Chapter 8
Wagner and Verdi: *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Modern Business

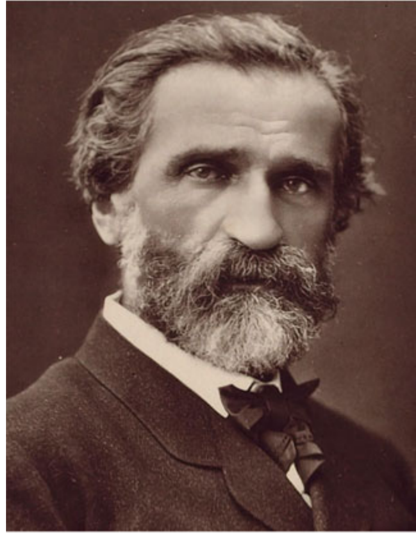
Francisco Cabrillo

Richard Wagner

F. Cabrillo (✉)
Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain
e-mail: fcabrill@ucm.es

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2023

T. Baumert and F. Cabrillo (eds.), *On Music, Money and Markets*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-43226-2_8



Giuseppe Verdi

Oh vincero stasera; e l'oro guadagnato
Poscia a goder fra' campi ritornerò beato

(*La traviata*, Act II)

Hütet das Gold!
Vater warnte
Vor solchem Feind

(*Das Rheingold*, Act I)

If I had wanted to be a businessman, no one could have stopped me, after la Traviata [1853], from writing an opera a year and making myself a fortune three times as big as I have.

(Giuseppe Verdi in 1874)

It is true that Wagner searched for gold incessantly, but only to put it at the service of his noble artistic purposes or his less noble human purposes: never to bury it.

(Manuel de Falla)

Music, Nation and Politics

The year 1813 was a difficult but hopeful year for many Europeans. The Napoleonic wars had been ravaging the continent for more than a decade, but that year the end was in sight with the victory of the allied powers against the French Empire. In June, an army made up of British, Portuguese and Spanish troops defeated the French army in the battle of Vitoria, which meant, in practice, the end of the French occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. And, more important, in October, a coalition of Austria, Russia and Prussia along with other minor allies defeated Napoleon at the battle

of Leipzig, opening its way to Paris, which would surrender only a few months later. But 1813 also witnessed kinder events, including the birth of the two most important opera composers of the nineteenth century. On the 22nd of May, just a few months before the famous battle, Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, then part of the kingdom of Saxony. On the 10th of October, Giuseppe Verdi was born in Le Roncole, near Busseto, in the Duchy of Parma, which at that time was a territory of the French Empire. This duchy would be under the government of Habsburg princes after the Congress of Vienna, and, later on, it would return to its former sovereigns, the Bourbon-Parma family, until its integration into the new kingdom of Italy.[1]

They were two very different musicians, with very different lives. But their biographies also had some traits in common. They were two of the most brilliant composers in the history of music. And both were born in countries that had not achieved at that time their national unity, which would be achieved only many years later, almost at the same time, around 1870. Both were then famous musicians and, in one way or another, contributed to the birth of the new states and, above all, to the creation of a German or an Italian culture and a national consciousness shared by people who had lived for centuries in a number of more or less independent states and cities of very various characteristics and importance. Verdi dedicated an opera, *La Battaglia de Legnano*, to the battle in which the Lombard cities defeated the emperor Frederick Barbarossa in the twelfth century, a historical fact that represented for later Italian nationalists the possibility of a victory over Austria. The chorus "Va pensiero" of *Nabucco* became a symbol of the country's struggle for unity and independence. It is a well-known fact that the cry "Viva Verdi!" could be understood in mid-nineteenth-century Italy both as a tribute to the great composer and as a cry for the unification of the nation under the rule of Vittorio Emanuele, King of Sardinia-Piedmont. To say "Viva Verdi!" could also mean "Viva Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia". And Verdi's efforts in favour of the new national state were recognized by his country. In 1861, he was elected member of the first Italian parliament, and later on, in 1874, was appointed senator of the Italian Kingdom.

Richard Wagner's relationship with German nationalism was more complex. There is no doubt that his music was considered for many years—inside and outside Germany—a clear representation not only of its national music but also of its national spirit. It is no coincidence that the emperor of the new powerful German Reich attended the first Bayreuth festival as a special guest in 1876. And that, for quite some time, the festival, managed after Wagner's death by his wife Cosima—and

---

[1] Many biographies of Wagner and Verdi have been published, as well as numerous studies about their works, of which only a small sample is mentioned in the references of this chapter. Around the second centenary of their birth, several useful books were published about both musicians. To point out only two, Holger Noltze (2013) published an interesting comparative study of both composers, with a very different approach from that of this article. Riccardo Muti analyzes the Italian character of Verdi in Muti (2012), as did later Thielemann (2015)—another conductor—with Wagner. We also know many details of their lives from the composers themselves. Wagner was the author of an extensive autobiography (Wagner 1994 [1870/1875), which describes in great detail his life until his meeting with Ludwig II of Bavaria's envoy in 1864. And Verdi wrote a large number of letters, which are available to the interested reader. A good selection of letters can be found in Verdi (1981) and Verdi (2000).

later by their son Siegfried and their daughter-in-law Winifred—maintained close relations with nationalist groups, even questioning whether it would make sense to hire a non-German musician like Toscanini to be the conductor of Wagner's work in the temple of German opera (Hamann 2005, p. 100). In fact, the second reason why the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche broke with Wagner—the first being the religious conversion that the composer showed in *Parsifal*—was that the latter had become a "German" composer, at a time when the philosopher was especially critical of his own country. But Wagner's attitude towards the new German state was ambivalent. There is no doubt that he believed in the German nation and culture. But, in the pessimistic vision of the world that dominated him in his last years of life, he came to think that the new state, rich and powerful as it was, could mean, at the same time, the end of the German nation as he conceived it. Cosima wrote in her diaries in September 1873 about her husband: "He is not to be counted among the ranks of…patriots". And in April 1874: "We might […] have a German Reich, but […] not a German nation" (Snowman 2009, p. 444). Perhaps what Wagner meant by speaking of the German nation and culture as something different from the German state is summed up in the words that Hans Sach sings in the final scene of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*: "Even if the Holy Roman Empire would dissolve in mist, for us there would yet remain the holy German art".

Early Careers

Their origins and childhoods were different. Wagner was the son of a Leipzig police officer, who died when Richard was just six months old. His mother soon married Ludwig Geyer, a friend of the family, who was an artist with broad interests, being at the same time a theatre actor and a painter. In addition, four of Richard's brothers were engaged in theatre or music. It is not surprising, therefore, that from a very young age, the future great composer showed interest in the performing arts; first in the theatre and later in music. It seems he decided to become a professional musician after having listened to some fragments of Beethoven and Weber, composers whom he always admired. Soon he began to live as romantic artists were supposed to live. Taverns, lovers, duels and gambling were important in his Leipzig years from 1828 through 1832, when he was a student first at local schools and then at Leipzig University, and, at the same time studied music with Christian Theodor Weinlig, also known in the history of music for having been the teacher of Clara Schuman. Those early years surely contributed to shaping his character and gave rise to a way of life that he maintained throughout his entire existence: to live as well as possible, without worrying too much about expenses, trusting that, in one way or another, and with the help of the right people, he would go ahead.

In 1833 Wagner was appointed chorus master in Würzburg and later on musical director of the Magdeburg theatre, while working in his two first operas, *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*. In 1836 he made his debut as an opera conductor with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Bad Lauchstädt, a small town near Leipzig known as a spa and

summer resort at the time, but soon after the company went bankrupt. In the same year 1836 he married in Königsberg (East Prussia)—today Kaliningrad—an actress, Minna Planer. Their marriage would never be happy. The following year, 1837, the couple moved to Riga, a city that, although part of the Russian empire, had a large German population and used German as its administrative and cultural language. Wagner was appointed music director of Riga's theatre with a salary of 800 rubbles (Watson 1979, pp. 52–53). But this did not fully solve his financial problems. In 1839, harassed by creditors, Richard and Minna had to flee Riga. And after a difficult journey through Denmark, Norway and London they arrived in Paris.

It has often been said that, although Verdi was a man of the theatre from a young age, he always retained something of the mentality of the peasants of northern Italy. Born in a family of small landowners and traders, his parents were owners of an inn near the small town of Busseto, one hundred kilometres from Milano. Later on, he became a famous and wealthy composer whose works were performed in opera houses of many countries, including places so distant as New York or Cairo. But he never forgot his origins. When he began to have money—and he did win a lot of money throughout his life—he invested a good part of it in the purchase of farms and land in his province. He first bought a farmhouse in Pulgaro which would be his parents' home. Later he became the owner of the Palazzo Cavalli, in Busseto's main street. And then bought the land in Sant'Agata, where he built the villa in which he lived for almost fifty years, from 1851 until his death in 1901, and it is now known as Villa Verdi.

A brilliant musician since he was a child, Verdi tried to study music at the prestigious conservatory of Milano; but he failed to be admitted as a student. Later on, however, he moved to Milano with the help of some friends of Busseto, especially Antonio Barezzi, his patron for years. There he studied music with Vincenzo Lavigna from 1832 through 1835, attended regularly the performances at La Scala and made his first connections with Milano's music world. In 1836 he was appointed "maestro di musica" in his hometown and married Margherita, Barezzi's daughter. In 1839 Verdi and his wife left Busseto and moved to Milano. That same year his first opera, *Oberto, Conte di San Bonifazio* was performed at La Scala with some success, opening his career as a composer. But the following years would not be happy for him. In 1840, his second opera, *Un giorno di regno*, failed at La Scala. And, much worse, Margherita died of encephalitis at the age of 26.

The following years were for Verdi a period of intense work, in which he wrote many of his most famous operas. Between 1842, the year of *Nabucco* premiere at La Scala, which was his first great success, and 1851, when *Rigoletto* premiered at La Fenice, Verdi wrote about twenty operas. Over time, he would describe this period as his "galley years". But it was these years that forever established his fame as a composer. His works were requested in the main theatres of Italy and later in other countries. 1847 was important in his life as an international musician. In that year his opera *I Masnadieri* was premiered in London, Verdi himself being the conductor of the orchestra, and the composer travelled to Paris for the premiere of *Jérusalem*.

From the Home Country to the Conquest of Paris

The world of opera was quite international in the mid-nineteenth century. The works of the most famous composers were performed in numerous theatres throughout Europe. The German and Italian courts rivalled each other for prestigious theatres and orchestras. But if a city was the capital of opera, in which all composers wanted to succeed, this was Paris.[2] There were several reasons for that. Paris was a city that in 1850 already had more than one million inhabitants. It was a town in which a high number of wealthy people lived, a necessary condition to finance first-class theatres and high-level performances. In addition to this, the court and the state contributed generously to theatrical and musical activities. The *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris*, founded in 1827, soon became the most important musical magazine in Europe. And, also very important, France had designed before other countries a copyright system that improved the economic situation of composers (Albinsson, 2021). Hence, it is not surprising that the greatest composers and interpreters of different countries tried to succeed in Paris. Rossini, Liszt, Chopin, Paganini, Donizetti, Meyerbeer or Offenbach are only the names of the most famous of these musicians. We should add the names of Wagner and Verdi to this illustrious list. Their fortunes, however, were very different.

Wagner's Failures in Paris. From Dresden to Exile

Wagner arrived in Paris for the first time in September 1839. After some difficult and adventurous years, he went to France's capital with the desire to conquer the city and to be recognized as a relevant composer. But things did not go well from the first moment. The letters of introduction that he had obtained from Meyerber to some relevant people in the musical world, among them the director of the Paris opera, did not have the desired effect (Wagner 1994 [1870/1875], pp. 211–212). He soon began to experience financial difficulties, which would lead him to sell everything he had of value, including the jewellery of his wife. He managed to organize a concert, with a second-rate orchestra, in which his overture *Columbus* was performed. Some of the soloists in the orchestra showed their mediocrity and the concert failed. In his own words "I was clearly conscious of my complete failure. After this misfortune Paris no longer existed for me" (Wagner 1994 [1870/1875], p. 236). And, to get some money, he had to engage in composing French songs and adapting for piano some parts Donizetti's *La Favorita*, an opera that, incidentally, he did not like and whose success in Paris was a sample, in his opinion, of the degenerate taste of the public of this city (Wagner 1995, p. 232). It seems he got 1,100 francs for this adaptation and later on 300 more francs for correcting the proofs of the full score of the opera.; a

[2] A good description of Paris social and cultural life in the first half of the nineteenth century can be found in Mansel (2001).

work not very pleasant for him, but convenient for a musician with serious financial problems.

Nonetheless, these two and a half years in Paris were not a totally wasted time, since in the spring of 1841 he worked on what would be his first masterpiece for the theatre, *Der Fliegende Holländer*. Wagner finally left the city in April 1842 and travelled to Dresden. Shortly before he had received the good news that the opera theatre of this city had approved the performance of *Rienzi.* He had to go back to Germany. His first attempt to conquer the music world of Paris had failed.

The arrival in Dresden improved the economic situation of the young couple and that city could have been the refuge and the quiet place that Wagner needed to carry out his great musical work. There he premiered *Rienzi* (1842), *Der Fliegende Holländer* (1843) and *Tanhäuser* (1845) and was appointed Royal Kapellmeister with an annual salary of 1,500 thalers (Watson 1979, p. 78). But the good times would not last long. The 1848 revolution in Paris soon spread to other European countries, including several German states. On April 30, the king of Saxony dissolved the Saxon Parliament and as a reply, the town council organized a Communal Guard on the 3rd of May. The clashes between the troops and the Communal Guard soon began, and the king and the government had to leave the town. Wagner became a "passionately interested spectator of the proceedings" (Wagner 1994, p. 479). Later on, he took an active part in the revolt: "I definitely abandoned all considerations for my personal situation and determined to surrender myself to the stream of developments which flowed in the direction towards which my feelings had driven me with a delight that was full of despair" (Wagner 1994, p. 488). But the uprising soon failed when Prussian and Saxon troops reconquered Dresden. Repression was hard and many of the leaders of the revolt were arrested. Wagner was able to flee the city and take refuge in Switzerland. These events left their mark on his life for quite some time. Two years and a half later, in November 1851 he said in a letter to Theodor Uhlig that in *Der Ring* he had attempted "to make clear to the men of the Revolution the meaning of that revolution in its noblest sense".[3]

For the next decade, his life would be relatively uneventful, at least if compared with previous years. As far as his work as a conductor is concerned, the most interesting event of this period was his trip to London in 1855. The reason for this trip was an invitation from the Philharmonic Society of London to conduct a series of subscription concerts (for a description of this trip, see Christiansen [2000, pp. 42–59]). The offer seemed attractive, since a fee of 200 sterling pounds—equivalent to 5,000 French francs—was agreed. In his autobiography, Wagner asserts that he thought that this trip was really of no advantage to him but had accepted it in the prospect of handling a large and excellent orchestra (Wagner 1994 [1870/1875], p. 620). But it seems that finally the results were not very positive in this aspect either. Wagner recounts that, for financial reasons, he was allowed only one rehearsal per concert, even though it included, for example, two symphonies and several minor pieces (Wagner 1994 [1870/1875], p. 623). Wagner did not like his stay in London. The fog annoyed him. The city's musical life was mediocre, in his opinion. And it

[3] "Wagner and the Dresden Uprising (May 1849)". In: Vazsonyy, Nicholas (ed.) (2013).

seems that the economic results of this trip were not what he—always confident of earning some money—had expected. He stayed in the British capital for four months. His accommodation, close to Regents Park, cost him two pounds a week, a total of about 36 pounds for the whole period; but the cost of living in the city was high, and he complained about it. He wrote to Mina: "places are so dreadfully far apart that I simply have to take a cab everywhere" and "half a bottle of Bordeaux in the worst restaurant costs three shillings". The final result was that his net profit, after all his costs had been paid, was only 40 pounds, that is, about 1,000 francs. In his own words: "This is the hardest money I have ever earned" (Christiansen 2000, p. 58).

An important event of this period was his meeting in Switzerland with Otto Wesendonck, a wealthy silk merchant who would become his patron and, a few years later even offered him a house located in the gardens of his elegant villa in Zurich. Wagner and his wife moved to this "Asyl" in 1857. It seemed again that the composer had achieved the necessary stability to fully dedicate himself calmly to his work. But, once again, things got tough. Wagner fell in love with Wesendonck's wife, Mathilde, in whose honour composed a series of five lieders, the text of which is poems by his new beloved. So he had to leave his patron's house, and in 1858, he returned to his travelling life and attempted a new conquest of Paris, with a new opera, *Tanhäuser*, that was performed in the French capital in March 1861.

This time he was far from the second-class orchestra that had performed some of his works in his first stay. *Tanhäuser* was performed at the Imperial Opera, which made high expenses both in terms of a large number of rehearsals and very expensive lavish theatrical sets. But there was no success on this occasion either, and the scandal that occurred at this France premiere is a well-known chapter in the history of opera. The disaster was certainly related to the rejection of Wagner's music by a conservative public, who did not like the work. But the fact that many people went to the opera in Paris in those days more for being a social event than for the musical values of the work and the quality of the interpreters also had to do with it. And this audience demanded a ballet in the performance. And this was especially relevant for the members of the so-called Jockey-Club, wealthy holders of season tickets who only arrived in the theatre at the second or third act, after a good dinner and were interested above all in the choreography. For the Paris performance, Wagner introduced a ballet in his opera—Bacchanal on the Venusberg—, but in the first act. In short, the members of the Jockey-Club became angry and bought whistles and hunting trumpets, with which they made a fuss, supported by part of the public present in the theatre. Despite the defence of this opera and his new music made by some artists and writers such as Baudelaire or Theophile Gautier, Wagner failed again in Paris. Germany and Austria, not France, would be his promised land, in which his merits would be recognized.[4] Only two months after *Tanhäuser's* failure

[4] The acceptance of Wagner's music encountered greater resistance in France than in other European countries, as his work was mixed with the political issues of the time. The rejection was not only general among people with conservative musical tastes. Following Prussia's victory over France in 1871, many French nationalists would regard Wagner's music as an unacceptable symbol of German culture. It would be necessary to wait until a date as late as 1891 so that *Lohengrin* could

in France, Vienna enthusiastically received *Lohengrin*. A new life was beginning for the composer.

Verdi's Triumphs in Paris

Verdi's relationship with Paris and its opera houses was very different from Wagner's. In July 1847, when he was thirty-three years old, he got his first contract to premiere an opera in the French capital. This was *Jérusalem*, a significantly modified translation of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, that had had its premiere at La Scala four years before. The work was successfully screened in November. That same year he was awarded by the king Louis Philippe the order of the Legion of Honour. Verdi lived in Paris on several occasions and his operas were performed many times. And even two of them *Les vêpres siciliennes* and *Don Carlos* were premiered in the French capital in 1855 and 1867, facts that clearly contrast not only with Wagner's initial failure but also with the problems that Wagner's operas would face in France for many years.

An important difference between opera performances in Italy and in Paris in the mid-nineteenth century was determined by the popularity of what was called the "Grand Opera" in the French capital. This was a much longer work, usually five acts instead of the usual three in Italy, necessarily including ballet, and often staged with expensive sets. The costs of the sets and the performances were often so high that could only be supported by a rich theatre in a wealthy city that received the financial help of the royal court. Of course, these Grand Operas were more profitable for composers, since the royalties per performance were much higher (approximately 300 francs for three-act operas and 500 francs for five-act operas). The Verdi's operas premiered in Paris were framed in the tradition of the French great opera. A good example is *Les vêpres siciliannes* that includes in its third act the well-known ballet of "The Four Seasons", the longest ballet music written by Verdi.

Verdi was in Paris when the revolution broke out that dethroned King Louis Philippe in February 1848. On the 9th of March, he commented in a letter to Giuseppina Appiani that things were calm and that, if no urgent matter arose in Italy, he planned to stay in the city until the end of April to see what was happening in the constitution of the National Assembly. But what happened in France soon had repercussions in Italy. On the 18th of March of the same year, a revolt broke out in Milan against the Austrian occupation. A provisional government was formed, and the Austrians had to withdraw temporarily. Verdi was clearly on the side of the Italian patriots and in the first days of April he left Paris for Milan. On the 21st he wrote to Francesco Maria Piave:

> Imagine whether I wished to remain in Paris, hearing of a revolution at Milan! I left immediately I heard the news but was only able to see these stupendous barricades. Honor to these

---

be successfully performed in Paris. And the nationalist protests continued for some time yet. See the chapter "Le wagnerisme en France et à l'étranger" in Grand-Carteret (1892).

> brave men! Honor to all Italy, which at this moment is truly great! The hour has sounded—be convinced of it—of her liberation. (Walker 1962, p. 187)

But two months later he returned to Paris. The patriotic movement in Milan ended in failure, and in the first days of August 1848, the Austrian army recaptured the town. Some of Verdi's friends were forced to flee the city; among them Countess Maffei, in whose salon she and her friends had openly supported Italian unification. These events deeply affected Verdi, who, from Paris, continued to think of Italy. And this same autumn he composed in the French capital his aforementioned patriotic opera *La Battaglia de Legnano*, which would premiere in Rome in January of the following year.

Verdi: Music and Business

When analysing the remunerations of the three main types of artists needed for an opera performance—composers, librettists and singers—the contrasts between them are striking.[5] Naturally, there were singers, composers and librettists of very different levels that received substantially different payments. But if we focus on those at the highest level, who were hired by the main theatres, it is easy to verify the existence of a clear hierarchy between, singers, composers and librettists. At the head were the singers, then the composers and, last, at a great distance, the authors of the libretti. Given that an opera performance requires the collaboration of the three groups, the distribution of income must be explained by the particularities of each of the submarkets. Let us first look at the case of singers. There were many opera singers at that time. But, for the public, the product they offered was not at all homogeneous. The best opera singers—as was also the case with the best pianists or violinists—enjoyed a quasi-monopoly position, which allowed them to obtain large incomes. Demand for their services had a low elasticity, since people came to hear a specific star, who could not be easily replaced by another singer and such a substitution would clearly reduce theatre attendance and impresario's income. Such an argument had already been used in 1850 by the British economist Nassau William Senior when explaining the extraordinary high income obtained by the Swedish soprano Jenny Lind, who had made a very well-paid tour of the United States hired by the famous circus impresario P.T. Barnum:

> Most people would be puzzled if they were told that when Madame Goldsmith (Jenny Lind) receives 200 pounds for a night performance, 10s of it are the wages of her labour, 30s more the profit on her acquired capital of knowledge and skill, and the remaining 198 pounds is a rent derived from the extraordinary powers of which nature has given her a monopoly. (Levy 1979, p. 173)

[5] Orchesters were part of the opera houses and the role of stage directors and set designers, so relevant nowadays, had much less importance in the theatres of the nineteenth century. The richness of the theatrical staging and the costumes of the singers were certainly highly valued, but this depended, fundamentally, on how much money each impresario was willing to spend on them in order to perform an opera.

As an example, Adelina Patti could get up to 2,500 French francs for a single performance in Paris (Panico 2002, p. 246). So, the amount of money paid to Verdi for his first operas—around 9,000–12,000 lire—was relatively small and, in addition, he had to use part of that money to pay the authors of the libretti. However, things would get much better for Verdi in the course of a few years.

There were also differences between the composers, certainly. But the hierarchy generally accepted today with regard to the merits of composers of the past was far from the one prevalent at their times. Today no one doubts, for example, that Rossini was a superior composer to Paisiello; or that Mozart is more important in the history of music than Salieri or Martín y Soler. But things were not so clear in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. We know, for example, that the Austrian Emperor Leopold II valued Domenico Cimarossa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto* above any of Mozart's operas and paid its author very generously. Moreover, what was sought by the public were more premieres and novelties than reruns of great works. For many different reasons, failure was always possible, as shown by the cases of the premieres of *La Traviata* at La Fenice in 1853 or the French premiere of *Tanhäuser* in Paris in 1861, to which we have referred, to cite just two examples of operas that today are considered masterpieces of their genres. And a failure could mean heavy losses for an impresario. It is true that a famous singer could fail at a premiere, but the degree of uncertainty regarding success was significantly less for the famous singer than for the composer.

Finally, the librettists, although they had a certain degree of specialization, were part of the group of writers, very numerous in the nineteenth century, and in many cases, their role consisted of more than creating an original work, in adapting to the world of opera a play by a famous playwright (Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Schiller or the Duke of Rivas, among many others). Most of the authors of libretti were not outstanding figures of literature, but men who knew well the trade of putting literary works—some of them already well-known—into verse so that they could be sung. On this topic, the differences between Wagner and Verdi are very important. For Wagner, the text was essential for his operas, which he understood as integral works of art, in which music and text had to blend together. The phrase "Prima la music e poi le parole" (see for details Muti, 2012)—which served as the title to an opera by Salieri and that, many years later, would serve as the theme for Richard Strauss's last opera, *Capriccio*—applies more strongly to Verdi's operas than to Wagner's. In the words of Christian Thielemann, "one could say that Boito and Verdi are setting the words to music. Wagner is setting sound itself. Boito and Verdi are cutting, distilling, dramatizing; Wagner is letting the sound flow" (Thielemann 2015, p. 32). In the nineteenth century, opera composers were much more important than librettists, and the differences in income between them reflect this evident hierarchy. This was certainly not the case with Wagner's operas. Although today we value the musical elements of his operas infinitely more than their libretti, it makes no sense to disparage Wagner as a librettist, especially when compared to other libretti authors of his time.

As Thielemann noted, “Are we to turn our backs to one of the best librettists in operatic history because of a single Wallalla weiala weia?”.[6]

In most cases, librettists, no matter how well they did their job, could not get payments that were beyond the competitive market prices. Payments of between 500 and 900 lire were common for librettists of Verdi’s operas. One important exception was, however, Eugène Scribe, who was the author of between four and five hundred plays of all types for the theatre and libretti for operas. It is said that he had created a business firm that produced works for the stage, which he signed with his name, although a large part of the work was done by a group of collaborators who worked for him. Scribe became a wealthy man. But this was not the case for most authors of opera libretti. We know, for instance, that the two main Verdi’s librettists—Solera and Piave—ended their lives in poverty.[7]

A Contract with La Fenice

While we don’t have much information about the financial investments Verdi made with his growing income as an opera composer, we do have good data about his contracts with the theatres in which his works were performed and with his publishers.[8] As an example, we can review a contract which offers us precise information about the nature and clauses of the contracts between an important theatre—La Fenice of Venice—and an already famous composer, Verdi. La Fenice was, after La Scala in Milano, the most important theatre for Verdi premieres. In that theatre took place the first performances of *Ernani* (1844), *Attila* (1846), *Rigoletto* (1851), *La Traviata* (1853) and *Simon Boccanegra* (1857), In May 1856, an agreement—Scrittura Teatrale—was signed in Busetto, Duchy of Parma, between Guglielmo Brenna, secretary of the presidency of the company that owned the theatre of La Fenice in Venice, and Giuseppe Verdi, “master composer of music”. These were the main clauses of this contract: (1)—Verdi undertook to write a new serious opera for La Fenice to be performed in the following carnival—Lenten season (1857) (2)—The composer undertook to provide a libretto for this opera, which should be sent to the theatre in the month of August in order to be presented to the censor (3)—Verdi undertook to be in Venice before the middle of February 1857 to carry out the rehearsals, so that the opera could be premiered no later than March 5. (4)—The composer could choose the singers among the members of the theatre company; but not those of the

---

[6] Thielemann, p. 31. These are words sung by Woglinde, one of the Rhein-maidens in the first scene of *Das Rheingold*, the first opera of the tetralogy, *Der Ring des Nibelungen,* while circles swimming a rock in the river. Even better known is the cry of Brünnhilde in the second act of *Die Walküre*: “Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha! Heiaha!”

[7] Snowman (2009, pp. 124–125). Another example of the differences in income between composers and librettists can be found in the case of *Norma*, an opera for which Bellini received 12,000 lire, while the author of the libretto received less than 1,000. Panico (2002, p. 80).

[8] Panico (2002) offers excellent information on these contracts and is the best reference for the study of these issues.

main performers, who would be Luigia Abandazzi (Prima Donna), Carlo Negrini (Primo Tenore), Leone Giraldoni (Primo Baritono) and Giuseppe Echeveria (Primo Basso Profondo). (5)—The score remained the property of Maestro Verdi. But the theatre of La Fenice kept the right to also represent the opera in the following season. (6)—The composer should remain in Venice at least until the third performance of the opera and attend all the rehearsals that take place. (7)—The theatre of La Fenice undertook to pay Cavaliere Verdi the amount of 12,000 lire in three instalments of 4,000 lire each. The first, on the day of the first test with cembalo, the second, on the day of the first rehearsal with orchestra, and the third on the day of the dress rehearsal (Panico 2002, pp. 282–284).

The work was *Simon Boccanegra*, with a libretto by Franceso Piave based on a play by the Spanish writer Antonio García Gutiérrez. And the deadline for the premiere was strictly respected, since it took place in Venice on 12 March 1857. The work had only limited success, largely due to the fact that the libretto was quite mediocre. Verdi's collaboration with Piave in writing it certainly did not get good results. And years later Verdi asked Arrigo Boito to remake it for the performance at La Scala in Milan in 1881. But this was not the end of the story, since, as we have seen, Verdi had retained ownership of *Simon Boccanegra's* rights in the contract. Because of this, he was able to negotiate the sale of it to his publisher, Ricordi, and raise his income considerably. In his contract with Ricordi, signed in the same year 1857, it was established that Verdi sold his rights to the publisher for a fixed payment of 36,000 francs, plus 40% of the income obtained from the rental and sale of the score. The composer had tried to get his share of the revenue raised to 50%. He did not succeed, but the figure obtained was better than the 30% that he had set in other previous contracts. These figures show Verdi's growing bargaining power and the increased income he was earning over the years. The improvement in his position can be explained by at least two reasons. First, with the passage of time and the development of the copyright model, composers were obtaining higher incomes and, furthermore, even more important, because Verdi had become the most famous opera composer in Italy, and this, naturally, had its economic effects.

The Calzado-Affair

Despite the advantages that the French copyright system offered to opera composers, it seems that attempts to perform operas without paying royalties to their authors were not uncommon. Verdi found himself in this situation in the mid-1850s with a Spanish impresario, Toribio Calzado, who was the manager of the Theatre des italiens in Paris between 1855 and 1863. Calzado, an interesting figure in the Paris opera world of mid-nineteenth century, was born in Valladolid (Spain). Like so many Spaniards of the time, he emigrated to Cuba, where made a substantial fortune in the tobacco businesses. Although it seems that he did not speak well neither French nor Italian, he got the concession to manage the theatre, which was in a difficult financial

situation. And he was able to clean up the accounts, in part with methods considered unorthodox.

During his eight years in office, he offered many performances of Verdi's operas. The most successful opera was, clearly, *Il trovatore*, which he staged 169 times; but some other operas by the Italian composer were also performed, including *Rigoletto* (86 times) and *La traviata* (51 times) (Devries-Lesure 1998, p. 158). And most importantly: he did it without paying royalties to either Verdi or his French publisher Léon Escudier. Verdi took him to court on several occasions; but lost all the lawsuits. The reason was that Calzado was clever enough to take advantage of a gap in French copyright law, which left out of its protection those works that, prior to their premiere in France, had been performed in foreign countries. This was the case for most of Verdi's operas, which were premiered in Italy. Only two of Verdi's operas—*Les vêpres siciliennes* and *Jérusalem*—had been premiered in France in the years when Calzado managed the Theatre des Italiens, and this regulation allowed him to win all the lawsuits that took him to court… at least until 1863, when, due to some shady affairs, lost his concession and was even imprisoned (Panico 2002, p. 246). But, before that, he got high profits throughout his eight years of managing the theatre and he did not hesitate to hire some of the best voices of the time such as Enrico Tamberlick or Adelina Patti. It is not surprising, therefore, that Verdi was outraged, and in 1863 made ironic references to Calzado's honesty, noting that surely, when the case was over, those he had robbed would be considered thieves, while he would retain his prestige and even "be canonized". And years before, in a letter to Ricordi, he lamented his situation in these terms:

> So I have to stay in Paris, wasting my money! As usual the expenses and annoyances are for me, the profits for other people…I have never been considered as anything but an object, a tool, to be made use of as long as it works. Sad words, but true! (Walker 1962, p. 218)

Wagner: New Years of Pilgrimage. The Road to Wahnfried

After his failure in Paris, Wagner undertook a new series of trips between 1861 and 1864 in which he tried to get money working as a conductor in different countries. In December 1862 and January 1863, he conducted three concerts at the Theatre an der Wien, the last of which was attended by the Empress of Austria. These concerts were a popular success but a financial failure. But Wagner, despite the losses, offered a magnificent dinner for his friends and the performers. Fortunately, he was once again able to count on the help of the rich and powerful, and the empress gave him a gift of 1,000 gulden. In February, he conducted a concert in Prague, again with artistic success, and this time with benefits, he got another 1,000 gulden. And in March, he started a tour of Russia (Watson 1979, p. 191).

The concerts in St. Petersburg and Moscow, with programmes consisting of Beethoven's symphonies and his own music, did well and he was able to return to Vienna with money, not only from the profits from the concerts but also from new donations, such as that received from the Grand Duchess Helene, who gave

him 1,000 rubbles, after attending a reading of the Ring poems. But this money and Wagner were soon departed. Instead of thinking that these funds could allow him to live for some time and dedicate himself to composing and advancing his unfinished operas, he began to spend as if his income were inexhaustible. In addition to sending some money to his wife Minna, with whom he had been having a bad relationship for some time, he decided to move to a new house in Penzing, a suburb of Vienna at a cost of 2,400 marks a year. And, as expected, he spared no expense to furnish and adorn it with the greatest luxury. He hired two new servants, bought fine wines for his cellar and renewed his wardrobe. And, to celebrate his fiftieth birthday on 22 November 1863, he organized a lavish party, which included a torchlight procession by local choral societies. So, in a very short time, he ran out of money again. He asked Wesendonck for a new loan, but this time he did not get any reply. He sold a gold snuff-box, a present from the Grand Duke of Baden and got 4,200 marks from Prince Hohenzollern-Hechingen. But it wasn't enough. He had to borrow more money and, unable to pay his creditors had to escape from Vienna in March 1864. The series of flights from creditors, which he had begun in Riga in 1839, continued twenty-five years later (Watson 1979, pp. 192–194). It seemed that only a miracle could save him and allow him a quiet life. Surprisingly, this miracle took place at the hands of the young King of Bavaria Ludwig II. It had been too many years of financial anguish. When Wagner finally settled in a beautiful villa in Bayreuth, he gave it a name that reflected what his life had been like and the peace he seemed to have finally achieved: Wahnfried, or the peace after delusions (also peace of musings).

Royal Sponsorship

In the first months of the year 1864, Wagner's financial situation was once again desperate. He had travelled through Germany, Austria and Switzerland, dodging his creditors and seeking, without success, an income that would allow him to finish The Mastersingers and even wondering if it was worth living. Demoralized, he arrived in Stuttgart, and there, at the beginning of May, when he was at the home of the conductor of the city's opera orchestra, he received a letter from a gentleman named Pfistermeister, who introduced himself as the secretary of His Majesty the King of Bavaria. Afraid of his creditors, he came to suspect that under that name and illustrious title, someone could be found who wanted to collect his credits. But it wasn't like that. The gentleman was really who he claimed to be and what happened at that moment was a real miracle for a bankrupt and morally depressed Wagner.

Ludwig II had ascended the throne only two months before, when his father, King Maximilian II died. Ludwig was only 18 and he was already enthusiastic about Wagner's work. His offer could not be more generous. The composer would move to Munich and the king would pay his debts and guarantee him a stipend that would allow him to live and operas on his operas. The capital of Bavaria was a city with a great musical tradition and a magnificent opera house. Patronage was, therefore, salvation for Wagner. But even counting on the royal support, things would not be

easy for him. As usual, he did not bother to make friends at the court and was not a man particularly attractive to Munich's high society. On the other hand, his expenses were considered excessive and, in some cases, extravagant. This led to him being called "Lolus Montez", mockingly referring to an Irish dancer and adventurer named Elizabeth Rosanna Gilbert who had adopted the more exotic Spanish name of Lola Montez and had been the lover of Ludwig I—the grandfather of Ludwig II—contributing in some way to his abdication, both for her private life and for her absurd interference in the country's politics (Snowman 2009, p. 195). In addition, in the summer of 1864, Wagner had begun an affair with Cosima von Bülow, daughter of Franz Liszt and wife of his friend, the conductor of the Munich opera orchestra Hans von Bülow, a relationship unacceptable for the Munich society. A year later, at the end of 1865, Wagner had to leave Munich and move to Switzerland to live in Luzern with Cosima, whom he would marry a few years later. But, fortunately for him, this did not mean a break with Ludwig or the end of his patronage. The story is known of the secret trip that the king made to Luzern to visit Wagner in Triebschen, his villa by Lake Luzern, where he introduced himself as Walther von Stolzing, the young knight in love with Eve in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. Wagner frequently travelled from Luzern to Munich, and before the Bayreuth Festival theatre was built, four of his masterpieces were premiered in that city: *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), *Die Meistersinger* (1868), *Das Rheingold* (1869) and *Die Walküre* (1870).

Financing the Bayreuth Festival

Much has been written about the financial support that Ludwig II gave Wagner in the nearly twenty years that elapsed since the famous Stuttgart meeting with the king's representative and the composer's death. It is quite clear that his enemies raised the figures above reality to use them as a weapon to force him to leave Bavaria. But later studies cast doubt on whether they were really that high. It has been calculated that, over the near twenty years of their relationship, the money that Wagner received from Ludwig was not so high, especially if we compare it with the sumptuary expenses of the king (Snowman 2009, pp. 195–196).

But it is also clear that the Bayreuth festival had high costs. In the first place, building the theatre, whose first stone was laid in 1872 was not cheap. The initial budget was 300,000 thalers, but it seems that the real costs were much higher, King Ludwig offered 25,000 thalers, and later on, he would lend 10,000 more thalers. The selling of 1,300 *Patronatscheinen* was not a success, since patrons bought less than half of them. Wagner got some donations from some aristocrats and rich friends. But was not enough. And managing and sustaining the festival itself, whose first season took place in August 1876, was a constant concern for Wagner from the very beginning (Watson 1979, pp. 252–263). As always, he needed money, more money, and he had to resort to the most diverse ways to get it. That same year Marie d'Agoul, Cosima's mother, died her daughter received a small inheritance of 40,000 francs, which she used to pay part of the festival's debts (Watson 1979, p. 293). Of course, it

was not enough. And Wagner tried get more money in different ways, from composing a march for the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition, held to commemorate the United States first century, to a series of concerts he conducted in the spring of 1877 at the Royal Albert Hall in London. His stay in London was a social success, that included a visit to Windsor Castle, where he was received by Queen Victoria. But it was not a success from the economic point of view. Pessimism took again possession of the composer's mind for some time. In a letter sent to Cosima in 1880, he announced that he was seriously thinking of leaving Germany, going to the United States and applying for American citizenship (Snowman 2009, pp. 199–200). Of course this journey never went beyond the composer's mind.

Furthermore, Wagner had other projects for which he had no money. The first, a school for the training of singers, instrumentalists and conductors to improve the performances of his operas. The second, the creation of a fund that would subsidize those people without sufficient financial means to attend the festival in Bayreuth. Given the situation in which the composer found himself, it was logically impossible to start them up.

The financial failure of the first festival made it impossible to organize the second until six years later. But in this period of time Wagner and his group achieved some significant progress to increase funding for the festival. An important new source of income was obtained from an agreement with Munich Opera Theatre that established that the composer would receive ten percent of the gross receipts from performances of his works in Munich. And, in addition, other theatres in Germany were more and more interested in performing his works, which meant new income from royalties.

The 1882 festival had as its main feature the premiere of Parsifal. And this time it was both an artistic and an economic success. At last, the festival had obtained the necessary financing and a period of splendour began.

A Reflection on Wagner and Money

It is evident that the search for income was of great importance in Wagner's biography. His complaints regarding the economic difficulties he went through were frequent and became a *Leitmotiv* throughout his life. And we know that, in many cases, he had to flee his creditors. But he liked to live well. And if he had the chance, he didn't hesitate to spend beyond his means. At the same time, he had a very critical attitude towards the world of money, lamenting that the society in which he lived had lost many of the noble ideals of the past to become a mercantile society, which he did not appreciate at all. It has been commented many times that the origin of the tragedy described in the tetralogy should be found in the cursed gold of the Rhine. And, in one of his best known writings, he stated that "in our social evolution Money, with less and less disguise was raised to the virtual patent of nobility". And he considered it regrettable that modern culture was accessible to no one but the well-to-do and had sunk into a venal article for luxury. This idea, developed in his article "Judaism in Music" (Wagner (1995), inspired not only some relevant aspects of his operas but

also the staging of his new integral art, his musical drama. The architectural design of the *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth was inspired by the old Greek theatres and lacked the usual decorations and luxuries in the great opera houses of his time, required by the upper classes that frequented them. He did not like the idea of opera theatres for rich people. But he was always ready to accept the money offered to him by royalty, aristocracy or wealthy bourgeoisie.

Old and New Music: The Italian Battlefield

Despite being the two most important opera composers of their time, who travelled throughout Europe, who spent long periods in Paris and despite Wagner having been in Italy on several occasions, Verdi and Wagner never met or had a personal relationship, neither personal nor even epistolary. When Wagner died in February 1883 Giuseppina Verdi wrote:

> Verdi, who is in the country at the moment, never knew or saw Wagner…This great individuality, now departed, was never afflicted with the little itch of vanity, but devoured by an incandescent, measureless pride, like Satan or Lucifer, the most beautiful of the fallen angels! (Walker 1962, pp. 445–446)

It seems that neither of them wanted to openly criticize the other's work. But, after the death of Wagner, whom Verdi outlived by eighteen years, the Italian showed his disagreement with some aspects of the German composer's work on different occasions. In a letter to Franco Faccio written from Montecatini in July 1887, Verdi showed his concern for Wagner's influence on Italian composers, whom he even accused of being unfaithful to their national musical tradition:

> Our young masters are not good patriots. If the Germans, starting from Bach, have arrived at Wagner, they write operas as good Germans and they do well. But we, descendants of Palestrina, by imitating Wagner, commit a patriotic-musical crime, and write useless, even harmful operas. (Verdi 1981, p. 432)

An interesting difference between the two musicians is the way in which they got their incomes and financed their artistic activities. In fact, a paradox that arises when the works and lives of Verdi and Wagner are compared is that, on the one hand, there is no doubt that—as regards aesthetics—Wagner was an innovative and revolutionary musician, while Verdi appears as a more conservative composer. But, on the other hand, as far as his life and economic activity are concerned, Verdi was the modern man, who understood how business worked and was successful in the opera market of the nineteenth century, and Wagner, however, followed the old tradition of the artists who needed a protector, a patron to get a substantial part of their income. In business, Wagner was the old artist and Verdi the new one.

The first performances of the operas of Wagner in Italy took place at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna and they were largely due to the interest that the mayor of the city Camilo Casarini showed in the work of the German composer. Thanks to his efforts, *Lohengrin* was performed in the Comunale in 1871. This performance

was a success. Naturally, many of the debates on Wagner's music, which had already taken place in other European cities—the best known being the one that took place in France after the aforementioned scandalous premiere of *Tanhäuser* in Paris in 1861—were reproduced in Italy. But the beginning of Wagner's opera performances in Italy had also a relevant business component that deserves some comment.

From 1808 to the twenty-first century, Casa Ricordi has been the main music publisher in Italy. Years after the foundation of the company, Tito Ricordi, one of the sons of the founder Giovanni Ricordi, became Verdi's publisher and, at the same time, a personal friend of the composer. But in 1825, a rival company emerged, with which Ricordi had many disagreements and even lawsuits. Francesco Lucca, a musician born in Cremona in 1802, started working at Casa Ricordi at the age of 14 and remained there as an employee until 1822. Three years later, after a stay in Germany, he created his own company—Francesco Lucca and Co.—and became a competitor of Ricordi. Lucca died in 1872, and his wife Giovannina continued for years in charge of the company, showing great commercial and management skills. At the beginning of his career Verdi had dealings with Lucca, which did not end well, and it was Ricordi who managed afterwards most of the composer's operas. By the middle of the century, Verdi's works were the most performed operas in Italian theatres. So Lucca sought to get rights to works that had been successfully performed abroad, such as Gunod's *Faust* or Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, and also Wagner's operas. Verdi's correspondence with Tito Riccordi reveals not only the little sympathy they both felt for Lucca but also Verdi's complaints about the better productions that the rival company achieved. While lamenting about the poor staging of his own works—such as the *Rigoletto* of La Fenice of 1871—he pointed out that the performances of *L'Africaine* were always of high quality and that Lucca did not hesitate to spend money and to impose very good conductors for the performances of the works under his control. In his own words: "The fact is that the operas of which Lucca is proprietor are always well performed, and with his three operas he now has the main theatres of Italy in his hands" (Walker 1962, p. 372). This comment shows the concern that Verdi had to ensure that his operas were performed in the best possible conditions. In April 1873, he wrote Giulio Ricordi a letter from Naples, in relation to the performance of Aida, which was being prepared in La Scala. In it, he insisted on the need to have a good conductor, in charge of high-quality soloists, choir and orchestra. He told Ricordi: "If I go to Milano it is not for the vanity of seeing my opera performed, but to have a truly artistic performance". And he concluded: "Answer me categorically; because, if you could not grant what I ask, it would be better to abandon the attempt" (Verdi 2000, pp. 418–419).

Lohengrin's performance in Bologna not only ushered in a new type of opera in Italy but also raised problems with Verdi because Lucca and the Teatro Comunale de Bologna chose Angelo Mariani as conductor of this performance. Mariani was a famous conductor—born in 1821—who got his first success conducting in 1846 *I Due Foscari* and *Nabucco*. Over time he would maintain a close personal friendship with Verdi, which ended badly for various reasons; first, some disputes on the organization of the collective *Messa per Rossini* following the death of the composer from Pessaro in 1868. And more importantly, the fact that when his fiancée, the soprano

Teresa Stolz, broke her engagement with him, newspapers said that the singer had an affair with Verdi. Later on, Mariani refused—alleging health reasons, which seem to be well-founded—to conduct the premiere of *Aida* in Egypt. His last two major performances were conducting *Lohengrin* and *Tanhäuser* in Bologna, the latter just a year before he died of cancer in 1873.

It has been argued whether the fact that he agreed to conduct Wagner in Italy (*Lohengrin* in 1871 and *Tanhäuser i*n 1872) was a "revenge" against Verdi. We will never know if there was any spite between them for this reason; but it seems certain that Mariani, a very competent musician, was interested in Wagner's operas and understood well his music. In fact, after the first performance in Bologna, Wagner himself wrote Mariani a very complimentary letter congratulating him on the performance. Verdi's attitude towards Wagner's work always reflected a certain scepticism towards what he considered "excesses" of the German composer. But if something bothered him, it was some critical comments, in which he was considered, in some respects, a follower of Wagner's music. In 1875 he wrote to Giulio Ricordi, Tito's son:

> After *Aida*, endless chatter: that I was no more the Verdi of *Un ballo in Maschera*… and that I was an imitator of Wagner!!! A fine result, after a career of thirty-five years, to end up as an "imitator"!!! (Verdi 2000, p. 339)

Wagner's influence in Italy undoubtedly went far beyond his operatic work. For some young Italian intellectuals, Wagner was more than an opera composer: he was a model for the new artist, in which—in the words of Gabriele D'Annunzio—"modernity speaks in its most intimate language" (D'Annunzio 2013, p. 43). In D'Annunzio's literary work Wagner often plays a relevant role. In *Il Fuoco*, a novel whose action takes place in Venice in 1883, the writer imagines the participation of some of its characters in the transfer of the coffin of the German composer to Venice's railway station, from where it would be driven to Wagner's grave at the Villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth. In this novel, D'Annunzio contrasted the Germanic spirit with the Latin spirit. Wagner would be the representative of the first. But the spirit of Latin music, alternative to Wagner's, is not represented by the operas of Verdi or any other Italian nineteenth century composer, but by the music of Monteverdi, of whose music D'Annunzio gave as the best example the beautiful "Ariadne's Lament" (D'Annunzio 1995, pp. 73–74).

Epilogue: Wills and Estates

Giuseppe Verdi died at the beginning of the new century, in January 1901. He was then a wealthy man and left behind a valuable legacy of copyrights for operas that were frequently performed in Europe and America. In his last years, he lived like a gentleman, the domestic service on his country house in Sant'Agata consisting of, more or less, ten people: cooks, maids, gardeners and other servants (Reparaz 2007, pp. 110–112).

He was a very generous man who dedicated a good part of his money to charities, including a hospital in Villanova sull'Arda. Although his main heiress was his cousin María Verdi, whom he had adopted in 1869, in his will he left to the Villanova's hospital nine farms, whose rents exceeded the cost of maintaining the hospital, for which reason he established that, with part of these funds it would contribute to maintaining the Cortemaggiore Children's Asylum and to help the poor of the village. And to the Monte di Pietà de Busetto he left some land.

But his most important charity work was a residence for retired musicians called Casa di Riposo per Musicisti, also known as Casa Verdi. In the words of the composer, his goal was to shelter elderly singers who had not been favoured by fortune, or who did not have the virtue of saving when they were young. Verdi, in addition to paying for the building, left 275,000 lire in credit titles to this institution in his will. And, much more importantly, the copyright of all his operas. The house was built between 1896 and 1899 according to a project by Camilo Boito, brother of Arrigo Boito, the librettist of several of Verdi's operas. It started admitting guests in 1902, the year after the composer's death. We do not have precise data about the initial costs of Casa Verdi. The value of the land and the building declared to the Registry was 412,369 lire.[9] But probably real value was substantially higher. Nor do we know precisely the value of the copyright of Verdi's operas. But partial available data indicate that the amounts obtained must have been very high, which allowed the smooth running of the house, which would later receive many other donations, especially from people related to the world of music.

Wagner also left an exceptional legacy. Not only did this consist of a dozen operas, most of which were performed with increasing frequency already in the last decades of the nineteenth century. He also left a festival dedicated to his own work, with a theatre for the performance of his operas—the Bayreuth *Festpielhaus*—and all this managed by a family whose role was considered, in Wagnerian circles, similar to a royal family. Wagner died in 1883, so under German law, the family could enjoy the copyright for the following thirty years. The problem arose, therefore, in 1913, at the end of that period. His wife Cosima tried in that year to have the copyright period extended by at least twenty more years. But she failed. Then she petitioned the Reichstag to grant the Bayreuth festival the exclusive rights to the performance of Parsifal. But the German Parliament rejected to pass what became known as "Lex Cosima", voting against the proposal the liberals and the social democrats (Hamann 2005, p. 7). This would have the effect that the financial problems that the founder of the dynasty had encountered would also be posed to the next generations of the family. It was again necessary to seek the support of the State to maintain both sufficient funding for the celebration of the festival over the years a conflict-free management. But 147 years have passed since the *Festpielhaus* opened its doors for the first time and almost 140 since Richard Wagner's death, and his festival is still today a very important institution in the world of opera.

Whoever takes a walk through the Giardini di Castello in Venice finds busts of our two musicians, recently restored after the vandalism they suffered a few years

---

[9] Data from *Fundazione Giuseppe Verdi. Casa di Riposo per Musicisti.* Reparaz (2007, pp. 134–135).

ago. The busts are close to each other. But whoever observes them carefully will immediately realize that they are placed in such a way that Verdi's and Wagner's gazes never meet, since one looks forward and the other looks to his right. And I suppose they will continue to do so for years to come. This image can be, perhaps, a good summary of these reflections on the two best opera composers of the nineteenth century.

References

Albinsson, Staffan. 2021. Avoiding Silent Opera: The "Grand" Performing Right at Work in Nineteenth Century Paris. *European Journal of Law and Economics* 51: 183–200.
Christiansen, Rupert. 2000. *The Visitors. Culture Shock in Nineteenth Century Britain.* London: Chatto and Windus.
D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 1995 [1990]. *Il Fuoco.* Roma: Newton.
D'Annunzio, Gabriele. 2013 [1893]. *Il Caso Wagner*. Roma: Lit. Edizioni.
Devries-Lesure, Anik. 1998. Les démêlés de Verdi avec le Théâtre-Italien sous la direction de Toribio Calzado (1855–1863). *Studi Verdiani* 13: 155–182.
Grand-Carteret, John. 1892. *Richard Wagner en caricatures.* Paris: Larousse.
Hamann, Brigitte. 2005. *Winifred Wagner. A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth.* London: Granta Books.
Levy, S. Leon. 1979. *Nassau W. Senior 1790–1864.* Newton Abbot: David & Charles.
Mansel, Philip. 2001. *Paris Between Empires. 1814–1852.* London: John Murray.
Muti, Riccardo. 2012. *Verdi l'italiano. Ovvero, in music, le nostre radici.* Milano: Rizzoli.
Noltze, Holger. 2013. *Liebestod. Wagner, Verdi, Wir*. Hamburg: Hoffman und Campe Verlag.
Panico, Paolo. 2002. *Verdi Businessman.* Gruppo Editoriale Atman. Pray (Biella).
Reparaz, Carmen. 2007. *El genio en su entorno. Giuseppe Verdi-Richard Wagner*. Madrid: Ediciones del Serbal.
Snowman, Daniel. 2009. *The Gilded Stage. A Social History of Opera.* London: Atlantic Books.
Thielemann, Christian. 2015. *My Life with Wagner*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
Vazsonyy, Nicholas, ed. 2013. *The Cambridge Wagner Encyclopedia.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Verdi, Giuseppe. 1981. *Autobiografia dalle lettere.* A cura di Aldo Oberdorfer. Milano: Rizzoli.
Verdi, Giuseppe. 2000. *Lettere 1835–1900.* Milano: Oscar Mondadori.
Wagner, Richard. 1994 [1870/1875]. *My Life.* London: Constable.
Wagner, Richard. 1995. *Judaism in Music and Other Essays.* Ed. Ellis William Ashton. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Walker, Frank. 1962. *The Man Verdi.* London: Dent.
Watson, Derek. 1979. *Richard Wagner. A Biography.* New York: Schirmer.