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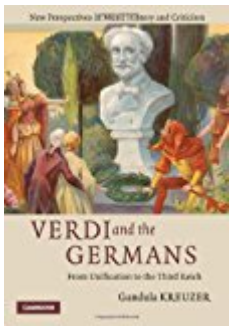
Gundula Katharina Kreuzer. *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xix + 362 pp. $95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-51919-9.



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It is Kreuzer's basic contention that Guiseppe Verdi was "an important catalyst for defining the national character of German-language culture from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries" (p. 246). She "looks at the position of a musical 'outsider' within a nation desperate to assert its cultural supremacy, and … confronts the construction of this Other with images of the German Self in both musical and wider political contexts" (p. 3). I recommend judging her study in two steps, focusing initially on her reconstruction of Verdi's reception in Germany before turning to her more general inferences.

In her introduction, Kreuzer discusses the evolution of the perceived dichotomy between Italian and German music fundamental to nineteenth-century German-language musical discourse, focusing especially on German criticism of Gioachino Rossini, which, on her reading, also provided a model for the critique of Verdi. In the first full chapter, her point of departure for the German-language discussion of Verdi's ***Requiem*** (1874) is Hans von Bülow's well-known characterization of that composition as an "opera in an ecclesial guise." Here she offers an extremely nuanced account, noting both regional and denominational distinctions, especially between Catholic Vienna, Protestant Prussia, and the Catholic Rhineland.

In the following chapter, "Maestro to Meister: Verdi purified," Kreuzer explains how the image of Verdi changed over time. By the turn of the century he had been transformed into an "ethically impeccable and upward mobile ***Bürger*** [citizen]" (p. 104) well suited to the bourgeois ideology prevalent in Imperial Germany. What Kreuzer does not examine, however, is the extent to which this change in Verdi's image was owed to the marketing strategy of Verdi's publisher, Ricordi, rather than the requirements of German nation-building, or, for that matter, the degree to which this transformation also transpired outside Germany. To be sure, German critics who, on the one hand, sensed a Wagnerian affinity in ***Otello*** (1887) and, by extension, Richard Wagner's influence on Verdi yet, on the other hand, could not very well

claim that it was not an Italian but a Wagner opera, found themselves in a tricky position. This is as unsurprising as the fact that German critics argued along nationalist lines (as did their Italian counterparts, albeit from a different perspective). However, to conclude from this that German Verdi reception "exposed German music-historiographical biases to the full" (p. 124) surely overstates the case. All in all, given his alleged Wagnerian affinities and his "purified" image, Verdi was quite neatly integrated into the German musical narrative.

Kreuzer then turns to the Verdi renaissance of the 1920s closely associated with Franz Werfel and his *Verdi* novel (1924). For her, the principal significance of Werfel's novel lay not so much in the fact that it presented some novel perspective on Verdi but, rather, in its broad appeal. Werfel's translation of *La forza del destino*, performed in Dresden in 1926, sparked a Verdi boom on the German stage. As Kreuzer rightly points out, though, each Verdi performance had its own history and it would be simplistic to credit the Verdi renaissance solely to Werfel's efforts. "The prime engineers of the 'renaissance,'" she explains, "were directors, translators and conductors: it was they who insisted on trying out operas and often promoted their 'excavations' in the press" (p. 160). Modernist directorial techniques and the introduction of notions associated with the New Objectivity (Neue Sachlichkeit) movement also played an important role, as did the revival of less well-known works and the musicological canonization of Verdi in his own right, independently of Wagner.

In Nazi Germany, Verdi's works were among the most frequently staged operas. Indeed, during the Second World War they were performed more frequently than Wagner's. The image of Verdi as a folksy, modest, and patriotic farmer required little tweaking to match the National Socialists' cultural concepts. In his 1932 book, ***Musik und Rasse*** (Music and race), Richard Eichenauer nevertheless went to some lengths to "nordicize" Verdi, classifying him as "nordic-dinaric." Herbert Gerigk meanwhile expressed his belief that some German blood must surely have flowed through Verdi's veins (pp. 201-02). Verdi's portrayal as a folksy composer who embodied the national spirit facilitated his integration into National Socialist ideology and legitimized, with biographical means, the great popularity of his operas on the German stage. Kreuzer presents a detailed, in-depth analysis of Verdi adaptations and the politicization of Verdi's operas in the Nazi era. The book concludes with a short "epilogue" on "Post-war Verdi," presented—a little pretentiously—as the outline for a sequel on "Verdi and Post-War German Cultures."

So far, so good. It is into this reconstruction of German Verdi reception that Kreuzer weaves her thesis. She begins by defining whom, for the purposes of her study, she intends to treat as "The Germans." They are not simply the Germans as such. She focuses on "the German-language intellectual community, both within and outside Germany's respective borders" (p. 4). Yet her line of argument hinges crucially on the nation-building process in Imperial Germany, which she rightly characterizes as problematic. How, then, can she nevertheless draw liberally on sources from Vienna (there is no getting by without the inevitable Hanslick) and other areas outside Imperial Germany? Basically, anyone writing in German is in. In her introduction, she justifies this with recourse to the concept of the German "cultural nation" (***Kulturnation***) but the minutiae of her own account clearly demonstrate the limits of this concept.

An intellectual, for Kreuzer, is somebody who can write a newspaper article in German. Her personnel ranges from the ***Kapellmeister*** who dabbles as a critic in his spare time to the luminaries of German musical journalism. Almost entirely absent from her account is German musical life itself. As early as 1858, the brothers Escudier noted in their journal, ***La France musicale***, re-

sponding to a German polemic against Rossini and similar criticisms of Verdi, "The German audience certainly does not share the sentiments of its journalists. One can call out to it as loudly as one likes that its taste is depraved, that it should worship the domestic Gods and drive out their false Italian counterparts. The German audience is fleeing those theaters where German scores spread boredom and flocks to the performances of operas that come to them from Milan, Naples, Venice or Rome."[1] This assessment was entirely correct though it failed to mention that the German audience cherished not only Italian composers—in 1858 this would have included Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti as well—but also their French colleague Daniel-François-Esprit Auber. Much to the chagrin of Germany's music journalists, German opera audiences tended to be entirely indifferent to the critics' concerns regarding these composers. Rather than attending performances for the widely advertised educational value of opera or to reassure themselves of their national identity, they came to the opera primarily for its entertainment value and to share in the sociability and social prestige associated with an evening at the opera. Kreuzer does acknowledge this split between Verdi's popular success, even with the works of his "middle period," and the journalistic discourse about Verdi (pp. 34-35), but it has no impact on her line of argument.

Nor is she interested in other material aspects of musical life. One would be hard-pressed, for instance, to ascertain from her account that the "opera crisis" of the Weimar era was not so much intellectual as fundamentally financial in nature. Kreuzer does point out in passing that the high number of Verdi performances during the Second World War was due "partly" to the theater's poor finances and limited slots as a result of the curfew during the bombing campaign (p. 204), but she clearly does not consider this a significant factor. Can one really write a reception history without paying attention to the material aspects of musical life? Does the reception of a composer transpire only in print? Might not the strange fact merit attention that Rossini and Verdi were equally popular with the audiences while their reception by critics could not have differed more dramatically?

Kreuzer, as we saw, not only sees transformations in the Germans' national self-understanding reflected in their reception of Verdi's works, but actually assumes that relevant transformations were evoked by this reception in the first place. Consequently, she is interested not in the music itself nor the material and performative aspects of its realization, but only in those qualities, which, according to her rather formulaic reasoning, have been attributed to it. But here's the problem. The notion that Rossini, for instance, in his Italian operas, focused primarily on the music rather than the text is not something that was attributed to him. As we know from his conversations with Ferdinand Hiller, it accurately describes his aesthetic position. Rossini, conversely, criticized Carl Maria von Weber for having composed the *Freischütz* (1821) in a manner determined too heavily by the text. At stake here are genuine aesthetic differences that fueled aesthetic debate, not mere clichés attributed post facto. Nor were critics of Verdi's *Nabucco* (1842) projecting some sort of clichéd perception when they pointed to its undifferentiated and "noisy" instrumentation. This criticism was both justified and also articulated, to varying degrees (and differing by region), by Italian critics well into the 1860s. It is telling that Kreuzer points to the partial overlap between German and Italian critics' assessments of Verdi only once, in a footnote (p. 44n84).

As a result of her narrow focus on the "discourse" concerning Verdi, Kreuzer occasionally loses her footing. To be sure, her line of argument comes together nicely—simply because it is all too neat. She claims, for instance, that Carl Dahlhaus's notion of a "stylistic dualism" between nineteenth-century Italian (not "Franco-Italian") opera, on the one hand, and German instrumental

music, on the other, amounted to a Germanocentric relapse into the tradition of nineteenth-century musical criticism. This charge simply fails to do justice to Dahlhaus's extremely sophisticated (and, I would add, essentially accurate) position. When one reaches the end of the relevant footnote (p. 36n91) it transpires that the American musicologist Richard Taruskin—who is anything but a friend of German musicology, let alone a believer in the preeminence of German music—shares Dahlhaus's stance, which presumably renders it not all that Germanocentric after all. Kreuzer's claim, in her preface, that "music-historical research"—by Germans, about Germany? —"has focused primarily on Germany's own musical tradition" (p. xi) ceased to be true quite some time ago. In her epilogue, she characterizes her account as a "counter-narrative to many prevalent paradigms of music history"—by which she primarily means German-language music history —designed to secure "a more central place in the historiography of Western music" for Verdi (p. 265). That the latter should still be necessary in the early twenty-first century seems debatable. She has certainly not achieved the former. Kreuzer is largely preoccupied with the erection of Potemkin villages, which she then tears down again on the assumption that she is producing a new historiography in the process. Kreuzer is unable to demonstrate that Verdi functioned as a catalyst for the process of German nation-building, least of all in the nineteenth century. Her all too often pretentious formulations cannot detract from the fact that she frequently short-circuits her thesis with the reception history. Consequently, her inferences tend to rely more on autosuggestion than proof or plausibility. She simply overrates Verdi's role. Kreuzer confuses the reflection of nationalist dynamics in the Verdi reception of German critics with the notion that the latter was the cause of the former.

There are also troubling indications that her use of sources can be problematic and she shows a certain inclination to takes concepts and utterances out of their context or overinterpret them to suit her line of argument. Take her discussion of Raphael Georg Kiesewetter's ***Geschichte der europäisch-abendländischen oder unserer heutigen Musik*** (History of European-Occidental or our contemporary music) of 1834. Kreuzer makes the rather remarkable claim that Kiesewetter was compelled by nationalist ideology to conclude his history of music with the "era of Beethoven and Rossini" because any other perspective "would have thwarted the ideology of German instrumental music as the crowning goal of music history" (p. 23). Why, though, should these considerations have been important to a historian of music whose section headings for the Baroque, for instance, refer to Giacomo Carissimi, Alessandro Scarlatti, and Leonardo Leo and Franceso Durante, but not to Johann Sebastian Bach or Georg Friedrich Händel; whose account of the epoch of Cristoph Willibald Gluck is free of nationalist resonances; and who insisted that Franz Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart were part not of a German but a Viennese school, since, in Germany, the former designation had since been appropriated by a "sect"? In delineating these "eras," Kiesewetter focused on those composers he thought had been decisive in creating new paradigms. This is also the reason for his decision to name his own period after Ludwig van Beethoven and Rossini, both of whom he described as geniuses. For Kiesewetter, "national concerns" (p. 23) were neither here nor there in all this.

Or take Kreuzer's reference to a report in the ***Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*** (General music journal) of 1845 whose author contradicted the flattering description of Verdi offered by his French publisher, Escudier.[2] He was in fact of "medium build, not ugly but far from handsome; earnest and self-important." From this Kreuzer infers that the author "coupled the prevailing notion of Italian opera's current decay (as surveyed in Chapter 1) with the assumption of mediocrity of physique and character in its latest composer" (p. 88). Yet the report simply does not bear out this

line of argument. The author wanted to unmask Escudier's portrayal of Verdi as a marketing trick ("incense") and therefore described a number of Italian opera composers—as he emphasized, from personal knowledge—in order to demonstrate the ridiculous nature of Escudier's claim that Verdi was equally good-looking. In terms of the physiognomy and character of the Italian opera composers in question, the author presented a nuanced picture that by no means matched the negative associations Kreuzer outlines in her first chapter. According to the author, Rossini, for instance, had a "handsome and interesting" face and Donizetti some of the traits of "an honest German." To be sure, Verdi was heavily criticized in the article—but that critique took the form of a 24-line quotation, translated into German, from the *Riccoglitore Fiorentino*, in which Verdi was accused, specifically in connection with the fiasco of *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845), of "following the German school"—which obviously flies in the face of Kreuzer's line of argument.

As far as Verdi's *Requiem* is concerned, Kreuzer is surely right in stating that it served as a foil for "confessional or political Selves," but this hardly makes it a "cultural catalyst" in the German nation-building process (p. 81). The Prussian *Kulturkampf*—Bismarck's quest to contain political Catholicism—doubtless resonated in the reviews of the *Requiem* but the attendant "politicisation" (p. 76) Kreuzer sees at play is posited rather than demonstrated and her suggestion that the *Requiem* was "clearly" a "driving thrust behind attempts to bolster *Kulturprotestantismus* [cultural protestantism] against Catholicism" (p. 79) is in no way borne out by her sources. Her proof text here is an article on provincial music festivals by Hermann Zopff in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New journal of music) of 1877.[3] Yet in this article, Zopff was not arguing from the vantage of nationalism but principally articulating a particular notion of *Bildung* (the creation of a well-rounded, well-educated, and cultured individual) prevalent at the time. He took issue with the "cult of convenience" he held responsible for the popularity of a "superficial concept of the arts," which, to his mind, was epitomized by the performances of the works not only of Verdi and Rossini but also of Carl Heinrich Graun, Rodolphe Kreutzer, and Carl Gottlieb Reissiger, all three of whom were unambiguously German composers. Contrary to Kreuzer's claim, Zopff certainly did not refer to any of them as "unworthy" (p. 79).

To be sure, Zopff began his article with the claim that one of the finest traits of the "Germanic national character" (*germanischer Volkscharakter*) was its "community spirit" (*Gemeinsinn*), which manifested itself in German choral culture and music festivals. But, he argued, too little attention was paid in this context to the educational value of the performed works. Zopff was taking issue with what he considered fashionable hype. "If one invites the court orchestra from Vienna to Salzburg etc. or gets high on Verdi on the Rhine or revels in Etelka Gerster in Breslau," Zopff wrote, "then none of this does justice to the artistic or national dimension." Kreuzer paraphrases this as: "Zopff demanded that future music festivals should cater to both 'artistic and national matters'" (p. 79). Where Zopff's emphasis actually lay should be instantly obvious from the fact that he began by lamentings performances by the Viennese court orchestra in Salzburg. His ire was directed not at Verdi, Rossini, Graun, Kreutzer, or Reissiger, but at the frequent and repetitive performances of a narrow repertoire of already well-known works by "great" composers. When Zopff went on to appeal to regional music festivals to rely more on *"einheimische"* performers, he meant not German (as opposed to non-German) but local artists from the respective provinces. Even his use of the much more ambiguous term *Landsleute* (compatriots) was clearly qualified: the organizers of Silesian music festivals, he complained, were neglecting their own *Landsleute*, that is, their fellow Silesians. Whatever Kreuzer's claim that Zopff's "message is clear: the entire breadth of Germanic culture was to be supported;

if not at any price, then certainly at the expense of foreigners such as Verdi“ may be based on (p. 79), it certainly cannot invoke Zopff's article as evidence.

Kreuzer's discussion of the first German Verdi biographer, Arthur Friedrich Bussenius, who drew heavily on the first Italian Verdi biography, by Benedetto Bermani, is similarly questionable. [4] On Kreuzer's account, the dearth of biographical information on Verdi was at odds with the German "romantic ideal of the composer-genius" (p. 91). The fact that Bussenius effectively apologized at the beginning of his biography for the fact that Verdi's life lacked "adventurous and novelistic traits" (cited on p. 91) clearly demonstrated this. Bussenius, in other words, was preparing his readers for the fact that Verdi's life (as opposed to that of, say, Beethoven) did not conform to the sort of novel of personal development associated with a romantic genius. Verdi was merely an "upright, industrious, able labourer“ (cited on p. 91). "Thus conflated, works and man were equally untouched by genius," Kreuzer concludes her summary of Bussenius's stance (p. 92). In truth, Bussenius, like Bermani, was extremely well disposed towards Verdi, whom he characterized as "a genuine, true artist" and "not simply the fashionable composer as which he has recently been presented."[5] Moreover, he expressly defended Verdi against criticisms of the kind leveled at Rossini,[6] and against the accusation of insufficient originality directed at most of the more recent Italian opera composers.[7] Kreuzer fails to devote a single word to the main body of Bussenius's book and simply takes the introduction out of its context. Anything else would, of course, have militated against her line of argument.

I have another methodological concern regarding the material base of her reconstruction of German Verdi reception. The question of what was actually performed in German theaters is of no concern to Kreuzer in the context of the nineteenth century but increasingly takes center stage the further she proceeds into the twentieth century. This is essentially a good thing, especially when it comes to the adaptations of the 1920s and 1930s and the productions after the Second World War. Yet with this shift in focus the object of Kreuzer's study also changes imperceptibly, moving from Verdi's "works" to their performative realization.[8] While this is entirely legitimate, the study then no longer focuses on Verdi but instead on the phenomenon of director's theater and its precursors. Kreuzer pays no attention to this distinction. This leads, to give just one example of the implications, to the curious claim that the "Sanctus" from Verdi's ***Requiem*** still shocked the audience of the 2001 performance in Berlin's German Opera—when in fact what shocked some members of the audience was the presentation of the fugue "as a comic carnival procession" (p. 84).

Where does all this leave us? When she draws on incontrovertible data Kreuzer certainly deepens our understanding of German Verdi reception, notably in the Weimar era. Where we are forced to rely on her summary of the sources' tenor the accuracy of her account, as I have indicated, cannot be taken for granted. Nor are all her suggestive trains of thought necessarily based on her discussion of the sources in the first place. Kreuzer's historiography is exclusively continuous and one-dimensional. German history simply did not transpire in such a neat and straightforward way. And she certainly fails to bring home her thesis. Her analysis of German Verdi reception does not render any substantial new insights into the German process of nation-building. Nor is even her music-historical account consistently even-handed. In fact, it is rooted in no small measure in the nineteenth-century understanding of music she is so keen to challenge. Take her claim that, "after all, Italian opera had been the most prominent and most institutionally backed foreign musical influence in German lands since at least the eighteenth century, routinely eclipsing the works of native composers“ (p. 3). This implies that the institutional interests of the court operas

of the eighteenth century were the same as the predominantly financial interests of the court operas and municipal theaters of the nineteenth century. It ignores the fact that in the eighteenth century "native" composers like Johann Adolph Hasse also composed Italian operas. It fails to take into account that nineteenth-century German composers, prior to Wagner, were unable, with very few exceptions, to compose works that were sufficiently competitive to become part of the repertoire. They were, in short, perfectly capable of sidelining themselves without any help from their Italian counterparts. Not to mention her oblivion to French *opéra comique* (especially in the form of Auber) and *grand opéra*, and her failure to focus on audience demand. This is, alas, by no means the only instance in which Kreuzer claims to offer a succinct summary of a historical context, be it musical or political, when in fact she has carved out a selective rendering of that context to suit her line of argument.

Translated from the German by Lars Fischer.

Notes

[1]. Cited (in German) in "Hr. Leon Escudier in Paris und die Deutschen," *Süddeutsche Musik-Zeitung* 7, no. 24 (June 18, 1858): 93–94.

[2]."Frühlingsopern u.s.w. in Italien," *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 47, no. 39 (September 1845): 666–68.

[3]. Hermann Zopff, "Provinzial-Musikfeste," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 73, no. 39 (September 21, 1877): 405–06.

[4]. W. Neumann (Arthur Friedrich Bussenius), *Giuseppe Verdi. Saverio Mercadante. Biographien* (Kassel: Ernst Balde 1855); Benedetto Bermanis, *Schizzi sulla vita e sulle opere del maestro Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1846).

[5]. Bussenius, *Verdi*, 52.

[6]. Ibid., 70.

[7]. Ibid., 71.

[8]. Kreuzer does, however, discuss the contemporaneous performance practice of the *Requiem* (pp. 64–7).

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