



Massimo Zicari

## Verdi in Victorian London

Open Book Publishers

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# Introduction

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Publisher: Open Book Publishers  
Place of publication: Open Book Publishers  
Year of publication: 2016  
Published on OpenEdition Books: 1 June 2017  
Serie: OBP collection  
Electronic ISBN: 9782821881648



<http://books.openedition.org>

### Electronic reference

ZICARI, Massimo. *Introduction In: Verdi in Victorian London* [online]. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016 (generated 08 mai 2019). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/obp/3112>>. ISBN: 9782821881648.

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# Introduction

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Giuseppe Verdi's first success was *Nabucco*, given in Milan on 9 March 1842. Although this was Verdi's third opera,<sup>1</sup> the composer referred to it as the first milestone in what would become a life-long, successful career. "With *Nabucco*," he declared to Count Opprandino Arrivabene years later, "my career can be said to have begun."<sup>2</sup> However, when Verdi made his first appearance as the young Italian composer with the necessary talent to forge an international reputation, Italian opera was said to be in a state of decadence.

Gioacchino Rossini, already a classic, had long quit the composition of operas to devote himself to smaller works and chamber music. Gaetano Donizetti, whose first works bear witness to the Rossinian influence, would die in 1848, but his last operas—*Don Pasquale*, *Maria di Rohan*, *Dom Sébastien*—premiered in 1843. Vincenzo Bellini, who had pushed traditional Italian opera towards a more dramatic style, passed away in 1835. Contemporary critics often remarked on Bellini's innovative use of *canto declamato*, and some were preoccupied with the alarming turn taken by modern vocal composition. Under the influence of Bellini's works, proper vocalisation was all too often sacrificed on the altar of dramatic poignancy, they believed, a choice that revealed the younger generation's limited talent. Saverio Mercadante, who outlived

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- 1 As we know, Verdi's first opera was *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio* (libretto by Temistocle Solera); it was firstly performed at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan on 17 November 1839 with moderate success. Instead, *Un giorno di regno*, a 'melodramma giocoso' set to a libretto by Felice Romani and performed at the same theatre on 5 September 1840, was a failure.
  - 2 See Julian Budden, *The Master Musicians: Verdi* (London: Dent, 1985), p. 21.

most of his colleagues and died in 1870, never attained the popularity of either Donizetti or Bellini. Having abandoned the *bel canto* style for the highly declamatory singing style adopted by Bellini, Mercadante for many years was said to be the only Italian composer to stand comparison with Verdi. However, although his operas were produced internationally, they were rarely revived and soon forgotten. In a contribution appearing in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* on 30 January 1842, the author elaborated on the sad state of Italian opera and listed Giovanni Pacini, Federico and Luigi Ricci, Pietro Coppola and Alberto Mazzucato as the only representatives of the younger generation who were worth mentioning in the same breath as Bellini, Donizetti and Mercadante.<sup>3</sup> Although their names mean little or nothing to modern operagoers, their works enjoyed a certain degree of popularity in the first half of the nineteenth century. In a letter published in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* on 6 February 1842 (one month before the premiere of *Nabucco*), the Belgian music critic François-Joseph Fétis summarised the reasons for the diminished state of Italian opera: "An exaggerated preference for the declamatory style, the shouting of the actors (I dare not call them singers), and a noisy instrumentation have become a necessity for the Italians; they no longer understand dramatic music but in this form."<sup>4</sup>

Verdi made his appearance when Italy, the cradle of *bel canto*, was craving fresh blood. As early as 1836, Giuseppe Mazzini, the man whose political writings and ideas were to contribute enormously to the cause of Italian unification, expressed the hope that a young composer would soon appear who might regenerate Italian opera. He prophesied the rise of a genius who would give birth to a new operatic genre and dreamed that the false ideals of classicism would be abandoned for a more strongly realistic music drama. The new genre should bring together two features traditionally associated with either Italian or German music: melody and harmony. Mazzini pronounced the epoch of Rossini over and the traditional combination of separate set pieces and pointless recitatives surpassed. It was time to restore the recitative to its

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3 C. Mellini, "Della musica drammatica Italiana nel secolo XIX," in *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, January 30, 1842, pp. 18–19.

4 "Seconda lettera del signor Fétis, intorno allo stato presente delle arti musicali in Italia," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, February 6, 1842, p. 22.

original dramatic function and dignity, and get rid of the stereotyped manners that then prevailed. In a word, it was time to emancipate opera from the bulky figure of Rossini and his worthless imitators. Of course, had he had the authority, Mazzini would have forbidden singers to add any arbitrary embellishments and cadenzas to operatic arias, for they impinged on the true expression of their dramatic content.<sup>5</sup> Since Verdi's first opera, *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio*, would be premiered in 1839, Mazzini could not yet be aware in 1836 that a young composer of genius was already at work to give Italian opera a fresh start.

When Alberto Mazzucato, a composer of some reputation and also the first editor of the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, reviewed the premiere of Verdi's *Nabucco* in Milan, he drew the readers' attention to the innovative features the new opera presented and to the courage the composer thus demonstrated. Verdi, Mazzucato claimed, had put himself at the head of a group of composers who, regardless of the bad taste then prevailing, were committed to interpreting the dramatic content of the libretto and breaking away from the long hackneyed operatic conventions consisting of the unavoidable *cabalette, finali, strette* and *rondo*.<sup>6</sup> However controversial this claim may sound to us today—soon after the introductory choir *Nabucco* opens with the "Recitativo e Cavatina di Zaccaria," which consists of a typical cavatina-cabaletta structure, while the "Finale I" ends with a *stretta*—the degree of novelty represented by Verdi could not escape the critic's attention. In a review appearing on 20 March 1842, Mazzucato returned to *Nabucco* and elaborated further. Verdi's melodies were spontaneous, smooth and free from superfluous flourishes; they reached their highest point when, on occasion, they were given to the choral masses and sung in unison. In general, Verdi's melodiousness reminded the critic of Bellini, Rossini and even Giovanni Paisiello, whose *Nina, o sia La pazza per amore* (1789) was also mentioned as a reference model. More tranquil than Bellini's, less artificial than Mercadante's, less brilliant than Donizetti's, Verdi's melodies, although belonging to the Rossinian school, came to establish a new mould of song.<sup>7</sup>

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5 Giuseppe Mazzini, "Filosofia della musica," in *Scritti editi ed inediti*, 94 vols. (Imola: Cooperativa tipografico-editrice Paolo Galeati, 1906–43), 8: 119–65.

6 Alberto Mazzucato, "I.R. Teatro alla Scala. Nabucodonosor, Dramma Lirico di T. Solera, Musica del Maestro Verdi," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, March 13, 1842, p. 43.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Of course, not everybody agreed with Mazzucato on the value of Verdi's operas. To others, the popular success Verdi enjoyed in the 1840s meant little or nothing since, as someone suggested, the public also lay in a state of decadence. All too often, operagoers yielded to the blandishments of false idols, ignorant as they were of the difference between the true art that never perishes and the musical platitude they were served in its stead. With *Nabucco* the question of plagiarism was also raised, and Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* (1818) and *Le siège de Corinthe* (1826) were hinted at when it came to specifying the models Verdi might have taken inspiration from.<sup>8</sup> Abramo Basevi, who contributed music reviews to the *Gazzetta Musicale di Firenze* (1853–1855), *L'Armonia* (1856–1859) and *Boccherini* (1862–1882), insisted repeatedly on the line of continuity that connected Verdi's *Nabucco* to Rossini's operas. With regard to the *grandioso* character and the melodic treatment of Verdi's arias, he recognised the strong influence exerted by Rossini's style rather than Bellini's or Donizetti's.<sup>9</sup> Basevi can also be counted among those critics who objected to the treatment Verdi reserved for the voice: "Considering the human larynx as an instrument, for such it is, Bellini treated it like a wind instrument while Verdi, one may occasionally say, like a percussion."<sup>10</sup> Verdi was well aware of these reproaches and as early as 1844 admitted to the librettist Salvatore Cammarano that he was accused of cherishing noise and punishing song.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, in 1846 Benedetto Bernani, a contributor to the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, claimed that Verdi knew very well how to employ the voice and how to make use of the individual artists he had to work with.<sup>12</sup>

This last issue was long at the core of the critical discussion regarding Verdi's new dramatised style. Some contemporary commentators

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- 8 See Benedetto Bernani, "Schizzi sulla vita e sulle opere del maestro Giuseppe Verdi," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, V/8 (Supplement), February 22, 1846, pp. i–viii.
- 9 Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Tipografia Tofani, 1859), pp. 1–18.
- 10 Basevi, *Studio*, p. 162. See also Marco Capra, "'Effekt, nicht als Effekt.' Aspekte der Rezeption der Opern Verdis in Italien des 19. Jahrhunderts," in Markus Engelhardt (ed.), *Giuseppe Verdi und seine Zeit* (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2001), pp. 117–42.
- 11 Verdi to Salvatore Cammarano, Milan, 23 February 1844. See Francesco Izzo, "I cantanti e la ricezione di Verdi nell'Ottocento, trattati e corrispondenza," in Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Marco Marica (eds.), *Verdi 2001, Atti del Convegno Internazionale* (Florence: Olschki, 2003), pp. 173–87.
- 12 Benedetto Bernani, "Schizzi sulla vita e sulle opere del maestro Giuseppe Verdi," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, V/8 (Supplement), February 22, 1846, pp. i–viii.

sympathised with those unfortunate singers who had to bear with the composer and endure the repeated strains he put on their voice. Even in the 1860s Francesco Lamperti, who taught singing at the Milan Conservatory and counted Sophie Cruvelli and Emma Albani among his pupils, lamented that the art of singing lay in a terrible state of decadence owing to the new and overwhelming tendency to assume a more dramatic character at the expense of true melody. This change was deplorable, leaving even a strong and sonorous voice sounding monotonous and wanting in the character and dramatic accent required by the lyrics and the quality of the music.<sup>13</sup> Basevi coined the expression that best describes the manner in which many commentators conceptualised Verdi's dramatic orientation: "The effect, nothing but the effect." In his view, composers like Verdi aimed uniquely at the applause of the public, for no matter how short a moment.<sup>14</sup> Basevi did not intend to pay Verdi and his colleagues compliments, for these composers, by feeding countless "effects" to their public, could be compared to those courtesans who manage to attain their prince's benevolence by way of blandishment and adulation. For this reason, he could not recognise in Verdi the founder of a new school, prone as he was to the ephemeral appetites of the public. In contrast to Basevi, however, Filippo Filippi,<sup>15</sup> who also advocated a radical reform in Italian opera, understood Verdi's mannerisms, that is to say Verdi's adherence to a distinctive manner or style in relation to each different operatic libretto he set to music. He considered this approach a quality and not a fault. Verdi's striving for new effects depended on the careful attention he paid to the dramatic content of the chosen librettos. His style stemmed from a deep sense of music drama and not from a gratuitous propensity for pointless mannerisms.<sup>16</sup>

Three main issues appear to have characterised the critical discussion that accompanied the first appearance of Verdi's operas in Italy: the continuity with an operatic tradition considered at its lowest ebb; the

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13 Francesco Lamperti, *Guida teorico-pratica-elementare per lo studio del canto* (Milan: Ricordi, 1864), p. ix.

14 Basevi, *Gazzetta musicale di Firenze*, II/1, June 15, 1854, p. 1. See Marco Capra, "Effekt, nicht als Effekt."

15 Filippo Filippi was editor of the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (1860–1862) and music critic of the Milanese daily newspaper *La perseveranza* (1859–1887).

16 Marco Capra, "Effekt, nicht als Effekt," pp. 117–42.

composer's arguable preference for strong dramatic effects; and the new singing style, to which he sacrificed proper vocalisation. Although not every critic agreed on Verdi's talent and some objected that Italian opera had taken a dangerous turn owing to his works, Verdi's popular success in Italy was undeniable and in a few years he came to symbolise his country's artistic excellence and cultural identity.

But while the figure of Verdi in nineteenth-century Italy has been investigated at length, and a number of scholarly contributions have recently appeared which explore the manner in which his operas were received and his figure was conceptualised, little attention has been paid to Victorian London and its music milieu.<sup>17</sup> What was the London critics' initial response? Why did some of them react so harshly? When did their initial antagonism change? Who were these journalists, and what credentials did they possess? What biases and prejudices influenced their critical response? Why did London opera managers continue to produce Verdi's operas, in spite of their alleged worthlessness?

This story begins in 1845, when *Ernani* was performed in London for the first time, and unfolds chronologically until the first performance of *Falstaff* at Covent Garden in 1894. Each chapter touches upon the circumstances that led to the London premiere of a new opera, describes the contextual conditions of their performance and expands upon the manner in which they were received by the press.

Not every opera composed by Verdi reached London in his lifetime. *Macbeth* (1847), Verdi's tenth opera and the first set to a Shakespeare play, was not given in London until 1960. Others were performed in London during Verdi's lifetime but only after years of waiting, a circumstance that caused critical misunderstandings of his compositional development. A case in point is represented by *Luisa Miller*, which was premiered in Naples on 8 December 1849 and first given in London in 1858. Basevi considered *Luisa Miller* the turning point between Verdi's first and

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17 In Italy, an increasingly strong scholarly interest in the reception of Verdi's operas is suggested by the recent publication of Marco Capra (ed.), *Verdi in prima pagina* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2014). Extensive monographs investigating the reception of Verdi's operas outside Italy have been published in recent years, e.g. Gundula Kreuzer's *Verdi and the Germans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), Hervé Gartioux's *La réception de Verdi en France* (Weinsberg: Galland, 2001) and George W. Martin's *Verdi in America: Oberto through Rigoletto* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

second style; in the first style, the composer followed Rossini's example, resulting in the grandioso and the passionate prevailing over other dramatic features.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Verdi's second style was characterised by a more tranquil treatment of the voice and a more careful portrayal of the *dramatis personae*, a trait that Basevi associated with Donizetti.<sup>19</sup> In *La traviata* (Venice, 1853) Basevi recognised a third style and argued that Verdi was then looking to the French comic opera.<sup>20</sup> As we will see, in London *Luisa Miller* was performed for the first time in 1858, two years after *La traviata* (1856), three after *Il trovatore* (1855) and five after *Rigoletto* (1853). Nor was *Simon Boccanegra* (Venice, 1857) performed in London in Verdi's lifetime; according to Basevi, with this opera Verdi attempted a fourth style, which emerged from a closer look at Wagner and the German music drama.<sup>21</sup> The mismatch between the chronology of Verdi's compositions and that of their London performances gave rise to different interpretations of the models the Italian composer was taking inspiration from. No trace of Basevi's periodisation can be found in the contemporary English press and only occasional reference was made to the manner in which Verdi's operas were reviewed in Paris. As one might expect, Verdi's late operas were often conceptualised in relation to the theories and, to a more limited extent, the works of Richard Wagner. Giacomo Meyerbeer also continued to be cited as an important model for the Italian composer.

*Ernani*, performed at Her Majesty's Theatre on 8 March 1845, was the first opera bearing the name of Verdi to reach London. *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* followed in 1846, *I due Foscari* and *I masnadieri* in 1847, *Attila* in 1848. These works triggered quite diverse critical reactions, in a manner similar to what we have observed in Italy. Although it was clear that Verdi possessed a strong dramatic power, not every critic agreed that this feature should be understood as a positive quality. The most conservative commentators attacked the composer and objected to both the librettos he chose and the manner in which he set them to music. The choice of the plays from which Verdi derived his librettos revealed his

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18 Basevi, pp. 157–58.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 158–59.

20 *Ibid.*, pp. 230–32.

21 Basevi, p. 265. Rather than agreeing with Basevi on Verdi's different styles, I simply wish to suggest that the different production chronology in London may have led to a different understanding of Verdi's compositional trajectory.

tendency to look to the French Grand Opéra, which was characterised by the crudest passions and the strongest human conflicts. This seemed to explain, at least in part, why such features as melodiousness and melodic ornamentation were no longer to be found in Italian opera. In fact, strong dramas qualified by crude passions and strong human conflicts called for tragical declamation rather than cheerful tunefulness. English critics such as Chorley from *The Athenaeum* and Davison from *The Musical World* conceptualised Verdi's first compositional and dramatic achievements in counterpoint to Rossini and his predecessors, Domenico Cimarosa and Giovanni Paisiello, then considered imperishable classics. In this light, Verdi's passionate compositional style, characterised as it was by a strong preference for declamation—to which proper singing was all too often sacrificed—and a noisy orchestration, was pronounced devoid of any merit. On the other hand, some critics showed signs of sincere appreciation, as *The Herald*, *The Daily News* and *The Post* testified.

On 30 May 1846, *The Illustrated London News* published a portrait of the young Italian composer and acknowledged the prominent position Verdi now held by the side of the beloved Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti.

We offer to our readers, in the present number, a portrait of the great star of the musical world at this day—Giuseppe Verdi—on whose production the fate of lyrical art would now seem to depend, as the great *maestri* whose works for the last thirty years have had possession of the Italian lyrical stage, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, are precluded from any longer wielding the pen for our profit—one by advance of years and exhaustion of mind, the other by premature death, and the third, alas! by a still more terrible fate, loss of reason.<sup>22</sup>

The enthusiastic appreciation in Italy of a composer of Verdi's stamp would appear strange to those who imagined Italian musical taste to be represented by the sickly, sentimental composition until lately classed as "Italian music" *par excellence*. But Verdi's works showed that the 'fatherland of song' had newer and vigorous resources, attributes that promised a brilliant future.

In the late 1840s, Verdi's strong dramatic feeling, energy, passion and exuberant conception prompted words of open hostility from some of the most influential Victorian critics. In the years to come, as Verdi's

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22 "Verdi," *The Illustrated London News*, May 30, 1846, p. 357.

popular success could be neither denied nor ignored, they mitigated their tone. In the period spanning the years 1849–1852, no new opera bearing the name of Verdi was given in London, despite the fact that four new operas of Verdi premiered in Italy: *La battaglia di Legnano* (Rome, 27 January 1849), *Luisa Miller* (Naples, 8 December 1849), *Stiffelio* (Trieste, 16 November 1850) and *Rigoletto* (Venice, 11 March 1851). In spite of the popular success Verdi had scored in London, it was not until 14 May 1853 that *Rigoletto* was produced at Covent Garden for the first time. Verdi strengthened his position and his operas came to be incorporated into the regular repertoire of both Her Majesty's Theatre and Covent Garden, notwithstanding the repeated attacks of the most hostile music critics.

With *Rigoletto* some commentators referred to what had been said on the continent about Verdi having entered a second, more mature compositional stage. Of course, not everybody agreed and some critics claimed that no sign of such a change could be noticed in his music. The only audible difference consisted in the composer neither overloading the music with trombones and drums nor terminating each act with the usual choirs singing in unison. This change resulted from the different librettos Verdi was setting to music, since they no longer called for strong, noisy effects. When *Il trovatore* was produced at Covent Garden in 1855, even some of the severest critics pronounced much milder judgments. Among them, *The Musical World* expressed a first tentatively positive opinion. In general, Verdi's growing popularity in London was plain and it would have been absurd to deny that he was to some extent gifted; however, the question concerning the basis on which his popularity was founded was still open to debate. More often than not, Verdi was dismissed as a composer devoid of any true merit, while the interpreters were credited with the success of his operas.

With *La traviata*, which premiered in Venice in 1853, it was clear that Verdi was pursuing the dramatic truth even at the expense of the musically beautiful. After the lofty dramas of the early years he was now shifting his attention towards dramatic subjects closer to contemporary everyday life. This explained at least in part the extensive and—according to some—objectionable use Verdi was making of *parlanti*, that is the dramatised style that lies halfway between recitative and proper singing. As previously mentioned, Basevi saw in *La traviata*

the rise of a third style in Verdi. The critic lamented that the composer had chosen an immoral subject and argued that under the influence of French literature the notion of true love had now come to justify adultery and concubinage. According to this objectionable tendency, passion if sufficiently spontaneous and sincere might justify any human mistake and redeem any piece of guilt. When applied to marital life this idea could excuse any inconsiderate deviation from the path of virtue.<sup>23</sup>

However, not every critic saw a threat to public morality in the subject of *La traviata*. When in 1856 Alberto Mazzucato reviewed the opera, he ignored that question and instead emphasised what, in his opinion, was one of the composer's highest achievements. Verdi had brought together the dramatic and the musical without mutually sacrificing either; in his opera music and drama were joined in perfect harmony to give rise to moments of intense beauty.<sup>24</sup> Other critics expressed different opinions and some attacked both the composer and the librettist. Carlo Lorenzini, alias Carlo Collodi, deemed the libretto that Francesco Maria Piave had derived from *La Dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils an unworthy patchwork made up of bad verses and indecent words. The music, despite some beautiful moments, would never last, owing to a complete lack of dramatic consistency. The moral question, Lorenzini added, was not worth considering since a number of plays of much more dubious morality had long overcrowded the Italian dramatic scene. The morbid reaction exhibited by some members of the female public found no justification in the operatic subject, despite the scandalous text from which it had been derived. According to Lorenzini, a number of reasons could be given to explain why *La traviata* was perfectly harmless. Among them was the role played by the music, to which the text was constantly sacrificed, and the nature of opera as such, which privileges grandiosity and subordinates the meaning of the lyrics to the music.<sup>25</sup>

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23 Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, pp. 226–28.

24 A. Mazzucato, "La traviata," *Gazzetta Musical di Milano*, XIV/39, September 28, 1856, pp. 308–09; n. 42, October 19, pp. 329–31. See also Marco Capra, *Verdi in prima pagina*, pp. 65–85.

25 Carlo Lorenzini, "Corrispondenza di Firenze (dove si parla di Livorno)," *L'Italia musicale*, VII/89, November 7, 1855, pp. 353–54. See also Marco Capra, *Verdi in prima pagina*, pp. 103–10.

In 1856 London, *La traviata* triggered a huge discussion and provoked strong reactions. The idea of having a *lorette* on stage was perceived as outrageous and offensive, while the negative influence exerted by French literature was declared deplorable. Of course, not every critic agreed that *La traviata* was immoral, its subject shameful and its music worthless. Nor was it necessarily wrong to disguise corruption by means of beautiful singing. *La traviata*, some critics held, was no less immoral than any other opera of the same kind and, in the end, dealing with morality was still a business of the stage. Even the theatre manager, Benjamin Lumley, had to intervene in the discussion, arguing that the subject was worthy of consideration since it reflected the continuous conflict between good and evil, although in a new shape. The immense popular success *La traviata* scored in London, a success which the moralising positions expressed by the press did much to arouse, also drew the critics' attention to the role played by individual interpreters. Although many a critic agreed that Marietta Piccolomini, the first Violetta in London, was inadequate as a singer, most of them claimed that the enormous success of the opera depended on her dramatic talent. In fact, the composer was confined to a marginal position and *La traviata* was pronounced a success despite Verdi's music.

*Luisa Miller* was first performed in London in 1858. Little or no attention had been paid to this opera since its premiere nine years earlier. Nor had the debate concerning Verdi's new style found significant resonance in the London press. Furthermore, its success in London was limited and did not add to the composer's fame. But by the late 1850s, *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata* had entered the regular operatic repertoire and established themselves as "stock operas" together with *Ernani* and *Nabucco*. A theatre manager could put them on stage at a moment's notice, and rely upon them in order to secure a large audience, all the more so if a cast of cherished interpreters were attached to them. Two singing styles were now generally accepted, depending on the repertoire; while the Rossinian coloratura continued to lie at the foundation of Italian *bel canto*, Verdi's new declamatory manner, no longer condemned as the epitome of a sad state of decadence, came to be considered a more suitable style for modern dramatic operas.

*I vespri siciliani* reached London in 1859, *Un ballo in maschera* in 1861, *Don Carlos* and *La forza del destino* in 1867. By the end of the 1860s

Verdi was the only living Italian composer enjoying an international reputation. Some London critics still held, however, that this fortunate condition rested less on his artistic merits than on the desperate condition of Italian opera generally. It was felt that although in *Un ballo in maschera* the composer had advanced his dramatic and compositional skills, the attempt to imitate Giacomo Meyerbeer did not result in an improvement, but rather in a reduced effectiveness in the melodies and in a less spontaneous dramatic genius.

In 1862 Verdi's cantata *Inno delle nazioni* was the object of an animated discussion and caused some embarrassment in the press. Having commissioned a march for the inaugural ceremony of the Great London Exhibition, the Royal Commissioners refused to have a cantata performed in its stead, for reasons that were never made entirely clear. Therefore, Verdi's *Inno delle nazioni*, was instead performed on 24 May at Her Majesty's Theatre, upon the conclusion of a performance of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.

In 1867 *Don Carlos* and *La forza del destino* were given in London. Some critics argued that in *Don Carlos* Verdi had assimilated the lessons of the "German school," although it was unclear how this influence was manifested in his compositional style. Nor was it evident whether by "German school," Wagner's works and theories were meant to be understood. In fact, many critics were still referring to Meyerbeer as Verdi's main reference model.

In 1875, Verdi himself conducted his *Requiem Mass* at the Royal Albert Hall, while in 1876 *Aida* was given at Covent Garden for the first time, featuring Adelina Patti in the title role. In the 1870s, the London musical milieu underwent major changes, mostly due to the prominent position now occupied by Richard Wagner's works and theories. In 1870 *Der Fliegende Holländer* was performed in Italian at Drury Lane, while in 1872 the London Wagner Society was founded. *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser* were given at Covent Garden in 1875 and 1876, respectively. Some critics could not resist the temptation to draw a comparison between Verdi and Wagner, and some suggested that while Wagner's lofty theories represented an overwhelming challenge to both the musical cognoscenti and the uneducated operagoers, Verdi's music had a merely entertaining function. *The Times* drew a comparison between the poverty of *Aida's* libretto and the manner in which Wagner's works

were characterised by a more stringent sense of dramatic necessity. However, the critic did not agree with those commentators who argued that Wagner's influence was audible in Verdi's music. Although it was not possible to deny that Verdi's style had developed over time, the claim that he was imitating his German colleague was devoid of any concrete justification. Other periodicals acknowledged a change in Verdi's style and suggested that, having abandoned the Italian models, he had begun to found himself upon Meyerbeer and Wagner. The imitation of the first resulted in *Don Carlos*, while the influence of the great prophet of the future was thought evident in *Aida*.

By the time *Otello* and *Falstaff* were performed in London (1889 and 1894), the image of Verdi had undergone a radical change. No longer a young composer to be treated with scorn and contempt, he now commanded respect. The Milan premiere of *Otello* offered itself as an opportunity for the English critics to report on a momentous event in the history of Italian opera. Some of the correspondents published ample retrospectives covering Verdi's career and works, while others indulged in portraying him as a country gentleman, a landed proprietor and successful breeder of horses who now used composition as a means of relaxation. In the 1870s music journalism in London was transformed, largely because a group of well-known personalities passed away and a new generation of young music critics made their appearance. The critics of the young generation treated Verdi with respect, and the hostility that had been meted out to his early operas can no longer be found in the later reviews. Some commentators continued to insist on the relationship between Verdi's late style and Wagner's music-drama. Whether Verdi was considered an imitator of Wagner or not, the compositional technique of the second was constantly hinted at as the benchmark against which the music of the first should be examined. The question concerning the use of *leitmotifs* was often raised, especially when it came to specifying the discriminating factor between Wagner and Verdi. However, no one could deny that with his last operas Verdi had realised two unparalleled masterpieces.

This investigation does not aim at exhaustiveness and four journals occupy a prominent position: *The Athenaeum*, *The Times*, *The Musical World* and *The Musical Times*. Periodicals like *The Illustrated London News*, *The Spectator*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Literary Gazette*, *The Musical Gazette*

and *The Leader* have also been taken into consideration in order to reflect the extent to which, on specific occasions, the critical debate could be pervasive. Limited attention has been paid to the figure of George Bernard Shaw, whose complete musical criticism has long been available, selections having also appeared in monographs focusing on specific aspects of his journalistic activity. Although each Victorian periodical followed a slightly different style, with titles often appearing enclosed in quotation marks rather than italicised, the excerpts reproduced in this volume have been standardised according to the current practice. Titles of operas and other long musical compositions or literary works, plays and poems have been italicised, while titles of single arias, scenes, etc. are enclosed in quotation marks. In order to avoid confusion, the names of the characters, which were often italicised in the originals, are reproduced without any typographic emphasis.