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This article examines the relationship between Milan's 1906 Exposition and a celebrated revival of Verdi's *La traviata* (1853). An event of national and international importance, the exposition was notable for its focus on Italy's global presence, and in particular Italy's relationship with Latin America. The *Traviata* production, meanwhile, comprised the first Italian staging of Verdi's opera in period costume, performed at La Scala by a quintessentially modern, celebrity ensemble to mark the exposition's opening. This article explores the parallels between the exposition and the production, to investigate the complex, shifting position of Milan (and Italy) within the transatlantic cultural and operatic networks of the time; and more broadly, to examine the role of operatic staging in shaping understandings of global space within the mobile operatic canon of the early twentieth century.

## Italians Abroad: Verdi's *La traviata* and the 1906 Milan Exposition

[P]er conoscere il mondo bisogna costruirlo

Cesare Pavese

On 27 January 1906 – a characteristically cold, foggy winter's day in Milan – the fifth anniversary of Giuseppe Verdi's death was doubly commemorated by the La Scala opera company. In the morning, a funeral mass was performed at the Casa di Riposo per Musicisti, the retirement home for musicians founded by Verdi a decade earlier, featuring a selection of the composer's sacred and operatic works, and attended by various local musical luminaries as well as civic representatives.<sup>1</sup> And in the evening, a new production premiered at La Scala of Verdi's by-then classic opera *La traviata*. By 1906, such acts of public homage were becoming remarkably common, as they would continue to be in the following decades.<sup>2</sup> The composer's death in Milan in 1901 had already been marked by a variety of collective acts of remembrance, including the decision to construct a monument funded by an international consortium of donors.<sup>3</sup> As the fifth anniversary approached, commemorations such as these were moreover taking place well beyond the borders of Italy: long-running plans to erect a statue to Verdi in New York were finally coming to fruition, while in the irredentist heartland

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the funeral mass, see *Il secolo* (28 January 1906). Works performed included extracts from the *Messa da Requiem* (1874) and *I vespri siciliani* (1855).

<sup>2</sup> Verdi's posthumous history as a focal point for Italian national (and local) celebrations has been the subject of several recent articles: see Harriet Boyd-Bennett, 'Excavating Attila: Verdi "Allor che i forti corrono" (Odabella), *Attila*, Act 1', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 28 (2016), 167-170; and Laura Basini, 'Cults of Sacred Memory: Parma and the Verdi Centennial Celebrations of 1913', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13 (2001), 141-61.

<sup>3</sup> On the monument, see also Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 2010), 135; on Verdi's death, see Gavin Williams, 'Orating Verdi: Death and the Media, c1901', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 23 (2011), 119-143.

of Trieste a statue of the composer was unveiled on the day itself.<sup>4</sup> Nor was it merely the composer himself honoured with anniversary celebrations. The fiftieth anniversary of *La traviata*'s premiere had been marked in February 1903 with a series of performances at Paris's Opéra-Comique starring Mary Garden – believed to be the first in the 1840s setting originally imagined for the opera by Verdi, before the intervention of local censors in 1853 had moved the story a century and a half earlier.<sup>5</sup>

If the Parisian performances of *La traviata* could be imagined as a return home for La Dame aux Camélias, the Opéra-Comique was not alone in staking a special claim to this opera, however. The 1906 production of *La traviata* at La Scala likewise updated the opera from the usual c1700 setting to the 1840s, and was hailed as one of the greatest successes at the theatre in recent years; even an 'apotheosis' of Verdi, in the words of one effusive local critic.<sup>6</sup> The production was quickly revived for the opening of Milan's Universal Exposition later that spring, and was again acclaimed as a triumph, at a moment of intense national and international media attention on the city.<sup>7</sup> At once a welcome revival of a canonic opera not seen at La Scala for more than a decade, and a striking updating of the work's scenic dimensions, this was a *Traviata* that offered audiences something both old and new: a presentation of the opera as initially imagined – yet never witnessed – by the composer himself; and an exhumation of the Verdian spirit that also offered a decisive step away from the composer's own theatrical practice.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Il mondo artistico* (1 February 1906), 6. Trieste was at this point still under Hapsburg control: see Maura Elise Hametz, *Making Trieste Italian, 1918-54* (Rochester, 2005). The New York statue was founded by Carlo Barsotti, founding editor of the Italian-language newspaper *Il progresso italo-americano* and a prominent supporter of Italian cultural activity in the city.

<sup>5</sup> On the Paris production, see Michela Niccolai, "'Une mise en scène ingénieusement élégante': Albert Carré et *La traviata* à l'Opéra-comique (12 février 1903)", in *Verdi Reception*, ed. Lorenzo Frassà & Michela Niccolai (Brepols, 2013), 287-304. Alexandre Dumas's novel *La Dame aux Camélias* was published in 1848, with the stage play (created by Dumas himself) premiering in 1852; Verdi's opera followed a year later.

<sup>6</sup> 'Colla prima della *Traviata* la direzione della Scala offriva al pubblico, per così dire, la piattaforma di un apoteosi a Verdi nel quinto anniversario di sua morte'; *Lega Lombardia* (28 January 1906). All translations from the original Italian sources are my own.

<sup>7</sup> *La traviata* was revived on 17 April 1906, the first of a series of operas presented around the opening of the Exposition. Correspondence between the Exposition's executive committee and the La Scala management records the ambition on the part of the former to stage a suitable festival of works around the opening of the Exposition. See 'Faldone N 1906: Concerti e ricevimenti in occasione della Esposizione Internazionale e delle Feste per l'inaugurazione del valico del Sempione (28 documenti)', Archives of La Scala.

<sup>8</sup> Verdi's original plans to set the opera in the 1840s had by the premiere been replaced an early eighteenth-century setting due to censorship reasons; Verdi never reverted to his initial intentions. See Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (London and New York, 1993), 321. The 1906 Milan production is mentioned in Phillips-Matz, *Verdi*, 329, and Rene Weis, *The Real Traviata: The Song of Marie Duplessis* (New York, 2015), 302.

Explanations for the production's extraordinary success might extend beyond the well-established popularity of Verdi's score and the quality of the musical performances, and instead consider a more topical set of associations. The production at one level clearly bore witness to Milan's long-standing fascination with Paris – the most familiar of operatic reference points by the early twentieth century, as well as the paradigmatic modern city staged in Verdi's opera. At the same time, more recent operatic centres might also be invoked to account for the production's remarkable contemporary power. Both the production's conductor, Leopoldo Mugnone – a former colleague of Verdi – and its Violetta, Rosina Storchio, were by then renowned for their operatic travels to South America, visits documented in the Milanese musical press.<sup>9</sup> Buenos Aires in particular had become the site of notable triumphs for both conductor and soprano. Mugnone was director of the Circolo Italiano institute there, in which capacity he had helped to arrange Puccini's two-month tour the previous year, when he also premiered the revised version of *Edgar* in the composer's presence. Storchio, meanwhile, had experienced numerous recent successes in the Argentine capital, especially in the revised version of *Madama Butterfly* she presented together with Arturo Toscanini shortly after its disastrous premiere at La Scala in 1904.<sup>10</sup> An emerging Italian operatic centre, Buenos Aires had also become the object of intense public interest within Milan and across Italy more broadly in recent decades; above all as the destination for millions of emigrants departing the Italian peninsula (especially the South) in response to a series of economic and agricultural crises post-unification.<sup>11</sup> This situation had raised grave questions about the Italian nation's broader political project of cultural and economic unity, while facilitating the circulation of a diverse range of conceptions of *italianità* far beyond Italy.

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<sup>9</sup> Mugnone also conducted the funeral mass on 27 January 1906.

<sup>10</sup> On the Italian opera industry in Argentina, see John Rosselli, 'The Opera Business and the Italian Immigrant Community in Latin America 1820-1930: The Example of Buenos Aires', *Past and Present*, 127 (1990), 155-182; and Anibal E. Cetrangolo, *Opera, Barcos y Banderas: El Melodrama y la Migración en la Argentina* (Madrid, 2015). On the Puccini tour, see Gustavo Gabriel Otero & Daniel Varacalli Costas, *Puccini in Argentina, June to August 1905* (Buenos Aires, 2006). *Butterfly*'s Argentine success was widely reported in both Buenos Aires and Milan: see for example "Arte y Teatros", *La Prensa*, 3 July 1904; on Storchio and Toscanini's visit to Buenos Aires in 1904, see "Notizie teatrali", *Corriere della sera*, 3 May 1904, 3. Tito Ricordi wrote to Puccini on 4 July 1904 to report on *Butterfly*'s reception in Buenos Aires, arguing that 'it's like this that it takes a little step forward!' ['È così si fa ancora un piccolo passo alla dietro!']: <https://www.digitalarchivioricordi.com/en/letter/display/CLET000996>, accessed 2 February 2019.

<sup>11</sup> On Italian emigration to Argentina, see Fernando Devoto & Gianfausto Rosoli, ed., *La Inmigración Italiana en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires, 1985); and Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York City, 1870-1914* (Ithaca, 1999). On emigration from an Italian perspective, see Mark I. Choate, *Emigrant Nation: The Making of Italy Abroad* (Cambridge, 2008).

The 1906 La Scala *La traviata* might therefore be productively situated within a complex set of wider debates in Milan at this time; both about the future of Italian opera and its canon, and more generally about the relationship between Italian identity and geography during a period of unprecedented transatlantic mobility and interconnection. The production's premiere around the opening of the Milan Exposition moreover discloses an unusually complex intersection of operatic and urban discourses within the city: a moment when Italian opera's status as a global signifier of Italian identity was juxtaposed with efforts to present Milan as a globalised urban centre, one especially connected with the Americas. If the 1906 *Traviata* could appear to offer an unambiguously local, even parochial celebration of a native composer, its performance in the context of the flamboyantly international Exposition invites a more far-sighted assessment of the production's unusual power.

My broad aim in this article is thus to investigate the relationship between the *Traviata* production and wider contemporary concerns outlined at the Exposition: partly as a way to reconsider the relationship between Milan, Italian opera and Italian identity at this time; and partly to shed further light on the particular imaginative powers of operatic staging in the early twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> Examining operatic reception in relation to specific urban environments is by now a familiar approach, but my goal here is to expand the usual purview of discussions by focusing specifically on the transnational networks that shaped Milanese self-representations and civic discourses.<sup>13</sup> An examination of the 1906 *La traviata* through such a focus, I would argue, can offer an unusually powerful lens to consider the importance of operatic production as a discursive site in early-twentieth-century Milan, and its scope for negotiating global relations at this time.

In what follows, I first place the production and its reception within the specific context of the International Exposition that occasioned the revival of *La traviata*, and that notably also featured a pavilion dedicated to 'Italians Abroad'. The *Traviata* production therefore initially remains in the distance, as I situate it within an ongoing critical discussion about the consequences of Italian music's global circulation for the musical identity of the Italian nation – as well as the changing character of Milan's musical life – before addressing

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<sup>12</sup> For a recent overview of scholarly debates about Italian opera and *italianità*, see Axel Körner, 'Opera and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Italy: Conceptual and Methodological Approaches', in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17 (2012), 393-9.

<sup>13</sup> An early example is Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, 1998); a more recent overview of approaches can be found in Suzanne Aspden's forthcoming edited collection *Operatic Geographies* (Chicago, 2018).

some of the parallels between the Exposition's topography and the production's own particular set of temporal and geographical markers. To that end, I want to suggest that the different contemporary concerns outlined in the 1906 *La traviata* production were echoed in various ways in the Milanese Exposition; and such similarities can usefully alert us to some of the parallels between the exposition space and the opera house, in their attempted construction of compressed versions of 'modern' urban reality.

**'Italia: Avanti!'**<sup>14</sup>

The 1906 Milan Exposition was the first Universal Exposition held in Italy and was on an extraordinary scale.<sup>15</sup> Running for six and a half months between April and November, it was conceived to celebrate the completion of the Simplon Tunnel connecting Italy and Switzerland through the Alps, and hence – in line with many previous international exhibitions in Europe and the United States – was explicitly intended to demonstrate the city's technological prowess, as well as its quintessentially modern connections with other urban centres.<sup>16</sup> These ambitions were closely tied to Milan's recent self-fashioning as the *capitale morale* of the Italian state.<sup>17</sup> As Tullio Panteo argued in the theatrical journal *Ars et Labor*, while the 1881 Milan Exhibition had been the revelation of Milan as a commercial and agricultural centre, 1906 signified 'the solemn intention to compete with the most illustrious city of the whole world; to victoriously assert itself victoriously equal to them, at the very least; to match them all in skill, at the very least', an ambition received by 'all the civilised world in an act of homage'.<sup>18</sup> Other writers were more bellicose, drawing attention to Milan's long history of foreign occupation: '[the Exposition] will perhaps be the beginning of a new historical epoch of this city, after centuries of foreign servitude [...] ruined,

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<sup>14</sup> *Il sole*, headline (28 April 1906).

<sup>15</sup> Universal Expositions were familiar events by 1906, that since London's famed Crystal Palace in 1851 had brought together pavilions presented by different nations to display the latest industrial innovations. Official accounts record the size of the Milan Exposition as over one million square metres; estimates of visitor number vary between four and ten million. On Italian expositions more generally, see Cristina Della Coletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style: The Great Exhibitions in Turin and Their Narratives, 1860-1915* (Toronto, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> The Exposition had in fact been planned for 1905 but was delayed due to the late opening of the Simplon tunnel. On Expositions as displays of modernity and economic (and racial) might, see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851-1939* (Manchester, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> On Milan's self-image as Italy's moral capital during the post-unification period, see Giovanna Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale: letteratura e pubblicistica a Milano fra otto e novecento* (Milan, 1982); and in a later era, John Foot, *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> '[II] tentative solenne a gareggiare con le più illustre e fastose città del mondo intero; affermarsi vittoriosamente eguale ad esse, almeno; raggiungerle tutte in competenza, almeno'; *Ars et labor* (15 May 1906), 509. The 1881 Exhibition, the 'Mostra nazionale delle Arti e dell'Industria', had been an exclusively Italian event, as were subsequent exhibitions held across Italy before 1906.

destroyed by violence, dominated by ambitious egoists, subjugated by Frenchmen, Spaniards, Austrians', one author argued, the city would now finally reveal its independence and strength.<sup>19</sup> The ambitions of the Exposition's organisers not merely to announce, but actively to *perform* the nation's entrance into modernity were clear: as the official guide informed readers, their aim was 'to give a unique character of great solemnity to the event, bearer of new elements of life and progress not only to the city, but throughout Italy', and a deluge of publications issued throughout the year bore witness to the event's importance.<sup>20</sup>

Originally planned to occupy the park of the fifteenth-century Castello Sforzesco, the international scale of the event necessitated an expansion into the then-rural Piazza D'Armi, with the two sites connected by an elevated tram (see Fig.1).<sup>21</sup> A relic of Milan's noble past was thus connected to a suburban site identified with the city's future, with the two elegantly fused by the magic of late-nineteenth-century industrialisation – even if the trams themselves were chronically overcrowded. The decision to inaugurate the Simplon tunnel with an international exposition took advantage of an obvious opportunity to advertise the economic progress Milan had made following Italian unification in 1861, as well as the changing fortunes of the Italian state more generally.<sup>22</sup> As with the 1881 Exhibition, however, the exposition was unsurprisingly susceptible to a wide range of local and national appropriations. Milan could function as a metonym for Italy within the event's international remit; yet the city was also repeatedly presented as exceptional in the local press in light of

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<sup>19</sup> 'L'anno 1906 non segnerà soltanto una delle date storiche più eloquenti della vita industrial sempre più operose e più larga di Milano: sarà anche forse il principio di un nuovo periodo storico di questa città, la quale, dopo secoli di servaggio straniero, seppe così fortemente accentuare la propria gagliardia indipendente e iniziatrice. Ruinata, distrutta dai violenti, dominate da ambiziosi egoisti, soggiogata da Franceschi, Spagnuoli, austriaci, contaminate persino dai Cosacchi, Milano diede al fine nell'esplosione magnifica delle Cinque Giornate il segno epico e storico della propria virile dignità e indipendenza'. Raffaello Barbiera, 'L'Ascensione di Milano e l'Esposizione', in *Milano e l'Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione 1906: Cronica Illustrata dell'Esposizione*, ed. E.A. Marescotti & Ed. Ximenes (Milan, 1906), 99.

<sup>20</sup> 'Vennero così a fondersi in una sola varie iniziative che da diverse associazioni Milanesi eran state prese per dar singolare carattere di solennità all'avvenimento grandioso, apportatore di nuovi elementi di vita e di progresso non alla città soltanto, ma all'Italia tutta.' See 'Poche parole sull'origine e sullo sviluppo dell'Esposizione' in the *Guida Ufficiale* (Milan, 1906), 114. In practice, the opening of the Exposition on 29 April 1906 was partly overshadowed by the eruption of Vesuvius in Naples earlier in the month, a national catastrophe that dominated the media in the following weeks.

<sup>21</sup> See 'Milano, il traforo del Sempione e l'esposizione del 1906 (XI, 1906)', cited in Pietro Redondi, ed., *Città Effimera: Arte, Tecnologia, Esotismo all'esposizione internazionale di Milano del 1906: Fotografie inedite dagli archivi di Leone Soldati e Vincenzo Conti* (Milan, 2015), 28.

<sup>22</sup> On Italian industrialisation, see Paolo Milanima & Vera Zamagni, '150 years of the Italian economy, 1861-2010', in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15 (2010), 1-20; and in an earlier period, Gianni Tonioli, *Storia economica dell'Italia liberale (1850-1918)* (Bologna, 1988); and Alberto Acquarone, *L'Italia Giolittiana* (Bologna, 1988). The Exposition was initiated by a meeting of the Touring Club committee and funded through a combination of public subsidy and private finance in addition to ticket sales: see Marianonietta Picone Petrusa, Maria Raffaella Pessolano & Assunto Bianco, ed., *Le grandi esposizioni in Italia, 1861-1911: la competizione culturale con l'Europa e la ricerca dello stile nazionale* (Naples, 1988), 114-15.

the focus on industrialisation: an area in which Milan claimed to be at the forefront within Italy, and for which reason tropes of ‘work’ and ‘progress’ had become central to the city’s self-publicity.<sup>23</sup> Earlier exhibitions in Florence, Genoa, Turin, Naples, Palermo and Milan set a number of important precedents, but Milan offered itself as a model for the nation’s future – the city through which international encounters would now inevitably be mediated for Italians and foreigners alike. ‘Milan, the rich industrial Milan, whose name all us Italians from Turin to Trapani pronounce with pride, as the exponent of activity that will renew and raise up our country’, intoned the *Corriere della sera* at the year’s opening: a sentiment the Exposition sought to verify for visitors, in cementing the city as the nation’s urban centre.<sup>24</sup>

[INSERT FIG 1. AROUND HERE]

Amongst the exhibits, those dedicated to specific industrial or agricultural products alternated with national pavilions, highlighting the overlap between locally specific and more globalised products of industrialisation. A specially designed panorama demonstrated the journey from Milan to Paris enabled by the new tunnel, while extensive railway and aeroplane exhibits stressed developments in transcontinental travel. Germany, France and Great Britain – hosts of celebrated earlier expositions – appeared alongside smaller nations and emerging powers, in ways that also hinted at shifting hierarchies between international locales.<sup>25</sup> The presence of non-European pavilions – in particular from China and Egypt – allowed commentators to indulge in predictably Orientalising fantasies, with the Cairo street scene proving especially popular. At the same time, these exoticised, apparently timeless pavilions helped to position the Exposition as a space that accommodated a variety of historical stages within itself: the Exposition’s celebration of cosmopolitan modernity theatrically played out on the stage of Milan’s past and present.<sup>26</sup>

In a recent comparative study of fin-de-siècle imperial expositions in London, Paris and Berlin, historian Alexander Geppert has drawn attention to the ‘complex interplay

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Ed essendo questa la prima volta in cui dalla sua più moderna città l’Italia parla in sè in confronto del mondo moderno, è bene che essa dichiari anche questo, tranquillamente, con fede’. See Ugo Ojetti, ‘Verso l’avvenire’, *Corriere della sera* (29 April 1906).

<sup>24</sup> ‘Milano, la ricca, l’industre Milano, da cui tutti noi italiani, da Torino a Trapani, pronunziamo il nome con orgoglio, come esponente dell’attività nella quale si rinnova e si rialza il nostro paese’, *Corriere della sera* (1 January 1906).

<sup>25</sup> Germany, France, Great Britain, Belgium, Holland, Austria, Canada and South America all had individual national pavilions; forty countries participated in total.

<sup>26</sup> The fundamentally colonial ideology of international expositions has long been recognised by scholars: see for example Timothy Mitchell, ‘The World as Exhibition’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989), 217-236.



between national and internationalism in a concrete urban locality' at such events.<sup>27</sup> Geppert emphasises the rhetorical trope of expositions as 'fleeting cities', highlighting the interdependent relationship between exposition and city. The former invariably incorporated the host nation, while encouraging a perception of the city itself as an urban spectacle extending beyond the temporary duration of the exposition. Drawing on the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, Geppert identifies expositions as moments when different aspects of socially-produced space were explicitly juxtaposed and interwoven: the 'representation of space' (here the exposition itself) placed alongside the 'space of representation' – the permanent city in which the exposition was displayed and observed.<sup>28</sup> In Milan, a similar dynamic was continually created between the exposition that sought to represent the globe, and the city in which it was staged, with boundaries between the two spaces becoming porous. Milan, for example, had its own pavilion within the Exposition, celebrating the city's recent improvements in drainage and hygiene, alongside its many artistic riches and landmarks.<sup>29</sup> Most strikingly, the Exposition entrance was a life-size replica of the opening of the Simplon Tunnel, allowing visitors to trace the tunnel's construction through a number of interior displays before entering Milan's own grand reimagination of the fin-de-siècle Exposition.<sup>30</sup>

The Exhibition of Italians Abroad became recognised as a highlight amongst the numerous pavilions (see Fig.2).<sup>31</sup> Initially overlooked in the press, by the final week a proposal had been put forth to make the pavilion a permanent fixture of the city's cultural landscape.<sup>32</sup> A feature borrowed from earlier national exhibitions in Genoa and Turin, the pavilion celebrated the achievements of Italian citizens in the Americas and Northern Africa, eliding complex discourses about emigration and colonisation to emphasise instead the persistence of Italian cultural practices across a globally-dispersed community.<sup>33</sup> Focused in

<sup>27</sup> Alexander Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Palgrave, 2010), 11.

<sup>28</sup> Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, 222-40. For Henri Lefebvre's own account, see *La Production de l'espace* (Paris, 1974), republished as *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicolson Smith (Oxford, 1991). Lefebvre defines socially-produced space as a trialectic, in which *conçu* (the representation of space) and *vécu* (the space of representation) are continually supplemented by *perçu* (the lived practice of space).

<sup>29</sup> Reporting on the Exposition, *L'Illustrazione Italiana* remarked 'The expositions are a little new world in the old large world; they have a life of their own; they live on special events that take place exclusively in them and for them; they have their own characteristic public, cosmopolitan, accustomed to all the joys and all the little disagreements that an Exposition can offer'. 'Corriere' (24 June 1906), 600.

<sup>30</sup> On the construction of the Tunnel, see the *Cronica*, 50-71. The interior of the entrance contained an exhibition dedicated to the tunnel's construction.

<sup>31</sup> See for example 'Esposizione di Milano: La Mostra degli Italiani all'estero', *Corriere della sera* (18 September 1906).

<sup>32</sup> *Corriere della sera* (2 November 1906).

<sup>33</sup> On the earlier pavilions, see Coletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style*, and Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 119-22.

particular on Italian-language newspapers, the pavilion also included photographs, statistics and displays by 112 Catholic missions in order to outline the industry and patriotism of Italian citizens living abroad.<sup>34</sup> Argentina and Eritrea were allowed their own stands within the pavilion, a move that dissolved awkward power distinctions into the more neutral notion of ‘the Italian collective who exercise their work outside the confines of Italy’, in the words of the pavilion guide.<sup>35</sup> As Robert Viscusi has observed, such displays of emigrant activity typically presented Italian emigres in a ‘double optic’: the self-presentation of the diasporic community held in balance with the decisions of various Chambers of Commerce, for whom the exhibition could function as a way to highlight economic opportunities outside of Italy for Italian businessmen.<sup>36</sup> The pavilion at the same time sought to negotiate a delicate balance between the foreign and the diasporic, avoiding exhibits that could be subject to an inconvenient overlap of collective claims – an issue especially important for the awarding of prizes.

Despite this emphasis on clear distinctions between national allegiances, however, the achievements of Italian citizens were also prominently on display within a separate South American pavilion that had been specially commissioned by the American consulates in Milan in collaboration with the local government (see Fig.3).<sup>37</sup> As Mark Choate has shown, the defeat of Italian military forces at the battle of Adwa in 1896 precipitated renewed calls to develop emigration to the Americas, and for failed colonial efforts to be rejected in favour of efforts to develop a ‘new Italy’ (in politician Attilio Brunialti’s words) across the Atlantic.<sup>38</sup> Rhetorical assertions were supported by a complex system of societies, banks, churches, schools and publications that endeavoured to sustain links between Italy and its emigrant populations, contributing to the formation of an Italian identity at times less tarnished by

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<sup>34</sup> See the pavilion catalogue, *Esposizione di Milano 1906: Catalogo della Mostra ‘Gli Italiani all’Estero’* (Milan, 1906).

<sup>35</sup> *Esposizione di Milano*, 5-6. The USA was also represented within the Exhibition of Italians Abroad, and the Buffalo Bill show proved a notable attraction at the wider Exposition alongside other North American exhibits, but there was no specially-dedicated USA pavilion. Having hosted in St Louis in 1904, it would appear that the US government decided not to offer a unique pavilion.

<sup>36</sup> See Robert Viscusi, ‘The Universal Exposition’, in *Strangers in a Strange Land: A Survey of Italian-Language American Books (1830-1945)*, ed. James P. Periconi (Bordighera, 2013), 30-41; the quotation is located on 33. Viscusi’s essay examines the guide book *Gli Italiani negli Stati Uniti D’America* produced for the 1906 Expo, that was inspired by an earlier Argentine volume, *Gli Italiani nella Repubblica Argentina* (1898).

<sup>37</sup> See the *Guida Ufficiale*, 132.

<sup>38</sup> Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 21-56.

regional rivalries than within Italy itself.<sup>39</sup> In tune with such ambitions, the official chronicle declared that ‘[t]he Argentinian Republic effectively constitutes, by the number of Italians who have emigrated and are emigrating – 1,500,000 between 1859 and 1905 – a second Italy, yet [one] strange and mysterious, of which we know too little and of which we believe we know too much: a second Italy, of which returning compatriots fortunate and unfortunate alike have told miraculous and disheartening things, that we could judge on the extent and trustworthiness of them.’<sup>40</sup> A recent series of articles by journalist Luigi Barzini in the Milanese *Corriere della Sera* chronicling his visit to Buenos Aires – republished as *Argentina vista come è* (1902) – had already offered readers a deeply contradictory series of representations of the country, highlighting the poverty and exploitation that existed among Italian emigres alongside the promised riches of the New World. Noting the vast expenditure on public projects and urban expansion, for example, Barzini wryly commented that ‘the important thing is that Buenos Aires maintains its position as the “the second Latin city in the world” – the first, you know, is Paris – and it matters little that finances are ruined, and that debts mount in frightening proportions’.<sup>41</sup> Elsewhere, Barzini painted a gloomy portrait of life in the immigrant districts of the city, while acknowledging the extraordinary contribution of Italian citizens in developing the infrastructure of an emergent superpower.<sup>42</sup>

Barzini’s aim was clearly to demystify Argentina for his Italian readership, and to alert Italians to the hardships that existed in the New World – even if the sheer numbers making the journey across the Atlantic demonstrated the continued allure of a better life in the Americas. For some Italian emigration officials, indeed, such a departure of emigrants could even be imagined as a convenient way to regulate the oversaturated Italian labour market, however humiliating the results inevitably were for Italy’s international standing.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 72-147. On the internal politics and mechanics of Italian emigration, see also Piero Bevilacqua, Adreina De Clementi & Emilio Franzini, eds, *Storia dell’emigrazione italiana* (Rome, 2002); and Donna R. Gabaccia, *Italy’s Many Diasporas* (Seattle, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> ‘Effettivamente la Repubblica Argentina costituisce, per il numero degli italiani che vi hanno emigrate e che vi emigrano – 1,500,000 dal 1859 al 1905 – una seconda Italia, strana e misteriosa ancora, e di cui sappiamo troppo poco e di cui crediamo troppo di sapere: una seconda Italia, da cui i compatriotti fortunati e quelli sfortunati, tornando, hanno raccontato cose troppo miracolose e troppo sconcertanti, perchè noi potessimo, sulla scorta e sulla fede di esse, raccapazzarci e guidicare.’ *Cronica*, 608.

<sup>41</sup> Luigi Barzini, *Argentina vista come è* (Milan, 1902), 105-6. Barzini’s account built on earlier travel writings, such as Edmondo de Amicis’s by-then classic Argentine travelogue, *Sull’Oceano* (1888). Already in 1886, the *Corriere della sera* had prophesied that ‘the Argentine Republic will, in a few years, be a new Italy across the Ocean’: ‘L’America Latina’, 19-20 September 1886. On Buenos Aires’s astonishing urban growth in this period, see James R. Scobie, *Buenos Aires: Plaza to Suburb, 1870-1910* (New York, 1974).

<sup>42</sup> Barzini, *Argentina vista come è*, 144-163.

<sup>43</sup> For a recent study of efforts to exploit emigration as a way to deal with labour problems within Italy, an approach frequently in conflict with nationalist foreign policy, see Marco Soresina, ‘Italian migration policy

When parliamentary committees had first met to discuss the issue of emigration in 1888, the Piedmont representative ruefully declared that ‘emigration to America has become a necessity. It is an inevitable evil no one can stop.’<sup>44</sup> Argentina’s ambiguous position as a new Italy across the Atlantic was reinforced elsewhere during the Exposition by sustained news reports on the emigration crisis, a situation that escalated further in the decade leading up to the Great War.<sup>45</sup> After the Decorative Arts and Architecture pavilions were destroyed by fire on 3 August 1906, *Il secolo*’s coverage over the reconstruction was placed alongside a lead story on the crisis of emigration, ‘the greatest problem of modern Italy’.<sup>46</sup> Lamenting the many citizens departing the country in order to ‘secure themselves a better fortune in America’, the paper estimated that the total number of emigrants in 1906 alone would be one million – a figure that dwarfed the population of Milan itself, and offered an ironic counterpart to the Exposition’s focus on human mobility.<sup>47</sup>

[INSERT FIGS. 2 AND 3 AROUND HERE]

The South American pavilion reinforced the promulgation of a transatlantic Italian identity through numerous parallels with the exhibition of Italians Abroad. The former featured a statue of Columbus at its entrance in the act of sighting land – a physical reminder of the Italo-centric gaze of the exhibits – while the Argentinian section centred around a giant sculpture of Garibaldi on horseback, a monument to the general’s time in South America and his involvement in the Uruguayan Civil War. So strong were the parallels, in fact, that in an exchange between *La perseveranza* and the commissary of the Latin American pavilion published a few weeks after the opening, the newspaper asserted that ‘many of the exhibits in the Latin American Pavilion are *Italian*, and therefore ought to be displayed in the Italians Abroad section’, concluding that the two pavilions had effectively entered into competition.<sup>48</sup> The implication that the modern Italian and Argentinian states shared roots both from the discovery of America in 1492 and from the Risorgimento in turn underlined the unusual historical purview of the two pavilions within an Exposition otherwise largely dominated by

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during the Great Migration Age, 1888-1919: the interaction of emigration and foreign policy’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 21 (2016), 723-746.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Choate, *Emigrant Nation*, 28-9.

<sup>45</sup> See Bailly, *Immigrants in the Land of Promise*. Italian citizens abroad were recorded in the official census from 1871 onwards; in 1901 the Italian government published a nine-volume work entitled *Emigrazione e colonie*.

<sup>46</sup> *Il secolo* (23 September 1906).

<sup>47</sup> ‘[Hanno] disertato quei paesi per recarsi [...] miglior fortuna in America’, *ibid.* The *Guida* informed readers that Milan’s population in 1906 was 600,000.

<sup>48</sup> ‘molti degli Espositori dell’America Latina sono *italiani*, e dovevano adunque esporre nel padiglione degli Italiani all’Estero’; ‘Mostro degli Italiani all’estero ed America Latina’, *La perseveranza* (22 July 1906).

ideas of technological modernity. Not merely focused on the present and an imagined future, the pavilions traced a shared lineage of Italian mobility and productivity, emphasising a narrative of parallel yet ambiguously hierarchical development. ‘This display, destined to be the summit of *italianità* abroad, could not and should not do without a historical part, that recounts past Italian glories: a part exclusively dedicated to the propagation and diffusion of *italianità*’, declared the guide.<sup>49</sup>

The tensions inherent in Milan’s progressive (and nationally emblematic) self-image were further highlighted in the renaming of prominent thoroughfares during the Exposition’s run. Corso Loreto – now one of the city’s most prominent shopping streets – was renamed Corso Buenos Aires, while two adjacent squares were renamed Piazza Argentina and Piazza Lima in honour of the nation’s relationship with South America. Renowned for its Lazaretto (a quarantine station for travellers), Corso Loreto was associated with movement to and from the city and had become a key part of Milan’s popular representation through the final pages of Manzoni’s novel *I promessi sposi*. The renaming of the three sites into a ‘South American’ quarter thus recognized the expanded conceptions of travel and cultural interchange that were marking the city by 1906, and did so within a district cut off from the city’s medieval centre and already undergoing rapid architectural change.<sup>50</sup> If the name ‘Corso Buenos Aires’ was a sentimental homage to the millions of emigrants across the Atlantic, the actual choice of location embedded the Americas amidst more immediately topical notions of the future. As the renaming reminded visitors, the Exposition as a whole was dominated by visual and verbal signifiers of other realities, that nevertheless resided within the more venerable surroundings of the ancient city. Such signifiers drew attention to Milan’s position within international cultural, economic and communication networks, while inviting visitors to imagine unseen worlds and hidden realities fleetingly available to them within the Exposition’s brief existence.

### **The Sounds of Milanese Modernity**

The musical activities at the Exposition reflected the wider cultural politics of the city during this period. As numerous scholars have noted, Milan’s musical life had since the 1870s been marked by the growing internationalism of the operatic repertoire and a sustained emphasis

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<sup>49</sup> ‘Questa mostra, destinata ad essere come l’apoteosi della italianità all’estero, non poteva e non doveva mancare di una parte storica, che raccogliesse le glorie italiane del passato: di una parte esclusivamente dedicate alla propogazione e alla difesa della italianità’. See the *Guida*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> On the city’s architectural change, see Elisabetta Colombo, *Come si governava Milano: politiche pubbliche nel secondo Ottocento* (Milan, 2005).

on symphonic music. Civil authorities had sought to expand the range of musical performances presented at La Scala, as part of a wider programme of democratisation and modernisation across Italian theatres precipitated in part by the collapse of public funding.<sup>51</sup> As Axel Körner has observed, the continued political power of aristocratic elites after unification was nevertheless increasingly replaced on a cultural level by the educated middle classes, for whom cultural institutions became a site of local self-representation.<sup>52</sup> As Körner argues, the expansion of the musical (and more specifically operatic) repertoire in theatres across Italy during this period can thus be seen as part of a wider effort to engage with transnational attitudes towards modernity, ‘by a nation which understood its cosmopolitan orientation as an integral part of its cultural value system, its intellectual ambition and its humanist legacy’.<sup>53</sup>

If the diversification of the repertoire could be construed as a means of participating in a broader European understanding of modernity, however, persistent tropes of crisis – ones that frequently (if problematically) elided Italian operatic decline with post-unification disillusionment – nonetheless continued to circulate.<sup>54</sup> Commentary during the years surrounding the Exposition repeatedly returned to ‘the insoluble La Scala question’ – problems that were both economic and artistic, and that continued to reverberate after the temporary closure of the theatre in the 1897-8 season.<sup>55</sup> The financial pressures of subsidising the theatre, combined with an increasingly militant political atmosphere, that would eventually erupt into workers riots in May 1898, had led to the wholesale withdrawal of municipal funding; a situation only eventually resolved by the intervention of private donors. Debates about the future of La Scala in this context circled around several interrelated themes. Questions regarding the vitality of Italy’s own operatic tradition, and the appropriate forms of musical modernity, had already rumbled around the press for several decades, at a time when discussions of musical activity were unavoidably bound up with nationalist

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<sup>51</sup> See Jutta Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt: Mailand und das Teatro alla Scala zwischen Risorgimento und Fin de Siècle* (Vienna, 2009), 62-7.

<sup>52</sup> Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York, 2009), esp. 1-79; and Fiamma Nicolodi, ‘Opera production from Italian unification to the Present’, in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi & Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago, 1998), 165-228.

<sup>53</sup> Körner, *Politics of Culture*, 222.

<sup>54</sup> On concepts of ‘progress’ and ‘crisis’ in Milan in the 1870s, see Francesca Vella, ‘Bridging Divides: Verdi’s *Requiem* in Post-Unification Italy’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 140 (2015), 313-42.

<sup>55</sup> *Il mondo artistico* (21 June 1908). On the closure, see Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915* (Boston, 2007), 167-74. A collection of articles from *Corriere della sera* about the La Scala problems was collected in April 1906, entitled *Sulla Questione della Scala*, ed P. Volpi; its circulation is unclear, however (the document is held at the Brera library in Milan).

rhetoric.<sup>56</sup> The recent high-profile failure of *Madama Butterfly* (1904) had cast into doubt Puccini's already faltering position as the most likely heir to Verdi's throne. Economic discussions, meanwhile, exposed uncertainty surrounding La Scala's role within the city's civic politics – as tourist attraction, cultural monument, elite playground or public service.<sup>57</sup> Even more urgently, perhaps, the diffusion of operatic performers away from La Scala had in recent years brought into question its position as a centre of artistic excellence, and Italy's wider standing as the focus of Italian cultural activity. 'Those singers, who have turned their minds this way, have found outside of Italy a market that pays them much better ... the theatres of America offer them – to make them sing only their favoured operas – what at La Scala you can spend on an entire production', lamented *Il mondo artistico* during an ongoing series of articles about La Scala's difficulties later in the decade.<sup>58</sup>

In such a context, tours to Latin America had become an especially lucrative activity for impresarios and performers, who could take advantage of the explosion of performance opportunities in cities such as Buenos Aires (compared to the dwindling public funding for opera in Italy), as well as the differently-timed operatic seasons in the Southern hemisphere. Such tours could involve the wholesale export of scores, sets and costumes as well as performers, with new productions transferring within months or even weeks. By the 1880s, commentators already remarked on the ever-growing allure of American fees, which had hastened the decline of Italy's summer and autumn opera seasons. 'From July or even June well into September, if not halfway through October, the big cities are deserted', critic Francesco D'Arcais observed. 'Artists go to Buenos Aires and to Montevideo with the same nonchalance with which they once went from Rome to Bologna or from Milan to Venice.'<sup>59</sup> Yet Ricordi could still confidently declare in 1889 that his publishing house sat at the centre of a global Italian operatic industry, even if one shadowed by worries of decline.<sup>60</sup> Nearly two decades later, Ricordi's broadly colonial attitude appeared substantially less steady, as operatic premieres and celebrity performances increasingly took place abroad, and La Scala's

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<sup>56</sup> See Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge, 2009) on the nationalist pressures on Puccini and his generation.

<sup>57</sup> See for example 'Per l'avvenire artistico della Scala', *La perseveranza* (16 February 1906).

<sup>58</sup> *Il mondo artistico* (21 June 1908).

<sup>59</sup> Francesco D'Arcais, 'Rassegna musicale e drammatica', *La nuova antologia* 25, 16 September 1889, 369-78; cited passages 369 and 371. Sections from this article are cited in Nicolodi, 'Opera Production from Italian unification to the Present', 170.

<sup>60</sup> Ricordi's comments can be found in the introduction to Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala, 1778-1889* (Milan, 1889), xiii-xviii; Rosselli also draws attention to this introduction in 'The Opera Business'. Piracy was nonetheless a recurrent concern for Ricordi, particularly in South America, one that undermined the publisher's control of foreign operatic territory.

own security wavered.<sup>61</sup> ‘Italian music is a commodity happily exported’, remarked the *Corriere della sera* in an article covering the re-opening of Buenos Aires’s Teatro Colón in March 1908:

If it weren’t so, composers, editors and above all our artists would not be able to derive from their virtuosity such great earnings, which reach quite unbelievable heights. This constitutes, it’s true, the most beautiful triumph of Italian lyric art, and national pride can feel itself justly satisfied. But every medal has a reverse, and in this case, it resides in the fact that the stages of the peninsula are being depopulated of the best artists, and worse still, real battles will have to be fought, because it’s not certain that famous conductors won’t also desert the directors’ seats of the best theatres in Italy.

If New York’s Metropolitan Opera House offered one obvious rival in an operatic war – one characterised by an alarming ‘inequality ... in the arms of battle’ – then Buenos Aires’s lavish seasons and spectacular architecture presented another clear and present danger: if things deteriorated any further, ‘the catastrophe of Italian art in its own land would be inevitable’.<sup>62</sup> Opportunities for Italian singers outside Italy were recorded via regular reprints of foreign reviews and publicity photographs, in ways that continually highlighted the interconnection of musical centres across Europe and the Atlantic throughout the previous decades.<sup>63</sup> The San Francisco earthquake that nearly destroyed the city in April 1906, for example, was widely reported via the figure of tenor Enrico Caruso, then on tour in the city with New York’s Metropolitan Opera (rather than participating in the Exposition).<sup>64</sup> For audiences in Milan, operatic experience was thus inflected to an ever-greater degree by an awareness of Italian opera’s global movements, an awareness occurring at unprecedented speed and furthermore attuned to Italy’s shifting (and uncertain) position within an international hierarchy.

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson addresses the frustrations of Puccini’s international premieres in *The Puccini Problem*, 155-9.

<sup>62</sup> ‘La musica italiana è merce di fortunata esportazione. Se così non fosse, i compositori, gli editori, e soprattutto gli artisti nostri, non trarrebbero dalla virtuosità loro quei lauti guadagni, che assai sovente raggiungono altezze inverosimili. Ciò costituisce, è vero, il più bel trionfo dell’arte lirica italiana, e l’orgoglio nazionale può sentirsi giustamente soddisfatto. Ma ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio, e in questo caso il rovescio è costituito dal fatto che i palcoscenici della penisola si spopolano degli artisti migliori e, peggio ancora, vere battaglie si debbono sostenere perchè i direttori d’orchestra di fama già sicura non disertino gli scanni direttoriali dei maggiori teatri d’Italia [...] la catastrophe dell’arte italiana negli stessi confini della patria sarebbe inevitabile.’ ‘Emigrazione temporanea nell’America Latina di artisti italiani’, *Corriere della sera* (18 March 1908), 3. Arturo Toscanini and Giulio Gatti-Casazza’s relocation from La Scala to New York in 1908 provided an emphatic example of such a shift in operatic power. The title of the article in the *Corriere della sera* drew an explicit parallel between seasonal workers and opera singers, both attracted to economic opportunities in Argentina.

<sup>63</sup> See for example Drew Keeling, *The Business of Transatlantic Migration Between Europe and the United States, 1900-1914* (Zurich, 2012); and *A World Connecting, 1870-1945*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg (Cambridge, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> See ‘L’odissea degli artisti italiani’, *Corriere della sera* (22 April 1906).



In light of such anxieties, the musical offerings at the Exposition are especially revealing, suggesting as they do the efforts of the city's cultural authorities to position Milan at the forefront of Italian musical modernity, yet in a context that invited a delicate handling of the city's national and transnational affiliations.<sup>65</sup> A pair of concerts conducted by Richard Strauss at the Exposition were especially widely-reported. A precursor to the Italian premiere of *Salome* in Turin later that year, these concerts featured a selection of Wagner's overtures, works by Weber and Beethoven, and a selection of Strauss's own tone poems, and were hailed as 'an artistic event of the first order'.<sup>66</sup> Strauss's position at the time as a predominantly instrumental composer who had recently gained extraordinary success in the operatic field cast him in an unusual light in the Milanese context: a potential Other through whom Italian musical modernity could be formulated, and whose *Salome* signified an ongoing traveling operatic scandal that risked leaving older works such as *La traviata* looking like historical relics.

Yet Strauss's appearances were only the most highly advertised of an extended series of orchestral concerts, organised by the committee overseeing festivities. The most ambitious of these events were the series of weekly concerts directed by Argentinian born, Milanese-trained conductor and composer Ettore Panizza in the Exposition's Great Hall, which brought together an orchestra of 100 professors to perform 'the most difficult works of classical music, with magnificent shading and precise and effective blending', alongside technical novelties such as a concert for twenty harps.<sup>67</sup> Panizza's heritage made him an apt choice in light of the Exposition's international purview and its focus on the Italian diaspora: known both as Ettore and Héctor, he was the son of a cellist from Mantua who had trained in Milan before emigrating to Argentina in 1872; he thus embodied a kind of musical homecoming for the Italian emigrant community.<sup>68</sup> Panizza's Italian-language opera *Aurora* – set during the Argentinian war of independence – would soon become the first Argentinian opera to be

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<sup>65</sup> On music at Italian expositions more generally, see Alberto Napoli's forthcoming doctoral dissertation (University of Bern).

<sup>66</sup> 'Questi concerti segnarono un avvenimento artistico di primo ordine'; *Il mondo artistico*, 21 September 1906, 5; see also *Gazzetta teatrale italiana*, 20 September 1906, 1. The Italian premiere of *Salome* had been offered to Toscanini by Strauss himself, but the conductor's move from Turin to Milan prompted a rivalry over the premiere; the performances in Turin were followed only a few days later by a production at La Scala.

<sup>67</sup> '[I] brani più difficile della musica classica, con colorito magnifico, con precisa ed efficace fusione'; *Ars et labor* (August 1906), 713.

<sup>68</sup> For more on Panizza's career, see his autobiography, *Medio siglo de vida musical. Ensayo autobiográfico* (Buenos Aires, 1952); and Sebastiano De Filippi & Daniel Varacalli Costa, *Alta en el Cielo: Vida y Obra de Héctor Panizza* (Buenos Aires, 2017). The career of Panizza's father, and other Italian emigres to Argentina, is explored in Anibal E. Cetrangolo, 'Aida Times Two: How Italian Veterans of Two Historic Aida Productions Shaped Argentina's Musical History', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 28 (2016), 79-105.

premiered at the Teatro Colón when it reopened, and later became the source of one of Argentina's national anthems.<sup>69</sup>

Alongside all these concerts, choral and military band competitions (both national and international) sought to valorise the ideals of peaceful collective industry that underlay the Exposition's theme, while drawing on a gallimaufry of contemporary operatic hits, from the 'Ride of the Valkries' to Massenet's *Esclarmonde*.<sup>70</sup> Yet for some commentators actual Italian music was problematically absent within this celebration of modern musical life: rather than an 'acoustic signifier of the event's specificity' – as Annegret Fauser has written of the music at Paris's 1889 Exposition – the soundscape of the Milan Exposition was more an indicator of its interchangeability with other such events, and potentially portended nothing less than the loss of a specifically Milanese identity.<sup>71</sup> For *La perseveranza*, for example:

If one may be allowed to say so, little, very little indeed, has been done [–] given the scale and significance of the event [–] to convey an idea during this great international festival of labour of what there is and what Italy can do under the banner of music, which in our country's history has more immortal pages, which is considered everywhere to be the favorite daughter of this enchanted land, where nature and language are themselves the most exquisite, beguiling melody. What has been done does not lack a certain significance, I do not deny it, but what there is, has always been done elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

Reflecting the increasingly international focus of Milan's musical life in recent decades, the concert series was thus perceived to have sacrificed local specificity for a more routinely international exposition soundtrack. Overlooking Italy's illustrious past and the innate melody of an 'enchanted' land, the Exposition's focus on the present and future had replaced a pastoral fantasy of the nation with an industrial one: a fantasy that risked giving rise to a broader process of national disenchantment; the loss of individuality in commodity culture

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<sup>69</sup> *Aurora* was translated into Spanish in 1945. On the opera, see Malena Kuss, 'Nativistic Strains in Argentine Operas Premiered at the Teatro Colón (1908-1972)', Ph.D diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1976).

<sup>70</sup> 'Bande musicali militari internazionali', *Ars et labor* (June 1906), 593-600.

<sup>71</sup> Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World's Fair* (Rochester, 2005), 8.

<sup>72</sup> 'Mi sia permesso di dire che ben poco, anzi pochissimo s'è fatto, data l'entità, il significato dell'avvenimento per porgere un'idea durante questa grande festa internazionale del lavoro, di ciò che è, di ciò che può fare l'Italia sotto il rapporto della musica, che nella storia del nostro paese ha più pagine immortali, che è considerata dappertutto come la figlia prediletta di questa terra incantata ove la natura, l'idioma sono per sé stessi, la più squisita, affascinante melodia. Ciò che si farà non manca d'una certa importanza, non nego, ma è ciò che fu sempre fatto altrove'. 'La Musica all'Esposizione', *La perseveranza* (22 July 1906).

even echoed on a national scale through the participation in an international musical marketplace.<sup>73</sup>

Within the Exposition's pavilions proper, meanwhile, a temporary display of musical objects juxtaposed the latest American innovations in recording technology with prized Italian string instruments. In shifting visitors' attention from musical performances to musical media, the displays once again highlighted the internationalisation of Milan's musical culture, as well as music's involvement with broader economic and technological networks. Such musical objects existed on the border between the archeological and the prophetic, as new inventions that promised to re-animate the past in ever more precise ways. Paradoxically, however, these objects were frequently left silent, in ways that recall Walter Benjamin's remarks on 'the enthronement of the commodity in its lustre of distraction' at Parisian expositions.<sup>74</sup> More recently, Cristina della Coletta has drawn attention to the prevalence of 'reality objects' amongst the more exotic displays of fin-de-siècle international expositions: items which bore an iconic relationship to realities beyond the boundaries of the Exposition space, and encouraged visitors to imagine distant worlds via material objects.<sup>75</sup> Understood in the light of Benjamin's and Coletta's arguments, then, the musical displays seem at one level to underline the intertwining of musical and commercial culture in Milan around the Exposition, and more specifically the mediation of aesthetic experience through capitalist modes of consumption. As Emanuela Scarpellini has suggested, the 'most majestic architecture created to give dignity and prestige to bourgeois Milan was neither a civil monument ... nor a government palace, a museum, nor a traditional work of art, but a shopping arcade', the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II completed in 1877, a historical fact that indicates that 'social prestige and economic progress revealed themselves in a commercial form'.<sup>76</sup> Scarpellini adds that the rhetoric deployed in adverts for the first department stores in Italy frequently drew on the vocabulary of the theatre: sites of social display and sensory

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<sup>73</sup> This ambivalence was expressed further in the exposition by 133 workers from Florence – the so-called 'artisan city' – who had been invited to attend. See Anna Pellegrino, *Operai intellettuali: Lavoro, tecnologia e progresso all'Esposizione di Milano (1906)* (Manduria, 2008), especially 33-55.

<sup>74</sup> See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1999), 1228. On musical displays at London's 1851 Exposition, see Flora Willson, 'Hearing Things: Musical Objects at the 1851 Great Exhibition', in *Sound Knowledge: Music and Science in London, 1800-51*, ed. James Davies & Ellen Lockhart (Chicago, 2016), 227-45.

<sup>75</sup> Coletta, *World's Fairs Italian Style*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Emanuela Scarpellini, *Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy*, trans. Daphne Hughes & Andrew Newton (New York, 2011), 69-70.

discrimination that were already familiar to visitors, and that similarly encouraged them to imagine realities far beyond the confines of their immediate physical environment.<sup>77</sup>

If such arguments regarding urban spectacle rehearse observations more typically made in relation to Paris, the overlap between aesthetic and commercial experience in Milan gains further impact when considered in light of the discursive networks that made up Milanese musical life around the Exposition.<sup>78</sup> As both Giulio Confalonieri and Jutta Toelle have argued, Milan's reputation as an exceptionally musical city was generated at least in part by the transnational circulation of scores and print journalism. The home of Italy's most important musical publishing houses and the site of a uniquely active musical press within Italy, the image of Milan's musical vibrancy and the 'La Scala myth' at times concealed the city's musical deficiencies earlier in the nineteenth century and its financial woes at the turn of the century.<sup>79</sup> This emphasis on the *constructed* nature of Milanese musical identity points towards a specifically Milanese aspect of musical experience at this time: towards music, that is, understood as inseparable from discourse about music; or else towards representations of music as integral to the city's musical identity.<sup>80</sup> The oft-silent musical displays in some way therefore offered an appropriate counterpart for Milan's wider musical culture: celebrating industrial labour, they invited spectators to imagine sonic worlds unheard or already vanished in time, while also drawing them briefly into an international commodity circuit that shaped contemporary operatic and musical culture.

Both the freestanding musical displays and the musical exhibits within the Exhibition of Italians Abroad raised similar critical anxieties, however. In this case, the concerns centred on the pavilions' apparent neglect of Italy's longstanding association with the operatic voice, and of the global dissemination of Italian musical culture: something ideally expressed in 'memories and documents of our glorious singing in Italy and abroad'.<sup>81</sup> In a front-page article reviewing the Exhibition of Italians Abroad, for example, *Il mondo artistico* lamented:

Dealing today, for the first time, at the Milan Exposition with something that particularly concerns the nature of this journal, we find ourselves in an original and strange situation: we must write about

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<sup>77</sup> Scarpellini, *Material Nation*, 79.

<sup>78</sup> See for example Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London, 1999).

<sup>79</sup> Giulio Confalonieri, 'Milano, città musicale' in *Cento anni di concerti di Società del quartetto di Milano* (Milano, 1964); and Toelle, *Bühne der Stadt*.

<sup>80</sup> On Milan's media networks, see also Gavin Williams, 'Arts of Noise: Sound and Media in Milan, c.1900', Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 2013).

<sup>81</sup> 'Non, è vero, nel senso da noi desiderato: come accolta cioè di ricordi e di documenti della nostra gloria canora in Italia e all'Estero'. 'La sezione musicale all'Esposizione', *Il mondo artistico* (1 September 1906), 3.

something at the exposition which isn't there.[...] In fact, while they are setting up – or at least so they assure us – a session of musical arts, of which we'll report in its own time, we have looked with a care worthy of Diogenes for the so-called artistic session that forms part of – or perhaps we ought to say *should* form part of – the Exhibition of Italians Abroad.<sup>82</sup>

As the article goes on to protest, the Exhibition of Italians Abroad at Milan's Universal Exposition was in fact marked by a bewildering lack of interest in the performing arts. While a small section was devoted to theatre, those displays centred on spoken drama were disappointingly small and often difficult to locate within the pavilion; as Enrico Polese asked in an article published earlier in *L'arte drammatica* (and cited in *Il mondo artistico*), 'if a foreigner succeeded in finding the pavilion (anything can happen in this world!), what would they think of our national theatre?'.<sup>83</sup> Such declarations support Silvana Patriarca's contention that discussions within Italy about national character have repeatedly been informed to an unusual degree by foreign perceptions of Italian identity.<sup>84</sup> Yet if spoken theatre was understood as poorly represented in the Exposition, the musical arts fared even worse:

'The land of song', 'the Italian *bel canto*', 'the country of sounds', all the beautiful phrases made to signify Italy, Italy and Italy, do they have an echo in this exposition? No.<sup>85</sup>

For *Il mondo artistico*, it was evident that music had been given no role within a pavilion displaying Italy's global triumphs. Indeed, the journal was forced to acknowledge that the Exposition itself could add little to the crown of celebrated Italian performers around the globe, and that the small scale of the artistic exposition was perhaps inevitable. The minor position occupied by the dramatic arts within the Exposition thus aroused conflicting emotions. Music – in this account at least – seems to sit awkwardly within contemporary

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<sup>82</sup> 'Occupandoci oggi, la prima volta, dell'Esposizione Internazionale di Milano, per quanto riguarda particolarmente l'indole del nostro giornale, ci troviamo in condizione originale e curiosa: dobbiamo scrivere di quello che all'Esposizione non c'è [...] Infatti, mentre sti sta allestendo – almeno così si assicura – una sezione d'arte musicale, di cui verremo parlando a suo tempo, abbiamo cercato anche noi con una cura digne del simbolico Diogene la cosiddetta sezione artisti che fa parte – forse convien dette *dovrebbe* fa parte – della Mostra degli italiani all'Estero.' 'Dove si parla di ciò che non c'è all'Esposizione di Milano'. *Il mondo artistico* (1 July 1906), 1-2.

<sup>83</sup> 'Ma se un forestiere riuscirà a trovare il padiglione (tutto può darsi al mondo!) che cosa penserà del nostro teatro nazionale?' Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge, 2010), especially 10-11. The long legacy of Italy's perception by foreigners as an especially musical land was well documented in the most specialist musical press: see for example G. Roberti's article, 'La musica in Italian nel secolo XVIII, secondo le impressioni di viaggiatori stranieri', *Rivista musicale italiana* 7 (1900), 698-729; and H. Kling, 'Madame de Staël et la musique', *Rivista musicale italiana*, 13 (1906), 221-43.

<sup>85</sup> 'La terra dei canti', 'il bel canto italiano', 'il paese dei suoni', tutte bellissime frasi fatte per significare l'Italia, L'Italia, e L'Italia, hanno forse una qualche eco in questa esposizione? No.' 'Dove si parla di ciò che non c'è all'Esposizione di Milano', *Il mondo artistico* (1 July 1906), 1-2.

definitions of Milanese identity: at once integral to the city and nation's self-image, yet irreconcilable with its present-day position in a global order. Particularly revealing, however, are the variety of real and imagined critical voices that the journalist summons up during the article in order to articulate and contextualise his emotional maelstrom. First of all comes the hypothetical visiting foreigner, for whom the displays would provide a measure of Italy's national theatre; then the presumed intentions of international Italian performers, absent from the Exposition; and later on the imagined foreigner returns in a fantasy of the reactions the musical displays might have aroused:

And who would be better placed [in this exhibition] than the singing artist, who has triumphed abroad for years – indeed we would say centuries – wherever they bring the virtuosity of their throat, the subtlety of their expression, and their interpretative warmth? And how many interesting memories have been unable to emerge here, to tell the foreigner once again our beautiful fame and to revive in our Italian souls a legitimate pride?<sup>86</sup>

More interesting still are the phrases in quotation marks, intended to express Italy's fundamental relationship with music – phrases that lack an author within the text's polyphony of voices. The union of Italy with music – above all with vocal and theatrical music – appears as a conception that hovers uncertainly between 'Italian souls' and visiting foreigners. Yet it is nevertheless an idea that is the site of national self-discovery and self-recollection: an audible *lieu de mémoire*. This identity, then, is revealed precisely in the encounter with the Other; but what is disclosed at the Exposition is instead an absence, a sonorous vacuum. Without Italian music – that is, music *understood* as Italian – the Exposition itself was in some sense empty; and as the article concludes, the hope of future musical displays elsewhere can only enable the Milanese 'to enjoy living again with wishful thinking', in fantasies paradoxically focused on the reiteration of the past.<sup>87</sup>

## Back to the Future

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<sup>86</sup> 'Eppure chi, meglio dell'artista lirico, trionfa da anni, da secoli vorremmo dire, all'estero, ovunque esso porti la virtuosità della sua gola canora, la finezza della sua dizione, il suo calore interpretativo? E quante memorie interessanti non avrebbero potuto emergere qui, per dire al forestiere ancora una volta la nostra bella fama e rinfrescare nell'anima nostro di italiani un legittimo orgoglio?' Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> 'Ora poichè questa sezione sarà allestita fra breve e fra breve inaugurata, amiamo vivere ancora di illusione'. Later newspaper coverage suggests that any musical displays added subsequently to the Exhibition of Italians Abroad were only minimal, and did little to alter the modest status of the arts exhibition. See again 'Esposizione di Milano: La Mostra degli Italiani all'estero', *Corriere della sera* (18 September 1906).

These complaints notwithstanding, the operatic voice was of course not entirely silent around the Exposition. Alongside brief revivals of *Manon*, *Falstaff*, and Catalani's *Loreley*, the most contemporary operatic offering in Milan around the Exposition was the premiere of Alberto Franchetti's *La figlia di Jorio*. An adaptation of Gabriele D'Annunzio's celebrated play, it was conceived as a union of two of Italy's most prominent artists. Those with an eye for local politics would also have noticed the parallels with the premiere of Franchetti's *Cristoforo Colombo*, which had featured at the National Exposition in Genoa in 1892 and which re-told the 'discovery' of America in honour of its 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary.<sup>88</sup> While *La figlia di Jorio*'s plot offered no such concessions to local history, the triumphant premiere of D'Annunzio's play in Milan two years earlier enabled Franchetti's opera to act as a celebration of Milan's theatrical present, and invited commentators from across a wide variety of publications to assess the ease with which Franchetti had responded to the challenge of setting D'Annunzio to music.<sup>89</sup> Despite the presence of a large international crowd at the premiere, Franchetti's music was largely received as an unnecessary adjunct to the drama. 'For us the opera has weakened the impression of tragedy', confessed the *Domenica della sera*, while later performances elicited only very modest praise.<sup>90</sup> An exoticisation of Italy's rural past, D'Annunzio's play offered a glance back at a superstitious, pastoral way of life that the nation (and Milan) was presumed to have long abandoned; yet the opera's negative reception foregrounded the uneasy fit between urban and operatic modernity, the latter increasingly centred on foreign works and the revival of operas from Italy's past that risked a dissolution of the city's operatic self.

In light of such wide-ranging debates, the revival of *La traviata* at La Scala in early 1906 unsurprisingly triggered a number of historical recollections. These shifted between the work and its performance history, memories of Verdi himself, and observations on the

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<sup>88</sup> On Franchetti's opera, see Luca Zoppelli, 'The Twilight of the True Gods: "Cristoforo Colombo", "I Medici" and the Construction of Italian History', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8 (1996), 251-69; and Davide Ceriani, 'Romantic Nostalgia and Wagnerismo during the age of Verismo: The Case of Alberto Franchetti', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 14 (2017), 211-42.

<sup>89</sup> D'Annunzio's play tells the story of a doomed love affair between a shepherd and a female pariah, using elements of dialect from D'Annunzio's home region of Abruzzo. The story was later also adapted into an opera by Ildebrando Pizzetti (*La Figlia di Jorio*, 1954).

<sup>90</sup> 'In noi l'opera ha attenuato l'impressione della tragedia', *Domenica della sera* (April 1906). The opera's later critical reception has been brutal: 'taken as a whole, the music of Alberto Franchetti unequivocally cheapened *figlia di Jorio*, and turned it into an utterly worthless, ugly, opera' commented the *Revista musicale italiana* (1939), 198; cited in Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 256.

changing character of Milan's musical culture.<sup>91</sup> Verdi's self-fashioning as a musical father figure for the newly-founded Italian nation has of course been the subject of much scholarly investigation, associations firmly in place by the premiere of the *Traviata* production in 1906.<sup>92</sup> In recent years, Emanuele Senici, Laura Basini and Francesca Vella have all investigated the (at times fraught) position occupied by Verdi within the Italian national imagination in the final decades of the nineteenth century, at a moment when efforts to forge national unity and assert imperial might had led to widespread disillusionment with the unification project.<sup>93</sup> As Senici has argued, the mood of national festivity that had marked *Falstaff*'s premiere in 1893 was in stark contrast to the opera's muted public reception, a situation that reflected the disconnection between the work's self-consciously modern aesthetic and the nationalistic nostalgia surrounding the event. Both before and immediately after his death, in fact, the popular image of Verdi was overwhelmingly wedded to his relationship with an earlier musical aesthetic: one in which (as Senici writes), 'Verdi the prophet of the Risorgimento and its last surviving witness stood for an age in which opera was the product of a unified society and a unified culture, an age in which the artist could effortlessly address his fellow artists and the public, Kenner and Liebhaber, at the same time, and aesthetically as well as politically.'<sup>94</sup> Within the Exposition itself, the privileged status of Verdi's corpus within the national imagination was exemplified by Ricordi's exhibition of a number of his operatic scores alongside those of other Italian masters such as Rossini.<sup>95</sup> Despite this sacralisation, however, *La traviata* had not been presented at La Scala since 1893, when three performances had preceded the premiere of *Falstaff* (the first of which was attended by Verdi himself).<sup>96</sup> The decision to stage the opera at La Scala in 1906 was therefore both an act of local remembrance and a more covert one of cultural reconciliation: celebrating not just *La traviata* but Verdi himself, the performances could once again exhume

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<sup>91</sup> Francesca Vella draws attention to the implications of this historical awareness in relation to performance culture around the 1881 National Exposition, in 'Milan, *Simon Boccanegra* and the Late-Nineteenth-Century Operatic Museum', *Verdi Perspektiven* 1 (2016), 93-122.

<sup>92</sup> On a recent summary of debates about Verdi's national position, see Roger Parker, 'Verdi politico: A Wounded Cliché Regroups' in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 17 (2012), 427-36. For a more recent account dealing with the early nineteenth century, see also Mary Ann Smart, *Waiting for Verdi: Opera and Political Opinion in Nineteenth-Century Italy, 1815-1848* (Berkeley, 2018).

<sup>93</sup> Emanuele Senici, 'Verdi's "Falstaff" at Italy's Fin de Siècle', *The Musical Quarterly* 85 (2001), 274-310; Laura Basini, 'Verdi and Sacred Revivalism in Post-Unification Italy', *19<sup>th</sup>-Century Music* 28 (2004), 133-59, and Francesca Vella, 'Bridging Divides'.

<sup>94</sup> Senici 'Verdi's "Falstaff"', 301.

<sup>95</sup> 'Esposizione Internazionale di Milano, 1906', *Ars et labor* (August 1906), 823-4. False news reports circulated that the scores of both *La traviata* and Rossini's *La gazza ladra* had been destroyed in the Exposition's blaze.

<sup>96</sup> See *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (22 January 1893), 50.



an imagined earlier age of political and aesthetic unity, while also indirectly trumping Paris's own claims over the figure of Violetta Valéry. The opera's original premiere in Venice (rather than Milan) was in the process largely passed over; Verdi's earlier compositional aesthetic and his later association with Milan were collapsed into a narrative of unruffled identification between composer and city.

The position of *La traviata* within the Verdian canon by 1906 was nevertheless also coloured by more recent operatic developments. Most notably, the *giovane scuola*'s experiments with realist sound and setting had cast Verdi's opera as an unusually prescient precursor, and *La traviata* had emerged as a persistent intertextual reference point for the younger generation of Italian composers.<sup>97</sup> Stagings of *La traviata* in Italy and abroad in the previous two decades had also been caught up in this changing theatrical tide, with a number of productions indulging in nineteenth-century crinolines for Violetta, while maintaining eighteenth-century costumes for the other characters and for the setting.<sup>98</sup> The decision in 1906 to cast Rosina Storchio in the lead could only heighten the sense that Verdi's opera foreshadowed contemporary operatic developments. Famed as Mimì and Zazà, Storchio was highly familiar in more recent depictions of the Parisian underbelly in Milan and abroad. Leopold Mugnone, like Storchio, had not only established himself as a regular fixture in Latin America in recent years, but was also a notable proponent of more recent and self-consciously modern compositions by Mascagni and Leoncavallo as well as Puccini; he had also conducted some of the first performances of Wagner's operas in Latin America. His close friendship with Verdi, and his strong reputation amongst new Italian composers, at the same time made him a natural choice to conduct the Verdi memorial celebrations – a visible link with the past that also gestured towards possible future paths.<sup>99</sup>

The costumes and staging for the production were designed by Luigi Sapelli, better known as 'Caramba'. A distinguished Turin costumier later responsible for the majority of La

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<sup>97</sup> Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1893) and *La bohème* (1896), and Leoncavallo's *Zazà* (1900) are all prominent examples.

<sup>98</sup> Gemma Bellincioni has often been credited with starting the trend for a crinoline-wearing Violetta, in the 1886 La Scala production that marked her 'breakthrough' performance; yet surviving reviews of the premiere make little mention of costumes, instead directing critical ire at the poor direction of the chorus. Julian Budden is the invariably-cited source for this: *The Operas of Verdi, Vol 2: From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (Oxford, 1978; revised edition 1992), 121-2. On Bellincioni's Violetta, see Annamaria Cecconi, 'Stage Sisters: Gemma Bellincioni's Violetta and Eleonora Duse's Margherita' in *Woman and Music* 19 (2015), 54-62. On the 1886 production, see for example *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* (1 April 1883), 111; and *Il mondo artistico* (10 April 1886).

<sup>99</sup> Mugnone conducted all of the operas around the Exposition, including Franchetti's work, and would later conduct *Nabucco* for the 1913 Verdi centenary at La Scala. On further performances in Latin America, see Susana Salgado, *The Teatro Solis: 150 Years of Opera, Concert and Ballet in Montevideo* (Middletown, 2003).

Scala's designs in the 1920s – he was initially favoured by Puccini to design the costumes for *Turandot* – his scenic overhaul of *La traviata* was widely acknowledged as a break with an earlier tradition; one that sought to confer on the production an unprecedented aesthetic unity (see Fig. 4).<sup>100</sup> 'The show pleased everyone in all of its components – a truly new and magnificent show', declared *Corriere della sera*: '*La traviata* has never had a more beautiful or complete scenic staging, nor been performed with greater expressivity or evenness'; while *Il secolo* more modestly observed that 'the staging and the wardrobe – costumes not à la Louis XIII as usual, but in the style of around 1845 [*sic*] – was worthy of La Scala'.<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere, *Il mondo artistico* expressed relief that the aesthetic inconsistencies of the past had finally been abandoned: 'That abominable anachronism, decreed by tradition, that performs *La traviata* with the costumes in the style of Louis XIII, or the style of today, or even worse an unrealistic mixture of both, has given way to a wonderful picture of costumes of the 1840s, which render the drama of Dumas more logical.'<sup>102</sup> References to 'the style of today' suggest that *La traviata* had in fact occasionally been subject to stagings more overtly influenced by verismo trends; yet if so they had left little trace on Milan's critical community, for whom the opera's staging tradition was firmly wedded to the seventeenth or eighteenth century. In drawing the musical and visual components together around a single historical moment, the staging was (for *L'arte melodrammatica*) 'a real marvel': an otherworldly event that almost had the quality of an intercession.<sup>103</sup>

[INSERT FIG.4 AROUND HERE]

Critical reactions to the production in the Milanese press unanimously declared the performances a glorious memorial to Verdi – in the words of *La Lombardia*, 'the last great Italian genius'; and verbal overlaps between a 'messa in scena' and a 'messa di requiem' were a recurring thread throughout reviews. For *Ars et labor* – Ricordi's house organ – the performances were demonstrably a success 'such as we have not encountered in the glorious annals of the Milanese theatre'; and the historic nature of the occasion – in the sense of

<sup>100</sup> On *Turandot*, see William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton, 1991), 141.

<sup>101</sup> 'Lo spettacolo piacque a tutti in ogni sua parte - spettacolo veramente nuovo e magnifico. *La traviata* non ebbe mai più bella e completa rappresentazione scenica, nè esecuzione più di questa equilibrata ed espressiva', *Corriere della sera* (4 February 1906); 'La scenografia e il vestario (costumi non alla Luigi XIII come di solito, ma secondo la moda del 1845 circa) degni della Scala', *Il secolo* (28 January 1906).

<sup>102</sup> 'Quell'abbominevole anacronismo che per tradizione faceva eseguire la *Traviata* coi costume alla Luigi XIII o alla moda d'oggi, o ancora o peggio mescolando inverosimilmente lo due foggie, ha fatto luogo ad un mirabile quadro di costumi dei 1840, che rende più logico il drama di Dumas.' *Il mondo artistico* (1 February 1906).

<sup>103</sup> 'La messa in scena una vera meraviglia: assai ammirato, fra l'altri, e con ragione'. *L'arte melodrammatica* (12 February 1906).

actively *making history* that would be remembered by future generations beyond Italy – emerged in several other accounts.<sup>104</sup> For *La perseveranza*, the performance would ‘bring new prestige to the theatre, and add another golden page to the many that have created our theatre’s worldwide fame’.<sup>105</sup> As *Il sole* observed, such a performance could only be the object of jealousy for ‘theatres abroad’ – a performance destined to circulate around the globe as part of the theatre’s international mythology.<sup>106</sup> *Il mondo artistico* in turn asserted that the performances had done more than simply celebrate a great composer; they were an act of civic rediscovery:

And we believe that the intensity of attention and enthusiasm that alternately accompanied all the events of the show the other night, not only demonstrated admiration for the opera itself and its interpreters, but also an eruption of the Latin spirit that is below the skin of our public even when they adopt a future-orientated attitude. No, our tastes haven’t evolved, and we say ours because we are ourselves Milanese: they have remained what they were twenty, thirty years ago: they are still for *Linda*, for *Il trovatore*, for *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and when we humbly ask for a little Wagner, we do it for reasons of snobbery, and when we enjoy *La Damnation de Faust*, it’s in part because of the merits of flying ballerinas or some other no less surprising scenographic trickery.<sup>107</sup>

The production thus revived an earlier historical epoch – one in which *Linda* and *Barbiere* had not yet been superseded by international operatic novelties, nor by the symphonic repertoire that would soon dominate the Exposition. References to ‘twenty, thirty years ago’ in turn cast an eye back to the immediate post-unification era – a moment before the gradual disillusion of the 1880s, when Milanese (and Italian) identity had perhaps seemed more steadily coherent, and could (retrospectively) be imagined as unthreatened by foreign

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Al teatro alla Scala continuano le rappresentazioni della *Traviata* con tale successo che non ha rincontro negli annali gloriosi del massimo teatro Milanese’. “La Traviata” al Teatro alla Scala’, *Ars et labor* (March 1906), 244.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Fu una sera magnifica; piena pei tutti di profondi, intensi emozioni; una serata venuta ad apportare nuova prestigia al nostra Teatro, ad aggiungere un’altra pagina d’oro alle molte che costuniscono il patrimonio della sua fama mondiale’. *La perseveranza* (28 January 1906).

<sup>106</sup> ‘Della messa in scena e del senso d’arte che vi ha presieduto, dissi all’inizio di queste note affrettale. Essa è invidiabile dai più grandi e più progrediti Teatri dell’estero.’ *Il sole* (28 January 1906).

<sup>107</sup> ‘E noi crediamo l’intensità di attenzione e l’entusiasmo che alternatamente hanno l’altra sera accompagnato tutto lo svolgersi dello spettacolo, aver bensì dimostrata ammirazione all’opera in sè stessa, e agli interpreti, ma anche un po’ l’erompere di quello spirit latino ch’è a fior de pelle nel nostro pubblico anche quando prende qualche atteggiamento avvenerista. No, i nostri gusti non sono affatto evoluti, e diciamo noi; sono rimasti quali erano venti, trenta anni or sono; essi sono ancora per la *Linda*, per il *Trovatore*, per il *Barbiere di Siviglia* e quando domandiamo umilmente un po’ di Wagner, lo facciamo per snobismo, e quando ci divertiamo alla *Damnation de Faust*, è un po’ per merito delle ballerine che volano o di altri non meno sorprendenti trucchi scenici’. *Il mondo artistico* (1 February 1906).

influence. At the same time, critics noted that the performance had in fact confounded the expectations of some audience members in its sheer vitality: as the *Corriere della sera* argued, many beforehand had feared that the music would seem too old, the style too tired and that the performance was more an act of homage to a fallen master than a living part of Milan's present.<sup>108</sup> Instead, audiences had been brought back to a vanished era: the production was 'a return to the past, a return to our youth and to that of our musical art', remarked *L'illustrazione italiana*. 'The old melodies, that we sing in our hearts from the first years of our lives, seem born again, renewed with new charms.'<sup>109</sup>

In the context of the wider Verdian festivities, operatic rhetoric unsurprisingly abounded. The event itself could even take on a further, quasi-operatic dimension for some visitors, as the production's artistic excellence was mediated through the symbolic position of Verdi himself and the history of Italian opera more broadly. For a reviewer of the second performance, the audience's applause was comparable to a 'Rossinian crescendo', slowly but surely increasing in intensity until a final explosion at the curtain calls.<sup>110</sup> Elsewhere, the overlap between the opera's final act carnival-time setting and the premiere in late-January became the source of journalist speculation: as the critic in *La Lombardia* suggested, the opera was likely to become the chief attraction of Milan's own carnival celebrations.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps it was no surprise, therefore, that the only two movements in the opera that were encored were the preludes. Representations of Violetta's illness, the preludes cast the opera itself as a kind of historical enactment, a nostalgic look back at a beautiful life cut short. At once a theatrical depiction of death and a memorial to a composer, the *Traviata* production finally locked both into a fantasy of Italian opera in the mid-nineteenth century. For the critic in *Il sole*, therefore, a performance of *La traviata* was itself something that could evoke proud memories of the audience's grandfathers: an event allowing spectators to experience the performance through the gaze of an imagined past.<sup>112</sup> Rather than being obsolete – a remnant

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<sup>108</sup> *Corriere della sera* (28 January 1906)

<sup>109</sup> 'È stata una festa senza nubi; un ritorno al passato, un ritorno alla giovinezza nostra e della nostra arte musicale. Le vecchie melodie, che ci cantano nell'anima dagli anni prima della nostra vita, parvero rinascere rinnovate dai nuovi fascine; e la vecchia storia romantica d'amore ritrovò ancora le antiche emozioni nei cuori degli spettatori'. 'Rivista Teatrale', *L'illustrazione italiana* (4 February 1906), 118.

<sup>110</sup> 'La seconda rappresentazione della *Traviata* rinnovò e confermò il successo trionfale della prima [...] Gli applausi incominciarono subito – ai brindisi del primo atto e continuarono sino alla fine dell'opera con in crescendo rossiniano.' *Corriere della sera* (4 February 1906).

<sup>111</sup> 'Riassumendo la serata do iersera, che segna il primo successo immediato della stagione e ha fatto riassaporare le bellezze della "Traviata", resterà come uno spettacolo tipico di giubilo scaligero e forse l'opera sarà il caposaldo del carnevale.' *La Lombardia* (28 January 1906).

<sup>112</sup> 'E infatti – questo della "Traviata" – una spettacolo che rinnova il fastigio e la clezione d'arte scaligera di cui s'inorgogliosce il ricordi dei nostri nonni.' *Il sole* (28 January 1906).

of the past still pointlessly clinging on in the present – the production demonstrated the continued power of Verdi's music to excite Milanese audiences, and the composer's unique relationship with those same audiences; indeed as the *Lega Lombardia* critic noted, the powerful response of the public to the work was in stark contrast to the poor reception given to recent premieres, which had made La Scala seem a refuge for malcontents.<sup>113</sup> Only the statues in the entrance, the author asserted, static emblems of Milan's operatic history, had failed to be transformed by the power of the performance.<sup>114</sup> For *Il secolo*, audiences left the theatre breathing a sigh of relief – here at last was a durable masterpiece, a work that could transcend time and still move audiences generations after its premiere.<sup>115</sup>

Critical tropes surrounding the production, then, emphasised both the historical importance (and possible critical afterlife) of the production and the varying degrees to which audience members were sutured into the production's fantastical imagination of the operatic past – compelled to participate in a collective memorialisation in ways that at times blurred distinctions between the work and the performance event. Indeed, the historical distance from the opera's premiere also encouraged reflections on the opera's own journey in the intervening years, the 'path of glory' that the opera had traversed from its debut in Venice in 1853 to its Milanese revival in 1906.<sup>116</sup> At the same time, however, the production's reality-effect was also periodically disturbed for some commentators by the traces of present-day performance practice that tore through the dramatic surface. This created a sense that, notwithstanding the production's aims of precise (albeit ersatz) historical re-enactment, both the vocal qualities of the singers and the opulence of the stage designs were in conflict with the imagined modesty of the operatic past. Not merely a museum piece, the work's fluid ontology raised problems for those who could see the trace of the present day all too clearly in the performance. For the *Lega Lombardia*, for example, the new costumes and scenography could not conceal that both the choice of voice types, and the opulence of the stage designs were in conflict with the audience's imagination of the 1840s, to the point of

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<sup>113</sup> 'Sia lodato il cielo che il genio verdiano ha rotto solennemente la tradizione di musoneria che di premiere in premiere minacciava di trasformare la Scala in un club degli eterni malcontenti!'. *Lega Lombardia* (28 January 1906).

<sup>114</sup> *Lega Lombardia* (28 January 1906).

<sup>115</sup> 'Ieri, ricorrendo il quinto anniversario della morte del grande Verdi, la Scala ebbe il felice pensiero di darci la premiere della Traviata con la Storchio, il Sobinoff e la Stracciari. La sala gremita era un incanto di bellezza muliebre, uno splendore abbagliante di toilettes, ed offriva tutti la solenne imponenza di una serata eccezionale [...] Quella di ieri fu la prima sera della stagione in cui il pubblico uscendo dal teatro mandasse (e non era tempo!) un respiro di sollievo.' *Il secolo* (28 January 1906).

<sup>116</sup> *La rassegna melodrammatica* (31 January 1906).

almost invading the ‘homely and modest spirit of our classical work’.<sup>117</sup> The *Gazzetta dei teatri* similarly lamented that the staging was excessively opulent and anachronistic, despite the production’s outward claims to realism, and notwithstanding its seductive visual beauty.<sup>118</sup> Surviving sketches of figurines from the production do indicate a surprisingly rich royal blue outfit with neck tie for Alfredo in Act One, and an ostentatious pink and cream dress for Violetta in the impoverished setting of the third act; the Act Two gypsies similarly sport outfits more suited to Ottoman royalty, suggesting that efforts at historical accuracy in the production were intertwined with a clear desire for luxury display (see Figs. 5 and 6).<sup>119</sup> Storchio’s performance elsewhere came in for extravagant praise by many journalists; and yet the attention lavished both on the soprano and on the conductor underlined precisely those elements that belonged to the post-Verdian era. If the conducting of Mugnone was enough to prompt one writer to wish that Verdi had been there to attend the performance – ‘to embrace him, he who loves and admires Verdi so much’ – then trends in modern performance were nevertheless obtrusive enough partially to break the spell.

[INSERT FIGS. 5 AND 6 AROUND HERE]

Revived for the opening of the Exposition later that spring, the 1840s setting of the 1906 *La traviata* production on one level echoed other historical re-enactments and exotic entertainments found within international expositions more generally: examples of ‘spectacular visual-virtual ersatz realities’ (in Geppert’s words), that also sometimes included early period-performance experiments.<sup>120</sup> Understood in the context of the Exposition’s other displays, the overlap between *La traviata*’s tragic narrative and the audience’s heightened involvement in the staging – the collective fulfilment of an operatic funeral rite – could seem to offer an enticing parallel to the blurring of spaces associated with the Exposition previously mentioned: the operatic past and the Milanese present interacting in the space of

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<sup>117</sup> ‘la spirito modesto e casalingo della nostra opera classica’. The complete statement raises concerns about the future implications of theatrical updating: ‘Così ancora l’azione scenica – un nobilissimo canovaccio per la abbondante vena musicale dei nostri vecchi – assurge poco a poco nelle moderne riproduzioni scaligere ad invadere quasi il campo musicale [...] Per ultimo l’allestimento rinnovato nelle scene, nei costumi, nella disposizione dei quadri è divenuto un altro punto capitale delle riproduzioni antiche alla Scala; ed anche qui – non se n’abbia a male la benemerita direzione – si è andati in tale eccesso da urtare decisamente contro la spirito modesto e casalingo della nostra opera classica [...] La scena mimica è toccante, non le neghiamo; ma di questo passo, di aggiunta in aggiunta, dove finiremo?’ *Lega Lombardia* (28 January 1906).

<sup>118</sup> ‘Ottimi tutti gli altri e sfarzosa oltre ogni dire la mess in scena, la quale forse ha peccato di soverchio lusso e di qualche incongruenza. Troppa grandiosità, per esempio, nella sala in casa di Flora, che non era certo una Principessa Reale – troppa ricchezza nella camera di Violetta, il cui peculio era ridotto a venta luigi – troppa primaverilità in quel giardino, data la stagione invernale.’ *Gazzetta del teatri* (1 February 1906).

<sup>119</sup> These figurines are now held at the Archivio Storico Ricordi, at Milan’s Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense

<sup>120</sup> Geppert, *Emigrant Nation*, 11. On period performance at expositions, see Fauser, *Musical Encounters*.

the theatre, with both transformed by the encounter. Rather than maintaining a historical distance, many audience members were instead immersed in an alternative operatic reality, brought headily back to the 1840s and all the associations of an operatic golden age.

Interpreted in the context of the Exposition, *La traviata* would also seem especially appropriate for a meditation on the spectacular dimensions of modern Milanese reality: not merely set in Paris (and preoccupied with the collective social gaze), the opera also continually collapses the divide between interior physical space and urban sound, transforming Violetta's body into a resonant echo chamber for her Parisian milieu.<sup>121</sup>

Understood in those terms, the *La traviata* production could offer contemporary audiences an operatic revival that functioned as a kind of operatic 'reality object' – briefly turning them from detached observers to active participants in a Verdian commemoration through the partial collapse of historical distance.<sup>122</sup>

Yet I would suggest it is precisely the ruptures and breakdowns in the production's verisimilitude, and the audience's *awareness* of a historical fiction, that are ultimately most revealing. As previously outlined, *La traviata*'s position as a proto-verismo work (and thus a pre-eminently modern opera) could only be enhanced by its updating to the mid-nineteenth century; repeated references to the 'realism' of Storchio's performance throughout reviews underline precisely such a mediation of *La traviata* through later operatic works. The presence of both Storchio and Mugnone was moreover an indelible reminder of the future paths being taken by Italian opera and Italy itself in the New World, ones dramatically – indeed permanently – played out in Milan's urban landscape. While surviving reviews of the *La traviata* production make little mention of the performers' other appearances, the exceptionally active theatrical press in Milan – reprinting telegrams on the opening nights of Storchio's performances in Argentina – ensured that international performances were almost as heavily mediated as those in Milan itself; indeed, Storchio's *La traviata* in Buenos Aires that summer was extensively reported.<sup>123</sup> *La traviata* itself was furthermore an opera that was

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<sup>121</sup> See Emilio Sala's stimulating observations on 'sonic subjectivisation' in the opera: *The Sounds of Paris in Verdi's La traviata*, trans. Delia Casadei (Cambridge, 2013). Milan's own efforts to fashion itself along the lines of Parisian modernity were underlined by a series of paintings on display at the Exposition by Pompeo Mariani, entitled 'Vita Milanese', and including a depiction of a society ball named 'La Violetta'.

<sup>122</sup> Distinctions between active and passive spectatorship have of course been challenged by many scholars, most recently by Jacques Rancière in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (Verso, 2011). What is crucial here, I would suggest, is the diminished sense of historical distance from the opera and the composer's epoch enabled by the production.

<sup>123</sup> See for example 'Rosina Storchio a Buenos Aires', *Il mondo artistico*, (1 October 1905), 2, for a full-page article on the soprano's recent visit to the city. Storchio also joined Toscanini in Buenos Aires and Montevideo during the 1906 tour, when his company presented sixteen operas (including *Traviata* and the again

at once undeniably Italian (and retrospectively Milanese, through Verdi's history with the city), yet also quintessentially international by virtue of its plot and reception history. If Verdi's opera had once sought to capture the decadence of mid-nineteenth century Paris, *La traviata* was now the object of multiple histories and national appropriations: a work whose mobility made it a natural yet also complex, even problematic work for Milanese celebrations.

It was precisely this paradoxical position occupied by the 1906 staging, I would suggest, that accounted for its impact: its capacity to act as a kind of operatic diorama, one that could shift via the audience's perception between Milan's operatic past; a partial – yet still historically distanced – renovation in the present; and its possible future, international paths; paths that were nevertheless historically bound up with Italy in ways that complicated straightforward notions of progress or 'renewal'. At once nostalgic and forward-looking, the production simultaneously provided audiences with a variety of possible degrees of historical and imaginative distance: it could both be heard as a brief revival of the Verdian past (something both alluring and inescapably alien), and as a distinct break with operatic tradition: a performance that looked and sounded new, that signified Italian opera's future both in its echoes of contemporary works and the American profile of its performers, however much it was founded on the reinvention of the operatic past. It is in this interplay, then, that the production most productively offers an analogy with the Exposition's own historical and spatial imagination: not simply through its implication of the Milanese public in the theatrical event, but in the over-layering of different historical and geographical strata within the production itself. It was precisely these different dimensions of the production – the multiple anachronisms that persisted within the production and in relation to its performance space, despite its surface unity – that created a multitude of viewpoints for spectators. Ultimately, the production's success was rooted in its capacity to compress a number of contemporary operatic preoccupations into one aesthetic experience, in a way profoundly attuned to the Exposition's theatrical, Milan-centred configuration of time and space. The exposition, the city and the opera house emerge as markedly similar and mutually revealing sites of performance. If the wider musical life of the Exposition offered a problematic image of Milanese modernity for some visitors, this *La traviata* could offer a site

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unsuccessful *La Figlia di Iorio*), earning a reported 500,000 lira. See 'Notizie Teatrali', *Corriere della sera* (26 September 1906).



of articulation for these contemporary operatic concerns: the Milanese operatic chronotope in material form.<sup>124</sup>

## Viva Verdi

On 11 November 1906, the Exposition finally closed. Despite discussions concerning the future of the Exhibition of Italians Abroad, the Exposition's only permanent legacy within the city was the fish farming pavilion that now houses the city's aquarium. By November, Storchio and Mugnone had returned from their regular tour to Latin America and La Scala was busy preparing its new season with *Carmen* and the much-anticipated premiere of *Salome*. *La traviata*, though, continued to prosper with Caramba's designs, even if the work chosen for Verdi's centenary celebrations at La Scala in 1913 was *Nabucco*: an opera heavy with Risorgimento mythology and also intimately identified with Milan. Soon the 'Luigi XIII' tradition would drift into operatic history, replaced by staging trends never witnessed by Verdi in his lifetime, but that nonetheless came to embody a vaguely defined notion of historical authenticity. Removed from its original context, the '1840s' staging became normalised and eventually every bit as familiar as the c1700 setting had previously been; in an ironic foreshadowing of the Zeitoper movement two decades later, the effort to be retrospectively up-to-date doomed the production to one historical moment.<sup>125</sup> Yet, as previously outlined, the *La traviata* production's contemporaneity was already a half century out of step when it was premiered in 1906, positioning the staging in the curious state of the conditional perfect. Whereas the recording technologies and musical instruments on display at the Exposition promised to reproduce sounds in the future, the production instead offered something that had never been – something nevertheless experienced as an extraordinary moment of civic operatic commemoration.

The implications of this, I would contend, are both specific to Milan (and ideas of *italianità*) and yet also more generally revealing of the period. Considered in the context of the Exposition, the 1906 *La traviata* at one level suggests that preoccupations about the past and the future within Milanese contemporary society and musical culture should be

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<sup>124</sup> The term 'chronotope' refers to the particular configuration of time and space in fiction, and is derived from Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M.*, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist, (Austin, 1981). Geppert also draws upon the concept in his concluding remarks on expositions.

<sup>125</sup> On the temporal conundrum of Zeitoper, see Alexander Rehding, 'On the Record', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006), 59–82.

considered more closely through the lens of geography; and in particular the growing importance of the Americas. Questions about the city's identity, and about the relationship more broadly between Italian identity and music, were continually interrogated through a concern with the emergence of cities such as Buenos Aires, a new Italy here represented by Mugnone and Storchio. Understood in these terms, the 1906 *Traviata* production might therefore be considered exemplary of the particular set of spatial preoccupations and associations attached to operatic spectatorship in Milan around the Exposition, and more generally during this period – ones that here were significantly bound up with constructions of *italianità* and its contemporary circulation across the Atlantic. Only through a more mobile history of early-twentieth-century Italian opera, I would argue, can the performance's local impact truly be accounted for.

The success of the *Traviata* production – and its kinship with the Exposition – thus more broadly offers an important reminder to pay greater attention to the importance of geography in considering operatic performances: an attentiveness, not just to physical location (and an immediate set of architectural semiotics), but rather to the wider cultural and imaginative networks within which performances take place.<sup>126</sup> On a specifically local level, in other words, the production's success can draw us closer to a more historically and geographically informed understanding of operatic spectatorship in Milan at this time – to the nexus of associations and meanings that constituted operatic experience for audiences, and in particular their relationship with vexed notions of *italianità*. In a Lefebvrian vein, this set of ideas might even be termed the spatial (or global) imaginary of operatic spectatorship in Milan: a geographical imagination relating to opera in the city, that was here theatrically embodied by the 1906 *Traviata*, alongside all the historical associations that Verdi and *Traviata* also triggered. Yet beyond the specific example of *Traviata* and Milan, such an attentiveness to geography can alert us to the spatial encounters that individual performances provided for audiences in this period, ones that extended beyond the proscenium and stage to the operatic world beyond: the imaginative world constructed by the performance event. The La Scala *Traviata* can thus encourage us to think more carefully about the specific interventions that opera can make in local and collective understandings of space, and the

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<sup>126</sup> A focus on the physical sites of performance and their meanings is by now a well-trodden path in performance theory and theatre studies: see for example Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theater Architecture* (Ithaca, 1989). For a study focused more explicitly on the relationship between the theatre and the alternative realities it represents, see Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor, 1998).

temporal associations such constructions can prompt. The staging did more than simply tune in to a particularly Milanese operatic *Zeitgeist* and a set of concerns about the operatic future. It implicitly made a claim for opera – and operatic *production* – in negotiating global relations: as a way to calibrate and assess forms of cultural and historical affiliation. And it did so at a moment when the international mobility of the operatic canon made the re-fashionability of operatic works a particularly resonant site for cultural stock-taking<sup>127</sup>

What is ultimately at stake here is therefore an early instance of operatic ‘glocalisation’: the recreation of globalised commodities in local ways, here by the very nation that first produced the operatic commodity. Yet more interestingly, perhaps – and more specifically theatrical and *operatic* in dimension – is the emergent sense of opera’s power to exemplify particular localities on an experiential level. Like the exposition, the production was an immersive, theatrical event that reflected a particular imagination of time and space within a distinct locale: one in which perceptions of the past and future were bound up with specific geographical ties. Rather than simply reflecting local tastes through the adaptation of costumes or texts, the performances instead created a specifically Milanese imaginative world, in a way profoundly similar to the exposition. Operatic production, within the 1906 *Traviata*, emerges as a site in which perceptions of historical change and geographical meaning can be embodied in a spectacular form: one implicating the audience in a process of self-discovery and re-invention. form: one that implicates the audience in a process of self-discovery and re-invention.

This is not to credit Caramba, Storchio, Mugnone, the La Scala management (or for that matter Verdi himself, beyond the grave) with singular agency nor a specific agenda, but rather to locate the production’s collective impact precisely in its resonance with local cultural politics. Although the *mise-en-scène* was always already out-of-date, the production was supremely of its time: in its memorialisation of Italy’s operatic past and its assertion of Verdi’s unique relationship with Milanese cultural identity; its valorisation of Paris and its efforts at modernisation; and the American future promised, yet also threatened, by its lead performers. The parallels between the Exposition and the *La traviata* production are ultimately revealing not because of any explicit forms of authorial intention, but because both events emerged from a distinct local set of preoccupations. Their contiguity sheds light on opera’s particular affordances at this historical moment. If expositions functioned as fleeting

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<sup>127</sup> On the emergence of the operatic canon, see the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook to the Operatic Canon*, ed. Cormac Newark and William Weber (Oxford, 2019).

cities, ones that briefly echoed and transformed the cities in which they were erected, then operatic performances could on occasion act as fleeting expositions: phantasmagoria that fluctuated between past and present, local and global, and that had the potential to reconfigure audiences' relationships with time and space.

Perhaps attending to a historical moment such as the 1906 *La traviata* – an event with tantalising if incomplete echoes of more radical latter-day experiments in operatic updating – might then also alert us further to some of the other less visible, yet no less important agents in shaping later operatic developments. To the role of local politics and local preoccupations in shifting theatrical culture; to performers, audiences, journalists and civic authorities as constitutive forces in shaping a discursive framework for a production's novelty; and to the importance of operatic production as a site of urban redefinition and reinscription. Shifts in operatic staging, in other words, might be reconsidered in terms of a new understanding of a globalised operatic repertory and operatic community, in which perceptions of a local musical culture were being rapidly reshaped.<sup>128</sup> Within Milan, such an interplay of different forces is outlined in a *Traviata* production that at once memorialised the operatic past, yet also traced possible paths for opera's future, in ways that echoed the Exposition's own Milanese imagination. Above all, attending to such inchoate experimentalism might alert us to opera's scope for textualising or embodying local, national and transnational relations at the fin-de-siècle, and for operatic production's capacity to reclaim or remake local conceptions of global space. The production's significance ultimately resides precisely in its ambiguous position, caught on the cusp between nostalgia and an orientation towards the future; between a world already passed, and one yet to come.

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<sup>128</sup> Gundula Kreuzer has addressed some of these issues in her exploration of early examples of Verdian operatic adaptation in Germany, especially in the context of changing religious attitudes: 'Voices from Beyond: Verdi's *Don Carlos* and the modern stage', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18 (2006), 151-79. The shift I want to note here is instead the re-imagination of familiar operatic works in light of a thoroughly globalised operatic repertory.