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Larry Wolff, *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016. xii + 490 pp. Acknowledgements, introduction, figures, notes, index. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-5036-0823-8.

Review by Alessandra Palidda, Oxford Brookes University.

The cultural importance of Turkish subjects and of *alla turca* and *turquerie* imagery and musical elements on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European operatic stages is well known. Although the bulk of the repertoire, as Wolff himself notes in his introduction (p. 1), has been either forgotten due to lack of attention in the nineteenth century, or submerged by a few examples from particularly celebrated composers (Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and Rossini's *L'italiana in Algeri* being only two notable cases), the presence of Turkish and Turkish-inspired settings, plots, figures, and instrumental colours can be described as a paramount and widespread component of the European discourse throughout the period stretching from the late seventeenth up to the early nineteenth century. Although this phenomenon has been analysed in its musical outputs as well as in its connections to both orientalist and transnational dynamics (see pp. 6-7), the approach chosen by Wolff can be considered rather innovative in its theoretical framework, methodological applications and breadth of research objects and findings.

As a historian who has long focused on East-West relationships and on historical and cultural constructions of identity (see *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* and *Inventing Eastern Europe*), Wolff combines history and music at an extraordinarily deep level and on a particularly large scale.[1] While tackling an interesting, vast, and forgotten repertoire, he blends a detailed study of the diplomatic and military relationships between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires with that of the cultural relations between Enlightenment Europe and the Eastern world. At the same time, Wolff adopts an approach combining wider issues of opera, politics, and society, especially in terms of cultural contamination and power and identity mechanisms, paying homage to works such as Feldman's *Opera and Sovereignty*, Johnson's *Listening in Paris*, and Walton's *Rossini in Restoration* (p. 7).[2] Through these combined investigations, the 'Turkish phenomenon' can be fully contextualized on the European timeline, map, and cultural environment, arguably in a much deeper and more definitive way than before, thus allowing the readers to understand the resulting network of cultural, musical, and identity connections. As the author himself affirms, this is, indeed, "not a musicological study but rather a study in cultural and intellectual history" (p. 5).

The book follows a mainly chronological pattern, providing the musicologist with some key moments and events described and contextualized in detail, the historian with a rich cultural and musical contextualization of the various periods, and both with often unexplored case studies. Although the breaking of the Siege of Vienna (1680s) and the Greek War of Independence (1820s) are chosen as necessary moments of chronological framing, the book offers an impressive array of moments interlinked in terms of both time and space: although the focus could be considered mainly on the former provinces of the Habsburg Empire in its different declinations, rich connections to other countries such as the Italian States, England, and France are also established. Issues of geography (and geographies) are also presented and continuously re-contextualised; Wolff convincingly presents the alternation between peace and warfare and the resulting border instability as a dynamic capable of shaping both theatrical networks and the general cultural discourse.

Wolff is thus able to explore 150 years of European history and to find, contextualize, and present characters, figures, and groups revolving around the meta-role of the “Singing Turk,” considered a catalyst for the expression of different historical, cultural, and musical processes. From the defeated sultan Bajazet to the conquerors Tamerlane and Mohamed, from the “enlightened” Pasha Selim to Suleiman and his love adventures, from the Albanian proud warriors to Verdi’s Lombard crusaders, musical and literary characters are seen as constantly embodying far wider dynamics, which both express and articulate a relevant portion of Europe’s cultural history. At the same time, Wolff is able to weave the forgotten repertoire and the already vastly celebrated works and composers (Rameau’s *Les Indes galantes*, Haydn’s *Lo speziale*, Mozart’s *Zaide* and *Die Entführung*, and Rossini’s *Il turco in Italia* and *Maometto secondo*, to cite just a few) in a detailed tapestry of extraordinary cultural richness. Works and characters are presented not only in their conception and series of appearances on the theatrical stage, but also in their origin and inspiration in literary and artistic works. The sources used include not only opera librettos and literary texts confidently presented and analysed in at least four different languages, but also paintings, periodicals, theatre publicity materials, correspondences, and chronicles, the rich iconographical apparatuses providing additional detail.

The reader is thus able not only to follow the development of relevant works and ideas, but also to explore intricate and forgotten paths of cultural circulation. Wolff’s journey also allows us to explore meta-themes such as the historical and cultural tension between the West and the East and the resulting Enlightened self-critique of European society, as well as the fear and the fascination for the “other” in terms of religion, social behavior, and appearance, and the transnational nature of many of the characters, topics, and emotions presented. For instance, the exploration of different, re-contextualized appearances of the same characters/models in different times and cultural frameworks (e.g., the captivity and death of Bajazet as they are presented in the 1680s, 1720s, and 1800s) provides an insight into the ability of theatrical character to embody and, at the same time, mirror contemporary issues and tensions, in a word to “stage the metamorphosis of a nation” (p. 354).

As previously mentioned, Wolff ends his journey in the 1820s. He does, however, offer a rich, conclusive section explaining the historical and cultural reasons behind the decline/rejection of ottoman imagery throughout nineteenth-century Europe, particularly within the rise of the Eastern Question. He highlights the numerous traces of this process within several nineteenth-century operatic and, more in general, musical works, showing that the Singing Turk and associated figures, values, and musical elements had, indeed, played a paramount role in the

construction of European identity, and that operatic stages had been primary venues for the articulation of that process. Wolff concludes: “The European operatic tradition did in fact create an enormous cultural monument for commemorating, and thus remembering, the Ottoman empire by setting to music the scenarios of European-Ottoman relations” (p. 405). Never before has a study been able to illustrate this intricate process with such completeness and richness.

NOTES

[1] Larry Wolff, *The Idea of Galicia: History and Fantasy in Habsburg Political Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[2] Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

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