

Mille e una Callas. Voci e studi, a cura di Luca AVERSANO e Jacopo PELLEGRINI (Musica e spettacolo) [Atti del convegno a Roma, 3-5 dicembre 2007], Macerata, Quodlibet, 2016, 640 pp.

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The conference that led to the publication of *Mille e una Callas* was held to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the singer's death.¹ In the event, the publication of the proceedings had to await the fortieth anniversary, but in the meantime, the editors increased the number of contributors from 26 at the conference to 39 in the book. The aim of the original conference was "to discuss the phenomenon of Callas from an interdisciplinary prospective," ("discutere il fenomeno Callas in prospettiva interdisciplinare") through presentations by "scholars with very different backgrounds," us-

¹ The title of the book was taken from that of Alberto Arbasino's brief but eloquent tribute, the first in the section entitled "Ricordi."

ing “different approaches and methodologies.” (“approcci diversi e diverse metodologie”)² The interdisciplinary nature of this research gives the book considerable breadth and depth. In addition to noted musicologists and music critics, distinguished scholars from the fields of moral philosophy, life quality studies, cinema, photography and television, sociology, dance, theater, and gay and lesbian studies contributed insightful essays. In their introduction to the volume, the editors Luca Aversano and Jacopo Pellegrini note that the essays are organized around “due grandi poli di attrazione: la Callas come professionista della musica e interprete, ossia soggetto attivo; la Callas come soggetto passivo, o meglio, oggetto del discorso creativo, critico, antropologico, sociologico.” (9) As the editors point out, sometimes these “poles” overlap: “Per esempio, il tema della moda, nella seconda parte del volume, riguarda allo stesso tempo la persona del soprano.” (9)

The first part of the book—about Callas as the “active subject”—is further divided into the following subsections: “Corpo e voce,” “Sulla scena,” “Medea,” “Il modello Callas: le registrazioni, l’insegnamento, la critica.” What the editors term an “intermezzo” follows, entitled “Ricordi,” consisting largely of personal recollections by musicians and theater people who knew her or collaborated with her. The final part of the book, pertaining to Callas as “passive subject,” is entitled “Il mito,” and comprises nine essays, which cover a range of topics that contribute to a more profound understanding of the “myth” or “legend” of the great singer as it developed after her death.

Consideration of Callas’ professional life begins with essays that explore more general aspects of her art in “Corpo e voce:” the unique qualities of her voice and vocal technique (Elio Matassi and Marco Beghelli); her style of acting and her encounter with Luchino Visconti (Luciano Alberti); and the adoration of gay men for her persona and her art (Marco Emanuele). The sections “Sulla scena” and “Medea” analyze the significance of her interpretations in the various repertoires in which she excelled: Rossini (primarily her comic roles in *Il Turco in Italia* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*: Jacopo Pellegrini); Bellini’s *Norma* (Luca Aversano); Verdi roles (Emilio Sala, Marcello Conati, and Teresa Camellini); French repertoire in collaboration with George Prêtre (Aldo Nicastro); and Puccini and Verismo roles (Cesare Orselli). Particularly interesting is Francesco Cesari’s comparative study of

² See the original announcement for the conference of 2007, available on line at https://www.sba.uniroma3.it/images/Documenti/BAA/Maria_Callas.pdf (all translations mine).

her performances of three different operas, led by six different conductors: *La sonnambula* (Leonard Bernstein and Antonio Votto); *Il trovatore* (Herbert von Karajan and Tullio Serafin); and *Tosca* (Victor de Sabata and Georges Prêtre). The three essays devoted to Cherubini's *Médée* also comment on her silent role in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Medea*. The chapters by Franco Serpa and Franco Ruffini both consider the polemical disputes that raged in the critical press after her performances of the Cherubini's Italianized opera in Rome, 1955. In a notorious review of that production, music critic Guido Pannain had condemned primarily her style of acting, which he found far too active and exaggerated, lacking the poise he considered essential for the classical subject. Mario Praz, a noted scholar of English literature, and Ettore Paratore, a Latinist, both admirers of Callas, challenged Pannain's view, and the dispute continued in print for months.³

The final section on Callas' professional activity is concerned with her recorded legacy (Giorgio Biancorosso), her teaching (Cecila Gobbi, Tito Gobbi's daughter), and her reception by the critical press, even from her early career in Greece, where the lines that later divided her admirers from her detractors in the Italian press were already clearly drawn (Gina Guandalini).

The second part of the book—"Il mito"—in certain respects offers the most original contributions to the volume, primarily because of the interdisciplinary approaches to the topics addressed in it. In characterizing the Callas "legend" that developed after her death, the authors explore works of fiction inspired by her life and art (Paola Bono), plays based on episodes in her life (Paolo Puppa), dance pieces inspired by her (Concetta Lo Iacono), films about or inspired by her (Renata Scognamigli), and film documentaries or fiction about her (Giampiero Gamaleri). There is some overlap between the last two articles, but they complement each other well. Anna Chiara Tommasi's chapter on Callas and the figurative arts also suggests specific artworks that may have served as models for her gestures on stage. Simona Segre Reinach writes about the essential role that the fashion designer Elvira Leonardi Bouyeure (known as "Biki") played in the creation of Callas' glamorous image, especially after her dramatic weight loss. The final chapter "Nel nome di Maria," by Karl H. von Zoggel, is a brief account of the various international Maria Callas clubs that sprang up after her death and published newsletters in addition to collecting source materials.

³ As Franco Serpa notes at the end of his essay, "oggi una pubblica contesa intorno a questioni di estetica sarebbe in Italia non una novità, ma un miracolo" (267).

While the volume as a whole reflects the adulation that so many operagoers still feel for Callas, it does not shy away from more recent views that have been critical of her performance practice. Her ideas about the performance of Bel Canto repertoire came principally from the conductor Tullio Serafin, whose views were to a great extent formed during the verismo period. As Robert E. Seletsky has pointed out, “Callas’s external attitude toward opera was often frustratingly unadventurous and ill-informed. [...] She was content to observe so-called traditional cuts in standard operas—even in studio recordings, mechanically defending their necessity in order to “keep the action moving.” [...] Even more surprisingly, Callas’ understanding of performance practice, as we now think of it, was quite threadbare and uninformed. One can find many examples in Callas’s studio and live broadcast recordings where obvious and expected unwritten cadential trills and *appoggiature* are omitted; perhaps these errors would be understandable if the tradition had been long dead, but it was not.”⁴ Certainly far more is now known about performance practice during this period than was true when Callas was singing. Even Seletsky admits, however, that in spite of her shortcomings in that respect, her recorded legacy contains numerous haunting and unforgettable moments. One of these is surely the final scene of Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena*, which Marcello Conati describes so eloquently in this book “per ragioni legate alla perfetta fusione fra arte scenica ed espressione vocale, ma soprattutto per la suggestione esercitata dalla sua mezzavoce, una mezzavoce, come dire?, inedita. [...] Mentre ascoltavo mi dissi che non avrei mai più sentito qualcosa di simile. E così è stato.” (176)

The scholarly apparatus of the book is impressive indeed. The copious and detailed footnotes are full of cross-references, not only to other essays in the volume, but also to a wealth of other sources relevant to the topic under discussion. Many of these notes also contain extended excerpts from contemporary reviews that convey a vivid sense of the cultural context in which Callas worked. Jacopo Pellegrini’s *Bibliografia scelta e ragionata* is a useful starting point for further reading.

That the first edition of *Mille e una Callas*—published in 2016—sold out in three months testifies to the continuing fascination that the life and work of this singular artist continue to exert on a large segment of the population. This volume is the first in what is planned as a new series “dedicata

⁴ Robert E[ric] SELETSKY, “The Performance Practice of Maria Callas: Interpretation and Instinct,” in *The Opera Quarterly*, 20 (2004), pp. 590–591. The essays of both Luca Aversano and Concetta Lo Iacono refer to Seletsky’s important article.

alla musica e allo spettacolo.” (17) With such a rich and engaging collection of essays, this book has made an auspicious beginning to the series.

David Lawton

«*Poetischer Ausdruck der Seele*»: *Die Kunst, Verdi zu singen*, hrsg. von Isolde SCHMID-REITER (Schriften der Europäischen Musiktheater-Akademie, 10), Regensburg: ConBrio 2016, 248 S.

Isolde SCHMID-REITER, *Vorwort* (7) – Sieghart DÖHRING, *Krise und Neuorientierung. Zur Situation des Operngesangs in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (11) – Emanuele SENICI, *Vocal categories and individual singers in early Verdi* (23) – Daniel BRANDENBURG, *Varesi, Penco und die anderen: Verdi-Sänger des 19. Jahrhunderts* (39) – Thomas SEEDORF, *Meta Seinemeyer und die deutsche Verdi-Renaissance* (53) – Jürgen KESTING, *Verdi-Gesangs-Traditionen* (65) – Andrew MORAVCSIK, *Where have the great big Verdi voices gone?* (83) – Leo NUCCI [im Gespräch mit Dominique MEYER], *Die Herausforderung, Verdi zu singen* (129) – Claudio TOSCANI, *Verdi und die Sänger: Von der Ästhetik zur Interpretation* (135) – Peter BERNE, *Verzierungspraxis bei Verdi. Die Cotogni-Ricci-Tradition* (153) – Antonio PAPPANO [in conversation with John DEATHRIDGE], *Singing Verdi: between fidelity and freedom* (189) – Dominique MEYER, *Verdi besetzen* (209) – Christa LUDWIG und Ramón VARGAS [im Gespräch mit Stephan MÖSCH], *Accento verdiano* (223)

The present volume grew out of a conference held at the Vienna Staatsoper on 25 and 26 June 2012. The words in quotation marks in the title are from an interview with Verdi when he conducted his *Messa da Requiem* in Vienna, 1875:

An Stimmen fehlt es gewiß nicht in Deutschland, sie sind beinahe klangvoller als die italienischen, die Sänger aber betrachten den Gesang als Gymnastik, befassen sich wenig mit der Ausbildung der Stimme und trachten nur, in der kürzesten Zeit ein großes Repertoire zu erhalten. Sie geben sich keine Mühe, eine schöne Schattirung in den Gesang zu bringen, ihr ganzes Bestreben ist dahin gerichtet, diese oder jene Note mit großer Kraft hervorzustoßen. Daher ist ihr Gesang kein poetischer Ausdruck der Seele, sondern ein physischer Kampf ihres Körpers.¹

¹ Anonymous, *Verdi in Wien*, in: *Neue Freie Presse*, 9 June 1875, 1; reprinted in: *Signale für die musikalische Welt* 33 (1875), 465–467; here 466; English translation: Marcello CONATI, *Encounters with Verdi* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 109–110; Ital-