

autonomous understanding of a composer and his music, and the often under-represented knowledge about how that composer and his music fitted into the social, cultural, artistic, political, religious, ideological—you name it—perspective of his time.

Jonathan Lewsey, *Who's Who in Verdi*
Aldershot, Hants. & Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001
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Reviewed by Nancy Calo

From its very beginning, opera has played a significant social and political role in society. The role of Verdi's operas in particular was one of great importance in fulfilling the need for a people's voice. Verdi purposely developed a musical vocabulary around historical themes that were admirably suited to the expression of political ideas. Perhaps his themes fulfilled his personal agenda of protest at the time. However, Italian opera remained at the mercy of the censors throughout Verdi's era: any music that hinted the Risorgimento spirit was forbidden on top of which the libretti themes heavily revolved around political messages of power, authority and human relationships. It is the latter that shines through in Lewsey's A-to-Z of Verdi's operas and characters: *Who's Who in Verdi*.

Thorough understanding of an opera is a complicated process. One cannot perceive operatic meanings exclusively through the music; neither can the libretto or plot be undervalued in the search for a complete understanding of the genre. That is where this book is a much-needed addition to the other generalist opera publications that tend to surface from time to time. The publication comprises over 250 entries covering each of Verdi's operas and their characters. A detailed synopsis of each work is provided, as well as commentaries on each character's motivation and function. The source of the libretto is given, together with the date and place of the opera's first performance. The cast is listed and the time and place of setting is also provided.

As far as reading the book is concerned, however, where does one start? The preface by Lewsey himself is a must solely for the purpose of being clear about the author's intentions. At first glance, there is barely a mention of music and how Verdi's operas fitted into the social and political milieu. Why did Lewsey not delve into the politics with which Verdi's operas, and especially their choruses, are intertwined? Much has been written to suggest the correlation between the Italian opera chorus and its role as a voice for the people dating as far back as Rossini's era. This is entirely intentional: Lewsey acknowledges the available literature on every possible facet of Verdian opera but this. He wishes to fill a gap, dedicating this volume entirely to the libretti. Yet Lewsey concedes that many 'libretti have been condemned as having no literary merit.' What makes this work successful is that he 'take[s] each libretto on its individual merits and [is] not to be tempted into lengthy digressions on where libretto and source converge or diverge.'

Throughout the book, Lewsey remains focussed on the fact that the drama invoked and 'elicited a wealth of great music.' It is exclusively a work of Verdi's dramatic content that

makes reference to music only where it becomes relevant to illustrate a point. The book is 'more a tribute to Verdi's librettists than to Verdi himself.' Colin Wilson has written an introduction that does the book justice, briefly contextualising Verdi's more poignant works. Following the A-to-Z section, Lewsey includes a helpful glossary of translations. Appendix A consists of a brief summary of Verdi editions, and of the revisions and additions that Verdi made and those that are most frequently performed. Appendix B consists of the ballets that Verdi wrote or revised (six in total) specifically for performance in Paris. The discography in the final section of the book proves useful, particularly for the lesser known operas.

The book is, at first, daunting. It is probably best to start with the well-known operas and to follow subsequently each character as listed. Lewsey cross-references often to illustrate his points more effectively. For example, it is helpful when he makes a comparison between Riccardo in *Un Ballo in Maschera* and the Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*. According to Lewsey, the role of Ulrica (*Un ballo*) the fortune teller is worth comparing with that of the ill-fated gypsy Azucena in *Il Trovatore* as it is, at times, given to the same type of singer: 'a dramatic mezzo with considerable histrionic powers.' Of course, the comparison ends at the dramatic level after one considers that 'both characters epitomise a woman possessed of strength of character and almost demoniac obsessiveness.' Between Nabucco and his daughter Abigaille, Lewsey draws upon the parallels with Shakespeare's characterisation of King Lear. He claims that Verdi had contemplated a score of King Lear and suggests that it possibly didn't materialise due to the central thematic similarities between it and *Nabucco*. Act I Scene 2 in *Oberto* features many parallels to Verdi's subsequent operas, including *Un giorno di regno*, *Ernani*, *Il corsaro*, *La Battaglia di Legnano*, *Aida*. Lewsey claims that Verdi's first opera, set in the magnificent room of Ezzolino's palace, provides a sketch illustrating several major themes that set the pace for Verdi's future works (p. 342). *Don Carlo*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *I due foscari* also hold similar dramatic content to each other.

When describing the context of Verdi's operas, Lewsey's main focus is their dramatic content, and there is only passing references to musical numbers. Lewsey provides a detailed narrative of the plot and a comprehensive profile of each character. Each member of the cast is given an appropriate relative level of description, analysis and explanation. The psychological profile of Nabucco, for example, is (for want of a better word) intense, while the corresponding synopsis is detailed. Particular attention is given to relating how each character is motivated, and by whom. In some instances, it could be thought that Lewsey gets a little carried away with his subjects: 'At any given moment of [Nabucco's] incarceration he could have beaten on the doors of the prison, initiated his own release and, incidentally, that of his people' (p. 336). In the case of *Aida*, the conclusion 'would seem to suggest that the only true consummation of love lies in death. It is the supreme illogicity, yet irrefutable.' Lewsey's description of the consumptive Violetta (*La Traviata*) and her role as courtesan is also somewhat poetic: 'Knowing that she is dying, Violetta is relieved from the crippling fear of consequences that renders most human destinies stillborn' (p. 451). In his preface, Lewsey acknowledged that the 'conclusions I come to about individual characters are unashamedly subjective,' but also argues that the music can only be interpreted and appreciated 'through understanding precisely what motivates each character at any given moment.' It is the nature of the scenario that motivated Verdi to write the music accordingly.

Lewsey's intensity continues with the inclusion of choruses within the A-Z section. To the uninitiated, and even those who are more familiar with the limited dramatic function of the generic chorus of the early 1800s, the move is well justified. The chorus in *Aida* 'demands huge forces to ensure that it effectively evokes the age of the pyramids when Egypt was a great power' (p. 109). On the other hand, Lewsey doesn't make much more of the choruses than their positioning within the dramatic content. In keeping with his aim, he briefly concedes that *Nabucco* is primarily a chorus opera: 'It could be said that it is more about the destiny of an entire people than about any one individual' (p. 133). Further, it was through the Verdi chorus that the people found their freedom of expression. The chorus of *Alzira* takes on several roles as the Indians (maidens and warriors) and as Spanish soldiers. In *Attila*, it plays variously Barbarians, Ezio's Roman soldiery, Aquilean refugees, hermits, and Druid priests and priestesses. A further example of Lewsey's thoroughness is that the tiny role of 'A Voice From Heaven' is listed in the cast of *Don Carlo*. A soprano takes this brief part: the reassurance from above, the salvation of souls that perished in the Inquisition. However, the function of this role is not mentioned in the bulk of the synopsis, but only in the final paragraphs of the commentary, which is puzzling.

Lewsey goes as far to bring in relevant extracts of other works that may pertain to the character or story. In the case of *Rigoletto*, the inclusion of Italo Calvino's description of the court jester from *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* makes for interesting reading and places the receptor clearly in the picture. Where it is relevant, an historical background on the libretto is given, for example, for *Un Ballo in Maschera*. The censors disallowed the depiction of a ruling monarch being murdered on stage, so the events of the assassination of Gustavus III of Sweden had to be re-set under the guise of Riccardo in colonial America. Verdi's first opera, *Oberto*, also has an interesting background, based on two of the most notorious and most hated people in Italian history: Ezzelino and his sister Cuniza. Ezzelino, of German descent, also appears in Dante's *Inferno* in the seventh circle of Hell. The Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* is based on the personality of François I of France (1494–1547). Princess Eboli in *Don Carlo* is given a clearer depiction in the individual entry, while her description in the synopsis seems less clear. The background to *La Traviata* also makes for interesting reading, but the information is more vibrant in the 'Violetta' entry. This opera is based closely on the play *La dame aux camelias* by Alexandre Dumas fils, and based on his own experiences. The character of Violetta is based on Marie, the 'lady of the camelias' whose ante room in her Paris apartment was constantly filled with flowers. Marie was rumoured to carry white camelias when 'available' and red ones when indisposed with her monthly period (p. 450).

This publication is multi-faceted, even though Lewsey makes it quite clear that the book is intended chiefly as a 'who's who.' It is a must for anyone's library: the literary academic, the musicologist, the performer and anyone wishing an introduction to opera. The book would also prove useful in stage direction, as well as for those preparing any of the roles. It provides helpful insight into interpretative subtleties, for example where Lewsey suggests that the Duke could, in effect, be portrayed as homosexual (p. 159). There is, at times, so much detail in the synopsis section that the plot becomes difficult to follow. However, once the trail of characters is followed, it eventually becomes clearer. To understand Verdi, whose work is so much determined by its historical, political and sociological context, it is necessary to look at the

interaction of drama in literary and musical terms. Lewsey's aim here (as in his *Who's Who and What's What in Wagner*), is to assist the uninitiated, the regular audiences, directors and singers. This he does successfully.

Stan Hawkins, *Settling the Pop Score: Pop Texts and Identity Politics*

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Reviewed by Gavin Carfoot

The scholarly study of popular music has its origins in sociology and cultural studies, disciplinary areas in which musical meaning is often attributed to aspects of economical and sociological function. Against this tradition, recent writers have offered what is now referred to as 'popular musicology': a method or approach that tends towards a specific engagement with 'pop texts' on aesthetic, and perhaps even 'musical' terms. Stan Hawkins uses the term popular musicology 'at his own peril,' clearly recognising the implicit scholarly danger in his approach, whereby 'formalist questions of musical analysis' are dealt with 'alongside the more intertextual discursive theorisations of musical expression' (p. xii). In other words, popular musicologists dare to tread that fine line between text and context. As editor of the journal *Popular Musicology Online*, Hawkins is a leading advocate of this practice, specifically in the application of music-analytical techniques to popular music. His methodology attests to the influence of other leading figures in the area, notably Richard Middleton, Allan F. Moore and Derek Scott (general editor of the Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series in which this book is published).

Settling the Pop Score is predominantly a collection of articles drawn from Hawkins's previously published research, looking at popular figures that typify the 1980s MTV generation: Madonna, Morrissey, Annie Lennox, the Pet Shop Boys and Prince. Throughout the book, Hawkins presents a plea on behalf of these artists: that their musical texts not be left out of discussions of musical meaning and identity, and the affective and signifying power immanent in the *sound* of their music be acknowledged. His case studies are thus meant to demonstrate how aspects of musical structure, or 'musical codes,' impinge upon aspects of identity; that is, how text and context interact in the construction of identity.

Hawkins's rather gun-totting title refers to his cross-disciplinary approach, as the score he wishes to settle seems to be with those who have ignored the fact that popular music is bound up with both socio-cultural practice *and* the affects of musical texts. In fact, *Settling the Pop Score* could be interpreted as a rather misleading title for the book. Hawkins's own understanding of what constitutes 'the score' is never really 'settled,' but remains suitably abstract, and he concedes that 'no amount of transcription or conventional musical analysis can ever render the pop score fixed' (p. 33). The emphasis throughout is on the open-ended nature of the musical score, whereby what constitutes 'the text' is always penetrated by new contexts