and literatures, this joint research project is developing a digital platform for Transatlantic Cultural History to be published in four languages. In a series of essays exploring cultural relations between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, it presents a connected history of the Atlantic space since the 18th century, highlighting the cultural dynamics of the Atlantic region and its crucial role in the contemporary process of globalization.

Transatlantic Operatic Networks during the Nineteenth Century

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- Europe - South America - North Atlantic - South Atlantic - Caribbean
- The Steam Atlantic - Atlantic Revolutions and Colonialism

This article explores operatic networks in the nineteenth century, with a focus on mobility between the Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean. After a brief introduction to the history of opera in these places, it goes on to consider themes of infrastructure and agency, as well as methodological questions relating to the study of these networks.

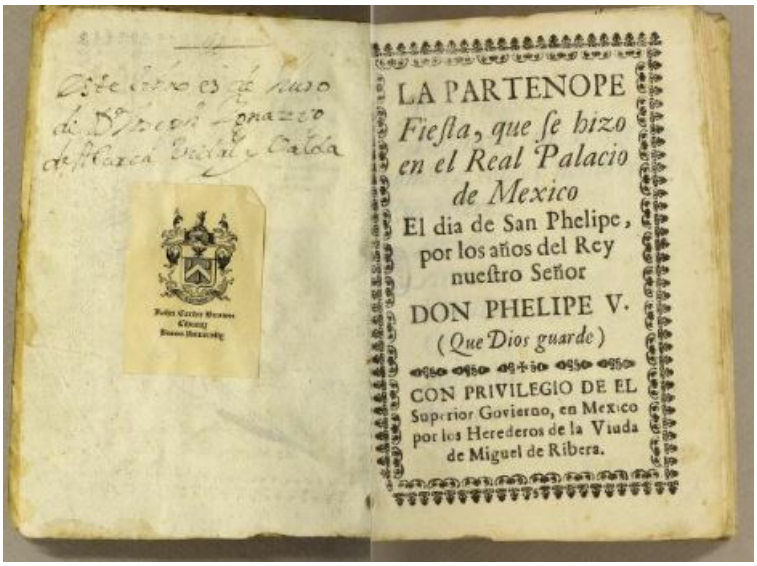
From its earliest days, opera's history was characterised by a remarkable degree of movement. By the middle of the seventeenth century, opera had spread from its origins in Florence throughout Italy and made its first appearances beyond the Alps. The eighteenth century saw impresarios, librettists, performers, and composers take to the road, zigzagging their way across Europe as opera's popularity continued to grow, not only in courtly environments, but among the emerging metropolitan elites of Paris, London, and other large cosmopolitan cities. At the same time, demand for opera also emerged overseas, facilitated in large part by the empires of Spain, Portugal, and France.

The nineteenth century marked a new stage in opera's travels overseas, forming a transition between the transatlantic movement of opera as a trapping of imperial splendour and the emergence of business-driven networks of operatic performance. These networks came to play a vital role both in developing postcolonial identities for newly independent nations and shaping a sense of global interconnection. By the final years of the century operas could be heard everywhere from New Orleans to Calcutta, Melbourne to Manaus. While opera's early proponents had once crossed Italy by horse-drawn coach, now they made their living by crossing oceans, at first by wind power and later by steam. The Atlantic Ocean became a hive of operatic activity, as coastal cities across the Americas and places further inland participated in the emergence of a new operatic world.

Before the nineteenth century

The Spanish instituted the performance of opera across Latin America, with particular success in Mexico and Peru; the Portuguese acted similarly in Brazil. How much operatic activity took place, however, depends on how we define 'opera'. In the early part of the eighteenth century, the history in hispanophone lands of what we might think of today as opera was closely entwined with other kinds of musical theatre. *Zarzuelas*, *tonadillas*, and *comedias*- all genres involving songs, but also considerable spoken dialogue and dances - were the works of choice. In Brazil, although a number of buildings bore the title 'casa da ópera' in the eighteenth century, much of the theatrical activity seems to have equally mixed, consisting in large part of imported Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian comedies, with occasional performances of sung works based on adapted Metastasian opera libretti (a practice which was common in Portugal at the time). The early operatic history of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies was nonetheless not uniform: in Lima, for instance, Italian opera became a feature of theatrical life from as early as the 1730s, through the efforts of the then viceroy, the Marquis de Castelldosrius, who brought Italian musicians with him when he moved across the Atlantic.

While most works were brought from Europe, there are occasional examples from the colonial period of works composed in the New World. Perhaps the earliest is the one-act opera in Spanish *La Púrpura de la rosa*, which was premiered in Lima in December 1701. Its composer was Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco, a Spanish man who had come to Lima in the 1660s with the Count of Lemos, one of Castelldosrius's predecessors as viceroy. Although it was likely the first opera composed in the Americas, it preserved close ties to Spain as the imperial centre: Torrejón's music was a setting of an older Spanish libretto, by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, which had first been used for an opera of the same name in Madrid c.1660 by the court composer Juan Hidalgo. The occasion for the premiere of this new version in Lima was the eighteenth birthday of King Philip V of Spain. It was not long after, however, that the first opera to be written by a composer born in the Americas - Manuel de Zumaya's *Partenope* - received its premiere at the viceroy's palace in Mexico City in May 1711. Zumaya (*c*1678-1755) was born in Mexico, and he served as director of music at the cathedral in Mexico City and later in Oaxaca. Unlike *La Púrpura de la rosa*, which featured mainly strophic songs in Spanish fashion, Zumaya's *Partenope* was a three-act work, Neapolitan in style, which might even have been performed in Italian.



LA PARTENOPE
Fieſta, que ſe hizo en el Real Palacio de Mexico
El dia de San Phelipe, por los años del Rey nueſtro Señor
DON PHELIPE V.
(*Que Dios guarde*)
CON PRIVILEGIO DE EL Superior Govierno, en Mexico por los Herederos de la Viuda de Miguel de Ribera.

Title page of Zumaya's Libretto for Partenope (1714)

Source : Archive.org

Early operatic performances in the Spanish colonies were, like Zumaya and Torrejón's operas, limited to private courtly settings. It was not until after the middle of the eighteenth century that public opera performance started to take place. The first public performance of an opera in Lima took place in 1763 and in 1773 in Rio de Janeiro. The timing was similar in many other cities in the region, and public theatres started to spring up, which presented operas alongside spoken plays (which often included music of some sort). Performances served variously as a luxury entertainment for the ruling elites and, in the view of those same elites, as a 'civilising' influence on local people.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, French colonialism had also left its mark on opera's transatlantic spread, as theatres sprang up in New Orleans and across the Caribbean. Perhaps the most important site of colonial French operatic production was Saint-Domingue (modern day Haiti). The island was France's principal source of sugar cane, making it extremely wealthy. A theatre opened in Port-au-Prince as early as 1744, and at various times the island had eight theatres. Regular opera seasons were given from 1764, which featured both performers from France and local actors and musicians. Guadeloupe and Martinique also had colonial theatres, staffed by performers brought over from France, although they were much smaller in scale than those of Saint-Domingue.

The thirteen English colonies on the eastern coast of North America also developed an operatic life. Unlike in the colonies of Spain and Portugal, there was no elite courtly culture to foster operatic performances, but there were nevertheless some musical-theatrical performances in colonial North America. English ballad opera made a particular impact here from the mid-1730s. The first confirmed operatic performance seems to have been of *Flora, or a Hob in the Well*, a ballad farce by Colley Cibber, which was given in Charleston, South Carolina in 1835. A little later, it was John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* - the most famous ballad opera of the period - which dominated

theatres across the colonies, following its American premiere in New York in 1750. As in Latin America, the colonial period in North America also saw the first attempts to compose local operas. Andrew Barton's *The Disappointment: Or, The Force of Credulity* (1767), unlike the operatic efforts of Zumaya and Torrejón further south, engaged with local subject matter, featuring local businessmen and African Americans, alongside the national types that were the typical target of ballad opera's satire.

Colonial operatic life, then, was linked strongly with the culture of the European colonisers, but it did not preclude attempts to provide new repertoire that was distinct from Europe. Nonetheless, the issue of operatic composition across the Atlantic was one that would continue to be problematic well beyond the colonial period, as composers and audiences wrestled with the question of what exactly local opera could and should be when European imports continued to dominate the repertoire.

The nineteenth century

While opera owed the beginnings of its global success to these colonial contexts, it was the revolutionary period - beginning with the Revolutionary War of 1775-83 in North America, gaining momentum with the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, and reaching its height with the wave of Latin American independence movements that lasted until 1823 - that really cemented its popularity and its significance across the Atlantic.

Italian opera

Italian opera's widespread fame across the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century, as in so many places around the globe, was driven in large part by the frenzied enthusiasm surrounding Gioachino Rossini and his music. His operas were not the first Italian works to reach the New World: in Brazil, for instance, the vogue for Italian opera had been growing since 1808, when the Portuguese court arrived in Rio de Janeiro in flight from the Napoleonic Wars. But the constant reference to and discussion of Rossini's operas in an emerging sphere of international press circulation generated the earliest sense of both an international sphere of operatic performance and of discourse.

In most cases, news of Rossini and his European fame reached places across the Atlantic before the works themselves. Even when the music did arrive, the first experience of his operas in a place would often be in concert performance or in the form of excerpts, not in staged form. This was the case in Buenos Aires, where the first performances of Rossini, in the autumn of 1822, were given in concert performance by a young locally born composer, Juan Pedro de Esnaola, who had just returned from his travels to Paris.

For many Latin American countries, enthusiasm for Italian opera marked a deliberate break from Spanish influence. Before the waves of Italian immigration that would later change the demographic make-up of Argentina and other parts of the Americas so substantially, the significance of Italian opera was perhaps related less to any specific sense of 'Italian' identity, than to its image as a cosmopolitan, European product, which promoted a sense of the newly independent nations' aspirations to a model of European 'civilisation', which was nonetheless not Spanish (Walton, 2012). It found success among the wealthy merchant classes in various Latin American port cities and also among the new creole ruling elites who had taken on governing roles after independence. Italian opera's position as a means of going against established 'Spanish' identities was cemented through the emergence of independent papers and arts journals, which created a public, discursive sphere for opera.

Cuba, meanwhile, remained under Spanish control until 1898, with frequent tension between the Spanish ruling class and the island's creole elites. Italian opera was not the preserve of either group, but Havana became home to some of the largest Italian opera troupes across the Atlantic. By the 1830s, troupes under the management of the German impresario Franz Brichta were on the stages of Havana, and later that decade were undertaking large tours from Cuba up into the United States, initially under the management of Brichta and later Don Francisco Marty y Torrens. The performance of Italian opera, then, seems neither to have been a particular endorsement of or a means of resistance against Spanish rule, but was perhaps instead tied up in wider ideas of international commerce for the island's creole elites.

Italian opera arrived in the United States with the first performance given by the García family at New York's Park Theatre on 29 November 1825. The group had travelled from London, on the encouragement of Lorenzo da Ponte (best known as the librettist for

Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*), who had been living in New York since 1805. This was not the very first time that audiences in New York would have heard Italian opera: there had been occasional performances of various works or excerpts in English translation, but the García family's performance introduced Italian opera in its original language. Although the New York public was somewhat reluctant to embrace it at the time, the García season of 1825-6 set the stage for America's passionate, but rocky love affair with Italian opera later in the century.

For the first half of the nineteenth century opera was much wider in its demographic reach in the United States than it had been elsewhere. Opera was often one of a number of variety entertainments presented in an evening and the ticket prices for operas were rarely more elevated than those for other kinds of entertainment. From the 1850s, however, prices for foreign-language opera started to rise, driven by the demands star performers made for huge fees, and by the end of the century Italian operas performed in their original language had become the preserve of monied elites, even in spite of the waves of Italian immigration to the Americas in the later nineteenth century. Meanwhile, some critics debated whether Italian opera was even a desirable part of cultural life, or if the prestige given to imported Italian works was somehow preventing the development of a more intrinsically 'American' school of composition.

Nonetheless, by the end of the nineteenth century, New York had become a major centre for operatic production. The opening of the Metropolitan Opera in the city in 1883 (funded by members of New York's growing wealthy elite, who were frustrated at the shortage of proper boxes at the existing Academy of Music further downtown) soon confirmed the city's importance in the operatic world. The soprano Adelina Patti (1843-1919), who had begun her career in the United States in the early 1860s before cementing her fame in Europe, returned to the city's stage in the 1880s as a mature performer and a global star. Latin America's operatic centres, too, continued to draw talent from Europe, and in the summers of 1899 to 1903, Enrico Caruso, the great Italian tenor, took his first transatlantic engagements in Buenos Aires, before his debut at New York's Metropolitan Opera in November 1903. Such were the attractions of transatlantic operatic life that by the early twentieth century, such operatic luminaries as the composer Giacomo Puccini were on the move, visiting Buenos Aires in 1905 and New York in 1907 and 1910.

Recording of Puccini and his wife thanking their New York hosts, 1907

Source : Youtube

Composers born in the Americas, however, often struggled to find a long-term position for their works on either local stages or on the international scene. While the names of locally born and locally based composers appeared semi-regularly on opera listings for the Théâtre d'Orléans in New Orleans, their works rarely seem to have received more than a handful of performances before disappearing from the stage. This is perhaps due to the financial unviability of learning new works that were not tried and tested for impresarios who recruited troupes internationally every year or eighteen months. On the other hand, as the American composer William Henry Fry (1813-61) complained bitterly, it perhaps reflected a disregard among American audiences for 'home-grown' composers and a desire instead to show themselves to be cosmopolitan and sophisticated by preferring European works. As a result, composers from the Americas looked to Europe to have their works performed. While some, such as Fry himself, found the doors of Europe's most prestigious opera houses firmly closed to him (he tried repeatedly through the late 1840s to persuade the Paris Opéra to produce his *Leonora*, which he felt had also been overlooked by the American public), others were more successful. The Brazilian composer Carlos Gomez (1836-96) wrote a number of Italian operas, several of which received their premiers at La Scala in Milan, most notably his *Il Guarany* (1870), which tells of the interactions between a Portuguese father and daughter and indigenous tribespeople in the Amazon.

French opera

In contrast to the astonishingly widespread success of Italian opera, French opera's travels were, for the first half of the nineteenth century at least, mostly confined to sites where the French language was spoken. *Opéra comique* was the first French operatic genre to move. The genre developed from its eighteenth-century roots as a mixture of pre-existing tunes and spoken dialogue (as it had been when the first French colonial theatres were founded in the Caribbean) to a fully-fledged operatic genre in which newly composed musical numbers alternated with spoken dialogue. Composers such as André Grétry, François-Adrien Boieldieu, and Etienne Nicolas Méhul were among the

first whose works found a place on French stages overseas.

The Haitian revolution was undoubtedly an important catalyst for the development of the thriving traditions of French operatic performance that grew up in the circum-Caribbean region in the nineteenth century. The revolution saw thousands of the island's citizens - black and white, free and enslaved - flee from the violence to other islands in the Caribbean or to the United States. In Santiago de Cuba, on the Eastern tip of the island of Cuba, where many refugees from Saint-Domingue set up residence, the St Thomas Street Theatre seems to have been the first on the island to produce French operas.

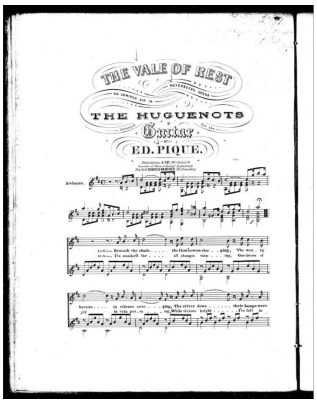
Legend has it that it was again refugees from Saint-Domingue who provided the city of New Orleans on the northern side of the Gulf of Mexico with its first theatre. The first recorded performance of opera in the city - of Grétry's *opéra comique Sylvain* - took place in May 1796. Early theatres in the city, as with so many in the region, were perpetually plagued by fire, disease, and the corresponding threat of low box office receipts, and many failed to last beyond a few seasons. But from 1819, the Théâtre d'Orléans - the first theatre in north America to have a resident repertoire company - provided the city with regular opera performances, which kept it at the forefront of operatic life in the United States for 40 years. French opera in New Orleans achieved the height of its popularity long after the city became a part of the United States (it ceased to be a French colony in 1803, when Napoleon sold the Louisiana Territory to US president Thomas Jefferson). For audiences in the city, the performance of French works provided a dual imaginative link to both the city's francophone heritage, which was increasingly being subsumed into an anglophone mainstream, and to the image of Paris as a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity.

The Orleans Theatre and Ballroom, New Orleans, 1838.

Source : Library of Congress

The emergence of *grand opéra* in the 1830s posed a new challenge to the production of French works overseas. The enormous resources required to perform these works meant that their production was a challenge to all but the wealthiest of companies. New Orleans once again managed to put them on, starting with Auber's *La Muette de Portici* in 1831, but it was really with Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* in 1835 and *Les Huguenots* in 1837 that the city's enthusiasm for *grand opéra* began to take off. All three had libretti by the French dramatist Eugène Scribe, whose spoken dramas also became popular both in their original language and in translation across the Americas. The Théâtre d'Orléans company's tour of the north east in 1845 comprised mainly grand operas, including one - *Esmeralda* - written by Eugène Prévost, the theatre's *chef d'orchestre*.

French operatic performances elsewhere in the Americas seem to have taken place on a less sustained basis. In North America, the Théâtre d'Orléans troupe was responsible for introducing cities of the Eastern seaboard such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and even, on occasion, Montreal to the latest operas, through a series of summer tours between 1828 and 1831 and again in 1843 and 1845.



Extract from Les Huguenots's arrangement, Philadelphia, 1850. Meyerbeer, and Ed Pique. The vale of rest from the opera The Huguenots. A. Fiot, Philadelphia, monographic, 1850. Notated Music.

Source : Library of Congress

In Latin America, French troupes seem to have performed in Rio de Janeiro and likely visited other cities too, but this was not sustained theatrical activity. Although Quebec did play host to some French-language opera performances in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century (including a locally written *opéra-comique* by Louis-Joseph-Marie Quesnel (1746-1809) called *Colas et Colinette*, which was performed in Montreal in 1790 and again in 1805 and 1807 in Quebec City), by the middle of the nineteenth century most of French Canada's operatic life was provided by visiting English or Italian troupes from the United States, perhaps most notably when Luigi Arditi's Italian company visited Montreal, Quebec City and Toronto in 1853.

After the middle of the nineteenth century, French opera performed in translation became very popular across the United States. Meyerbeer's operas were frequently performed in Italian by touring companies. French operettas, in particular those by Jacques Offenbach and Charles Lecocq, also became immensely popular, always performed in English translation.

Poster for Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta H.M.S. Pinafore. Created by "A.S. Seer's Print, N.Y." 1879

Source : Theatrical poster collection, Library of Congress

The texts of Offenbach's works were often substantially rewritten as they were translated, softening their satirical content and making them palatable for middle class sensibilities. Nonetheless, they often drew scathing comments from critics; many would doubtless have agreed with W. S. B. Mathews's observation in the *Musical Independent* in November 1868 that 'no accustomed concert-goer [should] imagine he has seen real Opera, when he has heard only Offenbach'.

Other works by Bizet, Massenet, and Saint-Saëns also became popular as the century progressed. Bizet's *Carmen*, in particular, was a resounding success. Max Strakosch's Italian Opera Company included the work as part of their 1878-9 tour of the United States, meaning that the first encounter many audiences had with this French opera was in Italian. English versions, both serious and burlesque, inevitably followed hot on the heels of (and in some places doubtless preceded) initial foreign-language productions, and Emma Abbott's English Grand Opera Company included the work in

its tour across the United States in 1879-80.

German opera

For the first half of the nineteenth century, German opera had little by way of a transatlantic operatic career. Weber's *Der Freischütz* was the only German work to receive any degree of popularity across the Atlantic before 1850; the final decades of the century, however, saw the thrall of Richard Wagner's music dramas spread to the Americas. After the founding of the Metropolitan Opera in New York in 1883, Wagner became a mainstay of the company's repertoire, and critics such as Henry Krehbiel established nothing short of a cult of Wagnerism in the North Eastern United States. The sheer size and technical difficulties of these works, however, as with French *grand opéra* before them, made it impractical for smaller companies with smaller budgets to perform these works for themselves.

Nonetheless, various influential American critics worked hard to position Wagner's music - not just in the performance of the whole music dramas, but in excerpts and arrangements for the concert stage - as essentially democratic. Wagner himself purportedly expressed his hopes for the future of German music in the United States, in a two-part article bearing his name in August 1879 in the *North American Review* (entitled 'The Work and Mission of My Life'), in which he expressed the belief that the German spirit would continue to develop more freely in the 'land beyond the ocean'. In the 1890s, there were efforts to try to bring Wagner to a wider audience than ever before; conductor Anton Seidl, for instance, ran summer concerts (including dedicated concerts for children) full of Wagner's music at the popular Brighton Beach Pavilion on New York's Coney Island.

English opera

The history of English opera across the Atlantic in the nineteenth century contains far fewer works than any of the abovementioned traditions. Nonetheless, a select few found enormous popularity in the United States. Michael Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl* (1843), for instance, continued to draw large audiences until the end of the century (both in English and in Italian translation as *La Zingarella*). Perhaps the most significant part of English opera's history across the Atlantic, however, was not of works originally written in English, but the question of 'Englishing': of how foreign-language operas were translated and adapted for audiences in the United States. This was, of course, a practice that was far from unknown back in the United Kingdom, but it generated a particularly heated set of debates in the context of the United States' concerns about its cultural identity and cultural independence from Europe.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, rising costs in foreign-language opera production meant that tickets prices were accessible only to the wealthiest of audiences. The translation and production of operas in English meant that companies could avoid paying the huge salaries demanded by foreign star performers, and ticket prices remained lower. English-language opera production sought to attract the middle classes, pitching itself as both entertaining and educational. It offered the hope that opera might remain financially viable in the United States, and also that exposure to English-language opera might eventually create and sustain a homegrown American school of composition. This latter position was especially significant in that, from early in the nineteenth century, Americans were worried that their constant reliance on imported cultural products was to the detriment of their nation's own artistic development.

While they did little to assuage fears about a reliance on imported culture, Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas had enormous success on American stages in the last two decades of the nineteenth century (a success that continued into the twentieth). Following the first American performance of HMS Pinafore in 1878 in Boston, audiences across the United States began to clamour for more of their works, and newly formed theatre companies across the country made Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas a mainstay of their repertoire. Critics were, perhaps predictably, divided in their attitudes towards these works and the acclaim they drew from audiences: for some, these operettas, like Offenbach's before them, were a symptom of debased public taste, while for others their music was refreshing, and their plots emphasised middle-class morality. The influence of these works was long lasting, and they went on significantly to influence the development of the American musical in the years from the start of the twentieth century.

Selections from Offenbach and Lecocq's Operettas. Title page for collection of operetta arrangements entitled 'Juvenile Opera Bouffe'. Gray, Matthias, San Francisco, monographic, 1876. Notated Music.

Source : Library of Congress

Networks and infrastructure

The transatlantic production of opera did not rely on dyadic links with Europe, but instead on various interlocking networks of performance, which maintained various kinds of connections with Europe. Many troupes were not recruited simply for a single city across the Atlantic but were put together specifically for the purposes of touring. In North America during the first half of the nineteenth century, resident troupes were the exception rather than the norm, and impresarios developed extensive touring networks across the United States for troupes clustered around a star singer. The singers would generally be recruited from Europe, often by a European impresario, and would then begin their tour of the United States from New York. Even the rare resident troupes, like that at New Orleans's Théâtre d'Orléans, would sometimes tour during their summer breaks: the New Orleans troupe visited a number of cities in the north east in the summers of 1827-32 and again in 1843 and 1845.

Early networks often relied on sea or river connections, as travel over land could prove impossible because of poor roads and difficult terrain. Later in the nineteenth century, the introduction of rail travel and improved internal infrastructure facilitated operatic connections away from the major cities. Water-based networks led to the rising importance of places like Havana. From the late 1830s, large Italian troupes gathered there, using it as the starting point for tours up into the United States. Meanwhile, some groups moved from the United States into Latin America. The García family, for instance, having entered the United States in New York, moved on to Mexico, where they were rather more warmly welcomed than they had been by northern audiences. Other impresarios had plans to establish lucrative touring routes for large troupes between the United States and Latin America. Max Maretzek, the Moravian-born

impresario who enjoyed great success in the United States, went on business trips to Havana and Mexico with the hope of establishing connections that would allow him to expand his troupes' touring circuits from the United States into Latin America, using Cuba as a way point. Meanwhile, some troupes worked their way from Buenos Aires and Montevideo round the perilous Cape Horn towards Valparaíso (Chile) and Lima, creating an extended Atlantic operatic world. A few troupes found themselves on even more distant voyages: the first opera troupe to circumnavigate the globe did so as early as the 1830s, heading from Europe to Latin America and from there on to Macau and Calcutta. This small and somewhat motley troupe doubtless played a significant role in both puncturing existing imaginings of opera beyond Europe and creating new ones, but the path they took around the globe never became an established touring route for later troupes.

Infrastructural developments not only facilitated performances in new places, but also helped to create different images of and roles for opera. Most prominent of these developments was the building of grand new theatres, which served to produce operas (as well, in many cases, as a great variety of other entertainments). The building of a theatre was sometimes used to signal colonial power. In 1830s Havana, General Miguel Tacón, the newly appointed governor general of Cuba (which was, in the 1830s, the only remaining Spanish colony), ordered the building of the Teatro Tacón, a grand theatre with over 2000 seats and standing room for several hundred further spectators, which was inaugurated on 15 April 1838. The theatre was known for its luxury and for the fact that it played host to some of the largest opera troupes to be found outside Europe for much of the nineteenth century. Its acoustic was deemed to be so good that the present-day building housing the Gran Teatro de La Habana Alicia Alonzo was built around the outside of the Tacón auditorium.

Aerial View of Teatro Amazonas, Manaus. Author: José Zamith

Source : Wikimedia

In other places, the building of a theatre could serve as an important symbol of independence and cosmopolitanism. Various large cities across Latin America planned grand, often Italianate opera houses in the wake of their independence from Spain. Early in the 1840s, plans were drawn up in Montevideo for a 1500-seat theatre house that would confirm Uruguay's place as a cosmopolitan, cultured nation. The theatre opened in 1856 as the Teatro Solís. Meanwhile, the building of the French Opera House in New Orleans in 1859 was both a proud statement of the city's French heritage and its position as a wealthy, cosmopolitan city in an increasingly interconnected world.

Waves of theatre building continued much later into the nineteenth century. The impressive Teatro Amazonas in Manaus (opened 31 December 1896), in the depths of the Amazon rainforest, was first proposed in 1881 and built during the height of the region's rubber boom, long after independence from Portugal had been achieved in 1822. While opera remained a symbol of prosperity and power, this was not imperial power, but rather commercial power.

Teatro Tacón (Habana). Frédéric Mialhe, Isla de Cuba pintoresca, 1839

Source : University of Miami Library, Cuban Heritage Collection Books

Few of these buildings were specifically called opera houses, although they played host to operas and operas often came to be thought of as the most prestigious and challenging works they hosted. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, thousands of tiny theatres sprang up across the United States - some not much more than rooms above shops - that proudly bore the title 'opera house'. These buildings are reflective of two important facets of opera's transatlantic travels: first, the lack of a clear distinction between opera and other kinds of stage works involving music and also, as the century progressed, the association of opera with artistic status and luxury, which meant that even small towns were keen to name their performance spaces in an aspirational manner.

Human agency: managers and performers

There is more to understanding the significance of transatlantic operatic networks in the nineteenth-century world than tracing the routes troupes took and the places they performed. A focus on the agency of individuals in building and sustaining these networks provides a different perspective on the growing sense of global interconnection in this period. Impresarios played an important role in recruiting troupes: Maurice and Max Strakosch put together large troupes from across Europe and North America. Sometimes, recruiters would rely on theatrical agencies to recruit troupes for overseas. This was often the practice for Italian opera; in France, it became normal practice for impresarios to contact Parisian recruiters to build troupes for the French provinces. It was not always the case, however: the Théâtre d'Orléans in New Orleans adopted what appears to have been a more personal approach, sending recruiters from New Orleans to Paris (sometimes these were musicians, but on other occasions they were artists or others who had business in Paris), and they would oversee the process with the help of further Parisian contacts.

Performers, too, forged many of the connections on which transatlantic theatre relied. Early opera singers on the move have been characterised in themselves as exemplifying the colonial relationship: either as young singers seeking fame in uncharted operatic territory, or else older singers near the ends of their careers seeking to exploit a foreign public financially before retiring. While there certainly are examples of both types in opera's transatlantic history, such characterisations can prove reductive both to modern conceptions of what a career as a performer looked like in the nineteenth century and also to the new publics that these performers encountered across the Atlantic.

Performers' reasons for accepting transatlantic engagements in the early nineteenth century were many and varied, including personal scandals and a desire for adventure. But, for many, the incentive was likely to have been at least in part financial. That is not to say that they were paid the kinds of sums demanded by the star singers of Italian opera in London or other European cities, but the pay often seemed attractive to

performers who made little money in provincial or minor metropolitan theatres back in Europe.

What is perhaps most notable is the way in which many performers' careers were marked by movement over a period of many years. That is to say, a transatlantic trip was not simply a one-off decision: a performer's life might be characterised by a great deal of international movement. The advent of steam transport certainly increased the number of performers on the move by adding to the speed and ease of travel, but many performers had sustained essentially peripatetic careers, sometimes involving multiple Atlantic crossings long before such technologies either existed or became widespread.

The life of a performer on the move could be difficult, and for those who had harboured dreams of stardom, could quickly turn out to be a disappointment. Large troupes, like those managed by Brichta in Havana in the 1830s were exceptions rather than the norm, and many performances of operas in the first half of the nineteenth century (not only Italian ones) were criticised for lacking the resources needed for a decent performance. Sometimes these criticisms were levelled at the singers, whose voices were not necessarily either what their publics had hoped for or, indeed, what certain portions of the audience had heard previously in Europe. Complaints were frequently made about theatre orchestras. While most impresarios made considerable efforts to find a core cast of principals to fill the main roles, they were often less successful in recruiting a large enough orchestra to support them. Underpowered string sections and missing wind parts were frequent complaints; the orchestra parts were often rearranged for the forces an impresario had managed to secure. Many counted on expanding their troupes with additional local musicians.

The involvement of local performers in operatic productions could bring with it a very particular set of differences from productions back in Europe. Where opera's audience at home had been almost exclusively white, when operas were performed across the Atlantic they often found themselves with performers and audiences of very different racial backgrounds. These can, however, be very difficult to uncover, owing both to systematic factors that obscure the agency of people of colour and also to the anonymity that comes with the passing of time. For all but the biggest stars, identifying the people involved in the production and reception of opera (performers, theatre staff, and audiences alike) can be difficult.

Nonetheless, we know that racially diverse performers appeared regularly on stages in Saint-Domingue. Perhaps the best known of these were Elizabeth Alexandrine Louise Ferrand, known as Minette (1767-1807), and her sister Lise (1771-?), who were both free people of colour. In keeping with many performers of the time, particularly those working outside Europe, they appeared in a range of spoken and musical theatrical works, and also ballets. Minette, in particular, seems to have been highly thought of as a singer, and the pair appeared in many of Grétry's *opéras comiques* on the island. The sisters left Saint-Domingue in 1791, after the burning of the theatre in Port-au-Prince, and are said to have fled to New Orleans with the rest of the troupe. They were but two examples of the many people of colour who worked as performers across the Atlantic, even though their presence on stage was frequently the source of debate and sometimes disapprobation. But they could also be celebrated, as indeed Minette and Lise were and as was Joaquina Lapinha in Brazil (Lapinha was on stage in Rio de Janeiro in the last decade of the eighteenth century). Their histories on stage reflect changing racial dynamics over the course of the nineteenth century and how opera could be brought into them.

Studying operatic mobility

In recent years, opera scholarship has started to engage seriously with questions of mobility, both inside and outside Europe. Such a move seems to be at least in part a response to the methodological nationalism that for many years dominated musicological scholarship on Western Art Music in the nineteenth century. What is more, while opera on the move inevitably still relied in various more or less obvious ways on opera's image as European, focussing on the movement can help us to think about relationships across and between cultures in a way that a focus on a handful of European opera houses does not.

Nonetheless, turning one's attention to the transnational provides a new set of challenges to the opera scholar. One major practical consideration is access to resources. Studying transatlantic connections often demands searching for material held in multiple, often geographically disparate locations. To an extent, digitisation has mitigated the need for expensive global travel, and online newspaper and sheet music

databases as well as the census and shipping records compiled by such sites as www.ancestry.com and other family history websites now provide access to information that would otherwise have to be gathered by extensive travel. This reliance on digital resources, however, brings its own pitfalls. The digital archive offers a potentially dangerous illusion of comprehensiveness: digital searches are often made of incomplete information - it depends, after all, on what has been digitised - and Optical Character Recognition can be patchy, especially with printed sources that are in less-than-perfect condition. How exactly digital scholarship should be balanced and complemented by physical archival work, then, is something that needs to be carefully considered.

What is more, while scores, press reports, and composers' and managers' correspondence have often formed the mainstays of Europe-focussed opera studies, they are not necessarily the most useful or even viable ways of exploring transatlantic opera. Musical documents have not often been preserved or are very hard to locate (with occasional exceptions, such as the Tams-Witmark Collection's repository of scores and parts from touring opera productions in the United States), and composer-centred approaches are most often not particularly revealing of European works' transatlantic travels. Even press criticism proves to be an area in need of re-evaluation for its role in illuminating opera's transatlantic reception: reviews of European performances and articles about works were often printed in places across the Atlantic long before the works themselves made their way there, changing the role that the criticism of a work's first performance in a place played in shaping its longer-term reception. Turning to the transatlantic, then, creates the opportunity to reflect upon whether the narratives, sources, and methods that we have relied upon in the discipline's Europe-centred history are necessarily the most potent for telling opera's story and for revealing its significance in the nineteenth-century world.

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See on Zotero

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