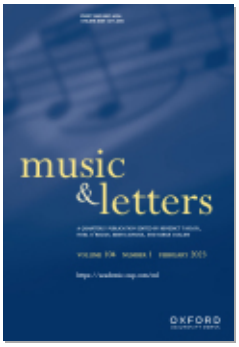
D'Oyly Carte: The Decline and Fall of an Opera Company by Paul Seeley (review)



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as a mass that comments on German complicity in the Holocaust. In this case, a form of musical engagement with Holocaust memory seems to have been possible, even within the boundaries of 'antifascist' ideology.

The final chapter returns to the official practices of state funerals by examining the memorial services organized for Brecht, Eisler, and Dessau, among others. Well aware of their positions as leading cultural figures of the GDR, these artists knew that they would receive ornate state burials, and they often hoped to assert control over their funerals in an attempt to shape their posthumous legacy. Brecht, for instance, wished to counteract the politicization of his funeral by requesting a gravestone with only his name, that there be no official speeches, and that no music be performed at his funeral service. In other cases, unofficial events counterpointed the official funerary events. Dessau requested that his friends and students gather around his grave in a semi-private event, which Sprigge views as an embodiment of the social circles that offered East German composers a temporary sanctuary from official public culture. She discerns a similar story in a composition written by his students in his honour, titled *Freedom: Collective Composition Following the Structure of the 'Thälmann-Battalion'*, which was based on one of his most famous *Kampflieder* ('songs of struggle').

One of the central accomplishments of *Socialist Laments* is to reveal how artistic responses to trauma become legible when situated in a deeply understood cultural and historical context. While Sprigge does engage thoroughly with literary-theoretical writings on trauma, her scholarship ultimately helps to broaden inquiry into the aftermath of trauma, pushing scholarship away from the psychoanalytic tropes that have characterized early examples of such research. Rather than focusing primarily on how art works might have channelled trauma through musical-formal qualities—such as fragmentation, repetition, or a breakdown of musical discourse—he suggests that scholars should seek to develop an empirical understanding of musical mourning as grounded within specific communities, musical traditions, and political contexts.

In this regard, some of the most powerful passages of the book are when Sprigge draws our attention to the subtle resonances of earlier musical mourning practices in the GDR. In Dessau's *German Miserere*, for instance, she teases out traces of the centuries-old practice of the Jewish city lament (pp. 60–1). Throughout, the book is full of discussions of the role of Protestant mourning customs in both rituals of the GDR and the compositional language of its mourning music. Ultimately, Sprigge's broad historical perspective helps reveal that the appeal of musical lamentation under German state socialism derived not so much from the fact that the state or its composers managed to create a radically new body of socialist works. Rather, the music of socialist mourning was powerful because of its ability to channel, update, and reimagine the practices through which Germans had long given meaning to loss.

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D'Oyly Carte: The Decline and Fall of an Opera Company. By Paul Seeley. Pp. xii + 209. Routledge Advances in Theatre & Performance Studies. (Routledge, London and New York, 2022. ISBN 978-0-367-61049-4, £120.00.)

In many ways the story is already familiar: the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, established in a partnership with W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan explicitly to perform their new works, and continuing to promote those works to a devoted audience until closing more than a century later. It is an oft-told tale: an inevitable subject in studies of the Gilbert & Sullivan tradition; the subject of a few books in its own right; and related in varying detail in the memoirs of former company members. But Paul Seeley offers an important perspective—not the devoted fan nor the actor on stage, but coming from within the administration in its last years (serving on the music staff and then as assistant to the company manager). His narrative is thus not a series of fond memories of particular performances and anecdotes of the goings-on among those on the stage, but is framed rather in balance sheets and board minutes, encompassing the whole of the twentieth century. This is a story that has long needed to be retold.

It may be significant that Seeley's account is appearing only now, as a new generation is ready to hear it. I am just old enough to remember the demise of the old D'Oyly Carte some forty years ago, but perhaps too young to regard that event with any regret. Maybe you had to be there. Seeley *was* there, of course; not just for the defiant and self-congratulatory last night at the Adelphi Theatre on 28 February 1982, but also for the harrowing months leading up to it. He devotes a whole chapter in this book to dispelling the myth

that the blame for the company's death was the perceived neglect by the Arts Council, shifting it instead to the incompetence, negligence, and obliviousness of D'Oyly Carte Opera Trust in the two decades prior to the closure. Seeley names names and devotes an appendix to a full listing of the trustees together with their dates of service. (Another appendix provides a detailed accounting of the 13 June 1966 Sotheby's sale of Sullivan manuscripts—tangential to Seeley's subject, but a valuable resource nonetheless.) As Seeley explains, the Arts Council looked favourably on a number of strategies that would have enabled the company to continue, but the D'Oyly Carte trustees were unable or unwilling to think creatively about a future that did not replicate the past. It is a testament to his prose that Seeley can inspire some hope (at least in this reader) in his discussion of the 1978 idea to morph the D'Oyly Carte into a new Manchester-based 'British Light Opera Company'—even when one knows this scheme was ultimately not pursued. That idea was clearly but one of many moments in the company's history that might so easily have turned out differently. Indeed, Seeley hesitates to fix one crucial moment that sealed the fate of the company, but instead demonstrates that the failures were systemic across many decades.

When reviewing Seeley's 2019 Routledge biography of Richard D'Oyly Carte in this journal (*Music & Letters*, 101 (2019), 790–1), I offered that 'the reader may sense from time to time that the focus is on the wrong Carte'. Richard's second wife Helen, who in 1901 succeeded him as the head of the company, deserves our attention: she presided at the crucial moment when the company changed from presenting newly written shows by Gilbert & Sullivan and a few others to subsisting entirely on a repertory of old favourites. For a time—for a considerable period, even—this new approach was sustainable, although Seeley demonstrates that the company increasingly depended on the income from lucrative American tours to stay afloat. Even though the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company was arguably the most successful commercial British theatrical company prior to the transformation of the West End in the Andrew Lloyd Webber era, Seeley's new book shows that by the first decade of the twentieth century the company was already set on the path that would lead to that Adelphi curtain falling in 1982. As a family business, the leadership (Helen from 1901 until 1913; her son Rupert from 1913 until 1948; and his daughter Bridget from 1948 until 1982; she died without issue in 1985) each took a very conservative approach to management—suspicious of outside influence. Staff were internally promoted into positions for which they were frequently unqualified; at the same time, understudies in the cast were regularly passed over for promotion (Seeley documents a number of promising members of the company who departed when it became clear that management was looking elsewhere). Seeley doesn't say as much, but his evidence supports a certain strategy to keep the performers under control: the longer they stayed, the more popular individuals became with the faithful audience, and the more autonomy they felt. The biggest names of the company inevitably became virtually unmanageable by the directors. It made sense to management to bring in new faces (who could be controlled) rather than promote familiar ones.

This is not to say that with new faces the management also wanted new blood. On the contrary, as Seeley observes, the productions were stagnant no matter how they might appear on stage; to quote him, '[t]here was no such thing as a new production, just new costumes and new scenery, with no attempt at imaginative rethinking' (p. 52). Although he makes this characterization in his discussion of the company under Rupert D'Oyly Carte's management, it is a consistent thread throughout the narrative. He refers to a 1969 editorial in *The Savoyard*—essentially a D'Oyly Carte fan club newsletter—which contended that (in Seeley's words) 'the Trustees were not curators of a museum but guardians of a tradition' (p. 107), or in other words, seemingly defenders of the faith. Although the company could trace its lineage to the very first productions, the performances in the twentieth century had evolved over time to be quite distinct from the originals—in music, text, and stage business. Until 1961, the last year in which Gilbert's works were protected under copyright, the company had a monopoly on professional productions and could survive in an environment free from competition. With the expiration of copyright, all sorts of creative stagings not aligned with the 'tradition' were produced. As the public gradually lost its nostalgia for the style of production the D'Oyly Carte had so carefully protected, there was really no reason for the company to persist. It was more valuable dead than alive: the value of the rosy hue around the memories of the D'Oyly Carte exceeded the financial life-support of the company. It is therefore no surprise that, as Seeley documents, sustaining the 'new company' which emerged in the late 1980s would be an insurmountable challenge; it looked and sounded different, performing texts closer to the creator's originals than anything the old company had presented in many years, and with production styles no longer in 'the tradition'. By then,

the company was just one more competitor in the market.

Even with a sad tale to tell, Seeley's book is not a depressing read. It is, rather, a riveting account of mismanagement and incompetence intermingled with innocent merriment. Not only does he bring his own insider perspective, he cites extensive correspondence with his former colleagues to support his accounts. That said, the book is occasionally marred by traces of grudges that apparently linger even forty years later. As an example, the appointment of Alexander Faris as the company's musical director in 1981 apparently still rankles. Seeley's attempt to set the record straight twice mentions the justification in Faris's 'self-published' memoir, as if that moniker fatally undermines its credibility, while many other cited memoirs (e.g. those of David Mackie, Roberta Morrell, John Reed, and Thomas Round) all deserve the same adjective. Seeley's interpretation of this situation may well be correct, but his telling of it is tainted by an unnecessary pettiness.

There are also moments when the bulk of the data Seeley includes might have been better served in tabulated form. One chapter is devoted to recordings and radio broadcasts and another to film and television. To some extent the *what* and *when* of these chapters is familiar enough; Paul Seeley goes one better by dealing with *who* was performing in the studio, pointing out many instances in which the recording producers contracted at least a few principals different from those who were on stage with the company at the time. Thus, the recorded legacy presents a false record of the company performances at the time yet is the primary way in which the old D'Oyly Carte Opera Company lives on.

All other books on the D'Oyly Carte company have been written primarily for the fans—written, that is, to elicit smiles, nods, and the occasional tear. This one is for the rest of us, but it can serve especially well as a cautionary tale for theatrical producers and arts administrators generally. It, too, will elicit smiles and nods, but more gasps than tears.

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The Female Voice in the Twentieth Century: Material, Symbolic and Aesthetic Dimensions. Ed. by Serena Facci and Michela Garda. Pp. 218. (Routledge, London and New York, 2021. ISBN 978-0-3674-1855-7, £120.00.)

The Female Voice in the Twentieth Century: Material, Cultural and Symbolic Aspects is an edited collection of eleven essays that explores a range of vocal practices including opera, experimental music, vocal performance art, jazz, and folk revival. The volume's title evokes the broad spectrum of female voices cultivated in the twentieth century, but its contents primarily focus on musical manifestations of the female voice—excluding, for example, literary and written voices. The collection features eleven contributors, including many important figures in the field of voice studies and musicology who presented at a 2018 conference in Venice from which the volume originates. As noted in the preface by the editors, Serena Facci and Michela Garda, the research contained in the volume fills a scholarly gap on the 'centrality of female voices in musical cultures' (p. xiv) and includes a wealth of specialized information about twentieth-century female voice(s), its/their impact on compositional practices, and its/their materialities and mediations. Despite its breadth, the volume is not exhaustive, nor does it purport to be, but it is also not an introduction to the twentieth-century female voice for the amateur reader. It lies somewhere in between, each chapter effectively situating the reader in its specific context.

The collection is divided into two parts: 'The "Voice" and the Voices: Definitions, Iconologies, Myths and Practices' and 'The Grain of the Voices, Experimentation and Technology'. The first part primarily explores ontologies, composition, and performance practices of the female voice, drawing on examples from classical music, particularly opera. The second focuses on the female voice and its relationship to the body, artistic and political transgression, and technology. The latter casts a wider net including examples from jazz, folk, and experimental musics. Positioning the classical voice as a beginning or foundation for twentieth-century female voice(s), is, as I discuss below, potentially problematic.

The collection begins with a short preface. The editors argue that the female voice in the twentieth century and its related themes, including the materiality of the voice, its symbolism, and the impact of technology, are timely matters. The preface's concision, however, seems like a missed opportunity. The editors might have used the preface to situate the reader in relation to broader scholarship about the female voice and explain the organization of the volume—particularly the decision to forefront classical voice(s) in the first part while more contemporary and embodied approaches were grouped in the second. This would also have been an ideal place to contextualize and define the female voice and to address