

# Music on Stage



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Edited by

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Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-7603-8

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-7603-2

*TO SUE HUNT -  
THANK YOU FOR YOUR WISE COUNSEL*



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# FOREWORD

ERROLLYN WALLEN

Opera (here encompassing all genres of music theatre, whether virtual or digital) is bloodshed. From the first kernel of an idea, right through to the last word sung in performance, the confluence of so many storytellers — composers, librettists, conductors, directors, designers, filmmakers, singers, dancers, historians, critics, wigmakers and, indeed, the audience itself — wreaks havoc with the human psyche. It isn't just power play — everyone yearns to tell their own story in their own way, more than often to the death. But when we hold our nerve, when we fully explore, when we witness and tell the stories of our time — when we open up the stage, when we share that stage, we can begin again; we can rediscover and reinvent. From carnage to spirited collaboration!

These papers from the Music on Stage conference are an important contribution to scholarship and the general understanding of music theatre in all its forms and performance practice. The international contributors reflect on and further provoke contemporary discourse about the ever broadening notion of opera as an art form without boundaries; indeed, of music itself as theatre.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the contributors for their considerable patience during the long gestation of this book. I am greatly indebted to Christopher Hurrell without whom this volume would not exist—his phenomenal IT expertise and infinite patience has enabled this project to finally reach fruition—to him I owe immeasurable thanks.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my many colleagues at Rose Bruford College for their support and encouragement, not just for and during the conferences, but also during the preparation of this book, especially Professor Nesta Jones, Dr. Paul Fryer and Professor Kathy Dacre for awarding me the RSVP bursary and the Rose Bruford Teaching Fellowship which have allowed the necessary release from regular deployment to complete this project.



# INTRODUCTION

## OPERA, THE MUSICAL AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

JANE SCHOPF

Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance in Sidcup, Kent, offers the only online undergraduate degree focusing exclusively on all aspects of opera. It was from this programme that the “Music on Stage” conference series emerged; starting in 2006, and held biennially in October. The conferences aim to embrace all music and musico-theatrical genres; highlighting the fact that drama exists wherever performance takes place, with or without text. Each conference offers scholars the opportunity for interdisciplinary study and debate in all aspects of musical performance. The keynote speakers at the fourth conference were the composer Errollyn Wallen who discussed her compositions for the 2012 Paralympics and Welsh National Opera, and Professor Nicholas Baragwanath who shared his research into eighteenth-century Italian composition manuals. There were twenty-six papers from which thirteen are presented here. The conference was truly international with delegates coming from ten different countries. For ease of navigation, this volume sets out the papers under the three main conference streams of opera, the musical and performance practice, even though there are, inevitably, substantial crossovers and subtleties of focus within each section.

### Opera

The collection of papers on opera covers a wide spectrum of operatic debate reflecting the online programme as a whole, from historic (contextualising Wagner and Rimsky-Korsakov) to contemporary opera (Nono, Maher); the current discussion of *Werktreue* v. *Regieoper*; investigation into the genesis of one of opera’s most iconic characters, Wagner’s Wotan; exploring Nono’s *Prometheo*, Jennifer Walshe’s music

theatre pieces and Reich's *The Cage*; while also interrogating the use of animal characters on stage and their perceived threat to the human voice.

Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe's paper "*Werktreue* and *Regieoper*" reassesses the binary opposition inherent in these two terms and considers whether such opposition needs exist at all. He offers a full definition of each term and seeks, through selected Wagner productions, to proffer a redefinition of each term and the notion that both approaches aim for the same thing—to bring the work "as close as possible to the spectator", concluding that, ultimately, both can offer insightful, meaningful productions and "serve the purpose of allowing opera to fulfil its spiritual purpose, of developing the feminine aspect of members of the production team and of spectators".

The paper "Katharina Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as a Meta-production" by Lufan Zu considers the *Werktreue* v. *Regieoper* debate in respect of this 2007 Bayreuth production. For Katharina Wagner, this opera encapsulates the ideological clash between artistic tradition and innovation—conventional production and *Regieoper*. Zu interrogates Katharina's arguments for reform through an analysis of Act 3. She explains Katharina's support for Brecht's anti-Wagnerian view that the notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk* induces observational torpidity and outlines her belief that audiences must be stimulated to become active interpreters rather than passive observers (especially with Bayreuth's political past). Zu concludes that "Katharina's meta-production in Bayreuth [is a] typical avant-garde *Regieoper* illustrating the post-war ambivalence of operatic institutions."

John Nelson contextualises the political events in Russia which surrounded the composition of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas. Drawing on these, he analyses the composer's own political stance showing that the composer was quite outspoken about repressive Tsarist policies. For performances, the composer preferred the freer, private theatres (as opposed to the courtly, Imperial establishments) as he could give greater rein to his views on the oppression of the people and the concomitant stultifying effect on the arts and artistic expression. However, Nelson points out that despite this progressive approach seen in his operas, the composer was a conservative in terms of his teaching, as he wanted students to be grounded in the 'old' techniques before they experimented with the newer ones which were just emerging.

Katherine Syer's paper "Artemis, Agamemnon, and the Evolution of Wagner's Wotan" unearths material about the genesis of one of Wagner's most iconic characters by tracing "Wagner's artistic experiences in the period just prior to his encounter with Aeschylus's *Oresteia* [1847]" when

Gluck's *Iphigenia* operas and Spontini's *La Vestale* formed a study project for Wagner. By interrogating his re-working of the end of Gluck's *Iphigenia in Aulis* and his familiarity with Spontini's opera, Syer uncovers intertextual threads between these works and Wagner's own latent compositions (most notably *Die Walküre*), while further exploring his reading of the Greeks to uncover the real influence on the final nature of the character Wotan.

John Green discusses Mark Messing and Mickle Maher's *The Hunchback Variations Opera*, "the first [...] truly Chekhovian opera"—a work which inhabits the liminal world of historic and imagined realities. The paper explores the thematic structure (developing variations on the theme of artistic endeavour) and initial production of this work and the challenges presented in attempting to recreate Chekhov's "mysterious sound" (*The Cherry Orchard* Acts 2 and 4)—a feat which, ultimately, the two protagonists, Beethoven and the Hunchback, fail to achieve, thus embodying the Chekhovian sense of failure, even though the Hunchback becomes "transformed through the transcendent power of music."

Trevor Siemens' paper on Nono's *Prometeo* explores a new type of theatre piece performed in near darkness, without narrative, where the listener is at the centre of the performance and where the performance space itself is integral to the final aural experience. Outlining Nono's radical use of text in various compositions, Siemens discusses the essence of this highly original work—"All that is, is sound". The work challenges us to re-evaluate what constitutes opera, for Nono it was "acoustic dramatics", forcing us to listen "to find the expressive power within music."

The paper "From Cage to Walshe" is a study of the genesis of the theatricality of Jennifer Walshe's music (specifically *Hygiene*) which defies traditional labels as she attempts, influenced by John Cage's 4'33'', to embrace more elements of performance—"the essence [...] being] precisely the integration of the aural and visual elements by means of action" where all aspects of the performance, musical and otherwise, have equal status and where "the affirmation of the theatricality of music is not withdrawn, but rather exhibited". Katschthaler sums up the dilemma of labels: "we can do justice to *Hygiene* as a piece of music only with a hybrid concept of music, in which the aural isn't privileged any more."

Justin Grize's paper "Orpheus among the animals: beastly presences on the operatic stage" is a study of the history and use of animal characters in opera set against Humanist philosophy. It delves into the Renaissance notion of the opposition of opera's striving to reach the sublime against the perceived moral degradation embodied in animals with their lack of moral

and spiritual attributes. Has opera tried to silence the voices of those operatic characters depicted as animals because they threaten the autocracy of humans, the supremacy of the human voice and the centrality of humans in the universe/on the stage? Grize contrasts the inclusion (or otherwise) and silence of animals in various seventeenth-century operas based on the Orpheus myth with later operatic narratives that embrace animal protagonists and highlight the importance of man's co-existence with the members of the animal kingdom.

## The Musical

The Musical is the genre within musicology that has seen the most growth in recent years. The "Music on Stage" conferences always support a strong stream of scholarship in this field; but the term is unsatisfactory as often it becomes the repository for works which defy the traditional label "opera" yet are not from the Broadway-style stable. The term "music theatre" is gaining much ground in accommodating theatrical pieces which embrace wider aspects of performance yet retain dramatic narrative in various guises.

Maia Sigua's paper on Reich's *The Cave* highlights the dilemma many of us feel with traditional labelling of musico-theatrical forms. Is this or that work an opera, a musical, a video-opera, a documentary video theatre or something completely different? Sigua argues that the term 'musical-multimedia performance' best fits Reich's extraordinary composition.

Boris Wong's paper on Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* suggests a further reading of this work in the light of the influence of Seurat's method of pointillism on its composition, suggesting the composer and librettist adapted this approach "as a reflection on the relationship between songs and drama". For illustration Wong employs Scott McMillin's theory of the two types of time in musicals, "book" and "lyric" time, and applies it to the song "Putting it together" from Act 2, concluding that "the song reorganizes the convention of the two orders of time, [...] in a manner paralleling the juxtaposition of coloured dots in Seurat's pointillist work." Wong thus brings Seurat's painting into sharper focus rather than it being merely the instigation for the narrative and the visual focal point on stage, by linking the creative thought processes of the plastic and aural arts.

Alejandro Postigo talks about his project to create a musical synthesis between Spanish *Copla* music and the Anglo-American "book" musical. Trying to resurrect an indigenous genre of musical theatre which suffered from censorship during Franco's reign, and building on the subsequent

importation of Anglo-American musical theatre, Postigo hopes for a future with an amalgamation of *Copla* folk art and the structure of modern-day musicals as exhibited in the Tin Pan Alley comedies and “book” musicals. With this idea, he sought to create such a work in his theatre project *The Copla Musical*, utilizing an intercultural team of librettists and performers to synthesise both cultural traditions.

One stage not often considered in its own right in scholarship on music theatre, is television – a domestic stage, as Alicia Alvarez notes, which is immediately available to all without the need to travel and attend traditional buildings normally associated with stages. Identifying this stage, Alvarez considers it as a narrative element of the music. By analysing Spanish popular music programmes from the 1970s onwards, plotting their development and commenting on the various styles of set which reflected the types of music played, she maps the evolution of the use and meaning of this stage.

## Performance Practice

Rose Bruford College has been a pioneer in establishing the role of the actor-musician as a singular artist in its own right by being the first to offer a degree programme in Actor-Musicianship. This highly successful programme, under the direction of Jeremy Harrison, has made this professional role a distinctive one, as under his guidance the programme has generated many professional actor-musicians and ignited academic debate in the whole area of live music within performance.

Ben MacPherson’s paper on “A: The suggestive; B: The direct; C: The Altern; Towards a tripartite model for analysing actor–musicianship” interrogates performance from the perspective of the actor-musician – about whom little scholarly work exists. Explaining the first two branches of his tripartite analytical approach, the one viewing the actor-musician’s instrument as “an extension of the performer’s corporeality” akin to the phantom limb theory of neuroscience, and the other the “inherent (paradoxical) liminality of enacting the drama and acting the performance”, he goes on to apply them to the character Bobby in the final scene of John Doyle’s 2006 actor-musician production of Sondheim’s *Company*. This leads him to question these approaches by using a third approach—conceptual blending—regarding the “feedback loop” between actor and audience as a crucial tool in performance analysis.

Jeremy Harrison’s paper “Making Musgrave Dance” interrogates the whole gestalt of music and text as well as the process of actor-musician training in the light of a third-year production of Arden’s *Serjeant*

*Musgrave's Dance* at Rose Bruford College. Arden saw music as a means of adding meaning to a text “as part of its primitive or ritual register, a hidden territory which has long been the domain of music”. Actor-musician training involves “developing sensitivity to the dual presence of music and textual meaning in the actor”. Staniewski’s “mutuality” approach to text (acting) and music (singing) in his actor-musician training was one of the influences when the Rose Bruford Actor-Musician programme started. This programme seeks “to offer the actor-musician in training a way of considering how music can inform the process of acting and how, in turn, the concerns of the actor can be harnessed in the performance of music, as an integrated part of dramatic action”. By incorporating songs in the rehearsal process of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* to gain further insights into the characters, Harrison notes the process enabled actors to “play [...] the song[s] with [the] text, just as [the text] sang [their] voice[s] and bod[ies] into life: mutuality and musicality in action”.

The paper on “Musicianship above all? New Perspectives on Training towards Integrated *Bel Canto* Performance” by Konstantinos Thomaidis explores Basarab Nicolescu’s *transdisciplinarity* idea where multiple performance disciplines are embraced within the singer’s training and “disciplinary contradictions cease to work against each other”. Thomaidis analyses the practice of the Experience Vocal Dance Company’s Integrative Performance Practice (IPP), which is “based on the conscious isolation and constant engagement of the iliopsoas [muscles]” as the only core set of muscles. This “vocal dance” (integrated dance and classical vocal training) “allows fully-sounding vocalism to be integrated with unlimited movement.” It thus breaks through the traditional notion that separate disciplines are oppositional, incompatible and exclusive and creates “a single poetic statement”.

All the papers in these three sections intrinsically elucidate and expand on one subject—Music on Stage—and it is the richness of that subject which makes the interdisciplinarity of the conferences such a fertile meeting ground for composers, practitioners and academics from the worlds of theatre, opera, the Musical and performance practice.

**PART I:**

**OPERA**

## CHAPTER ONE

### *WERKTREUE AND REGIEOPER*

DANIEL MEYER-DINKGRÄFE

#### Terms

The debate regarding the role of the director in the context of an opera production has focused on the alleged binary opposite of *Werktreue* and *Regieoper* (applied to opera from the term coined in conjunction with theatre as *Regietheater*). *Werktreue* can be understood as the director's commitment to do as much justice as possible to the perceived intentions of the composer and librettist in the process of translating the libretto from page to stage in conjunction with the conductor who is in charge of the score. The director becomes the servant of the art form, in the service of the librettist, as much as the conductor is in the service of the composer. Related terms are *traditional*, *conventional* and *orthodox*. *Regieoper*, in contrast, places emphasis on the ideas that the director develops inspired by, and in relation to the combination of libretto and score. The director is no longer anyone's servant and develops an idea, often referred to as a concept, for the production and puts that idea or concept into practice over the rehearsal period. The historical development in opera is one from *Werktreue* to *Regieoper*, in parallel to the development within theatre: initially, the role of the director was to ensure singers or actors knew when to enter and exit the stage, leaving the activity of actors in theatre predominantly to improvisation, and not expecting from singers more than predominantly stationary delivery as close as possible to the ramp. According to Heeg, any binary is inappropriate that sets the work of art as it was originally intended, against the director's personal arbitrariness.<sup>1</sup> Semiotics defines the play text or libretto as a text in its own right; equally,

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<sup>1</sup> Günther Heeg, "Die Zeitgenossenschaft des Theaters", in *Regietheater! Wie sich über Inszenierungen streiten last*, Ortrud Gutjahr, editor, (Würzburg: Königshausen, 2008), 30.

the performance is a text in itself, following its own rules, and thus independent of the play text or libretto. The binary of *Werktreue* and *Regieoper* disappears in the context of these definitions.<sup>2</sup>

The opposition between the two comes into play if we consider results of the *Werktreue* approach as old-fashioned, lifeless, boring, and “fundamentalist in nature even if necessary for the discussion of opera and theatre”<sup>3</sup> and *Regieoper* as dynamic, associated with ideas, provocation and confrontation.<sup>4</sup> The opposition can be found equally between the view of *Regieoper* as the apparent disregard for the original work, with traditionalists unable to see directorial decisions as resulting from, or as intrinsic to the work, but as superimposed arbitrarily on the work and thus artificial, an expression of decadence. In contrast to that view of *Regieoper*, *Werktreue* represents the view that the director’s role is to express for the audience the author’s perceived intentions without any conceptual superimposition of their own. As Heather MacDonald put it, productions following the *Werktreue* approach “allow the beauty of some of the most powerful music ever written to shine forth”. MacDonald, writing in 2007, associates many European, in particular German, directors with *Regieoper* and sets up the Metropolitan Opera House in New York as a bastion of the *Werktreue* approach.

### Problems with *Regieoper*

What is so problematic about *Regieoper*? Allegedly, if directors engage in this mode of directing, much of the original is lost. MacDonald, for example, argues that *Regieoper* denies its audiences the “unimpeded experience of an art form of unparalleled sublimity”.<sup>5</sup> She locates the origins of opera in the seventeenth-century as an attempt by the Florentines “to recover the power of Greek tragedy, which united drama and song. Since then, opera has expressed a limitless range of human emotions, set to music of sometimes unbearable exquisiteness”.<sup>6</sup> Here is a

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Balme, “Werktreue. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines fundamentalistischen Begriffs”, in Gutjahr *Regietheater!*, 47-8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Heather MacDonald, “The Abduction of Opera”, *City Journal*, Summer, 2007, Accessed 16 September 2012, [http://www.city-journal.org/html/17\\_3\\_urbanities-regietheater.html](http://www.city-journal.org/html/17_3_urbanities-regietheater.html).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

longer passage from MacDonald to demonstrate the passion of the argument:

Without Mozart or Verdi, the Regietheater director is nothing; he cannot even hope for third-rate avant-garde status. In a world where displaying bodily fluids in jars, performing sex acts in public, or trampling religious symbols will land you a gig at the Venice Biennale and a government grant, the only source of outrage still available to the would-be scourge of propriety is to desecrate great works of art.<sup>7</sup>

In general terms, this “depressing” phenomenon of *Regieoper*, MacDonald argues, “suggests a culture that cannot tolerate its own legacy of beauty and nobility”.<sup>8</sup> According to Klonovsky, *Regieoper* is characterised by an egalitarian view of history and people, epitomised by the word “downwards”: nothing is great, nothing is beautiful, nothing has turned out well, in particular no human being. The only acceptable perspective on important people is that of the valet (who does not understand or accept anything beyond his sphere), and great deeds are the results of addictions, vanity and inhibitions. The lowest common denominator is that all people have sex, and that needs to be presented on stage as a result. The existence of high culture is considered by leftist intellectuals, among whom Klonovsky counts representatives of *Regieoper*, as suspect and scandalous.<sup>9</sup>

Rather than remaining general, some critics provide details as to where libretto and score do not match directors’ choices: MacDonald, for example, writes about the 2011 Salzburg Festival production of Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* by Claus Guth:

Lost, too, is the humor. The recognition scene, in which Figaro and Marcellina improbably discover their mother-son relationship, embodied Guth’s cluelessness about comic tradition. The repeated “Sua madre’s!” and “Tuo padre’s!” of the startled participants should be a moment of ebullient silliness, as indicated by the music’s mounting pitches, unbroken major harmonies, and accelerating tempo; instead, the characters stood around woodenly, looking uncomfortable, alienated, and glum. Figaro nervously cleaned his glasses rather than joyfully embrace his long-lost mother. The delightful fillip dissing the Count which ends the episode fell hollowly among this unhappy new family. Not surprisingly, the scene

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Klonovsky, “Herunter, Herunter”, n.d. Accessed 8 November 2012, <http://www.michael-klonovsky.de/content/view/104/42/>.

elicited not a chuckle from the audience on the night I saw it, nor was it apparently meant to—contrary to the patent intentions of Mozart and Da Ponte.

How do the singers and conductors respond to *Regieoper*? Writers opposed to this approach to opera directing in principle tend towards sweeping statements such as “singers, orchestra members, and conductors know how shameful the most self-indulgent opera productions are, and yet they are powerless to stop them”.<sup>10</sup> In fact, however, they seem not to have problems listing incidents where artists went on record with their dissatisfaction. Thus, MacDonald refers to baritone Sherrill Milnes and his appearance as Iago in a German production of Verdi’s *Otello*: the director asked him to come on stage during the third-act duet between Otello and Desdemona, crawl across the stage on his belly and engage in obvious masturbation.

Milnes was astounded. “I won’t do it, it’s wrong on every front,” he remembers responding. “At the very least, it’s rude to interrupt the focal point of the scene between Desdemona and Otello. It’s not about Iago’s reaction.” (In fact, Iago is not even supposed to be onstage.) “No way I’ll put my hand on my crotch; it’s embarrassing for Sherrill Milnes and it’s embarrassing for Sherrill Milnes as Iago.” But Milnes gave ground: “I came on the stage, but not as long as the director wanted, breathed a little hard and exited.”<sup>11</sup>

MacDonald also refers to soprano Diana Damrau and her involvement in the infamous Bavarian State Opera *Rigoletto*, set on the Planet of the Apes.

“I fulfilled my contract,” she says scornfully. “This was superficial rubbish. You try to prepare yourself for a production, you read secondary literature and mythology. Here, we had to watch *Star Wars* movies and different versions of *The Planet of the Apes*. . . . This was just . . . noise.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2010, Carl St Clair resigned from his post as general music director of the Komische Oper Berlin in protest against the *Regieoper* approach prevalent at the house. He had been critical of the *Regieoper* approach for some time, but the last straw came with Benedikt von Peter’s production

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<sup>10</sup> MacDonald, “The Abduction of Opera”.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of *Fidelio*. St Clair commented: “In this particular production I experienced what I would consider the darkest side of Regietheater, where the back of Beethoven was used for a concept. ... This concept used and abused Beethoven’s greatness in a way that was very disturbing to me.”<sup>13</sup>

### **In defence of *Regieoper***

*Regieoper* finds many voices in its defence, which tend to be as sophisticated as those defending violence on screen or extreme body art among performance installations. A closer look at alleged analysis in favour, or even in defence of *Regieoper* tends to reveal much detailed description of offending productions, which is equally present in texts against *Regieoper*, in addition to phrases that reveal hermetically sealed jargon: Steier’s comment on Bieito’s 2003 production of Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is a suitable example.

Setting the piece in a glittery, violent, vaguely eastern European whorehouse, peppered with guns, drugs, and all varieties of bodily fluid and physical assault, Bieito cut through any sentimental/contextual membrane protecting the opera from the stomach-churning brutality of such modern phenomena as human trafficking and snuff-films. In addition to the unswervingly committed cast, the Komische Oper hired 15 professional adult entertainers to fill out the sordid aesthetic texture of Bieito’s vision.<sup>14</sup>

What does the specific descriptor “sentimental/contextual” mean, precisely? What is the relationship between this particular opera and modern phenomena such as “human trafficking and snuff films”, precisely? What is the purpose of the employment of “professional adult entertainers”, precisely? In each case, the argument lacks precision and does not hold up to scrutiny.

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Mangan, “Ambushed by Regietheater ‘Fidelio’, St.Clair quits Berlin”, *The Orange County Register*, 13 May, 2010, Accessed 15 September 2012, <http://artsblog.ocregister.com/2010/05/13/ambushed-by-regietheater-fidelio-st-clair-quits-berlin/29309/>.

<sup>14</sup> Lydia Steier, “Shock and awe in the German capitol”, Online draft, 24 July, 2004, Accessed 16 September 2012, [http://www.striporama.com/steier\\_kids/Eine\\_Schande.htm](http://www.striporama.com/steier_kids/Eine_Schande.htm).

It is not necessary to hide behind such jargon. In her introduction to a collection of interviews with opera directors, many of them in the *Regieoper* category, Beyer considers the question important as to what the director wants to achieve with his or her production, and differentiates between intended provocation of the spectator, conscious irritation of habits of thinking, seeing and hearing, and consensus. On the basis of interviews with fourteen opera directors, first published in 2005, Beyer concludes that there is agreement that the directors' task is to prove, again and with commitment, that, and how, music theatre can have a meaningful impact on its audience.<sup>15</sup> Beyer emphasises that all the directors that feature in her book share their serious dedication to the operas they work on, their belief in the dialogue, and their love for and of opera.<sup>16</sup>

In line with this argument, directors associated by the critics with *Regieoper* refuse to be categorised in this way. They insist that they work predominantly intuitively with their teams of singers and designers predominantly during, and not before, the rehearsal process, and do not superimpose a concept on to the opera in question, but develop their ideas in relation to the libretto and music, even if in contrast. Peter Konwitschny is an example. He says:

I do not consider myself a representative of the *Regietheater*. Often, these directors present one single idea, such as for example staging *Rigoletto* in an empty swimming pool or in a slaughterhouse. These ideas are not consequentially followed through and explored, and in most cases, the singers stand next to each other on stage just as unconnected as in conventional productions. My stagings, on the other hand, aim to return to the roots: to get to the core of the pieces, through the jungle of interpretative traditions, which in most cases, have distorted the pieces. The accusation that this is "too intellectual for the average viewer" is absurd and exposes the enemies of such theatre as opposing new insights.<sup>17</sup>

Katharina Wagner, too, claims that she does not direct in order to provoke. She directs from within the piece, to bring out what she sees in it, and what it has to say today in relation to changes across its reception history. It is then left to each spectator to select any specific aspect they want to talk

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<sup>15</sup> Barbara Beyer, editor, *Warum Oper? Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren*, (Berlin: Alexander, 2007), 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> Per-Eric Skramstad, Peter Konwitschny, "I do not consider myself a representative of the *Regietheater*", 2009, Accessed 15 September 2012, <http://www.wagneropera.net/Interviews/Peter-Konwitschny-Interview-2009.htm>.

about in discussions of the production—there are many aspects on offer in her production, not limited to the role of the work in the Third Reich. In addition there is the thought of the general discourse on art: what is art in the first place? Who defines what art is, and what can art achieve in the spectator?<sup>18</sup>

Many representatives of *Regieoper* thus claim not to be provocative intentionally. However, what *Regieoper* does, according to Heeg (and this applies to *Regietheater* as well) is to challenge the great canonical works of theatre and opera by confronting them with the demands of the present and limited life, searching for the aspects in those works that have been left incomplete, or have not been thought through to their ends, due to the different times in which they were created.<sup>19</sup> He locates the advantage or strength of *Regieoper* in its examination of the past, its new interpretation and new definition of cultural self-image, in order to create cultural identity in times of crisis.<sup>20</sup>

This approach may come across as provocative to an audience. In terms of audiences, Beyer differentiates between spectators for whom opera continues to be a hideaway from reality, an expression of their yearning for a feeling of security, and a place where feelings appear genuine, honest and strong and can be acted out without existential hazard. For others, opera is a means to ascertain the continuation of traditional values.<sup>21</sup> Briegleb takes this argument in terms of audiences further, assuming that the yearning for theatre and opera that is “decent” is equivalent to the desire for comprehensible and stringent narrative. Against that background he argues that the difference between what he calls *alive* and *lethargic intellectualism* lies in the readiness, or unwillingness, to accept the stress caused by being confronted with theatre that is not easily understood, in the sense of the statement of theatre director Frank Baumbauer that theatre has to be straining.<sup>22</sup> In turn, stringent narratives invite recognition and identification, and spectators stop thinking on their own. The cinema, Briegleb muses, is much more

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<sup>18</sup> Ludwig Steinbach, “In Bayreuth wird die Erinnerung geweckt”, *Musenblätter*. 27 July, 2011, Accessed 15 September 2012, <http://www.musenblaetter.de/artikel.php?aid=8981&suche=>.

<sup>19</sup> Heeg, “Die Zeitgenossenschaft des Theaters”, *Gutjahr*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Beyer, *Warum Oper?*, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Till Briegleb, “Wer anständiges Theater will, soll ins Kino gehen. Ein Plädoyer für die komplexe Narration”, in *Gutjahr, Regietheater! Wie sich über Inszenierungen streiten last*, 83.

suitable to serve this mode of reception.<sup>23</sup> This argument seems to imply that it is the fault of the spectator if they dislike what they see in the opera house, because such dislike is characteristic of *intellectual lethargy*. Anders, too, takes up the perspective of the spectator, proposing that *Regieoper* plays with the spectator's expectations, provokes through new forms and cannot be digested easily by the spectator.<sup>24</sup> Walburg places himself in the position of a spectator: "If I see *Macbeth* and it is set in the job centre, then I do not understand it. Someone tries to garner attention with something that does not make sense."<sup>25</sup> Khuon, finally, insists that his theatre wants to avoid an audience leaving with the feeling that they have understood everything, and it was somehow great, but unable to remember even the contents after only two days.<sup>26</sup>

Schmidt proposes avoiding the dead-end of quarrel implied by the conventional, negative association of *Regieoper* by considering what we might hope and expect from *Regieoper*.<sup>27</sup> One is the expectation that art opens up new spaces for experience. The director needs to be prepared to have his/her certainties shattered by getting in touch with the essence of the opera. If that were the case, we would not only question opera, but we would allow those operas to question us.<sup>28</sup> Briegleb takes this consideration of the expectations regarding *Regieoper* further by suggesting how *Regieoper* could work best: he is in favour of complex narration, and sees two obstacles to its success: first, access to opera cannot be assumed any longer to be enabled by a common canon of signs and education. Secondly, directors sometimes confuse the foreign with the private.<sup>29</sup>

The overall argument that emerges from these multiple positions is that self-indulgent work, and concepts that do not make sense because they do not relate to the spectator but are private to the director are not what *Regieoper* should be all about. Rather, *Regieoper* should be understood as

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 85.

<sup>24</sup> Sonja Anders, "Mitte—Rampe—vorn: Jedem sein Regietheater. Über Zuschauerreaktionen auf Thalheimer-Inszenierungen", in Gutjahr, *Regietheater!*, 117.

<sup>25</sup> Joachim Kaiser, Ulrich Khuon, Peter Kümmel, Lars-Ole Walburg, Manfred Osten, *Regietheater – Theaterregie. Zur Lage des deutschen Theaters*, (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2010), 33-34.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Schmidt, "Geist, der stets bejaht. Regietheater in der Konsensfalle", in Gutjahr, *Regietheater!*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 77-78.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 86.

the director's attempt to enable the audience, through their work, to think about the issues presented in the opera for themselves in a contemporary context. Gutjahr sums this up in her comment that *Regieoper* implies a new role for the director, close to that of an author; rather than reconstructing and interpreting an opera that claims sacrosanct status, directors develop a new conceptualisation of the stage experience, in which the opera hypertext is exposed to multiple exchanges with discourses, arts and media.<sup>30</sup>

### *Werktreue*

Opposition against, and justifications and explanations of *Regieoper* are frequently contextualised in relation to the concept of *Werktreue*. In that set of binary opposites, the call for *Werktreue* has been presented as a yearning for an irretrievable past, with its traditional understanding of art and culture, in which opera becomes the location of everything true, good and beautiful. Heeg understands such yearning not so much as a left-over of the “eternally of yesterday”, but as a reaction of fear of and escape from the loss of a collective cultural identity in view of current trends of fragmentation.<sup>31</sup> Balme takes this argument further and identifies the understanding of *Werktreue* as the inappropriate yearning for an irretrievable past as essentially fundamentalist in nature. *Werktreue*, (mis-)understood as a desire for unrestricted obedience, implies a disposition towards absolutes, which is in opposition to freedom of the arts and is close to fundamentalism.<sup>32</sup> Linguistic studies reveal that the term *Werktreue* was first used in the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1935 with reference to Furtwängler conducting Beethoven.<sup>33</sup>

The views by the eminent German theatre actor and director Gustaf Gründgens (1899-1963) are of particular interest in this context as he is widely considered a major proponent and representative of the *Werktreue* approach in the very early days of the debate. A statement of 1930, in which actor Gründgens writes about director Gründgens, provides evidence that the spectator is at the centre of Gründgens's theatre aesthetics: spectators should be able to understand what the actors say; for

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<sup>30</sup> Gutjahr, *Regietheater!*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Heeg, “Die Zeitgenossenschaft des Theaters” in Gutjahr *Regietheater!*, 29-30.

<sup>32</sup> Balme, “Werktreue. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines fundamentalistischen Begriffs” in Gutjahr *Regietheater!*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.