Imperial Opera:
The nexus between opera and imperialism in Victorian Calcutta and Melbourne, 1833–1901.

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Abstract

The nineteenth century was a period during which European powers raced to conquer the world—not only geographically, but (more significantly) ideologically and culturally. The British were arguably the most determined and most successful colonisers of the era, and Calcutta, the ‘City of Palaces’, and Melbourne, the ‘Marvellous’ metropolis of the south, became the jewels in the crown of British imperialism. Meanwhile, due to social, political and economic factors (consider the rise of the middle class, political upheaval in Europe and the Industrial Revolution), the nineteenth century saw opera ascend to the zenith of its accessibility, influence and prestige. The simultaneity of the rise of imperialism and the Golden Age of opera is a connection that has long been ignored by musicology, yet it is a relationship which illuminates the intersectional relationship between of music, culture, politics and society in the nineteenth century.

Whilst the past decade has seen increasing scholarly interest in the nexus between opera and colonisation, these studies have consistently approached the opera-colonial relationship solely through analyses of the representational, that is how notions of the ‘Orient’ or ‘Other’ were created or reinforced by the operatic canon. By contrast, this thesis looks at the interactions between the art-form, the coloniser and the ‘other’ in occupied lands, using Calcutta and Melbourne as case studies. This dissertation discusses the role of opera in colonised territories and reveals the ways in which opera both reflected and aided the imperial attitudes of those cities’ inhabitants. By doing so it will advocate that discussion of opera in extra-European settings (in terms of both sociology and performance practice) not only sheds light on the different roles and guises operatic culture assumed as it spread across the globe, but also adds to our understanding of the art-form itself in the nineteenth century.

The thesis is in four parts; the first consists of an introduction and a cultural history of British imperialism, with particular reference to the two case studies examined in the thesis, Calcutta and Melbourne. In the second and third sections, the discussion turns to the development of operatic culture in each of these cities, with an emphasis on the way that opera adapted and contributed to the imperial project at local, regional and global levels. The final part of the thesis compares the roles that opera played in each centre in order to draw conclusions about the relationship between the art form and socio-economic and imperial models. This section particularly focuses on opera as a tool of colonisation and/or marginalisation and its employment within colonial British societies as a means of expressing and perpetuating idealised versions of Britishness and colonialism.
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Editorial notes

Spellings of Geographical Names
Throughout this thesis, geographical place names will be rendered in their nineteenth century form. Thus, the nineteenth-century name ‘Calcutta’ is used over the twenty-first century ‘Kolkata’; Bombay, Madras, and Simla are preferred to Mumbai, Chennai and Shimla. Australian places, too, are referred to by their nineteenth century names: hence, the State of Victoria will be known as Port Phillip District, Australia Felix, or Colony of Victoria. Similarly, Tasmania will be referred to as Van Diemen’s Land until 1856, when the name Tasmania was formally adopted. Regional names are similarly affected: the subcontinent will be referred to as British India rather than India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, whilst ‘Bengal’ refers to the modern territories of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

The nineteenth century colonial names denote not only geography but also recall a colonial and hegemonic attitude to those spaces. By using Calcutta, rather than Kolkata, the discussion is centred in a specific colonial time and space. The choice to use the historical rather than modern names is also made to provide uniformity between the dissertation and its primary sources.

Some places like the Indian provinces and states of Orissa and Bihar, or the city of Melbourne, have not had name changes. In these cases, the reader should bear in mind that the names are used with reference to the region’s nineteenth-century boundaries.

The demonym for people from Melbourne, Melburnian, has been spelled according to the latest edition of the Macquarie Dictionary.

Names of Operas and Singers
This thesis makes innumerable references to operatic works. Works were often performed in translation or in markedly altered forms. This can create confusion: should a work be referred to by its original name in the original language or, instead, render the work’s title in the language of its presentation? The matter is further complicated by the inconsistency of language choice within a season, or even within a performance, as well as the lack of uniformity in the ways contemporary commentators referred to the work. Is an Italian performance of Les Huguenots, for example, to be called by its French name, its Italian name ‘Gli Ugonotti’ in deference to the language and nationality of the artists, or its English title ‘The Huguenots’ which is the language of the majority of the audience? What happens if some sang in Italian and others in French? What happens if throughout a single season the version and language changed?

In all cases, this thesis will refer to operas by their original names, regardless of language(s) or performance location. Where alterations have so transformed an opera as to be almost unrecognisable from the original, the name of the work as advertised is preferred, and note is made of the differences between the work as performance and the work as written.
Where more than one version of a singer’s personal name is offered, note is made of the variations, but the discussion will use the spelling most used by the primary sources. Similarly, those artists who employed a *nom de théâtre* will be referred to by their artistic name.

**Currency Conversion**

In order to contextualise the costs of tickets, theatres and wages, this thesis provides currency conversions for all nineteenth-century figures to 2011 values.

It makes use of the algorithms provided by Measuring Worth (www.measuringworth.com), an online resource for scholars founded by Professors Lawrence H. Officer and Samuel H. Williamson. Measuring Worth calculates relative values of British Pounds (1270-present), American Dollars (1774-present), Chinese Yuan (1952-present) and Japanese Yen (1879-present) according to CPI, GDP deflator, Average Wage, Nominal GDP (per capita), Real GDP (per capita) or GDP. Each of the currency conversions in this thesis was made using the most appropriate the calculator for the specific subject of the conversion according to the guidelines set out by Officer and Williamson.

Indian Rupees had first to be converted to British pounds, before being converted to modern values on Measuring Worth. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Rupee was pegged to the world silver price; therefore, I have converted determined the value of the rupee in silver, then converted this value in nineteenth-century British pounds to 2011 values.
Preface

This thesis has its origins in the author's personal background as an opera student in Perth, a city which has produced many good, and even great, opera singers, pianists and instrumentalists, despite being the most isolated capital city in the world. From there, it was a small step to thinking about how well represented Australia was in international opera, and how it had been so for well over a hundred years. Australia's operatic honour roll is not limited to those who are still celebrated like Nellie Melba (who occupies the plum spot on Australia's one hundred dollar note), the late Joan Sutherland, Joan Hammond, Yvonne Kenny, Cheryl Barker, and Lisa Gasteen; along the way there have been many others who held court in the world's top opera houses. Some wore their Australian heritage on their sleeve, changing their names to reflect their origins: Elsa Stralia, June Bronhill, Violet Mount (under the alias 'L'Incognita', inspired by one of Australia's many informal names, 'Terra Incognita'), and Frances Austral come to mind. Others may not have adopted patriotic noms de théâtre, but were, nevertheless, great ambassadors for Australia's remarkable operatic culture. Consider Essie Ackland, Frances Alda, Marie Angel, John Brownlee, Joan Carden, Lionello Cecil, Geoffrey Chard, Peter Coleman-Wright, Marie Collier, Ada Crossley, Peter Dawson, Danielle De Niese, Margreta Elkins, Lauris Elms, Sylvia Fisher, Glenys Fowles, Elizabeth Fretwell, Margherita Grandi, Una Hale, William Herbert, Gertrude Johnson, Glenn Kesby, Albert Lance, Marjorie Lawrence, Malcolm McEachern, Yvonne Minton, Elysie Morison-Kubelik, Browning Mummery, Eva Mylott, Margaret Nisbett, John Lempriere Pringle, Rosina Raisbeck, Deborah Riedel, Frances Saville, John Shaw, Amy Sherwin. No doubt this list forgets many singers of high repute, yet despite being nowhere near exhaustive, the list is long and impressive. Given the promise of Australia's young singers, this honour roll will only balloon in time.

The consistent presence of Australian voices on the world's great stages, especially from Australia's colonial or early post-colonial days, provoked my curiosity. Why did generations of young Australians, running wild in the outback and suburbs of 'uncultured' and isolated Australia, think to turn their attention to opera, and why were they so successful when they did?

The answer had to lie within the country's history. I began to research Australia's colonial operatic culture and was astonished even by the little I found. I wanted to know more, and one particular figure intrigued me: Augusto Cagli, who had brought a company to Melbourne in 1871. Thus, I embarked upon an honours dissertation that focused on Cagli's Italian Opera Company, which between 1871 and 1874 had functioned as a quasi-national opera company in Australia. At the completion of this project I was surprised by Cagli's career, astounded by his legacy and perplexed by his reputation. Cagli, who had achieved and contributed so much to Australia's operatic development, who had enjoyed enormous

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1 Although the city has less than 10% of Australia's population, it is responsible for 50% of the winners of the Australian Singing Competition, outshining more well-known and culturally authoritative cities such as Sydney and Melbourne. The city is also responsible for eleven of Opera Australia's forty-five Australian-trained principal singers.

2 Bronhill is a contraction of Broken Hill, a famous mining town in South Australia and June Bronhill's place of birth.
fame in his day, and whose name had been a byword for opera itself, had been largely forgotten by history. His role in Australian opera history had been reduced to a footnote in most accounts, and a single chapter in the one book that attempted to chronicle colonial opera. Additionally, his role in bringing opera to India, Singapore, South Africa, Java, China and Japan was unknown.

Cagli’s fate has not been unique. Indeed, he is but one of innumerable musicians whose work in the Asia-Pacific region during the nineteenth century has been the subject of little to no investigation. Given the enormous amount of attention that imperial and settler societies are attracting as colonial and post-colonial studies gain traction in the academic world, this silence is all the more puzzling. As one of the West’s most potent artistic and cultural artefacts, surely a study of opera had something of importance to add to our understanding of cultural colonialism and the Westernisation of the East during the nineteenth century? Hence, I set about exploring the nexus between the countless operatic ventures in India and Australasia and Britain’s imperial enterprise in the region. This doctoral dissertation is the result of this research.
PART ONE
Chapter 1: Introduction

Aims
This thesis explores the nexus between opera, colonial societies, and the British Empire between 1833 and 1901. It argues that opera both shapes and is shaped by the particular cultural context of each colonial city, taking on different roles according to the social, geopolitical and economic circumstances of the diverse colonial locations in which it appeared.

To the twenty-first century mind, even the mind of a musicologist, an attempt to understand British colonialism and imperialism in Australasia and India through an operatic lens may seem unorthodox. The logic of doing so, however, becomes apparent when one considers opera's importance in Western culture during the nineteenth century and the centrality of high-art musical genres to ideas of identity, 'civilisation', and prestige, all of which were integral parts of imperialism.

This thesis does not set out to place opera at the centre of the grand narratives of the history of the British Empire. Instead, it seeks to add one more thread to the tapestry that is the burgeoning postcolonial understanding of Western imperialism in the Eastern hemisphere. Like any tapestry, no one thread is more important than the next; each adds depth, colour and breadth to an overall picture.

The Structure of the Thesis
This thesis comprises four parts, each of which has several chapters. Part One consists of this Introduction and Chapter 2. The Introduction describes and rationalises the parameters of this study, explains the intellectual and methodological approaches adopted in this thesis, and defines key terminology. Chapter 2 introduces and evaluates ideas of empire and colonialism, demonstrating how Britain's evolving attitude towards the East, empire, colonialism, civilisation and society influenced the development of the cities at the centre of this work, Calcutta and Melbourne. This chapter also examines the interconnectedness of opera, empire and urban culture, a nexus which lies at the heart of this research. Parts Two and Three (comprising of Chapters 3 through 8 and Chapters 9 through 13 respectively) examine the development (and collapse) of operatic culture in each of the two cities which are the particular focus of this thesis; Part Two concentrates on Calcutta whilst Part Three turns its attention to Melbourne. Although these sections’ descriptions of operatic artists and events are a necessary part of recreating and examining the operatic culture of these cities, these chapters are not designed to be exhaustive account of operatic artists or performances. Instead, the emphasis is always on the social, political and economic context of events. The fourth and final part of this thesis is conceived of a multi-sectional conclusion, synthesising and evaluating the research presented in the preceding chapters. Chapter Fourteen brings Calcutta and Melbourne
together, and places the cities’ operatic cultures in a regional and global context by following the career of Augusto Cagli, the most important and prolific impresario of the Asia-Pacific region during the nineteenth century. Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen examine two key issues of the dissertation: the exploitation of opera as a tool of colonisation, and the role of opera in the creation of British Identity. Chapter Seventeen discusses the conclusions of this study, comments on significant issues raised by the research and suggests possible avenues of further study.

Rationale for place

The decision to focus on the British Empire was a natural choice. Whilst other European powers such as France, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain had colonial interests in the New World, Africa and Asia, it was undoubtedly the British who were the dominant imperial force of the nineteenth century. The British Empire was also interesting for the diversity of its territories and the varying modes of its colonial activity. There were examples of high-colonial societies such as India and the West Indies; there were settler colonies, such as Toronto, Adelaide and Melbourne; there were penal colonies such as Sydney and Hobart; there were trade-based colonies, such as Hong-Kong; and there were colonies such as Malta and Mauritius, where the British were occupying a land and culture that already had deeply European roots. In short, the British Empire offered the largest scope and scale of discovery for a discussion about opera in colonial society.

The size and diversity of the British Empire, however, also presented problems: there were simply too many cities and regional centres. An exhaustive study would have left no capacity for the evaluation and analysis with which this thesis is most concerned. The decision to concentrate on two cases studies was the result of the desire to be comprehensive whilst ensuring that the research was both manageable and meaningful. The inclination towards cities rather than more remote areas grew from the greater regularity and continuity of opera in metropolitan areas. Such continuity would be helpful in identifying the art form’s development.

As to the choice of which particular cities to focus on, many criteria were considered. Some cities were eliminated for geopolitical and cultural reasons. The Canadian and West Indian colonies, for example, were ruled out because their proximity to, and relationship with, the United States and Spanish America meant that their operatic cultures were best understood in a regional, rather than imperial, context. Likewise, a discussion of Malta was better placed within a discussion of Western European or Mediterranean opera cultures. These early eliminations left the colonies of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. The colonies were more promising, not only because their remoteness and history tied them together, but also because it was these colonies whose opera history remained most obscure.

The eventual choice of Calcutta and Melbourne was supported by several aspirations: to demonstrate the differences in the way opera was used between two modes of imperialism (in this case high-colonialism and settler-colonialism); to do a fairly extended longitudinal study (which necessarily eliminated centres like Cape Town, Singapore and Auckland, where opera was introduced only towards the end of the nineteenth century); to have a large amount and diverse range of data (which ruled out centres like Hong-Kong); and to
have cities which complemented and contrasted with each other. Calcutta and Melbourne formed an ideal pair. The cities shared a ‘home’ culture, a geographical region and many of the same artists, yet formed an interesting dichotomy: one was old, before the other was even established; one declined in prestige and fortune as the other one grew in geopolitical importance; each city had a notably different demography. In short, an examination of Calcutta and Melbourne would be at once representative of the region as a whole, whilst still illuminating the ways in which opera’s role differed depending on its cultural context.

**Rationale for timeframe**

This thesis is concerned with the operatic culture in Calcutta and Melbourne between 1833 and 1901. This time period was chosen for several reasons.

Firstly, these dates coincide almost exactly reign of Queen Victoria, the head of the British Empire. Given that this study is concerned with nexus between opera and its imperial context, there is an obvious advantage in framing the project in an era that was, itself, characterised by an unusually forceful imperialist attitude. The reign of Victoria was the period during which British imperialism gained momentum and its territorial claims exploded. During this era, too, imperialism became part of Britain’s identity, transcending economic and political arguments to occupy a place in every facet of British culture. Hence, the years 1837–1901, or the Victorian Era, seemed the most appropriate timespan in which to frame a study of opera and its role in the British Empire.

The beginning of the project’s timeframe was pushed back by four years for three key reasons. Firstly, the era of popular imperialism really began with the India Reform Act of 1832 (which came into effect in 1833). This act transformed Britain’s largest imperial interest, India, from a mere trading post to a colony in the full sense of the word. The Act allowed British citizens, who were previously restricted from living in India, to now come to India as though it were a part of England. This radically transformed the colony’s demography, economy and polity, as well as Britain’s attitude to British India and its capital, Calcutta.

Significantly, 1833 was also the year in which the first opera company arrived in Calcutta. To have omitted the company, and the company which followed it, on the basis of four years would have grossly altered the discussion of opera in India, and would have led to a poorer piece of research.

The third reason for the revision was the wish to include Melbourne’s development as a city from its first days as an illegal settlement in 1835. As will be discussed in the Melbourne chapters, an understanding of Melbourne’s beginnings, and the mythology created around them, is invaluable to any discussion of Melbourne as a colonial city, and how its interaction with opera was unique within the Empire.

The year 1833, therefore, was a watershed, marking the beginning of high-imperialism, and its relationship with opera. The endpoint of 1901 made sense, as it was not only the year in which the Empire’s monarch died, but was also the year in which Australia’s colonies federated to become a single nation. This was an event with changed much about
Melbourne’s economic and political status, and was a natural endpoint for any discussion about its colonial culture. The turn of the century was also a time when British India was undergoing significant reform, not least of which was the decision to shift the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi.

Sources

This research uses a broad range of primary source material, amongst which are: newspapers and magazines, private journals, contemporary newsletters and club journals, letters, financial accounts, legal and government documents, family histories and personal memorabilia, maps, photographs and illustrations, musical scores and orchestral parts, programmes and playbills, performance practice manuals and treatises, sound recordings, and contemporary fictional works (such as novels and short stories).

Newspapers have been the most prolific source, providing not only detail, but also continuity. Over 31,000 newspaper articles contributed to the data upon which this thesis is based. Newspaper articles contributed information not only referring to opera and music, but also to politics, economic, society, demography, technology and current affairs. The newspapers were, therefore, invaluable for placing opera and music within a broader political and cultural context.

Issues regarding source materials

Like any source, the use of newspapers presents limitations and challenges about which a researcher ought to be mindful. Newspapers are by nature a public institution, charged with broadcasting the public affairs of a community to its private members. Hence, newspapers emphasise the extraordinary, the unusual, and the public, and rarely discuss the private and unexceptional events of which the day-to-day lives of most people consist. This is not necessarily a disadvantage when it comes to an examination of opera. The fact that opera was usually considered important enough to have twenty or more column inches devoted to its examination each day reveals its position in the public imagination and collective identity. Yet, it is also prudent to remember that operatic culture did not begin and end with the contents of the cities’ quotidians. Hints at the ordinary can be found by reading in between the lines of articles, or in the advertisements, where sheet music, music tuition, musical instruments and the many traces of domestic and low-key music making which underpinned the more formal and grandiose expressions of operatic culture can be found.

Another issue related to the newspapers is that of journalistic and editorial bias. Some historians and cultural studies scholars have recently raised concerns over what they perceive as an over-reliance upon newspapers for this very reason. Yet, the bias of a newspaper only becomes a problem if it is treated as an objective source. Acknowledging and embracing the political, commercial and social alliances of those who wrote the

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reviews, articles, editorials, and letters to the editor enriches, rather than impoverishes, the research.4

It is also important to remember that no primary source material is objective. Each manuscript and each piece of evidence was a creation authored by a person or group that had its own biases and prejudices. This does not render the content of the material worthless; rather, an understanding of the author’s context and intention adds value to the source.

**Approach**

Just as the nineteenth century newspaper editor exercised bias when he chose one letter over another, or emphasised one singer or company or genre over another, I acknowledge that I too, as the researcher and author of this work, bring biases and subjectivities to the dissertation. I do so through the innumerable decisions made from conception to completion as I chose, emphasised or excluded data. As Rob Wegman suggested in ‘Historical Musicology: Is It Still Possible?’, history as a pursuit is rewarding for this very reason. ‘It is the creative act of imposing order on chaos.’5 As described at the opening, this work has been shaped by my experience and interests. Yet, in acknowledging my unavoidable subjectivity, I also profess that this work was conducted with a view to balancing my conscious and unconscious prejudices with a certain degree of dispassion and open-mindedness.

The research began from open questions, lacking preconceived notions of the answers that would be found. I also consulted a wide range of sources from various disciplines in order to lend the project both perspective and context. In evaluating these sources, I blended a traditional musicological/historical approach (concerned with facts, event sequencing, and narrative) with a cultural studies/sociological perspective which sought to see beyond the ‘great men’, linear understanding of history towards a broader recognition of the diversity that exists within cultures and peoples. It is hoped that by taking this self-reflexive and interdisciplinary approach my research will avoid the excesses of both the traditional and post-structuralist concepts of what culture and history are; leaving behind the pretence of objectivity and the notion that history and society are shaped by a few prominent figures, whilst also eschewing the idea promulgated by some that history is an impossible and unrepresentative pursuit.6

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6 One of the best discussions of the directions and divergences in the philosophy of modern history is Daniel Little, *New Contributions to the Philosophy of History* (Volume 6 of Methodos Series; New York: Springer, 2010). In it, Little explores the various theoretical trends in meta-history, historiography and the philosophy of history, and ultimately favours an approach which balances narrative and language (a Barthesian attitude), minority histories and consensus history.
The interdisciplinary nature of this thesis extends beyond approach into content. It grows out of the body of research of scholars such as Warren Dwight Allen, Cyril Ehrlich, John Rosselli, Kurt Blaukopf, William Weber, Roberta Marvin, Rachel Cowgill and Julian Rushton, Karen Ahlquist, Ian Woodfield and Jennifer Hall-Witt, each of whom has placed music within a wider historical framework. Hall-Witt’s work, *Fashionable Acts*, was a particularly inspirational work for the way it went beyond situating opera in a sociological context and instead used opera as the lens through which to evaluate London’s social development.

**Terminology**

This section clarifies how key terms and concepts are employed in this thesis. The definitions elucidated below are as much the product of this research as of already existing usage and theory; therefore, not all of the following definitions reference the works of fellow scholars.

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Culture vs Society

In this thesis, the terms culture and society, whilst interconnected, are not used interchangeably. Borrowing from the assemblage theory of Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze and Manuel De Landa, this thesis understands society as an assemblage of the residents of a specific place and time. In his 2006 work, *A New Philosophy of Society*, De Landa asserted ‘social entities are not mind-independent’ and acknowledged that society is more than just the sum of its constituent parts (a departure from what he calls the ‘micro-reductionist’ approach that has limited the social sciences since Hegel). These ideas have influenced this dissertation’s conceptualisation of society as a constellation of heterogenous components that together interact and affect each other with a complexity that in itself adds to the product. This has had various methodological and philosophical implications for the thesis; suffice it to say that this dissertation has been written with a view to balancing the pluralistic facets of society with the observable and palpable phenomenon of the social collective. Also inherent to this ontological definition of society is a recognition that each entity is both in discourse with, and a product of, its history.

Whereas society is the assemblage of individual and micro-communal entities, culture is the product of that assemblage and its practices, traditions, attitudes, beliefs and values. This thesis also bases its conceptualisation of culture in a tradition of feminist critique, queer theory and race studies in its assertion that culture is performative; that is, it is not a static or discrete entity but is, instead, manifested in the attitudes and values of the society which constantly creates, reinforces, or even subverts the culture.

Colonialism vs Imperialism

The approach to imperialism employed throughout this dissertation is based on post-colonial theory. I take as my starting point Edwards Said’s definition of Orientalism as a discourse by which we may ‘understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.’ This research accepts Orientalism as an attitude and approach that underpins imperialism.

‘Imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’ are terms that are often misused or thought to be interchangeable. This thesis follows post-colonial and post-structural practice of assigning each term a discreet, albeit, related meaning. ‘Imperialism’ will be used to refer to the attitude and ideology of empire; that is, imperialism is the cultural basis for the desire to extend a nation’s sphere of influence and power. The imperialist’s attitude transcends all aspects of his/her culture—economics, politics, philosophy, society, arts, religion,

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18 I thank Richard Taruskin and Roger Parker for the discussions they had with me on the issue of culture and society.
education, medicine—and, usually, tries to pass on these cultural values to the ‘Other’ who is being colonised. ‘Colonialism’ is the product of imperialism. It is the practice of establishing a significant physical presence, political rule and cultural dominance in a place where one is a non-indigenous person.

**High-Colonialism vs. Settler Colonialism**

‘High-colonialism’ refers to the style of colonialism practiced by the British in Asia and Africa. In these territories the British had political and cultural hegemony despite never forming an ethnic or cultural majority. The authority of the British, therefore, depended upon their ability to convince the colonised people that British characteristics were desirable, ‘civilised’ and superior, whilst ‘natives’ were objectionable, ‘savage’, and inferior. The creation of this cultural and racial dichotomy placed the British atop the socio-political hierarchy. Many tools were employed by the British to achieve this end, not just the technological, militaristic and economic advantages they secured upon colonisation, but also the arts, education, religion and law.

By contrast, many of Britain’s colonies were settler societies or penal colonies. In these instances, the British either settled uninhabited places (such as the Falkland Islands), or overwhelmed a small, low-density indigenous population with mass migration (consider Canada, Australia, New Zealand). In the case of Australia, the British government had declared the continent to be *terra nullius* (uninhabited country)—an outrageous statement given the fact that between 750,000–1,000,000 Indigenous people lived across the continent and had done so for upwards of 40,000 years. In Australia, Aboriginal populations either were massacred (see, for example, the genocide of the Tasmanian Aborigines), fell victim to relocation, starvation, disease and British law, or were utterly ignored. This rapid decline in the indigenous population, combined with the ideology of *terra nullius* combined to create a society where the ethnically British were in the majority.

Their collective identity and attitude to colonialism was very different to that of high-colonialists. They had no one to rule over, and considered their biggest threats to be other migrant groups, such as the Chinese, rather than Aboriginal people. These settler-colonists often came from poor backgrounds, drawn by the promise of a new, more prosperous life; their primary aim was permanent settlement not colonial administration. Unlike high-colonists, who retained a fiercely conservative British identity, settlers often considered themselves simultaneously British and ‘Australian’.

**Victorianism and the Victorian Era**

This thesis focuses on a period of time 1833–1901, which coincides with the reign of Victoria. For many years, such a timeframe would have been immediately accepted as the ‘Victorian Era’, but this is no longer the case. Many Victorian scholars debate the era’s parameters. Some historians place the beginning of the Victorian age in the 1820s; others conceive of a long Victorian era that coincides with the long nineteenth century (1770s–1914) and some advocate for an understanding of the Victorian era as a long eighteenth

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Some academics challenge the wisdom and value of even using the term; Richard Price, for example, has objected to the widely accepted idea that political, social and industrial modernity was born in the Victorian Era.

Each of these definitions of the ‘Victorian Era’ is valid and helpful. The debate over the era’s boundaries reflects the fact that every characteristic which has come to define the Victorians—whether it be imperialism, political activism balanced by prudence and moderation, mercantilism, militarism, urbanisation, morality, an interest and dependence upon science and technology, and a prolific patronage of the arts—had its origin in earlier ages. It is important not to construct an idea of the age as a departure from Britain’s past. Furthermore, the number of works recently published which prove assumptions about Victorian life to be half-truths if not entirely wrong remind us that no society is homogenous; those traits that have become part of the folkloric picture of the Victorians are only generalisations of norms and ideals. Many Victorians rejected or refuted these attitudes; others engaged in the hypocritical behaviours that have undermined the ideologies of societies at every stage of human civilisation.

This thesis acknowledges, and largely agrees with, the trend in contemporary scholarship towards a less absolutist vision of Victorian society and culture. Yet, in recognising these issues, there is still merit to using the term ‘Victorian’ or ‘Victorian Era’ as a shorthand for the society, which for all its heterogeneity and hypocrisy, was dominated by a set of normative traits, attitudes and values. Moreover, Britons and colonials living during the mid-to-late part of Victoria’s reign conceived of themselves as being part of a ‘Victorian Era’.

**Opera**

The term ‘opera’ can mean many different things; in its narrowest definition it refers only to a few operatic genres that presented soliloquy, dialogue and any other speech entirely through music and song. Such a definition would include opera seria, opera semiseria, opera buffa, grand-opéra and Wagner’s Gesamtkunstwerke but would exclude operetta, opéra-bouffe, and burletta. Yet, such a restricted idea of opera does not reflect the way in which the art form was conceived by nineteenth century Anglophone society.

Victorians were more likely to divide opera along line of its geographic origin and performance language than the extent to which a work was sung throughout. The term ‘English opera’, for instance, referred to operas presented by English-language singers, and could include not only operas by British and Irish composers such as Balfe, but also works which properly belong to the category of burletta or vaudeville, such as Dibdin’s *The

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Waterman, Hatten’s *Simon the Cellarer*, and Brougham’s *Po-ca-hon-tas*. Also included in the category were any English arrangements of works by Continental ‘serious opera’ composers such as Donizetti, Bellini, Auber, or Verdi, as well as the comic operas, operettas and opéras-bouffes of Sullivan, Cellier, Strauss, Hervé, Offenbach, Lecocq, and Planquette.

The terms Italian, French, and German opera denoted the language in which the opera was sung (not necessarily the original language of the libretto) and, therefore, it usually also reflected the nationality of the performers. This can lead to confusion for a modern reader, for Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* when performed by a troupe of Italians in an Italian translation as *Gli Ugonotti* was referred to as Italian opera. Similarly, a performance of Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, would be regarded as French if performed as *Le Barbier de Seville* by a Francophone company. Wagner appears to have been an exception to this rule; even when his Gesamtkunstwerke were performed in Italian (as they were in 1880s Melbourne), the productions were still conceptualised by the public as German opera. This has more to do with Wagner’s fame as a German Nationalist and the cult and force of his personality than any particular understanding of the works as being distinctly German.

Guided by the view of the Victorians, this thesis uses the term ‘opera’ to denote any music-theatre genre that was presented as ‘high-art’ culture by musicians that were regarded by their peers and audience as opera companies/singers. The thesis will also refer to work/season as being ‘French’ or ‘Italian’ according to the nineteenth-century applications of those terms rather than their modern definitions.

**Operatic culture**

It is also important to recognise that neither opera’s performance, nor its role in Victorian society, was limited to the opera house. Opera also existed as a cultural artefact, and social and political institution. Opera was present in the programmes of concert hall recitals, in the repertoire of city, military and provincial brass bands, in the performances given in the home, in the waltzes played at balls, in the songs played by street musicians, in the musical education of the public. It was emulated by amateurs and parodied by comedians. Beyond the musical realm, opera was also present in the literature of the day, in the public’s imagination as an art, a cultural artefact and political symbol. Opera’s characters, both on-and offstage, were part of popular culture and its narratives were intertwined with politics, history, art and fiction. This thesis refers to these various abundant facets of opera as ‘operatic culture’.

**High-art and low-art music**

The existence of a stratified notion of art, that of ‘low-art’ and ‘high-art’, was common to all Western nineteenth-century societies. Indeed, as Paul Charosh explored in his discussion of mid-century America, ideas of ‘popular’ (low) and ‘classical’ (high) art were gaining particular currency during the middle third of the 1800s.26 The emerging dichotomy grew out of two contrasting attitudes towards the performing arts that prevailed during this

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time. Some, predominantly the ever-growing middle-class, believed that the ‘proper’ function of the arts was to uplift, inspire, and provide moral and intellectual stimulation. They supported the ‘legitimate’/high-art forms of theatre, such as morality plays, drama, Shakespeare, oratorio, ‘classical’ concerts and some opera, all of which were apparently able to fulfil these ideals. For the more conservative members of Victorian society, opera was a contentious member ‘legitimate’ category of theatre; however, opera clearly had more in common with this group than with popular genres.

Others (mostly people of lower education, though not necessarily poorer) regarded art’s true purpose as being entertainment and diversion. Low-art culture was cheaper, more accessible intellectually or linguistically, and usually employed a wider variety of elements, many of which were designed to entertain.

This is not to imply that genres which are included in the ‘low’/popular theatre category, such as vaudeville, pantomime, variety, burlesque, minstrelsy and the circus arts, were bereft of social purpose. Indeed, such works often commented on social and political issues of the day and could be important instruments of social change. Moreover, their contemporary relevance does not signify that these works were being disposable ephemera; like ‘high-art’ culture, popular culture had both a canon and a tradition.

Opera was considered, alongside the string quartet and the symphony, to be at the apex of the West’s hierarchy of musical forms. It was, therefore, a most valuable weapon both for the high-imperialist asserting his cultural and ethnic superiority, and the settler-colonist trying to establish his social position and his colony’s cultural authority. It is important to note that notwithstanding the delineation between the two traditions, high-art and low-art often shared audiences, theatres, performances and even artists and repertoire.

**Amateur and Professional**

In this thesis, the term amateur is used to describe a person whose music-making was not for financial gain, and who was either employed in a different profession, such as the law, or was of no profession, i.e. a gentleman. Professional is, therefore, used to denote a person who made music for a living. This career, however, should not be understood as limited to public performance; like their modern counterparts, nineteenth century musicians often engaged in a range of activities to cobble together a sufficient wage. These activities included private performances (in salons, for parties, etc), teaching, composition, arranging, as well as some non-musical work, such as dressmaking, retail, hospitality, or service. Their foremost public identity, however was as a musician.

Despite these differences, it should not be assumed that amateur and professional musicians operated in mutually exclusive circles. Likewise, it would be inaccurate to suppose that all amateurs were inferior in skill, passion or talent to their professional colleagues. Much early colonial operatic culture was the product of professional/amateur collaboration. Furthermore, the activities of amateurs in the domestic sphere, coupled with their desire for music education and participation in choral and philharmonic societies were integral to the continuity and richness of operatic culture across the Empire during the Victorian era.
**Public and private music**

These terms denote the spheres in which operatic culture was present. Public music includes performances (whether for profit, charity, ceremony, or free civil entertainment) which occurred in public spaces such as theatres, town halls, churches, schools, public gardens, festivals, and to which attendance was open to the public. By contrast, private music includes performances in domestic spaces as well as any performance in a public space when attendance was limited by invitation only; hence, although performed in a town hall, any music played during a Masonic meeting or a regimental ball, or a banquet at Government House would be classified as private.

Although public music was dominated by professional musicians, and private music was largely the purview of amateurs, there was some overlap between the two spheres.

**A Social and Historical Geography**

**British Empire**

The term ‘British Empire’ was first coined by Queen Elizabeth I’s advisor and friend John Dee, who compared early-Modern Britain’s colonial ambitions to the ‘heroes and deeds of English folklore’. The term’s origin illustrates the fact that the British Empire was not merely a geopolitical description, but also an ideology and identity, which, over the centuries, would become Britain’s *raison d’être*.

In this thesis, ‘the Empire’ or ‘British Empire’ will denote both the expanding territorial claim of Britain (see Figures 1.1–1.4) and the evolving sense of Britain’s global cultural, social, political, economic, and militaristic dominance. This development will be discussed further in Chapter Two. As can be seen in the maps below, the nineteenth century was the period when the British Empire underwent its fastest and most radical expansion, and the two colonial investigated most closely in this work, Calcutta and Melbourne, were at the heart of some of the Empire's largest and most impressive colonies.

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Figure 1.1: The British Empire in 1763 (British Territories marked in black). Courtesy South Williamstown Community Association.

Figure 1.2: The British Empire in 1815 (British Territories marked in red). Courtesy of Ken Welsh.
British India

Britain’s deepening imperialism was reflected in the political geography of British India. As the maps below reveal, over the nineteenth century British India grew from a handful of
unconnected and discretely administered ports and trading cities to an expansive colony covering the entirety of the subcontinent and also some of the adjoining territories of South-Central Asia (see Figures 1.5–1.7).

Figure 1.5: Map of British India, 1806. British India denoted by pink, Maratha possessions denoted by green, Nizam territory tinted orange and the Raja of Mysore's lands are outlined in blue. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection.
Figure 1.6: British India (also referred to as Hindoostan) in 1846. The pink territory was under British colonial administration, the brown areas were British protectorates nominally managed by Indian sovereigns, and the yellow regions were independent states. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection.
Calcutta and Bengal

As shown in Figure 1.8, Calcutta was situated on the banks of the Hooghly River in the region of Bengal. Bengal is a historical geographical area occupying the Ganges delta and spans from the Himalaya Range in the north to the Bay of Bengal in the south, from the Chittagong Hills in the south-east to the Chintoo Hills and Subarnarekha River on the east. Bengal’s position at the ‘bottleneck’ of India (i.e. the land between the Himalaya mountain range and the ocean, where the Indian subcontinent connects to the Asian landmass) ensured that the region was a natural melting pot of ethnicities and cultures. Over many centuries, the population’s plurality of religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds fused into a rich and unified Bengali cultural identity. The people of Bengal also came to share a common language (Bengali).

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28 Bengal no longer exists as a political region—most of the area now lies in the country of Bangladesh (which translates as the nation of the Bengali people) and in the Indian state of West Bengal. Parts of Bengal are also now part of the adjoining provinces of Bihar, Assam, Orissa, Tripura, and Jharkhand.
Figure 1.8: Map of the City of Calcutta. The map is oriented with east at the top and north on the left. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Map Collection.

Figure 1.8 also features places of particular note that are discussed in this thesis. The large green mass is the city’s central open space and park, known as the Maidan. The smaller green rectangular property abutting the north of the Maidan is Government House, home to British India’s Viceroy. The central polygonal structure within the Maidan is Fort William, the East India Company’s (hereafter EIC) original barracks in Calcutta. To the north of Fort William, still on the banks of the Hoogly River are the Eden Gardens, where the Town Band played most nights of the week. The eastern boundary of the Maidan, marked in yellow on the map, is Chowringhee Street, Calcutta’s most fashionable district. In the centre of the innermost of the concentric circles is the Lindsay Street Opera House (built 1867) and nearby were several other theatres including the Corinthian and Lewis’s Theatre Royal (all marked in red).

White Town and Black Town in Calcutta

From the outset, Britain’s administration of Calcutta (whether by the EIC or the Crown) had based on segregation and exclusion. White Town was the area in Calcutta where the English and other Europeans had been based. Black Town was the area in which Bengali and other Indian people lived. White Town was where all British society and infrastructure was based, hence it was where all the theatres and halls were built.
‘White Town’ was small during the eighteenth century, and although some musicians managed to eke out a living combining primarily teaching with some performing, eighteenth-century White Town was not the sort of society that could support the number of professional musicians it would take to form an orchestra or opera company. With the dawn of the age of imperialism, and the Reform Act of 1832, ‘White Town’ became larger, more insular, and increasingly convinced of its own superiority. As Sumanta Banerjee points out, ‘the physical-spatial structure’ of Calcutta was divided between White Town and Black Town, with the entry of Indians into White Town increasingly regulated during British occupation. As a study of the nexus between opera and imperialism, this thesis concentrates upon the White Town district of Calcutta.

**Australia Felix, the Port Phillip District and the Colony of Victoria**

In 1835, a group of Van Diemen’s Land pastoralists (known as the Port Phillip Association) travelled across the Bass Strait to explore the agrarian potential of the south of the Australian continent. After four months of surveying the coast and inferior, and extremely pleased with what they saw, the members of the Association permanently (and illegally) emigrated to the region, calling the area Port Phillip, after the generous bay around which they had settled.

A year later, the Surveyor-General of New South Wales, Major Thomas Mitchell, mounted his third expedition, surveying, mapping and reporting on an area that covered much of modern Victoria. So impressed was Mitchell with what he saw that he famously described this land as ‘*Australia Felix*’, meaning a fertile southern land of bounty, blessed by fortune and favour (see Figure 1.9).

Mitchell not only coined this happy toponym, but also foresaw the ability of this land to cater for many colonisers and its potential importance to the Empire:

> We had at length discovered a country ready for the immediate reception of civilized man; and destined, perhaps, to become eventually a portion of a great empire … Every day we passed over land, which, for natural fertility and beauty, could scarcely be surpassed … A more bountiful distribution of the waters, for the supply of a numerous population, could not be imagined, nor a soil better adapted for cultivation.

By the time Melbourne had gained city status in 1837, it was already considered to be the capital of Australia Felix. The romantic moniker was, however, never formally adopted. Instead, over the course of the Victorian Era, the region would have two names. The first, the Port Phillip District (1837–1851) reflects the territory’s semi-autonomous relationship to the Colony of New South Wales. Port Phillip’s residents were never happy with their tie to Sydney and as the District grew over the next decade, its citizens continued to campaign

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30 The Bass Strait is the body of water separating the island of Tasmania from mainland Australia.


32 Ibid., pp. 171-203.
for independence from New South Wales. In 1851, independence was granted and was henceforth known as the Colony of Victoria (see Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.9: A Map of Australia Felix, 1838. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia
Melbourne
Prior to its European settlement, Melbourne and its surrounding areas were the traditional lands of three Indigenous peoples, the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, and the Wathaurong who, together with the Djadjawurung and Taungurong peoples, formed the Kulin nation alliance. The city now known as Melbourne33 was founded on August 30th 1835 by the pastoralists of the Port Phillip Association.34 The city of Melbourne sits in the south-east of the Australian continent, on the banks of the Yarra River. The city is nestled between the Dandenong mountain ranges and the natural harbour of Port Philip Bay.

33 Melbourne had been known as Doutta Galla, Bearbrass, and Bearport amongst other names, until it was officially declared Melbourne, after the British Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, in 1837.
34 Museum Victoria, 'Early Days', Marvellous Melbourne <http://museumvictoria.com.au/marvellous/early/index.asp>, accessed August 10th 2010. There had, of course, been previous attempts to settle in this region since the beginning of the nineteenth century, but all such colonies had failed. In 1834, the Henty brothers came to the Yarra Valley, raising Merino sheep and indulging also in some whale hunting. They did this as individuals, however, with no intention of fostering a settlement, and hardly any officials knew of their whereabouts. The clandestine, solitary and unofficial nature of their activities renders them as pre-settlement for the purposes of this study.
Chapter 2: Society, culture, and identity in the British Empire, Calcutta and Melbourne

This thesis argues that the uses and ends to which opera was put in two of the British Empire’s quintessential cities, Calcutta and Melbourne, reflected and reinforced the modes and practices of imperialism. Yet, the conceptualisation of ‘empire’, let alone its realities, was not fixed. The British Empire was not merely a geopolitical entity; it was also a process that demanded constant construction. As a product of the society that imagined and created it, the development of the Empire reveals much about nineteenth-century British thought and identity.

This chapter outlines the evolution of empire as an idea in the cultural fabric of Britain, from the beginning of Britain’s imperial drive during the last years of Elizabeth I’s reign to the end of the Victorian Era. It will then narrow its focus, describing how this philosophical evolution shaped the development and culture of the two centres at the heart of this thesis: Calcutta and Melbourne. It does this in order to evaluate the nature of empire and to reveal the interconnectedness of imperial culture, colonialism and opera.

Ideas of Empire: The evolution of the British Empire 1600–1901

This section argues that Britain’s imperialism and colonialism went through multiple phases, transitioning from a commercial paradigm to a culturally-centred model. This is not to suggest that cultural imperialism was absent from early pursuits, nor were economic concerns lacking from later colonial processes. Rather, as the idea of empire evolved, the balance between economy and culture shifted and this change of emphasis was reflected in the mode of Britain’s colonial administration.

Empire as Enterprise: 1600–1770

Modern England’s interest in empire and colonisation is surely a result of its own history. It had been a colony of Rome and a conquest of the Normans; more recently Britain had flexed its imperial muscles by repeatedly invading France and Ireland in attempts to reclaim
the Angevin Empire of its historic Plantagenet rulers.\(^{35}\) During the reign of the Tudors, Britain’s horizons spread further with the advent of trans-Atlantic exploration, \(^{36}\) and these adventures led to John Dee’s imagination of a ‘British Impire’.\(^{37}\) In general, Britain preferred to divorce its imperial interests from the colonial process, leaving the conquest and administration of foreign lands to the various Royal Charter joint-stock companies charged with pursuing British interests around the world. Such companies include the British East India Company (EIC), the Hudson’s Bay Company, the Virginia Company and the Somers Isles Company.

A generation after the term British Empire came into being, the idea began to be translated into a reality. Joint-stock companies established settlements and trading posts across the world. The British were most prolific in the West Indies, establishing six colonies between 1604 and 1628.\(^{38}\) Colonial activity also occurred on the eastern coast of North America: Jamestown (USA), named in honour of the new regent, James I, and Virginia (USA), named for the Virgin Queen who had died some years prior, were formally settled in 1607. The 17th Century also saw the beginning of Britain’s Asian and Indian colonial activities. Britain set up trading posts across the region in order to protect its economic interests from rival European nations,\(^{39}\) as well as secure the favour of Bengali, Carnatic, Marathi, Chinese and Malay rulers. In 1640, the British built Fort St. George in south-east India and, over the coming years, the city of Madras grew up around the fort. In 1661, Britain acquired Bombay through the marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza. At the end of the century, the EIC were granted permission to establish a settlement at Calcutta. Thus were the three Presidencies of India established.

Although dominated by economic interests, there were even at this early stage sociological, political and imperialist dimensions to Britain’s colonial activities. In 1620, the first Puritan settlers left England to establish a ‘New England’ in the New World. Naturally there were economic aspects to these settlements; the increasing demand for timber and the pelts of various American animals made New England attractive to investors. These New England colonies, however, represented an early step towards an idea of Empire beyond economy. In conceiving of New England as a home and as an idealised version of England, the Puritan settlers’ colonial pursuits had a cultural, rather than economic emphasis. Moreover, the British began to justify their military presence and economic exploitation of indigenous

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\(^{35}\) ‘The Angevin Empire is a modern term denoting the various states ruled by the Plantagenet house of the English Royal Family during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. ‘Angevin’ refers to the house’s origins in Anjou. At its largest extent, the Angevin Empire included England, the eastern portion of Ireland, Normandy, Gascony, Aquitaine, Brittany, Anjou, Poitou-Charentes, Touraine, Marche, Dordogne, Limousin, and Quercy. See John Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

\(^{36}\) Walter Raleigh briefly colonised Roanoke in present-day Virginia from 1584, although this colonial activity might be better described as a ‘fact-finding mission’, as the British were keen to learn indigenous smelting methods. See Gary Gragg, ‘Joachim Gans of Prague: The First Jew in English America’, *American Jewish History*, 86/2 (1998), pp.195-217.


\(^{38}\) These colonies were Guyana, St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Kitts, Barbados and Nevis.

\(^{39}\) Other European nations active the India and East Asia were France, Portugal, The Netherlands, and Spain.
peoples and lands by the ‘good’ they were doing in spreading ‘civilisation’, religion and culture to heathen and savage peoples around the world.  

The Classical Standard of Civilization and the Age of Empire, 1780–1880s

The political and economic events of the eighteenth century (from the Industrial Revolution and the discovery of the Australian continent, to the establishment of the American and French Republics and Britain’s various wars against other European powers) changed the nature of the British Empire. Britain lost many of its American territories, found its ‘Great Southern Land’, and increasingly found itself in need of defending its Asian interests. These political and economic developments engendered much social change. Britain transformed from a rural, quasi-feudal society into a nation of ambitious, urbanised, upwardly-mobile people. British society was also shaped by the Enlightenment principles that were then dominating European thought. Western society, which had formerly been in thrall to God and King, was liberated by this renaissance of reason. Whereas faith had been prized, now the pursuit of knowledge was lauded; where God had been supreme, now was man and his powers of creation and improvement celebrated.

The new respect for logic, reason and progress influenced ideas about the role and fate of humanity. Many logicians concluded that it was the moral and ethical duty of man to exercise his powers of creation and improvement. In his 1789 lecture, The Nature and Value of Universal History, Friedrich von Schiller neatly summarised the prevailing attitude of the time:

... man in his self-interest may indeed pursue lower purposes, but unwittingly advances more excellent ones... To prepare for our human century... has been the endeavour of all ages past... And who could be mindful of this high obligation without the quiet wish that he might repay to the coming generation the debt which he can no longer discharge to the last? A noble longing must glow within us to add from our own resources our contribution to the rich legacy of truth, morality and freedom which we have received from former ages and must deliver richly increased to the ages to come; and to fasten to this imperishable chain, which winds through all generations of men, our own fleeting existence.

According to Schiller and his contemporaries, such a duty was most pressing for the European man, who was at the apex of civilisation. Indeed, Schiller argued that the exploration and nascent imperialism of the eighteenth century had proven he European man’s superiority to other races:

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41 The masculine pronoun ‘his’ is used consciously here, as, apart from the work of proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, Enlightenment principles, reforms and literature were conceived of as means to liberate men, not women.

The discoveries which our European seafarers have made in distant oceans and on remote shores afford us a spectacle which is as instructive as it is entertaining. They show us societies arrayed around us at various levels of development, as an adult might be surrounded by children of different ages… A wise hand seems to have preserved these savage tribes until such time as we have progressed sufficiently in our own civilisation to make useful application of this discovery… What contrasting pictures! Who would suppose that the refined European of the eighteenth century is only a more advanced brother of the Red Indian and of the ancient Celt?… The philosophical mind cannot long detain itself with the subject matter of world-history before a new impulse is activated… Thus, he imports a rational purpose into the course of the world and a teleological principle into world-history.43

However, Schiller and his contemporaries also championed the idea of the brotherhood of all races of man. Once Western philosophy and culture accepted the idea that civilisation and progress was humanity’s raison d’être, and that it was the duty of the ‘advanced’ to govern the ‘inferior’, the conclusion that imperialism and colonisation were preordained by Nature and by God was obvious. The result was a transformation of the economically centred colonial model into a cultural centred paradigm.

As evinced by the maps in the Introduction, this new idea of empire resulted in rapid and large territorial claims, including Australia, new parts of Upper and Lower Canada, new holdings in Africa and increasing amounts of land in India. These geographical developments were accompanied by an evolution in the style of Britain’s colonial administration. Britain was no longer interested in protecting its trade interests militarily: the loss of the American colonies in the 1770s coupled with the threat posed to its Indian colonies by native and rival European forces had taught the virtue of cultural colonisation. Britain was now determined to underpin its economic and military presence with political authority and cultural hegemony. The government transitioned the responsibility of colonial administration from joint-stock companies to the Crown; it lifted migratory restrictions to its Indian colonies; it encouraged free migration to Australia as supplement and alternative to penal resettlement. Britain slowed the haemorrhage of money flowing out of the colonies into British bank accounts, and instead began to reinvest these funds back into its colonies. The empire became truly British, and Britain became absorbed by its empire project.

The bifurcation of empire: ‘Greater Britain’ and empire, 1880–mid-20th Century

By the 1880s, the British Empire had become the famed empire upon which the sun never set. A century had passed since the loss of the thirteen American colonies, and despite uprisings in India, wars in Africa, continuous campaigns for home rule in Ireland, and the increasing prosperity and independence of its Canadian and Australasian colonies, Britain had managed to keep a firm grasp on its empire. Yet, change was in the air. The task of administering and securing its diverse and large territorial claim was beginning to strain even Britain’s indefatigable, pro-Empire populace. This strain was exacerbated by the fact that the colonies that were proving most difficult to govern were no longer the most

43 Ibid.
resource rich territories in the Empire: the second half of the century had seen the
discovery and exploitation of Australia, New Zealand and Canada’s bountiful natural
resources. Britain began to question the value and nature of its empire.

In 1883, one of the most influential historians and empire men of the day, J. R. Seeley,
presented a lecture series entitled *The Expansion of England*. The main argument that Seeley
put forth in these lectures was the need to reconceptualise the Empire, and the term he
coined was ‘Greater Britain’. Seeley urged Britain to stop viewing itself as ‘an island off the
northern coast of the Continent of Europe’, and instead recognise that, just as Great
Britain consisted of four nations (England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales), Greater Britain
consisted of four territories: Canada, the West Indies, South Africa and Australia/New
Zealand.44 India was notably absent from this vision.

Although an avowed imperialist, Seeley opined that India was a moral, political and
economic dilemma for Britain. He argued that Britain’s presence in India was sapping
England’s finances and energies, and giving little in return.45 He noted the difference
between England’s administration of India and its management of Anglophone settler
colonies, and concluded that India was undermining Britain’s global position as a modern
and democratic nation:

> the same nation which reaches one hand towards the future of the globe and assumes the position
> of mediator between Europe and the New World, stretch the other hand towards the remotest past
> [India], becomes an Asiatic conqueror and usurps the succession of the Great Mogul [sic]. How can
> the same nation … be despotism in Asia and democratic in Australia, be in the East…the guardian of
> the property of thousands of idol-temples, and at the same time in the West be the foremost
> champion of free thought.46

In short, Seeley declared that India may be ruled by the British, but it never would be
British. Yet, Seeley was convinced that Britain had a responsibility to stay in India, just as it
must stay in Ireland. Even Seeley’s anti-imperialist contemporaries, such as Goldwin Smith,
agreed:

> …in granting the Hindoo independence [the British] would be handing him over to murderous
anarchy, as they are to see that in granting the Irish Celt self-government they would be handing him
over to political brigandage.47

The consensus was that although Britain had a duty to continue managing the affairs of
these ‘inferior races’, it ought to focus its attentions on its cousins in the enlightened,
Anglo-Saxon colonies. The idea of empire had evolved again; now it was to be conceived
of as a compound nation-state, or federation. The Empire was now a two-tiered institution
and India and Australia were to have very different roles in this new iteration of the
Empire.

46 Ibid., p. 205.
The next section details how the changing face of empire from 1600–1901 impacted the two cities at the heart of this dissertation, with particular reference to the importance that culture, and the arts, played in the fortunes and identities of these two colonial cities.

**Imperialism in action**

**Calcutta**

**Calcutta as economic post 1694–1756**

Although there had always been villages in the area, Calcutta as a city was only founded in the 1690s, when, under the invitation of the nawab, Ibrahim Khan, the British East India Company (EIC) established the trading port city on the banks of the Hooghly River. It was not long before Calcutta began to flourish. The EIC lost no time in exploiting the area’s abundant resources, both material and human, and was soon processing and exporting chintz, silk, opium, indigo, jute and tea, creating a busy town in the process.

Early Calcutta could hardly be called ‘British’, however. The economic nature of the EIC’s presence in India, coupled with the fact that India was too technologically advanced and populous to be overwhelmed by force, meant that the EIC depended upon the continuing support of India’s complex governance framework to maintain its economic foothold in Calcutta. Moreover, India had a ‘highly sophisticated’ indigenous fiscal system already established, which, through excises and taxations, provided the English with the revenue needed to maintain their military and commercial presence on the subcontinent.

The EIC, therefore, needed to ensure that British culture did not overwhelm or offend Indian rulers, nor displace the economic framework on which it was dependent. That a culture of mutual respect was recognised as being crucial to the success of British activities in India is evident from the migration restrictions imposed by the EIC and government alike. As P.J. Marshall discussed in ‘The Whites in British India: A Failed Colonial Society?’, the British believed that migration limitation not only secured the Company’s monopoly, but also, by preventing the ‘low and licentious’ from coming to India, averted threats to British authority. The British Parliament passed a series of bills that regulated the migration of British subjects, prohibiting anyone who was not an EIC worker, or a member of the British army, from coming to the city. There were no missionaries, no private merchants, no educators, few servants, and few women. The result was a colony whose demography was that of a barracks or a ship, rather than a settlement. Ostensibly, White Town presented little threat to the sovereignty and autonomy of the Mughal

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49 The East India Company (EIC) was a joint-stock company first established in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I.


53 Ibid., p. 28.
Empire, and the EIC was successful in maintaining its status as the Mughals’ preferred foreign trade partner.\textsuperscript{54}

Beneath the surface matters were more complicated. The EIC’s monopoly was jealously guarded by more than migratory restrictions. The British also exploited the political instability of the crumbling Mughal Empire to further their own interests—they took sides in debates over Mughal succession, favouring the candidate who would best protect their commercial and colonial concerns (for example, the Second Carnatic War, 1749–54). The EIC also expanded European wars into the Indian theatre when it was in its interest to do so.\textsuperscript{55} As the Mughal Empire continued to disintegrate, and Enlightenment society and philosophy became increasing convinced of the superiority and duty of European civilisation, the British became bolder. Matters came to a head in 1756–57, when a series of events decided the fate of Calcutta and the nature of British colonialism in India for more than a century to come.

\textbf{Clive’s Calcutta: The expansion of British India and its effect on Calcutta 1756–1833}

In 1756, the new Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Mirzâ Muhammad Sirâj-ud-Daulah, confronted the British. He accused them of abusing their EIC privileges, interfering in political and legal matters, and threatening his throne with increased military activity in Calcutta.\textsuperscript{56} When the English ignored his requests to desist from such actions, Sirâj-ud-Daulah besieged Calcutta, imprisoned the garrison and detained those unable to flee. Up to forty of these prisoners died after they were locked in small, airless cell overnight. As Metcalf et al have explained, these deaths were the fault of the negligent officers, not the result of a cruel edict from the Nawab.\textsuperscript{57} Nevertheless, the event, colloquially referred to as ‘The Black Hole of Calcutta’, after much embellishment and hyperbole was snatched up by enlightenment society as an example of Indian barbarism and became a convenient excuse for Britain’s desire to wrest control of the Nawab’s lands.

The British, led by Robert Clive, retook Calcutta in 1757. Eager to be rid of his rivals and knowing that much of Bengal’s Hindu community, together with some Muslims, were also unhappy with Sirâj-ud-Daulah’s policies,\textsuperscript{58} Clive plotted to depose the leader and plant a sympathetic, puppet Nawab in his stead. The puppet was Mir Jaffar, a disgruntled bakshi of Sirâj-ud-Daulah,\textsuperscript{59} who betrayed the Nawab by surrendering, as pre-agreed, to Clive at the Battle of Plassey.\textsuperscript{60} Sirâj-ud-Daulah, the last independent ruler of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa was put to death and Jaffar became the EIC’s puppet Nawab. Guaranteed now of the

\textsuperscript{54} In 1717, the young and malleable Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar, under severe financial pressures of which the EIC took advantage, issued the firman that granted trade concessions to the EIC. Among these concessions was the introduction and legalisation of dastaks: passes that exempted the bearer from taxation and excises.

\textsuperscript{55} Consider the First Carnatic War, 1746–48, which grew out of the War of Austrian Succession.


\textsuperscript{57} Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, \textit{A Concise History of India} (Cambridge Concise Histories; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 50.


\textsuperscript{59} Bakshi is a term denoting the head of the armed forces.

\textsuperscript{60} Dodwell, ‘Clive in Bengal, 1756-1760’, pp. 147-52.
Nawab’s economic, political and military support, the British then made sure to end the threat of France, capturing the important French towns of Chandernagore and Pondicherry. By the end of the Third Carnatic War, Britain’s position as the dominant European force in India had been secured. Whilst Article XI of the Treaty of Paris (1763) restored Chandernagore and Pondicherry to France, France now acknowledged British and Mir Jaffar’s sovereignty in Bengal and Carnatic. Mir Jaffar’s ascendancy and the Treaty of Paris signified the beginning of British Rule in India.

Over the next five decades, Governors-General Hastings, Cornwallis, Wellesley, and Rawdon-Hastings continued to attract Native allies and conquer Native lands. Between 1766 and 1799, through a series of victories in the four Anglo-Mysore wars (1766–69; 1780–84; 1789–92; and 1799), the complete region of Mysore was ceded to the British and its allies (the Maratha Empire and the Hyderabad Empire). The British-Maratha alliance in these conflicts did not preclude rivalry between these two belligerents; over the course of the three Anglo-Maratha wars (1774–83; 1802–05; and 1817–19), the British came to control almost all of the Indian subcontinent (See Figure 2.1).

In addition to these military victories, the British cemented their growing control of India with various social, economic, and legal policies. The foremost of these is the Cornwallis Code (1793), which translated Hindu and Muslim legal codes into English, formalised British legal and social supremacy in India, and altered the system of taxation revenue payable to the British by the zamindars. The British were also careful to cultivate what Metcalf et al., have referred to as the quintessential ‘colonial economy’, which was designed to benefit England and subjugate India. The British encouraged Indians to produce raw materials over finished/manufactured goods (i.e. cotton was preferred to woven textiles), and zamindars were pressure to raise cash crops (jute, indigo, cotton) instead of sustenance crops (such as wheat and rice). The benefit was entirely for the English. With India exporting only raw materials, such as cotton, Britain had the cheap base products to fill its factories, whilst eliminating competition for artisanal products. The economic arrangement also artificially skewed the distribution of labour in India, devastating the artisan classes who had formerly been weavers, manufacturers and designers. These, like the former employees of the numerous Indian Royal courts that disappeared after the British defeated them, were forced into unskilled agricultural labour to survive. Together, these factors made India wholly dependent upon Britain for its livelihood, destroyed India’s social and economic independence, forced previously secure people into subsistence living, wreaked social havoc, and predisposed India to famine: the echoes of which are still felt in modern India.

In amongst this all, Calcutta, which had been won, lost, and reclaimed, was made the official capital of Britain’s dominions in India.

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61 Ibid., pp. 146-64.
62 The Definitive treaty of peace and friendship between His Britannick Majesty, the Most Christian King, and the King of Spain: concluded at Paris, the 10th day of February, 1763; to which the King of Portugal acceded on the same day’ (London: E. Owen and T. Harrison, 1763).
63 For a list of the Governors-General of India and their terms, please see Appendix A.
64 Metcalf and Metcalf, A Concise History of India, p. 75.
Early High-Colonial Calcutta 1833–1856

By 1833, Britain and the world viewed the subcontinent at part of the British Empire. The EIC had outlived its purpose and the British government set about transforming its seventeenth-century trade colony into a model of cultural imperialism. Some people raised doubts about the wisdom of this ambition, but the Government, beguiled by the chance to expand its colonial prestige and its wealth, ignored such warnings, and pushed ahead with
its plans to create a British Raj in India. The process of transitioning from EIC administration to Crown rule was deliberate and slow, taking over twenty years and innumerable pieces of legislation to achieve.

The India Charter Reform Act of 1833 marked the final, irrevocable shift in policy towards the ideas of ‘British India’ and high-colonialism. The EIC was stripped of its few remaining monopolies, opening the floodgates to independent merchants. Furthermore, the migratory restrictions that had protected the EIC and India from privateers and British culture were removed. From 1833, any ‘natural born subjects of His Majesty could now legally travel to, and reside in, British India without a licence’.65 Furthermore, British men could hold title to Indian land, a ruling that made no attempt to hide from India or the world the scope and scale of Britain’s ambitions. Over the next fifteen years, the European population of Calcutta more than doubled, growing from 3,138 to 7,534.66

Calcutta’s European population underwent more than mere ballooning, however. The demographic profile of White Town changed rapidly. The European population of Bengal became more urbanised: in 1832 there were 473 European indigo planters and assistants in Bengal, but twenty years later there were only 273 Europeans engaged in any activity in the Mofussil.67 There was also an ever-increasing proportion of women in White Town; indeed, once the garrisoned population was excluded, women formed as much as 46% of the population of White Town.68

The reforms also changed the type of British people who came to Calcutta. The shift from EIC to Crown role resulted in a large increase of civil service numbers: Margaret Macmillan estimates that by the end of the transition period, half of British men resident in Calcutta worked in the Indian Civil Service.69 They were a different class of people from those who had come to Calcutta in the days of the EIC; the more so because of the changes that British society had undergone. The Industrial Revolution, the abolition of slavery, victory against Napoleon, Catholic Emancipation, and the recent expansion of the British Empire to Australasia were factors which combined to create a large and progressive middle class population that was convinced of its intrinsic moral, legislative, military, and technological superiority. It is from this class that the new migrants to Calcutta were drawn. This collective superiority complex was inflated by this community’s mandate in India: to rule and administer the ‘natives’. The result was a society that was insular and disinclined to adapt to, or even understand, its surrounds. Even the non-official migrants (i.e. those not employed by either the EIC or British government/armed forces, such as private traders, merchants, farmers etc.) who were more likely to come from working-class British backgrounds, held similar values and attitudes. Moreover, at a time when the bourgeoisie was gaining rights, wealth and status all over Western Europe, these non-

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67 Renford, *The non-official British in India*, p. 16.
68 These figures are my own calculations based on the figures given in Renford, *The non-official British in India*, p. 15.
officials were likely to aspire to a middle-class lifestyle and therefore ape the manners and habits of the ‘official’ class in Calcutta.

It is in this context that opera first appeared in Calcutta, arriving on the banks of the Hoogly in December 1833. As will be discussed in detail in later chapters, this high-colonial context shaped opera’s role, with reference to both White Town and Black Town. Within White Town, opera patronage was one of the shibboleths of the pseudo-aristocracy formed by Calcutta’s elites, bureaucrats and high-ranking militia. This delineation was soon racialised and opera became a battleground of culture and politics between Bengali and English residents. Opera’s role as a tool of cultural colonisation continued throughout the nineteenth century.

**Rebellion and Dissent: The effect of the Sepoy Rebellion** and other mid-century skirmishes on Calcutta and British India

When James Broun-Ramsey, Earl of Dalhousie, became Governor-General in 1848, he immediately instigated an agenda of provocative administrative reform and ambitious territorial acquisition, the aim of which was to achieve a true and synthesised ‘British India; that is to create a dominion that was unified both geographically and administratively. Dalhousie set about annexing territories that had hitherto been under the *de jure* or *de facto* rule of Indian sovereigns, arguing that the annexed lands were ruled by ‘false’ heads of state.

Annexation had severe social and economic repercussions for millions of Indian people. The end of autonomous rule in Oudh in 1856, for example, saw almost the entirety of the royal household’s employees rendered unemployed overnight. The newly-unemployed came from a range of castes and educational backgrounds: servants, advisors, entertainers, and, most significantly for the British, 200,000 armed personnel. Similar situations occurred in each of the territories that were annexed during Dalhousie’s administration, including Satara, Sambalpur, Punjab, Jhansi, and Nagpur. Such widespread unemployment not only resulted in severe economic strain among the affected families and communities,

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70 This event is referred to by many names: Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy Rebellion, or the First Indian War of Independence. Of these terms the author prefers Sepoy Rebellion. The term ‘mutiny’ is completely inappropriate, as it suggests that the Indians were in some way ‘within’ the framework of the Raj, when they were merely considered so many bodies to control the Indian population. The idea of the Rebellion being a ‘War of Independence’ is not compelling, as there was little unity of military strategy and still less common ground in ideology among the dissenting Indians. Different camps of natives fighting at this time had different objectives, and it was only an ineffective minority that had the intention of driving the British out altogether. This is why the Rebellion ultimately failed, and why the event will be referred to, throughout the thesis, as the Rebellion. Sepoy is a term denoting an Indian member of the armed forces.


72 It had been longstanding practice amongst Indian rulers without heirs to adopt an heir of their choosing prior to death, in order to protect the peace, stability, and political integrity of their kingdom. Dalhousie chose to discontinue Britain’s recognition of adoptive heredity, instead only acknowledging biological male heir as valid inheritors of Indian autonomous rule Lawrence James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Abacus, 2008), p. 234.

73 Oudh is rendered as Awadh in modern usage.

74 James, Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India, p. 234.

but also ruptured India’s traditional social structure. Moreover, Britain’s actions, and apparent disregard of the consequences, precipitated a realisation across India’s population that the British were set on eroding their rights and sovereignty. The British were now perceived as a genuine threat to Indian culture, self-determination, and dignity. Across the subcontinent, discontent simmered and spread, and eventually erupted in 1857 with the Sepoy Rebellion.

The Rebellion was quelled within a year, but alongside the countless other skirmishes and wars that grew from Dalhousie’s belligerent policies, the Rebellion caused widespread political, economic and social volatility, both within and without Calcutta. Indeed, the 1857 Sepoy Rebellion was the key turning point in nineteenth-century British India, for in its aftermath, the Raj obsessed over the threat that Native Indians posed to British authority. This protectionist, hegemonic attitude would later become one of the central elements in opera’s renaissance and demise.

The single most significant outcome of the Rebellion was the official end of EIC rule in India. The success of Lord Stanley’s India Bill in 1858 saw every aspect of British India come under the control of the British Government; India was no longer an enterprise but a dominion. With this shift came the arrival of the Golden Age of British Imperialism. The British immediately began to stamp their mark across British India: they did this quite literally in the sense of minting currency (from 1858 the Rupee bore the visage of Victoria), and ideologically in attempting to establish British cultural dominance, a project in which opera was to play a major role.

The Jewel of the Raj: Calcutta 1857–1880s

The appointment of Sir John Lawrence to the Vice-Regal post in 1864 heralded an age of relative peace and prosperity in British India, especially in Calcutta. Over his five-year tenure as Governor-General, Lawrence sought to maintain and improve Dalhousie’s British

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76 Such discontent fuelled suspicions among Indians that the Company was engaged in measures, both overt and surreptitious, to break the Hindu caste system and pollute Indian Muslims. Whilst many of the rumours which were promulgated were baseless—for example, that the British were befouling the Indian soldiers’ salt supply with cow’s blood in an attempt to eradicate the divisions between Hindu castes (when, in fact, the reddish tinge to the salt had no more subversive a cause than the salt sacks’ ochre dye staining the supply)—the sentiment behind the tales was, nevertheless, insightful. The British were indeed engaged in efforts to transform and control India and its people. The Indians merely mistook the means by which the British were attempting their agenda of religious and social reforms; the British had no reason to resort to cow’s blood to undermine the native populace. They were already making substantial headway through political, economic, and cultural measures.


India through a programme of ‘masterly inactivity’—i.e. cultural and technological, rather than militaristic, conquest.  

Lawrence and his immediate successors concentrated on Westernising India through tangible, as well as intangible, means. He went to war with India’s geography, rather than its people, investing in large-scale infrastructure projects to make India increasingly accessible and governable. One of the major schemes of the post-Rebellion age was railway. Although the first railways had been built earlier, it was only after the Rebellion that the bulk of the expansive Indian Rail network was laid and made operational. It was during this period also that mental as well as physical distance began to be conquered. In 1870, India’s burgeoning internal postal service was augmented by the intercontinental telegraph, which connected London to Calcutta.

The introduction of these modern communications and transportation systems began to create a globalised world—and, just as they continue to do in the twenty-first century, structures that enhance globalisation are central to the dissemination and translocation of culture. Such technologies did not merely speed up the movement of people and information, they also redefined concepts like near and far, connected and isolated. Although nothing could fully ameliorate the distance between India and ‘Home’, these improvements in transport and communications did diminish the degree of emotional isolation experiences by Europeans. When coupled with improvements in global sea travel and telecommunications, these technologies served to make India a less physically and emotionally remote place for Europeans. More migrants came to India, and soon so would more musicians.

Britain may have harnessed technology as a means of facilitating its sovereignty, but it was cultural infrastructure that was to become Britain’s biggest project in post-Rebellion British India. In a land where the native population outnumbered the British so greatly, the British realised that their rule was dependent upon the politics of persuasion, rather than a policy of aggression. They would never be able to govern a discontented India, no matter how advanced their infrastructure or military technology. Instead, the British embarked on a process of enculturation. This, too, was a legacy from the Rebellion, for the events of 1857 had been as much a result of cultural clashes as it had been about of issues of sovereignty.

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79 It is notable that Dalhousie was the first Governor-General to have technological aspirations for British-India, and indeed established the first railway service in 1853, but the progress and safety of these endeavours was held-up by war, economic hardships, and lack of support back Home for reinvesting in India—this attitude changed, of course, with the EIC’s full ceding of power to the British Government. Similarly, it must be acknowledged that some of the world’s first experiments in telegraphy happened in Calcutta in 1839, when Sir William O’Shaughnessy created a 13.5 mile telegraph route around the Hooghly river. Yet, however significant these experiments were in telecommunications history, they did not materially affect life in Calcutta and therefore cannot be said to have had an impact on European (or Indian) life in the city. For further information regarding early telegraphy in Calcutta see Mel Gorman, ‘Sir William O’Shaughnessy, Lord Dalhousie, and the Establishment of the Telegraph System in India’, *Technology and Culture* (12: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp. 581-601.


The excerpt of an article published by *The Indian Mirror* shows that the British had shifted in their attitudes and strategies concerning their occupation of India as early as March 1863:

...[With] the presence [in India] of a strong and thriving commercial and colonizing element, we have long ceased to view the Anglo-Indian community only as bureaucratic and military... the effect of our transplanting the civilization of modern Europe and England into Indian soil will be, to some extent to Europeanize and Anglize the Indians... [It] [is not] wise to trust to railways, telegraphs, steamers and armies alone for our hold on India and its 150 million inhabitants of mixed races... The true success of governance in India must be the result of education and enlightenment of the native. The more a thorough taste for European education and civilization spreads among the Hindoos [sic] the more friends we will make among them... The civilized Indian must yearn for a civilized government, while the ignorant mass, nurtured in deep-rooted prejudices, and unable to break-off the thraldom of a time-honoured priesthood and a heartless superstition, can only hanker after a decrepit civilization... In science, in arts, and in every branch of literature and learning they are beginning to acquire proficiency... The English language is becoming their language, and English ideas are fast replacing the stereotypes cast of thoughts of the old Hindoos [sic].

In his 1997 work, *Dominance without Hegemony*, the subaltern scholar Ranajit Guha focussed on how the English language, and Western education, became ‘a hegemonic instrument to persuade the subject population about the desirability of its own subjection’, an instrument that ‘deposited Western values into the soul of the educated’. The British, like any society embarking upon a Golden Age, appreciated the value of culture in their status as sovereigns. Their objective was no longer merely occupation, which is a purely bureaucratic and militaristic endeavour, but cultural conquest—making India truly and naturally English, by assimilating its people into British culture.

The great Anglicising project was not just about institutionalised education; it also valued the role of the arts, and opera was to become a primary weapon in Britain new cultural artillery. Whilst opera’s role as a tool of colonisation in British India will be discussed in full in Chapter 15, it is useful at this point to raise the issue of opera’s role in the imperial process. It is no accident that opera’s Golden Age in Calcutta corresponds with the ebullient first years of the British Raj, and just as opera was dependent upon the context for its success in the coming years, the British Raj was also dependent upon opera’s success to cement its position as India’s rightful and natural governor.

**Calcutta’s decline: 1880–1901**

As the century wore on, and Seeley’s vision of Greater Britain became the favoured model of Empire amongst the British, British India’s star began to fade and Calcutta’s significance and prestige faded also. Yet, even within British India, Calcutta’s fortunes were on the decline. By the mid-1870s, many Western-educated Bengali intellectuals and artists had begun to agitate for Indian rights, culture and autonomy. Indeed, in 1876, even the Bengali moderate Surendranath Banerjea had, in addresses to the Indian National Association,

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83 Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without hegemony: history and power in colonial India* (Convergences Series; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 174-75.
argued passionately and logically for the need for Indians to have British citizenship, representation, and autonomy.\textsuperscript{84} The nationalist activities of these men and women became known as the Bengali Renaissance and, as the seat of the Raj and the centre of Bengali life, Calcutta found itself in the midst of a sophisticated and persuasive form of resistance.

The Raj was also confronted by more traditional tensions. The rapidly worsening population density in Bengal, especially in Black Town, was exacerbating historic hostilities between the Hindu and Muslim communities, and riots were not uncommon. Moreover, these riots had repercussions in White Town and led to internal conflicts within the Raj.\textsuperscript{85} The British were also concerned about the threat that Russia posed to its interests in Central Asia. Many in the Civil Service believed that the Raj ought to establish a more powerful political presence near the Hindustan plains of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{86} The confluence of the factors made Britain contemplate moving the seat of government away from the powder keg that was Calcutta to a more central and manageable location as early as the 1880s.\textsuperscript{87}

The ancient city of Delhi became the official favourite. Although Britain only announced its the decision to shift the capital of British India from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911, it was evident during the final decades of the Victorian Era that Calcutta’s days of glory were coming to an end. It is no coincidence that it was during these last years the century, when Calcutta was losing both its ambition and ability to be a culturally significant metropolis, that opera lapsed into somnolence.

**Melbourne**

**From illegal to regal: Melbourne 1835–1851**

In many ways, colonial Melbourne was the emblematic city of the Victorian period. Proclaimed in 1837, the year in which Queen Victoria ascended the throne, Melbourne progressed from a village of a few hundred illegal settlers to become the largest city on the Australian continent and the first capital of the newly-formed Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, the year in which Queen Victoria died. However, Melbourne’s colonial history was representative of the ‘Victorian period’ in more ways than mere chronology.

From its establishment in 1835, Melbourne was different to other Australian cities: it was not part of a government settlement scheme or a solution to Britain’s convict problem. Indeed, what by the end of the nineteenth century would become Australia’s largest and most culturally authoritative city began as an illegal settlement founded by an altogether different type of pioneer. Melbourne’s founders were neither convicts nor free settlers directly from Britain; instead, they were prominent and respected Van Diemen’s Landers.


\textsuperscript{85} Metcalf and Metcalf, \textit{A Concise History of India}, in passim.


all of whom had been in Australia for at least ten years. These free, Australian men united to establish the Port Phillip Association, a syndicate aimed at advancing their interest in establishing a settlement in the Port Phillip area of the mainland. Their leader, John Batman, was a man notable not only for his business acumen, intrepidity and level of public engagement, but also for his background: Batman had been born in Australia and was among the first generation of Australian-born Europeans, colloquially known as ‘Currency lads’ or ‘- lasses’.

Being Australian had its advantages—the graziers were well acquainted with the continent’s harsh, extreme climate and its exotic native flora and fauna. This level of knowledge ensured that no one starved, and crops and stocks were, from the outset, successful—a story that was unique amongst Australian cities at this time. As Australians by birth or naturalisation, these settlers experienced little-to-no culture shock; their roots, families and friends were on the other side of the Bass Strait, not on the other side of the world. Many primary source accounts reveal an independence and ebullience of spirit in early Melbourne that was entirely lacking in the initial years of other Australian settlements.

The settlers had very explicit views on the type of city Melbourne was to be. For many of them, it was an opportunity to build the utopia they had long dreamed of. One early settler, John Pascoe Fawkner, had outlined a ‘constitution’ (see Figure 2.2) for a free man’s settlement c. 1832, some three years before Melbourne was settled. In Fawkner’s ideal settlement, all men would be recognised as free and equal. All men aged twenty-one years or older would be eligible to vote. Fawkner, the son of a convict, dreamed of a place where punishment would fit the crime, not represent the power of some men above others. The fact that such a ‘constitution’ was written prior to the founding of Melbourne demonstrates the ideological and emotional investment these early settlers were making. Such long-cherished dreams carried a power that was difficult for circumstances or the will of other men to undermine.

Figure 2.2: Constitution and Form of Government by John Pascoe Fawkner, ca. 1832. Image courtesy of the State Library of Victoria (Manuscript MS 13273)

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89 Ibid.
90 John Pascoe Fawkner, Constitution (State Library of Victoria Manuscript Collection, MS13273, 1832).
In essentials, Fawkner’s concept was an ideal shared by the other settlers of Melbourne. Melbourne was to be an Australian town; a town suited to the people who lived in it, rather than the people who exploited or governed it; a town created by entrepreneurial equals and friendly rivals rather than a stratified town of a military or bureaucratic ruling-class and voiceless workers or convicts. In 1836, when writing to Lord Glenelg (Secretary of State) to plea for Melbourne’s legitimacy, one of the city’s founders, George Mercer, described the fledgling city as ‘a nucleus for a free and useful colony founded on the principles of conciliation and civilisation, of philanthropy, morality and temperance’. Mercer was very particular on the subject of Melbourne’s independence from Sydney and its status as a free (i.e. not penal) colony:

Port Phillip is about 600 miles from Sydney, and 400 from the nearest lands of the Colony yet occupied by British subjects with the sanction of the government … These lands, unless formed into a free Colony, must … lie dormant, or be grazed by Squatters only for a century to come... The [Port Phillip] Association profess their wish to be a free Colony without pecuniary sacrifice to the Mother country.

Although A.G.L. Shaw has rightly noted that all these good intentions were little more than pleasing window-dressing for what was essentially an economic project, this rhetoric was nevertheless Melbourne’s ideological archaeology and fingerprint. Propaganda evolved into folklore, emblem and collective identity. The folklore of Melbourne as a township of independence and with leadership built on values of egalitarianism and utilitarianism became a history upon which Melbourne continued to model itself.

Notwithstanding the settlers’ ebullience of spirit, the settlement of Melbourne was not easily achieved. According to British law, the Port Phillip Association (PPA) had no legal authority to explore and settle the Port Phillip area. Indeed, the region was already designated Crown Land and as part of the Colony of New South Wales (NSW), despite the fact that Port Phillip was several hundred kilometres from the nearest British settlement. Moreover, the legal doctrine of terra nullius (trans: uninhabited country) divested the local Wurundjeri people of their land rights, voiding the ‘treaty’ that the Batman and other settlers had signed with them, thereby undermining the PPA’s claim of ownership of over 600,000 acres of land.

The result of these legal arguments meant that all of the settlements in the Port Phillip Area, including Melbourne, were deemed illegal. The settlers were not deterred from their

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vision. Over the next fifteen years they successfully campaigned for Melbourne’s legitimacy (1837), its city status (1847) and semi-autonomous rule (in 1837, Port Phillip became a semi-independent territory of New South Wales). In 1851 Melbourne’s settlers achieved the greatest prize of all: complete independence.

The Australian Colonies Government Act (1850) declared the region of Port Phillip to be a separate colony from New South Wales. The new colony was to be known as Victoria. Self-government could not have come at a more serendipitous time for the nascent colony. The Act came into effect on July 1st 1851. Less than a week later, James Esmond proved to the Geelong Advertiser that he had found gold. The discovery, notable for Esmond’s guarantees that there were expansive tracts of auriferous land around Clunes, close to Ballarat, was published two weeks later and sparked the Victorian gold rush.

The Golden ‘50s: The effect of the gold rush and separation on Melbourne 1851–1861

The gold rush has long been acknowledged as the major catalyst of Melbourne’s growth between 1851–61. Yet, as economic historian James Belich has pointed out, Melbourne’s population was growing at immense pace before the first gold discoveries in July of that year. The gold rush is, therefore, better understood as a phenomenon that accelerated an already existing trend of growth in Victoria. But the rate of acceleration was astounding.

Between 1851 and 1861, the non-indigenous population of Melbourne increased over six hundred percent (see Figure 2.3). The gold rush attracted fortune-seekers from across the world and from a diverse range of backgrounds. The regional cities of Bendigo, Ballarat and Castlemaine (near which the gold camps were based) drew a predominantly young, single, male population, a demographic that is not usually conducive to operatic culture. It would be wrong to assume, however, that these miners were disinterested in opera and high-art culture. Seasons of Italian opera in these gold rush towns were always very successful and the audiences very enthusiastic and generous. Indeed, this was the primary way in which the goldminers themselves aided the metropolis’ operatic culture, for Melbourne-based opera singers continually returned to the regional centres to share their art with the miners.

Accounting for the operatic explosion that occurred in the 1850s in Melbourne itself is more complex. Certainly, the large numbers of single, male miners who passed through Melbourne to do business were hungry for socialisation and entertainment, and the money that, thus, poured into the city made theatre more profitable. However eager these men were to patronise the opera, they were transients. The enthusiasm of these visitors cannot alone explain the establishment of a reliable and vital operatic culture. These visitors created an enormous demand for more businesses, government services, and financial establishments in the city of Melbourne. These needs encouraged other immigrants to come to Victoria, not to mine gold, but to prosper from it nonetheless. It was these merchant and professional settlers that became the champions of Melbourne's embryonic high-art musical culture.

The gold rush, and the political independence that ensured that its spoils remained in Victoria, shaped every facet of Melbourne life, including opera. Yet, unlike other gold towns of the nineteenth century, Melbourne’s fortunes did not wane when gold fever began to subside. Over the coming decades, Melbourne went from strength to strength, and the city’s operatic culture both reflected, and in some ways added to, this.

**Maturing Melbourne 1860–1880**

By the end of the 1850s, Victorian gold production had begun to plateau, and many of the colony’s fortune-seekers forsook Victoria, chasing their gilded dreams on the newly-discovered goldfields of Otago and British Columbia. The exodus was not so large as may have been expected; indeed, significant numbers of goldrushers remained in the colony and Victoria’s population growth and prosperity continued. ¹⁰¹

The colony’s economy evolved from a gold-based economy to one that balanced primary industry with mercantile, social and government sectors. Such fiscal development fostered a demographic maturation. Young women flocked to the colony to become teachers,

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dressmakers, servants and wives, thereby restoring the gender balance. Over the next twenty years, the buccaneers of the golden ‘50s aged and settled: they became urbanised, took up career, married and began families. What had once been a city of young, single men was now a metropolis of children, women, men and retirees. As permanent residents, rather than fortune-seekers, these Melburnians had an interest in developing every aspect of the city, and securing an enduring position on the world stage for the city. This newfound social and economic stability had a profound effect on Melbourne culture, and one of the many beneficiaries was opera, which came to fulfil a number of roles within Victorian society.

For all this stability, however, Melbourne was still a product of its mythology and its migrants. The founders of the 1830s and ‘40s alongside the self-made men and revolutionaries of the gold rush were now mature, experienced men of great stature, wealth and influence, and they set about realising the city’s founding vision. This created a uniquely progressive, even radical, political culture.102 There were the ‘Young Irishers’ such as the colourful Gavan Duffy, a self-described ‘radical reformer’ who ‘began his political career by sponsoring a bill to abolish the property qualification for [Lower House] members’ and later served as Premier from 1871–72.103 Another reformist Premier and 1850s migrant, Glaswegian James McCulloch, was instrumental in forcing the UK Parliament to back down from plans to resume sending convicts to Australian colonies. The Cockney-Londoner Graham Berry dismantled the ‘squattocracy’ in Victoria (whereby 800 men owned almost all the pastoral land in the colony) with his Land Act of 1865.104 The piece of legislation which best demonstrates the liberal-socialist atmosphere of Melbourne at this time is the 1872 Education Act, which was the project of yet another 1850s migrant turned Premier, James Francis. The policy was the first of its kind in the world; it guaranteed free, universal, secular, compulsory primary school education to every child resident in the colony.105 The immense cost of this programme was justified by the ‘common good’: having educated citizens promoted the advancement of Victorian society, bridged class divisions, ensured opportunity for all, and was imperative in the quest for self-government. Moreover, the proscribed secularisation of this education, encouraged plurality and tolerance in a community that was at this time still deeply divided between Catholics and Protestants. The post-gold rush period was, in short, an age in which liberalism and egalitarianism were the prevailing attitudes and values.

Indeed, opportunities and equality were on offer to all—as long as they were European and male. Racism became politicized and enshrined in law during this time and, as will be elaborated upon in Chapter 15, opera—like other cultural artefacts—was manipulated to

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102 A list of the Premiers of Victoria (including an indication of their origins) is attached as Appendix C.
support Western, especially British, hegemony.  

It is worth noting at this point that the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* (and the consequent lack of status of Aboriginal people in Australia) coupled with the influx of immigrants from diverse backgrounds during the gold rush created a different species of cultural war in Melbourne than in Calcutta. Aboriginal Australians were dehumanised and their cultures went unrecognised; they were kept under the protection of the state, which managed not only their health and education, but every aspect of their private lives—where they could go, for whom they could work, the amount they ate and drank, their social lives, their relationships, their arguments, what they spent their wages on etc. Dismissed as uncultured, subhuman heathens, and victims of disease and dispossession, Victorian Aboriginees were not considered to be threats to British settlement or government—that dubious honour was given to the Chinese.

Chinese immigrants had first come to Victoria in the 1840s as indentured labourers, and were generally welcomed as preferable to convict labour, but it was during the 1850s that the greatest migration of Chinese people to Victoria occurred. Sizeable Chinese communities began to be established in Ballarat, Bendigo and Melbourne. As they became more visible in inner-urban areas, the Chinese community was vilified as the other that threatened the fabric of Victorian society.

Women, too, often found themselves maligned. Indeed, when it came to the burgeoning feminist culture of the late-nineteenth century, Melbourne was a city of paradoxes. Melbourne’s radical political climate, combined with the prevailing belief in equality, both of rights and opportunity, gave way to a remarkably advanced feminist culture in Melbourne. It was in Melbourne that women first took up the feminist cause in public, publishing their opinions via *The Argus* in 1869. It was in Melbourne, too, that Australia’s leading suffragettes (Annie Lowe, Henrietta Dugdale and Vida Goldstein) were most active. Their efforts bore some fruit. Women were bestowed financial and educational opportunities from the 1870s, with the University of Melbourne Senate unanimously voting to accept female students in 1872 and married women were granted the right to...

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106 Despite Asian immigration being at its lowest point, the entire Chinese population having fallen from 42,000 in 1859 to 12,000 in 1874, and the continuing strength of the economy, the perception of ‘yellow-peril’ was highest in the 1870s and 1880s, culminating in the Victorian parliament’s refusal to confer citizenship on any new Chinese applicant after 1887. Likewise, the 1870s see the beginning of white control over Indigenous people, after the first Indigenous ‘Protection’ Acts were passed in 1869. The acts divested power to the Governor to manage all facets of an Aboriginal person’s life, including where they lived, when, who and if they could marry, what education and employment they were allowed to undertake, what they could own and even socialisation (such as a ban on liquor). See Geoffrey Blainey, *A history of Victoria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) at p. 52. Parliament of the Colony of Victoria, ‘An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria’, in Parliament of the Colony Of Victoria (ed.), *Aboriginal Protection Act: 33 Victiae Na. 3 [49]* (Melbourne, 1869).


110 ‘This Month’ *The Illustrated Australian News*, May 21st, 1872, Issue 185, p. 110. This source also remarked that ‘during the debate, great encomiums were passed upon the intellectual capacity and steady application of the female students of Victoria,’ with Dr Madden adding that ‘no sufficient reason had been shown why females should be excluded from the educational advantages and corporate privileges of the university.’
own property outright by 1884. Yet, for all its libertarianism, Melbourne was also the city of most resistance. Many quarters openly mocked the idea of women serving as parliamentarians and Victoria was the last Australian colony to grant female suffrage, doing so only in 1908, seven years after Federation.

The mix of freedom and limitation, openness and xenophobia, egalitarianism and division created a culture in which opera served a multiplicity of purposes. Opera came to symbolise Melbourne’s coming of age both as a society and as a metropolis. Yet, whilst Melbourne harnessed opera’s ability to advertise social and geopolitical capital, it did so on its own terms. Rather than serving as a luxury to the plutocracy, opera in Melbourne was a symbol of the education, taste, cultivation and refinement of Melbourne’s population as a whole. Opera was, however, also used as racial propaganda, becoming an emblem of European supremacy during the 1850s and ‘60s when white society was experiencing its first anxieties over ‘Yellow Peril’. In short, the contrasting roles of opera in Melbourne reflected the complexity, confusion, and hypocrisy within Victorian White Australian society.

Marvellous Melbourne: The 1880s

By the 1880s, the transformation from gold-rush community to urban middle-class society was complete. Melbourne, with a population of approximately 275,000 non-indigenous people, was an unusually middle-class society with an unusually progressive polity. Victoria’s parliament was setting international benchmarks for social development and education. These expensive public works and social services were funded by a combination of government and private investment. In 1885, journalist George Augustus Sala coined the epithet ‘Marvellous Melbourne’, a term that came to be used at every opportunity to sell the wonder-story that was Melbourne.

Moreover, Melbourne’s international standing was reaching ever greater heights. It was the largest city in the southern hemisphere and one of the fastest growing cities in the world. The city hosted two International Exhibitions during the 1880s, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors into the burgeoning metropolis. All this led to the city having the desire and ability to support and patronise the arts on an unprecedented scale. An entire generation of Melburnians had grown up with varied, extensive seasons of opera being available every year without fail. Melbourne continued to entice good singers to its own shores, but, most significantly, the city was beginning to produce world-class singers.

The Great Panic: Melbourne in the 1890s

In the early 1890s, the building of public works, the sale of land, and high-risk speculation in the financial sector, all of which had been the foundation of Victoria’s economic boom in the 1880s, began to slow. Melbourne’s economy had long been fuelled by large-scale

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112 For discussion of the evolution of the epithet see James Button, 'He Came, He Saw, He Marvelled', The Age, January 10, 2004.
infrastructure projects, such as the railways and inner-city buildings, which had a natural endpoint once demand was filled. The economy had also been plagued by an excessive reliance upon foreign investment and importation, both of which created a trade imbalance and made Victoria extremely vulnerable to downturns in the world markets. In 1891, an oversupply of property combined with infrastructure that outstripped need, caused land values to plummet. The next year saw 133 companies go into receivership. The crash of property and commercial ventures undermined the confidence of the foreign investors who had for forty years thought of Melbourne and Victoria as a high-return, fail-safe investment bonanza. Lack of investor and consumer confidence combined with economic difficulties in North America and Europe saw banks and stocks fall and then fail. By 1893 the Federal Bank had collapsed, and all banks were forced to temporarily suspended trading.

This collapse had two effects on the city’s culture, both of which impacted Melbourne’s operatic culture. Firstly, it curbed financial extravagance. As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 12, men and women who traditionally performed in or managed opera companies concentrated their efforts in less financially risky ventures, such as concerts and music comedy. Although no quite so ‘Marvellous’, the city continued to be the shining city of the colonial empire, being aided by the Greater Britain emphasis of contemporary attitudes to empire. It was also still the greatest, wealthiest and most influential city on the Australian continent—Melbourne, for example, was the first capital city of the newly-federated nation of Australia in 1901. This reserve of cultural capital, alongside Melbourne’s enduring thirst for opera and music, ensured that even during these difficult times, there was an abundance of operatic culture in Melbourne, albeit in a different form.

This section has described the geopolitical, demographic and economic evolution of the two cities of this study: Calcutta and Melbourne. It showed how these cities’ reputations and fortunes were shaped by ideas of Empire, their economic relationships to Britain, their colonial model, regional politics, their own unique mythologies and political values, the nature of their internal race relations, and many other factors besides. The section also touched on the nexus between the city and opera. The following section will evaluate this relationship, explaining how and why empire, colonialism, metropolitanism, culture and opera intersected so successfully.

**Empire, metropolis and opera**

As an ideology, an economic-political structure, and a geographical reality the apparatus of ‘empire’ creates unique cultures wherever it has influence. Yet, the apparatus of empire is also a product of the culture that animates it. The same can be said of opera: it is simultaneously a reflection of its context and a force that can be used to shape that context. If the context is imperial, then opera and empire exert varying degrees of pressure upon each other. The society that advocates for empire will use opera to advance its cause;

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113Rohan Price, ""In bramble of chicanery belated justice stands": Early Judicial Interpretations of the Factories and Shops Act 1896 (Vic), *Labour History* (96, 2009).
in turn, this society becomes dependent upon opera, and will therefore use its social, political and economic structure to support opera.

Hence, when empire as a concept, and a city in particular, was on the rise, opera thrived (Calcutta 1833–45, Calcutta 1865–75, Melbourne 1851–1893). At those times when the empire or its cities were under duress, (Calcutta 1845–65; Melbourne 1893–1901) opera adapted to this new cultural habitat by appearing in different guises. When the empire model, or a part of the empire, was in decline (Calcutta 1875-1900), operatic culture, too, collapsed. Due to opera’s ability to advertise the increasing (or decreasing) wealth, stability, geopolitical importance, education, etc of both the collective society and the individual, opera broadcast and amplified the fluctuations that occurred within the cities and the empire.

As this study will show, opera and empire are promoted and injured by the same factors. The circumstances that exert the greatest influence upon opera and/or empire are not necessarily the phenomena with which they are traditionally associated. Both opera and imperialism often conjure ideas of elitism and stratification, alongside the notion that without such social constructs both cultural institutions collapse. This thesis challenges that notion. For all the debate to the contrary, opera is an art-form that thrives in societies where liberalism, education and egalitarianism create both an interest in opera and the means to translate this interest into patronage. Consider the genre’s history: opera may have been created for the elites of Florence and Paris, but it has always done best when it enjoyed middle-class patronage (from seventeenth century Venice, to eighteenth century London, to nineteenth century Paris and New York). It relies upon its historical aura of exclusivity to entice the elites to remain patrons, and to encourage the aspirational bourgeoisie to emulate them. The same is true of empire. Whilst elitism and stratification are necessary to establishing an imperial socio-political model, if the strata become too rigid, resistance and rebellion ultimately result.

The symbiotic relationship between opera and empire is intersected by another Western socio-political ideal: the metropolis. The metropolis is a concept steeped in ideas of imperialism; the Classical Greeks coined the term to denote the mother city-state of an empire. The Portuguese and Spanish empires of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries also conceptualised ‘the metropolis’ with relation to empire. 115 By the early nineteenth century the word had acquired another meaning—that of a ‘world-city’ (that is a city whose society, culture, economy and politics had international significance). Paris and London were deemed ‘metropolises’ as were Vienna, Amsterdam, Boston, and, after a time, New York.

In England, ‘The Metropolis’ stood for London (as evinced in anachronisms like the Metropolitan Police), 116 a usage that merged the term’s international and imperial senses. London as the seat of the British Empire fused with the idea of London as a world city. Cities across the empire modelling themselves on the parent culture were, in effect, emulating both the motherland and modern metropolitanism. Metropolitan values such as education, government, society, culture, arts, commerce, industry became yardsticks of

116 Ibid.
Englishness. Thus, just as the British capital was a world capital, the British Empire became a ‘world-empire’.

Given the importance of opera to London’s cultural authority, and London’s importance to both global opera culture and the British Empire, opera, metropolitanism, and empire were natural bedfellows. As the head of Britain and her ever-growing empire, London came to stand symbolise British high-culture; hence its metropolitanism became part of British identity and culture. Imperial cities found that the status of world-city and successful resemblance to the parent culture largely required the same things. The reliance of opera upon a vibrant commercial sector, stable demography, widespread education, leisure time, progressive governance and other middle-class traits and values made it the symbol par excellence of both metropolitanism and imperialism. It is for this reason that opera was so ubiquitous amongst Britain’s colonial cities, and that an evaluation of opera reveals so much about its context.

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PART TWO

Part Two of this thesis provides a detailed account of Calcutta’s operatic culture. It does not aim to be an exhaustive account of opera in the capital city of British India; rather, the following chapters distil and evaluate the most salient events and aspects in the trajectory of Calcutta’s operatic cultures, with specific emphasis always being placed on opera’s imperial, metropolitan, and social context. Chapter 3 describes Calcutta’s musical beginnings from the establishment of the city in the late seventeenth century, to the first period of opera in the 1830s and ‘40s, emphasising the relationship between these musico-cultural developments and the political, economic, social and intellectual reforms occurring in British (and Western) society throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Chapter 4 evaluates White Town’s attitudes towards the culture created by the first four opera companies that visited Calcutta, with particular focus on the role that that community bestowed upon opera. Chapter 5 tests some of the central claims of this thesis—that opera reflects its broader context; and that there exists a permanent connection between Britain, its culture and its colonists, even in the furthest reaches of the Empire—by examining opera in Calcutta during a period when, ostensibly, there was no opera, between 1844–65. Together, Chapters 6 and 7, ‘Opera’s Indian Summer’ and ‘Trouble in Paradise’ focus on the role of opera during Calcutta’s halcyon days, showing first how opera rose, and then how it fell. Whilst these chapters provide some detail about the seasons and performances of this most rich era of Calcutta’s operatic history, the emphasis, as ever, rests on the interconnectivity between society, empire and opera. The final chapter of this section, Chapter 8 ‘The Long Farewell’, will show that opera mirrored its host city’s drawn-out collapse and conclude by offering explanation of opera (and Calcutta’s) fate.
Chapter 3: Music in Calcutta and the beginnings of opera, 1690–1844

This chapter gives an outline of music, particularly opera, from the arrival of the British in Calcutta from 1690 to the middle of the nineteenth century. It describes the musical activities of the Europeans living in Calcutta, illustrating the diversity of musical activity that occurred at different points in time and tracing the development of the city’s musical culture from early British settlement to the arrival of the first wave of opera companies in the 1830s and ‘40s. Such an account will reveal how changes in British law, demography and economic activity influenced the type, scale, formality and frequency of musical activities in Calcutta.

Music under the East-India Company: 1690–1813

Scholars such as Ian Woodfield, Richard Leppert, Raymond Head, and Martin Clayton have been at the forefront of research into Anglo-Indian musical life during the eighteenth century. Their works are both varied and thorough enough to render redundant any attempt by this thesis to provide a detailed examination of the Anglo-Indian musical culture in the late 1700s. This section will synthesise the main points of this body of research, adding further original research where relevant, in order to establish an understanding of the culture from which Calcutta’s nineteenth-century operatic culture sprang.

During the eighteenth century, Anglo-Indian musical culture was almost entirely the province of amateurs and military bands. In *Music and the Raj*, Woodfield estimated that between forty and sixty keyboard instruments were imported into British India each year in the late-eighteenth century along with a number of smaller instruments such as flutes, violins, and horns, all of which were for amateur use. Leppert’s examination of artistic depictions of eighteenth-century Anglo-Indian homes reveals that rarer instruments, such as harps, were also present. Despite the quantity and diversity of musical instruments arriving each year in British India, Woodfield estimates that only ten percent of Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian population owned a musical instrument. This statistic demonstrates both the difficulty of maintaining instruments in Calcutta’s hot and wet climate, as well as the passionate nature of Calcutta’s small group of music lovers, who replaced their instruments almost every year.

Calcutta’s musical amateurs were engaged in innumerable activities; women practised, learned and entertained in private spheres, whilst men rehearsed and performed in both private and public settings. Some were interested not only in transplanting British culture to India, but also in familiarising themselves with Indian music. From the 1780s, there was a fashion for ‘Hindostannie airs’ in Calcutta, most of which were collected and performed by women. In his two 1994 articles, Woodfield examined both the socio-cultural context and reception of these airs, as well as the musico-cultural and proto-ethnomusicological issues which the process of transcription posed. These first forays by the British expatriates into understanding Indian music formed the basis for much early research and critique by British scholars into Indian and Asian musics.

With respect to European music, Anglo-Indians created a musical milieu filled with surprising juxtapositions of modernity and conservatism. Some, like the nabob Joseph Fowkes, deplored the fashionable contemporary musical style of composers such as Haydn, whom he described as ‘the Prince of Coxcombs’, instead championing the Baroque works of Handel and Corelli. Others, however, championed the Rococo and Classical styles; and Haydn, J.C. Bach, Stamitz, and Grétry were among the composers regularly performed in Calcutta. Anglo-Indians bought newly-published sheet music and eagerly awaited news from Europe about the latest musical trends. Indeed, in 1784 (a time when the instrument was still new in Vienna), the Anglo-Indians were importers and experimenters of the clarinet. By 1797, there was a sufficient number of skilled amateurs and a wide enough range of instruments in Calcutta for the British community to mount a surprisingly monumental performance of Handel’s Messiah.

Besides the amateurs and the regimental bands of the British military, there only were a handful of professional musicians. The first attempt to introduce professional music to Calcutta was made by Calcutta’s first Governor and Commander-in-Chief, Robert Clive. After having reclaimed Calcutta, conquered vast tracts of Indian land, and having established British Rule on the subcontinent, Clive must have regarded the importation of four musicians as straightforward. The challenge of bringing professional Western musicians to Calcutta, however, proved too great a task even for the far-famed ‘Clive of India’. In 1764, Clive set sail from London to Calcutta with four musicians. En route, the ship was obliged to stopover at Rio de Janeiro for two months. The Portuguese city soon became the scene of a terrible row when Clive discovered that his musicians planned to

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125 Ibid., p. 551.
127 For further information regarding this performance see Chapter 13.
desert him. Clive charged the Brazilian Viceroy, Antônio Álvares da Cunha, with personally having ‘enticed his musicians away for the Rio opera’, and a diplomatic crisis soon ensued. Da Cunha denied any such musical subterfuge. He was most likely being honest: given Calcutta’s reputation for disease, insurrection, intolerable weather, the unpleasant sea voyage conditions, and the distances (both physical and emotional) between Europe and Calcutta, it is unlikely that Clive’s musicians would have needed much ‘enticing’ to abandon Clive for the relative comforts of eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.

Such disincentives, coupled with the EIC’s migratory restrictions, kept both musicians and the audiences needed to support them away from Calcutta for a long time. Thus, until the nineteenth century, European musical culture in Calcutta remained the preserve of the amateur and European musical life was furnished by domestic music-making, private soirées, gentlemen’s catch clubs, and a handful of public professional-amateur concerts. The demographic, social, economic, and political impact of the Charter Reform Acts of 1813 and 1833, however, had immediate and concrete effects on Western music and European opera in Calcutta.

In transition: Musical life in Calcutta during the Charter Reforms, 1813–1833

Although Calcutta boasted of its first European theatre (the Calcutta Theatre, see Figure 3.1) as early as 1775, performances were rare, mostly amateur, and the theatre had fallen out of operation by the end of the eighteenth century. It was not until 1813, the year in which the relaxed migratory framework was first trialled, that Calcutta’s first professional European theatre, the Chowringhee Theatre (see Figure 3.2), was built. The simultaneity of the theatre’s construction and Calcutta’s changing economy and demographic is no mere coincidence, for it was the changing attitude to empire, and the consequent shifts in politics and society that made the theatre a viable business venture for the first time in Calcutta. According to Dhrubajyoti Banerjea, the Chowringhee Theatre became a hub of social activity ‘for Calcutta’s elite would gather here every evening for gossip and drinks, whether there was a performance on the bills or not.’ Indeed, the fact that the erection of the Chowringhee preceded the establishment of that other, more famous bastion of British Culture and Imperialism in Calcutta, the Bengal Club, by fourteen years points to the importance of theatre and music in Anglo-Indian identity.

129 Ibid., p. 210
130 Ibid.
133 Banerjea, European Calcutta: Images and Recollections, p. 240.
134 Ibid.
Figure 3.1: Calcutta Theatre (large building in the centre-left background), 1786.136

Figure 3.2: Chowringhee Theatre, Calcutta, 1833.137

136 Detail from Thomas Daniell, 'Old Fort, Playhouse and Holwell's Monument', (Calcutta: British Library Shelfmark: P88, 1786), Aquatint with etching, coloured.

For the first twenty years, the Chowringhee Theatre presented dramatic repertoire, with music taking an incidental role. By the 1820s, however, the theatre had a modest orchestra of professional musicians. Led by Frenchman Delmar, the band consisted of a handful of violinists, one double bass, two celli, two bassoons, two flutes, two clarinets, two horns, two trumpets and a set of timpani. The orchestra was certainly kept busy: each year over Rs. 500 worth of sheet music was imported from England. The music appears to have been limited to incidental music for the theatre’s dramatic performances, which included many Shakespeare plays, rather than the scores of any music-theatre or opera works.

Apart from providing musical accompaniment to the drama, the band also performed in between acts, and supported the occasional soloists who ventured to Calcutta, such as the German violinist Scheitelberger. The most prestigious musician to come to Calcutta was undoubtedly the Danish pianist David Gottfried Matrin Kuhlau (the brother of composer Friedrich Kuhlau), who stayed in Calcutta and became the city’s most respected teacher and musical director. By 1828, Calcutta was furnished with a dozen professional orchestral musicians, nine professional non-orchestral musicians Calcutta and two musical instrument repairers/makers in Bengal.

In 1823, the British journal *The Harmonicon* discussed the presence of several professional singers in Calcutta: Mr. Wilson (who was also the lessee of the Chowringhee Theatre), Mr and Mrs Bianchi-Lacy, Mrs Cooke, Mrs Kelly and Miss Williams). The Bianchi-Lacys were favourites of the court at Windsor Palace and quite accomplished singers. Jane Bianchi-Lacy (née Jackson 1776–1858) was a soprano who had appeared at the Concert of Ancient Music in 1798. After marrying Italian composer Francesco Bianchi, she performed at the King’s Theatre, where she was at first thought to be a pleasing performer despite her inferior voice. By 1815, she had made vocal improvements and some even judged her to be ‘one of the finest Handelian singers of her day’. Accompanied by her second husband, John Lacy, Jane Bianchi-Lacy arrived in 1818 and although there was not an abundance of performance work in Calcutta, there was evidently enough to keep the Bianchi-Lacys occupied, for the couple remained in the city for eight years.

Apart from the songs and overtures mixed into Calcutta’s dramatic life, there was the occasional concert, in which a mixture of professional and amateur performers would perform a diverse range of music, such as airs from English ballad operas (Bishop’s works being perennial favourites), oratorio works, glees and catches, Hindostannie airs, and

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140 Ibid., at p. 111.
143 Like their colleagues, the Bianchi-Lacys likely drew the majority of their income from teaching, where they could earn between Rs.8 and Rs.16 per lesson. See W. H. Hamerton, 'Minutes from the Chowringhee Theatre Meeting'.
Scotch, Irish or English ballads. Some scholars have claimed that in 1831 there was a production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*; these claims, however, cannot be substantiated by any extant primary source. The closest that Calcutta may have come to an operatic performance was a production of Davy’s ‘operatic play’ *Rob Roy* (1800) some time between 1828 and 1832. How much of the vocal music was performed cannot be confirmed. The earliest verifiable performance of an operatic work occurred in February 1833, when a professional-amateur association mounted a single scene from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. The scene chosen was the Commendatore coming to dine with Don Giovanni (taken by church organist, William Linton), a scene that features only three male singers. Despite its limitations, the event was evidently the highlight of the Calcutta winter season, being much talked of at the time, and remembered for several years to come.

The enthusiasm shown by White Town for this performance is very likely to have reached the ears of a small opera troupe then stationed in Macau. The troupe’s conductor was the brother-in-law of Santiago Massoni, a virtuoso violinist currently enjoying success in Calcutta, who was currently acting as the director of the Chowringhee Theatre’s orchestra.

These singers would also have been aware of the recent relaxation of British India’s migratory laws (as enacted by the 1832 Charter Reform Act) and of the transition of Indian administration to Crown rule. As described in Chapter Two, the relaxation of migration laws, coupled with the EIC’s demise, created an environment in which an operatic culture was at least plausible. Calcutta did not have to wait long before melody began to flow.

**The Dawn of a New Era: Opera in Calcutta 1833–45**

With the doors to Calcutta suddenly flung open, and an increase in trade, wealth and imperial activity in the Asia-Pacific region, it is perhaps unsurprising that after the long operatic famine there was now a feast. Between 1833 and 1845, not one but four opera companies came to Calcutta, and, indeed, for some of that time these companies’ visits overlapped. This section will detail the composition and repertoire of each of these companies.

**Company 1: The Pizzoni-Bettali Company**

The first of the opera companies to reach Calcutta, doing so in December 1833, featured a mix of Italian, Spanish, and South American musicians. In Calcutta, the company styled itself as the Italian Musical Society, but had previously appeared in Macao, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Peru under the name of the Pizzoni-Bettali Italian Opera Company.  

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144 From 1826, the dramatic star was Mrs. Esther Leach, who may have also run a millinery and ladies’ dressmaking business on the side. With the arrival of Italian opera, Leach begun to move to more lyric performance, though she was, until her death onstage in 1849, first and foremost, an actress.


146 The 1831 Chowringhee Theatre’s shareholders meeting mentions no such opera performance, only eight plays and three benefits. See W. H. Hamerton, ‘Minutes from the Chowringhee Theatre Meeting’.


Company. The troupe comprised of four principal singers, Teresa Schieroni (mezzo-soprano), Margherita Caravaglia (contralto), Domingo Pizzoni (baritone), and Giacomo/Joaquin Bettali (baritone). There were also two secondary singers, Giuseppe Mayorga (bass) and Signor Garate (baritone and chorus master), an unspecified number of instrumentalists, and the Uruguayan-born Louis-Théophile Planel, who acted as violinist, pianist, conductor and composer. For an in-depth discussion of this company, its previous exploits and the professional backgrounds of the artists please see Appendix D.

The company arrived in Calcutta in December 1833, and between that time and late April 1836, when the company dissolved, the company presented seventeen operas, as detailed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Repertoire presented by the Italian Musical Society, Calcutta 1834-36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auber</td>
<td>Masaniello (1828)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherubini</td>
<td>La Lodovica (1791)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercadante</td>
<td>Elibia e Claudio (1821)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicolini (pastiche attributed to Nicolini)</td>
<td><em>Baccanali di Roma</em> (1801 — in reality pastiche arranged by company)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacr</td>
<td>Agnese (1809)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Rossini (including pastiche attributed to Rossini) | *Adelaide di Borgogna* (1817 — in reality pastiche arranged by company)*  
| | *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1816)  
| | *La Cenerentola* (1817)  
| | *Edoardo e Cristina* (1819)  
| | *La Gazza Ladra* (1817)  
| | *L’Inganno Felice* (1812)  
| | *L’Italiana in Algeri* (1813)  
| | *Otello* (1816)  
| | *Semiramide* (1823)  
| | *Tancredi* (1813)  
| | *II Turco in Italia* (1814)  
| Spanish Tonadilla | *El Contrabandista* (n.d.)*† |

**TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKS** 17 works

* Further discussion of the nature of these company-composed pastiches is contained in the forthcoming article, ‘Composing for Calcutta’. † Note this is neither the song by Yradier, nor the opera buffa by Basili, both of which post-date this work. *El contrabandista* appears to be a tonadilla that the company had learned and performed in Latin America.

The above table shows the reliance of this company on the works of Rossini. Despite the fact that by the mid-1830s Meyerbeer, Bellini and Donizetti had all become recognised masters of the Italian stage, the company’s repertoire does not feature a single work by these composers. In this regard, the Pizzoni-Bettali company was somewhat old-fashioned, representing the operatic repertoire of the early-1820s rather than the mid-1830s. Yet, it should be noted that Rossini continued to dominate the repertoire of Europe’s premier opera houses, and therefore, the troupe was not entirely anachronistic.

Calcutta could have been the scene of the troupe’s greatest triumphs, but instead the company was plagued by both internal and external troubles. Caravaglia, whose health had been fragile even as she arrived in Calcutta, was by mid-1835 too ill to work. She retired
and attempted to return to Italy, but sadly died en route to Europe on June 1st 1835.\textsuperscript{150} Moreover, Calcutta’s resident performers were initially hostile to the company, which made the artists’ first few months in the city quite difficult. As soon as relations between the Italian Musical Society and Calcutta’s long-term professional musicians began to thaw, another opera company arrived in Calcutta, which threatened to spread the city’s opera patronage so thin as to be insufficient to all.

**Company 2: The Nouveau French Opera Company**

The Nouveau Company arrived hot on the heels of the Italians in March 1834, likely having come from Batavia.\textsuperscript{151} The Company featured six singers: Messieurs Waleski, Nouveau and Minard, Mesdemoiselles Flore and Nouveau, Madame Isidore; and a dancer, Madame Nouveau. The French troupe presented both operatic and vaudeville works. Besides their own work, members of the Nouveau company were often invited to perform alongside the Italians and the English artists, which improved the quality of both the opera and the drama in Calcutta. Like their Italian colleagues, the Nouveau Company did not depart Calcutta, but rather disbanded. Some members left its shores, whilst other remained behind. The Nouveaus had already had at least one child, a daughter Augustine Fanny, in Calcutta,\textsuperscript{152} and remained in the city, continuing to teach singing, French and dancing to the men, women, and girls of White Town.\textsuperscript{153} Mlle Nouveau continued to be an active member of the Calcutta community, singing in soirées and concerts well into the 1840s. Waleski retired from the stage to take up a career in the Calcutta police force.\textsuperscript{154} Bertrand Nouveau died in Bengal in 1839, at the age of only thirty-one.\textsuperscript{155} Minard eventually returned to Calcutta, as part of the Compagnie Française. Of Mlle Flore and Madame Isidore there is no further trace.

**Company 3: Thonon’s French Troupe**

The third troupe to arrive in Calcutta was larger than either of its predecessors. It boasted twelve singers, who between them possessed a better balance of voices than either the Nouveau French Company or the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe (see Table 3.2).

\textsuperscript{150} ‘Signora Caravaglia’, *Bengal Hurkarn*, November 4\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{151} This is a supposition based upon several factors. Firstly, the company did not advertise itself as having come from Europe. Secondly, there is no record of this company in nearby Mauritius. Thirdly, Batavia is known to have hosted several French opera troupes during the 1830s–1860s.

\textsuperscript{152} ‘Augustine Fanny Nouveau’, *The Bengal Obituary: or, a record to perpetuate the memory of departed worth* (Calcutta, Holmes and Co., 1851), p. 315.

\textsuperscript{153} The fact that men were taught singing and dancing by these French artists is very interesting. For evidence see ‘Theatricals - Masaniello’, *Calcutta Monthly Journal and General Register*, 1837, pp. 181–83.


Table 3.2: Members of the Thonon French Opera Company, Calcutta 1836–37

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mlle. Léméry</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame de Ligny</td>
<td>Mezzo Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Thonon</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mlle. Fleury</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Charles</td>
<td>Mezzo Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Bonniol</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Fleury</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Welter</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Fradin</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Sivord</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Charles</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Alphonse</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mons. Thonon</td>
<td>Leader of the Band and Director of the Orchestra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The company came to Calcutta from Mauritius,\(^{156}\) where it had performed to small but select audiences. Its time in Mauritius coincided with the stopover of Charles Darwin who noted the surprisingly high quality of the company’s singers.\(^{157}\) Like the Mauritians before them, Calcutta’s residents were impressed by the vocal and dramatic talent of the company’s singers. The prima donna, Léméry, was said to have a ‘clear and glassy soprano’,\(^{158}\) with the unusual combination of power and flexibility,\(^{159}\) whilst her acting skills were thought superior to those of many singers back in Europe, particularly in comedy.\(^{160}\) Léméry’s comprimarie, Thonon, de Ligny, and Fleury, were also strong performers. When they were not required as principals, these women sang in the chorus, a policy partly responsible for the (relatively) superior quality of the Thonon Company’s choral scenes.

The tenor, Bonniol, was, perhaps, the weakest member of the company. Although he was described as an able musician,\(^{161}\) and he was always effective as a vocalist, his acting was often described as ‘indifferent’,\(^{162}\) and, as the principal tenor, this defect had quite an adverse effect on some scenes, especially when contrasted against the histrionic talents of Léméry as leading lady.

Monsieur Fleury was in some ways Bonniol’s opposite. He was always very vivacious and engaging, conscientious and well-rehearsed, but his vocal technique was poor. His Figaro (Le Barbier de Seville) was a triumph of characterisation, but the disjunct between his vocal

\(^{157}\) Auguste Toussaint and Patrick Joseph Barnwell, A Short History of Mauritius (Port Louis: Longmans and Green, for the Government of Mauritius, 1949), p 154.
\(^{160}\) Ibid.
registers, and the unpleasant ‘screech’ of his falsetto ‘made people stare not a little’. His effort and energy, however, were enough to win him the affection of the Calcutta audiences, who regarded his vivid and charismatic impersonations of Raimbaud (Robert le Diable) and Zampa (Zampa) as amongst the finest dramatic performances heretofore seen in the city.

Welter, on the other hand, left his audience in transports of delight. He was ‘pure in method, refined in taste and with a voice at once rich and soft, as crimson velvet’, his bass voice was ‘an invocation’ of celestial beauty, and its cessation was ‘a positive privation’. No better indicator of his success in Calcutta can be supplied than the sole critique he earned, which is so trivial as to be inconsequential. During his stay in Calcutta, the only chastisement that could be levelled at Welter was that he sang Kaspar’s aria in Der Freischütz sitting down instead of standing. Quel horreur!

The singers were supported by a strong musical director, Thonon. He was thought the equal of the Italian company’s Planèl and superior to any other Calcutta musician, described as having the ‘magic touch’. Such a sizeable and versatile cast, alongside a knowledgeable conductor, was able to perform a remarkably varied and large repertoire. It was the troupe’s habit to present one opera and one vaudeville per performance. A list of the former is shown in Table 3.3; the vaudevilles included d’Artois’ Angeline, ou le Champenois, Scribe’s Vatel, and Mélésville’s Le Philtre Champenois.

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163 Ibid.
Table 3.3: Repertoire of the Thonon French Opera Company, Calcutta 1836–37.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Le Chalet (1834)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Attignant</td>
<td>Le Rossignol (1756)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Auber   | Fra Diavolo (1830)  
|         | Le Maçon (1825)  
|         | Le Muette di Portici (1828) |
| Boieldieu | Le Calife de Bagdad (1800)  
|          | La Dame Blanche (1825)  
|          | La Nouveau Seigneur de Village (1813)  
|          | Jean de Paris (1812)  
|          | Le Petit Chapron Rouge (1818) |
| Dalayrac | Maison a vendre (1800) |
| Devienne | Les Visitadines (1792) |
| Hérold  | Zampa (1831) |
| Meyerbeer | Robert le Diable (1831) |
| Paër    | Le Maître du Chappelle (1821) |
| Pastiches  | Les Folies Amoureuses (created by Castil-Blaze, 1824) |
|          | La Italiane en Algiers (created by company) |
|          | La Lodoiska (based on the Cherubini, but a pastiche first performed in Drury Lane in 1801, consisting of many composers’ works) |
| Rossini | Le Barbier de Séville (1816) |
| Weber   | Der Freischütz (1821) |

| TOTAL WORKS | 20 works |

The company’s repertoire is interesting both for its overall diversity. Pastiches sat alongside unadulterated masterpieces. Sizeable, serious works such as Le Muette di Portici and Der Freischütz were balanced by lighter, comic works like Le Maître du Chappelle and Le Chalet. Old favourites from the eighteenth century (consider Le Rossignol and Le Calife de Bagdad) alternated with works that came to define the modern French ‘Grand Opera’ genre (Zampa and Robert le Diable). The company appears to have been as successful at one end of the spectrum as the other. This versatility, alongside many other characteristics of the troupe, made the Thonon Opera Company undeniably the best company to come to Calcutta until the 1860s.

**Company 4: La Companie Française de Batavie**

The last opera company to come to Calcutta in this period was the Companie Française. It arrived very late in 1843, having come from Batavia, where it had been performing for some months. It appears that the company had been invited to come by Leon Jamé, a professional musician based in Calcutta.

The troupe was neither so large nor so impressive as those it succeeded. It featured only seven singers, Mme and M. Guillenet, Mme and M. Minard, Mme Charles, M. Alphonse, and Clarisse Cailly, of whom only Cailly was of any particular merit. It is noteworthy that two of the seven singers, Minard and Alphonse, were familiar to Calcutta’s audience, having previously appeared with other French opera troupes.
Upon its arrival, the troupe was managed by a Madame Baxter, who quickly arranged for the company to take the lease of Calcutta’s new theatre, the Sans Souci. Baxter’s management was a complete fiasco; she repeatedly scheduled performances on evenings when Calcutta’s beau monde was already engaged, and had much difficulty due to her poor knowledge of French. Baxter’s mismanagement undermined the ability of the company to succeed in Calcutta, and the majority of the troupe left Calcutta as soon as possible, giving its final performance in mid-March 1844. Of the troupe of seven, only Cailly chose to stay on in Calcutta; she left the following year.

Despite the short duration of its stay, the company was able to perform a surprising variety of repertoire, including La Dame Blanche (Boïeldieu), Lucie de Lammermoor (Donizetti), Fra Diavolo and L’Ambassadrice (both by Auber), L’eau Merveilleuse (Grisar), Le Chalet (Adam), as well as significant portions of Norma (Bellini), Les Huguenots (Meyerbeer), and Le Couronne des Diamantes (Auber).

The repertoire was mostly chosen in order to best display the talents of the troupe’s young Belgian prima donna, Clarisse Cailly. Although light, very high, and somewhat thin, her voice was quite beautiful, and, as is typical of high small voices, Cailly had an impressive command of fioratura technique. She was also a strong actress. By virtue of her dramatic gifts and her physical attractiveness, Cailly made particularly good impressions in the roles of Lucie and Norma. Following the departure of her colleagues, Cailly performed at nearly every public concert in Calcutta for a year, boosting the profile of French repertoire amongst a sea of British ballads and Italian arias with performances of innumerable arias by Meyerbeer, Halévy, Auber and Boïeldieu.

Over the course of ten years, four companies (three French and one Italian) arrived on the banks of the Hoogly River, performing countless operas, operatic vaudeville, and pastiches in a city which had hitherto seen only one, amateur performance of a single operatic scene. The operatic flood coincided with a shift in White Town’s composition and raison d’être. The following chapter will explore the role that opera played in White Town’s during this period, arguing that the city’s new citizenry and purpose shaped, and was shaped by, the activities and mere presence of these opera troupes.

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172 The Chowringhee Theatre had burned down on May 31st 1839, and Esther Leach, with generous donations from Lord Auckland and Dwarakanath Tagore and other Calcutta residents, built the Sans Souci theatre on the site presently occupied by St Xavier’s College. For more information see Hemendra Nath Das Gupta, The Indian stage (New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2002).


Chapter 4: Opera and society in early-Victorian Calcutta

This chapter is concerned with the intersection of society and opera in early-Victorian Calcutta. Although a reception studies methodology is sometimes called upon to illustrate particular attitudes and values held by opera’s patrons, this chapter is not an attempt at a reception history of the four companies then active in the city. Instead, this evaluates the roles that opera played, and was expected to play, in 1830s and 1840s Calcutta and connects these to the wider colonial project then being undertaken in British India. The chapter is in three sections. The first section, ‘Patronage’ begins by identifying who amongst Calcutta’s early-Victorian population patronised the opera, before focussing on the relationship between the Opera House and Government House in order to illustrate the various motivations behind opera attendance amongst White Town’s beau monde. The second section analyses the roles that White Town ascribed to opera and how these roles manifested. The final section assesses the impact that patronage, attitudes towards opera and the wider social, political and economic context had upon the success of opera in Calcutta.

Patronage

As previous chapters have explained, the Charter Reform Act of 1832 resulted in an influx of people who previously had been discouraged or barred from migrating to British India. Despite this influx, Calcutta’s European population remained comparatively low. In 1837, the British population of Calcutta and its suburbs stood at 3,138 persons (1,953 men and 1,185 women). There were, additionally, small populations of Portuguese, French and Prussian people, raising the total European population to 6,488.

This was a very small population to establish an operatic culture; consider that for the Chowringhee Theatre (which had a capacity of approximately six hundred) to be filled, more than twenty percent of the city’s British population (and more than ten percent of the wider European population) would have to be in attendance. No city in the world, in either the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first centuries, has ever furnished an opera house with ten to twenty percent of its total population twice a week. In light of Calcutta’s small European population, the British in 1830s and ‘40s Calcutta may be regarded as prolific supporters of opera: eight percent were subscribers who patronised the opera at

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178 Ibid.
179 Even modern sporting competitions do not compete with this. Australia’s most popular sport to attend is Australian Rules Football. Yet only 5.152% of the Australian population aged 15 years attended Australian Rules games regularly in 2009. Australian Bureau of Statistics, ‘Spectator Attendance at Sporting Events, 2009-10’, (Catalogue Number 4174.0; Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010).
least once a week, and there were many occasions when the city filled the Chowringhee Theatre.

**Opera and the beau monde**

Of those who regularly patronised the opera, the overwhelming majority were White Town's most wealthy and influential residents: the beau monde. Composed mostly of British expatriates, but also including French, Greek, Portuguese, Dutch and other European minorities, the beau monde was at the apex of Calcutta’s highly stratified and rigid social hierarchy. The men of this group were employed as senior civil servants, occupied the top ranks of the military, or were among the more wealthy class of merchants and engineers. As the imperial project progressed, these men were increasingly accompanied by wives, sisters and daughters.

The assertion that opera audiences were drawn almost exclusively from this section of the community is evinced by attendance patterns. Audiences tended to be either very numerous, even crowded, or embarrassingly scant, suggesting that people were attending the opera congregationally, rather than as individuals. Meagre audiences always coincided with other events in the social calendar of Calcutta's elite: on evenings when an eminent family hosted a party, or a gentlemen’s organisation (such as the Trades Association) held a function, the opera was invariably poorly attended.

The synonymity of the beau monde and the opera audience, and the detrimental effect that the parties of the former could have on the latter, was apparent from the beginning. Indeed, opera’s most vociferous supporters were not afraid to publicly reprimand a Calcutta hostess who scheduled a soirée or a burra khana[^180] on an opera evening, claiming that such an act was careless and ‘uncharitable to our foreign visitors.’[^181] Following several such chastisements, many White Towners (eager to avoid reputations as thoughtless philistines) took care to reschedule parties or include opera as part of the social evening. Hence, an opera might open before a poor audience, but by the end of the night, the company might find itself bowing to a full house, for the guests of a particularly illustrious gathering had appeared halfway through the performance. This was often the case when Governor-General and Lady Bentinck hosted dinners and assembly balls at Government House.[^182]

This is not to say, however, that Calcutta’s opera audiences consisted solely of the wealthy and fashionable members of White Town. On the occasions when Calcutta’s elite were disinclined to attend the opera, or were otherwise engaged, the opera still had patrons, albeit in smaller numbers. Some of these less-exalted audience members went on their own accord, and on their own money, out of a passion for opera or a desire to be entertained. Others were gifted tickets by their betters who could (or would) not attend. Governor-General Eden, for example, often sent his English servants out to concerts or operas at his own expense, in order to alleviate their ‘shockingly dull life.’[^183]

[^180]: A burra khana (lit. ‘big dinner’) was a lavish feast or banquet given in impeccable Anglo-Indian style.
class patrons often considered themselves to be more authentic opera-lovers than the their social betters. This may be true to an extent, for in such a rigid social structure, opera attendance offered very little social benefit for the working classes. Yet, the fact that a royal gala evening, or a visit from a foreign dignitary to the opera, could attract a crowded theatre, with patrons from every walk of life, suggests that some middle and working class operagoers found satisfaction in sharing an evening in the presence of their social superiors, without any hope of social advancement. Despite the aficionado status of this public, opera in early-Victorian Calcutta remained a primarily elite affair.

The Opera House and Government House: symbiotic relationship or marriage of convenience?

Unlike their social inferiors, Calcutta’s beau monde had many reasons to attend the opera besides amusement or a love of Rossini. As will be discussed later in this chapter, a combination of social obligation, public relations and charity seem to have motivated members of Calcutta’s elite to spend an evening in a box at the Chowringhee Theatre. This was particularly true of Calcutta’s political leaders, who made a point of regularly attending the opera (and announcing publicly the night on which they intended to do so) despite regarding the opera as a tiresome burden. No better (or more amusing) illustration of this ambivalent attitudes can be found than in the writings of Emily Eden (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Emily Eden in 1835. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.184

Emily and her sister Fanny arrived in Calcutta in 1836, as companions to their brother George Eden, Earl Auckland, who recently had been appointed Governor-General. Emily’s

184 Simon Jacques Rochard, 'Emily Eden', (London: National Portrait Gallery, London, Primary Collection, 1835), 361mm x 261 mm corners diagonally cut; watercolour and pencil; NPG 6455.
diaries contain numerous references to theatre and opera, nearly all of which smoulder with her Austenesque wit. Eden considered the opera to be a duty both noisome and ridiculous, accompanied, as it was, by an absurd amount of pomp and ceremony. On Saturday, March 12th 1836, she wrote:

...To-night we make what the newspapers call “the first public appearance of the Governor-General and his family at the Opera”. The heat [at the Opera] I take it, surpasses all description; but I hardly see how it is can be worse in one place than another.185

Emily was left largely unimpressed by the Italian Opera. She thought the singers were overrated and the performances overpriced:

The singers are a Madame St. Nesoni [Schieroni], immensely fat, with a cracked voice – she is their Pasta; there is a Pozzeni [Pizzoni], very like Lablache; and a Mrs. Goodall-Atkinson, whom I remember as Miss Goodall, singing away at Drury Lane, but she is a good singer here; and they all ask their twenty-guineas a night, as if they really were *prima donnas*.186

Schieroni turned out to be an especial nuisance, continually begging favour from the Governor-General and his family:

Yesterday we dined early to go to a benefit of a tiresome Madame S--- who has actually persuaded us into going, by letters and petitions, etc. It was a sort of concert – songs out of various operas, remarkably ill sung by people dressed *in character*. Madame S --- is an exaggeration of the Duchesse de Cannizzaro [sic - Canniggaro], only fatter and she was dressed as Tancred; it almost made the concert amusing. Luckily it was all over by ten. We have got two more benefits to do, and then I think all further theatricals may be avoided for the hot season. George at first did not mean to do [Schieroni], as I handsomely offered to do it alone; and, to fill the box, I asked Mr. and Mrs. ---- and several other people to go with me.187

So odious did Eden find the opera that she sometimes scheduled other events on such evenings in order to avoid having to go. Occasionally, Eden was thwarted in her escape plans by the desperation of the opera companies to fall into the Viceroy’s favour and the enthusiasm of Calcutta’s aficionados. In 1837, for example, Thonon's French Company repeated its production of *Masaniello* in order to allow the Edens, who had missed out on the first performance due to an engagement in Barrackpore, to attend the performance. As the following excerpt demonstrates, Eden was exasperated by the ‘thoughtfulness’ of the French company and its advocates:

Wednesday … evening we went to see *Masaniello* which the French Company have got up, and acted last week to an enthusiastic audience. I thought it an absolute miracle in our favour that we were at Barrackpore at the time; but the subscribers, by way of consoling us for that ‘disappointment’, proposed to have it over again, contrary to the rules of the subscription, and wrote to beg we would not miss such a perfect opera: the ‘prima donna’ really surpassed herself in it. So kind; but it was very hot! However, we went and were received with great applause; I don’t know why, for I cannot recollect that we have done anything very good lately except stew ourselves to jellies at the theatre.

186 Wednesday, March 16th 1836, Ibid., pp. 106-08.
The opera was really wonderfully well got up for such small means as they have, and I thought [Mrs. Leach] did the dumb girl wonderfully, considering she does not understand a word of French, and therefore never knew what she was making signs to.188

Eden’s reflections on the opera in Calcutta reveal that what was perceived by social commentators as warm and liberal patronage, was little more than a social chore to the Edens, even when the opera was entertaining. Yet, for all her complaining, Emily Eden was no philistine; she enjoyed acting and singing, and was was an accomplished painter and author., Nor was she single-mindedly critical. Although she appears to have had no kind words for the Italian troupe, Eden often commented that the French opera exceeded her expectations; indeed, she declared that Thonon’s company performed its French operas and vaudevilles ‘quite as well as I ever saw them in Paris or London’.189 Her ire seems to have been primarily directed at the Italian troupe, the pomposity of Calcutta’s theatre life, and exacerbated by the heat of the theatre, rather than at the opera as an institution or art-form.

This discussion of patronage and patterns of attendance raises many questions. Why was so much effort and money lavished upon attendance by people who found it disagreeable? What was the meaning of opera to those people who attended it? Why (despite the time, energy, and money that Calcutta’s elite spent at the opera) did opera fail to thrive in Calcutta at this time. These questions will be explored in the following sections.

**The role of opera and attendance motivation**

**Reciprocity**

However noisome the opera may have been, Calcutta’s beau monde realised that public patronage was a small price to pay to support the artists who were doing so much to enrich their social lives (both public and private). Going to the Chowringhee Theatre once or twice a week to see an opera added the spice of variety to the limited opportunities for leisure available in Calcutta. Meanwhile, domestic music-making and amateur theatricals, which had always been a cornerstone of White Town’s social life and were more popular than ever, were being vivified and made more enjoyable by the skills of Calcutta’s visiting opera singers.

The Edens often hosted concerts at their house; some consisted solely of professional talent,190 whilst others were professional-amateur collaborations. Indeed, the Governor General’s sisters, and several leading military men, ran a small theatre within Government House for the production of concerts and amateur theatricals.191 The theatre came complete with orchestra pit, dressing rooms and wings. In these Government House theatricals, Calcutta’s beau monde was assisted by the city’s professional opera singers. These musicians also appeared at the soirées-musicales and assembly balls held at

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189 Friday, September 2nd 1836, Ibid., pp. 232-34.
190 Wednesday, March 16th 1836, Ibid., pp. 106-08.
numerous private residencies throughout Calcutta, including those of pro-European, elite Bengali figures like Dwarkanath Tagore.192

Hence, Calcutta’s elite was dependent upon the city’s opera singers for both its public entertainment and its more intimate amusements and acknowledged this debt by patronising and encouraging the opera. Emily Eden admitted as much in 1840 when she acknowledged that they owed much happiness to the French and therefore, ‘we must attend, in the course of time, a French play, as an excuse for giving the French artists a little money.’193 These amateur soirées and theatricals, however, did not involve enough people to explain the general interest in opera patronage amongst the city’s European residents. Two ideas were far more pervasive and persuasive in encouraging opera attendance: opera as a social good and opera as a status symbol.

**Opera as a Social Good**

Press reports, letters to the editor, public lectures and private journals, argued that opera’s aesthetic, intellectual and moral dimensions could benefit both the individual and the society which embraced the artform. The belief that opera had the ability to improve society appears to have stemmed from a perception that opera had been a powerful force of moral and cultural development amongst European nations:

> On reference to the history of the rise and progress of the Italian Opera in England, it will not be difficult to shew that it has had a very sensible effect on the surface of society, in introducing a degree of refinement and love for the fine arts which did not exist before we were made acquainted with its charms. We have not the history at this moment at hand but we will look it out and have very little doubt of being able to exhibit that there has scarcely existed in England a more potent agent in softening and humanizing the rough exterior of society than the music which has been given to it for the past 40 years by the accomplished natives of Italy.194

Although this quote, and indeed the whole tract from which it has been excerpted, is filled with historical inaccuracies (such as the assertion that Italian opera had been present in England for forty years, rather than over a hundred) and attempts to assert its claim (that opera is an agent of civilisation) without either argument or evidence, it is, nevertheless, indicative of the prevalent attitude towards opera in Calcutta.

The hypothesis that opera was regarded as a force for social development is supported by an analysis of the way in which the genre and the theatre in which it was housed were funded. The Chowringhee Theatre was run as a not-for-profit cooperative, with one hundred and fifty of Calcutta’s citizens (European and Indian alike) each owning one share in the Theatre. In 1835, each share was valued at Rs.200, putting the total value of the Chowringhee at Rs.30,000.195 The corporation of proprietors charged companies and artists a rental fee for each performance. At the end of a season, should the theatre have


195 ‘Meeting of the Proprietors of the Theatre’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, August 4th 1835, p. 3.
drawn a profit, no dividends were distributed to the theatre’s shareholders; instead, any funds raised went towards the salary of the secretary, building maintenance and improvements. The shareholder’s sole reward was the occasional free ticket, and the knowledge that they were facilitating ‘a public good’.\textsuperscript{196} Should the theatre make a loss, however, each shareholder was obliged to provide a certain sum to cover the deficit.

Upon its arrival, the Pizzoni-Bettali Company secured two hundred and fifty subscribers whom collectively raised Rs.10,000 for the production of five operas. The patrons’ subscription guaranteed them only admission to the performances; it did not give them any rights over any profits made from the venture (in the unlikely event that any such profit could be made), nor did it free the subscribers from liability.\textsuperscript{197} After only five months, the company revealed that it was approximately Rs.9,000 in debt. The reaction from White Town was interesting. Calcutta’s citizenry did not declare the figure to be the natural outcome from a risky commercial venture; instead, the debt was thought to be an embarrassment to Calcutta.\textsuperscript{198} Multiple donation funds were established in order to alleviate the company’s debt and allow it to continue performing in Calcutta. Collectively, these funds raised Rs. 6,000,\textsuperscript{199} a significant sum in 1834. They had, despite not having to do so, essentially become subsidisers of public opera. Calcutta’s anxiety to keep opera solvent is key to understanding how the city’s opera patrons thought about opera.

The donations, subscriptions, and additional fees that Calcutta provided to its early opera companies to keep them afloat, should not be confused with investment. The mode in which such funding came about, without any expectation of returns or accountability, place opera closer to a charity or a cooperative than a business. Yet, although it lacked the prospect of financial gain, supporting the opera was not without reward. Being an opera subscriber announced to the world that the individual or family had large amounts of disposable income and had committed at least some of these funds to a community project. This secured for opera’s benefactors a certain level of socio-economic, cultural, and educational status, the importance of which should not be undermined in so hierarchical a city as 1830s Calcutta. These benefits are almost identical to those earned through other philanthropic exercises, such as charity work, educational endowments, and other beneficent causes, such as orphan and widow’s funds.

The similarity of opera’s funding model to that of a charity stems from both institutions having a similar social purpose to the minds of those in Calcutta’s beau monde. Like other charitable missions, opera in Calcutta was credited with having a ‘humanising’ and generally positive effect upon any society that embraced it.\textsuperscript{200} The Italians were praised for ‘raising the standard’ of musical and cultural education of many people in the city by ‘imparting a taste for foreign music to persons who, before their arrival, had been content to think a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{196}‘Meeting of the Proprietors of the Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, August 4\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{197}‘Prospectus’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, March 17\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{198}‘Italian Opera’, \textit{Bengal Hurkaru}, May 10\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{199}‘Italian Opera’, \textit{Bengal Hurkaru}, May 10\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{200}‘Calcutta – The Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, January 17\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2, and ‘Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, August 6\textsuperscript{th} 1835, pp. 4–5.
\end{itemize}
simple Scotch Ballad the acme of musical excellence.\(^{201}\) The idea of opera representing cultural excellence is repeated many times, across many sources.\(^{202}\)

Hence, to the people of Calcutta, the opera companies were not corporations to be allowed to sink or swim on their own merits and fortunes. The prevailing sentiment seems to have been that opera was a social and cultural good, a positive influence on society. A failed opera company was an indictment on the taste and sophistication of the society that allowed it to collapse, for the community that would eschew the intellectual, cultural, and social benefits that an opera company offered would be the pariah of the Empire.

**Status symbol**

The idea of opera as a social good may seem paradoxical to its position as a status symbol and luxury; after all, something that is said to have transformative powers upon peoples morals, intellect and aesthetic taste ought to have been something made accessible to as many people as possible. Yet, the majority of opera-goers in early-Victorian Calcutta appear to have embraced both attitudes to opera simultaneously. That they did so was a product of the imperial process of which they were a part, and the structure of the society in which they lived.

The concern for the city’s reputation that led to the quasi-charitable funding model of opera in Calcutta also led to a concern for the reputation of the individual. If the community that spurned opera faced a reputation as a vulgar, mercenary city, then the individual that rejected opera’s charms surely risked a similar fate. Opera patronage, therefore, became a means by which White Towners could purchase, and broadcast, their elegance, taste and education.

The Opera House was also one of the few public fora in which social and political relationships could be advertised. An invitation to occupy a box translated to a public acknowledgment of being within the confidence of people of influence. The opera was also a space in which visiting foreign dignitaries could be publicly received; for example, when the Nepalese Envoy visited Calcutta in 1837, he was entertained at performance of *I Baccanali di Roma* performed by the Thonon company.\(^{203}\)

The real power of opera, however, lay not in its ability to demonstrate inclusion, but rather in the social exclusivity it facilitated. Many in Calcutta's beau monde made no secret of opera’s exclusive status, and were happy to define opera as a ‘luxury’.\(^{204}\) The term ‘luxury’ is a word laden with financial and social implications, such as costliness, superfluity, and exclusivity, all of which were entirely true of the way that opera was patronised in the City of Palaces. As discussed above, a night at the opera was often only one part of an evening that had included diversions such as dinner, billiards, and private entertainments. People

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\(^{201}\) ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, February 15\(^{th}\) 1836, p. 4.

\(^{202}\) ‘The French Opera – *Fra Diavoli*, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, January 25\(^{th}\) 1837, p. 4: ‘In fact, the French Opera in its present state is the highest theatrical treat the people of Calcutta can have.’


came to the opera in groups from other gatherings, and left the theatre whenever convenient to them, often privileging the comforts of their carriage over the final number of an opera. To its elite patrons, opera was at once ‘necessary’ and disposable; 205 a golden filament in the tapestry of their social life perhaps, but a mere thread, nonetheless.

Opera was a luxury by design. Everything about the institution, from the practice of seasonal subscription and ticket prices, to the very design of the Chowringhee Theatre itself, was designed to promulgate Calcutta’s rigid social structure and privilege those at its zenith. Tickets were divided into two classes: boxes and the pit, the former being more than double the charge of the latter. 206 The cheapest subscription (for a single pit seat) was Rs. 15, a figure that corresponds to £180 at 2011 values. Although the average cost per performance of these stall tickets (Rs. 3) was not a prohibitively expensive figure, the demand that it be paid in advance in a single instalment made it difficult for the average worker to afford. This was exacerbated by the cost of bringing spouses and family, which could multiply the cost two-, three- or even fourfold (Rs. 60). For the middle or working-class worker, living in an expensive city like Calcutta, such amounts were simply unaffordable. By contrast, the wealthy families of Calcutta, living off estate dividends and wages in excess of £5000, 207 could easily afford even the most expensive subscription of Rs. 40 (which averaged out to Rs. 8 (£96 in 2009) per evening). Even with the two-tiered ticketing system, the disparity of income and wealth among Calcutta’s European workers meant that opera was proportionally far more expensive for the hoi polloi than for the elite.

Moreover, boxes could seat up to six people, making these seats more economical per person than the ‘cheaper’ pit tickets. These boxes were, however, reserved for the theatre proprietors, those men of means and influence who could afford to donate both their time and money to managing the Chowringhee Theatre, so even if an average British resident could have afforded the Rs. 40 upfront subscription to a box ticket, they would not have had the opportunity to purchase it. Even ignoring issues of affordability and access, once inside the Chowringhee Theatre, the audience continued to be strictly divided, for, like all most nineteenth-century theatres, the Chowringhee was a space devised to physically manifest the social divisions of the audience. Clearly, the opera as a social institution was designed to benefit the society of the beau monde, not Calcutta as a whole.

**Opera as a business and commodity**

However much the city’s elites may have considered (and funded) opera as a social good or charity, Calcutta’s artists regarded opera as a business and a commodity. No merchant has ever operated at such disadvantage, however, as the intrepid opera singers who came to Calcutta during the 1830s and ‘40s. Their potential audience had to be drawn from an unusually small population. The climate was harsh, sanitation poor, and disease was not uncommon. Moreover, the artists found themselves as far away from home as any

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205 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, November 12th 1834, p. 3. All emphases in original.
207 By conservative estimates, £5000 in 1835 was the equivalent of £514,000 in 2011.
European could be in the 1830s, and without a community of fellow expatriates from which to draw comfort. Notwithstanding these considerable obstacles, these intrepid opera singers had come halfway across the world with a product to sell, and they did all that they could to maximise profits.

The troupes themselves were small. Even the largest troupe to appear in Calcutta at this time was far smaller than those which performed at the major European opera houses. This had both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, small companies resulted in interdependent artists, thereby encouraging cohesion and loyalty. Being small also cut down on transport and living expenses, whilst allowing the profits to be shared amongst the fewest number of people. Yet, the troupes’ small cast sizes were also problematic as they attempted to perform works that were written for the companies of the European opera houses. The result was that the majority of the operas presented in Calcutta were produced in a less-than-perfect manner. It was commonplace for singers to feature in roles for which they were neither physically nor vocally appropriate.\(^{208}\) It was common, too, for roles to be cut down to make them manageable for a mediocre performer or, where no adequate performer could be found, to dispense of a role altogether.\(^ {209}\) Such contingencies enabled Calcutta’s earliest opera companies to present the widest variety of repertoire with the smallest means possible, thereby maximising profit.

Such contingencies did not end with the score. With regard to the extra-musical aspects of opera, the companies’ productions varied from surprisingly good to utterly ridiculous. It is worth noting that the most spectacular effects were nearly always achieved without the company having to bear any additional financial burden. An extravagant military pageant that drew much praise and excitement from the public in the Pizzoni-Bettali Company’s 1834 performances of *Tancredi*, was the product of volunteerism rather than professional effort and expense. The supernumeraries, who created so splendid an effect in their regiments, were real soldiers given leave to appear in the opera by their ranking officers, whilst the live horses appeared courtesy of Mr. Horner, an avid horse-breeder who liked to show off his prize studs whenever possible.\(^{210}\) Had it not been for the generosity (or, in some instances, vanity) of these White Town’s residents, the opera could never have been given with so spectacular an effect.

Indeed, in trying to eke out a living, opera companies often cut corners, particularly in the extra-musical elements of their productions. No more apposite example can be given of this, than another production of *Tancredi*, in 1835, when the forces which had made the pageant scene such a triumph the year before were unavailable. The scene became a parody of its former self. The company hired local Bengali men as auxiliaries but could not provide them with costumes; hence, these men appeared in a selection of national dresses and British long trousers. Whereas the score stipulates that Amenaide enter in a ‘triumphal car’, the limited means of the company meant that the prima donna ended up being

\(^{208}\) Consider that Caravaglia sung the role of Almaviva in *Barbiere di Siviglia* and Ernesto in *Agone*.

\(^{209}\) Consider that Berta was missing from several 1834 performances of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, whilst the premiere of Generali’s *I Baccanali di Roma* lacked all the female roles. See ‘Italian Opera – Chowringhee Theatre’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, January 9th 1836, p. 3,

\(^{210}\) Editorial, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, March 10th, 1834 p. 2
dragged in a wheelbarrow.\textsuperscript{211} Other operas suffered similarly: \textit{Edoardo e Cristina} featured Roman generals as Swedish kings and painted claret boxes as prisons,\textsuperscript{212} whilst \textit{Semiramide} presented a semi-naked man wrapped in a white sheet as the ghost of Nino.\textsuperscript{213}

Whilst such absurdities were, of course, inevitable given the limited means of the companies and the isolation of 1830s Calcutta, these circumstances do not entirely explain the poor mounting of these productions. The companies could have performed their larger scale operas in concert-form, or could have chosen their repertoire more carefully, presenting only those operas that required more modest forces and effects. Instead, Calcutta’s resident opera companies elected to present grand operas or opere serie, even with the crudest of musical and extra-musical elements. They did so because these more ambitious works relieved the monotony of Rossini’s comedies and French vaudevilles and, consequently, drew larger audiences. In short, Calcutta’s opera singers chose variety and ticket sales over production values, a choice that demonstrates their attitude to opera primarily was primarily as a commodity and business.

This is not to say, however, that the companies were wholly mercenary; there is much evidence to prove that artists did sometime consider the integrity of the art form when preparing productions. This is especially true of launching premières. When the Italians chose to mount their first production of \textit{La Gazza Ladra}, the première was postponed four times to ensure that the work was sufficiently rehearsed.\textsuperscript{214} In this case, the Italians favoured serial postponement to giving a poor performance, a choice that not only tried the patience of the company’s audience, but also cost it money; the troupe’s artists only got paid when the company performed, but they were contractually obliged to pay the orchestra and backstage crew by the month, regardless of the number of performances given. Hence, it was in the company’s best interests to perform as often as possible, rather than as well as possible.\textsuperscript{215} Given these financial constraints, the Italian troupe’s decision to keep rehearsing an opera until it was satisfied that the work was sufficiently polished suggests that the artists did attempt, at least on some occasions, to balance the demands of art and commerce.

It is important to recognise that each company’s balance of finances and artistry was different. The Thonon Company, for example, invested far more into the extra-musical facets of its productions than its contemporaries. It was praised for having costumes that were not only more sumptuous than the other opera companies, but also were more appropriate and indicative of character. At the Calcutta première of \textit{Robert le Diable} (Meyerbeer), the audience and critics alike were amazed at the lavishness and detail of the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{211} ‘The Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, July 13\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 5
\textsuperscript{212} Signed ‘B’, ‘Letter to the Editor - Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, November 23\textsuperscript{rd} 1835, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{213} ‘Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, September 25\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{214} Originally scheduled for June 20\textsuperscript{th} 1834, sickness and alternate engagements had prevented the company from rehearsing regularly until the beginning of July; thus, the work underwent four postponements before Ladra finally received its Calcutta début on July 12\textsuperscript{th}. See ‘La Gazza Ladra’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, June 10\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 1, ‘The Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, June 30\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2, and ‘Theatricals’, \textit{Oriental Observer}, July 13\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{215} Editorial comment in response to ‘Letter to the Editor – Italian Opera’, signed ‘A Subscriber to the Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, August 12\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2.}
costumes. In the title role, Welter was praised for being no mere ‘gentleman in black, switching [sic] his tail as a gentleman switches [sic] his cane’ but rather:

all that a Demon could wish to appear... a beautiful and gorgeous creature with a mantle of red velvet and gold, which would have tempted Adam himself... he was Mephistophelian, mystic, mystifying, of about the complexion of a watch spring heated to a white heat, with horrid hair, and evil eye. Not one of your melodramatic Demons who come on, ushered by clouds which descend to slow music, but an active, busy, every-day-life sort of fiend, with an occasional gleam of hatred passing over his pallid features ... 216

The Thonon Company’s use of lighting, properties, and scenery also far exceeded the standard set by the threadbare productions of the Italians. In its production of Der Freischütz, the troupe created as fine a theatrical spectacle as had ever been seen in Calcutta:

The diablerie of the piece was wonderfully good considering the extremely limited means at the disposal of Fradin, who, we understand, presided over it. He had contrived to muster a most effective force of strange shapes and grisly skeletons, who, under a green light, showed ghastly and uncouth; indeed, the chase by these beings of Caspar and Rudolph and the appearance of the Wild Huntsman, were better stage effects than we have ever before witnessed in Chowringhee. 217

The Thonon troupe’s may have shown greater commitment to the extra-musical aspects of it repertoire than it contemporaries, but even amongst the French, the primary attitude towards opera was that of a commodity, rather than an art-form. The production of Der Freischütz may have been successful from an extra-musical standpoint, but its musical forces left much to be desired. Unable to afford choristers, the invisible chorus of the Incantation Scene was so pathetic as to make the critic question why the troupe thought to produce the opera at all. 218 The critic seems to have forgotten that the company was just that: a company, a commercial enterprise. Just as the Italians had chosen to perform Tancredi despite the inadequacy of their extra-musical resources, the Thonon company chose to mount Der Freischütz despite the mediocrity of its vocal resources in order to attract audiences and generate income. The companies may have privileged different aspects of the operatic art-form, but they all made decisions based upon a fundamental understanding of opera as a business before all else.

**Opera as artform vs. opera as entertainment**

The issue of commodification also troubled the audience, polarising public opinion as to whether opera was an artform or a mere entertainment. Those who subscribed to the view of opera as ‘Art’ littered their discussions with descriptions of opera as ‘the acme of


218 Ibid.
musical excellence’, ‘good music’, ‘raising the standard of music’, ‘fine music’, ‘eminently instructive’, ‘tasteful’, ‘rational’, ‘one of the Fine Arts’, ‘chaste and pretty’, etc. Art was to be venerated and respected by both the ‘artistes’ and public. When an opera was ‘mutilated’, or poorly performed, it was therefore taken as an affront to both the taste and intellect of the audience and ‘Art’ itself. After one particularly poor representation of Elisa e Claudio (Mercadante), one critic charged the singers with being ‘either fish-like or beast-like’ for:

… getting up the prettiest music in the most slovenly manner; for murdering without remorse all the concerted pieces; for omitting the choruses, or substituting in the place of them, something unlike any thing human or divine, or appertaining to harmony or to music…

Calcutta’s self-appointed ‘cognoscenti’ issued similarly stern chastisements to the public when they deemed that society was failing to pay opera the degree of esteem and admiration appropriate to its status as a fine art. Those who did not patronise the opera were likened to the ‘barbarous’, ‘uncivilised’ Scythians, Goths and Vandals, and those who preferred popular theatre or folk music were characterised as ‘vulgar’, debased of mind, and even lazy. Meanwhile, these aficionados claimed the reverse of themselves and others that patronised great ‘Art’, with opera described as the province of Orpheus and Apollo, enlightened and exalted figures from Classical Greek civilisation. Such ideas resonated with the Classical standard of civilisation (see Chapter 2) and the attitudes behind the imperial process. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter 15, many of the criticisms levelled at those not part-taking of Calcutta’s inchoate operatic culture were aimed at the native Bengali populace. The analogy created between the beau monde able to attend the opera and Classical Greek culture supports the idea prevalent through Britain and the West that civilisation was both a duty and a destiny of the Enlightened European.

Those who valued opera as ‘Art’ were, however, in the minority, even amongst White Town’s elite. Most of the city’s inhabitants appear to have viewed opera as an entertainment. It was an entertainment because, as discussed above in the section

221 The opinion of the editor of the Bengal Hurkura, reprinted in ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, April 11th 1836, p. 3.
225 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, April 11th 1836, p. 3.
228 ‘Italian Opera – Il Barbiere di Siviglia [sic]’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, February 21st 1836, p. 5. All emphases in the original.
229 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, April 11th 1836, p. 3.
231 Signed ‘An Opera Lover’, ‘Correspondence - Italian Opera’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, April 22nd 1834, p. 3.
232 The reference to the Classical Greek mythological figures is from ‘Agnese’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, February 21st 1834, p. 2.
‘Patronage’, opera was for many people merely a part of their broader social life, just another element to be negotiated into the schedule alongside dinners, amateur theatricals, domestic amusements, horse racing, trade association meetings, cricket, and charitable work.

For this reason, some objected to the amount of attention that the press lavished on opera. One citizen, under the nom de plume ‘Apple’, wrote to the *The Englishman and Military Chronicle* to criticise the treatment of opera by the *Bengal Hurkaru*, not for being to perfunctory but, rather, for being too detailed. ‘That paper’s editorial on the subject of the premiere of *Semiramide* was quite a ridiculous and frivolous waste of one and a half columns.’233 Ironically, ‘Apple’ then goes on to discuss the opera, and its reviews in quite some depth. The garrulous nature of his letter suggests that, far from being opposed to opera, Apple is quite invested in it; he just differs from others in that he regards it as an entertainment, another trivial piece of furniture in the social life of a Calcutta resident, rather than an ‘Art’ worthy of scrupulous observation and critique.

Regardless of whether an individual viewed opera as an ‘Art’ or as a form of entertainment, opera was valued by those who attended it for a variety of reasons. Yet, for all the economic, social and political support opera received, opera cannot be declared an emphatic success in early-Victorian Calcutta. None of the troupes survived their time in Calcutta—all four disbanded, losing members to disease, poverty, or differences of career ambition. None of the companies was able to turn a profit, and would have fallen into an abyss of debt had they not been bailed out by the pride and generosity of the opera-going public. The following section will examine the extent to which Calcutta’s demography, economy, and geopolitical context, account for opera’s failure to become a regular establishment in Calcutta during this early period of the city’s operatic history.

**Failure to thrive: Towards an understanding of opera’s ephemerality**

When the Italians arrived, with the French on their heels, Calcutta was described by the *Englishman and Military Chronicle* as ‘the worst of all possible markets’ for an opera company to visit.234 The following year, poor patronage and high levels of debt led *The Englishman and Military Chronicle* to muse on the reason’s behind opera’s tenuous position in Calcutta:

> If there be a musical public in Calcutta (and we are told that such a thing exists) we can only say that they experienced a great loss in not witnessing the *Semiramide*, and ...the Italian company will participate in the loss. An opera better got up (the parts throughout respectably filled, and, in one instance, finely) we cannot hope to see here, or indeed anywhere out of a European capital. Why then do not people who like dramatic representations go to it? Is it that they care not for the opera, or that their love for it does not go to the extent of 8 and 4 rupees per lover? Life is expensive in Calcutta and so we believe the latter.235


The editor’s comments suggest that opera was failing, not because of a lack of interest, but rather because of Calcutta’s strained economic circumstances. The expansion of the colonial project in British India, and the consequent demographic development seen in Calcutta, may have made the city a more promising opportunity to the visiting opera troupe, but the change also caused economic volatility. The Englishman attributes opera’s less-than-healthy state to this financial difficulty: the genre was regarded as a luxury and luxuries are often the first casualties of a financial crisis. Whilst the economic downturn certainly did not help opera, The Englishman’s analysis oversimplifies the cause of opera’s predicament.

Even at the lowest point of the financial crisis, many in Calcutta continued to enjoy large disposable incomes. Moreover, there is evidence that these wealthy White Towners (who composed the majority of the city’s opera audiences) continued to consume luxuries such as coffee, jewellery, musical instruments, and perfumes, whilst maintaining opulent estates in both Calcutta and Simla, the civil service’s hill station. This behaviour suggests that the downturn had little effect on the wealth and spending habits of Calcutta’s beau monde, and therefore cannot have had too severe an effect on the opera.

It is also worth noting that opera often flourishes not despite, but rather, because of its costliness and exclusivity, even (and sometimes especially) during time of economic decline. Luxuries become even more luxurious when fewer people are able to afford them, a phenomenon that ought to have added, rather than have detracted, from opera’s value to the beau monde and (consequently) increased support for the genre at this time.

Neither opera’s luxury status nor the depressed economic conditions can convincingly account for its ephemerality. Similarly, other simplistic hypotheses are easily dismissed. That opera’s position as an entertainment led to its disposability is an argument undermined by the strength of Calcutta’s theatre life throughout the 1840s. That notion that opera’s ability to become a permanent fixture in Calcutta’s social and cultural landscape was weakened by the inferiorities of the companies lacks potency given the continued strength of operatic concert music over the next twenty years.

Instead, an explanation may be found in the intersection of several of all of these hypotheses and in the very nature of Calcutta society itself: opera might be considered a victim of circumstance. Had the economy been stronger, had wages been more equitable, had the population been bigger, then opera may have become an established and regular cultural institution in Calcutta, despite its status as a luxury. Had it not been a luxury, with a luxury price tag, more people may have been able to afford the opera, which may have made it more profitable, encouraging the troupes to stay longer or other artists to come out to Calcutta. This would not have been without its problems, for Calcutta’s beau monde liked the opera precisely because it was so exclusive, and it, therefore, fit their demand for a socially select, public entertainment to add variety to their social and leisure time. Had more people regarded opera as an art, rather than as an entertainment, it may have been privileged over other expenditure, thereby establishing a large support base. If the opera
companies had been of a higher quality, the wealthy and the aficionados may have been even more eager (and more generous) in their support.

In the end, however, circumstances transpired as they did, and opera remained a transient affair. When opera departed from Calcutta’s shores, there was an air of resignation about it all, as though everyone recognised opera’s disappearance to have been inevitable. The Editor of *The Englishman and Military Chronicle* wrote:

The parting was not distinguished by any very lively regrets on either side. The audience on Friday was more remarkable for its scantiness and nonchalance than any we have ever seen within the walls of the Theatre, and the performers seemed to feel that they had no reason to be very much distressed on separating from a community of Goths who have been fervently wooed but never entirely won.

... Of the general effect of the attempt to introduce the Italian Opera to the people of Calcutta we are not prepared to say much. The *Bengal Herald* is of the opinion that it has tended *[to]* ‘raise [the] standard of music’ at the presidency, but whether by this the writer means that vulgar English ballads have generally been superseded by Italian airs, or that people take greater pains to cultivate good music than was wont before the arrival of the *corps operatique*, we cannot tell. As far as we perceive, the only effect of the Italian performance has been to encrease *[sic]*, temporarily, the amount of rational enjoyment allotted to the refined of the British residents in Calcutta, to provide bread for several enterprising foreigners, to give birth to [an] abundance of musical pretension in a journal that shall be nameless [directed to the *Bengal Herald*], and to produce a small fry of cognoscenti who, like the critics of Molière’s day ‘*decident toujours et parlent hardiment de toutes choses sans l’y connoître; qui, dans une comédie, se recrèrent aux mechants endroits et ne brilleront pas a ceux qui sont bons; qui, voyant un tableau, ou ecoutant un concert de musique, blament de meme, et louent tout a contre sens; prennent par ou ils pensent [possibly penoent ] les termes de l’art qu’ils attropent et se manquant jamais de les entropier et de les mettre hors de place*.’

In assessing the success of opera in early-Victorian Calcutta, it is necessary to define ‘success’. It is certainly true that opera did not attract so great an audience as to ensure its permanence. It is also true that when the Companie Française departed in the mid-1840s, no opera company was seen in Calcutta until the arrival of the Cagli Italian Opera Company in 1865 brought about opera’s glorious ‘Indian Summer’. Yet, the performances by the four companies of the 1830s and ‘40s left an indelible impression on the City of Palaces; as will be discussed in the following chapter, ‘The Loud Silence’, opera remained an important part of White Town’s identity and musical culture, albeit in different guises.

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236 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, April 11th 1836, p. 3.
Chapter 5: 
The loud silence — 
Operatic culture during an operatic
drought, 1844–65

Despite the fact that after the Companie Française’s short-lived 1843 season, there were no staged operas performed in Calcutta for twenty years, to describe mid-century Calcutta as a land without music or opera would be misguided. Between 1844 and 1865, Calcutta was surprisingly musical, and its music was surprisingly operatic. This chapter explores the status and role of opera during the period 1844–1865, when no professional opera companies visited Calcutta. It begins by examining the role that Calcutta’s political and economic environment, coupled with a series of devastations that destroyed Calcutta’s theatrical infrastructure, played in discouraging opera companies from visiting the City of Palaces. The chapter goes on to discuss the resilience of the city’s operatic culture during the period 1844–1865, detailing the ways in which opera continued to be present and potent, with particular reference to music’s role in White Town.

A Series of Unfortunate Events: Calcutta’s Public Theatres, 1839–1865

Calcutta’s musical woes began even before the ill-fated Companie Française arrived in Calcutta. On May 31st 1839, the Chowringhee Theatre burnt to the ground. Calcutta lost not only its temple of art, but also the entirety of its theatrical paraphernalia: sets, costumes, machines, properties, curtains, and several instruments.237 The damage to the building and assets amounted to Rs. 76,000 for the theatre’s proprietors,238 an immense sum even for so wealthy a group of people. Notwithstanding the economic cost, there were problems, for even if such an amount had been readily available, the assets were not easily replaced: ordering, shipping, and reconstruction would take years. Moreover, the loss of the city’s theatrical infrastructure was compounded by the departure of many singers and actors: the three first opera troupes had been and gone, and very few members now remained; Calcutta’s star actress and sometime opera singer, Esther Leach was convalescing from an unknown illness in England; Mrs Goodall Atkinson, another of Calcutta’s theatrical and operatic mainstays, died shortly after the fiery destruction of the Chowringhee Theatre, whilst the Nouveaus, who had remained in Calcutta after their opera troupe disbanded, were by now occupied by more stable and remunerative employment as

237 ‘The Chowringhee Theatre’, Bengal Hurkaru, June 1st 1839, p. 2 and ‘The Chowringhee Theatre’, Bengal Hurkaru, June 11th, 1839, p. 3.
238 Das Gupta, The Indian stage, p. 261.
music, French and dance teachers. There was no money and, without accomplished artists, there was little inclination to rebuild the city's theatre or its musico-theatrical tradition.

In June 1839, Esther Leach returned from England to find a city bereft of a theatre. In need of a site to rebuild her career, Leach quickly set about securing donations and pledges from Lord Auckland, Dwarakanath Tagore and other wealthy Calcutta residents (both European and Indian) to build a new theatre. Beyond the generosity of these moneyed patrons, Calcutta's middle class raised an additional Rs.80,000, which was used to outfit the theatre with the necessary stage appointments, costumes and instruments. The new theatre, named Sans Souci (literally ‘without cares’), was officially opened on March 8th 1841 and for a time it seemed that theatre and opera might once again live.

A year later, however, Calcutta’s musico-theatrical culture was dealt another blow when Lord Auckland, one of the city’s most faithful patrons and significant financial sponsors, passed the Governor-Generalship to Lord Ellenborough, a man who disapproved of theatres and made a point of eschewing the Sans Souci. Ellenborough’s disinclination for the theatre meant that the Sans Souci not only lost the financial backing of Government House, but also its social support. Theatre was no longer as fashionable as it had once been, and this cost the Sans Souci additional patrons and revenue. Despite great financial difficulties, the Sans Souci was able to host the brief operatic season of the Companie Française, when the opera troupe arrived in early 1843. The season was unsuccessful, and the company soon departed. In serious debt, performances at the Sans Souci became quite infrequent, with Esther Leach, Clarisse Cailly, Madame Valadares and the other singers and actors who remained in Calcutta turning their attention to the more respectable and profitable concert platform.

Opera and theatre took one final hit on November 2nd, 1843. For the first time in several years, the city’s theatre had an audience which in both numbers and fashion recalled earlier days. Hundreds of Calcutta’s White Town population had crowded to see a double bill of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and the farce *The Handsome Husband*. Disaster struck, however, when, whilst awaiting her cue, Esther Leach and her costume caught alight. Unable to douse the flames herself, Leach ran out onstage, where it took the efforts of several men to extinguish the fire, which by now had spread to the wings of the small theatre. Although damaged, the Sans Souci survived, but Esther Leach was not so lucky. She had been severely burned and after twenty torturous days, she died from her extensive injuries. Calcutta would have been able to withstand the loss of the building, but the violent and public loss of Esther Leach, the heart and soul of Calcutta’s theatre culture, was too much. Few performances followed and by 1846, riddled by debt and forever haunted by Leach’s desperate screams, the theatre was sold to Archbishop Carew. Later,

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239 ‘Death of Mrs Goodall Atkinson’, *The Englishman and Military Chronicle*, July 14th 1839, p. 2.
241 Das Gupta, *The Indian stage*, p. 269.
242 *Sambar Pravakar*, August 21st 1848, p. 3.
the Sans Souci passed onto the Jesuits, who in 1860s, built a school on the site: St Xavier’s College.243

When the Sans Souci fell dark and silent, so too did public professional opera and theatre in Calcutta. The few actors left in Calcutta occasionally mounted performances in their own houses or at the Town Hall. Mr. Berry, an actor who had appeared opposite Leach on numerous occasions, sometimes directed Shakespeare productions, several of which featured Bengali actors (consider the 1848 productions of Othello with the Bengali actor Baishnava Charan Addy as the tragic hero) at his house on Wellington Square.244 Although no accounts explicitly mention music being performed during these productions, given the interwoven nature of drama and music in Calcutta, it is likely that some musicians appeared in these staged performances. Berry was the city’s last remaining professional actor and his departure from Calcutta in mid-1849, therefore, signalled the end of professional theatre, and hence the end of theatrical music culture, in the city.

Any chance that opera and theatre might be imported was eroded by the political, economic and social upheaval that was beginning to occur in the late-1840s. As described in Chapter Two, the Governor-Generalship of the Earl of Dalhousie, 1848–1856, is best described as a period of regnum per bellum (rule by war). Fuelled by an ambition to make ‘British India’ both physically contiguous and culturally homogenous, Dalhousie sought to bring the remaining independent areas of the subcontinent under British rule by any means at his disposal. The devastating consequences of his belligerence (war, famine, civil unrest, fear, and economic depression) outlasted Dalhousie’s term as Governor-General, which finished in 1855, and were felt well into the 1860s.

Calcutta’s political, economic and social turbulence stifled public art, especially opera. Calcutta was still reliant upon immigrants for its professional opera, and very few singers were willing to brave the constant wars engulfing the Indian subcontinent to perform opera. Of the few opera singers who visited Calcutta during the mid-1800s, such as the Maltese bass Antonio Agius245 and the Irish prima donna Catherine Hayes, none found the journey rewarding. Indeed, upon her arrival in 1856, Hayes found the city so unwelcoming and the atmosphere so tense that she left after only a few days, preferring to tour the safer and more promising colonies of South-East Asia.246

244 Both Nandi Bhatia and Sudipto Chatterjee claim that this performance occurred at the Sans Souci Theatre, when, in fact, Othello was performed at Berry’s own abode. As both Das Gupta and his primary sources make clear, Berry appropriated the name ‘Sans Souci’ for his house when it was acting as a theatre, but this should not be confused with the former theatre. See: Das Gupta, The Indian stage, at p. 275, Nandi Bhatia, Acts of authority, acts of resistance: theater and politics in colonial and postcolonial India (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), Nandi Bhatia, ‘Different Othello(s) and Contentious Spectators: Changing Responses in India’, Gramma: Journal of Theory and Criticism, 15/Special Issue on Shakespeare and Worldwide Audiences (2007), Sudipto Chatterjee and Jyotsna Singh, ‘Moor or Less? The Surveillance of Othello, Calcutta 1848.’, in Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (eds.), Shakespeare and Appropriation (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 65-82.
245 I thank Alison Concord for helping me track down Agius’ first name.
Unlike theatre, however, music can flourish offstage. Hence, even in the absence of a theatre or a professional opera company, operatic culture continued to exist and evolve in White Town throughout this chaotic interval in Calcutta’s history. The following section examines how music, and opera in particular, continued to be expressed in the face of inimical social, political, and economic circumstances.

**Operatic culture in an operatic desert**

**Diaspora culture: Recreating ‘Home’**

In order to understand how operatic culture could continue in Calcutta during a period when opera was conspicuous only by its absence is important to recognise the way in which culture and identity is perceived and constructed by diasporas. Transplanted cultures are regarded not as a new cultures, but rather as a continuation of the ‘home’ culture, an attitude that helps diaspora groups maintain their identity.247 This is particularly true of imperial colonialists who, unlike other groups of migrants, feel no pressure to assimilate or ‘mask’ their otherness; indeed, colonial societies depend on defining themselves as different in order to assert their cultural identity and superiority.

As Jonathan Lamb explains in his article ‘Metamorphosis and Settlement’, Western colonists, both as settlers in the Anglosphere and as imperialists in the Orient, feared the effect that being far from home could have upon their identity. Many regarded the myriad strange experiences and necessary alterations to lifestyle that colonialism demanded as dangerous, having the capacity to ‘so far transform them that they would no longer be fit to perceive the world as it truly [was], and no longer therefore be able to claim to be the persons whom they were’.248 In order to avert any chance of being influenced by, or indeed becoming, the ‘Other’, colonialists tried to recreate ‘Home’ as fully as possible, often creating a more conservative and homogenous form of British culture than was practised back even in the most traditional circles of the metropolis.

There was a greater tendency towards promoting Britishness in British India than in other parts of the Empire, a fact that is largely due to the model of imperialism practiced in India. White Town was a high-imperial city, whose residents regarded their residence in Calcutta as temporary. These White Towners expected that after their civil service appointment ended, or after making their fortune, they would return to the mother-country to live out the rest of their days. They were Anglo-Indians in experience only, not in identity. They, therefore, attempted to preserve their Britishness by creating a world impervious to its exotic surroundings: the English lived and worked in European-style buildings appointed with imported British furnishings; the British steadfastly clung to European fashions of dress and hair, irrespective of the unsuitability of such clothing to an Indian climate. Many Anglo-Indians sent their children back home for their education. Meanwhile, standards of behaviour and class rigidity were practised far more diligently in the subcontinent than back home.

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247 Esmeralda Rocha, ’The Cagli Pompei Royal Italian Opera Company: The Australian Residency 1871-75,’ Honours (University of Western Australia, 2007), pp. 11-27.

Amongst the imports that secured White Town as a British space, safe for habitation by these temporary residents, were information and news. Calcutta’s daily journals were often dominated by news from England, featuring intelligence not only of a political or economic nature, which must be expected in a colony, but also of society and the arts, especially opera. Indeed, the Anglo-Indians of Calcutta were better informed about London’s opera developments, débuts, and performances than most other Victorian Era colonialists.249

Such connectivity served to protect operatic culture. Even though opera was absent from Calcutta’s manifestation of ‘home’ culture, Anglo-Indians did not regard themselves as an opera-less people: the parent culture sustained a sense of continuity in Calcutta’s own operatic culture. By keeping up-to-date with operatic culture in England, Anglo-Indians in Calcutta were partaking, albeit in a limited fashion, of a vibrant operatic culture with which they identified. Complementing this was the steady influx of newly-arrived British migrants, or the increasing number of people who holidayed in Britain/Europe and returned to Calcutta with fresh experiences of Old World opera. Each person’s fresh experience of the operatic culture at home was a renewal of the collective connection to it.

As important as this parent/colony connection was to White Town’s operatic identity, operatic culture was not experienced merely vicariously during these years; it was also preserved locally in both the music-making of both the domestic and public spheres. Furthermore, what Calcutta’s opera culture lacked in professionalism it made up for with diversity. As the following sections will reveal, opera was found at the public concert, in brass band culture, and even in the home.

The public concert
In his work on the sociology of music in nineteenth-century Europe, Henry Raynor claimed that the public concert was ‘the invention of middle-class amateur musicians in public towns where there was no opera’.250 Although he ignored the great success of the professional public concert in London, one of the opera capitals of the world, Raynor’s statement is, essentially, correct. Nineteenth-century concert culture was undoubtedly a bourgeois, urban phenomenon that often flourished in non-operatic centres. In comparison to opera, concerts made modest demands and offered greater programmatic variety. As a social institution and cultural product, the concert was also considered more ‘rational’ and moral than the extravagant and often licentious opera. That concerts were easier and cheaper to mount, and more accessible and appealing than a season of opera, made them ideal for smaller cities and towns, where small population sizes and economic constraints made opera impracticable. Calcutta was just such a town and the political instability it was experiencing at that time only served to make concerts even more apt to the city’s cultural life.

249 This is evident from the degree of operatic material which may be found in the ‘European News’ section of issues of The Englishman during this period. The regularity and the detail with which London and Continental operatic performances were reviewed in The Englishman is in excess of what may be found in comparable Australian, Canadian, and South African newspapers.
As was typical of the nineteenth-century concert, the concerts that took place in Calcutta contained both instrumental and vocal music; however, Calcutta’s concert programmes had a greater ratio of vocal numbers to instrumental items than concerts in England.251 This is less to do with audience preference than the nature and history of Calcutta’s musical life. The performance of orchestral and chamber music was inhibited by the difficulty of maintaining quality instruments in India’s hot and humid climate, the relatively few numbers of professional instrumentalists, and the small size of the European community, which limited the number of proficient amateurs. By contrast, vocal music had developed quite quickly: the recent residency of the four professional opera troupes had fostered an interest and skill for opera amongst Calcutta’s local musicians. The city’s most popular musicians during the 1850s were singers who had received good operatic training when they had performed with the Italian and French artists: consider, for example, Mr. Linton, Mr and Mrs. Valadares, Signora Ventura, Signor Agius, Mr. McGregor and the amateur ‘Almaviva’.

The legacy of the Calcutta’s early operatic era is also evident seen in the repertoire performed in the mid-century concerts, the majority of which was derived from those operas that had been produced by Calcutta’s operatic pioneers. A concert brought forth at the Calcutta Town Hall in January 1850 shows the extent to which the city’s musical culture was a product of the 1830s and ‘40s. The programme consisted of the overtures to *Semiramide* and *La Gazza Ladra*, both of which were operas that had been mounted by the Schieroni troupe. The concert also featured a duet ‘Ieri sul tramontar del sole’ from *Gazza Ladra*, an aria from *Le Pré aux Clercs* (Hérold, 1832) which had been introduced by the Cailly troupe, and arrangements of *Lucrezia Borgia* (an opera produced by multiple companies).252

Whilst concerts continued to promote the works with which Calcutta audiences were already familiar, it is important to acknowledge that these concerts were not mere echos of Calcutta’s bygone operatic life. As intimated earlier, the inhabitants of White Town kept abreast of the operatic developments of Europe, and this modishness, combined with a thriving sheet music industry, also ensured a steady introduction of new works to the public concert scene.

Such novelty is reflected in the programme of the last concert of 1850, which was organised by the Valadares family. Staged at the Town Hall (see Figure 5.1) on December 5th, the concert included arias and extended segments of familiar favourites such as Meyerbeer’s *Robert le Diable*, Donizetti’s *Linda di Chamounix* or Weber’s *Der Freischütz*, but it

251 This is evident from comparing Calcutta concert programmes with programmes from English concerts performed during the same years. English concert programmes sourced from those published in *The Times* (London), *The Musical Times* (London), *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol), Felix Farley’s *Bristol Journal* (Bristol) and those held in the Theatre Collection at The University of Bristol, particularly TCPB/000037, TCPB/000054, TCPB/000056, TCPB/000060, TCPB/000072, TCPB/000074, TCPB/000088, TCPB/000104, TCPB/000105, TCPB/000122, TCPB/000498, TCPB/000513, TCPB/000590, TCW/PG/000002, OV/M/000146, OV/M/000148, OV/M/000149, OV/M/000160, OV/M/000164, OV/M/000171, OV/M/000172, OV/M/000174, OV/M/000180, OV/M/000184, OV/M/000185, OVSB/000375.

also presented portions of works never performed by the European opera companies. Among the more modern items were ‘Ernani, Ernani involami’ from Ernani (Verdi, 1844), ‘De’ felici miei prim’anni’ from Federico Ricci’s La Prigione di Edimburgo (1838),253 and a medley of numbers from Don Pasquale (Donizetti, 1843).254 Of particular interest is the fact that at this concert, and others of a similar nature, neither the professionals nor the amateurs seem to be particularly responsible for the introduction of new material. Rather, the ebb and flow between the novel and the familiar appears to be an organic part of performance gesture at both levels.

Similar public concerts, nearly all of which occurred at the Town Hall, continued to be the principle arena of Calcutta’s professional operatic music-making until the arrival of the a troupe of Italian opera singers in the mid-1860s. There were, however, other fora where the city’s operatic culture continued to exist and develop. One such arena was the large open space at the heart of White Town, known as the Maidan, where the Town Band performed nearly every night for over thirty years. The following section details the contribution of the Calcutta Town Band to operatic culture in mid-century Calcutta.

Figure 5.1: Calcutta Town Hall, 1847, where the majority of White Town’s public concerts were held during this period (1844–1865).255

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253 This is a Cavatina and Cabaletta duet for soprano (Ida) with interjections from another character (Fanny) and the chorus.
254 ‘Programme of Henri de Valadares’ Annual benefit concert’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, Saturday November 23rd 1850, p. 3.
Opera in the Garden of Eden: The Town Band

As scholars such as Trevor Herbert have demonstrated, the brass band was an integral part of society and music culture throughout the British Empire during the Victorian era. Calcutta was no exception to this phenomenon. Indeed, due to the military history of the city, and the fact that Calcutta was the seat of the Governor-General, brass bands had been of enormous import since the city’s earliest days. They had even been part of the city’s earliest operatic productions; the services of several regimental bands had been volunteered to the various professional troupes to augment the orchestra or enhance the mise-en-scène, especially in operas that had a grandiose or martial bent. Hence, from its beginnings, operatic culture in Calcutta was inexorably linked to town and regimental brass bands.

The nexus between brass bands and operatic culture was further strengthened in the late 1850s, after the Rebellion, when promenade band concerts became a regular part of White Town life. These concerts occurred in the Eden Gardens, on the Maidan. The Gardens had been named in honour of former Governor-General Lord Auckland’s two sisters, who, as touched on previously, had been loyal (if not always cheerful) patrons of music, theatre and art in 1830s Calcutta. Initially, it had been one of the town’s regimental bands, or the Governor-General’s own private band, that had provided the city with this public music. By August 1861, however, the concerts had grown in popularity and the more musical residents of Calcutta established a Town Band, the specific purpose of which was to entertain the town each night. To accommodate the newly established Town Band, a large sheltered bandstand was erected in the Eden Gardens (see Figure 5.2). By the winter of 1861–62, the Town Band had become a musical and social institution; evenings would find the bandstand occupied by the Town Band, an ensemble of twenty-five performers supported entirely through voluntary private donations, with crowds of townsfolk coming in carriages, on horseback or on foot to listen.

257 Consider, for example, the 1834 production of *Tancredi* by the Italians described in Chapters 3 and 4.
258 The Maidan is a large open space in the centre of Calcutta (in the Chowringhee district). It always had military connection, first housing Fort William, and even in modern Kolkata it belongs to the Indian Army. In colonial times it contained a race course, a golf course (the largest outside Britain) and the Ochterlony Monument (now known as the Shaheed Minar).
259 'Meeting for the Town Band', *The Englishman*, August 23rd, 1861, p. 3.
The repertoire for each day’s concert was published in the morning edition of several Calcutta newspapers, including *The Englishman*. Although the individual pieces varied each day, the programmes followed a fairly standard formula: one or two opera overtures, a dance such as quadrille, waltz or march, an arrangement of an operatic set-piece, an arrangement of a British ballad or song, especially of a patriotic nature, and occasionally an arrangement of a parlour song or Hindoostannie air. Below is a programme from 1862, which shows the average range and scope of the Town Band’s daily concerts.

Programme of the Town Band at the Eden Gardens, September 23rd 1862.  
1. Overture to *Masaniello*  
2. Overture to *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*  
3. March and Quadrille  
4. ‘Valse’ and ‘Valentine Galop’ by Relle  
5. Selections from Don *Pasquale*  
6. ‘The Pilgrim of Love’ by Bishop  
7. Selections from Luisa Miller

It is not just the variety and richness of the operatic repertoire presented by the Town Band that is noteworthy, although it particularly impressive that selections from *Luisa Miller* (and other Verdi operas) were being played ten years before the opera would enjoy its

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260 Oscar Jean Baptiste Malitte, ‘Calcutta - Bandstand, Eden Gardens’, (Calcutta: British Library; Shelfmark: Photo 394/(68), 1865), Photographic Print - Part of Mallitte’s Album “Photographs of India and the Overland Route”.

261 *The Englishman* - various issues between 1861 and 1869.

Calcutta première. The Band’s best contributions to operatic culture were the regularity of its offerings and its low-cost. By presenting operatic works on a daily basis and for free, the Town Band cultivated a palate for operatic repertoire amongst Calcutta’s European residents, including those who lacked either the means or inclination to attend opera and recitals even when they were available. The population’s increased familiarity with the operatic canon was to be an important factor in the later popularity of Italian Opera.

Whilst the recitals of the city’s professional musicians and the daily promenade concerts given by the Town Band were invaluable contributors to Calcutta’s music culture, the continuance of city’s operatic culture also occurred in White Town’s domestic spaces. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss amateur music-making and the home — this will be the subject of Chapter 16. It is, however, worth noting the existence of this less visible musical world in any consideration of operatic culture outside the opera house. Domestic music had been important in the propagation of high-art musical culture since the amateur theatricals of the early-nineteenth century, and would continue to be an important site of operatic culture throughout British rule in India for many years to come.

Yet, even concentrating upon public music-making alone, the period from 1844–1865 was a period rich in musical, and operatic, culture. The city’s political, economic, social and theatrical circumstances may have forced opera to assume a myriad of forms, but operatic culture was, nonetheless, remarkably strong, diverse, and contemporary during this time. It was, indeed, a ‘loud silence’. With the arrival of more peaceful and stable years—the years of Governor-General Lawrence’s ‘masterly inactivity’—professional staged opera soon returned to Calcutta. In the aftermath of the Rebellion, White Town was keen to appropriate any social institution or cultural artefact to assert the superiority of European civilisation, and ‘the opera’ was a particularly potent tool. As Calcutta entered its halcyon days as the capital of Britain’s most impressive imperial project, White Town’s demographic profile and the high-imperial ideology of its residents, became increasingly favourable to the reintroduction of Italian Opera. Calcutta’s operatic renaissance, and its causation, is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 6:  
Opera’s Indian Summer,  
1865–71

The story of Calcutta’s operatic golden age begins over a thousand miles away in the city’s rival sister, Bombay, as a result of circumstances half a world away in the United States. In 1864, Yankee blockades choked the harbours of Confederate ports in an effort to starve the South of its cotton funds, force a surrender, and win the American Civil War. As a result, Bombay became the world’s largest cotton trading market, transforming the city once known as the ‘Gateway of India’ into one of the jewels in the ever-expanding British Empire. Invigorated by its wealth and newfound prestige, Bombay attempted to cement its position on the world stage by cultivating a reputation of cultural, as well as material, superiority.

A group of British opera aficionados resident in Bombay recalled an Italian soprano who they had heard in the opera houses of Milan, Turin, Florence and Paris. They invited this young singer, Signorina Gemma Onorati, to come to Bombay to present a series of operatic concerts. Onorati, however, was no longer a signorina—she had recently married a young Italian man, Augusto Cagli, who accompanied her on the three-month journey to the far-flung city of Bombay.

Although Cagli disembarked in Bombay as his wife’s companion, he did not remain in the shadows for long. Instead, his sojourn in this corner of the British Empire soon inspired him to create an empire of his own: an operatic empire over which he alone might be sovereign. Cagli recognised that the entrepreneur who furnished the European dominions of the Asia-Pacific with opera would be able to enjoy both a monopoly and significant pecuniary rewards—rarities in the cut-throat opera industry. He was no doubt aware that these far-flung imperial outposts were eager to prove their cultural superiority to indigenous populations and minorities. They were also ambitious, desiring position and legitimacy on the world stage. These attributes made them desperate for Italian Opera, for opera was commercial commodity best suited to achieving and advertising such cultural authority.

Cagli tested the waters at once, bringing a small operatic troupe to perform in Bombay in late 1864. This short season was a triumph, and induced Cagli to try to win the even more prestigious and lucrative Calcutta market. Between 1866 and 1872, Augusto Cagli and his ever-evolving troupe presented seven seasons of opera and established a vibrant operatic culture worthy of the prestige and self-conscious privilege of the ‘City of Palaces’. This chapter will detail the arrival and development of Cagli’s troupe and examine the effect that

263 The Times of India, 19th March 1864, p. 3.
Cagli’s company, Italian Opera and the erection of Calcutta’s first Opera House had on society in high-imperial Calcutta.

1866: The Arrival
When in April 1866 rumours began to circulate around Calcutta that an opera company intended to visit the city, the news was met with a mixture of excitement and embarrassment. There was no opera house; indeed, since the devastation of the Sans Souci in the mid-1840s, Calcutta had lacked a theatre of any kind. It must also have been somewhat of a worry for Calcutta to see that the opera company was coming from a successful season in Bombay. A rivalry between the Presidencies had simmered for many years, and Calcutta felt under pressure to prove its superiority to Bombay by providing a hospitable and profitable environment for the troupe.

Although the company arrived in April, after the end of the traditional theatre season, the troupe met with enormous interest and generous praise. The Town Hall was completely repainted and polished for the occasion, a fact which was not to the taste of the audience members who came away from their evening at the opera with paint and polish stains on their new attire. This new attire, too, tells of a different kind of polishing that occurred in Calcutta as the city prepared for this new opera company. Wives and daughters were equipped with new gowns, mantles and gloves, often on credit, whilst many of the men outfitted themselves with new dress coats, which were also not yet paid for. Despite the audience coming away from the Town Hall with their seat numbers branded across their new clothes, ‘like a convict or a sheep’, the concert was deemed a complete success by press and public alike.

The first of Cagli’s concerts was a recital, rather than a concert performance of an opera. The repertoire they presented was a mixture of Bel Canto repertoire, with which the Calcutta had been familiar since the first Italian troupe came to the city in the 1830s, and far more modern works that had not yet been performed, such as Verdi’s Il Lombardi and Il Trovatore. The next two concerts attempted a more authentic operatic experience, by presenting whole operas in concert form. The first was Ernani, a Calcutta première, and the second was Rossini’s evergreen opera buffa, Il Barbiere di Siviglia. The company’s opera concerts were so popular that the carriages of Cagli’s White Town patrons clogged the streets of Calcutta. In fact, the city’s Commissioner of Police was forced to devise road regulations in order to deal with a volume of traffic that had never before been seen in the City of Palaces. Like the recital, both performances attracted crowded houses and effusive applause. Such success encouraged both Calcutta and Cagli, and by mid-May 1866

265 Ibid.
266 Ibid.
268 ‘Notice from the Commissioner of Police’ The Englishman, Saturday May 5th 1866, p. 2. The glut of private carriages (as opposed to horses or cabs) on Calcutta’s roadways also indicates the high socio-economic status of the opera-going demographic.
Cagli and the Opera Committee had made arrangements to present a full season of opera in Calcutta. The terms of the season were as follows:

- Cagli’s company would perform twice a week (Wednesday and Saturday) over the course of four months.
- Cagli would provide this service for Rs. 60,000, a sum which would cover wages and sets/costumes. Wages were to be paid in instalments; monthly payment is suggested.
- Audience limited to subscription only.
- The subscription guaranteed that Cagli’s company would have an audience of three hundred patrons (limit of the Town Hall).
- Suggested price of a season subscription ticket was Rs. 100.

There remained, however, one significant obstacle to the establishment of a more permanent opera culture in Calcutta: the city lacked an opera house.

A Tale of Two Houses: The construction of Calcutta’s Opera Houses and their role in White Town.

Any embarrassment the city had felt on account of its lack of an appropriate theatre before Cagli’s Company had performed in Calcutta was only surpassed by the embarrassment the city felt after it had done so. Despite the beautification of the building, the Town Hall was found to be utterly ill-suited for the mounting of concert versions of operas, let alone full-scale productions. In a practical sense, the Town Hall was neither acoustically nor physically appropriate for opera. The Englishman cringed at the sight of the ‘white-washed sounding board’ hanging perilously low to the ladies’ heads as they sang, preventing their movement and freedom. The Editor also noted that ‘at every breath, [the singers were] drawing the fiery fumes of the gaslights into their lungs.’ For all the added sounding-boards, the Town Hall’s acoustics, which the media had been complaining of for a generation, were still abysmal, and the stage and poor airing of the hall made it unbearably hot for the audience and performers alike. Furthermore, the Town Hall was beginning to prove socially inadequate. Many believed it improper to house opera, the

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269 Rs. 60,000 was equivalent to £5,750 (‘The Rate of Exchange’ The Englishman, July 20th 1871 p. 3. Rate of exchange cited as Rs.1 = 1s. 11d.) A figure such as £5,750 in 1871 has the modern buying power of £7,213,453. Calculation by E Rocha based on information about historical currency exchange from www.measuringworth.com. It is important to note that this modern figure is not merely adjusted for inflation, but represents actual worth, i.e. what the 1871 figure would buy in modern days and the figure as a percentage of the society’s GDP (i.e. the value of that building to the community).

270 Rs. 100 = £664.84 while Rs. 6.25 in modern terms equals £41.55, in terms of RPI (Retain Price Index). This figure shows simply what Rs. 100 and Rs. 6.25 would buy in modern terms. However to get an idea of how “affordable” this was to the average person, it is useful to translate the figure using GDP per capita figures (average wage earnings). In these terms one can see how out of reach this would have been to the vast majority of wage earners: Rs. 100 would be closer to £6,184.77, as a proportion of modern wages, while Rs. 6.25 = £386.55. All economic data from http://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/index.php.


272 ‘The Italian Opera Company’, The Englishman, April 23rd 1866, pp. 2–3.

queen of all arts, in such a utilitarian building. Both the media and the community argued that all that was missing from Calcutta was an opera house, for it already boasted both a fine company and an enthusiastic audience. *The Englishman* averred that ‘were a suitable building erected, an opera could be maintained here’.

It is interesting that such a determined cry for an opera house came after only one orchestra-less, chorus-less, semi-staged concert given by a company of twelve artists (including the conductor and impresario). Such precipitousness suggests that some in Calcutta had wanted to see an opera house erected for some time. This hardly surprising given that this was a time when every great city in Western civilisation had at least one opera house, and Calcutta was in the middle of reinventing itself as a bastion of Western Civilisation in the East. The appeal for an opera house in Calcutta may, therefore, be less about the merits of the Cagli Company or its ability to inspire sudden operatic fervour in its audience than about fulfilling a social, political and ideological need in the Calcutta. The City of Palaces needed a palace to house and celebrate elite European culture, society and identity; what better palace than an opera house to accomplish this? The company’s arrival was the first plausible opportunity to raise the issue since the Rebellion, and it was gratefully and immediately exploited.

Despite the fervour of its residents, it was not White Town but rather Augusto Cagli who built the city’s first purpose-built opera house. Less than three months after the company’s arrival, Cagli had commenced construction of an opera house on the site of the Tivoli Gardens in order to build a theatre there. Cagli announced that his new theatre would accommodate seven hundred spectators; three hundred more than the Town Hall could seat. Although this claim proved false when the wooden opera house opened in November with a seating capacity of just five hundred persons, the swiftness and grandiosity of Cagli’s opera house was sufficient to capture the imagination of the community. A committee of volunteers was soon formed to help Cagli organise the season and attract subscriptions. Despite its smaller than anticipated capacity, the opera house in the Tivoli Gardens, which came to be known as the Cagli Opera House, had quite large dimensions (it was 150ft long, 45ft wide and 32ft high), dimensions which are comparable to the Holborn Theatre in London, which was built the same year.

The Cagli Opera House fulfilled many of the musical and social functions in which the Town Hall had been found wanting. It was cooler and more comfortable, it had an orchestra pit, dressing rooms, space for the storage of sets and properties, decent acoustics and less noxious lighting for the singers and audience, all of which allowed the company to mount full-scale opera. Yet, of all its positive attributes, the feature that most impressed

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274 Ibid.
275 ‘The Italian Opera Company’, *The Englishman*, April 23rd 1866, p. 3.
276 No longer in existence, and considered old even in 1866, the Tivoli Gardens were situated opposite the La Martiniere Boys School, five minutes from the Maidan, as described in Montague Massey, *Recollections of Calcutta for over Half a Century*, (Jayam Subramanian and PG Distributed Proofreaders, 1918), p. 6.
278 Ibid.
279 45.72m x 13m x 9.75m, see Editorial, *The Englishman*, November 1st, 1866, p. 2.
Calcutta’s media and public was the house’s tiered seating system. Cagli’s Opera House in the Tivoli Gardens had stalls, twelve boxes, four stage boxes and, significantly, three boxes for the Viceroy (the centre box, which seated six, was for the Viceroy himself, whilst the two on either side, which seated another six each, were for any guests he wished to bring).  

The fact that Calcutta was most interested in the social dimensions of their new theatre reflects the role of the opera house throughout the nineteenth century. An opera house was not only a temple of art; it was foremost a celebration and formal representation of Western civilisation and society. Its architecture and seating arrangements ritualised and stylised the stratification of society so engrained in European culture. Audiences were rigidly divided and separated on socio-economic lines. As a ticket increases in price, the seat becomes more conspicuous and yet more isolated. The wealthy patrons in their boxes near the stage and at the centre of the auditorium were well lit and were the cynosure of the space, yet they were elevated and segregated from the rest of the audience, as though on a pedestal. By contrast, the majority, seated in the stalls, were denuded of individuality and thrown together, forming a single featureless mass. The architecture forced the poorer, massed stall patrons to literally look up to their social betters. The social nature of the opera-house is also facilitated by the shape of the space; the tiered, concentric semi-circular of opera-house auditoria encouraged audiences to watch each other as much as the stage, and did so increasingly with the rank of your seat; the cheaper tickets faced the stage, whilst the expensive and exclusive boxes faced each other.

The ability of the opera house to express so many aspects of Western 19th Century society enabled individuals to assert and engineer their identities, whilst also allowing the community as a whole to advertise its cultural and social maturity. It is for these reasons that the opera house was of such concern to a community like Calcutta, which had recently emerged into a fresh new age and had a population that needed the ability to broadcast its newfound identity, both on a communal and individual basis.

Toward the end of the 1866–67 season, various parties began to discuss the erection of a larger, more permanent and prestigious opera house. The Opera Committee, an association of esteemed (mostly British) men, mentioned the idea of a new opera house in their advertisement of the arrangements for the coming season. There was widespread interest in the idea from the many in White Town. Thus, whilst Cagli returned to Italy to hire a larger and more efficient opera company, the committee was hard at work designing, funding and building this new opera house. Initially, the committee had planned to build the new house near the site of the Cagli Opera House. A theatre was built there, but there

was a growing consensus that it would be better to erect the new theatre in the exclusive White Town neighbourhood of Chowringhee rather than in the vast open space of the Maidan. When a property became available on Lindsay Street, construction of the Calcutta Opera House began.  

Hence, by November of 1867 there were three new theatres in Calcutta: Cagli’s opera house, rechristened The Corinthian, became a site of comedy and vaudeville, the Theatre Royal (also known as the Lyceum) on the Maidan, which became the home of drama and minstrelsy, and the Lindsay Street Opera House, which was reserved for Cagli’s Opera Company.

Calcutta at the Opera-House.

Given the passion, excitement and social interest surrounding the arrival of Cagli’s opera company and the construction of the opera houses, it would be natural to assume that the impresario was rewarded with full houses and handsome profits. This was, however, not always the case.

The seasonal ticket price of Rs. 100 averaged out to Rs. 6.25 per concert, a sum which was expensive but manageable for much of White Town in 1866. The demand that the bearer subscribe to the entire season at a cost of Rs.100, however, limited the potential audience to a very exclusive echelon of Calcutta society. The restriction that the audience was subscription-only (i.e. there was no opportunity for patrons to buy a ticket for a single performance) further limited the opera’s possible patronage. The funding model for the 1866–67 season reveals that, like a generation before, Calcutta’s opera was constructed by the elite for the elite, functioning more like an exclusive social club than as an accessible entertainment.

An additional impediment to crowded houses was the speed with which Cagli’s Opera House became operational. The seasonal subscription had been designed for the Town Hall’s capacity of 300; the Tivoli could accommodate up to 500. This meant that even if all the available subscriptions were bought, and all subscribers attended the opera, the opera house would still appear only half-full. The sight of Cagli’s company performing to half-empty houses in that first season was galling for Calcutta’s opera aficionados, who soon warned that should the company slip through Calcutta’s hands the City of Palaces would be guilty of its current reputation for being narrow-minded and mercenary.

Some endeavoured to compel White Town to view opera patronage as a sign of intellectual and social superiority. The editor of *The Englishman* implored Calcutta’s inhabitants to embrace opera and put their money to a higher use:

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284 The Lindsay Street Opera House existed in its original form until 1906, when it was bought by one E.M. Cohen. Cohen extensively refurbished the house, and reopened it as the New Opera House, which was Calcutta’s premier vaudeville venue. After WWII, the theatre was converted into a cinema, known as the Globe Cinema. Recently, the cinema has been converted into businesses and offices. The edifice still remains. See Walter Kelly Firminger, *Thacker’s Guide to Calcutta* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1906).


286 Modern buying power (RPI) = £41.55 although as a percentage of per capita GDP = £386.55.

287 ‘If Calcutta fails to avail itself of this opportunity to secure enjoyment of good music [the arrival of the Cagli Opera Company], it will confirm its present character of caring for nothing save smells and 20 per cent.’ Signed A. E. F, ‘An Opera for Calcutta’ Letter to the Editor of *The Englishman*, Tuesday May 15th 1866, p. 2.
And we have good reason for [promoting and reviewing the Cagli Opera Company] – namely, the hope of inducing those, whose lot it is to continue for some years longer in this City of Palatial dullness, to do something towards redeeming the bad character of this Metropolis by erecting a Theatre or Opera House, and making it worth the while of first rate Actors and Singers to pay a visit to Calcutta...

We hold it to be no relaxation to any human intellect, after a hard day's work in the elevated temperature of a Calcutta summer to be one of a crowd at a collection of Air pumps and Electrifying machines, or to listen to Mr. Scott Moncrieff [contemporary attractions to opera in Calcutta]...helping forward the cause of Christianity by abusive language towards other creeds. The one bore is known in Calcutta as a Conversazione, and the other as a Lecture. We think that neither is in any sense intellectual; we are certain that it is not amusing. What we think Calcutta really wants is a good Theatre and a good Professional Company to act and sing there. Money can obtain these as it can everything else, and now that there is an opportunity of securing the services of a good opera Troupe, we hope that the old stigma upon Calcutta, of appreciating no amusements beyond a Magic Lantern and Negro minstrelsy, will be removed. 288

However reminiscent the above quote is of the 1830s ‘opera as a tool of social advancement’ cause, there is one subtle but significant different. Opera had been transformed from a luxury to a necessity. The Englishman argued that that as an advanced society, Calcutta’s inhabitants ought to have recourse to amusement and intellectual stimulation and the Editor considered opera to be the best means by which to furnish Calcutta with such attributes. The idea that opera was simultaneously ‘relaxing’ and ‘intellectual’, that it was better than ‘Magic Lanterns’ and ‘Negro Minstrelsy’, that it could ‘redeem’ Calcutta and her population from a less-than-flattering reputation was central to opera becoming a key mechanism through which many members of the European (and select members of the Indian population) endeavoured to create their individual and collective identity.

The idea of opera as a necessity prompted changes to subscription and attendance policy. From the 1867–68 season onwards, attendance was not limited to subscription. There were one or two public nights and two subscription nights per week, and even the subscription evenings were open to non-subscribers. Subscribers were asked to pay far more (with seasonal tickets costing between Rs. 250 for a single ticket and Rs. 1000 for a private box, whilst stall prices steadily declined, in effect creating a system whereby Calcutta’s elite subsidised opera for the middle classes. 289 Despite the increase in tariffs, there were more subscribers, and the availability of single performance tickets to the general public ensured far more numerous audiences for the following seasons. Indeed, the late 1860s and early 1870s may be considered opera’s golden age in Calcutta, with the seasons becoming increasingly long, meritorious, and socially important.

The following section will detail how the impresario, Augusto Cagli, grew his enterprise from a few opera concerts in 1866 to a five-month long season featuring scores of artists and dozens of operas. It will emphasise the relationship between the company and White

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Town, with particular regard to the role opera played in the development of Calcutta’s new identity as the metropolis of the British Raj.

Building an Opera Company: Cagli in Calcutta 1867–71

Within days of the closure of the 1866–67 season, Cagli entered into agreement with the Opera Committee to bring a new and superior opera company for the next Calcutta cold season. Cagli was advanced money from the subscription fund and was advised to hire:

Two Prima Donnas [sic], One contralto, One Seconda Donna, One Tenore Serio, One Tenore Leggiero, One Tenore Secondo, One Barytone [sic] Serio, One Barytone [sic] Leggiero, One Buffo, One Basso, One Basso Secondo, Twelve Chorus Singers (Ladies and Gentleman) if the subscriptions suffice and a full Orchestra [players unspecified].

During Cagli’s absence, the Committee busied itself with furnishing the city with the purpose-built opera-house on Lindsay Street, advertising and collecting subscriptions, and repairing Cagli’s theatrical properties, which it held as security. Calcutta waited in suspense for the arrival of November, when its new opera house would be opened by a new, Italian opera company.

Both the committee and the impresario executed their commitments to the letter. As described above, a site was chosen for the opera house, and it was ready to house its inaugural performance by the opening of the new opera season. The enthusiasm generated by the new opera house, the excitement stirred up by frequent broadcasting of Cagli’s progress in Italy, and the tireless efforts of the Committee all resulted in an overabundance of interest in subscribing to the coming season. By mid-October, there were no longer any available subscriptions.

For his part, Cagli returned with a company that boasted a larger, deeper pool of talent than his earlier troupe (see Table 6.1).

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290 ‘Signor Cagli’s Prospectus’, The Englishman, March 1st, 1867, p. 3.
Table 6.1: The Cagli Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1867–68

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Donne Soprano Assolute</td>
<td>Rosa Villa and Emma Grilli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Leggiero</td>
<td>Nina Dario Maggi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Contralto Assoluta</td>
<td>Antonietta Mazzucco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Giovannina Spinzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Tenore Assoluto</td>
<td>Tommaso Villa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Baritono Assoluto</td>
<td>Antonio Grandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altro primo Tenore Leggiero</td>
<td>Federico Piana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altro primo Baritono</td>
<td>Giuseppe Dominici</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Profondo</td>
<td>Eugenio Anselmi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Comico</td>
<td>Alessandro Polonini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondi Parti</td>
<td>Angelo Brenna, Luigi Falcini and Pietro Favas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Direttore e Concertatore</td>
<td>Enrico Maggi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Istruttore dei Cori</td>
<td>Alessandro Rubini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choristers</td>
<td>Unnamed, ten in number</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Orchestra (From “La Scala” Milan) | Primi Violini: Guglielmo Bignami and Antonio Valsecchi |
|                                  | Prima Viola: Giovanni Ortori |
|                                  | Primo Violoncello: Cristoforo Merighi |
|                                  | Primo Contrabasso: Nestore Motelli |
| Maestro Direttore d’Orchestra    | Antonio Melchiore            |
| Suggeritore                     | Angelo Calvori               |
| Scene Painter                   | Aristide Frigerio            |
| Machinist                       | Giuseppe Santambrogio         |

Indeed, Cagli had exceeded his obligations for he engaged not only a company of singers and a small band, but also a corps de ballet. The corps de ballet (see Table 6.2) was appointed not only to enhance the mise-en-scène of his opera productions (in dance numbers and crowd scenes), but also to present performances in their own right.

Table 6.2: Ballet Corps of the Cagli Italian Opera Company, 1867–68

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prima Ballerina Assoluto</td>
<td>Pierina Sassi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Ballerino Assoluto</td>
<td>Tomaso Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altri Primi Mimi</td>
<td>Eliseo Zambelli and Alessandro Ferro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Mima</td>
<td>Enrichetta Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Ballerina</td>
<td>Carolina Botalli, Emilia Guerrerio and Adele Ferro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpo di Ballo</td>
<td>Unspecified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coreografo e Primo mimo assoluto</td>
<td>Enrico Isman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the company and the new opera house furnished White Town’s residents with the sense of pride, accomplishment and cultivation for which they had been so desperate. The Editor of the city’s leading journal, The Englishman, announced:

Calcutta can at length boast of an Opera House and a good Operatic Company. Everyone present last night must have been charmed with the former, and that the latter please, the loud and frequent

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applause amply testified. Upon the fall of the curtain the chief performers were called to the front, and they and Signor Cagli received a generous and hearty welcome.293

A few nights later, he rhapsodised about the quality of the audience:

A large and fashionable audience was present for the first performance this season of *L’Elisir d’Amore*…. We can only say that the old favorites [artists from the previous season] were as well received as ever by a critical and discriminating audience, and gave much satisfaction, whilst the *débutantes* proved the good taste of Signor Cagli in his selection of artists, and were highly appreciated.294

These articles are littered with words like ‘taste’, ‘critical’, ‘discriminating’, ‘appreciated’, the implication being that the audience was composed wholly of opera aficionados. It was as though the communal acquisition of a modest opera house and a semi-resident company provided confirmation of the distinction of Calcutta’s European residents. Such opinions hint at the importance of opera to the city’s self-esteem.

Opera fit White Town as perfectly as the well-tailored gloves worn by its audiences; the company consistently attracted good to crowded houses, and the critics were careful to temper the need to provide the audience’s sophistication by finding fault with a desire to encourage the opera upon which it was so dependent. Preparations were soon underway for the 1868–69 season, which was designed to be bigger and better. The season was lengthened from four months to five months. Also longer was the Committee’s list of members; new members included leading British figures like Hon J. Strachey, Hon Sir R. Temple, G. H. M. Batten Esq and Brigdr-Gen Buchanan, as well as two eminent Indian gentlemen, namely the Hon Khajah Abdul Gunny and Baboo Hera Lall Seal.295 The extension of the season, combined with the greater wealth and influence of the opera committee, provided Cagli with a bigger budget, which would allow the impresario to offer larger salaries and, therefore, lure superior singers to the City of Palaces.

The company that Cagli appointed for the 1868–69 season represented, perhaps, the single greatest improvement to Calcutta’s operatic culture. As Table 6.3 illustrates, Cagli’s company now boasted 52 persons altogether, including sixteen soloists (four of whom also acted as leaders of the sixteen-voice chorus), a chorus master, two conductors, a string orchestra of five, a corps de ballet of five dancers, and several backstage/managerial staff.

293 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 8th, 1867, p. 3.
294 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 11th, 1867, p. 3. Emphases added.
Table 6.3: Cagli’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1868–69 296

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Donne Soprano Assolute</th>
<th>Margherita Zenoni and Carlotta Tortolini.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Leggiero</td>
<td>Nina Dario-Maggi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Contralto Assoluta</td>
<td>Antonietta Mazzucco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimarie</td>
<td>Signora Paroli, Signora Giorgio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Tenori Assoluti</td>
<td>Tommaso Villa and Enrico Caroselli.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Baritoni Assoluti</td>
<td>(Luigi?) Magnani, Giorgio d’Antoni and Giovanni Cappelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seconde Tenore</td>
<td>Gaetano Marino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso</td>
<td>Enrico Gasperini.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Buffo</td>
<td>Orazio Bonafos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondi Bassi</td>
<td>Signor Pessona, Signor Pietro Favas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Istruttore dei Cori</td>
<td>Alessandro Rubini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choristers</td>
<td>Sixteen in number including four secondi singers, and featuring, Guerero, Sra Palazoli and Sr Ferro.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra (From “La Scala” Milan)</td>
<td>Primi Violini: Guglielmo Bignami and Signor Pizzola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prima Viola: Signor Grignani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primo Violoncello: Cristoforo Merighi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primo Contrabasso: Nestore Motelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestri Direttori d’Orchestra</td>
<td>Enrico Maggi and Antonio Melchiore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corps de Ballet</td>
<td>Unnamed, five in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
<td>Cesare Bonafos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggeritore (promptor)</td>
<td>Angelo Calvori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene Painter</td>
<td>Aristide Frigerio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>Giuseppe Santambrogio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above list represents an improvement not only with respect to size, but also to quality. The previous seasons’ successful singers, such as Nina Dario-Maggi, Antonietta Mazzucco and Signor Villa had been retained, but the less popular artists were replaced. Among the debutantes, the most illustrious was undoubtedly Margherita Zenoni, whose excellent and extensive European career is detailed in Appendix E.

Zenoni was superior to any singer who had yet appeared in Calcutta (barring Anna Bishop). Her quality was immediately recognised by the public. Zenoni was said to ‘astonish’ and ‘delight’ from first to last:

Her voice, acting and singing completely took the audience by storm, and from the loud and continued applause which greeted every part of her performance, it is evident that Calcutta has now an artiste who will please everybody...She is thoroughly dramatic in all her action, versed in stage requirements – and looks thoroughly a Queen – in her soft moments of entreaty (as in the scene with Alfonso) her accents … are most entreating, most charming, most pathetic. In the last scene she excels herself, and rises to an intensity of passion and love – most eminently tragic. She is a noble singer, a perfect dramatic artist and the best India has ever seen.297

The popularity and esteem that Zenoni cultivated had both a positive and negative impact upon Cagli’s company. Her ability to galvanise Calcutta’s opera-going public, reinvigorate its

297 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, November 7th, 1868, p. 2.
commitment to supporting opera as an institution, and make opera more of an enjoyment than a social chore was of obvious advantage to the company:

It has been stated that the opera-going public of Calcutta are cold and apathetic, and as a rule, they have appeared so. Many of them fresh from hearing the greatest artistes in London, Paris and other large cities, with a keen recollection of splendid European Theatres, gorgeous scenery, perfect orchestra, complete choruses and the soul-subduing tones of singers whose reputations are worldwide, could, hardly be expected to be very enthusiastic. Our Opera in India, shorn as it was of half its fair proportions, ... was simply endured, but gradually nous avons change tout cela. ... this season it may be pronounced as perfect as can be expected in Calcutta for some time to come, and judging from the enthusiasm displayed by the audience ... for Madame Zenoni, Signor Cagli has at last succeeded by his admirable arrangements in dispelling that coldness and apathy said to be so characteristic of Opera goers here.298

Zenoni’s charms, however, exposed the inferiority of many of her fellow artists. Singers who in the previous season had pleased audiences, were now found wanting. Mazzucco, for example, was described as ineffective, in the production of Marta whilst Villa, as Faust, was criticised for his stiff and unnatural acting, a charge never before laid at his feet.299

In many instances, Zenoni appeared to be a veritable rose among thorns, outshining not only her fellow principals, but also the productions themselves. She performed one of her most celebrated roles, Lady Macbeth, in circumstances that ranged from the bizarre and unintentionally comical to the grossly incompetent. Following Macbeth’s première, The Englishman’s editor felt compelled to scold and shame many members of the company, and his sharpest weapon was the consummate artistry of Zenoni:

In Lady Macbeth, Signora Zenoni found a character which gave her opportunities of displaying that highly dramatic power which she undoubtedly possesses... We can hardly say so much of Signor Gasperini, who counteracts the effect of an excellent organ by dropping his chin on his breast and lifting his eyes to the ceiling. We may remind him that Banquo was not a posture maker and ... that he would be scarcely expected to assume the attitude of a double armed direction post to express his emotions.300

Gasperini may have portrayed Banquo in a stolid and lifeless manner, but his performance was laudable in comparison to the inability of the minor characters and chorus to maintain any semblance of character at all:

The young gentleman who personates Fleance [Fleanzio], might be trained to believe that he ought not to laugh when he is being pursued by a murderer. Some of the gentlemen choristers might do better in the absence of that merry mood which induces them to look to one another and laugh in serious situation. We never saw a real ghost, and therefore are not quite certain of the style of their deportment when visiting this sublunary sphere, but we should hardly be prepared to see them glide on by machinery holding on at wooden supports to preserve their perpendicular, and to go off with

298 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, November 7th, 1868, p. 2.
300 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, February 1st, 1869, p. 3.
a jerk which on this occasion nearly destroyed the equilibrium of a sandy whiskered ghost and caused roars of irreverent laughter.

There were evidently serious problems backstage, too, and the unhappy technician charged with creating the lightening effect was found to be distinctly substandard:

We might take the liberty of reminding the gentleman who makes the lightening that it seldom assumes the form of an explosion of gunpowder, and that it is seldom accompanied with a volume of smoke. Moreover, the unconcealed person of this said lightning maker tends to further unbelief in the actualities.

Despite the absurdities of the performance, The Englishman still believed the evening to have been a success, being confident that ‘All these little things may be softened down by time and a little oil’. His main concern, once again, was the attitude the artists exhibited with respect to the audience and the art form. He condemned the male singers for their

… wretched custom of bending at every show of applause and returning to the stage to receive little ovations which destroy every spark of stage illusion, …[which we fear] will not be so easily eradicated. No true artist would ever descend to it, especially to snap up greedily the faintest show of approbation by instant acknowledgement. 301

The fact that this behaviour is deemed more irksome and offensive than the glaring production problems that transformed a serious opera into sheer farce gives insight into the attitudes and values of Calcutta’s opera-going public. The audiences rewarded effort and exertion, even when misguided or ineffective, but could not excuse self-interest and attention seeking, especially when it detracted from the work of the composer or the other artists.

Zenoni’s popularity and incomparable skill also shaped the company’s repertoire. In order to best exploit Zenoni’s gifts, Cagli’s troupe concentrated on modern, tragic operas (see Table 6.4). This repertoire may have suited the prima donna, but it put other artists, including the talented Orazio Bonafos, at a disadvantage, for their comedic gifts had little opportunity for appreciation.

301 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, February 1st, 1869, p. 3.
Table 6.4: Repertoire of Cagli’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1868–69.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSER</th>
<th>OPERA</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>L’Elisir d’Amore</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda di Chamounix*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucrezia Borgia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flotow</td>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercadante</td>
<td>Il Giuramento</td>
<td>2‡</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Don Giovanni*◊</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Il Barbiere di Niviglia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>Un Ballo in Maschera</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ernani</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Luisa Miller*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macbeth*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Traviata</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Il Trovatore</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 operas</strong></td>
<td><strong>94 performances</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes Calcutta première; ◊Although one scene of Don Giovanni had been given by amateurs in 1833, this was the first time the whole opera was presented; ‡denotes last act only, featured with full performance of other opera, and therefore not counted in the final performance count of 94.

Moreover, although they approved of Zenoni, Calcutta’s audiences wanted more buffa. By the end of the 1868–69 season, it was clear that Cagli would have to dismiss the majority of his artists if he wanted to adequately support Zenoni and better please his audiences. Indeed, the Opera Committee made it a condition of Cagli’s contract that he not reengage any of the vocal talent apart from Zenoni and Nina Dario-Maggi, another Calcutta favourite.302 This purge was emphasised in the advertisements for subscriptions and was obviously aimed at assuring Calcutta that the embarrassments and shortcomings caused by the uneven quality of the 1868–69 troupe would not recur in the following season.

This operatic ‘night of the long knives’ may portray Calcutta as ungrateful, given the years of service that singers such as Tommaso Villa and Antonietta Mazzucco had given to the city’s operatic culture; however, both the Committee and Cagli were not without their reasons. Firstly, some of these singers had begun to turn on the city and the impresario. Late in 1868, Villa had sent a report to Milan’s Revista Teatrale, in which he touted himself as the darling of Calcutta, whilst describing d’Antoni in insulting terms and declaring him to be very disliked by the city.303 Secondly, throughout the 1868–69 season, Villa had repeatedly cried off sick with only an hour’s notice, leaving Cagli scrambling to secure a replacement or substitute an entire work as the audience were finding their seats.304 This unreliability and petulance could not have endeared him to either the management or the public and would have ended his Calcutta career, even if he had been of comparable standard to Zenoni.

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Beyond these artistic squabbles, social changes were also demanding that Calcutta’s opera become more refined. Governor-General Lawrence, who, somewhat unfairly, had been described as ‘thoroughly unmusical’, had been a man of domestic habits, and was successful as Viceroy precisely because he stabilised Calcutta after the crises of the 1850s. During his tenure, he had patronised the opera in his own, modest way, but Lawrence’s gubernatorial style could never be described as artistically inclined. In early 1869, Lawrence was succeeded by Richard Bourke, Earl of Mayo. Lord and Lady Mayo (Hon. Blanche Bourke) were everything that the Lawrences had not been, and they came to embody the social, political and economic pretensions of High Imperial India. They drove splendid carriages and they insisted upon the most formal of protocols. The Viceroyalty surrounded itself with a select array of Calcutta society; Lady Mayo’s first action as Vicereine was to ‘restore’ the prestige of the Government House, ‘rigorously examin[ing] the claims of Government House visitors and stri[king] off a large number of … persons who in her opinion had no sufficient right to intimacy with the Viceroy.’ The arrival of Lord and Lady Mayo in Calcutta transformed an already elitist society into the ne plus ultra of high-imperialism and social exclusivity.

For their part, the Viceroyalty seemed eager to promote opera in Calcutta. Lord and Lady Mayo regularly patronised the high-arts, particularly opera, and expected Calcutta to follow their example. They usually arrived on time to performances, and stayed for the entire length of the evening, behaviour that was unheard of from previous Governors-General. They came often to the opera, unfailingly declared a ‘Grand State Opera Night’ when foreign dignitaries were visiting (Chulalongkorn, King of Siam, is perhaps the most illustrious example of this), and made their support of particular artists well-known. The arrival of the Mayos, therefore, heralded a new era in Calcutta, one in which opera fulfilled an exalted social position and degree of influence. The Mayos exploited opera, and those involved in Calcutta’s opera were willing to be exploited. The Opera Committee was clearly intent on claiming the Mayos and their social circle as their patrons: the two State boxes were refurbished them with expensive yellow silk hangings and furniture. The Chair of the Committee and Cagli as impresario escorted the Viceroy to his box each evening he attended. Cagli and the Committee soon realised, however, that they could only benefit from such exploitation if their product satisfied the target audience. Thus, the management attempted to create a far superior company for the 1869–70 season.

The singers Cagli engaged for the new season (see Table 6.5) were far more experienced than their predecessors, many of them having been regular performers in some of Italy’s best regional opera houses (see Appendix E for full details).

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305 Letter from Anna Bishop to Fanny Smith, dated 27th May 1867, GB 237 Coll-304, Edinburgh University Library. Thanks to Jane Adcroft for her help with this source.
307 ‘The New Viceroyalty’, Madras Mail, April 1st, 1869, p. 3.
Table 6.5: The Cagli Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1869–1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Donne Soprani Assolute</td>
<td>Margherita Zenoni and Amalia Peroni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Leggero</td>
<td>Nina Dario-Maggi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donne Contralti Assolute</td>
<td>Paolina Verini and Margherita Sereno Setragni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimarie</td>
<td>Amalia Fumagalli and Signora Gillardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Tenori Assoluti</td>
<td>Augusto Celada and Pietro Setragni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Baritoni Assoluti</td>
<td>Filippo Giannini and Signor Marini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso</td>
<td>Ernesto Daneri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Buffo</td>
<td>Benedetto Mazzetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondi Bassi</td>
<td>Carlo Visai and Signor Paroboschi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Istruttore dei Cori</td>
<td>Alessandro Rubini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choristers</td>
<td>Eighteen in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Direttore d'Orchestra</td>
<td>Enrico Maggi and Antonio Melchiore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestore</td>
<td>Angelo Calvori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene Painter</td>
<td>Aristide Frigerio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinist</td>
<td>Giuseppe Santambrogio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With such singers in the company, both Cagli and the Committee must have felt that success was certain. They were sadly mistaken. Neither Peroni nor Celada were able to impress the audience, both lacking both the dramatic and vocal skills that the Calcutta public so valued. Following a poor performance of *Un Ballo in Maschera*, the critic at The *Englishman* issued a harsh but honest appraisal of these two artists:

> We were not prepossessed with the Prima Donna [Peroni] or her associate Signor Celada. The former screams and strains and the latter has not sufficient force, either vocal or artistic, to fill prominent parts. We were much disappointed with the love scene in the third act.... Whatever intensity was given lacked force from an absence of feeling – it was merely loudness and harshness.\(^{310}\)

Celada was repeatedly accused of singing flat,\(^{311}\) whilst Peroni, despite her ‘tall and graceful figure and charmingly coquettish style of acting’, was found to have an unpleasantly thin voice.\(^{312}\) Marini, too, was utterly unsuccessful, having a voice so weak as to be completely inaudible,\(^{313}\) whilst Carlo Visai was thought a complete failure.

Other artists were popular and successful, but sadly underutilised by Cagli. This was true of Fumagalli, who was rarely cast in any role where she could make an impact. She was always praised when heard, as on the occasion of *Il Trovatore* when The *Englishman* claimed that ‘nothing attracted our admiration until the entry of Signora Zenoni as Leonora and Signora Fumagalli as Inez. We can compliment the latter lady on the sweetness of her voice, but not on its power.’\(^{314}\) Fumagalli’s lack of power was natural for a lyric coloratura performing the role of Inez. It was no doubt an error of judgment on Cagli’s part to have cast

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\(^{310}\) ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, December 16\(^{th}\), 1869, p. 2.

\(^{311}\) ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, December 27\(^{th}\), 1869, p. 3.

\(^{312}\) ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 10\(^{th}\), 1870, p. 3.

\(^{313}\) ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 1\(^{st}\), 1870, p. 3.

\(^{314}\) ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 4\(^{th}\) 1869, p. 3.
Fumagalli thus, and more so not to have replaced the unpopular Peroni with the capable and well-liked Fumagalli.

Likewise, and in a manner reminiscent of the underutilisation of the excellent Orazio Bonafos in the previous season, Ernesto Daneri was not given sufficient opportunity to shine in public, a fact that certainly hurt the artistic and commercial success of the 1869–70 season. Daneri had been popular with the public since his début. Soon, however, the same critic was complaining that this ‘good singer with a good voice should have better opportunities of showing his talents’ than the secondary parts of Samuele (Un Ballo in Maschera) and Ferrando (Il Trovatore). As with Fumagalli, there is no obvious reason for the mis- or underemployment of Daneri. Both singers had success and experience in Italy, and were popular in Calcutta from the beginning of the season. Their underutilisation was just one of many nonsensical decisions made by both Cagli and the Committee throughout the season. They withheld operas that were both popular and expensive to produce until the last few weeks of the season, a choice that wasted money, decreased the season’s profitability and tried the audience’s patience. Cagli hired another terrible chorus and then left them stranded in Calcutta with nothing but the mercy of the Committee preventing their permanent exile. Some of these shortcomings were the product of circumstances beyond Cagli’s control, whilst others may have been the product of contractual obligations (some singers, for example, may have secured first performance rights of certain works for their benefits). Yet these, and other, proceedings demonstrated the relatively poor management of the season by Cagli and his Committee.

The high-hopes that White Town had had for the 1869–70 season had not been met; the Calcutta Opera was not achieving the reputation for excellence that the city so desired and, to some extent, required. In the meantime, Cagli’s position as impresario had been compromised and, smelling blood in the water, rivals began to snap around him like sharks. Two of the contenders, Giovanni Pompei and Signor Steffani, were Italian impresari active in the Asia-Pacific region who had become interested in entering the relatively prestigious Calcutta market. Cagli also had enemies closer to home, for Enrico Maggi and Tommaso Villa, two of Cagli’s dissatisfied former-employees, had decided to become the man’s professional adversaries. In consideration of Calcutta’s disappointment with the 1869–70 season, and the availability of potential replacements, it is telling that the city did not dump Cagli and secure another impresario. Although Calcutta’s opera-goers imposed limitations on his authority and made it clear that he was ‘on his final trial’, the loyalty Calcutta showed towards Cagli proves how great a debt they felt to him, and that the city still had some degree of trust in the man’s abilities and taste.

Cagli was apparently aware of his fallen position in the community and was eager to make amends. In the negotiations for the 1870–71 season, he insisted on the meanest of terms for himself, asking for no advance or minimum number of subscriptions, but only an assurance that, upon arriving in Calcutta with the new company, the Committee would

316 ‘Report of the Sub-Committee appointed at the General Meeting of the Opera Committee on the 18th March 1870’, The Englishman, April 18th, 1870, p. 1.
reimburse the cost of fares. He also attempted to reach a broader audience by creating a special public night on Wednesdays, when the price of admission was reduced to two rupees (a third of the regular price). Interestingly, although such a move was remarkably popular amongst the poorer sections of Calcutta’s British community, and went some way towards building a larger and more diverse support base for the opera, the Committee objected to it, claiming that these extra performances wearied the company and adversely affected the artists’ performances on subscription nights. As will be discussed in a later section, this is just one example of how the opera-going public in Calcutta aimed at keeping opera as an exclusively elite social space, a policy that, finally, undermined operatic culture in the City of Palaces.

Meanwhile, the threat posed by Cagli’s rivals had begun to escalate. Giovanni Pompei was now in British India too, busying himself with the city of Bombay, where Cagli had begun his business five years ago. To add insult to injury, Pompei was entertaining Bombay with an array of Cagli’s former artists, including Margherita Zenoni, Carlotta Tortolini, Paolina Verini, Margherita Setragni, Pietro Setragni, Magnani, Enrico Gasperini, Benedetto Mazzetti and Marini. The idea of losing his monopoly must have weighed on him heavily as he attempted to form a new company during the summer of 1870. The perilous Pompei would have to wait, however. Cagli had to secure Calcutta’s affections, and he did so by securing a troupe of singers of a calibre never before seen in the city.

In assembling the 1870–71 troupe, Cagli had the benefit of his several years’ experience in Calcutta. He knew that a single stunning prima donna would not satisfy the city; he would have to return with an ensemble of able, experienced singers. The Calcutta public had also shown that it was as concerned with acting as with vocal accomplishment, which meant that he needed singers that looked good on stage and acted with conviction. The continued criticisms about the repertoire, coupled with his contractual obligation to present at least twelve operas in the coming season, made Cagli aware that he needed singers who were able to learn new roles quickly and would be especially accomplished in opera buffa. Bitter experience with defecting instrumentalists and singers also had taught him the value of loyal singers, and in order to earn that loyalty he would have to treat them, and pay them, well.

The company he returned with was, largely, a triumph. After four seasons of costly trial and error, Cagli had finally succeeded in formulating a company that met the expectations of Calcutta’s public (see Table 6.6). Although it was the smallest company Cagli had yet brought out, with only thirteen principals as opposed to the sixteen of the 1868–69 season, the troupe was a true ensemble company, with the majority of artists having equal abilities and experience. (For details of the artists’ experiences see Appendix E).

317 Ibid.
319 ‘Report of the Sub-Committee appointed at the General Meeting of the Opera Committee on the 18th March 1870’, The Englishman, April 18th, 1870, p. 1.
320 ‘Italian Opera at Bombay’, The Englishman, June 20th, 1870, p. 2.
Individually, most of the singers enjoyed a level of success unprecedented in Calcutta. Cortesi was lauded for her fine Rosina, and even as Gilda (Rigoletto), a role that was incredibly high for a lyric coloratura mezzo, Cortesi pleased all who heard her. Francesco Tournerie was mostly engaged in secondary roles, but Calcutta was pleasantly surprised by his meaningful execution of these parts. He particularly excelled as Valentine (Faust) where he ‘greatly surpassed expectations’ with his attention to detail and artistic singing and acting. Filippo Coliva was lauded for his interpretation of Rigoletto, which was both vocally and dramatically ‘excellent’ and gave Calcutta the ‘finest display of a full Barytone voice’ that the city had yet heard. On more than one occasion, Ferante Rosnati received the simple but impressive pronouncement of being ‘perfect’ and was declared to be ‘the best tenor to ever visit Calcutta’. Rosnati’s fellow tenor, Leandro Coy, also secured the esteem of the press and public. He was possessed of a ‘fine, clear tenor’ voice, and the high calibre of his fioratura technique was a virtue that had never before been heard in the male voice.

Amongst this compendium of talent, it was Giulia Tamburini-Coy who commanded the highest degree of admiration and devotion from the audience and media. She had been hired as a comprimaria alongside Luigia Tournerie, both of whom were married to principal singers in the company. The arrangement appears to have been that these ladies

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321 Of her Gilda the press remarked that she ‘acted finely’, and that ‘her cavatina “Caro nome” was well sung, and showed [her] great facility.’ ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 25th, 1871, p. 3.
322 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
323 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 25th, 1871, p. 3.
324 For example: ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 11th, 1871, p. 3 and ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
325 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
would not receive a wage for their occasional appearances in the company, but would have free passage to and from Calcutta, which allowed them to be with their husbands, as well as pursue other incomes, for example in teaching, as Tournerie did. Such a position would normally have been far beneath Tamburini-Coy’s attention and ability; however, she was pregnant for most of 1870, a fact that prevented her from taking principal roles for most of the season. A few months after her son’s birth in December 1870, Tamburini-Coy made her Calcutta debut, not as comprimaria, but as prima donna, to effusive acclaim.

On the occasion of her first appearance (as Amina in *La Sonnambula* on January 14th 1871), Tamburini-Coy transformed an initially indifferent audience into an assembly of wildly enthusiastic devotees:

The Signora … has a perfect Soprano voice, clear and sweet, though not powerful. At first she was nervous, and the chilling silence of an English audience on her appearance did not encourage her. But her first Cavatina “Come per me sereno” broke the ice at once, and from that time forward the applause increased, till it culminated at last into a perfect furore. Signora Coy’s intonation and articulation is excellent; not a word was lost. The little duetto with Signor Coy “Son geloso del zeffiro erranti” was a chef d’oeuvre, and the singers were both recalled. In the second act the quintetto “D’un pensiero d’un accento” was exceedingly well given with much feeling and expression; the animated acting was superior to that of any artiste we have yet seen on our stage. In the last scene, the cavatina “Ah non credea mirarti”, the Signora sang with vigor and spirit, more approaching to our memory of the first singers of the London boards than we could have ever expected. She took an E flat perfectly and without contortion. At the conclusion, the stage was covered with bouquets thrown to this talented artiste.

She soon took over from Varesi as Lady Enrichetta in *Marta*, a role in which she impressed the audience with her ‘gentle and lady-like manner on the stage’, ‘excellent acting’ and ‘clear upper notes (to E) [which] were delicious’ whilst ‘the ease of her vocalisation was remarked upon emphatically’. Tamburini-Coy became the favourite singer of the opera, even attracting the attention of the Viceroy and Vicereine, who made a point of attending each and every one of her performances, and ‘commanding’ her appearance as Lucia di Lammermoor for the occasion of the State Night of 1871. Her mad scene in that opera was described as ‘a chef d’oeuvre of singing and acting, we cannot remember anything more perfect in the greatest stages of Europe’. When the public realised that, for all her mastery and talents, Tamburini-Coy was not earning an income, the press advised the public to ‘send an honorarium to the favourite beneficaire in lieu of the mere price of a ticket’ as was the case in Europe. It appears to have been advice that was followed, for Tamburini-Coy received a large purse of gold coins.

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326 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, March 4th, 1871, p. 3.
328 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
329 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 4th, 1871, p. 3.
330 The State Night occurred on March 1st, 1871.
331 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, March 4th, 1871, p. 3.
332 ‘Opera’, *The Englishman*, March 13th, 1871, p. 3.
The above chronicle of the 1870–71 company’s successes, however rhapsodic, should not imply that the troupe was consistently perfect. After winning the admiration of the Calcutta public, Rosnati began to become careless and imprudent; at one performance of *Il Trovatore*, he decided to save his voice by not singing any of Manrico’s part in the Act 2 finale “E deggio... e posso crederlo”, which ruined the effect of one of Verdi’s most celebrated concerted pieces, and offended the public. Rosnati quickly remedied his attitude, and began to be more conscientious onstage.

There were some in the company whose Calcutta reception was less than exceptional. The beautiful blonde, Clotilde Rosavalle, was initially popular amongst the public, despite the censure she received from the critics for her heavy vibrato. She was particularly effective in the role of Margherita in *Faust*, in which her ‘fine, flaxen hair’ and gracefulness made her the very embodiment of Goethe’s tragic heroine, whilst vocally even her very defects helped her. The tremulous style of singing which has been so often condemned … seems especially fitted for the part, when employed legitimately as was the case in Friday; while her really fine voice and intelligent acting produced a great impression, and the warm applause she received was richly deserved.

Rosavalle, however, was not always so praised. She was given to forgetting to act whilst singing, and, worse still, breaking character altogether to converse with people backstage whilst in the middle of a scene. Unlike Rosnati, after earning such criticism for these habits Rosavalle did not mend her ways; she continued to be careless and inattentive to the drama throughout the season. This not only lost her the admiration she had earlier won, but caused her to be so disliked that when Cagli attempted to send her back to Calcutta for the 1871–72 season, the Committee rejected her.

Luigia Polli, too, largely disappointed the audiences, being troubled by a general inability to reach or sustain high notes, and an acutely obvious passaggio break, described as ‘unpleasant’ by *The Englishman*. Yet, despite making a poor Nancy (*Marta*) and an indifferent Siebel (*Faust*), she was incredibly successful in true contralto roles, and was considered to be the best Azucena (*Il Trovatore*) that Calcutta had ever seen. Her success, or lack thereof, may therefore be somewhat attributed to miscasting, rather than solely to an inherent inferiority of Polli’s. Had she only appeared in roles such as Azucena and Ulrica, rather than being employed for parts that are the proper province of light mezzos and sopranos, it is likely that she would have been commanded more admiration than she did.

Notwithstanding the deficiencies of Rosavalle and Polli, the evenness of the talent among the majority of Cagli’s cast made the majority of productions highly successful. Familiar

333 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 13th, 1871, p. 3.
334 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 11th, 1871, p. 3.
335 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
336 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 13th, 1871, p. 3.
338 ‘The Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 4th, 1871, p. 3.
339 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 13th, 1871, p. 3.
Bel Canto operas, such as *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Sonnambula* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* gained a freshness and vigour due to the excellent performances of Cortesi, Grandi, the Coys, Coliva and Rosnati. Similarly, the more contemporary operas also benefitted from the thorough artistry and completeness they received at the hands of Cagli’s new ensemble company (see Table 6.7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSER</th>
<th>OPERA</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Operatic selections</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Puritani*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Sonnambula</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimarosa</td>
<td>Il Matrimonio Segreto</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Don Pasquale</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>L’Elisir d’Amore</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lucia di Lammermoor</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucrezia Borgia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flotow</td>
<td>Marta</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td><em>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Due Foscari</em> (last act only)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rigoletto</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Traviata</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16 operas</td>
<td>76 performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cagli gave attention to the orchestra also. The ‘band’ had long consisted of a mere handful of string players who were augmented by various military winds throughout the season. Apart from the meagreness of its size, this arrangement also had other problems. It was reliant upon the discretion and generosity of military leaders, who at best spared their bands for only a few hours a week. Moreover, no one band had a standing contract with the opera; rather, at least six-to-eight different bands volunteered at the opera in any one season. Such erratic provisions meant that rehearsals were nearly always both insufficient and inefficient. After several years of such paltry orchestral resources, Cagli finally created a modest, but fairly complete, orchestra.340 This orchestra was available for all rehearsals, and over the season built up a repertoire and rapport with the singers, which made it even more efficient. When extra force was needed, for example in *Faust*, the band was still augmented by local players (increasing from the Viceroy’s own band) but, unlike previous season, the opera was not dependent upon them.

The orchestra was successful from the first, and was widely acknowledged to have facilitated significant improvements to musical performance standards and practices. Well into the season, the public and press were still impressed and relieved by the high standard of the orchestra’s playing; indeed, over two months into the season, the Editor of *The

340 The Orchestra consisted of one principal violin (Leader of the Orchestra), two 1st Violins, two 2nd Violins, one viola, one ‘cello, one double bass, one flute, one oboe, one bassoon, one trumpet, one pianoforte. This brought the total to fourteen players.
Englishman exclaimed that ‘the playing was excellent: it was indeed a treat to hear such a good Orchestra after “the Piano and five fiddle” we had endured in previous seasons.’

The artistic success of the 1870–71 company did not translate to security for Cagli. Contemporary press reports indicate that the season may not have been as financially rewarding as its critical success would lead one to imagine. Moreover, Giovanni Pompei continued to encroach into Cagli’s territory, and was doing so with singers from Cagli’s companies, in essence piggy-backing off Cagli’s hard work. Cagli was not the type of person to shy away from acrimonious public battles. Yet, when it came to confronting the threat being posed by Pompei, Cagli chose a different path and it was a masterstroke, simultaneously resolving the risk of his enterprise’s poor outlook in Calcutta and the threat of rivals on his monopoly.

Rather than fight Pompei and squabble over artists in an environment that, in any case, was not overly fertile operatic territory, Cagli invited his rival to form a partnership. The creation of a composite company would allow the men to pool their resources, both vocal and material, and expand their interests. Cagli would keep Calcutta and Pompei could keep his various holdings across the Asia-Pacific, each confident that the other would not lay siege to his claim, whilst collectively they could explore new frontiers. The frontier they decided on was Melbourne, Australia.

Melbourne’s particular strengths will be discussed in subsequent chapters; but it worth noting here that for two impresari struggling to fashion a reliable audience from the tyrannical and transient members of the British Raj machine, the ambitious, affluent, stable and radical middle-class residents of Melbourne must have struck them as the logical, promising stage on which to launch their venture. Melbourne’s appositeness was enhanced by its (relative) proximity to India as well as the fact that, due to being on different sides of the equator, Melbourne and Calcutta’s winter music seasons alternated (the former spanning May to September, the latter spanning November to March). This meant that the company could be in almost continual employment, with the journeys between the subcontinent and the Australian continent taking up most of the ‘spare’ time between seasons.

By April 1871, the arrangements had been finalised in both cities, and the Cagli-Pompei Company embarked for the city of Melbourne. Calcutta’s media kept aficionados informed of the troupe’s success in the Australian colonies, down to the detail of individual performances; Un Ballo in Maschera was reported as a triumph, Don Giovanni as a mediocrity, whilst the press seemed to take pride in the unequivocal success earned by its favourites like Zenoni and Tamburini-Coy.

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341 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, January 16th, 1871, p. 3.
Over the past six years, Cagli had grown his enterprise from a handful of concerts in a utilitarian and inadequate hall to an intercontinental operatic empire. His personal successes reflected and, in some ways, supported the growth of Calcutta’s social and political identity. The city had gone from post-war chaos to the stability and prosperity of peacetime. White Town had grown increasingly sure of its own superiority and position in British India. The Golden Age of opera in Calcutta coincided with the beginning of the British Raj’s Golden Age not by accident, but rather, because the two phenomena were dependent upon one another.
Chapter 7:
Trouble in paradise, 1871–75

Even at the moment of their greatest triumph, trouble was brewing for Cagli and Pompei, as well as for opera in Calcutta. This chapter details the ways in which Calcutta’s opera culture was injured by the burgeoning operatic culture in Australasia. It will also reveal how the social, economic and political nature of White Town led to problems within its operatic culture, eventually culminating in the ‘operatic crisis’ of 1875. European Calcutta had a strong desire to assert a cosmopolitan, educated, civilised, cultured collective identity, for such a reputation would simultaneously justify Britain’s imperial activity and to underpin the city’s pretensions to metropolitanism and geopolitical importance. Opera was a useful tool in creating such an identity. Yet, this desire was undermined by White Town’s insularity, exclusivity and nationalism. As will be shown in this chapter, these ambitions and attributes, coupled with the tendency of Calcutta’s most influential and wealthy European residents to interfere in opera, created conflict and led to a schism amongst some of the cities most illustrious residents.

Treachery, murder and debt: the 1871–72 season

As will be discussed in Chapter 12, the Cagli-Pompei Company met with enormous and instantaneous success in Melbourne. This success, and the grand plans it inspired, was not without costs, however. Melbourne was in easy reach of several other towns and colonies, making an irresistible base for an antipodean touring circuit. Reluctant to let an opportunity to expand his operatic empire slip by, and unwilling to relinquish his monopoly in Calcutta, Cagli decided to create two companies from his composite pool of talent and tour them simultaneously. One company would return to Calcutta for the 1871–72 season, whilst the other performed in New Zealand. Although ambitious, not to say avaricious, the plan may have met with success had Cagli not created two companies of differing quality and offered Calcutta the inferior one.

Cagli’s preferential treatment of the antipodean audiences meant that none of Calcutta’s favourite singers returned to Calcutta; Zenoni, Coliva, Cortesi, Rosnati, the Tourneries and the Coys were all sent to New Zealand. Calcutta did not realise the scale of Cagli’s neglect and double-dealing until after the 1871–72 season had begun, for Cagli spent most of 1871 hiding the truth from the city. He informed the Committee of staffing changes only
incrementally, and often lied about the reasons certain singers were not returning to Calcutta.\textsuperscript{344}

The non-appearance of any of the artists Cagli had promised Calcutta necessitated many makeshift arrangements: old faces, like Benedetto Mazzetti and Filippo Giannini, were roped in, but were found to have lost some of their shine. Rosavalle, who Cagli had sent in Tamburini-Coy’s place and who had been one of the least esteemed members of the 1870–71 season, was rejected by the Calcutta Opera Committee, who searched, in vain, for another lyric soprano willing to drop her engagements in Italy to come to Calcutta. Eventually, the Committee relented and hired poor Rosavalle in January, largely to relieve the pressure on the company’s other sopranos. Cagli’s other antipodean offering, Ugo Devoti who was sent at Leandro Coy’s replacement, was also hired by the Opera Committee; but, like Rosavalle, his employment was an action of necessity rather than enthusiasm. These and other changes resulted in a company that was utterly different to the successful 1870–71 company that Calcutta had been expecting (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: The Cagli-Pompei Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1871–72.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prima Donna Assoluta</th>
<th>Enrichetta Bosisio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altre Prime Donne</td>
<td>Giuseppina Aimé and Clotilde Rosavalle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prime Donne Contralti Assolute</td>
<td>Teresa Riboldi and Filomena Curti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Leontina Aschieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Tenori Assoluti</td>
<td>Signor Artoni and Ugo Devoti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Baritoni Assoluti</td>
<td>Gaetano Giotti and Filippo Giannini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Profondo</td>
<td>Giuseppe Vecchi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Buffo</td>
<td>Benedetto Mazzetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondi Bassi</td>
<td>Signor Montini, Signor Orlandini and Giovanni Pompei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choristers</td>
<td>Eighteen in number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Direttore d’Orchestra</td>
<td>Achille Marzorati</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the audience was extremely disappointed in the absence of its favourites, many of the artists pleasantly surprised the public. Indeed, although Cagli’s wanton disregard for

\textsuperscript{344} Coliva was the first singer withdrawn from Calcutta. On this occasion, Calcutta was indulgent of the change having been (falsely) told that Coliva needed to stay in Australia for his health. In September, two more singers were excused from the Calcutta company: Augusta Cortesi and Ferrante Rosnati. This time, Cagli used the artists’ recent marriage as the excuse. Whilst it is true that Cortesi and Rosnati were wed in September 1871, their appearance in New Zealand proves that their nuptuals did not prevent them from working. Cagli distracted White Town from its disappointment by advertising the excellent credentials of his newest prima donna, Enrichetta Bosisio. The impresario was most deceptive about Leandro Coy and Giulia Tamburini-Coy. As late as October 18\textsuperscript{th}, Cagli was still promising the Coys, despite having had already engaged them for his New Zealand project. It was only on November 9\textsuperscript{th}, already two weeks into the opera season that Calcutta discovered the dupe. The \textit{Indus}, the ship which was expected to bring the Coys, brought nothing but a letter from Cagli saying that the Coys ‘could not come’ and that he had sent Clotilde Rosavalle and the tenor Ugo Devoti in their stead. Rosavalle was already familiar to Calcutta, and was not made welcome. Devoti was little better: he had been in Australia since 1868, finding little success in Melbourne, but was now utterly unemployable across Australia due to the persistent (and accurate) rumour that he was losing his voice. Pompei was sent to manage the company and offered both his managerial and vocal talents to the Calcutta operation. See Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, August 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1871, p. 2, Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, September 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1871, p. 2, \textit{Italian Opera’}, \textit{The Englishman}, October 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1871, p. 1, and Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, November 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1871, p. 2. For information on Devoti’s Australian career see Alison Gyger, \textit{Civilising the colonies: pioneering opera in Australia} (Sydney: Pellinor, 1999), pp. 144-56.
Calcutta’s audiences may call his judgment into question, there can be no doubt that Cagli had good taste in prima donnas. Enrichetta Bosisio, like Zenoni, Dario-Maggi, and Tamburini-Coy before her, delighted Calcutta’s audience, a fact that is unsurprising given her extensive talent and experience (see Appendix E). Her dramatic and vocal abilities easily won over the public. Although no other singer had such a wealth of experience as Bosisio, but there were still several other talented and capable artists in the company. Both of the company’s contraltos, Riboldi and Curti, earned the esteem of the public.

Notwithstanding the excellence of the aforementioned singers, the company was an uneven one. Moreover, Cagli’s contractual obligation to present at least 16 operas and many première works was not fulfilled; the company performed only 15 operas over the season (see Table 7.2 below), all of which, except for *Ione* and *I Due Foscari*, had been staples of Calcutta’s repertoire since the 1860s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSER</th>
<th>OPERA</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Concert: Excerpts from Various operas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td><em>La Sonnambula</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td><em>Don Pasquale</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>L’Elisir d’Amore</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Favorita</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Figlia del Reggimento</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Linda di Chamounix</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lucrezia Borgia</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td><em>Faust</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrella</td>
<td><em>Ione</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td><em>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Due Foscari</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ernani</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rigoletto</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15 operas†</td>
<td>78‡</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes Calcutta premiere. † Further to these operas, excerpts from the following operas were also performed: *Betty* and *Pia di Tolomei* (both by Donizetti), *L’Italiana in Algeri* (Rossini), *Crispino e la Comare* (Ricci), *Robert le Diable* (Meyerbeer), *Marta* (Flotow), *Lady Jane Grey* (Mack), *L’Ebreo* (Apolloni). ‡The lower than usual number of performances is due to the assassination of Lord Mayo, Viceroy of India. His death prompted nationwide mourning, including the closure of the Opera House between 12th and 22nd February 1872.

Cagli’s indifference and maltreatment of Calcutta’s audiences could not have come at a more inopportune time, and his actions undermined not only his own fortunes, but also the future of operatic culture in the City of Palaces. The 1871–72 season was the season in which opera had the greatest chance of financial success. In May 1871, long before the 1871–72 season had been finalised, Calcutta’s opera had already attracted more subscribers than ever before. Indeed, by the time the season commenced, Calcutta’s opera had secured the largest and most prestigious audience Cagli had ever had the good-fortune to attract.345

345 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, May 4th, 1871, p. 3.
The season could have been Cagli’s (and opera in Calcutta’s) most successful. Instead, Cagli was remembered only for his ‘treachery’ and the audience became disillusioned with Italian Opera. Having offended so great a proportion of Calcutta’s opera public, Cagli’s good name was irreparably damaged; the public, press and Opera Committee vowed that they would never again entertain any prospectus from that impresario.

The 1871–72 season suffered another blow when the Earl of Mayo, who was not only the Viceroy, but also one of opera’s staunchest advocates in Calcutta, was assassinated. His death made an immediate impact upon the fortunes of Italian opera, for it prompted several weeks of national mourning during which the theatres were obliged to closed. In the longer term, opera was disadvantaged by the premature loss of its most illustrious and influential supporter. The Prince of Wales also became very ill, which added to the sobriety of Calcutta’s public life. This constellation of misadventures rendered the season a financial disaster, with a total deficit of Rs. 5,840. This debt, partially an accident of history and partially the fault of Cagli, left a sour taste in the mouths of those who had previously been amongst opera’s champions.

So large a debt would have been crisis enough for any opera establishment, but it was exacerbated by the fact that no policy existed to determine who was responsible for such arrears or the extent to which any party was liable. The Committee entreated Calcutta’s subscribers to pay a levy equivalent to one-third of their total subscription. At first, The Englishman supported this, viewing it as a means of not only distributing, and therefore lessening, the financial burden, but also proving the city’s commitment to the operatic genre:

We again appeal on behalf of a most rational, innocent and refining amusement to those who are able to save Calcutta from the reproach of allowing the Opera to fail for want of support. To the subscribers we would point out that if they all agree to help the Committee under the present special circumstances, the sum, required from each of them will be a mere trifle; whereas, if the whole burden is to be borne by the Committee, each member of it will have to pay a very large sum. Lastly, we would invite those who have generally or very frequently gone to the Opera at the expense of their friends, to show their appreciation for what they have seen and heard, by helping the Committee in its present difficulty.

Whilst some subscribers came forward, volunteering even more than they had been asked to donate, the Committee and The Englishman’s plea for magnanimity was largely ignored. Such reticence is unsurprising given that the amounts the Committee were originally asking for as ‘compulsory donations’ ranged from Rs. 93 for a Single Stall ticket and Rs. 193 for a Family Stall ticket to Rs. 400 for Upper boxes. Such figures were hardly trifling. The sum demanded from holders of family stalls (Rs. 193 or £222 in 1872) was quite a significant figure given that the salary of an Indian Civil Service clerk ranged from £100–500, and

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350 ‘Italian Opera – Meeting of the Subscribers’, Friday February 23rd 1872, p. 3.
even more executive civil servants, such as an assistant under-secretary, were earning only £1200–2000 a year. Such an amount may have been manageable if budgeted for ahead of time as a family’s chief source of entertainment for the year; but it was not affordable when demanded without warning for something that had already been paid for. The Committee’s appeal brought in approximately Rs. 3,000, chiefly from wealthy Indians such as the Maharajah of Vizianagram, but a considerable amount remained in arrears. Having no alternative, it was left to the Committee members themselves to settle the debt; two members refused to pay, whilst the other sixteen cleared the debt by contributing Rs. 365 each.

Plagued by the effects of Cagli’s double-dealing, the unforeseen murder of the Calcutta opera’s best customer, the Viceroy, and the enormous debt resulting from these events, the 1871–72 season was a complete fiasco. In some ways, the 1871–72 season was a pivotal moment in the operatic history of Calcutta, for, opera would never again enjoy the confidence and stability it had during the 1860s. The following sections will discuss opera’s chronic instability in greater detail, with specific reference to the social, economic and political facets of opera in high imperial White Town.

Debt, ambition and insecurity—Opera from 1872 to 1875

The fear of being encumbered with debts in the future made it impossible to find volunteers for the Opera Committee for the 1872–73 season. There were still many in White Town, however, whose passion for opera led to a determination to see an operatic 1872–73 season. At first it seemed as though they might succeed. Two proposals were put forth. The first gave an impresario full control of, and responsibility for, the enterprise’s finances. He would be given Rs. 60,000 from subscriptions and some of the ticket receipts with the understanding that any shortfall would be his burden alone.

The other plan, which was supported by the press, was that the Committee act as a collective and organise the season itself, bypassing the need for an impresario. This scenario required that the subscription raise 80% of the total cost of the season, with the remaining 20% to be covered by box-office receipts. The advantage of this plan was that the tightly-knit, exclusive, hierarchical, and officious nature of Calcutta’s social structure ensured that the subscriber would not be disappointed, for the Committee members, both collectively and individually, could not afford to lose faith or face with their friends and colleagues. However, there were also difficulties in this strategy. The Committee was comprised of working gentlemen—mostly members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS), judiciary or armed force executive. They had no experience in organising an opera season.

352 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, April 24th, 1872, p. 3.
353 Editorial, The Englishman, June 17th, 1872, p. 2. Note that this figure was equal to £401 at 1872, which is commensurate to £27,700 in 2011. Lawrence H. Officer, 'Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 to Present,' at Williamson and Officer, 'Measuring Worth'.
355 Ibid.
and lacked the time to learn. The arrangements with Europe would have to be conducted via intermediaries with whom they had no experience, leaving scope for yet further problems: Who would liaise with the performers? How would conflicts with a company who spoke little or no English be resolved? What if the artists were substandard? And who, ultimately, was responsible for the artistic success or failure of the season? Such issues had the potential to wreak havoc amongst so insulated a community and threatened the equilibrium of the upper-classes of Calcutta’s society.

Notwithstanding the support of the media and many members of the public for this second plan, the Committee was discouraged by the amount of artistic and financial responsibility, and effort demanded by such arrangements, and chose, therefore, to pursue the first. Telegramming from Milan, Giovanni Pompei declared that if the Committee approved of him, he would be happy to accept the position of impresario along these terms, informing Calcutta that he would not seek ‘any guarantee from the Committee or the public’ beyond a subscription list, which would serve to satisfy him that there was ‘sufficient promise of returns’.

Pompei assured Calcutta that he would bring out a first-rate company, even guaranteeing the Coy’s for the 1872–73 season. Meanwhile, Pompei’s deputy, Alessandro Massa, had already arrived in Calcutta and requested that a small committee be established. Massa stressed that such a company would be free from any financial responsibility, and would exist solely to liaise with the public and facilitate administration. The opera habitués and press were delighted with the arrangement and urged the public to generously support the opera.

Pompei, however, changed his demands. He asked for the (comparatively) modest sum of Rs. 6000 to cover immediate expenses, as well as a guarantee of the cost of the artists’ passage to Calcutta. When Massa announced this request at a Town Hall meeting, the Committee, still with a bitter taste in its mouth from the previous season, immediately rejected Pompei’s petition. The winter of 1871–72 was, therefore, bereft of public, professional opera.

This lacuna in Calcutta’s public operatic life appears to have been filled by a range of both amateur and professional projects. The Dalhousie Institute launched a series of soirées musicales. The black-face minstrel Dave Carson incorporated more musical numbers into his shows during the 1872–73 season, whilst also making them more India-specific (i.e. he increasingly caricatured the ‘coolie’ and ‘babu’, rather than the ‘mammy’ and the ‘negro-

357 Giovanni Pompei to the Editor of *The Englishman*, dated August 31st, 1872. Published in full in *The Englishman*, September 23rd, 1872, p. 2

These entertainments were not complete substitutes for opera, however, and throughout the 1872–73 theatrical season, \textit{The Englishman’s} editor bemoaned the city’s operaless state. White Town believed that the lack of opera not only deprived its residents of its foremost artistic and social experience, but also sent an unflattering picture of Calcutta’s residents to the rest of the Empire and the world. It was thought to be a tragedy of no small proportion that the ‘places which once rang with the silvery notes of Bosisio and Coy’ had been overtaken by ‘Dave Carson’s “gooks”’,\footnote{366 ‘Fort Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman}, May 1st, 1873, p. 1 and ‘Fort Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman}, May 3rd, 1873, p. 1.} and the absence of opera in the city was described as nothing less than ‘an abiding disgrace’.\footnote{367 Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, October 31st, 1872, p. 2.}

Much energy was expended by Calcutta’s elites during the winter of 1872–73 to rectify the situation, and by early March 1873, it was announced that Massa (Pompei’s former deputy, now acting independently) would be bringing forth an Italian opera company for the 1873–74 season. Massa, assisted by the basso Antonio Grandi (who had appeared in Calcutta during the 1860s and had sung in Cagli’s Australian seasons), pledged to deliver a company of singers not only larger than any previously seen in Calcutta, but also of the same, if not a higher, quality. He also promised to enlarge and improve the orchestra. Importantly, Massa undertook all this without asking for any advance; he was satisfied, instead, by a subscription list representing Rs. 50,000 of receipts and also agreed to assume all financial responsibility for the season.\footnote{368 Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, March 5th, 1873, p. 2.}

These terms were generous and secure and the Committee readily agreed. While Massa and Grandi made arrangements in Calcutta and Milan, public enthusiasm for the company was drummed up. Calcutta’s resolve to ‘properly support the Opera’ was strengthened by the news that both Bosisio and Riboldi were already \textit{en route} to Calcutta to take part in the company. News that Bombay was to have a sizeable company of its own that year, care of an impresario named Inzoli, fanned the flames of the old rivalry and added to Calcutta’s operatic fervour.\footnote{369 ‘Bombay – The Proposed Opera’, \textit{Bombay Gazette}, July 19th, 1873.} By the time the troupe arrived in October 1873, the city was extremely excited and determined to make the season a success.
Contrary to Massa’s promises, the company (see Table 7.3) was not the biggest ever seen in Calcutta, but no criticism was made of this fact. Indeed, the city was impressed by the smaller than usual chorus and the fact that there were three principal sopranos and three principal tenors. So large a complement of prime donne e primi uomini was a first in Calcutta and it was hoped that with such strength the company would be able to perform the full range of tragic and comic operas and, thus, attract a varied and loyal audience.

Table 7.3: Massa’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1873–74.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Donne Assolute</th>
<th>Enrichetta Bosisio, Adele Giannetti, and Maria Caranti-Vita</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Donne Contralti Assolute</td>
<td>Teresina Riboldi and Verginia Benzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Chiara Rossi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Tenori Assoluti</td>
<td>Giacomo Ferrari, Giuseppe Lendinara and Luigi Bertolotti,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Baritono Assoluto</td>
<td>Giovanni Gambetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Buffo e Baritono</td>
<td>Antonio Grandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Bassi</td>
<td>Cesare Melzi, Augusto Tessada, Giovanni Erzi,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus Master</td>
<td>Carlo Gianetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestore</td>
<td>Angelo Calvori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choristers</td>
<td>Fifteen in number (six women, nine men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenografo</td>
<td>Appolyto Stefanini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machanista</td>
<td>Giuseppe Santambrogio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrezzista (Prop master)</td>
<td>Angelo Luoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarto (Costumer)</td>
<td>Giacinto Serra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The real improvement, however, was in the orchestra (see Table 7.4), which now consisted of sixteen full-time instrumentalists, including instruments that had never before been included in any Calcutta opera orchestra, such as the clarinet and the horn.

Table 7.4: Orchestra of Massa’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1873–74.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maestro Direttore d’Orchestra</th>
<th>Antonio Melchiore</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st Violin</td>
<td>Enrico Invernizzi and Marcello Citterio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Violin</td>
<td>Sebastiano Faelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viola</td>
<td>Francesco Pizzola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cello</td>
<td>Luigi Mattioli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Bass</td>
<td>Francesco Vaccaroni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute</td>
<td>Ettore Rampezzotti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oboe</td>
<td>Giovanni Piva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarinet</td>
<td>Ettore Percallini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassoon</td>
<td>Giovanni Gallina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Horn</td>
<td>Luigi Rossetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Horn</td>
<td>Giovanni Colombino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet</td>
<td>Antonio Magri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trombone</td>
<td>Antonio Tincaiolii (also Tincajoli)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pianista</td>
<td>Guglielmo Mack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

370 The 1873–74 Company consisted of fourteen principal singers, meaning that the seasons 1868–69 and 1869–70 had been larger.

371 Editorial, The Englishman, August 28th, 1873, p. 2.
The Englishman opined that so strong a company would be the final chance for the city to prove its prestige and worthiness. Since ‘everything [had] been done to make the 1873–74 season a musical treat’, The Englishman argued that should opera fail again ‘it [would] be because our musical public is either unable or unwilling to support an opera at all. ... [I]t remains for the Calcutta public to show that it can and does appreciate the entertainment.’

The question of whether Calcutta rose to the editor’s challenge is a complex one. The season had an unpromising beginning (several of the public nights were embarrassingly under-patronised), but soon the non-subscription evenings began to attract good audiences, even to the less popular or less well-known items in the troupe’s repertoire, such as Maria di Rohan or La Favorita. It is clear that many people appreciated and admired the company. By the end of December, however, the initial enthusiasm had waned, and The Englishman was dismayed to find that ‘on non-subscription nights the music of Verdi or Donizetti or Gounod [was] played to principally empty chairs.’ Attendance continued to fluctuate widely in 1874: some performances played to ‘miserably thin houses’, whilst the benefits for popular artists such as Melzi, Giannetti, Bosisio (as well as the orchestra) attracted ‘full and enthusiastic houses’.

Yet, even these full houses caused dismay, for they often consisted not of ardent opera admirers but, rather, of dedicated socialites. Members of the public as well as the both critic and editor of The Englishman routinely denounced the ‘chatterers’ at the opera, who apparently talked so loudly as to challenge the opera singers for audibility. Such reports reveal that the opera-going public was not a homogenous group; some attended the opera to see and to hear, while others frequented the opera to be seen and be heard.

As for the poorly attended evenings, there are some explanations, besides a lack of desire, for the thin attendance. Early in the season, there was a public campaign to move the non-subscription opera nights from Saturdays to Mondays. One man explained that there were many among his acquaintance who appreciated the opera, and would love to go more often, but were prevented from doing so by their social schedules. He claimed that opera-goers were ‘of a different class to the frequenters of places of public amusement generally’, and that within this ‘class’ Saturday nights were usually taken up with formal dinners and private parties, whereas Mondays were generally kept free for more public socialisation. Massa did not alter the days of the public opera nights, and, as a result, Saturday night attendance continued to suffer.

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372 Editorial, The Englishman, August 28th, 1873, p. 2.
373 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 7th, 1873, p. 3.
374 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, November 15th, 1873, p. 3.
376 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, March 2nd, 1874, p. 3.
377 ‘The Opera’, The Englishman, March 25th, 1874, p. 3.
Audience numbers on subscription nights were similarly affected by Calcutta’s intricate social calendar. Subscribers were the same people that participated in socially prestigious events such as Government House Balls and the formal dinners of elite gentlemen’s associations. This clique evidently saw the opera as part of their social obligation and calendar, and complained vociferously when clashes arose between the opera and some other event. Indeed, whenever such conflicts arose, the expectation was that Massa reschedule his subscription night, a somewhat unfair demand given that the opera calendar had been set since October, well in advance of the organisation of these other events.

These explanations go some way to suggesting why the White Town public did or did not frequent the opera; but, ultimately, the decision to attend or ignore the opera was up to the public. Thus, explanations illustrate the attitudes and values of Calcutta society towards opera. Opera was important enough to make a public display of wanting to go, but not important enough to consider when organising other social events. People clamoured to pay Rs. 20 per ticket to attend the opera on State Nights, but deemed that the Rs. 5 for entry on ordinary opera evenings too dear. In observing these attitudes and behaviours, it becomes apparent that, far from being on a pedestal, opera was quite low down on the list of priorities for the majority of its patrons. The demands and pressures that Massa, and Cagli before him, faced confirm that even among the art form’s champions, opera was perceived as more of a public service, facilitating relaxation and socialisation, than an art. These attitudes are crucial to understanding the role of opera in Calcutta and why opera, inevitably, failed to thrive, despite the city’s political prestige, wealth, and social pretensions, which would otherwise suggest that opera should prove both a profitable and sustainable enterprise.

Despite poorly attended evenings, debates about ticket prices, and event clashes, evidently both Massa and the majority of the public were pleased with the 1873–74 season; they were, at least, pleased enough to begin planning the 1874–75 season before the previous season had concluded. Massa was thought to have ‘fulfilled his contract with the subscribers and the public … honourably and well’ and many had confidence that ‘Signor Massa will not disappoint the public if they will come forward in his support.’ Yet, the precariousness that accompanied all of Calcutta’s opera seasons was present again. By May, the subscription list was still fifty tickets shy of the minimum pledge that would be sufficient to induce Massa to organise another opera company for Calcutta. *The Englishman* and the Opera Committee pleaded with the public to come forward and take up the fifty subscription seats:

We should look upon it as a positive misfortune that Calcutta should be without an Opera again and we hope ...[that it will not] be said that, for want of subscribers of fifty seats, the Opera has ceased to exist in Calcutta.

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381 Ibid.
The fifty seats were not taken up, and Massa withdrew his prospectus in mid-May, not being prepared to take the financial risk of bringing an opera company with so few guaranteed subscribers. This appears to have shamed and shocked Calcutta’s elite, and the Committee scrambled to find an impresario willing to provide an Italian Opera company for 1874–75. One man, Colonel Peter Wyndham, immediately volunteered for the position.

Wyndham had little to recommend him: he was wholly inexperienced at opera management, and unlike the Italians before him, he agreed to act as impresario only if he were guaranteed a rather generous salary of Rs. 2100 (for seven months’ work). Despite these shortcomings, Calcutta was evidently so relieved at being saved the ignominy of having to cancel the 1874–75 season that it accepted Wyndham’s self-nomination and all his conditions. Indeed, the fifty subscription tickets that remained of Massa’s minimum subscription level were quickly bought, and many more besides, a fact that surely must have infuriated Massa.  

Wyndham sailed to Italy with Augusto Tessada, an Italian bass singer from Massa’s 1873–74 company who appears to have acted as a sort of advisor to Wyndham. There, the impresario followed in his predecessors’ footsteps, engaging his artists through Carlo Cambiaggio’s opera agency in Milan. In October 1874, Wyndham returned with the following artists (Table 7.5):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Drammatico</td>
<td>Rosa Genolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Leggiero</td>
<td>Elisa Corso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Mezzo-Soprano e Contralto</td>
<td>Annetta de Dominici</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Verginia Benzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Tenore di Forza</td>
<td>Luigi Gallo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondo Tenore</td>
<td>Luigi Bertolotti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Baritono Serio</td>
<td>Francesco Trapani-Bono</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Baritono Brillante</td>
<td>Pietro Marucco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Assoluto</td>
<td>Nino Rebottaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Comico</td>
<td>Augusto Tessada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondo Basso</td>
<td>Giovanni Erfi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>Fourteen singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro Concertatore and Direttore d’Orchestra</td>
<td>Guglielmo Mack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>Fifteen instrumentalists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The season was somewhat of a disappointment. Taken as individuals, the company was obviously a mixed bag: some were reliable and talented, others were gifted, yet overworked, and a few lacked any semblance of basic ability and displeased from the outset. The unevenness of the company’s vocalists, however, was only one of its flaws. Had the weakest members been secondary principals, the troupe may have fared better, but the
weakest performers were staffed in some of the company’s most important positions.\textsuperscript{387} Additionally, whilst no one could claim that Wyndham’s troupe was the worst company Calcutta had ever hosted, the company was undoubtedly inferior to its recent predecessors. For all their other faults, Cagli and Pompei had succeeded in steadily improving the calibre of opera companies, that is, each company contributed to the development of Calcutta’s operatic culture. By contrast, Wyndham’s 1874–75 troupe was a throwback to the mediocre companies of the mid-1860s. As the season drew on, the shortcoming of Wyndham’s company became increasing obvious, and public opinion of the company deteriorated. Some began to question Wyndham’s ability to manage a foreign troupe.

Usually, such ponderings would have gone no further than some editorial advice and a few disgruntled letters to the editor. Calcutta’s opera-going public may have been elitist and idiosyncratic, but it was fairly tolerant of inexperience, and it is quite probable that Wyndham would have been given a few seasons to prove himself, as had been the case with Cagli a decade earlier. Yet, Wyndham’s career was to come to an abrupt end, and the reason had nothing to do with the defects of his opera company or its performances. Instead, Wyndham’s downfall was his liberal attitude towards opera attendance and the social role of opera.

\section*{Society, Race, Culture and Opera: The Crisis of 1875}

This section will relate how Wyndham’s attempts to finance and democratise Italian Opera in Calcutta led to divisions in White Town society and how the resulting partisanship led to the disintegration of Calcutta’s operatic support system, leading to the extinguishment of opera itself.

No doubt aware of his inexperience (and perhaps even of his troupe’s inadequacies), Wyndham was careful to cultivate an identity of being ‘Calcutta’s Impresario’, making himself constantly accessible and amenable to the public. He was quick to adopt populist measures, such as offering special, reduced tickets to serving members of the armed forces (and their families). Only two weeks into the season, \textit{The Englishman} announced:

\begin{quote}
The Impresario of the Opera, with that readiness to oblige which distinguishes his management, has informed us...that he will on Wednesday nights, admit soldiers in uniform with their wives at 1 rupee each to the first class stalls. As the usual charge to these seats is Rs. 3...the soldiers should be grateful to the kindness shown to them.\textsuperscript{388}
\end{quote}

Despite the generosity of this offer, some members of the public immediately noted that, even at this reduced rate, many soldiers could not afford to take their wives to the opera. Ever quick to respond to Calcutta’s requests, Wyndham amended his offer, admitting soldiers’ wives gratis when accompanied by their husbands, as well as reserving these military men the two front rows of the stalls.\textsuperscript{389}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{387} Gallo, for example, was the primo tenore di forza; his ineptitude therefore adversely affected large portions of the majority of the company’s repertoire. ‘The Opera’, \textit{The Englishman}, January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 1875, p. 3.
\item \textsuperscript{388} Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, November 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1874, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
Such policies were aimed at democratising opera and establishing a broader base of patronage for the art form, both of which were necessary if the city wished to secure opera’s future. Wyndham’s ideas had the potential to exert a positive influence on operatic culture in Calcutta. Some amongst Calcutta’s elite were unhappy with the changes, as it reduced the social and economic prestige that opera patronage represented, but the ‘dusty coats’ and ‘unimpressive patrons’ were generally tolerated by the opera’s regulars. This tolerance was about to be stretched to breaking point by Wyndham, when his liberality extended to native Bengalis. In February of 1875, Wyndham came up with a plan to rescue Italian Opera from its precarious financial position leasing the Lindsay Street Opera House to the Great National Opera towards the end of the Italian Opera season. In order to understand why Wyndham’s scheme caused such friction amongst the city’s opera-goers, some description of the Great National Opera, and the socio-political climate in which it operated, is necessary.

The Great National Opera (GNO) was just one of many cultural activities that came to be collectively known as the Bengali Renaissance, a socio-cultural phenomenon with nationalist-political overtones. Established by illustrious Bengali artists as the singer/actor/author Nagendranath Banerjee in the winter of 1874–75, the GNO (like its sister movement, the Great National Theatre which had been established in 1873) had two aims. The first was to provide public performances of newly-composed Bengali music-theatre works. This would expose Bengali art to a much wider audience than was previously the case, for traditionally such performances had been presented at the private residences of Calcutta’s Indian elites. Secondly, it was hoped that these public performances would invigorate Bengalis’ cultural pride and fan the flame of nationalist sentiment that was then simmering throughout the highly-striated Bengali community.

393 ‘The Great National Opera’, The Englishman, January 9th, 1875, p. 3.
395 Although the National Opera was formally opened in January 1875, with a performance of the mythological opera Sati Ki Kalankini (music by Modun Mohun Bumano) at Lewis’ Theatre Royal, opera in Bengali had existed since at least 1865 (the year that Cagli first came to Calcutta), when Akuntala by Annada Prasad Banerjee was première to great success. see The Great National Opera’, The Englishman, January 9th, 1875, p. 3. and Das Gupta, The Indian stage, p. 136.
The GNO’s earliest works, such as *Sati ki Kalankini*, mixed traditional Bengali musico-theatrical traditions (such as the yatra) with Western musico-theatrical influences. Amongst the Western influences were a greater employment of mechanic scenes and sets, the use of a conductor and a larger band, the idea of the genre being a high-art, rather than popular, music-theatre genre, and the inclusion of female actresses and singers. Significantly, many of the National Opera’s most ardent champions, such as the Maharajah of Vizianagram, the Maharajah of Jodhpur and several members of Calcutta’s babu classes, were also generous benefactors and patrons of the city’s Italian Opera and Town Band.

The cross-cultural benevolence and interest exhibited by these Indian men was not matched by the majority of White Towners. The British Raj, cognizant of the potential of opera and theatre to challenge the privilege of hegemonies and undermine the sovereignty of governments, responded harshly. The government passed a series of measures, most famously the *Dramatic Performances Ordinance* and the *Dramatic Performances Act (1876)*, the latter of which endowed the Raj with the ability to prohibit any play, pantomime or other drama performed or about to be performed in a public place [which was]

(a) of a scandalous or defamatory nature, or

(b) likely to excite feelings of disaffection to the Government established by law in [India], or

(c) likely to deprave and corrupt persons present at the performance.

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399 Das Gupta, *The Indian stage* at p. 136.

400 *Sati Ki Kalankini*, for example, featured Benodini Dasi, a young Calcutta woman, who sang, danced, and acted in the work and would later become known as the ‘Prima Donna of the Bengali Stage’. For more detail on the nature of Bengali opera see Bandyopadhyay, *Sati Ki Kalankini*.

The penalties for anyone convicted of disobeying the prohibition were three months imprisonment and/or a fine.402

These laws had much support amongst the British, for there was a vociferous segment of the community that regarded ‘The Opera’ as a cultural symbol, never to be sullied by association with Native culture. It is important to note, however, that White Town was not a homogenous entity, with uniform racial values or attitudes to culture. Contrary to his fellow Englishmen, Colonel Wyndham was more than happy to enter into business with the Great National Opera; and there were other Westerners who went even further, enthusiastically welcoming the rise of Bengali opera and theatre in Calcutta.

The multiplicity of White Town’s views toward the Great National Opera and the role of Italian opera in Calcutta became apparent when Wyndham’s plan to lease the Italian Opera House to the Great National Opera was made public. The majority of comments disapproved of the plan. One of the Opera House proprietors, for example, was struck by a paroxysm of indignation and under the pseudonym ‘F’ he reminded Calcutta that

The opera house was built for a specific purpose … Italian Opera. The proprietors have never, so far as I know, benefited by their outlay in the smallest degree … the only return to the owners has been the unselfish one of having given Calcutta the means of hearing good music and of improving its taste.403

‘F’ further argued that Wyndham’s latest plan was yet another degradation in a series of abasements inflicted upon the Calcutta Opera as a social institution, a decline that had begun with the availability of reduced price tickets:

[The Opera House] has not been improved by cheap tickets, and, consequent numbers, in dusty coats and muddy high-lows, but it will reach a lower depth still if the proprietors have to refurbish the house by reason of the peculiar habits of our native musical friends.404

There can be little doubt that ‘F’’s main concern over letting the house to the Great National Opera was racially motivated, and this is evident in the imagery and language he employed. According to ‘F’, the Opera House was the ‘pretty little house’ dressed in ‘delicate amber satin’, whilst Bengali opera and its audiences are described as ‘uncouth’, ‘lustful’, dirty, malodorous, and offensive. ‘F’ asserted that Bengali Opera would ‘invade’ and ‘desecrate’ the ‘pretty, little theatre’, ‘marking’ and ‘sullying’ the house with their ‘disagreeable substances’ (ghee and mustard oil), and that they would, moreover, ‘ruin’ the lovely ‘pretty Royal box’s amber satin seats’ and leave the opera irreparably ‘damaged’. He accused Bengali patrons of being interested only in lustfully ogling the ‘scantily-clad’ native female actresses. The author finished his letter by declaring that he would rather have the house demolished, than allow it to be used for the purposes proposed by Wyndham.405

402 Ibid.
403 Signed ‘F’, ‘Letter to the Editor – Opera House’, The Englishman, February 18th, 1875, p. 2. The author identifies himself as one of the proprietors of the opera house elsewhere in his letter, not here quoted.
404 Ibid.
The violent, gendered and sexualised description of the intersection of Western and Bengali opera echoes the language and attitudes of the ‘Black Peril’ hysteria that exploded after the Indian Rebellion of 1857. Gender and sexuality were common tropes in nineteenth-century discussions of the intersections between East and West, ‘Other’ and civilised. Often the coloniser assumed a masculine guise, whilst the colonised was the second sex, and such depictions were used to justify the colonial process; just as Pygmalion created and breathed life into his idealised woman, so the masculine West was simply bringing perfection of form and fulfilment of function to the inert yet malleable people they colonised. At other times, however, it was Western civilisation that was feminised: the purity and loveliness of the West was described as being in need of protection from the masculine brute force of the savage, dark ‘Other’. As scholar Ann Laura Stoler has described, the ‘Black Peril’ phenomenon may have been cloaked as the West’s anxiety about ‘Native’ sexual threats, but it was, at a deeper level, ‘the fear of insurgence, of some perceived non-acquiescence to colonial control more generally’.406 It is in this vein that ‘F’ conducted his argument: ‘F’ likened Western culture to the pure, white woman that colonial Britain was so conscious of protecting from the threat posed by the hyper-lustful, savage, masculinised Native. His language and general attitude towards opera, culture, and British-Indian relations, is yet another example of how opera in Calcutta was framed by the political and socio-cultural context of high-imperial Britain.

Many, including the Editor of *The Englishman*, agreed with ‘F’. Given that the journal represented the views of British India’s conservative ruling elite, its espousal of such imperial, racist views is unsurprising. Yet, in agreeing with ‘F’ *The Englishman* was revising its position on the Great National Opera for, until Wyndham had announced his plans to house the GNO in the Italian opera house, *The Englishman* had been quite positive in its coverage of the Great National Opera. In January, whilst the Bengali opera *Sati ki Kalangkini* was being performed at the Corinthian Theatre, the newspaper’s Editor described the project as a promising ‘development’ in Indian culture, and reported that the orchestra, led by the opera’s composer Madan Mohan Barmana, was said to be a very good band.407 This support, however, evaporated once the Great National Opera, a product of the Bengali intelligentsia, began to compete, and perhaps usurp, Italian Opera, the symbol par excellence of Western cultural superiority. In short, Bengali opera was not fit (in all senses of the word) for the opera house, which ought to remain a sanctuary for western culture.

Some in the British community saw through the pallid excuses to the vitriolic racism of the underlying political and culture wars. Using the nom-de-plume ‘G’, one British man confronted ‘F’, *The Englishman*’s editor and, seemingly, the wider white community, hoping that such an ‘ungenerous avowal [was] simply an expression of private illiberal opinion’, and claimed that upon this hope lay the ‘credit of Europeans generally’.408 ‘G’ quickly

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exposed the hypocrisy of some of the opposition’s arguments. He pointed out that there were already a class of Indians who frequented the Italian Opera, many at the invitation of the Viceroy himself, and that there had never been any problems regarding soiling of the house, impolite behaviour or the like.409

In his rebuttal, ‘G’ also challenged the claims of both ‘F’ and The Englishman that they were supporters of both the Italian Opera and Great National Opera. Both parties, he said, had failed to comment on the business sense it made to lease the theatre on nights when the Italian opera was not able to perform. ‘G’ argued that, far from undermining Italian Opera, Wyndham’s invitation to the GNO would help to make the Italian Opera financially viable.

The arguments were not limited to the two protagonists above, ‘F’ and ‘G’, nor was their publication confined to The Englishman. By the end of the 1874–75 Italian opera season, the deep divisions that emerged from Wyndham’s decision to merge the Bengali and Italian operas had transformed the city’s formerly united opera-going society into two antagonistic factions. One camp called for Wyndham’s removal from the position of impresario, nominating Alessandro Massa, the previous season’s impresario, as his replacement. The other cabal doggedly defended Wyndham.

Ostensibly, the arguments moved away from the pro/anti-Bengali opera split; instead, issues such as managerial experience and trustworthiness dominated the debate, as will be discussed below. Yet, the anti-Wyndham faction consisted of the same people who had reacted negatively to his Bengali opera proposal, such as The Englishman and the opera house’s proprietors, whilst Wyndham’s supporters were the people, such as Captain Jarrett and Alexander Apcar, who had endorsed his announcement. The split shows that that the racial and cultural issues that defined colonial life were never far away from opera in Calcutta.

These cliques were composed along White Town’s strictly-hierarchical social lines: the pro-Wyndham group was composed of merchants and military men, and was, therefore, less prestigious than the anti-Wyndham camp, which was composed of India Civil Service men, such as Justice Glover, N. J. Valletta, and Lieutenant-Governor Richard Temple. Whereas the pro-Wyndham group consisted entirely of British men,410 the anti-Wyndham cabal also attracted the support of Calcutta’s European minorities: the French, the Germans, the Italians, and most particularly, the Greeks. The composition of each coterie reflects the intersections of race, class and authority in nineteenth century White Town. It was in the context that opera was to fall.

In March 1875, the Opera Committee called a meeting of all interested subscribers to decide on the arrangements for the 1875–76 season. The forty men in attendance debated many issues, all of which were argued along partisan lines. Some questioned whether or not

409 Just recently, the Viceroy had gone to the opera with Sir Salar Jang (Prime Minister of Hyderabad). See Editorial, The Englishman, January 9th 1875, p. 2.
410 It is true that Alex A. Apcar was of Armenian descent; however, in religion, education, society, habits, and commerce he was an Englishman—educated at Harrow School in England, President of the Calcutta Turf Club, a keen cricketer and horse breeder, and a became a knight of the realm. See ‘Obituary Sir A.A. Apcar’, The Times, April 19th 1913, p. 11.
Wyndham was a skilful fiscal manager, a matter that arose after a debt of Rs. 22,219 was forecast for the season.\footnote{411 ‘Opera Accounts’, The Englishman, March 1\textsuperscript{st} 1875, p. 1.} Others debated the extent to which Wyndham could be held to account for the artistic failure of the 1874–75 season, the label of ‘failure’ being beyond doubt, even among Wyndham’s supporters.\footnote{412 ‘Meeting of Opera Subscribers’, The Englishman, March 17\textsuperscript{th} 1875, p. 3}

Others made nationality the central issue. Wyndham’s detractors acknowledged that the impresario’s Britishness had been an asset on some limited occasions, but claimed that his propensity to please his military fellows contributed to the current season’s lack of profitability. They argued that the Italians, lacking such ties, were able to be more objective. The anti-Wyndham group also professed that Massa’s Italian nationality was the key to his more successful season, as Massa could negotiate better terms, and control the artists more effectively, than a non-Italian, such as Wyndham.\footnote{413 Editorial, The Englishman, 9th March 1875, p. 2, Tuesday, A. Massa, ‘Letter to the Editor – Opera Meeting’, The Englishman, March 23\textsuperscript{rd} 1875, p. 2.}

Wyndham’s admirers countered this argument, highlighting Wyndham’s proficiency in the Italian language and the fact that he had been a Colonel in the Italian Army during the War of Independence, for which service he had been honoured by the King of Savoy.\footnote{414 Rosa Genollini [sic], Elisa Corso, Annetta Dominici, Luigi Gallo, Guillamo [sic] Bardi, Trapani-Bono, P Marucco, N Erbottario [sic – Rebottaro] and 47 others [hence must include chorus and orchestra members], ‘Letter to the Editor - Italian Opera’, The Englishman, March 19\textsuperscript{th} 1875, p. 2.} The pro-Wyndham camp also asserted that the Italian impresari had proven themselves to be untrustworthy, a reference to Cagli’s duplicity during the 1871–72 season. For them, Wyndham’s Britishness was purely advantageous, making sure that Wyndham was committed only to the interests of the city. Massa’s advocates rejected this argument outright. Cagli’s behaviour had been less than honourable, but the other Italians had been sincere. Moreover, there could be no denying the superior quality of the Italian impresari’s companies. They insisted that impresari be judged not on their intentions but on their deeds.

The debate seems to have carried on in this circuitous fashion for an entire afternoon, with each faction as intractable as the other. The unyielding nature of the parties, coupled with the level of passion and vitriol attendant in the discussion, reveals that the conflict was less about choosing an appropriate impresario for season 1875–76 than (re)gaining control over the city’s preeminent social and cultural institution. It was not about Wyndham or Massa, their seasons, their successes or failures: it was about two discrete and rivalling socio-economic groups vying the power and prestige that came with managing the Italian Opera in Calcutta.

When the matter came to a vote, the caustic atmosphere between the two sides only intensified. Twenty-four men, a clear majority, voted for Massa as impresario, but the pro-Wyndham faction was not to be so easily defeated. They denied the eligibility of many of Massa’s supporters to vote, claiming that this was ‘a meeting for this year’s subscribers, not a meeting of gentlemen who took an interest in next year’s arrangements’. Outraged, ‘more than half the gentlemen present then left the room’ including the Chairman, Justice
Glover. One of Wyndham’s staunchest supporters, C.C. Macrae, took the Chair and Wyndham was summarily voted impresario for the coming season.

Those who had quit the meeting, however, had not surrendered. Over the next few weeks, the press was flooded with Letters to the Editor expressing the full gamut of views concerning the meeting. Most feared for opera’s future and criticised the destructive factionalism and segregation that existed amongst the city’s European population. Many held Wyndham himself to be most responsible for the disorganised and antagonistic nature of the meeting. One gentleman, styling himself ‘Heather’, charged the committee with acting both illegally and self-interestedly, but was most appalled by Colonel Wyndham’s behaviour. ‘Heather’ thought it particularly dishonourable that the impresario raised no objection to the presence or vote of the non-subscribers until after the vote had been taken, when he found himself and his supporters to be in the minority. Another man, under the nom-de-plume ‘Justice’, was disgusted by the offensive and uncivil way in which Wyndham (and his supporters) had spoken of Massa, all the worse because the latter was not present to defend himself.

‘Justice’ also thought that Massa’s camp had been operating at a disadvantage, which Wyndham all too keenly exploited, as many of Massa’s admirers were non-English speakers, and were, therefore, uncomfortable when addressing large assemblies in English. Wyndham’s faction made use of this, speaking over these men or pretending not to understand them, which soon eroded the non-English speakers’ confidence and impaired their ability to take an equal part in the debate.

Thus, the public continued to debate the issue of who the impresario should be, rather than what the impresario should do—the focus, as ever, on personalities and social allegiances, rather than art. The support for Massa seemed to grow steadily, with nearly all the Letters to the Editor in both The Englishman and Indian Daily News advocating for the Italian over Wyndham, although this is as likely to reveal those journals’ biases and target audiences than the levels of support for Massa in the city’s population. The Colonel tried once more to win over support, claiming that his season had turned a profit of Rs. 2,081, an outrageous, unbelievable, and unsubstantiated claim in light of the fact that, just a few weeks earlier, the accounts had pointed towards a deficit of almost Rs 22,219. He also fell back to the ‘Britons for the British’ argument, reasoning that Calcutta ought to model itself on London where the foremost opera impresari were Englishmen. The public were swayed neither by the implausible profit announcement nor by the appeal to British loyalty. By April 6th 1875, Wyndham seems to have acknowledged his unpopularity and

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417 Ibid.
defeat; he announced his intention to withdraw from consideration by putting his theatrical effects and scores up for auction.421

This should have been the end of the matter, and many assumed that it was. Members of the public began to look forward to Massa’s 1875–76 season, and were especially relieved that there would be an opera season with which to welcome and entertain the Prince of Wales, who was due in Calcutta at the end of the year.422 Yet, such an assumption neglected to realise the bitterness of the feud.

Rather than attempting reconciliation, Apcar and another pro-Wyndham Opera Committee member blindsided Massa. By early-April Massa was busy making arrangements—a committee had been formed and had already approved of his prospectus. The impresario was even earning praise for the special efforts he was making for the season with regard to the impending visit of the Prince of Wales.423 In the midst of this activity and approbation, Apcar announced that he had leased the Opera House (for the duration of the 1875–76 theatrical season) to a dramatic company run by William B. English, an American impresario who had previously managed Calcutta’s Corinthian Theatre.424 It appears that this was done without the consultation of either the Opera House proprietors or the majority of Opera Committee members, the majority of whom would have voted against such a plan.425 It was clear to many that Apcar’s actions were designed primarily to thwart Massa’s plans and undermine his position as impresario. ‘Agamemnon’ declared that Apcar’s behaviour was dastardly, not only for the underhanded manner in which the contract was drawn up, which he attributes to ‘petty jealousies’, but also because the dramatic company’s occupancy would undermine the purpose of the opera house.426

The Editor of The Englishman reported that Massa had attracted significant support, and had the Opera-House not been leased from under him, it was certain that the 1875–76 season would have gone ahead. Indeed, the majority of Calcutta’s opera-going public opined that Apcar and his associates had single-handedly destroyed Italian Opera as an institution in Calcutta. The Editor of Indian Daily News styled the incident as ‘the collapse of Italian Opera in Calcutta’.427 ‘Italiano’, a correspondent to The Englishman, begged that the Corinthian Theatre be leased by Massa and his Opera Committee, lest Calcutta be left without an opera due to want of unity amongst its inhabitants.428 It was soon apparent

422 Signed ‘Opera Lover’, ‘Letter to the Editor - The Opera’, The Englishman, April 10th, 1875, p. 2.
423 Editorial, The Englishman, April 13th, 1875, p. 2.
426 “The arrangement … is altogether a very disagreeable, not to say discreditable transaction…The Opera House in Lindsay Street was built some eight or nine years ago at a cost of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000 by a certain number of gentlemen who hold shares in the proprietary of the building ... The Opera House was built exclusively for the Italian Opera, and was not supposed to be used for any other entertainment, although it has very frequently been let when unoccupied by an Italian Company … I must observe that it is very annoying as well as disgraceful that the Opera should be disturbed by such petty jealousies.’ Signed ‘Agamemnon’, ‘Letter to the Editor – The Same’, The Englishman, April 12th, 1875, p. 2. All emphases in original.
427 Editorial, Indian Daily News, April 14th, 1875, p. 2.
however, that the divisions and chaos were insurmountable. Opera’s sometimes dazzling, sometimes disastrous career in Calcutta was drawing to a close.

It may be tempting to view these events as nothing more than a petty dispute propped up by the hyperbole of nineteenth century discourse; however this would ignore the value of opera to its patrons, and underestimate the capacity for polemics that issues of race and culture had in the days of the Raj. There really was a sense amongst the city’s opera-going public that after ten years, four impresari and almost continuous advertising, urging and fundraising, Calcutta had nothing to show for its efforts. For all its money, and ambitions for prestige and political importance, the capital of British India was bereft of that cultural symbol which best confirmed the quality of its citizens. After all its efforts, even *The Englishman* encouraged the citizens to give up the decade long-fight to establish opera and high-art music in Calcutta, declaring ‘If Pan is dead, he is dead, and there’s an end to it.’

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Chapter 8:
The Long Farewell —
The Decline of Opera, 1875–1901

For all the prognostications of annihilation, opera in Calcutta did not end with a bang, but with a whimper. Over the next five years, opera was still produced in Calcutta, albeit on a smaller, less prestigious, scale. The reduced brilliance of the performances was not the only change in the city’s operatic culture; the passion that had energised White Town’s operatic life just a few years previously had also dissipated. No longer was there a constant yearning for bigger and better seasons, novel repertoire and grandiose social galas; indeed, White Town’s opera-goers and supporters seem resigned to the eventual disappearance of opera in Calcutta. Many people continued to attend the opera events that came through Calcutta, but it seems they did so as if in commemoration. Performances had a bittersweet air of reminiscence about them, as though the singers and their songs were mere shadows and echoes of opera’s halcyon days.

This chapter will begin with a description of this ghost-culture, demonstrating that opera’s fall took almost as long as its rise. The chapter will then turn to an assessment of why opera failed to flourish in Calcutta, despite the city’s wealth, social eminence, political prestige, and the best intentions of opera’s numerous myrmidons.

Encores: Opera in Calcutta, 1875–1901

Despite repeated efforts by Calcutta’s aficionados to ensure that there would be an Italian opera for the 1875–6 season to coincide with the Prince of Wales’ visit, Italian opera was conspicuous only by its absence that theatrical season. There were, however, other expressions of operatic culture that winter, the most significant being Allen and May’s English Opera Company, which performed in Calcutta between October 9th 1875 and January 8th 1876.

Allan and May’s English Opera Company, 1875–76

Alice May (1847–1887) was a Yorkshire-born soubrette who met English composer George Benjamin Allen (1822–1897) when she began studying with him in London in 1868.430 Their close working relationship soon developed into an intimate affair, and (despite never marrying) George and Alice posed as ‘Mr. and Mrs. Allen’ as early as 1870, when they arrived in Australia.431 During their almost seven-year residency in Australia, May found acclaim in the operetta and opéra-bouffe roles that were so fitting for her sweet, light soprano voice and excellent acting skills. Towards the end of their stay in this part of the world, Allen and May made their only tour of Asia, choosing to visit Calcutta, Madras

431 Ibid., p. 17.
and Singapore.\textsuperscript{432} By December 1876, Allen and May had returned to the UK where, over the coming years, May would star in numerous high-profile operetta engagements, including the creation of the role of Aline in Sullivan’s operetta, \textit{The Sorcerer}.\textsuperscript{433}

Despite being English-born and -trained, the couple’s extended time in Australia, coupled with the fact that the rest of their company came from Melbourne, the Allen and May English Opera Company (see Table 8.1) was regarded as ‘an Australian company’. The troupe’s colonial origins put it at an immediate disadvantage, for antipodean artists did not receive the warm welcome reserved for European companies.\textsuperscript{434} This attitude reveals the bias that existed against non-European operatic artists, who were deemed less ‘authentic’ and less valuable than their Old World contemporaries.

\begin{table}[h!]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
Prima Donna Assoluta & Alice May  \\
Prima Donna Mezzo-Soprano & Florence Howe  \\
Prima Donna Contralto & Maggie Liddle  \\
Seconda Donna & Emily Thomson  \\
Seconda Donna & Blanche Harris  \\
Primo Tenore & Henry Hallam  \\
Primo Tenore & Howard Vernon  \\
Secondo Tenore & Charles Lester  \\
Buffo & F. A. Hilton  \\
Buffo & J. Wilkinson  \\
Baritone & C. H. Templeton  \\
Basso & T. H. Rainford  \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Allen and May’s English Opera and Opera-Bouffe Company, Calcutta 1875–76}
\end{table}

The company’s inferior stature was exacerbated by the company’s designation as an “English Opera Company”, a classification that reflected both the performance language and the ‘impure’ diversity of the company’s repertoire. The English-language performances and light-hearted, comic repertoire, in which the company specialised, may have rendered its productions more accessible and engaging to audiences, but, when it came to status and prestige, being an “English Opera Company” placed the troupe decidedly beneath the Italian Opera companies it had succeeded.

The company’s repertoire fell into three distinct categories, of which only the last overlapped with the repertoire of past Italian Opera Companies. Category One consisted of modern operetta and/or opéra bouffe works, such as \textit{Geneviève de Brabant} (Offenbach, 1859), \textit{La Fille de Madame Angot} (Lecocq, 1872), \textit{Cox and Box} (Sullivan, 1866), and \textit{La Princesse de Trébizonde} (Offenbach, 1869). Category Two included the English-language operas \textit{Lily of Killarney} and \textit{The Bohemian Girl}. Category Three comprised of Continental operas (such as \textit{Martha}, \textit{La Sonnambula}, \textit{Fra Diavolo}, \textit{La Fille du Régiment}, \textit{Faust} and \textit{La Cenerentola}) performed in English-language versions.

\textsuperscript{432} ‘Town Hall’, \textit{The Straits Times}, May 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1876, p. 2.


\textsuperscript{434} This is evident in comparing the public discussions about companies and individual artists, both prior to arrival/first performance and in reviews.
Although the most numerous group, Category Three was also the least successful of the Allan and May English Opera Company’s repertoire. This was partly owing to the company’s lack of ability; *Faust*, for example, was declared to be ‘entirely beyond the capability of the entire company’ and the troupe was warned by more than one critic not to further damage its reputation by performing repertoire that would invite comparisons to better companies. On other occasions, it was the interpretation, rather than the execution, of the operas which led to failure. The troupe’s production of *La Sonnambula* failed despite an excellent performance from Alice May, whose ‘careful and artistic singing’ and ‘exceedingly good’ acting was said to have imbued the ‘terribly hackneyed’ arias of Amina in *La Sonnambula* ‘with a fresh charm’. On this instance, the opera disappointed for other reasons. The work was generally under-rehearsed and, in order to render the opera performable by the company, drastic changes were made to the score. Amongst these alterations were the replacement of all the recitatives with spoken dialogue and an awkward transposition of the role of Alessio, from bass to tenor, to allow the popular singer Vernon to fill the role. Once again, the company was counselled by Calcutta’s reviewers to stay away from these Italian works, and focus on those pieces that emphasised the troupe’s strengths: operetta, opéra-bouffe and English opera.

In these genres, the company found moderate success. It was not that the problems that plagued the company’s renditions of grand opera were miraculously absent from operetta; rather, the comic, light opera genres were less reliant upon strong vocalisation or musical integrity, and were therefore less affected by transgressions in these areas. In the troupe’s production of *La Fille de Madame Angot*, many adjustments were made to the original work: the popular duet ‘Happy Days’ (‘Jours fortunées’) was substituted by another, unspecified duet; the role of Louchard was substantially truncated; and, most significantly, the libretto was altered to include dialogue written especially for Calcutta audiences. The frequent substitutions and insertions of British Isles ballads, and the often beggarly state of scenery and costume typical of the company’s productions, was found more excusable in the lighter lyric genres than in Italian Opera. In fact, sometimes such amendments were encouraged. This reception perhaps reflects the role each genre played in White Town culture. Operetta and opéra-bouffe were regarded as entertainments, whereas Italian Opera was a cultural artefact that needed to remain pure, and of high quality, in order to fulfil its role as a symbol of collective and individual taste, class and civilisation.

By the end of Allan and May’s 1875–76 season, Calcutta’s opera-goers were unenthusiastic towards the company. May, who had starred in every performance (except for two days of illness), was well regarded, and touted by some to be ‘not only one of the best singers we have had in Calcutta for a long time, but [also one who] has gone cheerfully through an

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435 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, November 25th 1875, p. 3.
436 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, November 5th 1875, p. 3.
437 Ibid.
438 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, October 26th, 1875, p. 3.
439 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, November 23rd, 1875, p. 4. The last example refers to the inclusion of an extra verse and chorus (‘We’ll turn him out, put Roberts in’) in one of the numbers, which made light of the recent internal machinations of the powerful Calcutta Trades Association, and declared the public’s support of the group of independents led by John Blessington Roberts.
astonishing amount of labour to entertain the public’. On the other hand, May was one of the only competent, let alone gifted, members of the company. For all her talent and effort, May was unable to satisfy a city that had become accustomed to the benefits of ensemble companies, whose talent was spread deeper and further than the voice of one star singer. Ultimately, audiences were left ‘cold’, and the company lost the favour of the social elite; the majority of Allen and May’s audiences were composed of the more populous, but less powerful, artisan and clerking classes. When the company left Calcutta in mid-January 1876 they were farewelled in a well-meaning but perfunctory manner.

**Insistent Italians and French flops: Opera and Music 1876–1880**

By the time of Allan and May’s departure, Calcutta had more pressing matters at hand, for the indefatigable Massa was trying to rekindle Italian opera. In his prospectus, Massa proposed a company of thirteen principals, a chorus of fourteen, and an orchestra of fifteen players. Regarding repertoire, Massa promised that between fifteen and twenty operas (from a possible list of over fifty) would be performed over the course of the season, which would run from November 1st to March 3rd.

The attractiveness of Massa’s bait, couple with the lack of any competition, initially attracted expressions of interest, but these soon petered away. It seems that, Calcutta was weary, and resigned to losing its operatic culture. Massa was unable to secure the necessary guarantees and excitement from White Town and, once again, the City of Palaces was without Italian opera.

Yet, as with the previous winter, the 1876–77 theatrical season was not entirely devoid of operatic entertainment. A small French Opera Company, known as Pillo’s French Opera Troupe, debuted at the Opera House on November 15th 1876. The company, which arrived unheralded, was the first sizeable French company to perform in Calcutta since the 1830s and 40s. It consisted of eleven principals (see Table 8.2) and a ‘weedy’ assortment of instrumentalists.

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440 ‘Miss Alice May’s Final Benefit’, *The Englishman*, January 10th, 1876, p. 3.
441 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, January 7th, 1876, p. 3.
442 Ibid., and ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, November 23rd, 1875, p. 4.
443 The singers: two prime donne, one contralto, one comprimaria, one seconda donna, two tenors, one second tenor, two baritones, one buffo, one bass and one second bass; the chorus: eight men and six women; the orchestra: two first violins, one second violin, one viola, one cello, one double bass, one flute, one oboe, one clarinet, one bassoon, one trumpet, two horns, one trombone and one piano.
444 For a full list of Massa’s potential repertoire see Appendix F.
Table 8.2: Pillo’s French Opera Company, Calcutta 1876–77

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sopranos</th>
<th>Mme Pillo</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mlle Fiorelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mlle Anna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mme Duvivier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
<td>Mme Sonqua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contralto</td>
<td>Mlle Silly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenors</td>
<td>Mr Duvivier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Joyeux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Dubois</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baritones</td>
<td>Mr Ernest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Achard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Mr Pillo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the Pillo troupe was liberally patronised by the French, Italians, Portuguese and Greeks, and a not insignificant number of Bengali men,448 the company failed to secure the all-important British market: Calcutta’s “Upper Ten” attended the season’s inauguration,449 but after a couple of performances, the British were conspicuous only by their absence. There are two reasons for this. The first was the company’s low status. Like the Allan and May Company before it, the Pillo Troupe suffered from its failure to deliver the serious/grand opera repertoire that White Town considered to be the apex of the operatic artform. The troupe’s repertory did not include those grand-opéras by Gounod, Meyerbeer, Massenet, Thomas, and Bizet that had become the apogee of French operatic culture; instead, the company performed the lighter works of Offenbach (*Barbe-bleue*, *Le Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*, and *M. Choufleuri restera chez lui*), Lecocq (*La Fille de Madame Angot* and *Giroflé-Girofla*) and Paër (*Le Maître de Chapelle*).450 The company’s status was further injured by its practice of presenting these operatic works alongside other more ‘populist’ low-art entertainments. The Pillo troupe was particularly notable amongst Calcutta’s operatic visitors for its appearance in the ‘millions’ evenings at the Corinthian Theatre, in which it appeared besides the vaudeville and minstrel shows of Dave Carson.451

The other factor which led to the company’s lack of support was the low-quality of the artists it featured. Whilst Madame and Monsieur Pillo, as well as the attractive Mlle Fiorelli, were described as pleasing singers and actors, the rest of the company was so lacklustre as to seldom earn even passing remark. It is noteworthy, however, that although the Pillo Company’s British and non-British supporters were equally unimpressed by the troupe’s artists, the latter steadfastly supported the troupe whilst the former attended only a handful of early performances. There is no evidence to suggest that the Europeans and Bengali opera patrons were more tolerant of bad opera than their British contemporaries. Instead, the explanation for the two groups’ differing attitudes seems to lie in organisation of White Town social life. The British had access to a far greater scope and variety of public social entertainment and socialisation than their Continental or Bengali neighbours. With nearly all public theatre in English, countless balls, soirees, and dinners to attend, the British could

448 ‘French Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 18th 1876, p. 3
449 ‘The New French Opera Company’, *The Englishman*, November 16th, 1876, p. 3.
451 ‘Corinthian Theatre’, *The Englishman*, November 28th, 1876, p. 3.
afford to be more particular in their choice of entertainment. The French, Greeks, Italians and Portuguese lacked access to so rich and varied entertainment and social life, and were, therefore, more likely to attend the few cultural activities that were relevant and accessible to them, such as the Pillo Opera Company. Their continued patronage, however, was insufficient to fill the opera-house and, hence, the French Opera continued to be plagued by meagre attendance, even on viceregal evenings. The company faded away from the historic record around the beginning of March 1877, never to reappear in the City of Palaces or elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific.

As French Opera waned, there was one last push to re-establish Italian Opera in Calcutta, and three would-be impresari came forward with proposals: two were British amateur-impersari, George Anderson and Charles Compton, and the third was that veteran of Italian Opera’s vacillating fortunes in Calcutta, Alessandro Massa. Anderson, the owner of a jute company based in Narayanganj, wished to form a ‘Grand Double Italian Opera Company’, which would perform both comic and grand opera in Italian. Compton, an opium trader, proposed importing an extant opera company from Modena, whose impresario he was currently negotiating with. Many favoured Compton’s plan, arguing that a company whose artists were familiar both with each other and the repertoire would ‘work better than one hastily gathered together’. Massa’s plan was similar to those he had put before the people of Calcutta previously, with the usual promises of forming ‘a better company than any we have hitherto had in Calcutta’.

This time, however, Massa had the support of Calcutta’s haut monde, particularly the Viceroy & Governor-General of India and Lady Lytton, and the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Ashley Eden, as well as that of former Wyndhamites like Alex Apcar and C. C. Macrae. Why the sudden harmony? Credit for the reunification of Calcutta’s opera-goers seems to belong to Lt-Governor Eden, the new chair of the Opera Committee. Eden was newly arrived in Calcutta, and therefore brought no biases or old prejudices to the position. Moreover, Eden was a widely-respected man, praised for his fairness and diplomacy. It seems that his impartiality, couple with his preparedness to concede several points, such as the inclusion of dancers and cheaper stall seats, to the Apcar camp, enabled him to ameliorate the bad blood between the two parties.

Massa’s proposal was, therefore, supported by the Opera Committee, and he set about building a company, which arrived in Calcutta in October 1877. The company (see Table 8.3), was composed entirely of singers never before seen in Calcutta, and even the orchestra consisted primarily of fresh faces.

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452 ‘The French Opera’, The Englishman, March 5th, 1877, p. 3.
453 Narayanganj, a port town on the banks of Shitalakshya River, was the jute capital of British India during the nineteenth century. Today, the city (located in the modern state of Bangladesh) is still an important centre of the global jute industry.
457 ‘Italian Opera’, Supplement to The Englishman, February 26th, 1877, p. 2.
Table 8.3: Massa's Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1877–78.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Drammatica</td>
<td>Bettina Capozzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Soprano Brillante</td>
<td>Olimpia Trebbi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prima Donna Contralto</td>
<td>Annina Orlandi*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altra Prima Donna Mezzo Soprano</td>
<td>Ida Antonetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Amelia Botticelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seconda Donna</td>
<td>Adele Ferrario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenore Drammatico</td>
<td>Luigi Columbana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenore Brillante</td>
<td>Astore Stucci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenore Comprimario</td>
<td>Ernesto Magliola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baritono Drammatico</td>
<td>Alberto Navarry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baritono Brillante</td>
<td>Pietro Marucco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basso Assoluto</td>
<td>Matteo della Torre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basso Comico</td>
<td>Giuseppe Frigiotti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basso Comprimario</td>
<td>Antonio Viglione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestro di Coro</td>
<td>Salvatore Botticelli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Coro                               | Soprano: Carlotta Caremoli, Luigia Piccaluga, Carlotta Ferrario;  
                                      | Alto: Luigia de Capitani, Aline Angela, Adele Fellina;  
                                      | Tenor: Giorgio Cernai, Ernesto Falletti, Giovanni Bettanini;  
                                      | Second Tenor: Pompeo Labanti, Guglielmo Limonta, Giovanni Gatti;  
                                      | Bass: Natale Moro, Vincenzo Ghiberti |
| Direttore d'Orchestra e violino    | Pompeo Bignami            |
| Maestro Concertatore e pianista    | Giuseppe Casoratti        |
| Concertmaster                      | Enrico Invernizzi         |
| Other First Violins                | Enrico Bovi               |
|                                    | Manuele Cacchi            |
| Second Violin                      | Giovanni Silvestri        |
| Viola                              | Carlo Barberini           |
| 'Cello                             | Ernesto Stefani           |
| Double Bass                        | Abelardo Lauger           |
| Flute                              | Ettore Prampezzotti       |
| Clarinet                           | Luciano Marchesini        |
| Oboe                               | Temistock Pozzoli         |
| Bassoon                            | Enrico Pomelli            |
| Trumpet                            | Edoardo Girola            |
| Horns                              | Luigi Bosetti             |
|                                    | Arturo Brandestini        |
| Painter                            | Ippolito Stefanini        |
| Machinist                          | Giovanni Santambrogio     |
| Property Master                    | Giuseppe Fosco            |

* Also known as Mariannina Orlandi.

Massa was confident in his company, advertising it more forcefully and with more conviction than he had done with any previous companies.\(^{458}\) Massa’s campaign went

beyond the usual tools of embroidered promotion and playbills. Mindful of the precariousness of opera position in Calcutta, Massa went to great lengths to appeal to as great a proportion of the public as possible.

One way in which he did this was with respect to admission. Acknowledging that there were diverse opinions on whether opera should be expensive or cheap, Massa solicited public opinion when setting ticket prices.459 Some, like the Editor of The Englishman, advocated that opera remain dear:

the Italian opera is necessarily an expensive class of entertainment; and the analogy of other countries justifies higher prices than those charged at theatres.460

The rationale behind this view was that, to be sustainable, opera had to be profitable, and it could only be so when tickets significantly offset the cost of the productions. It was also argued that opera was a social experience that benefited from exclusivity, and that entry prices assisted in the creation of a more select audience.461

Unsurprisingly, the military and middle classes disagreed, and advocated that opera be made more affordable. Whilst they understood that opera was an expensive art-form, they averred that it was the role of Calcutta’s wealthy to subsidise opera for the poor, rather than the poor to miss out entirely. ‘Redcoat’, for example, sought a discount for serving men, their spouses, and their children, encouraging a fifty percent reduction on second and third class seats.462 Both ‘All prizes no blanks’ and ‘A citizen’ suggested ticket rates that increased the cost of premier seats whilst reducing admission for the subordinate seats.463 ‘A Citizen’ went on to say that such a policy would not only be philanthropic, allowing more people in the city to enjoy the ‘intellectual treat’ of opera, but also would make financial sense:

where twenty persons would engage seats at Rs. 5 [totalling Rs. 100], fifty would engage the same class of seats if they were priced at Rs. 3 [totalling Rs. 150].464

Massa eventually set the prices as follows: Boxes: Rs. 16; Stalls: Rs. 8; half price for soldiers in uniform and their families.465 The Englishman’s Editor quickly lauded Massa’s effort, claiming that ‘the price of seats at the Italian Opera on non-subscription nights [had been reduced] to a much lower figure than has hitherto been usual in Calcutta, or than

460 Editorial, The Englishman, October 31st, 1877, p. 2.
463 ‘A Citizen’ advocated the following scale: Boxes: Rs. 20; Orchestra Stalls single: Rs. 3; Orchestra Stalls double: Rs. 5; Back Stalls single: Rs. 2; Back stalls double: Rs. 3. ‘All prized no blanks’ suggested: Stage Boxes: Rs. 20; Boxes: Rs. 10; Stalls: Rs. 3; Double seats: Rs. 5; Back Stalls: Rs. 1. The current figures were Boxes: Rs. 16; Stalls single Rs. 4; Stalls Double Rs. 7. See Signed ‘A Citizen’, ‘Letter to the Editor - The Same’, The Englishman, November 2nd, 1877 p. 2, signed ‘All Prizes no Blanks’, ‘Letter to the Editor - Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 2nd 1877 p. 2 and ‘Advertisement – Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 1st, 1877, p. 1.
London. However generous this scheme was to the military classes, and however keen *The Englishman* was to emphasise Massa’s magnanimity, the new price scale responded neither to the public suggestions (which, after all, Massa had elicited), nor the economic reality for the majority of Calcutta’s European population. The failure of Massa, his predecessors and Italian Opera Committees past and present to make opera truly accessible to the masses was one of the primary reasons for the failure of opera in Calcutta, and will be enlarged upon in a subsequent section.

Artistically, the 1877–78 season largely lived up to the hyperbole. With respect to the vocal talent, most of the principals exceeded Calcutta’s expectations, and some were quite gifted and experienced (see Appendix G). Massa’s company was admired beyond the strength of its principals; the chorus, in particular, attained a degree of excellence not hitherto heard in Calcutta. It was praised not only for singing its music in tune and correctly (a rare enough treat from opera choruses in Calcutta), but also for the attention it gave to expressive devices such as diminuendo and crescendo, staccato and dynamics, a feat not generally attempted by the ‘somewhat rough and ready singers’ that had previously served as choruses in the city. There were occasions when the chorus was considered to be best part of an entire performance, and choruses were encored regularly. Indeed, the only complaint about the chorus was that it was sometimes so effective and powerful as to overwhelm the principals and orchestra; balance was an art that was perfected over the course of the season.

The orchestra, too, was said to be superior to its predecessors, both as a body and for the individual virtuosity of its players. Following a performance of *Ione*, *The Englishman*’s Editor published the following review of the clarinetist:

> The solo for clarionette [sic] was so well played that it was alone worth going to hear. We have very rarely listened to a solo so carefully, so correctly, and so brilliantly played. We are not acquainted with the performer’s name but he is an artist of no small merit.

The artist’s name was Luciano Marchesini, and he was a career orchestral player in the opera houses and concert halls of Europe. He was evidently an accomplished all-round musical intellect for, upon his return to Europe, he became the chief conductor of the Civico Filarmonica di Lugano, Switzerland.

The company excelled Calcutta’s expectations even in extra-musical spheres, earning accolades and adjectives such as ‘gorgeous’, ‘most lovely’, ‘beautiful’, ‘rich’, ‘charming’,

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470 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 4th, 1878, p. 3.
‘perfect’ for its scenery and costuming. Scenographer and painter Ippolito Stefanini was the man responsible for the spectacular elements of the company’s performances, and only once disappointed the audience when, on the occasion of the second representation of Ione, the destruction of the amphitheatre was omitted.

The perfection of his scenes and costumes, the superior quality of the chorus and orchestra and the uneven, but generally high, standard of his principals, combined to make the 1877–78 season an artistic success, and earned Massa tributes, congratulations and letters of thanks from the critics and residents of Calcutta. Massa was acknowledged to have assembled a high-quality troupe that mounted respectable, and even marvellous, productions and, in his programmes, deftly balanced novelty and comfort, light and grand opera. All this, however, was not enough to secure for Massa either pecuniary success or the impresa for another season.

Many accused him of introducing too many operas at the last minute: Norma, La Sonnambula and I Promessi Sposi (Petrella) were all first performed within the last three weeks of the season. According to Massa, he had reserved these popular or première works in order to secure crowded houses for the benefits of the prime donne at the end of the season. This was, no doubt, a noble motive (although, to be more cynical, it was probably written into the women’s contracts), but it was not good business sense to create props, costumes and scenery, arrange orchestral parts, and allot precious rehearsal time to productions that would be produced so few times in the season. Moreover, delaying such novel or popular works for the end of the season, led to audience frustrations.

Yet, even this questionable practice of withholding lucrative productions until the season’s final weeks should not have undermined the financial success of a season so artistically accomplished as Massa’s in 1877–78. It seems that, ultimately, the failure of this company to re-establish Italian Opera in Calcutta had little to do with its achievements and procedures, and more to do with the attitudes of Calcutta’s residents towards opera. The season was admired and Massa was thanked, but the sense of urgency and importance that had once accompanied discussions and thoughts about opera was no longer present. Opera was no longer considered imperative for the City of Palaces; rather, it was a fleeting echo of the grandeur of an earlier age. Massa was, therefore, not given a chance to repeat his success. The end-of-season opera meeting did little more than congratulate Massa for a final time. There were no attempts to engage either Massa or another impresario/company for the 1878–79 season.


473 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 4th, 1878, p. 3.


Calcutta was, therefore, very surprised when opera showed up on its doorstep in early 1879. The surprise was compounded when it was revealed that the impresario was none other than the (in)famous Augusto Cagli. Cagli brought with him a talented, although relatively small, company (see Table 8.4), but lacked an orchestra and chorus. Some of the singers were familiar to Calcutta, including the Coys who had been such especial favourites at the beginning of the decade.

Table 8.4: Cagli’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1878–79.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prime Donne Assolute</td>
<td>Giulia Tamburini-Coy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rosa Genolini</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primi Contralti</td>
<td>Giuseppina Brusa</td>
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<td>Ermelinda Mancini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprimaria</td>
<td>Signora Gianolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primi Tenori Assoluti</td>
<td>Leandro Coy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signor Macchiavelli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Baritono</td>
<td>Giovanni Bemamaschi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso</td>
<td>Signor Salvini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primo Basso Comico</td>
<td>Signor Cortisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maestri Concertatori</td>
<td>Signor Guarnieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Signor Bignotti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggeritore</td>
<td>Signor Toriani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenery Painter</td>
<td>Signor Magni</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having spent the past three years in the Cape Colony, Cagli’s first Indian stop was Bombay, on the subcontinent’s west coast. Bombay, however, was not as promising a destination as perhaps Cagli remembered or expected. The Times of India reported that Bombay could not offer Cagli’s company a suitable theatre, and the Bombay Gazette claimed that Cagli would have to present its programmes of in recital or concert-style, instead of on stage. The troupe then toured through some of the smaller cities of British India, including Madras and Allahabad, before arriving in Calcutta on January 11th, 1879.

The audience and critics of Allahabad were unimpressed by the company. It seems that Cagli’s productions fell far short of his previous reputation for completeness, attention to detail, and authenticity. Some of these defects were caused by Allahabad’s poor infrastructure—the performance venue was a draughty railway hall, rather than an opera house, and the town was unable to provide the company with a suitable (i.e. tuned and fully-stringed) piano. Others problems were due to the limited resources of the company itself. Nevertheless, the town seems to have appreciated the company’s presence, likening a passion for opera to a drug addiction:

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477 Times of India, reprinted in The Englishman, November 22nd, 1878, p. 2.
478 The Bombay Gazette, reprinted in The Englishman, November 22nd, 1878, p. 2.
479 Editorial, The Englishman, December 14th, 1878, p. 2.
481 ‘The Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 14th, 1879, p. 3.
The performance of the *Trovatore* on Tuesday evening ought, perhaps, to have been called an operatic entertainment founded on the *Trovatore* rather than by the more pretentious title. However, it was a very charming entertainment and more so probably for those of the audience who appreciated its comic shortcomings. A taste for the opera is like drinking – once established the thirst is insatiable. In extreme cases, dipsomaniacs unable to get brandy have been known to drink turpentine rather than nothing, and an opera in a forlorn barn like our Railway Theatre, with a cracked tin kettle piano for an orchestra, is better by a great way than no opera at all.482

In their gratitude for having opera presented to them in any shape, the operagoers of Allahabad eagerly excused the company’s shortcomings:

The wild emotions of “Stride la Vampa” are hard to express in front of an entirely inappropriate old scene, which had to do duty for Leonora’s garden, and the gypsy camp, and Manrico’s palace by turns, and in its palmy days, may have, perhaps, been designed as a street in a pantomime. It would have been better had the Italians … been able to drape the back of the stage with a curtain, rather than work with the dismal old properties they dragged to the light … But of course they had no time for preparation as they only arrived from Bombay on the morning … and it is simply wonderful that they could sing at all after the torment of their long railway journey, not to speak of singing as they did with vigour and animation, and as much verve in acting their skeleton opera as if they were borne up by all the exhilarating accessories of a properly appointed theatre. … The audience freely forgave the makeshifts of the tattered old theatre, and did justice to the good points of the artists.483

Allahabad’s press and public may have been forgiving and indulgent, but their reviews damaged Cagli nevertheless. Notices of the less-than-polished performances preceded the company to Calcutta, which created low expectations and deterred audiences. The company’s première was only moderately attended. Furthermore, the city appears to have been rather keen to appear more discerning than its rival cities, which had so easily cast aside their standards and judgment to welcome the company. One critic reflected that the ‘the want of an orchestra is a drawback which is naturally felt more in Calcutta, where for so many years we have been accustomed to excellence in this respect, than in Bombay.’484 Reviews throughout the season were notable for their unusually hypercritical character. In *Faust*, Mancini, in the travesti role of Siebel, was criticised for being ‘too masculine’, whilst Genolini was ‘too good’ for the role of Marta.485 Similarly, having become accustomed to the more spacious auditoria of Australasia, both Leandro Coy and Giovanni Bergamaschi were chastised for ‘singing too loudly for so small a theatre.’486 It is significant to note that the critic’s determination to be discriminating was not accompanied by the sound theatrical knowledge that had been present amongst critics a decade earlier; *Lucia di Lammermoor* was attributed to Verdi,487 and arias were frequently associated with the wrong characters. There is, therefore, a sense that this criticism was primarily designed to preserve a sense of Calcutta’s superiority, rather than preserve an accurate record of the performances and help citizens decide whether or not to patronise the opera.

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483 Ibid.  
484 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 14th, 1879, p. 3.  
485 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 27th, 1879, p. 3.  
486 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 15th, 1879, p. 3.  
487 ‘Royal Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 28th, 1879, p. 3.
Despite the sometimes fastidious and ill-informed nature of the reviews, it was apparent to many that the company was of high quality, its performers being both accomplished singers and actors. Those who attended the performances ‘had nothing but praise … and [believed that] Signor Cagli is to be congratulated on having got together so excellent a company.’\textsuperscript{488} Genolini and the Coys quickly regained the esteem they had enjoyed years earlier, whilst the rich voices and strong dramatic skills of Bergamaschi, Brusa and Cortisi led to these newcomers finding similar popularity. Increasingly, White Town returned to the opera.

So favourable was the impression left by Cagli’s unsolicited visit, that Massa was persuaded once again to attempt to furnish Calcutta with an opera company.\textsuperscript{489} However, the (relatively) broad support that had existed earlier in the 1870s had been eroded, not only by the crisis of 1875, but also by the constant and aggressive championship that public musical enterprises seemed to require in Calcutta to keep them afloat. Massa was able to boast of Viceroy Lytton and Lieutenant-Governor Sir Ashley Eden amongst his supporters,\textsuperscript{490} but this was no longer sufficient to attract the numbers needed to make opera in Calcutta viable. Although an opera committee accepted Massa’s prospectus,\textsuperscript{491} neither the committee, nor the impresario (nor, indeed, the luminaries who supported them) were able to attract sufficient subscriptions and the project came to nothing. Thus, the departure from Calcutta of Cagli’s opera company on February 11\textsuperscript{th} 1879 represented the curtain call of Italian opera itself in the city.

It is perhaps poetic that Cagli, the man who had so vigorously tried to establish Italian Opera in Calcutta, was also the man to draw Italian Opera’s chapter to a close. Although other species of opera companies came to Calcutta occasionally during the 1880s, they enjoyed neither the status nor the permanence that Italian Opera had once been favoured with. Furthermore, these companies were transient troupes: they were neither planned nor solicited, they never recurred, and Calcutta was not their primary destination. Perhaps more telling of opera’s declining fortunes is the fact that there was never again any attempt by anyone in Calcutta to reinvigorate Italian opera in the city. The flame, which had been flickering since 1875, was now extinguished, a mere ember glowing only in the hearts and memories of those who had witnessed the halcyon days of Italian opera in the City of Palaces.

\textit{An operatic postlude: Opera in Calcutta 1880–1901.}

Italian Opera may have been at an end, but operatic culture endured well into the 1880s. Opera’s postlude began with Clara Stanley’s English Opera and Opéra-Bouffe Company in 1880, and wove its way across the years, concluding only after another member of the Stanley family, Harry Stanley, departed with his Dramatic, Operatic, and Pantomime Company in early 1889. During this time, operatic culture assumed a diverse range of forms.

\textsuperscript{488} ‘Royal Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman}, January 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1879, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{489} ‘A New Opera Troupe’, \textit{The Englishman}, January 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1879, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{490} Ibid and Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, February 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1879 p. 2.
\textsuperscript{491} ‘The Opera for Next Season’, \textit{The Englishman}, February 20\textsuperscript{th}, 1879, p. 3, and ‘Advertisement – Opera Season 1879–80’, \textit{Friend of India}, February 28\textsuperscript{th} 1879, p. 1.
At one end of the spectrum was Carlotta Patti (see Figure 8.1), who arrived in Calcutta and, alongside her equally talented husband Ernest de Munck, mounted a series of operatic concerts during the 1880–81 season. Calcutta was just one of Patti’s innumerable destinations on her round-the-world tour, which had begun in 1879 in the New York. Although Patti is now best remembered as the sister of Adelina Patti, in the 1880s, Carlotta was regarded as a formidable and talented soprano in her own right. She had a strong and flexible coloratura range, reputedly extending to G6, and would likely have enjoyed an operatic career had she not been slightly lame. Whilst her condition bore no effect upon her marvellous voice, the impediment nevertheless proved an intractable obstacle in the world of opera, where singers were held to nineteenth-century society’s inflexible standards of physical, as well as musical, perfection.

Coincidentally, Patti’s concert company also included Giovanni Pompei, who appeared during this season as a singer. The recitals consisted of a mélange of solos, duets, quartets from operatic and oratorio repertoire as well as solos by de Munck on cello.

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495 ‘Madame Patti’s Concert’, *The Englishman*, December 22nd, 1880, p. 3.
Patti was patronised by British elites and Indian and Asian nobility — including the Prime Minister of Nepal, who provided Patti with a small band of instrumentalists for her New Year's concert — and these attendees were devoted and enthusiastic. In general, however, and despite her talent and famous connections, Patti's concerts were not well attended. In truth, Patti and her associates scarcely made an impact on Calcutta, and Calcutta did not leave much of an impact on Patti; they soon left Calcutta to continue their melodious circumnavigation of the world.

At the other end of the spectrum were the operatic performances by the vaudevillian of Harry Stanley's Dramatic, Operatic and Pantomime Company, which was based in Calcutta for most of 1888. The company presented a diverse variety of musical and non-musical productions, ranging from Shakespeare tragedies and Boucicault dramas (such as The Colleen Bawn) to English operettas (notably Grossmith's gem of a curtain-raiser Uncle Samuel and several Gilbert and Sullivan works such as H.M.S. Pinafore, Ruddigore, and The Mikado), and Parisian opéras-bouffes including Offenbach's Barbe-bleue and Planquette's Les Cloches de Corneville (both performed in English). Also amongst the troupe's repertoire were more popular entertainments: vaudeville sketches, burlesques and pantomimes, most of which were composed by former impresario Alessandro Massa. Massa's pantomimes and vaudevilles, which included Lalla-Roukh and She-e, often had a local flavour, and were somewhat popular if ephemeral parts of Calcutta's local musical culture.

Stanley's company included Amy Childs, Horace Holland, Harry Pyne and Arthur Fawcett; all were sound, all-round performers who had achieved a modicum of success in Australia and New Zealand, but none, besides Fawcett, can be described as an accomplished singer. Amy Childs had begun in minor roles (such as Hebe in Pinafore) in G.B.W. Lewis' Juvenile Opera Company, but was soon entrusted with travesti roles, such as Harlequin in Harlequinade and Henri in Les Cloches de Corneville, due to her superior acting skills. She finally began to secure lead female roles such as the Duchess in La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein when she joined the Stanley's Juvenile Opera Company in 1884. Horace Holland had begun as a member of an Australian touring circus, specialising in balancing and equestrian acts. Harry Pyne had been a singer/actor in the Mavin Folly Company (New Zealand) in 1887. It was with this company that Pyne came to India, only joining the Stanley company once in Calcutta. Arthur Fawcett was the troupe's only professional opera singer, having appeared as Arturo in the Montague-Turner Company's production of

497 ‘Patti’s Concerts’, The Englishman, December 31st 1880, p. 3.
499 ‘Madame Patti’s Concert’, The Englishman, December 22nd, 1880, p. 3.
500 Prior to this, the company had been in Bombay.
503 ‘Chiarini’s Circus and Menagerie’, Launceston Examiner, February 17th, 1885, p. 3.
Lucia di Lammermoor in Australia, and in several principal tenor roles with the Salinger Opéra-Bouffe Company during its East Asia tour.\footnote{505}

The diversity of the performer’s theatrical backgrounds and talents may be interesting, but it did not make for strong operatic performances. Furthermore, the company was not large, and on many occasions relied upon amateurs or other vaudeville troupes, especially Dave Carson’s minstrel and burlesque company, to adequately fill its cast lists, further undermining the musical quality of the performances.

Between Patti’s gargantuan operatic talent and Stanley’s potpourri of theatrical delights, was the Emelie Melville English Opera Company, which came to Calcutta in 1885. The thirty-seven strong company had a most disastrous journey from Melbourne to Calcutta, as the following report details:

To anyone who is in want of a downright unlucky opera troupe I can honestly recommend the one Miss Emelie Melville took away to India. First, Mrs. Farley died on the way to Adelaide. In Ceylon misfortunes fell fast upon them. Scott and Rigby, choristers, and Perkins, leading violin, died of cholera. Signor Verdi was very ill with the same complaint. Miss Melville was, herself, very ill. Mr. C. Van Ghele [conductor] has become hopelessly insane, and is confined in a mad house, also in India.

I should not be surprised if the remainder of the company never comes back.\footnote{506}

The singers who survived the trip to Calcutta were all professionals of no mean skill (see Appendix H). The bountiful talent of the company, the personal losses its members had incurred \textit{en route}, and the ‘extravagance’ of the sets and costumes\footnote{507} were all elements that, ordinarily, would have predisposed Calcutta’s opera aficionados to be sympathetic to, and appreciative of, the company. Moreover, Melville took pains to present new and exciting repertoire to the people of the city; the troupe is notable for being responsible for several Calcutta (and, indeed, Asian) premières, mounting productions of \textit{Les Noces d’Olivette} (Audran, 1879), \textit{Boccaccio} (von Suppé, 1879), \textit{Madame Favart} (Offenbach, 1878), \textit{The Mikado} (Sullivan, 1885) and \textit{Carmen} (Bizet, 1875).\footnote{508} Yet, even these efforts were insufficient to win over Calcutta’s disenchanted beau monde. Indeed, the \textit{Statesman of India} encouraged residents to actively avoid the Melville Company’s productions, declaring that ‘She [Emelie Melville] and all her company are vulgar, and more fit for a Melbourne theatre than for a select Calcutta audience.’\footnote{509} There seems to have been no particular basis for this claim: Melville’s cast were reputable actors and singers, and her repertoire relied upon a staple diet of the very proper nineteenth-century works, all of which had prove popular in Calcutta in times gone by: Gilbert and Sullivan works, \textit{La Fille de Madame Angot}, \textit{La Mascotte}, \textit{Les Cloches de Corneville}, \textit{The Bohemian Girl} and \textit{Maritana}.\footnote{510}

\begin{thebibliography}{510}
\footnotetext[505]{‘Gaiety Theatre’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, January 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1884, p. 8, and ‘Salinger’s Opera Company’, \textit{Straits Times Weekly}, January 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1887, p. 4.}
\footnotetext[506]{‘Notes by Scalfax’, \textit{Otago Witness}, December 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1884.}
\footnotetext[507]{‘Dramatic Gossip’, \textit{South Australian Register}, April 4\textsuperscript{th} 1885, p. 3.}
\footnotetext[508]{Editorial, \textit{The Englishman}, January 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1885, p. 2, ‘The Corinthian Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman}, January 31\textsuperscript{st}, 1885, p. 3, and ‘The Corinthian Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman}, February 27\textsuperscript{th} 1885, p. 5.}
\footnotetext[509]{‘Melville’s English Opera’, \textit{The Statesman of India}, December 12\textsuperscript{th} 1884, p. 2.}
\end{thebibliography}
Despite the spurious nature of the charges of vulgarity, many White Towners were discouraged some people from patronising Melville's light-opera productions. There was one production, however, that was well attended: Carmen. Whilst Fischer's Michaela and Verdi's Escamillo impressed, many found Melville's impersonation of Carmen quite lacklustre and Farley's Don José equally flat. The Englishman's critic blamed the English version itself:

The opera in an English guise is not very palatable when we remember the elaboration with which the original version was produced. Bizet's work is deserving of the utmost care and elaboration…511

Evidence reveals that the poor arrangement that apparently caused the failure of Carmen may have been due to the ill-health that had dogged the company, rather than a lack of 'care'. An Australian happening to visit Calcutta at that time wrote home to report that midway through the performance, Melville was struck with severe illness and was, therefore, obliged to omit all the sung sections.512 In any event, the packed houses that witnessed Carmen were an exception, rather than the rule, and Melville's company enjoyed only moderate support throughout 1885.

This poor patronage resulted in the Melville Company becoming stranded in Calcutta, with the artists unable to pay for their accommodation, let alone their fare out of India. The troupe's baritone, Guglielmo Verdi, was thrown into debtors’ prison for being unable to settle his account with the hotel. Melville and Fischer were spared similar fates only by the beneficence of a Calcutta doctor and his wife, who welcomed the women into their home, cleared their debts and provided them with their fares back to Australia. Other members of the company were forced to take on non-theatrical work, from shopkeeping to teaching, to raise the funds to leave. The troupe was marooned in the City of Palaces for over five months before its artists were solvent enough to return to Australia.513

The inauspicious fate of the Melville Company was regarded as the death knell of culture and refinement in Calcutta, not only within the city, but also across the Empire. Indeed, the Calcutta-based correspondent who relayed this sorry tale to Melville's fans in Australia pronounced Melville and her fellow artists to be the innocent victims of the city's supine residents. Moreover, he did not believe opera to be the only form of high-art culture to be crumbling in 1880s Calcutta:

In days gone by companies used to pay their way in Calcutta, but now I verily believe that if Irving came here he would only draw one night a week, if Patti came here she would appear once and depart, if Mary Anderson came the Calcutta public would declare they had an amateur who would “out-Mary-Anderson” Mary Anderson. ... In Calcutta, Italian opera has failed to pay, Emelie Melville has failed to pay, Rosa Towers and her people are doing odd jobs over India, and a comedy company after playing here a few months, went to Madras, where they have disposed of all they had to pay their way home. It may be thought that I have written the above anxious to run down Calcutta. Such is not my intention. My hope in writing this is that it may be read by all theatrical people, and that

512 ‘Dramatic Gossip’, South Australian Register, April 4th 1885, p. 3.
Calcutta, the once prestigious City of Palaces, was losing its reputation for sophistication, and this was in large part to the disintegration of the city’s opera, drama and high-art culture. The last years of the century were marked only by an uneasy silence and cultural apathy. In letting its cultural ambitions fade away, White Town seemed to be presaging its own decline.

**An evaluation of opera’s demise**

The final part of this chapter, and the section detailing operatic culture in Calcutta, examines the broader social, economic, and political reasons that opera failed to take root in the city in this later period. Although the causes for opera’s failure to thrive in the City of Palaces are complex and multifarious, they can be conceptualised in two broad areas:

1) *Elitism*: Calcutta’s social, economic and political structure prevented the democratisation of opera, ultimately stifling energy and the ability of the art form to become profitable and permanent; and

2) *Empire*: Calcutta’s cultural life was a casualty of the shifts that occurred in Britain’s imperial identity and ambitions. These changes to Calcutta’s self-identity and geopolitical status rendered opera increasingly irrelevant to its social and political life, and the city less attractive to touring artists.

**Elitism: Calcutta and the failure to democratise opera**

As had been demonstrated, Calcutta operated on a social, political, and economic system that valued hierarchy and exclusivity, rather than accessibility, inclusiveness, and democracy. Such values had a deleterious effect on the ability of both aficionados and artists to establish a vibrant and profitable operatic culture. Such a declaration may seem counterintuitive given the prevailing idea that opera is an elitist cultural artefact of the educated, the rich, the powerful, and the aristocratic. This idea, however, is false. Opera may be a symbol of wealth and power, but it has always best thrived in societies where the art form is widely accessible and democratic in the original sense of the word (that is the power lies with the people).

A cursory glance at the history of opera reveals the genre’s reliance on large, accessible audiences for its success. Although opera was first produced for the leading families of Italy, it was only when the first public opera houses were built in seicento Venice that opera became a truly culturally and socially significant institution. The competition for, and reliance upon, public loyalty and favour in cities like London, Venice and Amsterdam may have given rise to some of the excesses of high-Baroque opera, such as the overembellished, oversimplified da capo aria or the despotism of the singer, but it also fostered vibrant, competitive and passionate operatic cultures.

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514 ‘Dramatic Gossip’, *South Australian Register*, May 20th 1885, p. 3.
The history of French opera offers another example of the connection between a democratic socio-economic and political culture and a vibrant operatic culture. French opera had existed since the mid-seventeenth century, when the works of Jean-Baptiste Lully, Marc-Antoine Charpentier and Marin Marais found popularity amongst the French aristocracy. In the next century, the works of Rameau, Grétry and Gluck may have kept the elites entertained, but French intellectuals were beginning to raise concerns about the art form’s stagnation, especially at the hands of Rameau, Louis XV’s Court Composer. It was only in the aftermath of the Revolution, with the ascent of the bourgeoise and the abolition of operatic monopolies and traditionalism that accompanied this social awakening, that French opera became internationally relevant. The rise of France’s middle-classes, which began with the July Monarchy (1830–1848), was the heyday of Meyerbeer and Auber. As their ascent continued throughout the Second Empire (1852–1870), France became a major operatic force in Europe with the works of Gounod, Thomas, Offenbach and early Bizet. As France’s urban masses grew wealthier and more powerful, French opera’s fortunes rose further: during the Third Republic (1870–1945), Bizet and Offenbach continued to flourish, whilst new composers such as Massenet, Saint-Saëns, Delibes, and Debussy added to the international operatic repertoire in profound ways.

Similarly, in her book on New York’s operatic culture, Karen Ahlquist has demonstrated that the city’s elite operatic world (made so familiar to us in the novels of Edith Wharton and Henry James) was a far cry from the Barnum-style opera patronised by various strata of antebellum New York society. Bruce McConachie may discern the beginnings of elitist culture and solidarity in this early phase of New York opera culture, but as scholars such as John Graziano have shown, impresari like Strakosch, Maretzek and Anschultz in 1860s New York continued to draw (and, indeed, target) audiences from middle-class and migrant communities. The fin-de-siècle elites at the Metropolitan Opera were able to enjoy opera only because of the genre’s early success in that city on the back of democratic appreciation.

Calcutta’s social structure bucked the overall Western trend towards middle-class agency and prestige because, in many ways, it was an artificial society. The Charter Reform Act of 1832 may have lifted migratory restrictions, but the city’s status as a high-colonial, hegemonic, imperial enterprise resulted in narrow demographic development. The Raj had no need to ban or discourage people from coming to Calcutta, for unless someone fit into the bureaucratic or mercantile frameworks that underpinned Britain’s imperial project, they were unlikely to remain there. Those who came to Calcutta during the height of the Raj came in to be part of, or exploit, British rule. Their imperial purpose, position and attitudes transformed these British civil servants, military leaders and wealthy traders into aristocrats in all but name. These pseudo-aristocrats sought the trappings of cultural authority, most

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distinctly opera, without realising that the days had long passed since opera was the exclusive playground of minority, and that opera had always best flourished as an *ars populi*. Their failure to realise this, combined with the political nature of the city, doomed Calcutta’s operatic culture to stagnation and failure.

That opera was the province primarily of this pseudo-aristocracy is evident from the membership and nature of the opera committees of the 1860s and 1870s. The majority of committee members and subscribers were lawyers, judges, secretaries, undersecretaries, lieutenants, brigadiers and captains; in other words, men of the upper echelons of the Indian Civil Service and military. Furthermore, the Committee and subscribers had a degree of control over the opera as an institution that was utterly anachronistic, having a greater resemblance to the aristocratic box-holders at the King’s Theatre between 1780–1820 than to their contemporaries at Covent Garden. Like the box-holders of the Regency period, the members of the Calcutta Opera Committee were able to suggest repertoire, choose impresari and artists, set ticket rates and generally meddle in the running of the theatre. Their control of the opera cemented the art-form’s prestige, and the opera augmented the social preeminence already enjoyed by these elites.

Calcutta’s opera certainly attracted a wider pool of patrons than its committee members and subscribers. Amongst those who came to the opera, but wielded little influence upon it, were low-ranking soldiers, teachers, farmers, travellers, shopkeepers and small-time merchants. These people had very little encouragement in their patronage. Indeed, many of opera’s influential subscribers and committee members resisted attempts to make opera more accessible. As discussed in the previous chapter, many subscribers disapproved of discounted tickets, claiming it to be a measure that facilitated the attendance of ‘undesirables’.

Calcutta’s beau monde believed that reduced admission compromised one of opera’s primary virtues—its exclusivity. Opera was a social affair, not a project for social equity. Many limited their attendance to opera’s more expensive nights; instead of paying Rs. 3 for a cheap stalls ticket on a public night, they chose to pay Rs. 20 for a ticket on State Night, purchase costly subscriptions, or buy Rs. 7 tickets at the door of the more fashionable subscription evenings. They did this not only because they wanted to advertise their affluence, although that was certainly a factor, but also because these were the nights when their social and business acquaintances would be attending. The beau monde expected opera, as an institution, to exist at their social, economic, and political convenience, and the iron grip they had upon the opera ensured that their expectations were met. It was simply too risky for any impresario to try to accommodate the masses, when such actions were likely to repel White Town’s elites, upon whom they were financially and politically dependent.

It was not only economic equity that Calcutta’s esteemed operagoers considered undesirable; the imperial attitudes and values that underpinned Calcutta’s social and political structure also impacted upon its operatic culture. The majority of White Town’s

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residents appear to have espoused two irreconcilable attitudes towards operatic culture and colonialism, arguing that opera would be a positive and civilising influence on Bengali people, but that Bengali people were disinterested and incapable of appreciating opera. The nexus between opera and racial politics will be more fully explored in Chapter 15, but it is worth noting here that both opera and instrumental art-music suffered from White Town's desire to own culture as an artefact instead of a practice, and its preference to let opera fall rather than let it transcend racial and social barriers.

The lack of democracy in Calcutta's opera culture may explain the inherent weaknesses in the way opera was run, but it does not explain why, after so much passion, effort and argument, the city's wealth and influential patrons allowed opera to simply disappear. To understand the puzzling devaluation of opera in Calcutta, it is necessary consider the evolution of Calcutta's collective identity and the city's changing role in the Empire.

**Empire: The evolution of the British Empire and British India, and its effect on opera in Calcutta.**

Hierarchy, rigidity, exclusivity and elitism may have inhibited the democratisation of opera in Calcutta, but these characteristics were central to imperialism, which was, after all, White Town's raison d'être. The success of the imperial project, and the stability of White Town itself, was dependent upon the strength of a chain of superiority. This chain put each person and each institution in its proper place in order to render these people and things useful to the imperial assemblage. British people were superior to colonised peoples and British culture was superior to indigenous cultures. Within the British Raj was an immutable chain of command, connecting the lowliest of civil servants to the Viceroy himself. More broadly, the rest of British India was subordinate to Calcutta, which in turn was subordinate to London; British India was imagined to be 'the jewel in the crown of the British Empire', and was, therefore, superior to the smaller or less valuable dominions of the realm. Ultimately, the British Empire was imagined to reign supreme over all foreign empires and nations.

Between 1800 and 1870, these hierarchical relationships were not merely preserved but became increasingly rigid: all Indian insurgencies had been quashed and British power in India had grown; British India itself continued to be regarded as the most valuable of all colonial possessions; the British Empire kept growing, even as other empires, like that of Spain, diminished. As the nerve-centre of British Imperialism in Asia, Calcutta had benefitted from all of this, and its reputation and prestige only grew.

By the 1870s, as outlined in previous chapters, the situation was changing. Phenomena like the rise of the Bengali Renaissance, problems with population density in Bengal, the ascent of other British dominions, and the emergence of a new concept of empire (Seeley's Greater Britain) injured Calcutta's prestige and geopolitical position. Opera had been a tool of asserting people's place in the hierarchy upon which the whole of White Town life was predicated. Thus, when the city lost its preeminence it also lost its ambition and ability to be a culturally significant metropolis, rendering opera unnecessary. In short, opera was undermined by the changing position of Calcutta within British India and of British India
within the Empire. Opera’s story in Calcutta had always followed the city’s fortunes; together the city and the art lapsed into somnolence by the turn of the twentieth century.
PART THREE

Before embarking on section three, it is perhaps necessary to refresh the history of its subject: nineteenth-century Melbourne and its operatic culture. Melbourne forms a natural comparison with Calcutta. Both were important and iconic cities of the British Empire during the Victorian Era; due to their (relative) proximity to one another, the cities often hosted the same artists (indeed, several companies treated Melbourne and Calcutta as the poles of an Asia-Pacific touring circuit); both were cities in which the British colonists had to contend with harsh and foreign environments and declared themselves masters of a land that was not rightfully theirs. Yet, for all these commonalities, the cities were very different. British Calcutta was a small, insular, highly-striated, elitist, bureaucratic and conservative community; Anglo-Irish Melbourne grew quickly from an illegal settlement of Australian pastoralists to a populous metropolis of middle-class immigrants and Australia-born men and women who prided themselves on progressive, even radical, politics, an egalitarian spirit and a mixed Australian-British identity.

Such contrasts in the midst of the cities’ strong connection makes for a very interesting comparison, and allows some general observations to be made. Hence, this section will focus on the development of Melbourne and its operatic culture, from the first white settlers in 1835, through Victoria’s independence from the colony of New South Wales and the discovery of gold in 1851, to continued growth and prosperity in the 1860s and ’70s, to Melbourne’s halcyon days, the 1880s, when it hosted two international exhibitions in a decade, had nearly continuous opera (often Melbourne had a choice of English, Italian, or French opera besides concerts, promenades and vaudevilles), and earned itself the immortal moniker ‘Marvellous Melbourne’. The section concludes on a sombre note, as did the Victorian Era for Melbourne, but not before putting some misconceptions and myths to bed about the effect that the Great Panic of the 1890s had on Melbourne’s operatic culture.
Chapter 9: 
Music in Melbourne, 1837–1851

Unlike Calcutta, Melbourne’s nineteenth century operatic culture has attracted much scholarly attention, particularly from Australian researchers. Over the past fifty years, Harold Love, Eric Irvin, John Cargher, Alison Gyger, Judith Bowler, and Katherine Brisbane have each illuminated certain aspects of the city’s operatic heritage. Alongside more recent scholarship by Kerry Murphy, Thérèse Radic and Peggy Lais, the work of these researchers has laid a firm foundation for understanding the chronology, development, and significance of nineteenth century musical culture in Melbourne. In order to avoid the futility of merely recomposing or reiterating the fine work of these scholars, the following chapters will enlarge upon the existing body of research, particularly focussing on opera’s wider role in Victorian Melbourne and the Empire.

In the year that professional opera first arrived in Calcutta, 1833, the city of Melbourne had not yet been established. Yet, within forty years, Melbourne had become the fastest growing city in the southern hemisphere and was never without a substantial and high-quality season of opera. Within another forty years, Melbourne had famously become the city in which the most celebrated opera singer in the world, Dame Nellie Melba, had been born, had gained early training and opportunity, and had based her stage name. Opera’s meteoric rise in Melbourne mirrored the rise of the city itself, and the nuances of the city’s operatic culture reveal a great deal about Melbourne and her population from the period from settlement (1835) to Federation (1901). This chapter outlines the development of opera and high-art musical culture in Melbourne with reference the city’s history, character and residents.

Egalitarian beginnings

Melbourne’s early settlers are often characterised as uncultured, poorly educated and narrow in their interests. This view may be shaped by the reputed absence of theatre, music and art from Melbourne’s early life—a fact which seems Thérèse incongruous with the reputation for excellence the city later developed in these fields. However, both the characterisation of the residents, and the conception of the settlement as a cultural backwater, are false. Melbourne’s pioneers were men of far-ranging interests and they invested time and capital into creating a cultural infrastructure. That this infrastructure has

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less music in it than some may expect owes far more to the demography and settlement patterns of Port Phillip’s early days than an intentional eschewal of the arts.

From the outset, the promise of ideal pastur- elands and a new society encouraged many people to start afresh in the Port Phillip District (the ‘Australia Felix’ area of the New South Wales colony), but those who came were mostly young men. Concerts, opera, theatre, art exhibitions: these cultural phenomena were traditionally associated with co-gender and intergenerational socialisation. Moreover, these young men did not settle into a dense, urbanised area. The majority of the early settlers of the Port Phillip District were pastoralists attracted by the news of rich grazing land. Whether as squatters or as recognised land owners, they settled over vast areas of Australia Felix (see Figure 9.1): swathes of land on the Wannon and Moorabool Rivers were settled; Winchelsea and Camperdown and even further west to the Grange and Warrnambool all attracted early settlement; a large run was established at Ballarat-Buninyong; to the north, the Plenty Valley, Sunbury and Kilmore were soon home to pioneering Port Phillip settlers as were numerous sections of the Major’s Path, where internal immigrants from Central New South Wales settled every day; even in the east around Frankston and Dandenong, and as far as Mornington, settlers were establishing sheep runs.520 This made for a very productive wool industry, but did not create the demography or the dense urban environment upon which the high-arts are dependent.

The cultural infrastructure which did spring up was, naturally, designed to facilitate the socialisation of semi-rural young men, rather than young men with wives or families. The early cultural institutions of Melbourne included cricket, horse-racing and watersports. The Port Phillip Gazette reminded its readers that cricket was ‘one of the most elegant and manly

521 Map by Esmeralda Rocha using Google Maps technology.
sports that can be enjoyed', whilst horse-racing and regattas were often accompanied by dinners. The Melbourne Club was established in 1839 and was designed to emulate London gentlemen’s clubs, create an environment of select society and ‘afford a comfortable method of meeting Gentlemen and give to Bachelors, especially such as frequently come in from the Bush, a quiet and economical home’. The following year was marked by the establishment of the city’s first Masonic Lodge and the Port Phillip Turf Club—both were classically masculine spaces, and hence well suited to Melbourne’s population.

Yet, even in its earliest days this masculine semi-rural society showed evidence of valuing artistic pursuits. In the same year that the Melbourne Club was founded, three other important associations were established: the Union Benefit Society, which boasted one hundred members within its first month, the School of Arts, and the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute. However, despite the implication of its name, the Mechanics’ Institute was to be a bastion of high-art culture for the rest of the century. There were, moreover, increasing numbers of balls and picnics and two days before Christmas 1839, Melbourne had its first public concert. It was organised by a Hobart resident, Mrs. Anne Clarke, and was held at the British Hotel on William Street. This concert, however, was not the first instance of music in Melbourne. Whilst travelling through Australia Felix, Henry Meyrick had been surprised by the number of homes, both in Melbourne and the bush, that were furnished with pianos. Music was obviously part of Port Phillip life, even if it had been confined to domestic spaces until Mrs. Clarke’s 1839 concert.

It is important to reflect that Melbourne’s artistic and musical development was self-generated and democratic from the start. The middle-class origin and ownership of Melbourne’s culture reflects the economic and political foundations of the city; nearly all the settlers were landowners (or squatters), and as discussed in Chapter Two, they valued egalitarianism and participation.

Interestingly, the populist origin and ownership of culture was not eroded by the appointment of British elites as colonial bureaucrats and administrators. Whereas the Governors-General in Calcutta exerted enormous influence on the arts, Melbourne’s most eminent bureaucrats had little effect on the development of the city’s culture. This is all the more surprising considering that Port Phillip’s Superintendent for fifteen years was Charles Joseph La Trobe, a man with a love of music and the arts. Despite his inclination to high-art culture, La Trobe himself did little to encourage the development of the arts in

522 Shaw, A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria before Separation.
525 Anne Clarke, born Anne Remans ca. 1806 in London, arrived in Hobart in 1834, and was the pioneer of opera in that city. ‘She married Michael Clarke and joined various theatrical companies … After a visit to Sydney, she became manager of Hobart’s Theatre Royal in 1840, the first woman to manage an Australian theatre for a significant period.’ See Alison Alexander, ‘Anne Clarke’, The Companion to Tasmanian History - Online (2006).
Melbourne. His own private entertainments were low-key and rare. He was in the colony five years before he joined the Melbourne Club, and never became instrumental to its management or organisation. He seldom attended public entertainments or other cultural activities. La Trobe’s public life reveals his attitude towards the city and his place within it: notwithstanding the fact that La Trobe was deeply committed to the planning and development of Melbourne and Port Phillip, he never considered himself to be of the colony. La Trobe scholar, Dianne Reilly, has discussed La Trobe’s feelings of identity and belonging during his fifteen year residency; he consistently regarded himself as an ‘exile’, as a man dislocated from his rightful society and context. A man with such feelings was unlikely to foster a vibrant arts community that would provide him a sense of belonging and society.

The Superintendent’s cultural dislocation was accompanied by the inability of other elites to foster (or meddle with), Melbourne’s culture, for there was too great a distance, both psychological and geographic, between Melbourne and the laws and society of Sydney or London. It was, thus, left to the settlers and squatters, who felt a sense of belonging and permanence, to establish the cultural life that would further cement them in their space. Sports, recreation and the arts created a cultural locus in which the settlers situated themselves. This unique socio-cultural construct was built upon by future generations, but the fundamental trait of mass-ownership never perished. It continued to ensure a wide and staunch support base for the arts in Victoria, which in turn created a vibrant and diverse cultural landscape in Melbourne.

The erection of Melbourne’s first theatre elegantly reflects the collective nature of the city’s socio-cultural paradigm. Known as The Pavilion or the Theatre Royal, this first theatre was built as an annex of the Eagle Tavern on Bourke Street in 1841. The building was not granted a theatrical license by the authorities in Sydney (hence the styling of ‘Pavilion’), but on occasion local police gave permission for concerts. The proprietor, Thomas Hodge, spent most of 1841 reapplying for a theatrical licence, and when his attempts proved unsuccessful, he disregarded the threat of legal action to mount a New Years’ Eve Concert. His reward was a large audience, good ticket receipts and a hefty fine and a six-month gaol sentence. Whilst Hodge was in gaol, the Amateur Theatre Association was formed and was granted leave to mount productions of ‘The Widow’s Victim’ and ‘The Lottery Ticket’ for charitable causes. This licence was stretched to allow further performances of other plays, under the auspices of successive actor-managers George Buckingham, Conrad Knowles, Samson Cameron and Francis Nesbitt McCrone. These productions were fiscally unrewarding, and the theatre closed in April 1845 — three days after the opening of Melbourne’s next theatre, the Queen’s Theatre.

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529 The Pavilion stood on the present location of Melbourne’s Centrepoint Mall.
530 Sometimes given as ‘Hodges’
The issues surrounding the legal and social status of theatre reveal several important aspects of the performing arts in Melbourne. Firstly, musico-dramatic culture was thought to be of sufficient economic and social importance to convince Hodge, his backers, the city's amateur and professional performers, and occasionally even the local police to repeatedly advocate for theatrical freedom, despite concerns over propriety and civil disobedience and the risk of imprisonment.

It is also important to note that public entertainment sprung up at the precise moment when Melbourne was entering its first recession, and, yet, Hodge thought there was a strong enough interest in theatre and music to warrant risking fines and prison. The economic timing may seem strange, but is, in fact, representative of the complex intersection of high-art and the economy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Sometimes economic depressions act as obstacles to the flourishing of the arts, particularly opera and drama which are expensive and elaborate art-forms. Yet, not all recessions lead to a decline in performing arts culture. Indeed, opera has often reached its apex during periods of stable and sometimes negative growth. The confluence of art and financial hardship suggests that Anglo-European societies most strongly embrace art and culture at times when they most crave the sense of escapism, reflection and social inclusion that these cultural artefacts can offer.

Despite, or because of, its economic and social circumstances, Melbourne had a burgeoning musico-theatre culture, less than a decade after Batman and his associates settled the area. The next section will describe how quickly this culture diversified, and how and why high-art music and opera gained traction throughout the 1840s.

The development of high-art music, 1840–1850

High and low art had appeared almost simultaneously, in Melbourne, but popular theatre was far more prevalent than high-art culture. Anne Clarke's noted 1839 concert, for example, had been an exception, rather than the rule. As a city of self-made, rural, young men who worked hard (often in isolation), music and drama naturally came to be regarded as a social and cultural institution whose highest call was relaxation and diversion, rather than self-improvement or moral proselytising. Thus, as demonstrated by the performances at the Pavilion and its successor, Queen's Theatre (where comedian-manager George Coppin held court), Melbourne's early musico-theatrical culture was dominated by popular 'low art' culture. By contrast, the 1840s was a period in which Melbourne's (and, indeed, Australia's) population became more diverse and gender balanced. This shift in

demography precipitated what has been described by Richard Waterhouse as ‘the bifurcation of Australian theatre.’

1841 was a watershed year for both high and lowbrow arts. Whilst the Pavilion continued to entertain fans of popular theatre illegally, the arrival of one of Australia’s most important musical immigrants, Isaac Nathan, proved to be a boon to Melbourne’s ‘high-art’ enthusiasts. Nathan’s first stop in Australia was Melbourne and in March 1841 he gave his debut concert. Nathan’s concert was a standing-room only affair, which is surprising given that Melbourne’s population was a mere 4,479, and the tickets were very expensive (10s, 6d). Despite the success of his concert, and the interest that Melburnians obviously had in high-art music, some were skeptical about the city’s capacity to support so great an artist. Indeed, Nathan’s talent—as well as Melbourne’s inability to support it long-term at that time—was immediately obvious to William Kerr, the editor of the _Port Phillip Patriot:_

> One wonders if Melbourne has room for the two distinguished artists Isaac Nathan and Mons. Gautrot — Mr. Nathan’s exploits exceeded anything of the kind that has ever been witnessed in Melbourne, in indeed in this quarter of the globe.

The Gautrot mentioned by Kerr was Melbourne’s resident ‘Professor of Music’, who, along with his singer-wife, was the first professional musician to live and work in Melbourne. Gautrot had been actively seeking a city where he could base himself and have a career, having first tried Sydney and Hobart. His decision to build a life in Melbourne shows that the fledgling community of Melbourne, then only six years old, impressed the Frenchman with enough promise to convince him to set up a musical practice in Little Collins Street. Melbourne’s small population, however, could not accommodate two full-time musicians; Nathan soon moved on, eventually building a significant career in Sydney.

At the same time that Nathan was performing to Melbourne’s small but appreciative population, opera was beginning to flourish in other parts of Australia. Both Sydney and Hobart had had seasons of opera and had played host to visiting international artists. British composer Vincent Wallace had been resident in Sydney for two years, and after he departed many gifted members of his family remained including his brother S.W. Wallace (a violinist), his sister, Elizabeth, and his sister-in-law, Mrs. S. W. Wallace, (the ladies were both opera singers). In 1845, the brothers Frank and John Howson arrived in Sydney, and were soon performing in concerts and opera productions. Hobart had recently played host to a troupe of travelling musicians, led by the Clarkes (who had mounted Melbourne’s first public concert a few years earlier), which included Jerome Carandini, an Italian marquis and dancer. He married Hobart resident Maria Burgess, a singer, who, as Marie Carandini, was to become the matriarch of a dynasty of Australian-born and trained opera singers, who would later become important figures in Melbourne’s own operatic scene.

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536 10s, 6d is an amount that has the buying power of £41 in 2011 but was as affordable to a person living in 1841 Melbourne as a ticket costing £610. See Williamson and Officer, ‘Measuring Worth’.
537 William Kerr, _The Port Phillip Patriot_, Late March 1841.
Despite the operatic enterprises of its neighbours, Melbourne—with only one theatre and a small, young, male, dispersed population—could not yet sustain seasons of staged opera. Nonetheless, the city undoubtedly benefitted from the inchoate opera cultures of its sister colonies. Operatic arias became regular features at concerts, and the sheet music industry thrived. One Mr. Clarke (likely to be related to Anne Clarke), was operating a musical warehouse by 1846, which sold pianos, violins, guitars, wooden flutes, bugles, flageolets, and post-horns, a large selection of sheet music which ranged from dance music (quadrilles, waltzes, marches, polkas etc.) to sung music such as glees and operatic trios, duets and arias.\(^{539}\) The ladies and gentlemen of the Port Phillip District began to partake of the public musical life of Melbourne, with one Mrs. Washington Wallace, a ‘very pleasing singer’ featuring in Coppin’s theatrical season at the Queen’s Theatre.\(^{540}\)

By the middle of the decade, Melbourne City Councillor J.T. Smith, owner of the Queen’s Theatre, had augmented his theatrical company with seven solo singers (Mrs. Richards, Mrs. Washington Wallace, Mr. J. Hambleton, Mr. Winter, Mr. Clarke and Mr. Minor) and a chorus of amateur men. His aim was to venture into more musical genres (including burlettas, melodramas and ballad operas) and his company soon mounted productions of works like *Rob Roy MacGregor*, *Clari* and *Blue Beard*.\(^{541}\) He also tried to encourage women and families to attend by reserving the dress circle, prohibiting smoking, and installing public lighting in the streets around the theatre.\(^{542}\) His relationship with his musicians was fraught with difficulties, mostly due to his tendency to mislead and profit from. In August of 1847, Hambleton argued with Smith and broke contract, sparking a legal debate which eventually decided that artists were not analogous to servants (a precedent that was to be important in protecting artists’ rights in colonial Melbourne). In 1848, Smith’s entire orchestra went on strike after discovering that Smith intended to take almost all the proceeds of a benefit concert that had been organised for two singers.\(^{543}\) Although Smith’s business methods may have been less than gentlemanly, his determination to ‘gentrify’ and musicalise Melbourne’s drama was important in establishing the tradition into which opera was soon so warmly welcomed.

Music’s elevation continued throughout the decade. By the late 1840s, community attitudes towards high-art music began to change; music was increasingly regarded as a cure for all of humanity’s ills, be they social, moral or even sanitary. Upon its establishment in 1847, the Melbourne Choral Society saw its position as both cultural and moral, hoping to inspire more regular church-going in the colony by ‘bringing together the musical talent of this Colony’ and, thus, ‘promoting and cultivating sacred music.’\(^{544}\) Similarly, Melbourne’s foremost newspaper, *The Argus*, sought to encourage Melburnians to sing by claiming ‘the

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\(^{539}\) Editorial, ‘New Music’, *The Argus*, July 3\(^{rd}\) 1846, p. 2.


\(^{541}\) ‘Queen’s Theatre’ *The Argus*, April 6\(^{th}\) 1847, p. 3; ‘Queen’s Theatre Royal’, *The Argus*, May 18\(^{th}\) 1847, p. 2; ‘Queen’s Theatre Royal’, *The Argus*, August 6\(^{th}\) 1847, p. 2; ‘Queen’s Theatre Royal’, *The Argus*, September 28\(^{th}\) 1847, p. 2. Whilst the exact proportion of music to drama in these productions is unclear, the critics’ remarks make it very clear that songs and dances were a significant part of these performances.


\(^{544}\) ‘Melbourne Choral Society’, *The Argus*, June 18\(^{th}\) 1847, p. 2.
Germans are seldom afflicted with consumption and this is attributed to the strength their lungs acquire by exercise in vocal music.545

The esteem in which music was increasingly held provoked greater musical activity. Each year the city had a greater number of professional concerts. Mostly these were charitable events—either for the benefit of an artist or of a city institution, such as a church or hospital. There were now three professors of music, Gautrot having been joined over the years by Mr. Megson and Mr. J. Henri Anderson, the latter of whom was described as a very fine singer who had studied at the Royal Academy of Music.546 Further to the singers that Smith had hired for his company were Mr. Wilson, Mr. and Mrs. Chester (lately of Calcutta), an EdinBURgher known only as Miss Julia and her accompanist Mr. Fitzgerald.

The activities of these artists and associations led to steady development of the city’s musical culture; accelerated growth came in 1849, when the ships Goddefroy and Wappaus brought approximately six hundred German immigrants to Melbourne, most of whom were fleeing their homeland after the failed 1848 revolutions.547 Amid these immigrants were gifted musicians, particularly instrumentalists, including Julius Buddee, who had been an accompanist to Jenny Lind during her Berlin concerts.548 This influx of non-English speaking musical migrants immediately raised the standard of Melbourne’s music making and introduced a cosmopolitan sensibility to the city. The setting for this cultural development was not to be the Queen’s Theatre Royal. Smith productions at the Queen’s may have been increasingly musical, but the type of music performed there was still largely popular, consisting mainly of folk songs, ballads, faux-negro songs, and dance music. Instead, high-art music found its first permanent home at the Mechanics’ Institute.

The Institute, which later became the Melbourne Athenaeum, was an important part of Melbourne’s social and cultural life, boasting an extensive library, reading rooms, a museum, an art gallery, and classes and lecture series covering a wide range of material, including music, all in aid of achieving the Institute’s aim to diffuse ‘literary, scientific and other useful knowledge amongst its members’.549 The organisation’s 1848 Annual Report shows a membership of 379,550 an impressive number for an institution less than ten years’ old in a city with a population of approximately 20,000.

By virtue of its largely middle-class membership, its cosmopolitanism, and its egalitarianism, the Mechanics’ Institute was the perfect crucible for high-art music in a city that had been founded with the aim of creating a cohesive, free and equal society. The artists at the Mechanics’ Institute began to organise concert series that resembled the concert culture of the urban centres of Great Britain and Europe. Below is a sample programme from an 1849 Mechanics’ Institute concert.

545 ‘How should a lady of fair complexion dress’, The Argus, August 21st 1846, p. 4.
546 ‘The Concert’, The Argus, May 26th 1848, p. 2 and ‘Mr. J. Henri Anderson’, The Argus, 16th June 1848, p. 3.
As the programme above demonstrates, the concerts of late-1840s Melbourne were similar in form and content to many British concerts. As is typical of the mid-nineteenth century, the concert was a blend of vocal and instrumental music. The repertoire was quite operatic, with arias, overtures and arrangements of operatic music presented throughout the evening. It is important to note that the inclusion of modern songs by Balfe, Russell, Reissiger etc., did not make the concert less ‘high-art’. As Paul Charosh has explained, ideas of ‘popular’ or ‘classical’ referred more to the inherent aesthetic of the work than its age or popularity. Hence, a fashionable, freshly composed song, like Balfe’s ‘The Blighted Flower’ or Reissiger’s ‘Die Grenadiere’, was considered ‘classical’.

The Mechanics’ Institute concerts, along with those mounted by the Melbourne Choral Society, may be considered to mark the beginning of Melbourne’s operatic culture. This assertion is based upon an understanding of operatic culture as a phenomenon that does not begin and end at the opera house (see Chapter One). During the nineteenth century, opera permeated many aspects of Western musical and social life; the music, subjects, expectations, conventions, power and hypocrisies of opera had cultural currency far beyond the parameters and patrons of the opera house.

That is not to say that operatic culture had no influence upon popular culture, for even after Waterhouse’s bifurcation process was complete, Melbourne’s high- and low-art musical cultures continues to be intertwined; for example, Smith’s Queen’s Theatre began

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552 This is evident from comparing Calcutta concert programmes with programmes from English concerts performed during the same years. English concert programmes sourced from those published in The Times (London), The Musical Times (London), The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post (Bristol), Felix Farley’s Bristol Journal (Bristol) and those held in the Theatre Collection at The University of Bristol, particularly TCPB/000037, TCPB/000054, TCPB/000056, TCPB/000060, TCPB/000072, TCPB/000074, TCPB/000088, TCPB/000104, TCPB/000105, TCPB/000122, TCPB/000498, TCPB/000513, TCPB/000590, TCW/PG/000002, OV/M/000146, OV/M/000148, OV/M/000149, OV/M/000149, OV/M/000160, OV/M/000164, OV/M/000171, OV/M/000172, OV/M/000174, OV/M/000180, OV/M/000184, OV/M/000185, OVSB/000375.
to dedicate extra forces, rehearsals, and effort to its productions of ballad operas, such as Rob Roy MacGregor and Guy Mannering.\footnote{Advertisement, ‘Queen’s Theatre’, The Argus, June 18\textsuperscript{th} 1849, p. 3; ‘The Theatre’, The Argus, June 20\textsuperscript{th} 1849, p. 2.} Polished musical interpolations were sometimes more important than full casts in that theatre’s representations of Shakespeare’s dramas, such as Macbeth.\footnote{Advertisement, ‘Queen’s Theatre - Macbeth’, The Argus; July 10\textsuperscript{th} 1849, p. 3. This production was given with the characters of Lady Macduff, Fleance or Siward being filled, but the advertisement promised to give the play with ‘all of the original music’. It was, of course, neither original, nor even authentic Renaissance music (most likely it was the music from an early-nineteenth century London production), but the claim does highlight the sudden importance of music in Melbourne’s theatrical culture.} Mr. Megson chose to perform operatic overtures and a ballet arrangement of Bellini’s La Sonnambula at his benefit performance at the Queen’s. Other venues began to mount their own concert series: Melbourne was introduced to lieder and string quartets at various performance venues around the city, including at the large hall at the Prince of Wales Hotel. By the end of 1849, several more professional musicians had arrived, including Mr. Reed, who had, for many years, been the leader of the Haymarket Theatre orchestra in London.\footnote{‘Concert’, The Argus, November 27\textsuperscript{th} 1849, p. 2.}

The new dynamism in Melbourne’s public music life also flowed to domestic and private music making. By 1850, it was Melbourne, rather than Sydney or Hobart, that boasted Australia’s largest music publisher and warehouse, Wilkie, Webster & Allen’s.\footnote{Anne Mavric, ‘Historical Timeline’, Port Phillip Pioneers Group Inc. <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~pioneers/pppg10.htm>, accessed August 10th 2010} The business began as a musical bazaar: anything and everything musical could be found there, from the sheet music publishing house and shop, to the musical instrument warehouse, to practice rooms and music teachers. The company, later known as Allan’s publishing, still exists today. Allen’s was just one of many musical warehouses catering to the increasing demand for music in Melbourne. There was also an upsurge in the number of private musicians teaching music and/or providing their performance skills for private balls, assemblies and parties.\footnote{The Argus 1849–1850 in passim.}

The upsurge, however, was not a torrent. At the time of separation in 1851, popular songs continued to dominate concert programmes and there had been no real attempt at mounting operatic productions. 1851 was to be, however, a crucial turning point in the development of Melbourne’s political, economic and cultural life. Separation was followed by a gold rush and decades of immigration, all of which fostered further political, economic, and technological developments. As is discussed in the next chapter, the combination of these circumstances created a society that could and would support a thriving operatic culture.
Chapter 10: Gold, Separation, and Opera in Melbourne, 1851–1861

The events of 1851 changed Melbourne forever. The discovery of gold combined with the district’s declaration as an independent colony led to political, economic and social developments that put Melbourne, a city that had only fifteen years earlier been an illegal settlement of some four hundred men, on a trajectory to become the greatest metropolis of the southern hemisphere. It was a destiny that even Melbourne’s ambitious founders could never have imagined.

Yet, the colony’s accelerated growth and autonomy were not enough to create the sophisticated identity that Melbourne would eventually secure. The ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ of the 1880s not just a product of the city’s wealth, self-determination or size. Cultural authority, too, was an indispensable feature of the nineteenth-century metropolis and opera was one of the most effective means of asserting cultural authority.559

This chapter examines the development of Melbourne’s operatic culture during the gold rush decade (1851–61), demonstrating that the 1850s were as pertinent a moment in the city’s operatic and cultural evolution as in its demographic or economic growth. The first section discusses the city’s most prominent artists during this period, placing their activities in a regional and global context. The second section will trace the maturation of Melbourne’s operatic culture from the concerts at the Mechanics’ Institute to fully-staged operas at the Princess’s Opera House. The aim of this chapter is not to give an exhaustive list of artists, performances or events (indeed, the second section surveys the development of opera through the selection of a handful of representative events over the course of the decade). This chapter, instead, aims to confirm the hypothesis that the road to the vibrant opera culture of the 1860s was neither linear nor homogenous; during these years, operatic culture was manifested in innumerable ways by a diverse range of artists. Throughout this chapter, the discussion will highlight the symbiotic relationship between the city’s operatic culture and the gold rush occurring in the colony’s interior.

International stars, musical migrants and ‘currency lasses’— opera singers in 1850s Melbourne

The operatic efflorescence that occurred in gold-rush Melbourne was a product of artists from a range of backgrounds and experiences. There were stars of the Old World, like Anna Bishop or Catherine Hayes, who brought a sense of prestige and glamour to Melbourne’s musical world. There were less-known international visitors like Emile Coulon, Clarisse Cailly, and the husband-and-wife team Eugenio and Giovanna Bianchi, who as non-English speakers made Melbourne’s operatic culture more cosmopolitan and

diverse. These singers’ antipodean sojourns could be remarkably long, sometimes a matter of years, but the artists were always acknowledged as temporary visitors. By contrast, Melbourne also hosted a variety of ‘Australian’ singers. Some, such as Elizabeth Testar, were musical migrants. They may have come from abroad but they regarded Melbourne (or other Australian colonies) as their permanent home. Others were ‘Currency’ lasses or lads, that is women and men who were born and bred in the Australian colonies. Included in this category were figures like Marie Carandini, who although born in London had come to Van Diemen’s Land at an early age, and was therefore considered a native. 560

In order to provide an understanding of the calibre and activities of the singers who were active in Melbourne during the gold rush, and thereby provide context for the discussion which follows, this section will briefly describe the backgrounds of several artists active in gold-rush Melbourne and discuss their contributions to operatic culture in the city.

Catherine Hayes

The Irish soprano Catherine Hayes (Figure 10.1) had enjoyed a respectable, even highly successful, career in the opera houses of Europe. After studying with Emmanuel Garcia (Paris) and Ronconi (Milan), Hayes débuted in *I Puritani* in Marseilles to great acclaim in 1845. She was immediately hired as a prima donna for La Scala, creating the title role in Ricci’s opera *Estella di Murcia* (1846).561 By 1849, she was appearing at Covent Garden in lead roles, like Berta (*Le Prophète*), opposite the likes of Pauline Viardot-Garcia and Mario.562 Inspired by the success of Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind, Hayes went to America, arriving in 1851. She found particular success in San Francisco: between November 1852 and May 1853 she earned an average of £650 a month. Time did nothing to assuage the excitement; sums got even more outrageous, with one performance netting Hayes £1150.563 Such sums were vastly superior to those she earned in the prime theatres of London, with *The Times* recording that over the course 1849 she had earned a total of £1300.564

Hayes then crossed the Pacific Ocean, arriving in Sydney in 1854.565 Over the next two years, Hayes would perform across Sydney, Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Adelaide, Hobart and Launceston. In Melbourne, the city she spent the majority of her time in, Hayes mostly performed in concerts, although some semi-staged and even fully-staged operas, were mounted by the Hibernian prima donna.566

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560 *The Argus* describes her as ‘native talent’; see ‘Madame Carandini’s Benefit’, *The Argus*, March 30th 1855, p. 5.
562 Ibid.
565 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 68.
Figure 10.1: Catherine Hayes, 1854. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.567

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567 George W. Mason, 'Miss Catherine Hayes, September 1854', (Sydney: J. R. Clarke, 1854), wood engraving.
Anna Bishop

Anna Bishop (Figure 10.2) arrived in Sydney on December 3rd 1855, having come directly from San Francisco, as Catherine Hayes had done in 1854. Although Bishop arrived without notice or professional engagements, Bishop’s reputation preceded her. Sydney manager Andrew Torning wasted no time in securing her talent for his enterprises by sailing out to meet her vessel, the Kit Carson before Bishop had even docked. After 4 months in Sydney, Bishop arrived in Melbourne in early May 1856, giving her first concert on May 13th, the day after Hayes’ farewell concert. As in Sydney, Bishop arrived without prior arrangements, but was immediately courted by the city’s primary theatre managers with George Coppin becoming the successful suitor.

569 ‘Sydney’, The Argus, December 8th 1855, p. 5.
In days gone by, Bishop had found particular success in Naples, where she had featured as the prima donna of the world-class Teatro di San Carlo, becoming a favourite of Mercadante and Fioravanti. She was not without critics, however; Donizetti disliked her tremolo and small voice, whilst Verdi dismissed her as a joke. Such opinions ought to be taken with a pinch of salt, given the rivalries between these composers. Yet, Bishop’s importance in the history of opera and its spread across the globe lies outside of her talents (or lack thereof). Bishop was already a seasoned traveller by the time she arrived in the Antipodes, having toured Europe and the United States since 1839 (with the exception of France, where Bochsa was wanted for debts and forgery). Bishop was unique amongst her contemporaries for both the regularity and breadth of her travels; by 1855 her list of conquered lands included the UK, Denmark, Sweden, the lands which now form Germany, the Russian Empire including the modern state of the Republic of Tartarstan, Moldavia (now Moldova), the lands which now form modern Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Cuba, Mexico, and the United States of America. She is remarkable for having beat Jenny Lind to America by four years, debuting as the eponymous heroine of *Linda di Chamounix* at the Park Theatre, New York in 1847, and doing much to promote the popularity of Italian Opera in that city. During 1851–52, Bishop, Bochsa, and German pianist Julius Siede toured America, the West Indies, and Mexico. Bishop and Bochsa then went to San Francisco, before arriving in Australia. Australia was a fateful destination for Bochsa who died in Sydney. Siede soon caught up with Bishop in Melbourne, and evidently saw enough promise there to convince him to quit his peripatetic ways; he settled in the city and became an important figure in Melbourne’s musical life.

Whilst relatively well documented, Australia’s operatic history is marred by the tendency to overemphasise some artists and underemphasise the role of other. Bishop is an example of an artist who, although significant, has had her impact on Australia’s operatic development overestimated. The historical revisionism began even whilst Bishop was in Australia, when in 1857 James Smith, the drama critic at *The Age*, credited her with single-handedly establishing Grand Opera in Melbourne. Such a claim not only proved overly grandiose in light of the future developments for which impresari like Lyster, Cagli, Pompei, Lazar, Williamson, Gonzales, and Quinlin were responsible, but ignored the enormous contribution already made to the establishment of a sound operatic culture by Hayes, Clarisse Cailly, Maria Carandini, Sara Flower and other less famous but, nonetheless, influential members of Melbourne’s musical society. Indeed, Bishop’s best legacy to Australia was her reputation, more than any musico-dramatic development. The fact that Anna Bishop, the doyenne of Naples, La Scala, New York, and San Francisco had chosen to come to Sydney and Melbourne, and had not found it lacking in either supportive artists

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576 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 80.
or loving audiences, did much to bolster the state of the arts in Australia’s own self-concept. It gave Melburnians a sense of its cultural legitimacy, which encouraged the citizens to further cultivate opera in order to grow the city into a global centre for Western culture.

The Francophones: Emile Coulon and Clarisse Cailly

It was not just singers from the United Kingdom who found success in Melbourne. French/Belgian Emile Coulon and Belgian soprano Clarisse Cailly were also important figures in 1850s Melbourne, with Coulon, in particular, leaving an indelible (although now forgotten) mark on Australian opera.

Coulon came to Australia as Hayes’ associate artist, but soon established a reputation for excellence in his own right, and stayed behind after the Hibernian Nightingale had flown away. As he had in San Francisco, Coulon promoted the modern Italian operatic repertoire, especially the works of Verdi, to the audiences in Melbourne, who, until that time had little exposure to any works composed after the Bel Canto period. Coulon’s attraction to Verdi’s repertoire may seem unusual in a Francophone artist, but the attraction reveals much about Coulon as a man and an artist. As George Martin has explained, before Verdi, Coulon’s bass-baritone voice would have been limited to buffa roles such as Figaro or Malatesta; Verdi was the first composer to exploit the darker, more serious facets of the bass-baritone voice in his repertoire. Coulon was strong both as an actor and a singer, and would have relished the challenge that this new, diverse, and exciting repertoire offered him. His passion led him to being the singer who introduced Melbourne to several important early Verdian baritone roles including Nabucco, Macbeth, Don Carlo in Ernani, Germont in La Traviata, and the Count di Luna in Il Trovatore. Yet, Coulon was a well-rounded singer and continued to excel in his fach’s more traditional, buffo roles. Starring opposite Anna Bishop, fellow Francophone, Clarisse Cailly, or Australian singer Marie Carandini, Coulon gave expert performances of Fernando (Gazza Ladra), Basilio (Il Barbiere di Siviglia), Dulcamara (L’Elisir d’Amore), and Malatesta (Don Pasquale). Yet, so committed was Coulon to Verdi that even in these Bel Canto roles Coulon continued to champion the Italian maestro at every opportunity; in 1855, for example, he spiced up the role of Dulcamara in a somewhat conflated and mutilated production of Don Pasquale by introducing a scene from Ernani. Such an action may not win Coulon accolades from purists, but the audience loved it, and it was a successful way of gently familiarising the Melbourne public with newer, modern works.

Belgian soprano Clarisse Cailly did not come with the European pedigree of either Hayes

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579 Although Coulon identified as French, he was likely born in Nivelles, Belgium, where his more famous brother Theodore-Jean-Joseph (aka Teodoro Coloni) was born in 1822 according to Casaglia, ‘Almanacco di Gherardo Casaglia’, http://www.amadeusonline.net/almanacco Accessed December 21st 2010.


583 ‘Concert at the Exhibition’, The Argus, September 5th 1856, p. 5.


or Bishop. Although she claimed herself to have been a prima donna of the Theatre Royal, Brussels, no material can now be found to substantiate that claim. Instead, Cailly’s career was based in the Asia-Pacific opera market. Cailly began her career in Dutch East Indies and soon travelled to Calcutta as the prima donna of the Companie Française de Batavie (see Chapter 3). After leaving Calcutta, Cailly toured extensively through South America before travelling to San Francisco, where she began an association with another Calcutta veteran, Louis-Théophile Planel, who ran an opera company there. 586 Whilst in Planel’s San Francisco company, Cailly formed professional ties with Coulon and tenor Jean-Baptiste Laglaise, both of whom preceded her to Melbourne,587 as well as becoming familiar with her more famous rivals, Bishop and Hayes.

In both San Francisco and Melbourne, Cailly was overshadowed by Hayes and Bishop, whose reputations, English-language backgrounds, repertoire and abilities endeared them to a predominantly Anglophone audience. Yet, although she never captured the public’s imagination in quite the same way as her competitors, Cailly enjoyed particular success in Melbourne in performances of Bel Canto opera buffe such as Don Pasquale, Paër’s La Prova d’una Opera Seria, and Il Barbiere di Siviglia. Cailly’s talent for opera buffa made the genre increasingly popular and ensured that Melbourne’s audiences had both light and serious opera presented to them during the 1850s. Given the later strength of opera buffa and opéra-comique in Melbourne, Cailly’s contribution, while modest, should not be overlooked. Her efforts were appreciated at the time and she won the public’s esteem and support. 588

The visitors discussed above, alongside many others not mentioned here, stayed only one or two years in Australia. Yet, despite the fleeting nature of these songbirds’ visits, the departure of a visiting celebrity never robbed Melbourne of opera and, in fact, opera grew from strength to strength during the 1850s. This was largely due to the passion and determination of the city’s resident artists who ensured that operatic culture was not dependent, but only enhanced, by these peripatetic artists.

Resident talents: Marie Carandini and Elizabeth Testar

Perhaps the most formidable of native Australian operatic figures is Marie Carandini (née

586 Martin, Verdi at the Golden Gate Bridge, pp. 55-57.
587 Ibid.
588 This support was to become valuable when Cailly’s foreignness led to her exploitation at the hands of the Royal’s manager, Frederick Bayne. Cailly and Bayne had signed a contract which guaranteed Cailly £100 per week (to be paid weekly), and half the net proceeds of her benefit. Bayne, however, paid Cailly only £6 one week, and no money at all the next, (despite the fact that all other company members received full payment). When these facts became public, Cailly’s audience and press rallied to her defence. She was encouraged and supported in her boycott, despite the fact that, without a prima donna, Bayne had to cancel performances. Soon, Bayne was both shamed and financially pressured to make restorations to Cailly, who agreed to continue with the rest of the season. Perhaps spurred by her experience with Bayne, or perhaps because the Melbourne opera scene was already saturated with prime donne, Cailly soon returned to the South America, finding particular success in Brazil and Uruguay, where she established her own company in 1859 at Montevideo’s newly established Teatro Solís. See the copy of Cailly’s contract, published by the Editor of The Argus, ‘Madame Cailly and the Management of the Theatre Royal’, 22nd January 1856, p. 5, Dalila Müller, Feliz a população que tantas diversões e comodidades goza: Espaço de Sociabilidade em Pelotas (1840 -1870), Ph.D. Thesis (Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos, 2010), Susana Salgado, The Teatro Solis: 150 years of opera, concert and ballet in Montevideo (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), pp. 36-39.
Maria Burgess (Figure 10.3), whose early work as a star soprano has been overshadowed by her later careers as impresario and makeshift tenor, aspects of her careers which fail to recognise her important role as a soprano in 1850s Melbourne. In 1843 she married the fugitive Jerome (originally Girolamo) Carandini, tenth Marquis of Sarzano, who had come to Australia as part of one of Anne Clarke’s many troupes. The Carandinis soon moved to Sydney, where Marie began voice training with Isaac Nathan, Elizabeth Wallace Bushelle (W. V. Wallace’s talented sister) and Sara Flower.

Figure 10.3: Madame Marie Carandini, matriarch of the esteemed Carandini family. Courtesy of the Lady Viola Tait Collection, National Library of Australia

It was in Melbourne, however, that Carandini founded her career. She first appeared in the Mechanic’ Institute Promenade Concert Series, performing operatic arias and entire scenes in quasi-staged operatic productions. Her stage début occurred soon after, when she played Norina in *Don Pasquale* in 1855 opposite Coulon. It was only after developing a reputation as ‘The Australian Prima Donna’ that Carandini made an unplanned and

589 ‘Mrs. Clarke’s Concert’, *The Courier*, February 18th 1842, p. 2.
590 Ann K. Wentzel, ‘Carandini, Marie (1826–1894)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.
592 Carandini played the title role in the performance of the first act of *Norma*, see ‘Madame Carandini’s Benefit’, *The Argus*, March 30th, 1855, p. 5.
short-term detour into the world of *soprano en travesti*. This detour has been the only part of her singing career that has attracted any historical notice, leading to an erroneous assumption that Carandini was a substandard singer. Carandini’s foray into the tenor repertoire occurred when the part of Elvino in Hayes’ production of *La Sonnambula* was in need of emergency filling due to the indiscretion, and hence sacking, of John Howson, who had previously been Hayes’ tenor in Sydney. For her readiness to sacrifice prestige and comfort to allow opera to be presented to the audience of Melbourne, Carandini was praised and gained even further love from the city’s public and critics alike:

No competent tenor having presented himself to the notice of the management, the part of Elvino will be undertaken by Madame Carandini, the music having, of course, been transposed to suit her voice. We are happy to note in these days of professional jealousies, the thorough artiste-like spirit which has prompted this talented lady to undertake so difficult a task ... It has, we recollect, been said of Lablache that that magnificent vocalist would, for the purpose of giving effect to a production, undertake the most insignificant part, and, indeed, we hold this to be the duty of every real artist.

Her short-lived career as a singer of tenor roles was emblematic of Carandini’s general devotion to pleasing her audience. Frequently enceinte, she continued to perform on stage even when eight months pregnant, and returned to the stage as soon as possible; in the case of the birth of her daughter, Frederica, in 1856, Carandini was back on stage within two days. She repeatedly toured to small Victorian towns such as Geelong, Ballarat, and Creswick Creek, taking opera to the miners and pastoralists who were the bedrock of the Victorian economy. It was this dedication, as well as her obvious talent, that made Carandini such a firm favourite among Melbourne’s audiences. Following Bishop and Hayes’ departures, Carandini was considered to be Melbourne’s resident prima donna, enjoying particular success as Leonora in *Il Trovatore* in 1858, which ran for 27 performances. Her career continued through the 1860s and ‘70s, when she formed her own companies, which often featured her talented daughters Rosina (later Palmer), Fanny (later Sherwin), Elizabeth (later Adams), Marie, and Isabella (later Lady Campbell) (see Figure 10.4).

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594 ‘Sonnambula’, *The Argus*, 16th October 1855, p. 8.
596 See the Advertisements throughout winter 1856 and the Birth Announcement in July 1856. Frederica was to die three years later in Sydney, the only one of Carandini’s five daughters not to survive to adulthood.
Carandini may have been dubbed the ‘Australian Jenny Lind’, 598 but she was not the only important Australian singer active in 1850s Melbourne. Elizabeth Testar (Figure 10.5) was born and raised in London, where, along with her sister Mary Turner, she had been a minor concert singer and book illustrator. 599 Upon her migration to Melbourne in 1850, alongside her new husband, Thomas Testar, Elizabeth became the prima donna of the prestigious Mechanics’ Institute concerts and a founder of the Melbourne Philharmonic Society. In the years before the arrival of such international talents like Hayes and Bishop, Testar’s flexible, melodious, and skilful soprano voice led her to be considered ‘the prima donna of Melbourne’ by visiting Englishman George Henry Wathan, a fellow of the Royal Geography Society and an opera aficionado. 600 Even after the globetrotting prime donne arrived on the scene, Testar retained a reputation for being a useful and talented soprano of no small skill; she regularly performed as an oratorio soloist alongside Anna Bishop. As Melbourne’s operatic and concert culture became rapidly more professional, Testar was unique for her disinterestedness in pursuing a career. Instead, Testar mostly donated her services gratis, for the improvement of Melbourne’s musical life and the benefit of numerous Melbourne charities. This generosity ensured that she was remembered, even into the

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twentieth century, as one of Melbourne’s musical matriarchs.601

Figure 10.5: Mrs Elizabeth Testar, in 1889, long after her retirement. She was still remembered as a founding mother of Melbourne’s musical and operatic culture at her death in 1908.602

The artists above were by no means the only singers whose activities in 1850s Melbourne left an indelible impression on the operatic culture in Victorian Melbourne. Jean-Baptiste Laglaise, Eugenio and Giovanna Bianchi, Paolo Borsotti, Monsieur Barre, Theodosia Yates, Mrs. Handcock, and Sara Flower were other singers who contributed in no small way to the development of a robust and vital operatic culture in Melbourne. The diversity of Melbourne’s artists during the 1850s is matched only by the variety of ways in which operatic culture was expressed. The next section will trace opera’s journey from the salon and concert hall to the opera house, demonstrating that this path was neither linear nor homogenous. The discussion also connects the performance of opera to the artform’s social roles and its relationship to Melbourne’s evolving socio-economic circumstances.

Towards the footlights: The formalisation of Melbourne’s operatic culture

In order to illustrate opera’s journey from concert platform to opera house, and describe the variety of guises in which opera was presented, it is useful to analyse six performances from the mid-1850s. From 1853 is a Mechanics’ Institute ‘opera night’ programme; from 1854 is Catherine Hayes’ first opera concert in Melbourne; from 1855 are two early examples of ‘fully staged’ opera, given only a month apart: Carandini and Coulon’s Don

602 Foster and Martin Photographers, ‘Mrs Testar as Grandmother at State Library of Victoria’, (Melbourne: image number: b20090, 1889), Photograph: gelatin silver, cabinet on mount.
Pasquale (September) and Hayes’ La Sonnambula (October); from 1856 is Anna Bishop’s first performance in Melbourne; and, finally, from 1857 is the inaugural performance at the Princess Opera House, presented by the John Black/Anna Bishop company. The sample will reveal the nuance and variety inherent in Melbourne’s operatic culture during the 1850s. The complexity of this culture negates the convenient but false historicisms which have plagued the story of opera in the Victorian era; as the evaluation below attests, no one historical figure was responsible for the creation of Melbourne’s vibrant operatic culture, nor were international stars (like Bishop) any more sophisticated than their ‘native’ colleagues.

1853
As has already been described, the Mechanics’ Institute was an important musical establishment in Melbourne, and had mounted several series of concerts that featured operatic music since the 1840s. In the years following separation, the Institute increasingly emphasised the opera in its programmes. The programme from one such Mechanics’ Institute concert of March 1853 (reproduced below) illustrates this tendency towards opera, and is notable for pre-dating the arrival of any of the famous, foreign singers who were later credited with single-handedly establishing a taste for opera in the city of Melbourne. The programme quoted below was known as ‘The Sonnambula Concert’; these artists later performed Norma in a similar way.

**PART 1**
Coro di Conguizati
Song: Mr Sayer
Duet: Like Sunbeams (by desire)-Mrs. Testar and Mrs. Hancock
Song: Robin Hood and the Abbot-Mr. Hancock
Cavatina: Merry is the Greenwood - Mrs. Testar
Duet: O My beloved - Mr and Mrs Hancock
Trio: The Flocks shall leave the Mountains, Mrs Testar, Mr Sayer, and Mr Hancock
Song: Tell me my heart - Mrs Hancock
Old English Glee

**PART 2**
Selections from Bellini’s opera La Sonnambula
Quartet: Lisa, too, can I wrong her
Cavatina: As I view these scenes so charming - Mr Hancock.
Recitativo e Cavatina: All is lost now - Mr Sayer
Cavatina: Care compagne - Mrs Hancock
Duet: Take now this Ring - Mrs Hancock and Mr Sayer
Cavatina: Ah non giunge - Mrs. Testar
Finale: Sleep gentle lady - Tutti

*Figure 10.6: Programme from the Melbourne Mechanics’ Institute’s Opera Evening, March 1853.*

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603 Author uncited, ‘Domestic intelligence’, The Argus, March 3rd 1853, p. 5. All emphases in original. Note that the finale “Sleep Gentle Lady” is a four-voice glee by Henry Bishop. Given the appropriateness of the lyric, it was common for this glee to accompany excerpts from La Sonnambula during the mid-century. The two works first appeared in this combination in 1836, given in London. See ‘Public Amusements – Concerts’, *New Monthly Belle Assemblée*, Volume 5, (London: Old Boswell Court, 1836), pp.43–44.
In considering the above programme as an example of early operatic culture in Melbourne, two issues arise. The first is how ‘operatic’ was the performance practice? The answer to this question is fairly straightforward: almost nothing about the delivery of the programme can be considered operatic. In addition to a lack of props, costumes and scenery, the operatic selections were not delivered with any sense of character. Indeed, neither Testar nor Hancock was actually cast as Amina, instead each woman sang one of Amina’s arias. Hancock sang Amina’s part in the duet ‘Prendi, l’anel ti dono’ whilst Testar sang the heroine’s part in the quartet. Such swapping of parts would have undermined the dramatic continuity and credibility of the performance.

The second aspect to be considered when evaluating the concert for its opera credentials is that of programming. The concert was just one of a series of concerts that were styled ‘opera concerts’, rather than as general concerts of miscellaneous songs; yet of the fifteen works performed that evening, the selections from *La Sonnambula* numbered only six and were confined to the second part of the evening. Given that the bulk of the performance consisted of ballads, airs, and the trio from Handel’s *Acis and Galatea*, the concert would appear to be more about English song than Bellini’s opera. This begs the question: do the six operatic numbers outweigh the nine non-operatic works in the programme to an extent that justifies the term ‘operatic’? Furthermore, if the Mechanics’ Institute was aiming to present an ‘operatic night’ why were the ballads included at all? In attempting to answer these questions, it would be easy to slip into realm of assumption, attributing the preponderance of English ballads to the inferior quality of the singers, or the unsophisticated expectations of the audience. Whilst these assumptions may have a kernel of truth, they obscure other more interesting and complex reasons, such as the public’s definition and understanding of opera and ‘high-art’ music.

The best explanation of why mid-Victorian audiences (and artists) found English ballads appropriate for inclusion into an ‘operatic’ programme is to acknowledge the emergence of an increasingly strict ‘high-art’/’low-art’ dichotomy in Western culture at this time, and the place of such works within this schema. The mid-1800s was the time when Western Art music was evolving into a canonical tradition and new works were either destined to

\[604\] Just as is true today, the abilities and inclination of the singers influenced the programming of the concerts, but the small proportion of operatic content cannot be attributed to a lack of skill on the part of the singers; Sayer may have been of no more than mediocre talent, but the past and future careers of Testar and the Hancocks prove that these performers had sufficient skill and stamina for full-length oratorio/operatic productions. Additionally, the particular selections chosen for this concert were some of the more difficult passages of Bellini’s work and the excerpts, particularly Testar’s ‘Ah non giunge’ and Mr. Hancock’s two cavatine, were executed successfully. The fact that these resident singers were capable of rendering these taxing numbers of *Sonnambula* shows that the decision to include ballads in an operatic concert must have been influenced by factors other than the singers’ skill levels.

\[605\] Likewise, programmes are tailored for their audience. The inclusion of the ballads might, therefore, be taken as a sign that Melbourne audiences were not yet sophisticated enough for full-length opera performances and, thus, by presenting opera alongside more popular ballads, the Mechanics’ Institute was able to secure a breadth and size of audience which opera itself could not yet do. This reasoning, however, cannot entirely explain the inclusion of ballad. If opera could not yet attract a large enough audience on its own, and therefore relied upon other genres to guarantee sufficient attendance, one would expect that the glees and British ballads would have been emphasised or, at least, featured in the advertisements. This, however, was not the case—the evening was styled very much as an operatic evening. That opera was very much the ‘point’ of the evening is also suggested by the programming of the opera for the second (and final) part of the evening, and blocking it all together, rather than dispersing the opera among more popular items.
become part of that canon (i.e. ‘high art’) or to fade away as ephemera of fashion and vulgar taste (i.e. ‘low art’). The ballads included in the Mechanics’ Institute concerts seem to have been recognised as belonging to the former category: they were high art. The ballads’ status seems to have been drawn from the inherent quality of the songs\textsuperscript{606} and the pedigree of their composers.\textsuperscript{607} The reception of these ballads appears to have been analogous to art song than to a vaudevillian work. Thus, rather than undermining the concert’s designation as an ‘opera evening’, the inclusion of the ballads supported its classification, in much the same way that the performance of Lieder or even some musical theatre does not erode the sense of a twenty-first century recital being, in some way, operatic.

1854

Melbourne audiences were by no means unique in their understanding of genre rules and concert formatting. When Catherine Hayes débuted in Melbourne in early 1854, she performed a programme that was identical in structure to those she had previously presented to the audiences of London, New York and San Francisco. These programmes featured a blend of operatic music, lighter opera (opéra-comique), British ballads, and the traditional ‘folk’ songs for which she was famous. Each part of the concert opened with an operatic overture from works like Hérold’s \textit{Zampa} (1831) and Auber’s \textit{Masaniello} (\textit{La Muette de Portici}, 1828). Hayes and Emile Coulon (her associate artist), then presented excerpts of the most popular operas of the day, including \textit{Lucrezia Borgia}, \textit{Don Pasquale}, \textit{Il Barbiere di Siviglia}, \textit{Lucia di Lammermoor} and \textit{Norma}. Interspersed throughout were ballads and folksongs such as the ubiquitous ‘Home, Sweet Home’, ‘Comin’ Thro’ the Rye’, ‘Savourneen Deelish’ and ‘There’s Nae Luck’. Also featured were musical items which bridged the gap between ballad and operatic aria, such as ‘Vive l’Amour et le Cognac’ from Adam’s \textit{Le Chalet} (1834)\textsuperscript{608} and the vocal polka from Alary’s \textit{Tre Nozze} (1851).

The only difference between the format of Hayes’ concerts and those of the Mechanics’ Institute was that, in terms of programme balance, Hayes actually presented less opera than was being presented by local artists such as Elizabeth Testar. This validates the assertion that rather than suffering from a significant cultural lag, the combination of opera and ballads found in the concerts of 1850s Melbourne was typical of global concert culture during the mid-nineteenth century.

A comparison between the Mechanics’ Institute concert of 1853 and Catherine Hayes’s concert of 1854 serves also to put Hayes’ appearance in Australia into proper context. She did not revolutionise Australian high-art culture, nor was she responsible for the introduction of significant amounts of operatic material. Hayes did, however, leave a legacy upon the city’s operatic culture, for she was unarguably more operatic in the delivery of her concert works than had heretofore been seen in Melbourne. Until Hayes’ arrival in

\textsuperscript{606} Indeed, ‘Tell me, my heart’, is operatic by any standard, especially its coloratura passages, and was written specifically by Bishop for performance by an opera singer.

\textsuperscript{607} The majority of the works are by ‘elite’ composers, themselves associated with high-art British musical culture and opera (Glover, Bishop, Handel etc) rather than men associated with vaudeville or popular culture.

\textsuperscript{608} The works of Adolphe Adam are no less vocally demanding than the works now part of the operatic canon, as arias such as ‘Mes amis, écoutez l’histoire’ from \textit{Le postillon de Lonjumeau} (1836) attests. I have referred to them as ‘light works’ due to their opéra-comique, status and the preeminence of acting, dancing and other non-musical elements in many of Adam’s works.
Melbourne opera buffa had always been translated into English, because no singer had had sufficient comic skills to overcome the language barrier. Yet, so strong were Hayes’ dramatic skills that even in excerpts of *Don Pasquale*, a work as yet unknown in Melbourne, and despite performing in Italian, a language that was incomprehensible to nearly every member of the audience, she and Emile Coulon were able to make the audience roar with laughter. After one concert in which a *Don Pasquale* duet had been the most successful piece of the evening, a critic reflected that:

The piece was sung in Italian, but the acting of the artistes was so true to nature as almost to explain to the unlearned the subject of the duet … The story is admirably told by the music, which is one of Donizetti’s cleverest comic efforts. The artistes acquitted themselves to the delight of the audience, and the comicality of the situation was done brilliant justice to by both. Miss Hayes’s acting being particularly rich and vivacious, while M. Coulon, as the Don, who gets his face slapped by his wife for attempting to remonstrate with her upon her love of pleasure, was irresistibly comic, his blubbering to music being enough to provoke laughter in the most serious.609

It was the attention to detail and the decision to include opera’s extra-musical elements in her concert performances that made Hayes’ concerts significant in Melbourne’s operatic development.

**1855**

*Don Pasquale* was again an instrument for the development of Melbourne’s operatic culture when, on September 20th, 1855, it became one of the city’s earliest ‘full-scale’ performances. The opera was billed as the ‘the entire score by Donizetti’; it was not, however, as fully-staged as its advertisements might lead one to believe. The production featured only three singers: the ‘Australian Prima Donna’ Marie Carandini sang Norina, Monsieur Barre, a French tenor, portrayed Ernesto and bass-baritone Emile Coulon, now a freelance opera singer, took the roles of both Malatesta and Pasquale.610

The threadbare casting necessitated several drastic cuts. Obviously, Coulon could not sing in duet with himself, and so the delicious meetings between the two buffi characters must have been significantly altered, if not omitted altogether. Similarly, with no one to sing the role, the character of Carlino, the notary, was missing from the production, which would have damaged Act 2, Scene 4. To compensate for the extensive omissions, the cast augmented scenes by substitution and interpolation, using fragments and even entire scenes from *Ernani* and *Trovatore*.

The nature of the ensemble led to a particularly amusing phenomenon: bilingual productions. The three artists came from different countries (there was a Belgian, a Frenchman, and an Australian), and also had widely different training and career experiences. The result was that the opera was delivered simultaneously in French and Italian. It was not the first time opera in Melbourne had been given a multi-lingual performance. The Mechanics’ Institute opera concerts had often presented the featured

609 ‘Queen’s Theatre - Miss Catherine Hayes’, *The Argus*, October 30th 1854, p. 5.

610 This, incidentally, had been the casting for the performances of *Don Pasquale* in Hobart and regional Victoria, which had occurred prior to the Melbourne production.
work in Italian and English (consider the *Sonnambula* programme of 1853 above in which Mrs. Testar sang in Italian whilst Mr. Sayer sang in English). Indeed, *The Argus* commented that the bilingualism of *Pasquale* was already an improvement on ‘the fantastic jumble of English, French and Italian with which we were favoured in *The Daughter of the Regiment*.611 Indeed, it is important to note that bilingual opera was not unique to Australia, having occurred sporadically even at the leading opera houses of Europe during the mid-nineteenth century.612 Interestingly, *The Argus* attributed both the polyglot nature of the performance and the severity of the score’s alteration to the inability of procuring full orchestral scores in Melbourne:

The difficulty, in fact the impossibility, of procuring in the colonies perfect instrumental scores necessitates the presentation of an opera in a mutilated form, and as the principal interpreters of the lyric drama in Victoria are foreigners, the librettos are compulsorily rendered after a somewhat polyglot fashion.613

It may seem peculiar to blame a lack of scores for poor casting, omissions, substitutions, and bilingualism, but the difficulty of purchasing scores was certainly one of the most significant obstacles to the development of opera in 1850s Melbourne. Without proper scores, operas could only be staged if and when there were enough singers who were familiar with a critical mass of the scenes and roles. In Melbourne’s nascent operatic culture, therefore, a cast would often be comprised of singers whose knowledge of the opera was in different languages and at various degrees of accuracy. If no one knew a role, the character was cut. If a role were known only imperfectly, an unknown scene would be substituted for another, more familiar scene, regardless of the source. Yet despite its Babel-inspired performance, the opera was a success, and opera audiences continued to grow. This was ‘reconstituted opera’ and it was an important link between the concert opera of the early 1850s and the more complete opera performed later that decade.

These early productions of *Don Pasquale* and *La Figlia del Reggimento* were declared to be ‘the inauguration of opera in the colony’, and claimed to be the most impressive performances of the genre ever given in Australia, even if they were not the first.614 However mangled and unrecognisable, in these performances of Donizetti, Melbourne’s press and public recognised enough promise and potential to prophesy the cultured city that Melbourne was destined to become:

… notwithstanding these drawbacks, the recent production of the two operas … at the Theatre Royal shows that … we possess in the colony the nucleus of an operatic corps, and we have little doubt but that the demand for such entertainments stimulated as it will be by proof having been

612 At Pauline Viardot’s 1848 Covent Garden benefit performance of *Les Huguenots*, the performance was given partly in French and partly in Italian due to the inclusion of French tenor Gustave Roger in a cast of otherwise Italophone singers. Similarly, the Covent Garden première of *La Juive* (Halévy) was presented in Italian and French (sometimes simultaneously). In both cases, the audience and critics did not reprimand the cast or management for this bilingualism. See Harold D. Rosenthal, *Opera at Covent Garden : a short history* (London: Gollancz, 1967), pp. 33-34.
614 ‘Theatre Royal’, *The Argus*, September 7th 1855, p. 5.
furnished of our ability to satisfy it in some degree, will at no distant period be amply met. At the present our criticisms must be tempered by the fact of our subject being the best of the kind that we can get, and [being] what we have a right to expect at this end of the world.615

The 1855 productions of Don Pasquale and La Figlia del Reggimento, and the reception of these operas, lend an insight into how interwoven opera and identity already was at so early a stage in the city’s history. A city that had been established only twenty years earlier, which for all its economic and political progress was still small and isolated and which lacked even the mechanism to import scores, was pressing ahead with performances of opera and concerts, ready to overlook imperfections to foster a taste and habit for the genre amongst its residents. Melbourne could already see a day, in the not too distant future when its operatic culture would be ample and lavish; and they understood that the arrival of such a day would be a sign of Melbourne’s maturity and sophistication.

The Argus’ expectation that opera would continue to develop proved true less than a month later, when Catherine Hayes opened a short season of staged opera. Although these performances boasted a larger cast, a greater range of repertoire and slightly more authentic renditions of the score, Hayes’ season was not without the oddities typical of colonial opera at this time. Following the (tantalisingly mysterious) ‘unpardonable indiscretion’ committed by tenor John Howson,616 and the utter unreliability of his would-be replacement, George Clifford, Hayes’ corps was rendered tenorless. In order to rescue the season, the protean Marie Carandini stepped into the breach, performing the role of Elvino in Sonnambula, until contralto Sara Flower was able to join the company to sustain the primo tenore roles (such as Edgardo in Lucia di Lammermoor).617

The situation certainly did not deter the public, with the Carandini’s first appearance en travesti securing an audience of 3,500, the largest audience yet seen in Melbourne for any theatrical event. The audience and critics did not come to gawk and ridicule; they appreciated Carandini’s performance, and continually praised the generosity of spirit and artistry that Carandini (and later Flower) displayed in sacrificing their own comfort and opportunities to secure Hayes’ a successful season and ensure the satisfaction of the audience. The conductor Lewis Henry Lavenu, who also arranged the score for the available voices and instruments, was likewise extolled for the ingenuity of his transpositions and arrangements. Yet, for all the plaudits won by the ‘lady-tenors’ for their generosity, talent, and acumen, there was a recognition that such practices were a most unfortunate necessity, which marred the effect of the opera, and brought the city’s cultural authority into disrepute.618

Aside from the ‘lady-tenors’, the season was a success. The efflorescence of opera during the spring of 1855 is significant because it undermines so many of Australia’s operatic

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616 It is likely that he performed drunk, since his performance was of the same repertoire that had pleased the Sydney audiences, so he could hardly have been unprepared. The Argus records ‘Of Mr. John Howson, we can only say that the audience tolerated him much longer than we ourselves felt disposed to do.’ See ‘Theatre Royal – Miss Catherine Hayes’, The Argus, September 28th 1855, p. 5.
617 ‘The Opera’ The Argus, October 19th 1855, p. 5.
myths. Firstly, it discredits the idea that W.S. Lyster inaugurated opera in Melbourne. It also invalidates the less espoused, but equally fallacious, notion that there was no fully-stage opera in Melbourne until the arrival of Anna Bishop. Indeed, the fact that within the space of a month there were two separate and successful seasons of opera, each of which employed a mixture of visiting and ‘native’ talent, attests to the persistence and robustness of the city’s operatic culture prior to the arrival of Bishop, the Bianchis, and/or W.S. Lyster. Melbourne was not passively awaiting opera to be brought to the city; rather, both its native singers (Carandini, Gregg, the Howsons) and its audiences were intent on creating and supporting an operatic culture.

1856

Indeed, even upon her arrival, Anna Bishop’s presence was not as transformative as might be assumed from her reputation and talent. Her performances, both in the concert hall and later in the opera house, had much in common with Melbourne’s earlier expressions of operatic culture. When she delivered her first concert in Melbourne, her programme was almost identical in form and content to the operatic concert presented at the Mechanics’ Institute three years earlier (see Figure 10.6).

![Figure 10.7: Programme from Anna Bishop’s first Melbourne concert, given at Coppin’s Olympic Theatre on May 13th 1856.](image)

The question of whether such performances by Bishop are part of Melbourne’s operatic history is an interesting one. Certainly, by appearing alongside a vaudevillian comedy and including her own Mexican-flavoured burlesque, La Pasadita, Bishop’s programme was a more piquant blend of high- and low-art than the concerts given by either the Mechanics’ Institute or Hayes. On the other hand, Bishop’s presentation of excerpts from Norma advances the tradition of opera concerts, using costume, chorus, supernumeraries, scenery, and acting.

Despite the arguments either way, it is inevitably neither the programming nor the performance practice that define Bishop’s Melbourne debut as operatic. The performance was operatic because Bishop was an opera star, and because of the audience’s own attitude towards the performance. They believed that they were seeing an opera singer perform an operatic programme, and the performance, therefore, became part of Melbourne’s operatic culture.620

The operatic concerts of Testar, Hayes, and Bishop, and audiences attitudes towards music and culture during the 1850s, demonstrate the fluidity with which operatic culture can be expressed, particularly beyond the opera house. The inclusion of such seemingly peripheral events in an exploration of Melbourne’s operatic culture reveals the gradual, organic way in which the opera and the city developed together.

1857

In contrast to some of the events described above, the 1857 event in which Bishop was again a key player was undoubtedly at the core of Melbourne’s operatic culture. After having toured Victoria’s gold towns,621 Bishop returned to Melbourne at a propitious time; where once a tawdry amphitheatre had been now stood an elegant new theatre, built with an especial consideration for Italian Opera. This was the Princess’s Opera House, which would host much operatic throughout the century. In order to inaugurate the new, purpose-built temple of art, Anna Bishop, in collaboration with manager John Black, presented a short season of opera. As Figure 10.7 demonstrates, the lessee Alexander Hamilton and Manager John Black were eager to establish the pre-eminence of their new enterprise, not only with reference to Melbourne, but to the entire Australian continent.

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620 Chapter 14 will discuss an even more unorthodox programme of Bishop’s, her famed ‘Soprano Sfogato’ extravaganza, with reference to the manner in which Bishop and operatic culture more generally were manipulated in an Anglo-centric colonial context to strengthen British cultural hegemony.

The advertisement places much stress on the expense, scale, and splendour of the enterprise: ‘several thousand pounds’, ‘no expense having been spared’, ‘extensive establishment’, ‘upwards of seventy performers’, ‘handsome’, ‘elegant’, ‘unrivalled’, ‘a scale of completeness’, ‘appropriate’, ‘the most powerful ever’. In his comment on the advertisement and the event, the editor of *The Argus* made a particular point of commenting on the location of the new opera house, being in ‘the immediate neighbourhood of the new Houses of Parliament, on the Eastern Hill, and contiguous to

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the fashionable and populous suburbs of Richmond and Collingwood’. Such emphases serve to tie opera to Melbourne’s newfound power and wealth. Whilst this is typical of Western attitudes to opera, the advertisement is no less interesting for its conventionality. Melbourne was now announcing that it had the money, resources (both human and material) and patronage to mount opera in the manner appropriate to the quality and prestige of the art-form. This raised the status of the city, in the eyes of both its residents and the world. It is interesting, too, that apart from mentioning that this engagement was the ‘last’ opportunity to see Anna Bishop in Melbourne, there is little fuss made about her, as if even the great prima donna is subordinate to the occasion and the operatic genre itself.

The season itself was no more or less remarkable than any of the other ‘operatic’ events discussed in this chapter. Certainly, it was longer and more varied than previous ‘seasons’: in the course of the six-week season, seven operas were brought forth, namely Lucrezia Borgia, Linda di Chamounix, Norma, L’Elixir d’Amore, Ernani, Robert le Diable and La Sonnambula. Importantly, amongst the staple Bel Canto operas were operas by Verdi and Meyerbeer, which signified the Australian première of both composers.

The season, however, was not the unfettered, unsullied event for which Melbourne was so desirous. Like its predecessors, the company was often forced to present operas in a polyglottal format: the adaptation of Robert, for example, was given simultaneously in French and English (the sung portions in the former, with the spoken dialogue introduced by the artists delivered in English). Further to this were serious casting complications: Laglaise and Coulon had been expected to appear, but both men left the colony to take up appointments in Sydney. In their stead were Farquharson and Gregg, but they were not the happiest of replacements. Farquharson was unreliable; he often sang himself hoarse at Philharmonic Society concerts and had no voice left for his opera commitments. Gregg was diligent but relatively inexperienced; he delivered some roles, such as Antonio in Linda di Chamounix, directly from the score. He was also often spread too thin; he was tasked, for example, with leading the chorus whilst taking the roles of both Antonio and the Prefect in the performance of Linda di Chamounix.

Furthermore, this season did not see the end of the ‘lady-tenors’. When Farquharson also left the company, it was left to the chameleon contralto, Sara Flower, to sing the baritone role of Don Carlo in Ernani. Whilst such ‘gender-bending’ is often cited as being indicative of the inferiority of colonial opera’s resources, both financial and vocal, this specific case has interesting and illustrious precedents. In 1847, Covent Garden’s attempts to mount a production of Ernani were almost thwarted when the resident primo baritone of the house, Antonio Tamburini, eschewed the role of Don Carlo, claiming it was too high. In order to save the production the esteemed visiting contralto, Marietta Alboni, took the role. Moreover, Pellegrini’s season of opera in Sacramento in 1851 also necessitated the

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623 Editor, ‘Public Amusements’ The Argus, April 14th 1857, p. 5.
624 The season was to have also included Martha and Judith (presumably Giuditta by Samuele Levi, 1844), but these two operas were inexplicably removed from the season.
employment of a contralto, in this case, Madame Von Gulpen, in the role of Don Carlo. In this case, therefore, the appearance of Sara Flower has as much to do with the novelty of Verdi’s demands of the bass-baritone voice as with the exigencies that faced operatic production in the antipodes. Notably, it wasn’t until the Cagli-Pompei Royal Italian Opera Company arrived more than a decade later, that Melbourne was regularly treated to operas that demanded a strong baritone singer.

Furthermore, from a purely fiscal perspective, the season was neither more successful nor remarkably different to its predecessors. At the end of the season, the Princess’s Theatre was left in an economically depressed state, and John Black relinquished the lesseeship to the Gougenheim sisters, Adelaide and Joey. This seems similar to the previous year’s opera season at the Theatre Royal, in which Coppin lost in excess of £1000. Interestingly, the poor financial outcomes of these opera seasons seem to have had little impact on the perception of the genre’s success. Despite his losses, George Coppin wasted no time in making arrangements for a 1857 opera season, and when the fiscal result of the 1857 season fared no better, the season was still hailed as ‘brilliant’ and ‘successful’, by public, press and management alike.

Given that there is little to set the 1857 season apart from previous opera seasons, it is important to question what it was about that event that instantaneously made Melburnians feel as though they had ‘at last, grand opera in a style worthy of the Victorian metropolis’. Was it due to Bishop’s celebrity (i.e. not so much what Anna Bishop did but, rather, the fact that Anna Bishop did it)? Certainly, she was uniformly lauded for her vocal talent and histrionic abilities and this, alongside her international fame, lent an undeniable stamp of authority and gravitas to the occasion. However, when Anna Bishop had appeared in a brief season of opera in 1856, the same critic somewhat snidely described the events as something that ‘was ambitiously called Grand Opera’. At least in the critic James Smith’s eyes, the 1857 season had translated this ‘ambition’ into an actuality; it was this season that signified the real beginnings of Grand Opera in Melbourne; all that came before it, whether it be Bishop’s own previous appearances, or the earlier efforts of Carandini, Coulon and Hayes, immediately disappeared from the collective conscious.

The element that seems most responsible for this historical revisionism is the venue; the 1857 opera was the first season of opera to be performed in an ‘Opera House’, a setting as grand as the music being performed within it. It was the inauguration of the opera house, rather than the performances that inaugurated it, that signified to Melbourne that ‘it had arrived’. As detailed in Chapter six, the citizens of Calcutta replicated this attitude a decade later, when that city saw the erection of its first opera house. The fact that such consequence was placed on the location and ambience in which opera was performed, and the idea that the art-form was something less than ‘grand opera’ if not performed in a specifically operatic site, is telling of the role of opera in Victorian society, in the British

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628 Martin, *Verdi at the Golden Gate Bridge*, p. 29.
630 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 88.
632 ‘Princess’s Opera House’, *The Age*, April 24th 1857, p. 3.
633 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 84. Italics not in original.
Empire and in frontier, boomtowns. Despite the fecundity of its operatic culture prior to the 1857 season, it was not until opera was being performed by an opera star in an opera house that Melbourne felt like it finally had an art-form that adequately reflected the cultural identity of the city.

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Some four years before the arrival of the famous Lyster Company, Melbourne already perceived that it had the Grand-Opéra culture to which it was destined and entitled. This development mirrored Melbourne’s broader maturation, from an illegal settlement to the capital city of the largest, richest and most developed colony on the continent. Throughout the intervening years, the nexus between opera and Melbourne’s social and economic circumstances grew increasingly strong, with milestones in opera being taken as a sign of Melbourne’s progress as a whole, and the expansion of Melbourne’s economy and society always furthering the social and ideological need for opera.

Of course, had Melbourne not been continually renewed by its indefatigable resident opera-singers and its foreign visitors, all this ‘arriving’ could easily have dissipated, leaving nothing but an echo in the ears of Melbourne’s audiences. Instead, as the next chapter will discuss, both opera and Melbourne grew from strength to strength during the 1860s. Chapter 11 will discuss the opera and society in 1860s Melbourne, with a particular focus on the famous W.S. Lyster troupe.
Chapter 11:
The Lyster Years —
A reappraisal of Lyster’s 1861–68 Company and its impact on Melbourne’s operatic culture

The period 1861–68 is unarguably the most discussed interval of Australia’s opera history —certainly prior to the founding of the national company in 1956.634 It was during this time that William Saurin Lyster (Figure 11.1) and his first opera company reigned over Melbourne’s cultural landscape and cemented the city’s strong operatic culture. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the Lyster company’s activities during these years; it would prove unnecessary, too, given the meticulous chronicling of the man and his troupe by researchers such as Alison Gyger and Harold Love.635 The work of Gyger, Love and other scholars has created a broad and deep knowledge of Lyster’s activities in 1860s Melbourne and has done much to establish Lyster as a monumental figure in the city’s cultural development. Yet, his contribution has sometimes been misrepresented and, on occasion, grossly exaggerated. For example, in his essay on Italo-Australian culture, Tony Mitchell not only erroneously credited Lyster with single-handedly creating Melbourne’s operatic culture, but also bestowed supernatural powers upon the man: he claimed that Lyster was bringing forth seasons of Italian Opera into the late 1880s, which is remarkable given that the impresario had died in 1881. Lyster may have been a formidable and indefatigable figure, but even he was limited by the bounds of mortality.636

In light of the body of research into Lyster and his opera companies, and the monumentalism and hyperbole that have begun to surround the man, this chapter will reevaluate Lyster’s contribution to Australian opera. It will contextualize Lyster’s activities against those of his predecessors and contemporaries, seeking neither to underemphasize his importance, nor blindly reaffirm the impresario’s mythological status in Melbourne’s operatic history. By exposing some commonly held truths as fictions, and by conducting analyses into Lyster’s practices, this chapter aims to give a nuanced and measured reading of Lyster’s impact and legacy.

634 The national company has been known variously as the Australian Opera Company, Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company, The Australian Opera and, most recently, Opera Australia.
Myth One – Lyster rescued Australia from an operatic vacuum.

Lyster has so often been heralded as the figure who inaugurated opera in Melbourne that much of what occurred before his arrival in 1861 has been forgotten. Yet as the previous chapter demonstrated, Melbourne was already developing an operatic culture in the ten years before the impresario and his troupe came to the antipodes. More recently, the city had hosted Eugenio and Giovanna Bianchi, Italian singers from San Francisco, who had presented a season of opera in Melbourne in 1860, and were performing in Adelaide when Lyster and his company arrived. The city also boasted a newly-established musical organisation, the Orpheus Union, which was a chorus of amateurs especially set-up to
serve as a ready-made opera chorus for any visiting professional opera companies.\(^637\) Indeed, at the very moment of Lyster’s arrival, in the very theatre that was to be the site of so much success, the voices of Marie Carandini, Walter Sherwin and Robert Farquharson were ringing in Melbourne’s Theatre Royal.\(^638\)

Far from being an operaless land in need of Lyster’s rescue, Melbourne was busy organising its own semi-permanent opera company. In late 1860 and early 1861, one of Australia’s leading artists, Emile Coulon, along with his brother, Theodore-Jean-Joseph (aka Teodoro Coloni, a principal at Paris’s Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique and Théâtre de l’Académie Impériale de Musique)\(^639\) had been busy recruiting a French opera company to come to Australia. The company was expected to start performing in Melbourne in June 1861, and the Coulon brothers were planning an Australian touring schedule in which the company would present two seasons a year in each of the colonies of Victoria, New South Wales, and Tasmania.\(^640\) Coulon advertised that his troupe would feature ‘three ladies, three gentlemen, ten members of the orchestra, and the nucleus of a competent chorus’,\(^641\) the latter two of which would be augmented upon arrival in Melbourne. The scheme garnered much interest; whilst Coulon hired singers in Paris, a committee was formed to drum up subscriptions in Melbourne.\(^642\) Unluckily for Coulon and his investors, Lyster’s company arrived in April 1861 and rendered the French speculation ‘defunct’.\(^643\) Coulon and his Melbourne investors lost money from the enterprise, recouping only 10s for every pound of investment.\(^644\) The enthusiasm for opera survived, however, and Melbourne’s opera aficionados now lavished their support on Lyster.

It is tempting to ponder the course that Melbourne’s operatic development may have taken had Lyster not unintentionally usurped Coulon’s position. Coulon’s brother Theodore was to have been the troupe’s bass, which, considering his talent and experience, would have been a great boon to Melbourne’s opera scene. He was one of Paris’s lead singers, creating many characters in Parisian premières of modern operas including *Les vêpres sicilienne* and *Tannhäuser*, and would go on to create the character of Don Antonio in *Il Guarany* (Gomes) at La Scala, where he became a principal singer in 1869.\(^645\) Theodore’s involvement in the project would have given Melbourne ties to the upper echelon of Parisian singers, and it is almost certain that Coulon’s troupe would have been of a substantially better quality than Lyster’s company. Likewise, with both Emile and Theodore in the cast, the company’s repertoire would likely have reflected the repertoire with which the men were most interested and familiar; instead of English operas and a tendency toward Bel Canto of Lyster’s company, the Coulon company would have included more French and modern

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\(^{640}\) ‘Opera Company’, *The Launceston Examiner*, November 10th 1860, p. 3 after *The Melbourne Herald*.

\(^{641}\) ‘Several gentlemen…’, *The Argus*, May 16th 1861, p. 5.

\(^{642}\) ‘Several gentlemen…’, *The Argus*, November 7th 1860, p. 5.

\(^{643}\) The Melbourne press reported it as ‘defunct’ by August 1861.

\(^{644}\) ‘M. Coulon’s opera scheme’, *The Argus*, August 31st, 1861, p. 5.

Italian repertoire.

Whether Coulon’s venture would have been successful is another question. Perhaps this company would have driven Melbourne’s operatic development faster, resulting in Australia producing ‘Melbas’ a generation sooner. Conceivably, the company’s French ties may have further encouraged continental singers and musicians to immigrate to Australia, creating a more cosmopolitan operatic culture in Melbourne. On the other hand, perhaps Melbourne was not yet ready for a wholly foreign-language, modern repertoire opera company, and needed an intermediate step like Lyster’s troupe before such a company (of which the Cagli-Pompei Company of the 1870s is the best example) could secure sufficient support in Melbourne. There is also the question of whether a French company would have been as welcome as an Anglo or Italian troupe in Melbourne at that time. Whilst the alliance forged between the French and English during the Crimean War (1853–56) had ameliorated some of the tensions in Anglo-Franco relations, a largely British colony might have had reservations over supporting French culture over British or Italianate culture. Such questions can never be definitively determined, but it is sobering to note that the most lauded figure in Australia’s nineteenth century operatic culture was very nearly the ambitious French-Belgian Coulon, rather than the plucky Irishman Lyster.

Given the number of operatic enterprises immediately preceding his arrival, Lyster’s success cannot be attributed to a lack of competition, Australia’s desperation or his company’s novelty. The company’s initial success is better understood as an accident of history; the company arrived in the right place at the right time, and benefitted from the groundwork that had been done throughout the 1850s and, in particular, by Coulon in the previous six months, which prepared Melbourne for a permanent, professional opera company. The efforts of his predecessors and his propitious timing, however, account only for the welcome Lyster and his troupe received. The continuing support that Lyster was able to inspire from Melbourne’s audiences and, for the most part, from the press, was due to the skilful management of his corps and his ability to cultivate a monopoly through his endeavours.

Analysis One – Lyster’s corps management and employment of local singers.

Upon his arrival, Lyster’s primary strengths were his experience and the loyalty of his troupe. Of the eight artists Lyster arrived with, three were immediate members of his family (his brother Frederick Lyster, his common-law wife, Georgia Hodson, and his sister-in-law, Rosalie Durand).646 Others were romantically involved: although neither Lucy Escott nor Henry Squires had any familial attachment to Lyster, they were attached to each other; over a twenty-year period, their careers had been incredibly intertwined, and after a long common-law relationship, they were married in 1870.647 The couple’s preference for

647 ‘F’, ‘The Late Mrs Lucy Escott-Squires — A Recollection’, The Mercury (Hobart) after The Age (Melbourne), February 15th 1896, p. 2 of Supplementary.
performing together would have been difficult in the ever-changing world of nineteenth-century opera; the stability offered by Lyster’s company must have been very attractive and was certainly a factor in the couple’s loyalty to the impresario. Moreover, the troupe had already been together for quite some time; all except Escott and Squires had been performing as the Rosalie Durand English Opera Company since 1856 and many of the singers had professional relationships that predated the company. These ties combined with the increasing instability of the US (whence they had come) ensured that the desertions and contested contracts which had plagued the seasons of Anna Bishop and others were not likely to sabotage Lyster’s enterprise.

The troupe’s arrival in Melbourne was unexpected and Lyster immediately set about securing the partnership of Melbourne’s theatre elite. Lyster went into partnership with actor-impresario George Coppin (now back in the theatre business after pursuing ice-importation, gold mining, and a political career). Lyster also set about improving his troupe, which lacked a bass, by employing a favourite local bass, Robert Farquharson, who Squires himself thought to be the equal of any in the company. Over its residency, the company would make use of other local singers: Rosalie Durand’s ill-health and untimely death in 1866, especially, necessitated the employment of local sopranos such as Octavia Hamilton and Geraldine Warden, whilst James Kitts, Enrico Grossi, and John Gregg augmented the relatively shallow bass section as comprimari or emergency stand-ins. Lyster also acknowledged the power and talent of his former rivals in San Francisco, the Bianchis: Giovanna appeared once as Adalgisa to Escott’s Norma in 1861, an occasion remembered as one of the strongest performances of the 1860s, whilst Eugenio gave Squires some rare respite by appearing as Manrico in Il Trovatore. Table 11.1 records the name of every singer who performed a solo role with the company, whilst Figures 11.2 and 11.2 illustrate the percentage of the company’s artists by origin and role.


649 ‘Shipping Intelligence’, The Argus, March 2nd, 1861, p. 4.


651 Squires reputedly wrote to a friend back in San Francisco, ‘Our new basso, Mr. Farquharson, has a magnificent voice, and is withal a gentleman.’ ‘F’, ‘The Late Mrs Lucy Escott-Squires — A Recollection’, The Mercury (Hobart) after The Age (Melbourne), February 15th 1896, p. 2 of Supplementary.

652 Durand died in Sydney at the age of 33 and was buried in a Roman Catholic cemetery. ‘Notes of the Week – Mrs. F. Lyster’, Sydney Morning Herald, December 17th 1866, p. 2.

653 ‘F’, ‘The Late Mrs Lucy Escott-Squires — A Recollection’, The Mercury (Hobart) after The Age (Melbourne), February 15th 1896, p. 2 of Supplementary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Voice Type</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Andrews</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Chorus member who occasionally covered minor roles for Durand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanna Bianchi</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Originally from Italy, based in San Francisco. Hired for 9 performances in Seasons 2 and 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosalie Durand</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Escott</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Jones</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Australian. Hired midway into Season 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Montrose</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma Neville</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Originally from England. Took Durand's roles in Season 9 (Queen Marguerite in \textit{Huguenots} and Gypsy Queen in \textit{The Bohemian Girl}). Part of company in Season 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fannie Simonsen</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Originally from Belgium. Hired as a replacement for the ailing Durand midway into Season 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Vitali</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Italian. Hired for Season 15 as a special push by Lyster to create an 'Italian' opera company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ada King</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Stuttaford</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Originally from Scotland, would become important figure in Canada. Played Leonora once in \textit{Il Trovatore} in Season 5, to allow Escott to appear as Azucena. (Sister of G. R. G. Pringle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giulia Colombo</td>
<td>Contralto</td>
<td>Italian. Hired for Season 15 as a special push by Lyster to create an 'Italian' opera company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Hodson</td>
<td>Contralto</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs Gladstone</td>
<td>Contralto</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. F. Baker</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Originally a chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works – later took on larger roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armes Beaumont</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Australian. Hired for Seasons 11 and 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eugenio Bianchi</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Originally from Italy, based in San Francisco. Hired for 8 performances in Season 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugo Devoti</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Italian. Hired for Season 15 as a special push by Lyster to create an 'Italian' opera company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Friend</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Squires</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Sprinckhorn</td>
<td>Second tenor</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Trevor</td>
<td>Second tenor</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuseppe Bertollini</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Italian. Hired for Season 15 as a special push by Lyster to create an 'Italian' opera company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Ewart</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John de Haga</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Originally from England. Had been in the Lyster company in San Francisco. Rejoined Lyster in Season 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Lyster</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert Richardson</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Australian. Hired for Season 10.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. H. Sutcliffe</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
<td>Australian. Hired midway Season 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietro d'Antoni</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Italian. Hired for Season 15 as a special push by Lyster to create an 'Italian' opera company.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Origin and Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrico Grossi</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Originally from Italy, based in San Francisco. Hired for 8 performances in Season 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Harwood</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Australian actor-manager. Hired to play Zamiel in <em>Der Freischütz</em> Season 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Levison</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Lloyd</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Original Lyster Company from America. Director, occasionally took roles, especially that of Sir Tristan in <em>Martha</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Nathanson</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ramsden</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signor Roncovieri</td>
<td>Bass</td>
<td>Chorus member who took small roles in the larger scale works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie Chart](image)

- **Original Company**: 21%
- **Hired in Australia (of which 65% were residents and 35% were other touring artists)**: 79%

*Figure 11.2: Lyster troupe's singers by origin.*
Figure 11.3: Origins of those singers hired in Australia. ‘Australians’ may include people born overseas, but either raised or long-term Victoria residents. ‘Anglophone’ refers to any singer from an English-speaking background, not from Australia (i.e. England, Scotland, the United States etc).

Table 11.1 is impressively long and taken along with the shown in Figures 11.2 and 11.3, it would seem that Lyster’s original company was overrun by a diverse array of colonials, fellow peripatetics, and general hangers-on. Yet, these data do not tell the whole story. As Figure 11.4 illustrates, the majority of the Australian and Australia-based singers employed by Lyster were hired only for minor roles.

Furthermore, of the 445 performances mounted during Seasons 1–12 inclusive, only 23 featured a non-original Lyster singer in a principal role (see Figure 11.5).
Hence, whilst a superficial glance may suggest that Lyster was generous in his encouragement of local singers, closer analysis tells a story of exclusivity and fierce protectionism. Australian singers were hired as chorus singers and comprimarie, whilst talented fellow visiting artists, such as the Bianchis, were employed for novelty. Gifted Australian-based singers were only offered the opportunity to take lead roles when a member of the cast was ill, or there was a desperate need (such as the gap left in the company's repertoire by Rosalie Durand's death in 1866).

Lyster's company was not strong enough to benefit from such exclusivity. It had too few singers of any fach, let alone its utter paucity of baritones and basses. Although the company had two sopranos, Durand was often very ill, and hence Escott performed nearly all the principal roles, which was an enormous burden. Moreover, as Love and Gyger have both noted, Hodson (the company's contralto) was an especially poor singer. Lyster's decision to limit the number of locals may appear strange, since it undermined the potential strength of his company and was not caused by any lack of talent in the colony. Closer interrogation, however, reveals that Lyster's protectionist practices were key to his success and legacy. Lyster's instinct to show preference and loyalty to his lover, Hodson, and his sister-in-law, Durand, was not merely nepotistic; it also benefitted Lyster's finances. Had he replaced these women, Lyster's expenses would have been far greater and less of the income would have stayed in Lyster family, facts that would have considerably weakened Lyster's position.

The replacement of longstanding members of the company would also have undermined

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655 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 120.
656 Both Sara Flower and Lucy Chambers, for example, were easily Hodson's superior, whilst Carandini was an obvious candidate to augment the troupe's soprano ranks and ease the pressure on the indefatigable Escott and the unwell Durand. Yet, Flower, Chambers and Carandini, and many other Melbourne women besides, were systematically ignored by Lyster.
company morale and cohesiveness. Unlike any of the opera companies that had previously performed in Melbourne, Lyster’s troupe was an extant company that existed well beyond the timeframe of a single season. It had, furthermore, an established repertoire in which all the singers knew their ‘pecking order’. Hence, the group dynamics within the company were relatively stable. Introducing transient singers into the company unnecessarily would have upset this balance, and could possibly have provoked jealousies and problems that had long ceased to exist. A discrete company that had an ensemble identity would be far more reliable and successful in the long run, than a company made of individuals who had personal agendas.

Another benefit to limiting opportunities for local singers was the notion of prestige and competitiveness. It is no coincidence that Lyster was most open to his competitors during 1861, when he still expected the company to return soon to the United States. Once it became apparent to Lyster that the American Civil War would not be concluding any time soon, and that Melbourne represented the opportunity to build a monopoly, the impresario became more protective of his company. If Lyster replaced his singers with those that had been singing in Melbourne for years, it would have been tantamount to admitting that Melbourne had singers of superior quality, which would have challenged the prestige of his product. Hence, Lyster restricted the employment of non-company singers either to fellow immigrants, such as the Bianchis or Grossi, or to those singers who were essential to the viability of the company, such as Warden and Farquharson. The Lyster now remembered for introducing Enrico Dondi, co-managing the Cagli-Pompei troupe of 1871–75, importing Antoinetta Link in 1877, and featuring early performances of Fannie Simonsen and Amy Sherwin (the Tasmanian Nightingale) is a Lyster that developed only after his 1861–68 company had disbanded and he no longer had an enterprise to protect.

It is also important to acknowledge the effect of Lyster’s insular employment policy had on Melbourne’s operatic culture. Upon Fannie Simonsen’s debut with the company in June 1866 (discussed below), The Argus’s critic declared that ‘the appearance of a new prima donna is an extreme rarity’. No statement can more succinctly show how unvaried Melbourne’s once heterogenous operatic culture had become. Lyster’s brand of opera, for better or worse, had become the opera. The impresario had succeeded in creating a operatic monopoly in Melbourne, and in doing so each of his company’s performances, and all of the company’s performance practices had a far larger impact than the performances of his multifarious predecessors.

**Myth Two – Lyster’s troupe was incomparably superior to both its predecessors and its competition.**

Whilst admirable for its detailed descriptions of the Lyster company’s productions, the existing literature does not evaluate the troupe’s performance practices in a regional, global or temporal context. In one sense, the very thoroughness of the chronicling has exacerbated the tendency towards uncritical veneration of the Lyster Company. By contrast, this section has no ambition to be an exhaustive account of each of the troupe’s

657 ‘The Opera – Madame Simonsen’s Debut’, The Argus, June 26th 1866, p. 5.
performances or seasons; rather, the following discussion identifies key areas by which a re-evaluation of the myth may be begun. It will demonstrate that in some areas the troupe triumphs, in others it fell short of audience expectation and standing practice, and in others the troupe was typical of its time and place. It is hoped that this critical analysis will stimulate further evaluation of colonial operatic practices.

The Good …
The arrival of Lyster’s company marked a drastic improvement to the area of ‘stage management’ (or ‘production values’ in modern parlance). By virtue of its stable cast and a sizeable standing repertoire, which needed only minimum preparation and maintenance, the company had a greater capacity than any of its forerunners to dedicate rehearsal time to stagecraft, dramatic detail, and blocking. That such care was taken and valued by the company is evident not only from critics’ comments, but also from the fact that the opera company was the first in the Antipodes to boast a dedicated, full-time and expert stage manager (a job which is similar to the modern director), William Lloyd. Lloyd was the first of his kind in Melbourne and his engagement represented a leap forward in Melbourne’s operatic culture towards performances that were as dramatically accomplished as they were musically consummate.

There are innumerable examples of the Lyster company’s flair for mise en scène. Consider, for example, the lavish production of Auber’s Masaniello, immortalised below by one of Australia’s leading journals (see Figure 11.6).

![Image of Masaniello production](image)

Figure 11.6: The lavish production of Masaniello (Auber) by Lyster’s troupe in Melbourne 1865. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

Of course, the artwork above is unlikely to be a faithful representation of every aspect of

the scene. Yet, irrespective of the veracity of the artist’s portrait, the impact of the scene was clearly monumental enough to be worthy of replication and comment. Moreover, it clearly impressed its audience and satisfied its expectations for detail, voluptuousness, special effects and spectacle.

Similarly, when Lyster presented his first production of Martha, critics were in awe of the vivacity of the fairground scene. “The opera was well placed upon the stage and its success was indisputable. In the fair scene we have the old Punch and Judy—perhaps a little too much of it—with the fairing stalls and roundabouts [carousels]. This scene was produced with great spirit; in fact the scenery throughout was excellent.”659 The report gives some indication of Lyster’s commitment to detail and strong performance values. Such comments are especially interesting given that the audiences and critics were consciously comparing Lyster’s production with that of Anna Bishop in 1857.

Another way in which the Lyster company’s residency signified an improvement to Melbourne’s operatic culture was through the sheer breadth of its repertoire. The exceptional diversity of the company’s repertoire appreciably expanded Melbourne audiences’ experience of opera. The company (re)introduced Classical opera with its performances of Mozart’s Don Giovanni and Le Nozze di Figaro and encouraged the accessible and popular English ballad-opera genre with its performances of Dibdin’s The Waterman and Rooke’s Amilie. Likewise, Lyster supported Romantic English opera, with numerous productions of several Balfe and Wallace works and continued Melbourne’s love affair with the Bel Canto works, both comic and tragic, of Bellini, Donizetti and Rossini. The troupe introduced some modern Italian works by Verdi and made its deepest impression with its increasing commitment to staging French Grand-Opéra. The company even encouraged Australian opera by producing the world première of Stephen Marsh’s opera The Gentleman in Black, despite some colonial snobbery and prejudice.660

Of course, the quality of the productions of these works were as varied as the works themselves. The artistic and financial success of a production fluctuated according to the demands made by the genre and the company’s (in)ability to satisfy these demands. The troupe was most successful in its performances of Romantic English opera, a small selection of Bel Canto repertoire, and some Verdi works. Its performances of Mozart’s operas were uniformly bad, and its ballad-opera, German opera and Grand-Opéra productions varied between the sublime and the ridiculous. Yet, although pecuniary interests saw Lyster focus his efforts on those productions he knew were most likely to please, he maintained a commitment to novelty and freshness during the duration of the company’s residency. Lyster tirelessly attempted to reach a broader audience—whether that meant enticing the more popular-art crowd with ballad opera and comedy, or appeasing the tastes of the aficionados with productions of Weber’s Der Freischütz and Oberon and lesser known or new Italian works, such as William Tell, Rigoletto, Un Ballo in Maschera, I due Foscari, L’Elisir d’Amore, and La Favorita. Such a broad repertory would not be offered by any other company in Australia until the late twentieth century. With regard to repertoire, the Lyster Company was undeniably remarkable and unique.

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As discussed earlier, Lyster carefully cultivated a group dynamic of loyalty and reliability. Lyster protected the position and prestige of his original singers by limiting his employment of local and fellow travelling singers to infrequent and/or desperate occasions. In return he had core group of artists who were unlikely to desert him or be unreliable as employee. The result was a stable and cohesive opera company.

The troupe’s solidarity may have been good for Lyster and his artists, but it undermined the quality of the company’s performances. The troupe’s claim to an ensemble identity ended at the stage door for, once on stage, there can be no denying that the Lyster troupe was a star vehicle, designed to exhibit the talents of Escott and, to a lesser degree, Squires. Whereas true ensemble companies are comprised of artists with similar degrees of talent and skill, Lyster’s troupe featured two admirable artists supported by singers who ranged from the mediocre to the inept. The company partially adapted to this condition, emphasising that repertoire which was least dependent upon a strong ensemble, in which, Escott and Squires’ talents combined with the troupe’s strong production values would deliver a product of acceptable quality. Hence Mozart was rare as were the opere buffe of Rossini or Donizetti; instead there was a preponderance of works that could be carried to success on little more than Escott’s broad and strong shoulders and the power of spectacle: Bel Canto opera seria (Lucrezia Borgia, Lucia di Lammermoor, La Favorita), the big Verdi dramas (Il Trovatore, La Traviata, Macbeth) and Meyerbeer’s grand-opéras.

Yet, even in these works, there were passages or scenes that highlighted the discrepancy of talent between the singers. The same repertoire that gave the scene painter, John Hennings, ample opportunity to display his mastery also demanded strong secondary singers. When the strengths of the principals and the potency of the spectacle were juxtaposed against the vocal and dramatic weaknesses of the rest company (consider for example Act 3, Scene 6 of L’Africaine or the Act Two finale of La Traviata), the troupe’s unevenness became painfully apparent.

The negative effects of the company’s star vehicle structure were felt in operas as diverse as Mozart’s Don Giovanni (produced in 1861) and Meyerbeer’s Les Huguenots (produced during the 1862–63 season). Being dependent upon even vocal and dramatic quality whilst relatively unreliant upon scenery and spectacle, Mozart’s masterpiece Don Giovanni easily exposed the flaws of Lyster’s company. During the eight consecutive performances of this dramma giocoso, the differences between the company’s strong and weak singers was even more apparent. Escott’s performance as Donna Anna in the first scene given with ‘fire and spirit’, and she was invariably greeted with enthusiastic applause.661 Contrastingly, Squires was thought too wooden as Don Ottavio, whilst Farquharson lacked sufficient ‘dash’ and was overzealous in cutting out the more difficult passages of Giovannì’s part. Trevor was accused of excessive vulgarity as Masetto, and King, Durand, and Fred Lyster as Elvira, Zerlina and the Commendatore respectively, received only the most perfunctory of praise.662

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662 Editorial, The Argus, October 24th 1861, p. 5.
In *Huguenots*, Escott drew raptures from public, whilst the critics compared her impersonation of Valentine to that by Pauline Viardot.\(^{663}\) She was the only singer to please. Despite the fact that Raoul was thought to be one of Squires’ best roles, he was criticised for his lack of characterisation and his lack of interest in the dramatic action. Moreover, Squires’ voice was often rough, suggesting that the part was beyond his stamina and/or technique; indeed, on the first performance he omitted one of his principal arias, and would do so again on other occasions.\(^{664}\) Similarly, whilst Farquharson was quite successful as Marcel, Durand was a poor Queen Marguerite; she dramatically cut down the role, that is when the role was not omitted altogether.\(^{665}\) Hodson found moderate success as Urbain, the pageboy, as did Fred Lyster as Nevers; yet beyond scant praise, neither was particularly lauded. Future companies with fuller and more skilled performers easily improved upon the company’s production of *Huguenots*; yet, *Huguenots* continues to be an opera irrevocably linked to the mythologised Lyster company.\(^{666}\)

As discussed earlier, Hodson and Durand were particularly inadequate members of the company, yet Lyster was constrained by his familial ties and finances to be able to easily replace the women. As the seasons drew on, however, Durand grew increasingly ill and unreliable, and Lyster was forced to engage an alternative soprano. His choice was a French-Belgian singer named Fannie Simonsen who had recently arrived in Melbourne and was proving popular in the various concert venues about town.\(^{667}\) Simonsen, who claimed experience in the courts of Europe and the Opéra Comique in Paris, had a light, sweet voice of great compass and exceptional coloratura. Her talents, combined with her experience and position as an outsider made her an easier figure for Lyster to employ than a more established Melbourne artist such as Carandini.

As Lucia di Lammermoor, the role in which she débuted, Simonsen enchanted operatic audiences and won encomia from the city’s critics. The acquisition of the competent and popular Simonsen was also a great boon to Escott. Whereas the nineteen successive performances of *Les Huguenots* in Season 6 had to be performed entirely under Escott’s steam, the premiere of *L’Africaine* in Season 11 was double cast, with Escott and Simonsen alternating in the role of Selika.\(^{668}\) As a result, Escott suffered less vocal fatigue and coarseness, and the dramatic vigour of her performances must have also improved.

There was, however, one drawback to Simonsen’s success. Once back on stage, Durand suffered by comparison. Whereas Simonsen’s characters and scenes were given with ‘exquisite effect’,\(^{669}\) Durand was chastised for causing her scenes to ‘fall flat’ through monochromatic acting:

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\(^{663}\) ‘The Opera’, *The Argus*, November 17\(^{th}\) 1862, p. 5.

\(^{664}\) ‘The Opera’, *The Argus*, November 26\(^{th}\) 1862, p. 5.


\(^{667}\) See, for example, reviews for the concert series presented by Fannie and Martin Simonsen at St George’s Hall in late 1865, published in *The Argus* and *The Age*.

\(^{668}\) *L’Africaine*, *The Argus*, July 9\(^{th}\) 1866, p. 5.

\(^{669}\) ‘The Opera – Roberto il Diavolo’, *The Argus*, October 30\(^{th}\) 1866, p. 5.
Mdame Durand’s Elly [sic] O’Connor, the simple Irish colleen [Lily of Killarney], was the same as Mdame Durand’s Zerlina, the Spanish coquette in Don Giovanni, or her Queen Marguerite in Les Huguenots. She has one set method of operatic acting, from which she is not disposed to depart upon slight occasion.670

The tremendous impact that a single singer like Simonsen had upon the Lyster company is a testament not only to her skill but also to the inherent flaws in Lyster’s exclusivity and protectionism. Had he replaced singers, or at least augmented his company, with singers like Simonsen more regularly there can be little doubt that the troupe’s productions would have been superior both from a dramatic and musical standpoint.

…and the bizarre.

The mythology of the Lyster troupe’s supposed superiority unravels still further when the more ridiculous aspects of its performance practice are described. Given the extraordinary number of total performances that the company gave whilst in Melbourne (discussed below), it would be unfair to pay too close attention to those absurdities that occurred only once or twice. A discussion of the November 1866 performance of L’Africaine in 1866 which lacked a Selika, and instead featured two Inezes (Rebecca Jones and Fannie Simonsen) one of whom appeared in Selika’s costume may make an amusing anecdote, but it is would not accurately represent the company’s modus operandi.671 Instead, this section will focus on one regularly occurring practice: female tenors. Significantly, this is a practice that Lyster’s champions routinely cite as an indication of the inferiority of Lyster’s predecessors, but it is rarely considered a major flaw in the impresario’s own productions.672 The injustice of this bias is moot, because in passing judgment upon either Lyster’s predecessors or Lyster himself, the causation, response, and context of this practice is ignored. This section espouses a non-judgmental attitude towards the Lyster company’s engagement in this ‘bizarre’ practice. Instead, it considers the employment of female tenors as a reflection of the exigencies of producing opera in the isolation of mid-1800s colonial Australia, the nature of the Lyster company itself, and the flexibility with which opera was produced around the world.

Lyster’s (Wo)men

The practice of casting women in tenor roles, which has come to be regarded as the emblem of the dubious quality of opera in pre-Lyster Melbourne, continued to occur throughout his 1860s seasons. Lyster’s eschewal of local singers, the need to rest star tenor Squires, and the general lack of depth in his company were all factors that occasionally left him with no alternative but to cast the contralto Georgia Hodson in tenor roles.

In the 1861 production of Auber’s Les Diamants de la Couronne for example, Hodson performed the role of Don Henrique. On this occasion, Hodson was not the only example of disagreeable casting—the critics were equally unimpressed by Ada King as Diana, whose casting was described as ‘a mistake’ and by Durand, who was ‘completely unable to

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671 Editorial, The Argus, November 14th 1866, p. 5.
672 In his seminal work on Lyster’s contribution to opera in Australia, Harold Love admits that Hodson had filled in as a tenor in Chicago, but fails to mention the continuation of this practice in Australia. See Love, The Golden Age of Australian Opera, in passim.
sing’, whilst even Farquharson, who usually impressed, was declared to be ‘the reverse of perfect’. Yet, despite the deficiency of her colleagues, it was Hodson’s hermaphroditic Don Henrique that attracted the greatest displeasure from the critics and audience alike:

Miss Georgia Hodson again was inappropriately cast for the part of Don Henrique; … the effect of her assumption of the opposite sex was occasionally almost ludicrous. The audience plainly thought so, for they laughed.674

The word ‘again’ reveals that this was not a unique event, and, as discussed in Chapter Ten, Hodson’s female tenor was not the first in Melbourne. Given the seeming ubiquity of this practice, it may be tempting to ascribe Hodson’s part-time career as a tenor to the exigencies of performing in isolated Australia. Yet to do so would be a mistake. Hodson had regularly appeared as a tenor in America; indeed, until Lyster secured the talents of Squires, Hodson was the company’s full-time tenor, even singing Verdian tenor roles such as Manrico.675 Far from being embarrassed by such practice, Lyster had made a virtue of his female tenor in the USA, where during the company’s 1859 Chicago season, and again in the San Francisco 1859 season, Hodson had been billed as ‘a tenor contraltina’.676 Chicago had been disdainful of such spectacles as a female Manrico serenading Leonora in II Trovatore, and Melbourne was equally unimpressed:

That the opera failed must be ascribed to the causes we have specified; but the fact suggests a few conclusions which seem materially to affect the existence of the musical art and profession in this country. The exertion to which operatic artists are here forced to submit, at least under the present system, is altogether excessive. Opera six nights a week by the same artists is an impossibility, if we are ever to advance or be critically satisfied. To be plain … had Mr. Squires appeared as Don Henrique Madame Escott as La Catarina, and Miss Durand as Diana, the fate of the opera last night would have … undoubtedly have been a success. But Mr. Squires and Madame Escott cannot sing six nights running; … nor should any artist living. Therefore, the manager of a company is compelled to make less efficient arrangements than he otherwise would, the energies of the artists are unfairly taxed, and the public are [sic] disappointed. Such must always be the case until, by a change of system, and due liberality being exerted in the support of the most delightful and refined of the arts, we can learn to be contented with three nights of opera in the week, and are able to secure the talent necessary for its existence.677

Lyster’s practice of employing Hodson as a tenor and her reception by the press and public contradict the idea so prevalent in discussions of Australia’s opera history that Lyster’s company signified so dramatic an improvement to Melbourne’s operatic culture as to herald a new era. In referring to the ‘present system’, for example, the critic does not distinguish between Lyster and his predecessors, and seems to regard the androgynous representation of Don Henrique as yet another indication that Melbourne’s operatic culture is not what it ought (and, indeed, could) be. Rather than marking the disappearance of the operatic practices that most embarrassed and disappointed Melbourne’s critics and

673 ‘The failure of Auber’s opera’, The Argus, April 13th 1861, p. 5.
674 Ibid. Emphasis added.
675 Gyger, Civilising the colonies, p. 121.
676 Eugene H. Cropsey, Crosby’s Opera House: symbol of Chicago’s cultural awakening (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1999), p. 40; and Martin, Verdi at the Golden Gate Bridge, p. 137.
677 ‘The failure of Auber’s opera…’, The Argus, April 13th 1861, p. 5.
audiences, Lyster’s company actually continued such practices.

Such an acknowledgement need not be accompanied by judgment or ridicule. The fact that a practice like women singing tenor roles was common to the history of both the city and the company, coupled with the fact that even Covent Garden, that paragon of nineteenth-century opera, occasionally resorted to female tenors and baritones (as discussed in Chapter Ten), suggests that Lyster’s company was a product of its time and place. Whether these contextualisations damn or restore Lyster’s reputation is very much up to the reader.

By reflecting upon the successes, failures and quirks of the Lyster troupe’s residency, the idea of Lyster as the harbinger of a golden age of opera to Melbourne collapses, and in its stead rises a more complex and enthralling story of how Lyster formed another integral step along Melbourne’s operatic development. No golden age can ever truly live up to its reputation: each age has its travails and inspirations, and Lyster’s first years in Australia prove no different. On some counts, the productions mounted by the fêted impresario were incomparable to anything that had preceded them; yet, on other occasions, his audience, critics and the historic record find little, if anything, to distinguish his endeavours from those of his predecessors.

Analysis Two—The prolificacy of the Lyster 1861–68 Opera Company

Bearing all this interesting complexity in mind, how does one account for Lyster’s undeniable status in the collective memory as the leading figure of opera in colonial Australia in the collective memory? Notwithstanding debates about production values, the quality and quantity of talent in his company, operatic performance practices etc, the Lyster opera company’s prominence in the popular and academic imagination might simply be due to the longevity of its residency and the prolificacy of its activities.

The company boasts some truly astounding statistics. As Tables 11.2 and 11.3 show, between 1861 and 1868 Lyster’s opera company brought forth fifteen seasons, during which it generally performed six nights a week. In total, the company performed on 610 occasions. Over the course of these performances, the company presented 45 operas, of which at least 21 were Melbourne premières.
Table 11.2: The seasons of the Lyster Company in Melbourne 1861–68.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season number</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>March 25th – April 20th 1861</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>June 18th – August 2nd 1861</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>September 23rd – November 9th 1861</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>April 21st – May 17th 1862</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5b</td>
<td>May 24th – June 21st 1862 (Concert Series)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 13th 1862 – January 31st 1863</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>May 2nd – July 2nd 1864</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>March 13th – April 1st 1865</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>August 21st – September 19th 1865</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>December 26th 1865 – February 3rd 1866</td>
<td>34</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>June 11th – August 1st 1866</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>October 1st – November 23rd 1866</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>May 6th – June 22nd 1867</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>November 21st – December 21st 1867</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>January 6th 1868 – February 15th 1868</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>610‡</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These are details of the Melbourne Opera Seasons only. Further to these seasons, there were short seasons at other major centres in Victoria: Geelong (2 seasons, 5 performances), Bendigo (3 seasons, 48 performances), Castlemaine (1 season, 2 performances) and Ballarat (7 seasons, 87 performances).‡‡Please note that these numbers represent not only evenings in which opera was performed, but also productions of oratorio and concert evenings.

678 Anne Doggett, "And for Harmony most ardently we long": Musical Life in Ballarat, 1851-1871 (School of Behavioural and Social Sciences and Humanities; Ph.D. Thesis: University of Ballarat, 2006).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Seasons in which the opera appeared</th>
<th>Partial Performances</th>
<th>Full Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auber</td>
<td>Les Diamants de la Couronne</td>
<td>1, 13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fra Diavolo</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gustavus III</td>
<td>13, 14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masaniello</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Balfe</td>
<td>The Bohemian Girl</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rose of Castile</td>
<td>4, 6, 8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satanella</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Puritani</td>
<td>7, 10, 12, 15</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benedict</td>
<td>The Lily of Killarney</td>
<td>7, 8, 11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brougham</td>
<td>Po-ia-bon-tas</td>
<td>5, 12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dibdin</td>
<td>The Waterman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Don Pasquale</td>
<td>6, 15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>L'Elisir d'Amore</td>
<td>9, 10, 11, 15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Favorita</td>
<td>2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Figlia del Reggimento</td>
<td>5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda di Chamounix</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucia di Lammermoor</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucrezia Borgia</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Flotow</td>
<td>Martha</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grétry (arr. Loder)</td>
<td>Midas</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marsh</td>
<td>The Gentleman in Black</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>L'Africaine</td>
<td>11, 12, 13, 14</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Les Huguenots</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15</td>
<td>48</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Prophète</td>
<td>7, 10, 11, 12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Robert le Diable</td>
<td>12, 13, 14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Don Giovanni</td>
<td>3, 4, 6, 7, 8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Nozze di Figaro</td>
<td>4, 6, 7, 12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rooke</td>
<td>Amilie</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Composer Opera Seasons in which the opera appeared Partial Performances Full Performances
---
Rossini Il Barbiere di Siviglia 8, 9, 10, 15. 2, 8. 10, 11, 12, 13. 14. 3 2 6 0 13 12
Cenerentola
Semiramide
Guglielmo Tell

Verdi Un Ballo in Maschera 15. 15. 2, 6, 7, 8, 15. 4, 5, 6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. 1 2 6 1 10 6 15 31
I Due Foscari
Ernani
Rigoletto
La Traviata
Il Trovatore

Wallace Lurline 1, 4, 5 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15. 1 13 31
Maritana

Weber Der Freischütz 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 12. 10, 11 1 31 13
Oberon

TOTAL: 45 operas 15 seasons, averaging 34 partial performances 582
18 composers

^For the purposes of this and other tables relating to repertoire, the term ‘partial’ means that at least one act of the work was performed. ¶No composer is ever cited for this work.679

Beyond the staged works listed above, the company also performed oratorios, masses, and other choral works, as Table 11.4 illustrates.

### Table 11.4: Non-operatic works performed by Lyster Company, 1861–68

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Number of Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beethoven</td>
<td>Symphony No. 9 in d minor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handel</td>
<td>Messiah</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haydn</td>
<td>The Creation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendelssohn</td>
<td>Elijah</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lobgesang</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reiff</td>
<td>Requiem for Burke and Wills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Stabat Mater</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7 works</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

679 It is described variously as an operetta and a burletta, which would be consistent with Grétry’s work Le jugement de Midas (1778), which was originally conceived as a ‘comédie mêlée d’ariettes’ (modeled on English comic ballad opera). Furthermore, Grétry’s work, arranged by George Loder, was quite well known in San Francisco, whence the company had come. Given these circumstances it is quite likely that this is the operetta presented by Lyster in 1862. (see: M. Elizabeth C Bartlet, ‘Comédie mêlée d’ariettes’, in Stanley Sadie (ed.), The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, Oxford Music Online (Oxford University Press, Accessed 23rd December 2010). ‘Julia Gould’, Daily Alta California, April 4th 1854, p. 3.)
The facts and figures above are impressive even without context or comparison. Yet, a spot of cross-millennial comparison may illuminate still further the extent of Lyster’s achievement. In its most prolific year, 1862, the company gave 147 full-length opera performances and 22 full-length concerts in Melbourne (bringing the total number of performance evenings to 169). This extraordinary number of performances is comparable to the 163 performances which Opera Australia, Australia’s national opera company, gave in 2009.\textsuperscript{680} Whereas Opera Australia had an income of AUD$68.8 million, a staff of 423 (FTE) artists, crew and managerial staff, and the support of multiple tiers of government, innumerable commercial partners, many generous philanthropists and its loyal audiences and subscribers,\textsuperscript{681} Lyster’s company had a staff of 31 (augmented in later years to up to 52), and only its modest box office receipts to rely on.

The length, diversity and interest of Lyster’s seasons compared to the uneven talent of his artists, the small number of his employees, his paltry assets and the meagreness of the financial investment in his company stand as a record that no Australian opera company (either before or since) has been able to match. Future companies may have improved on Lyster’s performance practices, but no impresario has been able to deliver so much with so little. In this respect Lyster is, indeed, a marvel worthy of his reputation, and it is likely that this disparity between the company’s humble resources, both human and financial, and the profusion of its output lay the foundations of the Lyster mythology.

**Myth Three—Lyster’s company presented a purer form of opera than its predecessors**

Another myth that has crept into Australian opera history is the idea that Lyster’s troupe was the first ‘proper’ opera company; that is, it was the first to present only opera, and to present that opera in full. Upon closer inspection, however, Lyster is once again found not better or worse than his contemporaries. In amongst his operas are the strange and varied entertainments that accompanied high-art music opera across the world at this time. To demonstrate this it is useful to examine the performances and programming of the company, with particular emphasis on Season 5.

The company’s early seasons did not show the commitment to ‘serious’ opera which its reputation might lead one to expect. This may partially be a result of the knowledge and confidence of its individual artists, but also has its roots in the company’s self-identity. The company had come to Australia with a view to stay only for a season or two. Its success, coupled with the outbreak of the American Civil War in April of 1861, had been good reasons to prolong its visit, but a sense of impermanence lingered about the company. By Season 5, the troupe still resembled an opera company in exile: the seasons was advertised as ‘farewell’ seasons and there were ‘farewell’ benefits for the singers. More significantly, no serious investment in infrastructure or new repertoire had yet been made. The long runs of


\textsuperscript{681} Ibid., and Ziggy Switkowski, Tim Mcfarlane, and Craig M. Jackson (Ernst and Young Sydney) (Auditor), ‘Opera Australia Financial Report 2009’, (Sydney: Opera Australia, 2010), p. 7.
Meyerbeer, Gounod and Verdi for which the company is now so well remembered began only in Season 6. The first five seasons were dominated by the sentimental English operas of Wallace, Balfe, and Benedict, along with Bel Canto tours de force for soprano, Lucia di Lammermoor, Lucrezia Borgia, Linda di Chamounix and La Sonnambula (see Tables 2–4 above). This repertoire was not remarkably different to that which had become before the arrival of the Lyster troupe, and the lack of novelty was disappointing for some of Melbourne’s opera-goers.

Throughout its early seasons, the company performed works that are more properly described as burlesques or vaudevilles, including Brougham’s Po-ca-bon-tas, the Grétry/Loder Midas, and Dibdin’s Waterman. There were even instances of pantomime. During Christmas 1862–63, for example, several members of the company including Kitts, Hodson and Trevor teamed up with local actors such as Kate Warde and Charles Young to present the pantomimes typically found during Yuletide in the British theatrical tradition. In these early seasons, Lyster’s company also liaised with ballet dancers and vaudevillians who performed works as diverse I Zingari (a vaudeville-ballet set to the music of Hérold’s opera Zampa) and La Vivandiere, (a serious one-act ballet composed by Cesare Pugni, choreographed by Arthur Saint-Léon of Coppelia fame).

In Season 5, after twenty-three performances, Lyster abandoned opera in favour of a series of concerts. The programmes were a typical mix of vocal and instrumental music, opera arias and folk ballads. A few featured ‘descriptive scenas’ such as Jessie’s Dream: a story of the Relief at Siege of Lucknow (1857). Many of the concerts had themes. Some centred around specific composers: there was one featuring all of Locke’s incidental music for Macbeth, whilst another was ‘An Evening with Sir Henry Bishop’. Patriotism featured highly with several concerts commemorating ‘Britishness’: there was a concert for the Queen’s birthday, another for the anniversary of the Victory of the Battle of Waterloo, and one advertised as ‘The Rose, the Shamrock and the Thistle’ which, as Figure 11.7 shows, was a celebration of English, Scottish and Irish song.

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682 ‘Theatre Royal – Grand Opera and Pantomime’, The Argus, December 26th 1862, p. 8. This was not without international precedent, for in 1859/60, the Louisa Pyne Company, occupying the Royal Opera House at Covent Garden, had combined performances of Mellon’s new opera Victorine with productions of the pantomime Puss in Boots. See ‘The Christmas Pantomimes and Burlesques’, The Times, December 27th 1859, p. 6, and ‘Royal English Opera, Covent Garden’, The Times, January 11th 1860, p. 8.

683 Also known as broadside ballads, descriptive scenas are narratives about historical events underpinned by a music score of popular tunes. Consider Grace Campbell and John Blockley, Jessie’s Dream: A Story of the Relief at the Siege of Lucknow (London: Stannards and Dixon, 1858).
The defining aspect of Lyster’s Season 5 concert series, however, was neither its repertoire, nor its diversity, nor the impresario’s penchant for all things British; it was, instead, its smell, for this was an *aromatic* concert season. The star of the show was not Escott or Squires but a contraption known as a ‘perfume vaporiser’, which Lyster had imported from France. Upon its début, the machine was described thus:

> During the intermission the theatre [was] perfumed with the most exquisite scents, by means of Rimmel’s Patent Perfume Vaporizer, imported expressly by Mr. Lyster for these concerts. The vaporizer, now all the rage in London, has never been used before in this colony.684

The box could make the theatre smell of a field of violets or a gentleman’s eau de cologne. Melbourne had been quite responsive to Lyster’s Promenade Concert series, but in the days after the little box of smells first appeared, Melbourne was in a mania.685 The *parfums* succeeded in attracting those impartial to the charms of ‘Eily Mavourneen’, ‘The Merry Little Grey Fat Man’ and Verdi alike.

> 685 Comparison of reports on attendance from late May to early June.
the stuff of opera. The wonderful diversity and eccentricity of Lyster’s fifth season clearly shows that Lyster did not arrive and suddenly delineate opera from its more popular cousins. Instead, Lyster employed every available means to attract as wide an audience as possible. Rather than raise the company onto a false pedestal, the company should be recognised for the sometimes deft, sometimes clumsy, but always interesting way it married different art forms early on in its residency. Purity of form came much later in the life of the company, and was perfected only by later companies.

***

Despite Lyster’s initial intentions and the plethora of false farewells he advertised, Lyster and his company ended up presenting fifteen seasons of opera over its seven year residency in Melbourne. By 1868, however, it was evident that the company’s residency was drawing to a natural close. The American Civil War had been over for several years and a post-war recovery economy was starting to boom there. The company’s artists were seven years older than when they had arrived—some had married, some had died, and some were no longer able to continue their careers. Numbers were dwindling and it is likely that many of the remaining artists were starting to pressure Lyster to return to the US. The company left Australia’s shores on August 4th 1868. Lyster’s departure was, however, another false farewell. Between the departure of his first company in 1868 and his death in 1880, Lyster continued to be involved with many of Melbourne’s most significant operatic ventures. He was, however, neither the architect nor the principal manager of these troupes. Indeed, his role in the opera companies of the 1870s is best described as consultative rather than managerial; he usually became involved only when the impresari of these companies, lacking knowledge and experience of the Melbourne market, invited him to join the management to lend his expertise to the endeavour. In 1868, however, Lyster was not ready to give up on opera. Using his knowledge of the Melbourne market, not only of the audience’s preferences, but also of the importance of opera to Melbourne’s identity, Lyster endeavoured to supply Melbourne with the company for which it had always craved. This ‘ideal’ opera company would have to be an ensemble of equally gifted yet diverse singers. He knew from his occasional employment of Italian and French singers that the city was especially desirous of a bona fide ‘Italian’ opera company. Over the next few years, Lyster used his knowledge and scoured the globe trying to recruit the perfect opera company for Melbourne. One thing that Lyster did not know, however, was that someone had already formed that company, and was closer than he might think. That man was Augusto Cagli. He had a company, a business partner, and, by early 1871, Cagli also had a ticket to Melbourne.
After more than two decades of being dominated by British and American singers, Melbourne’s operatic culture became thoroughly cosmopolitan. Throughout the 1870s and ‘80s, Melbourne was treated to innumerable Italian artists as well as singers from Spain, France, Croatia and Prussia. These artists, some of whom were internationally esteemed, introduced Melbourne to a host of works hitherto unknown to the city (works by Apolloni, Petrella, Ricci, Pedrotti, Marchetti, Verdi, Ponchielli, Meyerbeer, Bizet, Halévy, Offenbach, Lecocq, Thomas and Wagner). The ascendancy of continental opera singers and the increasing preeminence of these modern works in Melbourne was significant. Melbourne was fast outgrowing it colonial and gold-town identity, and its increasingly international operatic culture both reflected and shaped the city’s broader social and political transformation. Once again, as this chapter will demonstrate, the strength of Melbourne’s operatic culture stemmed as much from the settler-model underpinning the colony (and the egalitarianism which both Melbourne’s founding myth and the style of imperialism practised in Australia engendered), as from the continuing strength of its economy.

This chapter is in two parts. The first section outlines the activities of several of the key impresari and artists of 1870s and ‘80s Melbourne in order demonstrate the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of the city’s operatic culture. In the second section, the chapter explores the nexus between the evolution of this cosmopolitan operatic culture and the city’s general maturation. It argues that there was a symbiotic relationship between the city and its operatic culture: the city’s maturation facilitated the establishment of a cosmopolitan operatic culture and, in turn, the cosmopolitanism of opera in Melbourne endowed the city with greater cultural authority, something that was crucial to the geopolitical prestige the city was endeavouring to secure.
Age of the Italians: Cagli-Pompei Royal Italian Opera (1871–74)

Figure 12.1: Some of the original members of the Cagli-Pompei Company ca. 1871. From Left to Right: Giulia Tamburini-Coy, Leandro Coy, Clotilde Raveville, Enrico Dondi, Filippo Codina, Luigia Tournerie, Francesco Tournerie. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

Figure 12.2: Other original members of the company. Left to right: Pietro Favas, Margherita Zenoni, Augusta Cortesi, Ferante Rosnati. Courtesy State Library of Victoria.
The first sizeable company to perform in Melbourne after the 1861–68 Lyster troupe was the Cagli-Pompei Royal Italian Opera Company (see Figures 12.1 and 12.2). The company was unusual in that it was a composite company; that is, it featured artists who had been previously associated with two Italian impresari, Augusto Cagli and Giovanni Pompei. As intimated in Chapter 6, these men had been active as impresari in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific region since the mid-nineteenth century, and came to Melbourne directly from Calcutta. After years of trial and error, Cagli and Pompei were able to assemble a troupe of remarkable size and quality. Cagli and Pompei’s 1871 troupe consisted of fifteen singers and eight managerial/backstage personnel, a compliment of talent that easily outstripped any other company hitherto seen in Australia (See Table 12.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margherita Zenoni</td>
<td>soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clotilde Rosevalle</td>
<td>soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giulia Tamburini-Coy</td>
<td>soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta Cortesi</td>
<td>mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigia Tournerie</td>
<td>mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigia Polli</td>
<td>contralto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferante [Ferrante] Rosnati</td>
<td>tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelo Zennari</td>
<td>tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leandro Coy</td>
<td>tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Benso</td>
<td>tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filippo Coliva</td>
<td>baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francisco Tournerie</td>
<td>baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrico Dondi</td>
<td>bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antonio Grandi</td>
<td>bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietro Favas</td>
<td>bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alessandro Rubini</td>
<td>prompter and chorusmaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achille Marzorati</td>
<td>conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberto Zelman</td>
<td>conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristide Frigerio</td>
<td>scenic artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serafino Rivolta</td>
<td>machinist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domenico Bartolomeotti</td>
<td>costumer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annibal Gamboa</td>
<td>secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusto Cagli</td>
<td>impresario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni Pompei</td>
<td>impresario and sometime bass comico and cor anglais player</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout the company’s residency it would be known under various names, such as the Lyster-Cagli company. As these changes of name did not reflect any significant shift in the the operation of the company, the troupe will be referred to as the Cagli-Pompei company throughout this chapter in order to avoid confusion. The word ‘Royal’ in the company’s official title refers to the fact that it secured Vice-Regal patronage in both Victoria and New South Wales; this patronage bestowed various advantages to the company, including the right to be referred to as a ‘Royal’ company.
Both Cagli and Pompei were more pragmatic in their approach to casting than Lyster had been. Cagli in particular had no qualms about replacing an unpopular singer or employing an additional singer just for the novelty s/he would give the season. The impresari were also committed to developing the company’s chorus and orchestra. Hence, by 1874 the company looked quite different to the 1871 company (see Table 12.2); of its eighteen principals, only nine were members of the original 1871 troupe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12.2: Singers of the Cagli-Pompei Company, Melbourne 1874.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maria Palmieri * Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Persiani * Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita Zenoni-Gamboa Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giulia Tamburini-Coy Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusta Corsini Baldassare * Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almacinzia Magi * Mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luigia Tournerie Mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leandro Coy Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armes Beaumont * Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferante Rosnati Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Johnson * Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tavella* Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filippo Coliva Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesco Tournerie Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domenico Baldassare * Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrico Dondi Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietro Favas Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiorani * Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus of Forty-Eight singers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corps de Ballet of twenty-four dancers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes a singer not part of the original 1871 company

The company’s list of artists is formidable not only from the perspective of its unprecedented completeness and size, but also for the origins, experience and quality of the individuals of which it was comprised. With the exception of two locals, Armes Beaumont and George Johnson, who were hired in Australia, all the singers in the troupe were European. Although the singers of this troupe were not the first European artists to perform in Australia, the company was by virtue of its sheer size the first truly continental opera company in the city, a perception that boosted the city’s ambitions of (and pretensions to) a cosmopolitan identity.

It was not only the singer’s origins, but also their professional experience, that lent the city an air of cosmopolitanism and cultural authority. The majority of the troupe’s singers had experience as principals at some of Italy’s first and second-tier opera houses, like La Scala, La Fenice, San Carlo, La Pergola, Teatro Regio di Parma, Teatro Malibran Venice, the

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687 Consider Clarisse Cailly, Eugenio and Giovanni Bianchi and Fannie Simonsen in the 1850s and ‘60s, whilst more recently there had been small numbers of Italian singers in the 1869 and 1870 Lyster troupes.
Teatro Re and the Teatro della Canobbiana in Milan, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Teatro Regio di Torino, Teatro Comunale di Catania, and Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa. Others had performed principal roles at premier European and American opera houses in cities including Seville, Valencia, Lisbon, Zagreb, St Petersburg, Bucharest, Constantinople, New York, Philadelphia, Saõ Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Montevideo. Amongst the more talented and celebrated of Cagli’s artists were Margherita Zenoni, Enrichetta Bosisio, Leandro Coy, Filippo Coliva, Augusta Cortesi, Almacinzia Magi, and Giulia Tamburini-Coy, the talented coloratura niece of world-famous baritone Antonio Tamburini. The careers of individual artists (see Appendix E) attest not only to the quality and experience of the company (making the Cagli-Pompei easily the most prestigious company to have performed in Melbourne), but also to the company’s cosmopolitan pedigree. The Cagli-Pompei company was the first company in Melbourne that could boast a full compliment of singers that were not only continental by birth, but also in experience and quality.

The company’s superior composition facilitated numerous improvements to Australia’s operatic industry. The consistency of talent amongst the company’s artists meant that, unlike the Lyster company of 1861–68, which was essentially a vehicle for Escott and Squires, the Cagli Company was a true ensemble company, in which each of the versatile and diverse talents was able to supported the others. This trait translated into several palpable advantages. Firstly, the ensemble quality of the company had a profound effect on repertoire. Between 1871 and 1874, the company performed thirty-six full-length operas of which eleven were Australian premières (see Table 12.3). In addition, the company also gave two one-act operatic works (Donizetti’s *Mamma Agata* and Hatten’s *Simon the Cellarer*) and two important sacred works (Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* and the Australian première of Verdi’s *Requiem*).

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689 Although this section will concentrate on the artistic side of the company, it should be noted that the staffing advantages were not just vocal: they were also managerial. The existence of a fully developed management team allowed the singers to concentrate on the artistic, rather than the business, side of opera, a state of affairs which was surely envied by the company’s smaller rivals such as the Agatha States’ Opera Company, which comprised of only four singers, with States acting simultaneously as prima donna and impresario. Rocha, 'The Cagli Pompei Royal Italian Opera Company’, p. 38.

690 Two other operas, *Anna Bolena* and *Nabucco*, were performed by the company in Sydney, but not in Melbourne. *Anna Bolena*, performed May 31st 1875, by the company, now run solely by Pompei, was also an Australian première.
Table 12.3: The Melbourne Repertoire of the Cagli-Pompei Royal Italian Opera Company, 1871–74.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances 1871–74.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apolloni</td>
<td><em>L'Ebreo</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td><em>Norma</em></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Sonnambula</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Puritani</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cimarosa</td>
<td><em>Il Matrimonio Segreto</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td><em>Don Pasquale</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Favorita</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Figlia del Reggimento</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>L'Elisir d'Amore</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lucia di Lammermoor</em></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Lucrèzia Borgia</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mamma Agata</em> (a comic scene)*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Poliluto</em></td>
<td>2; ‡1: 2 full acts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>de Ferrari</td>
<td><em>Pipile</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiorvanti</td>
<td><em>Il Ritorno di Columella – the final scene, including the chorus of the lunatics</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flotow</td>
<td><em>Martha</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td><em>Faust</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Romeo et Juliette (arias)</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halevy</td>
<td><em>La Juive</em></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatten</td>
<td><em>Simon the Cellarer (a comic scene)</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td><em>L'Africaine</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Les Huguenots</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Prophète</em></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Robert le Diable</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td><em>Don Giovanni</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Le Nozze di Figaro</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacini</td>
<td><em>Saffo</em></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedrotti</td>
<td><em>Tutto in Maschera</em> (undefined extensive excerpts)*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrelli</td>
<td><em>Ione (arias and trio)</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricci &amp; Ricci</td>
<td><em>Il Birraio di Preston</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Crispino e la Comare</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td><em>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</em></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Guglielmo Tell</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mosè in Egitto</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Seminamide</em></td>
<td>7; ‡1: arias and the 3rd act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Stabat Mater</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Due Foscari - (last act)</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Lombardi</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Luisa Miller - (arias and duets)</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Requiem</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rigoletto</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Macbeth</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>La Traviata</em></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>I Vespri Siciliani</em></td>
<td>4; ‡1: arias and duets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>37 full operas, 2 1-act operatic works, 6 fragments only operas, 2 sacred works</td>
<td>331 performances of full-length operas; 4 performances of 1-act works; 23 performances of opera scenes, 6 performances of sacred works</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes Australian première; ‡ denotes fragment only (as specified). It should be noted that this list excludes recitals and concerts, of which the company gave many throughout its residency.
The lengths of the seasons varied, but the company performed no fewer than eighty nights each season. During these seasons, a broad selection of the company’s total repertoire would be produced, with between nineteen and twenty-one operas being produced. The majority of operas were in the Bel Canto, Grand-Opéra or Romantic styles, with only Cimarosa’s *Il Matrimonio Segreto* and Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and *Le Nozze di Figaro* having been composed prior to 1800.

The company’s repertoire and the scale of its seasons makes it comparable not only to the Lyster 1861–68 company, but also its European contemporaries. The autumn 1870 and 1871 seasons at Covent Garden, for example, consisted of seventeen and fifteen operas respectively, mostly consisting of Bel Canto works, a fair amount of the modern Italian repertoire and a small but steady supply of French grand-opéra. The spring seasons were larger, with between twenty-five and twenty-eight operas being performed, although the repertoire was much the same. The Cagli-Pompeii company’s practice of bringing forth between nineteen and twenty-one operas per season was clearly comparable with the practice at Europe’s elite houses. Moreover, with regard to the depth and emphasis amongst the repertoire, the Cagli Company actually delivered a more balanced spread of Bel Canto, modern Italian and French grand-opéra than its British contemporaries. The length of the Cagli-Pompeii seasons coupled with its extensive and modern repertoire furthered the development of a cosmopolitan arts culture in Melbourne.

The effect of the company’s ensemble nature can be seen not only in the volume of repertoire it staged, but also in the manner in which it mounted it. The singers who sang leads also represented secondary characters, with the result that every character was presented in a meaningful and meritorious manner. Critics immediately recognised the company’s ensemble nature and the superior performance it facilitated:

> The admirable manner in which the artists work together, and the filling of subordinate parts by good artists. This makes an ensemble far more delightful to the lover of music than the exquisite trilling of one nightingale amidst the croaking of frogs…

Indeed, the company’s composition resulted in the extinction of many of the performance practices of which Melbourne had been most embarrassed (such as female tenors, polyglot performances and omitted roles). The quality, depth and breadth of the troupe’s vocal and instrumental forces also allowed the company to present its repertoire in the most complete form that had been seen in Australia. Audiences and critics were delighted with the completeness of the company’s productions. The Cagli Company’s first production of *Lucrezia Borgia* was significant for being the first to fill all the roles and to perform the entire score; the critic exclaimed that ‘…it was a pleasure to hear the opera complete after the melancholy selections that audiences have been treated to in past seasons’. Melbourne felt like it had finally ‘arrived’; it was as though the Cagli-Pompeii company had

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691 *The Times* Digital Archive 1870–1871.
692 This balanced programme set Melbourne apart from opera in both London, the home culture of the majority of the audience, and Italy, the home culture of the company, where Modern Italian repertoire was by far the most dominant element in the seasons of La Scala, San Carlo or La Fenice.
694 ‘The Opera – Martha’, *The Age*, May 19th, 1871, p. 3.
695 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5th September 1871.
heralded not only a new operatic age, but also a new identity for the city. Melbourne saw its maturity reflected in the polished performances of the opera troupe, and took the company’s cosmopolitanism as a symbol of its own sophistication and coming-of-age.

Only a few months after the dissolution of the Cagli-Pompei company, Melbourne found itself suddenly hosting two continental artists whose presence and activities contributed to the city’s burgeoning cosmopolitanism. In July 1875, Adelaide Ristori, the famous Italian tragedienne, and the eminent Croatian soprano, Ilma de Murska, arrived in the city on board the same ship. Over the coming months, each through her own art form would transform the city’s culture.

The Croatian Nightingale: Ilma de Murska (1875–76)

De Murska (see Figure 12.3) had a career spanning over ten years, during which she had performed in all of Europe and North America’s premier opera houses alongside many of the opera world’s biggest stars. De Murska’s appearance in Melbourne was greeted with interest and excitement, not only in anticipation of her performances but also because of what her visit represented.

The Argus declared that de Murska’s arrival confirmed Melbourne’s reputation as the city of the southern hemisphere:

…the event is significant in more ways than one… it [proves] that artists in Melbourne meet with the just recognition of their talents, that the metropolis of the south is made a chief resting-place in the modern professional grand tour. With Ilma de Murska to illustrate music and Adelaide Ristori the drama, it must be owned that our claims to consideration in this light are in nowise neglected.

Indeed, when news followed in a few weeks that the Austrian actress Fanny Janauschek had arrived in Melbourne, the city became convinced that it had risen to the apex of the Western world:

The simultaneous arrival in these colonies of two such artistes as Madame Ristori and Mdlle. Ilma de Murska, followed almost immediately by Madame Janauschek, is conclusive evidence of the admission of Australia into the comity of nations standing at the head of civilisation. So long and costly a journey would not be undertaken without the confident expectation of finding here audiences of sufficient culture to qualify them to appreciate ability of the highest order.

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696 Although she was often referred to as Hungarian (see both 'Ilma de Murska', The Argus, July 31st, 1875, p. 9, and ‘Theatre Royal’, http://www.archive.org/details/cihm_17587), de Murska (born Ema Pukšec) was actually Croatian, was born and raised in Ogulin, Croatia. See Davor Schopf, 'Dani Ilme Murske u Ogulinu', Vijenac, 338/15 (2007).


698 Her résumé included roles such as the Queen of the Night (Die Zauberflöte), the title role of Dinorah and Senta (Der fliegende Holländer) in houses like Her Majesty’s Theatre, London. James Henry Mapleson, The Mapleson memoirs, 1848-1888, 2 vols. (1 London Remington, 1888).

699 'Ilma de Murska', The Argus, July 31st, 1875, p. 9.

700 'Madame Adelaide Ristori', The Argus, August 28th 1875, p. 5.
It was taken as a matter of certainty that de Murska’s stay in Australia would be successful, despite the various other attractions with which she had to compete, ‘because a taste for music is very generally diffused among our population, and has been educated by the permanent establishment among us many years ago, both of English and Italian opera’. These predictions were accurate: over the next year, de Murska gave dozens of concerts, appeared in numerous opera productions in Melbourne and used Melbourne as her base for visiting other Australasian cities. For its part, Australia was very good to de Murska—her agent estimated she profited from her Australian adventure to the tune of £16,000.

Initially, de Murska mounted a series of ‘opera scenes’ concerts, employing former Cagli-Pompei singers Rosnati, Favas, and Susini as her associates. Rather than satisfying Melbourne’s audiences, these concerts merely whet the city’s appetite and soon de Murska’s agent, Diego de Vivo, was in search of an opera company for his prima donna. Meanwhile, in late 1875, W.S. Lyster had formed an English and Opéra-Bouffe Company and secured the services of American soprano Emilie Melville as his star. The season had opened on Oct 6th 1875, and by late February had performed a wide range of repertoire over 118 performances. Melville’s contract was coming to an end, however, and there were still some weeks until Lyster’s comedy company was due to begin its theatrical season. Hence a seemingly unlikely match was born. Melbourne was desperate to hear and see De Murska in staged opera; de Murska was not averse to the idea, but had no theatre or company; Lyster had a theatre and company, but no prima donna.

Lyster and de Vivo formed a composite company; Lyster supplied the majority of the company whilst de Vivo supplied de Murska as well as her associates of choice, Rosnati, Favas, and Susini. De Murska, however, refused to perform six nights a week, demanding only three nights, with alternating rest nights. Eager to keep the theatre from being dark half the week, Lyster hired Fannie Simonsen, and also gave a local woman, Clara Thompson, an opportunity to step into bigger roles. Over the next three weeks, Melbourne was treated to the strangest hybrid-company it had yet seen: opera in Italian, opera in English, Offenbach comedy juxtaposed against Romantic tragedy, and no less than four prime donne from four different countries. Table 12.4 below shows the diversity of both the repertoire and artists of the Lyster-de Vivo company which gave twenty-three performances between February 21st and March 17th 1876.

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704 For details of this company and its repertoire see Appendix I.
705 Interestingly de Murska continued to promote some of these artists in Europe. Susini, for example, became one of her associate artists, and they performed in concerts all over Great Britain together. See ‘Miss Farler’s Annual Concert’, *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, February 3rd 1880.
Figure 12.3: ‘The Croatian Nightingale’: Ilma de Murska in Melbourne 1876. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.
Table 12.4: The repertoire of the Lyster-de Vivo English and Italian Opera Company, Melbourne 1876.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Prima Donna</th>
<th>Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balfe</td>
<td>The Bohemian Girl</td>
<td>Simonsen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>De Murska</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Lucia di Lammermoor</td>
<td>De Murska</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>De Murska</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecocq</td>
<td>La Fille de Madame Angot</td>
<td>Clara Thompson</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giroflé-Girofla</td>
<td>Melville</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenbach</td>
<td>La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein</td>
<td>Simonsen</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Perichole</td>
<td>Melville</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La princesse de Trébizonde</td>
<td>Clara Thompson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>Hamlet (Mad Scene Only)</td>
<td>De Murska</td>
<td>1 (in double bill with Il Trovatore)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>Il Trovatore</td>
<td>De Murska</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td>Maritana</td>
<td>Simonsen</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12 operas</td>
<td>4 prime donne</td>
<td>23 evenings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rather than diluting her pedigree, de Murska’s involvement in the makeshift Lyster-de Vivo company endowed the company with an air of sophistication that it otherwise would not have achieved. The presence and activities of De Murska, with her exotic origins, continental experience and international stature, contributed towards the evolution of a more cosmopolitan cultural identity for Melbourne.

**Continental Hybrids: Pompei Lazar Italian Opera Company, Antonietta Link and Wagner (1876–77)**

Melbourne’s claims to cosmopolitanism reached new heights in the late 1870s with the Italo-German-Australian partnership between Giovanni Pompei, Samuel Lazar and Antonietta Link. In 1876, Pompei returned to Australia after spending some years pursuing his operatic enterprises in India and South Asia. Pompei entered into a partnership with Samuel Lazar, an Australian entrepreneur who was the manager of Sydney’s newly-built Theatre Royal, to form the Pompei-Lazar Royal Italian Opera Company.706 The company was nominally based in Sydney but gave more performances in Melbourne, illustrating that even Sydney natives like Lazar recognised that Melbourne was the cultural capital of the Australian colonies.

Like Pompei’s previous companies, the Pompei-Lazar Company consisted entirely of European artists (see Table 12.5), some of whom would remain in Australia long-term and continue to contribute to the regions burgeoning operatic culture.

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Table 12.5: The singers of the Pompei-Lazar company, Melbourne 1877

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Augusta Guadagnini</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Caranti Vita</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlotta de Baraty</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria de Ronzi</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margherita Venosta</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleonora Parodi Fabris</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietro Paladini</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo Camero</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni Gambetti</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelo Cisella</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arturo Stefani</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augusto Tessada</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaetano Cesari</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the Cagli Company, whose singers were each of similar quality and experience, the Pompei-Lazar Company was a mixed bag. Some had enjoyed successful careers in Italy’s first and second tier opera houses; Parodi Fabris, for example, had been one of Teatro Regio di Parma’s most important singers since 1860, whilst Paladini had secured an engagement as a tenor in Mapleson’s 1874 company. For others, the adjective mediocre would be a generous descriptor of their skills and experience. The company may have lacked consistency but it was at least numerous, a fact that allowed it to perform a wide repertoire. Yet, even with regard to repertoire, the company proved inferior to its predecessor. During the first Melbourne season of 1877, 15 operas were performed, with a total of 38 full-length opera performances (see Table 12.6). Whilst this may, superficially, seem comparable to the Cagli Company’s record, analysis of the Pompei-Lazar troupe’s repertoire reveals a lack of diversity and novelty. The company neglected the Meyerbeer operas that had previously proved so popular with the Melbourne public. Similarly, there was but a paltry smattering of opera buffa: Don Pasquale and L’Elisir d’Amore were conspicuous only by their absence, Pipele and Crispino were reduced to excerpts, and even the beloved Il Barbiere di Siviglia only received three performances, and these were performed so poorly as to invite nothing but ‘criticism to an adverse point’.708

707 For further details about these artists’ backgrounds see Appendix J.
708 ‘The Opera – Un Ballo in Maschera’, The Argus, March 7th 1877, p. 5
Table 12.6: The Melbourne Repertoire of the Pompei-Lazar Company 1877

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>La Figlia del Reggimento</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linda di Chamounix</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucia di Lammermoor</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucrezia Borgia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Ferrari</td>
<td>Pipelé</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marchetti</td>
<td>Ray Blas*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Don Giovanni</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedrotti</td>
<td>Tutti in Maschera*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricci &amp; Ricci</td>
<td>Crispino e la Comare*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>Un Ballo in Maschera</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Il Trovatore</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15 operas</strong></td>
<td><strong>38 full length operas; 4 performances of excerpts</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes a Melbourne première; ^denotes excerpts only.

Despite its inferiority in many arenas, the Pompei-Lazar Company fulfilled two crucial functions. The first may be best described, somewhat unflatteringly, as a stopgap. The Pompei-Lazar troupe filled the void left by the Cagli company, the departure of Ilma de Murska and several other companies, ensuring that Melbourne continued to have an active Italian opera culture. This was vital for a city clamouring for cultural authority, for, in order to bestow its full prestige and weight as a cultural artefact, ‘The Opera’ has to exist as a habit, an institution, a mainstay of the metropolis’ social, political, economic and cultural life. Had this company not sustained the city’s operatic culture, opera may have reverted to being a transient, transplanted phenomenon—occasionally being in the city, but not ever being of the city.

The Pompei-Lazar company stumbled upon its most important role in the second half of 1877 when, like Lyster’s English Opera Company of 1875, the troupe became a support vehicle for a visiting luminary: German soprano, Antonietta (Antonie) Link (see Figure 12.4). In Europe, Link was best known for her performances in Viennese operetta, rather than the grand opera roles that she would tackle in Melbourne, and she was, indeed, as much an actress as a singer. Having grown up on stage at the Burgtheater, Link had made her début at the age of 16 as Agathe in Der Freischütz in Leipzig, but, despite some experience in traditional prima donna fare (such as Marguerite in an 1872 production of Faust, Link found was most famous and successful in travesti operetta roles at the Karlstheater in Vienna during 1870s. She was lauded for her ability to completely subvert

her femininity in these roles: ‘...some actresses like Antonie Link were not even recognizable as women in their male outfits.’

Although her reputation for these comic roles preceded her to Melbourne—it is important to note that Link was not Melbourne’s preferred Wagnerian prima donna and was hired only after negotiations with Italy’s first Elsa, Bianca Blume, fell through—Link was received as an artist of importance and quality, and it was hoped that she would add to the city’s growing claim to being cosmopolitan metropolis of the world.

Figure 12.4: Antonietta Link in Melbourne 1877. Courtesy of State Library of Victoria.

Given her reputation and her vocal and dramatic talents, it is unsurprising that Melbourne’s artists and public alike rushed to make Link feel as welcome as possible, showering her with gifts and public praises. They also aimed to make the most of her presence. It is at this point that the Pompei-Lazar company found its true raison d’être; not as an ensemble, Italian company but, rather, as support mechanism for Link’s remarkable faculties. As Table 12.7 attests, the company’s repertoire was entirely shaped by Link’s strengths and

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predilections: Gone was the Donizetti that had dominated the company’s previous season. In its place were the Romantic operas of Meyerbeer, Gounod, Verdi and Wagner. *Aida* and *Lohengrin*, the two premières, accounted for more than half the total number of performances alone.

Table 12.7: The Melbourne Repertoire of the Pompei-Lazar Company in partnership with Antoinetta Link, 1877

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Ferrari</td>
<td><em>Pipile</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td><em>Faust</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td><em>Les Huguenots</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Robert le Diable</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td><em>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</em></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Semiramide</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Aida</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wagner</td>
<td><em>Lohengrin</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 operas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46 performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There has been some discussion, both at the time and in more recent years, about the significance of Link to Melbourne’s operatic development. Link’s arrival galvanized both the company and the public. She was the first German star to come to Melbourne, a fact that finally pushed Wagner onto the Australian stage. Link and Wagner became ‘the principal topics for discussion in social circles after war, railways, and politics,’ with people star-spotting Link in public spaces, and ‘the wealthy amongst the citizens of Victoria giving their names and money to the [public] subscription list.’ ‘Wagnermania’ engulfed the city, and it was widely believed that the fate of *Lohengrin* would determine the fate of Melbourne and her opera-house:

We are to have the music of the future as represented in *Lohengrin*, and the Melbourne Opera-house, after counting the cost and putting itself upon its metal, is either going to stand or fall as an Opera-house, by the result.716

With ‘Wagnermania’ in danger of overwhelming the impresari, Pompei and Lazar invited Lyster to step up from being the theatre lessee to being the artistic director. Lyster immediately upped the ante: he poured enormous time, energy and resources into the production of *Lohengrin*: the orchestra of 28 was augmented to 40 players, whilst the chorus of between 80 and 100 singers, some of whom were brought over from Sydney, was unrelentingly drilled by Julius Herz, who was hired expressly for this purpose. Lyster also ordered expensive new scenery and costumes.718

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714 The delayed introduction of Wagner’s music to Australia had many factors. One cause was the relatively small numbers of German presence in vocal music. The ‘48ers and Liedertafel members who had formed the foundations of Melbourne’s high-art music culture had long been outweighed by Italian(ate) singers, who had patriotically ignored Wagner throughout the 1860s and ’70s.


The impresario’s efforts to please were matched only by Melbourne’s desire to advertise its sophistication by being pleased. The work was received with unprecedented approbation. The critic at *The Argus* could only criticise the English public back ‘Home’ (i.e. London) for their ‘sheer ignorance’ and ‘ignoble prejudice’ in continuing to be opposed to Wagner’s craft. He perceived the première of *Lohengrin* as a watershed moment in Melbourne’s musical history and predicted that the enthusiasm of the ‘splendid’ crowded audience would guarantee the production of others of Wagner’s works. This was a prophesy which was not to find fulfilment until the early-twentieth century.

So proud was Melbourne of its Wagnerian coming-of-age that Wagner himself was made aware of *Lohengrin’s* antipodean première. The letter quoted below, penned by German immigrant Emil Sander, illustrates the significance that the Melbourne public placed upon the arrival of Wagnerian music-drama.

Dear Sir,

You will undoubtedly be surprised to receive a letter in an unknown hand from Melbourne, Australia. I take this liberty because I believe it would please you to hear that in the course of the past month, one of your operas—*Lohengrin*—was performed for the first time in Australia.

With it a new epoch begins in the musical world of this land, which is still 'terra incognita' for so many in Europe.

William Saurin Lyster, whose picture I enclose, is the gentleman who undertook to bring the great work to performance, and he was so successful in pleasing the highly critical local public that the house was more full with every performance, and by request, the opera had to be given again and again, and still draws overflowing houses now.

Signora Antonietta Link appears as Elsa, Signor Paladini as Lohengrin and Alberto Zelman is the conductor.

Melbourne, one of the most beautiful cities in the world, although scarcely over thirty years old, has 250,000 inhabitants, three very beautiful large theatres and several small ones, and a large beautiful opera house. It is a wonderful city, and it is therefore surely no wonder that the 'Music of the Future' has met with so magnificent a reception here. I am sending you enclosed some views of Melbourne and if you should be interested, I will be delighted to send more.

…

Yours, most respectfully,

E Sander
4 September 1877

Evidently, Melbourne was not beneath the composer’s notice. A month later came Wagner’s reply, in which he indicated his delight at the news of the production and

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communicated a desire to have the operas performed in the native language of the audience (a wish that, incidentally, remains ignored in Australia to this day).

Dear Sir,

Your information has delighted me greatly and I cannot omit to thank you for it.

May you endeavour to have my works performed to you in English; only then can they be understood intimately by the English-speaking public. We hope this will happen in London.

My family and I were exceedingly interested in the views of Melbourne you sent us. As you are so kind as to be willing to let us have more, may I assure you that in doing so you would give me great pleasure.

Please present my compliments to Mr. Lyster, and even in your far away part of the world, retain a friendly attitude to

your much obliged,

Richard Wagner
Bayreuth
22 October 1877

The city boasted of its personal connection to the creator of the ‘Music of the Future’, reprinting both the Maestro’s letter and innumerable comments in most of the colony’s journals. Wagner’s letter, almost as much as his work’s performance, seemed to compound the sense amongst Melbourne’s inhabitants that the city had culturally come of age.

If assessed purely on the bases of the quality of its singers, the breadth of its repertoire and the success of its productions, the Pompei-Lazar company must be regarded as uneven, unremarkable and anti-climactic after the heights reached in these areas by its predecessors. However, once viewed in a wider social and cultural context, the importance of this company becomes more apparent. Once freed from the shackles of impersonating the Cagli company, the Pompei-Lazar Company had a formidable impact upon Melbourne’s operatic development. The term ‘star-vehicle’ is usually used pejoratively, describing a company with little value outside one or two star singers. However, like the Lyster 1861 company before it, the Pompei-Lazar company was remarkable precisely because it offered a home to talent which otherwise would not have had an opportunity for display in Melbourne. The stars of the company, significantly, were not only the singers, but also the geniuses of Wagner and Verdi.

The troupe’s activities, moreover, continued the city’s cultural authority and development. Indeed, judging by the rush of new companies that flooded Melbourne’s operatic market upon the dissolution of the Pompei-Lazar troupe, the company left the operatic culture more invigorated than it had found it. It is also testament to the internationalism that

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Melbourne’s musical culture had acquired by the late 1870s that no one, not a critic, not an audience member, not even Wagner, found it strange that three impresari (one Irish, one Italian and one Australia) had, with a German prima donna and a company of Italians, mounted a production of a German opera in an Italian translation for a predominantly English audience in Australia. Such cosmopolitanism was not remarked upon because it was not unusual: by this time, Melbourne, and indeed much of the world, was a very cosmopolitan place, and opera was just one of many expressions of this cultural pluralism.

**Opera in Marvellous Melbourne: Martin Simonsen’s Companies (1886–89)**

The trend towards cosmopolitanism and the desire to prove the city’s sophistication continued into Melbourne’s roaring 1880s. As described in Chapter 2, this was the decade in which Melbourne-mania reached the zenith, with the city’s gaining international prestige and fame. The companies that allow the most interesting exploration of Marvellous Melbourne’s relationship to opera are the troupes managed by Fannie and Martin Simonsen between 1886 and 1889.

Fannie and Martin Simonsen (Figures 11.5 and 11.6) were European musicians (a Belgian opera singer and a German violinist, respectively) who had met and married in Paris in 1857. Fannie had been a prima donna at the Opéra-Comique, appearing as Françoise Dehaes, while Martin had been a musician at many European courts including solo violinist for the King of Denmark. They arrived in Australia in 1865, after touring throughout Jamaica, South America and California, and India. Their talent was immediately recognised, with the critic of *The Argus* prophesying that ‘the cause of music in Victoria will benefit considerably by the presence here of M. and Mme. Simonsen.’ Fannie was soon co-opted into occasional performances in Lyster’s various companies, and under her own aegis she toured the urban and regional centres of Victoria and New South Wales. It was only in the 1880s, however, that the Simonsens became one of Melbourne’s major opera powers. Between 1886 and 1892, the Simonsens mounted three opera companies in Melbourne: the first two (1:1886–88; 2: 1888–89) were run in Martin’s name and are the

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724 ‘On Saturday evening last…’, *The Argus*, August 21, 1865, p. 5.
725 According to Alison Gyger, *Opera for the Antipodes: opera in Australia, 1881-1939* (Sydney: Currency Press/Pellinor, 1990), p. 23, the Simonsens cited Jamaica as the birth place of their daughter, Martina, in 1862.
729 Anae, ‘Operatic performances two hundred miles in the Australian bush’, in passim.
subject of this section. The astonishing success of the first venture was surpassed only by the atrocious failure of the second.

A third troupe run by Fannie in 1891–92 is beyond the scope of this chapter. The Simonsens had mounted an earlier company in 1882, but this company never appeared in their hometown of Melbourne, instead playing only to Sydney and Adelaide audiences. It was a different style of opera company to their later enterprises, being a small, family based troupe: Martin was conductor, Fannie the prima donna, and three of their thirteen children, Leonora, Martina and Frances [Saville], also appeared as principals. The company also hired Italian and English singers who had stayed in Australia after their engagements with other opera companies had ended; hence Pietro Paladini and Albert Brennir were employed as the company's tenors, whilst Pietro Luisetti and Ernest St Clair appeared as the baritones.
For his first Melbourne enterprise, Simonsen hired eleven singers (see Table 12.8), the majority of whom were Italian, but three of whom (Flora Graupner—see Figure 12.7, George Johnson and T. Morgan) were Melbourne locals. This company presented two seasons in Melbourne, the first of which inaugurated the city’s newest theatre, the Alexandra, on December 11th 1886.\textsuperscript{731}

\textsuperscript{731} Editorial, \textit{The Argus}, December 1st, 1886, p. 5.
Table 12.8: The artists of the Simonsen Royal Italian Opera Company, 1886–88.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice Rebottaro</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia Ciuti</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora Graupner</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angiolini Tagliava</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giovanna Cavalleri</td>
<td>Contralto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasquale Lazzarini</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuseppe Santinelli</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giuseppe Pimazzoni</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lodovico Bennuci</td>
<td>Second tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edoardo Cerne</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attilio Buzzi</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Johnson</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomaso de Alba</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Morgan</td>
<td>Second Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto Hazon</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harcourt Lee</td>
<td>Chorus-master</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12.7: Australian-born singer, Flora Graupner.\(^{732}\)

\(^{732}\) Illustrated Sydney News, August 8th 1889, p. 30.
The cast, filled as it was with so many new voices and faces, enticed the Melbourne audiences back to an operatic culture that, having not seen a fresh face since Antonietta Link back in 1877, had began to stagnate. Simonsen’s troupe was the first company of comparable size and quality to the Cagli-Pompei Company, which had delivered seasons of such regularity, abundance and diversity in the early seventies. Over its two Melbourne seasons, the size and scope of the company’s repertoire was impressive (see Table 12.9): nineteen operas were produced, five of which were Australian premières, and the season was particularly noted for introducing the Melbourne public to the works of Amilcare Ponchielli at a time when the public of Berlin, Brussels and Paris had not yet seen these works.733

Table 12.9: The Melbourne Repertoire of the New Royal Italian Opera Company (Simonsen 1), 1886–88.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>I Capuleti e i Montecchi*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donizetti</td>
<td>Belisario*‡</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucia di Lammermoor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lucrezia Borgia</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roberto Devereux</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>Les Huguenots</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Don Giovanni</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumpton</td>
<td>I Due Studenti*</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponchielli</td>
<td>La Gioconda*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I Promessi Spasi*</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossini</td>
<td>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>Un Ballo in Maschera</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ernani</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rigoletto</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Il Trovatore</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td>Mariatana</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>19 Operas</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes Australian Première. ‡Belisario was at this time undergoing revivals in Vienna and throughout Germany.734

Moreover, the company was remarkably even with respect to the talents of its singers; Emilia Ciuti and Alice Rebottaro were the undoubted stars, but they were surrounded by many able colleagues, many of whom had sung in the principal houses of Europe and North America (see Appendix K). The attractiveness of this superior company and its diverse and novel repertoire were augmented by the fact that Simonsen’s troupe was performing in Melbourne’s newest theatre, the Alexandra. The city boasted of both the auditorium (which, at the time of its construction, was the fourth-largest theatre in the world)735 and the company that filled it, claiming that, together, the theatre and the company proved the passion and sophistication of Melbourne’s citizenry:

734 Ibid., column 777.
735 Melbourne Correspondent, ‘Melbourne Tea-Table Talk’, *Western Mail*, July 3rd 1886, p. 27.
The Italian Opera Company has left Melbourne to the regret of all music-lovers. This company's present season has been one of the most successful ventures on record. A very prominent member of the dramatic profession once gave it as his opinion, in a farewell address to this city, that the taste of the Melbourne public was not, as yet, sufficiently educated to appreciate first class performances. The returns of the attendances at the Alexandra Theatre during the opera season ... seem a contradiction of the opinion of the above-mentioned gentleman.736

Many thought that Simonsen's company and the lovely Alexandra theatre together afforded lovers of the lyric muse an intellectual treat [with their] nightly productions of the master works of Italy's greatest composers. The "Alexandra" is now justly regarded as the most capacious and fashionable resort of public amusements. This handsome edifice, situated in Exhibition Street, contributed greatly to the architectural display of that thoroughfare... Internally it is noted for its excellent acoustic properties, and the greatest regard has been paid to the convenience of patrons by its widely esteemed and worthy proprietor, Monsieur Joubert... Ever since this elegant place of resort came under the spirited management of Mr. Martin Simonsen its career has been an uninterrupted series of success, for never before has a more accomplished cast of artiste been introduced to an Australian public. Mr. Simonsen has earned the gratitude of all lovers of true art, for most of the principal performers of his selected company are stars of the first magnitude.737

Melbourne flocked to the opera, and individuals and critics did nought but sing the company's praises; one gentleman, E. Peletti, congratulated Simonsen on forming ‘what I have no hesitation in calling the most talented Italian Opera Company we ever had in Australia'738 and his opinion appears to have been shared by Melbourne’s media.739

So feverish was Melbourne with opera fever that, not even halfway into the company's first season, Simonsen’s obvious success and Melbourne’s seemingly insatiable appetite for opera inspired other impresari and managers to organize their own continental opera companies.740 Over the course of two seasons more than 150,000 patrons heard and saw Simonsen’s company, and the impresario profited handsomely.741 Flushed by his artistic and pecuniary success, Simonsen immediately sailed to Europe to assemble a new opera company.742 Upon his return he mounted a six-week season of the Spanish Students' company, followed by another Italian opera troupe. As intimated earlier, the results of these enterprises were ruinous for Simonsen.

Contrary to the implication of the company’s name, the ‘The Spanish Students’ company was neither Spanish nor did it consist of students: its sixteen singers, eight dancers and

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736 Melbourne Correspondent, ‘Melbourne Tea-Table Talk’, The West Australian, March 21st 1887, p. 3.
737 ‘Italian Opera’, North Melbourne Advertiser, February 25th 1887, p. 3.
742 Editorial, The Argus, February 24th, 1888, p. 11.
cantaora (a female singer of Andalusian flamenco music), Adalgisa Parmiggiana,743 were all professional Italian musicians. The word ‘Spanish’ referred to the company’s repertoire, whilst the term ‘student’ referred to a historical tradition in Spain, upon which the company based its composition, costume and repertoire.744 The Spanish Students specialised in flamenco song and dance; this was a repertoire that ought to have proven popular in cosmopolitan Melbourne given that was an age in which all things Spanish were à la mode and Flamenco music was at the height of its fame and creativity. Simonsen’s company, however, was not gifted and it did not present true Flamenco music. The best of all the artists, Parmiggiana, was so disappointing that one critic described her as ‘a fiasco’.745 The company performed only the most paltry, pallid and inauthentic of compositions.

The season was an artistic and financial disappointment, and the losses were so severe as to force Simonsen to form a new Italian company immediately in order to try and recover his losses. His next venture was a double troupe: the Simonsen English and Italian Opera Company, which had specialist English artists for English opera and Continental Artists for the grand opera repertoire (see Table 12.10).746

Table 12.10: Melbourne Cast of the Royal Italian and English Opera Company (Simonsen 2) 1888–89

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ladies</th>
<th>Gentlemen:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luisa Lablache</td>
<td>Giuseppe Pimazzoni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosina Ajma</td>
<td>Luigi Lecioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian Tree</td>
<td>Giovanni Dimitriesco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flora Graupner</td>
<td>Giovanni Venturi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adalgisa Parmiggiana</td>
<td>Attilio Buzzi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicely Staunton</td>
<td>Guglielmo Verdi (aka William Green)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maud Walton</td>
<td>Roberto Mancini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Heath</td>
<td>Henry Atkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cissy Healey</td>
<td>George Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marion Llewellyn</td>
<td>George Webb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>George Sinclair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Henry Hodson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Walsh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frank Sceats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T. Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harry West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Gilpin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>William Forbes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Ashton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Craig</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 women 20 men

The company had some strong singers, most notably, the contralto Louise Lablache, granddaughter of the famous bass Luigi Lablache and daughter of contralto Emilie de

745 Ibid.
746 ‘Her Majesty’s Opera House’, *The Argus*, October 9th, 1888, p. 16
Meric-Lablache. Lablache was born in Vienna in 1855, and appeared in opera from a very young age. By the time she appeared in Melbourne, Louise was already at the top of her field. She had been employed in James Mapleson’s first US touring company in 1878. When her mother, who was also in the company, broke with Mapleson, Lablache followed her to New Orleans and appeared in the de Beauplan French Opera Company. She then sang in South America, before making her Met debut as Martha in Faust, on the occasion of the world-class opera house’s inauguration.

Others in the company were also extremely good singers. Romanian tenor Giovanni (aka Jean and Ion) Dimitresco, whom Lablache later married, had sung with Adelina Patti in Italy and would go on to enjoy a fruitful career in the US during the early twentieth century, making some of the earliest recordings of Il Trovatore. By 1892, he was a principal tenor at Covent Garden, appearing with Melba, Calve, Nordica, and fellow tenor Jean de Reszke. From the English part of the company, the stand out was Lillian Tree, who had already appeared in lead roles in Carl Rosa’s opera company, and who, by 1895, would be performing in Die Walküre at Covent Garden.

Such talent, along with the extreme popularity and competence of singers like Flora Grauper, Giuseppe Pimazzoni, Attilio Buzzi, George Johnson, and Luigi Lecioni ought to have ensured a success for Simonsen. Unfortunately, rather than matching these singers, he chose to complete the company with mediocrities such as Rosina Ajma and Adalgisa Parmiggiana, who had already been proved herself to be poisonous in Melbourne. There was also an overabundance of inexperienced singers: nearly half of the company were debutants or amateurs.

Simonsen’s decision to combine Italian and English opera also proved unwise. There were too many competitors presenting English comic opera for Simonsen’s foray into English repertoire to be marketable. This, coupled with the particular paucity of talent amongst his English opera singers, doomed the English side of the venture. With respect to the Italian opera, the repertoire was ill-chosen: only eleven operas were presented over the season (see Table 12.11), ten of which were beginning to feel stale by 1888.

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748 Ibid., p. 522.
749 Ibid., p. 527.
751 E. D. Parker, Opera Under Augustus Harris, (London: Saxon and Co.), p. 3.
752 Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes, p. 61.
Table 12.11: The Melbourne Repertoire of the Royal Italian and English Opera Company (Simonsen 2), 1888–89.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balfe</td>
<td><em>The Rose of Castile</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>The Bohemian Girl</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Satanella</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td><em>Norma</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizet</td>
<td><em>Carmen</em></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gomes</td>
<td><em>Il Guarany</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td><em>Faust</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Ernani</em></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rigoletto</em></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Il Trovatore</em></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td><em>Maritana</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td><em>11 operas</em></td>
<td>68 performances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* denotes Melbourne première.

Beyond the limitations of the company’s repertoire, there were severe problems in both the musical forces—the orchestra and chorus were reputedly often out of time, out of tune or under-rehearsed—and the extra-musical forces. Simonsen appears to have been unable to control the obnoxious personality of Carlo Lombardi, the conductor, which led to dwindling numbers in the orchestra and chorus.\(^{754}\) The Melbourne public, in the midst of their Exhibition triumph, prosperity and bounteous theatrical culture, was unimpressed by the poor scenery and hackneyed props, which were ‘not so pretty or appropriate as [they] might have been.’\(^{755}\)

By December 1888, both *The Argus* and *The Age* had given innumerable implicit indications that the public was not willing to patronise Simonsen’s company under such conditions. After no palpable improvement, the clearly exasperated critic at *The Age* then launched a more explicit attack on Simonsen’s managerial skills, declaring:

> It is not possible to watch night after night the progress of the season, and to notice how the conditions essential to success are disregarded, without a keen feeling of regret that the fragile hold Italian Opera has upon the sympathies of the public should be further reduced by ineffective representation of standard works.\(^{756}\)

The critic seems to suggest that the indifference of so many aspects of the company’s standard and performance practice were not only the ensuring artistic and financial failure of the season, but also had wider implications about the place of Italian opera in Melbourne. The thinly-spread talent among the cast, the poor orchestral support coming from Lombardi as conductor, the ineffectual/inappropriate stage sets, and a limited and stale repertoire were not only worsening Simonsen’s reputation and finances, but also devaluing opera as a piece of Melbourne’s cultural capital.

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\(^{754}\) “The Opera” *The Argus*, January 1\(^{st}\), 1889, p. 5.
\(^{755}\) “The Opera” *The Argus*, January 1\(^{st}\), 1889, p. 5.
\(^{756}\) “Norma”, *The Age*, December 12\(^{th}\) 1888, p. 6.
It is little surprise, then, that the company imploded in a spectacularly public fashion, only a few weeks into its Sydney run, leaving Simonsen in serious financial difficulties. At the close of a performance of Carmen:

Mdlle Lablache (Carmen) and Signor Dimitresco (Don Jose) were singing the final duet … when suddenly the tenor stopped, and addressing some words in a tone of reproach to Signor Lombardi, the conductor, bowed to the audience, and excitedly left the stage. [T]he conductor putting down his baton … the music entirely ceased. The sympathy of the audience seemed to be with the singers, Signor Dimitresco being loudly applauded as he left the stage. Directly the tenor had disappeared … the audience gave vent to their feelings in moans, hisses, and occasional bursts of applause, the hissing predominating. The conductor then rose and faced the audience as if about to speak but so far from this action having a pacifying effect, the hooting and groaning was renewed with increased vehemence. Many of the audience jumped to their feet in the excitement, which extended to all parts of the house … In the midst of the uproar Signor Dimitresco reappeared … the chorus and band behind the scenes coming to the rescue … [and] the orchestra, independently of the conductor, who sat motionless, took up the music and Mdlle Lablache and Signor Dimitresco sang the closing tragic scene and the curtain descended on the death of Carmen, amidst general applause.

Signor Simonsen writes to us explaining that after being at great expense in forming and bringing out this Opera Company, the season at Melbourne proved a losing one, owing as he says largely to disagreements among the artistes themselves. In coming to Sydney he hoped to retrieve his losses amounting to some £8000 but, to his great regret, the want of unity among his performers has compelled him to close the season in this unexpected manner.

Martin Simonsen then made the last bad decision of his career as an impresario. Against the advice of both his company and the public, Simonsen chose neither to fire Lombardi nor reconfigure the company, but instead simply walked away from his company. This decision not only caused extreme displeasure amongst the public but had serious repercussions for all involved. The consequences for Simonsen personally were an irreparably ruined reputation and significant levels of further debt, which he had no chance of recovering. The consequences for the artists were the prospect of six months of unemployment and the possibility of being stranded in Australia. Finding themselves in this desperate and unfortunate situation, the continental singers decided to stay on and finish the season under their own management. They engaged the talented Leon Caron as their conductor, jettisoned the English component of the company, and as the smaller, but more consistent, Italian Artists’ Opera Company, the singers enjoyed a successful season in Sydney.

Martin Simonsen’s meteoric rise and bizarre fall reveal much about the role of opera in Marvellous Melbourne. His first effort was strong and worthy, and Melbourne supported it with zeal. His second attempt was off-target, and Melbourne, lavished as it was with all manner of quality theatrical endeavours, had no need to tolerate a poor operation. It was, moreover, in the city’s best interest not to encourage those productions that would

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undermine its claim to being one of the most sophisticated and civilised metropolises in the world. Marvellous Melbourne was not the welcoming and indulgent city it had once been—its reputation depended upon it being discerning and cultivating only the most superior of theatrical projects.

Addressing the trade deficit: Cultural exports

In examining the effect of Melbourne’s increasingly cosmopolitan cultural identity on the city’s broader development, it is important not only to focus on its continental imports, but also on Australia’s operatic exports. The 1880s were the first time in Australia’s history that its singers began to garner international recognition. Amy Sherwin (1855–1935) was the first of many Australian sopranos to take the audiences of London, Paris, and New York by storm. Although Tasmanian by birth, Sherwin had come to prominence in Melbourne, when (after a somewhat romantic discovery in the hills of Hobart) the artists of the Pompei-Lazar Italian Opera Company brought her to Melbourne to portray the eponymous heroine of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in 1878.760 Within a few years, Sherwin had taken London by storm, singing with the Carl Rosa Company, the D’Oyly Carte Company, and performing roles as diverse as Arline and Michaela in London and Berlin.761

The most famous singer to come out of Melbourne was, of course, Nellie Melba (née Helen Mitchell, 1861–1831). Born and bred in Melbourne, Melba had been a popular singer in the city during the early 1880s, eclipsing more established favourites even whilst still an amateur.762 Her meteoric rise to acclaim in Europe was closely followed by the Melbourne press, who sometimes reported on her movements and successes every day.763 By July 1888, Melbourne was declaring her to be ‘An Australian Prima Donna’, and the world seems to have agreed. Melbourne had Melba mania, with people and the press obsessively discussing her pay, her location, her clothes, her friends as well as her voice.764 There was never a doubt that with a name like Melba, the singer was going to become an ambassador of Melbourne’s cultural prestige, and the city claimed its connection and

760 Sherwin later claimed her career began when she was discovered ‘carolling in the fields’ in the Hobart hills by picnicking members of the Pompei-Lazar company. Although this bucolic story seems too romantic for truth, Sherwin did appear almost as if from thin air, and it was entirely due to this company that Sherwin was able to launch a career which led to international fame. The Italian artists first invited her to sing a performance of *Norma* in Hobart, and following her unexpected and emphatic success there, the management cast her as the prima donna of the troupe’s farewell Melbourne season in 1878. See Judith Bowler, *Amy Sherwin: The Tasmanian Nightingale* (Dynnyrne: Self-Published by Judith A. Bowler, 1982), p. 13, *Love, The Golden Age of Australian Opera*, p. 280, and Advertisement, ‘The Opera’, *The Argus*, May 31st 1878, p. 8.


responsibility for La Melba from the first signs of her success. Reporting on Melba’s Covent Garden successes, one London-based Melburnian wrote:

I have nothing to say about Romeo et Juliette, except that it is rather a dull opera with a good deal of sameness about it. All the more credit accrues, therefore, to an artiste who makes a great success of her part in it and this is what Madame Melba (Mrs. Armstrong) has done. I expected to hear a finished and artistic vocal performance, and was not disappointed; but I was not expecting the warmth of feeling, the superb acting and the admirable portraiture of Juliette, which has deservedly created such a furor in London. Madame Melba, both as a vocalist and an actress, is one of whom we may justly feel proud.

As time wore on, more Australians, many of them from Melbourne, also found fame in the world’s leading opera houses. The city believed, perhaps with good reason, that Melbourne’s ability to produce and nurture such astonishing talent was a product of the city’s impeccable cultural standards. In time, figures like Melba became as important to Melbourne’s cultural identity as the singers who came to the city. The quality and cosmopolitanism of Melbourne’s cultural imports had built a city that now provided quality and cosmopolitanism to the metropolises of the world, and this redress of the cultural deficit left Melbourne with its best claim for the cultural authority it longed for.

The discussion above has demonstrated that Melbourne’s operatic culture became increasingly cosmopolitan throughout the 1870s and ‘80s. This cosmopolitanism was expressed and promoted not only by an influx of continental singers and an increasingly modern European repertoire, but also in the ever more punctilious standards of the city’s audiences and in the international recognition secured by Australian talent. This section also intimated that this operatic evolution was connected to the city’s desire to assert its cultural authority, an attribute necessary to any city wishing to be recognised and accepted as a metropolis of geopolitical relevance. The following section will examine this nexus more fully. It begins by establishing a correlation between the city’s socio-political maturation and the rise of a cosmopolitan operatic identity. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the ways in which the strength of city’s operatic culture contributed to the ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ phenomenon by advancing the asserting an identity of cultural sophistication and authority, thereby elevating the city’s geopolitical prestige.

The Effect(s) of Melbourne’s maturation on the city’s operatic culture

As discussed in Chapter 2, in the generation since the gold rush and Victorian independence, Melbourne had transformed from a colonial backwater into leading city of the empire. The gold rush had been a catalyst for demographic and economic change, whilst separation from New South Wales had ensured political autonomy which allowed Victoria’s population to expand upon the colony’s uniquely egalitarian and progressive political ethos. Between 1851 (the year of separation and the discovery of gold) and 1881, Melbourne’s European population grew tenfold (from 26,000 to 275,500), and it doubled

765 ‘Alto’ in his ‘Letter to the Editor-Madame Melba’, The Argus, June 18th 1889, p. 6, for example, credits Australian teachers and colleagues for Melba’s talent and technique.
again during the 1880s, reaching 491,000 by 1891. The city’s population didn’t just grow; it also diversified. The population that had been primarily male, young and English had, by the 1880s, become gender balanced, older and more ethnically diverse, with significant populations of French, Italian, German, and Chinese people. The men and women of this bustling colony transformed the nature of Melbourne’s economy. What had begun as a pastoralist paradise in the 1830s, and exploded into a resource economy in the 1850s, had become more robust and rounded. Agriculture and mining continued to be cornerstones of the Victorian economy, but there were also strong manufacturing, commercial, financial and real estate sectors.

The newfound diversity of Melbourne’s residents and economy may have transformed the Melbourne into a boom town and economic miracle, but its politics remained fundamentally connected to the old Melbourne ideals of democracy and egalitarianism. The city’s progressive politics and ethos made Melbourne unique amongst the plethora of mid-to-late Victorian boom cities. It invested in universal education and health; its workers were at the forefront of the labour movement and enjoyed an unusual degree of protections and rights; governments and private industry were investing in core infrastructure projects which were improving the quality of life and the profitability of trade. Such policies made Melbourne’s middle and working-class population more affluent, educated and healthy than their global contemporaries.

The combination of a booming economy, a large, educated and empowered population, and an egalitarian collective identity had several results of relevance to a discussion about opera. Firstly, it formed the bedrock of Melbourne’s strong operatic culture. As demonstrated in earlier chapters with reference to Calcutta’s operatic culture, the cultivation of opera is dependent upon a demographically balanced, educated, stable public, with the time, money and inclination to patronise the arts and socialise publicly. Melbourne’s economic and political circumstances created just such a society. Moreover, Melbourne regarded opera as an ars populi. The newspapers would comment on audiences comprised of families or working-class men, just as they paid attention to vice-regal attendance, and special praise was unanimously lavished upon managers who reduced admission and made opera more accessible to the middle and working classes. Indeed, Melbourne’s opera tickets were generally some of the most affordable in the world and there is evidence that working-class people could and did patronise the opera. Consider the following review of an 1873 opera performance:

The Opera-house was crowded, and amongst the many who were present, a large sprinkling of firemen’s costumes gave an unwonted appearance of liveliness to those parts of the house which on ordinary occasions display the neutral tint which belongs to sad-coloured clothes and fresh-coloured faces... The performance last night was [also] honoured by the presence of His Excellency the Governor and Lady Bowen, who came attended by their family and suite.

Although the firemen from the above example attracted attention for being unusual, it is clear that both the author and the audience was welcoming of them. There are no public or

private comments in which a concern is expressed about the middle and working classes patronage of the opera (in stark contrast to other cities, including Calcutta, where some thought this democratisation was undesirable). This inclusivity broadened the support for opera in Melbourne, and, thus, made opera even more entrenched in the city’s cultural framework.

The plurality, widespread affluence, education, leisure time, and egalitarianism of Marvellous Melbourne not only explains the city’s ability to foster so vibrant and cosmopolitan an operatic culture, but also accounts for Melbourne’s desire to do so. The population had never experienced anything less than meteoric growth and increasing distinction and, therefore, had every reason to expect that Marvellous Melbourne would climb to ever-greater heights. As alluded to previously, Melbourne had long been convinced of its destiny to be a world metropolis. Yet, as the city grew in wealth, education and sophistication it became aware that of all the criteria by which a city could be judged to ‘have arrived’, it was the flourishing of the high-arts, and the cultural authority they bestowed, which was most convincing. Money, as the gold rush had proved, could appear overnight and could fall into the hands of both the worthy and unworthy; technology could be imported; imposing architecture could imitated by any city with the least pretensions to grandeur. By contrast, high-art was inimitable, slow to develop, and had to be carefully cultivated by a discriminating society and of all the high-arts, opera was the most prestigious and potent. Melbourne was not alone in this view: as William Weber has demonstrated in his work ‘Opera and the Cultural Authority of the Metropolis’, it is no coincidence that the major opera centres of the nineteenth-century Western world were also the cities perceived to be of greatest cultural consequence, and, therefore, the metropolises of greatest geopolitical influence. Given Melbourne’s ambitions, and the attitudes towards opera held by the Western world, it is unsurprising that opera became the furnishing by which Melbourne could best advertise its coming of age, cultural authority and sophistication.

**Opera as Collective Cultural Capital:**

**How opera promoted Melbourne’s geopolitical prestige**

The chapter has so far demonstrated the increasingly cosmopolitan nature of the city’s operatic culture, explored the way that this was a product of the city’s maturation, and asserted that part of Melbourne’s preoccupation with opera was due to the city’s political and social ambitions. This, the final section of this chapter, will evaluate the effect that opera had on Melbourne’s regional and global standing.

**Melbourne as metropolis: music as an assertion of collective cultural identity.**

The role that music played in Marvellous Melbourne’s identity as an important centre of the Australian Continent, the British Empire and the world, is beautifully illustrated by the way that the city constructed its identity when it was on display in the biggest advertisement a nineteenth-century city could have, an International Exhibition.770

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769 Weber, ‘Opera and the cultural authority of the capital city’.

770 The term ‘advertisement’ was actually used as a descriptor of the Exhibition by nineteenth-century commentators. See Editorial, *The Argus*, August 4th 1888, p. 11.
Although ostensibly about promoting trade and international relations, both contemporary observers and twenty-first century historians have noted that exhibitions were laden with cultural symbolism and were means by which the host cities were able to assert the identity they wished the world to see: Werner Hofmann called them ‘the nineteenth century’s official visiting cards’, whilst Kate Darian-Smith likens the International Exhibition of the late-nineteenth century to the modern Olympics replete with opening and closing ceremonies.\footnote{Werner Hofmann, \textit{The Earthly Paradise: Art in the Nineteenth Century} (London: Faber and Faber 1961), p. 165, and Kate Darian-Smith, 'Exhibiting Australia.', in Kate Darian-Smith et al. (eds.), \textit{Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World} (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), pp. 1.1-1.14, and Graham Davison, \textit{Festivals of Nationhood: The International Exhibition}, in S. L. Goldberg and F. B. Smith (eds.), \textit{Australian Cultural History} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 158.} The nature of what image Melbourne hoped to project with its Exhibitions is more contentious. Australian cultural historian Linda Young views the nineteenth-century Australian exhibition as being dominated by colonial identity and metropole mimicry, rather than asserting an independent cosmopolitan identity: \footnote{Linda Young, "How like England we can be": The Australian international exhibitions in the nineteenth century, in Kate Darian-Smith et al. (eds.), \textit{Seize the Day: Exhibitions, Australia and the World} (Melbourne: Monash University ePress, 2008), pp. 12.1-12.19.}

\begin{quote}
...colonial exhibitions were inspired by the ambition, more cultural than economic, to reproduce the motherland in the antipodes, proving both continuity and parity of the colonies with the metropole.\footnote{Darian-Smith, 'Exhibiting Australia.', in Darian-Smith et al. (eds.), \textit{Seize the Day}.}
\end{quote}

Other scholars perceive greater complexities; Darian-Smith urges an understanding of ‘the contradictions and tensions that underscore the practices and ideologies of exhibiting Australia, especially with reference to the intersections of colonial, national and imperial culture and the making of modern identities’.\footnote{John E. Findling and Kimberley D. Pelle, \textit{Historical Dictionary of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 74 and p. 106.} I would argue that colonialism and cosmopolitanism were not mutually exclusive; given that Britain was the originator of the Exhibition, and that London itself was a cosmopolitan city of the world, the Exhibition as a genre was perceived as both quintessentially British and the height of Western internationalism.

In the space of less than a decade, Melbourne hosted two such events: the ‘Melbourne International’ in 1880, and the more extravagant ‘Centenary Exhibition’ in 1888–89. The Melbourne International Exhibition of 1880 hosted representatives of thirty-seven nations, while the 1888 Exhibition is said to have had ninety-three participating States, with the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany and Austro-Hungarian Empire the major nations to be officially represented.\footnote{John E. Findling and Kimberley D. Pelle, \textit{Historical Dictionary of World’s Fairs and Expositions, 1851–1988} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), p. 74 and p. 106.} Yet whilst its more than ten thousand exhibitors hoped that their wares, technologies and ideas would be seen, Melbourne saw the exhibition as a way of putting itself on display. The Editor of \textit{The Argus} reminded Melburnians:

\begin{quote}
It is instructive and edifying for us to see what other nations have done. But it is also gratifying to think that other nations will now have an opportunity of seeing what we can do. In an Exhibition such as ours we not only see, but are seen; and everybody knows which is the more
\end{quote}
When putting itself on display and maintaining its reputation, Melbourne chose ‘Arts, Manufacturing, Agriculture and Industry’ as its theme. These four categories represented not only areas of interest to the global market, but also spheres in which Melbourne considered itself to excel. With reference to ‘Arts’, Melbourne’s art of pride was music. In 1888–89, the 2.2 million visitors to the Exhibition were lavished with 244 concerts; 35 full symphonies (including all nine of Beethoven’s) and 91 overtures were performed; operettas direct from the stages of Vienna, Paris and London were performed; Wagner’s Lohengrin was performed as were the more standard operatic fare of Verdi, Pedrotti, Ricci, Meyerbeer, Gounod, the Bel Canto composers and Mozart. Much music was commission for the occasion: consider A Song of Thanksgiving, or the Centennial Cantata by Frederic H. Cowen, which was performed by an orchestra of seventy-three and a chorus of approximately seven hundred voices. The gargantuan Centenary Chorus also performed other choral works, such as Messiah, Samson, The Creation, Choral Fantasia, Elijah, Stabat Mater, Sleeping Beauty, Ruth, The Golden Legend, and Calvary, and as well as supporting innumerable popular operatic concerts.

The robust and varied musical programme presented during 1888 was ultimately one of Melbourne’s most impressive exhibits at the Centennial Expo because it married Melbourne’s resources (its wealth, its population, its artists, its theatres and more) to the high-art culture which the Western world had in common. The music argued Melbourne’s right to a place on the world stage more poetically and persuasively than any agricultural exhibit or technological demonstration ever could. Unlike trade, architecture or a talent for agriculture, art could not simply be bought, built or developed: it had to be nurtured and appreciated. To the nineteenth century world, the success of music indicated not only a city’s wealth and populousness, but also the character, education and sophistication of its citizens.

As Melbourne’s cultural cosmopolitanism continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century, the city’s ambitions of geopolitical influence began to materialise. Although one of the continent’s youngest cities, Melbourne was undoubtedly the most culturally

775 Editorial, The Argus, August 4th 1888, p. 1
778 ‘Delightful weather…’, The Argus, November 22nd, 1888, p. 8.
779 Not the oratorio composed by Tonhurst in Melbourne in 1864, but the oratorio by Cowen.
780 Refers to the cantata The Golden Legend composed by Arthur Sullivan in 1886 for the Leeds Music Festival, not the earlier setting by Liszt.
781 Calvary was composed by Spohr in 1834–5.
authoritative and politically potent city of late-nineteenth century Australia. Melbourne, rather than Sydney, was the city to which great artists first came and in which great artists were produced. Likewise, Melbourne was the city to which international traders and dignitaries first came when attempting to establish a presence in the region, and it was in Melbourne that the idea of an independent Australia had the greatest popular support. Opera, cosmopolitanism and Melbourne’s collective identity were inextricably linked, each supporting the development of the other.
Chapter 13:
The Great Panic — Opera in Melbourne, 1890–1901

To anachronistically borrow a phrase from twenty-first century writer George Monbiot, 'infinite growth is impossible in a finite world', the citizens of colonial Melbourne discovered this the hard way at the end of the nineteenth century, when the economic bubble which had been expanding for so long finally burst. During the early-1890s land values slumped, hundreds of businesses filed for bankruptcy, unemployment rose sharply, stock prices fell and banks failed. Naturally, the 'Great Panic' affected every facet of life in Melbourne, including the arts, but the extent and specifics of this effect have long been exaggerated, ignored or oversimplified. It has long been asserted in both popular and scholastic discussions that the Great Panic led to an operatic vacuum in both Melbourne and the entire Australian continent. For example, in her otherwise exhaustive chronicle of opera companies active in Australia between 1881 and 1939, Alison Gyger's book goes from 'Chapter 9: When Melbourne beat the Met (1893)' to 'Chapter 10: Almost Too Good to be True (1900–01)', bypassing the period altogether, whilst another of Australia’s most respected cultural historians, John Cargher, also overlooked the operatic activities of the 1890s in discussions of Melbourne's opera history. Works that have specifically focussed on the city’s musical culture during the 1890s have tended to concentrate on developments in composition and instrumental music rather than on opera. Without casting aspersions on the quality of these otherwise useful and important works, this existing gap in Melbourne's opera history is misleading. Operatic culture, in all its rich variety, continued to be a strong cultural presence in depressed Melbourne.

This chapter seeks to amend the historical record and provide a more balanced and nuanced examination of the relationship between opera and its social, political and economic context in 1890s Melbourne. The chapter will begin with a discussion of the

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782 This quote has become prevalent in popular culture since the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. My attribution of this wording to George Monbiot stems from several articles and interviews given by Monbiot in 2007 and 2008, prior to the financial collapse and the idea's increasing popularity. See, for example, Tanis Taylor, 'Ethical Shopping Is Pointless: 'I am very sceptical of consumer power' An Interview With Consumer Activist George Monbiot’, Newconsumer.com, August 2007 2007.

783 Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes, pp. 83-93.


Williamson-Musgrove Opera Company of 1893 and its season of verismo opera to illustrate that, even as the Great Panic was hitting Melbourne, the city’s residents remained enthusiastic patrons of opera. The second section will prove that opera did not disappear from Melbourne between 1893 and 1900 by providing a survey of the various operatic activities undertaken during this time. Such a survey will demonstrate the diversity of operatic expression. It will also contextualise this diversification with reference to the economic, social and artists circumstances at both a local and global level. By considering the performances of some of the innumerable visiting artists who came to Melbourne during this period, the chapter will also demonstrate that, despite its difficulties, Melbourne continued to hold a position of cultural authority and was able to attract opera and concert artists of international standing. As the final instalment in this thesis’ evaluation of the role of opera in colonial Melbourne, the chapter will conclude with a summary and evaluation of the arguments and evidence put forth in this and the previous chapters.

**Opera and the Great Panic: Verismo comes to Melbourne**

At the moment that the Victoria’s financial collapse was being felt hardest, and was being exacerbated by the global economic depression known as the Great Panic, Melbourne was hosting one of the most significant opera companies to have ever performed in the city: the 1893 Williamson-Musgrove Italian Opera Company. The company was remarkable for several reasons. Despite the gravity of the economic conditions in which they operated, and in full knowledge of the personal ruin that awaited them should the enterprise fail, the company’s two impresari (J.C.Williamson and George Musgrove) chose to build the company around a repertoire of only four works, three of which were not only premières, but also composed in an utterly new style: verismo (see Table 13.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Number of performances</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leoncavallo</td>
<td>Pagliacci*</td>
<td>22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mascagni</td>
<td>Cavalleria Rusticana*</td>
<td>24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L’Amico Fritz*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 operas</strong></td>
<td><strong>46 performance evenings</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes Australian première. " six of these performances were a Cav/Pag double bill. This is thought by many historians to be the first instance in the world of these two operas being presented as a double bill.

The speed with which verismo came to Australia is one of the great wonders of Australia’s colonial operatic culture. Contrary to the idea that colonial opera was always at a time lag (perhaps best demonstrated by the Wagner delay), verismo was brought before Melbourne’s audiences within months of the operas’ London, New York and Vienna premières, and in advance of centres like Paris, Barcelona and Moscow. The rapid transfer of verismo from Europe to Australia was the result of George Musgrove’s personal admiration of the

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verismo movement and his opinion that the works were eminently suitable for Australian audiences:

…The idea arose with Signor Lago's production of *Cavalleria* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, in October, 1891, for after I had seen the opera once I went again and again, recognizing more and more every time that in an opera which told its own story so plainly I had found a work suited for performance in Italian at the Antipodean capitals. Unfortunately, one short week would have been useless for my purpose, and I accordingly laid the idea aside until the end of 1892 when one evening, after I had been dining with Mr. Raudegger, he played through the music of *I Pagliacci* [sic], prophesying the success in London which it achieved the following May. Music and libretto were equally striking…

Musgrove recognised that the successful introduction of this new operatic repertoire depended upon a specialist cast. Amongst the singers were internationally acclaimed artists like Olga Mettler (see Figure 13.1), Italia del Torre (Figure 13.2), Fiorello Giraud (who had created the role of Canio at the première in Milan in 1892—see Figure 13.3), Guglielmo Caruson and Mario Roussel. The company featured a corps de ballet of eleven, including two prime ballerine, Catherine Bartho from the Imperial Opera St Petersburg, and Enrichetta D’Argo from La Scala Milan, a chorus and orchestra of more than one hundred, and Niccolo Guerrera, a conductor who was sympathetic to the verismo style (see Table 13.2).

Table 13.2: The William-Musgrove Italian Opera Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Cavalleria Rusticana</th>
<th>Pagliacci</th>
<th>L’Amico Fritz</th>
<th>Faust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italia del Torre</td>
<td>Santuzza</td>
<td>Suzel</td>
<td>Marguerite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olga Mettler</td>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>Nedda</td>
<td>Beppe</td>
<td>Siébel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giulia Camerno</td>
<td>Lucia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Esdaile</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caterina</td>
<td>Marthe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiorello Giraud</td>
<td></td>
<td>Canio</td>
<td>Fritz</td>
<td>Faust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guglielmo Caruson</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tonio</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Valentin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ciro Frasca</td>
<td>Turiddu</td>
<td>Beppe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mario Roussel</td>
<td>Alfio</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hanezò</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osborne Sheppard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Federico</td>
<td>Wagner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. M. Jackson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Saunders</td>
<td>Turiddu (cover)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atillio Buzzi</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Méphistophélès</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niccolo Guerrera</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
<td>Conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lovell Phillips</td>
<td>Chorus Master</td>
<td>Chorus Master</td>
<td>Chorus Master</td>
<td>Chorus Master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Baynham</td>
<td>Stage Director</td>
<td>Stage Director</td>
<td>Stage Director</td>
<td>Stage Director</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13.3: Corps de Ballet of the Williamson-Musgrove Italian Opera Company

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Bartho</td>
<td>prima ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrichetta d’Argo</td>
<td>prima ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara Symonds</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelina Hartley</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maud Dysart</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lottie Dickens</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Edwards</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Collins</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annie Valitaine</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Edwards</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina Farina</td>
<td>ballerina</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13.1: Olga Mettler, 1893. Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.
Figure 13.2: Italia del Torre. Courtesy of Allister Hardiman.

Figure 13.3: Fiorello Giraud. Courtesy of Nina Vosough.
Figure 13.4: James Cassius Williamson. Courtesy of the National Library of Australia.

Figure 13.5: George Musgrove, working in his office at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne. Courtesy of the Lady Viola Tait Collection, National Library of Australia.
Musgrove’s reflection on the formation of his company provides insight into perceived (and perhaps real) differences between Italian, British and Australian audiences. Musgrove appears to have thought that Australian audiences prized believability and acting over a beautiful voice alone, coming to the opera with expectations of a well-rounded evening of entertainment:

…I heard Signor Giraud sing the great part, and decided, if possible, to secure him. I spent the six Carnival weeks of the year in hearing and seeing nearly every first-rate singer in Italy, meeting with fresh difficulties and disappointments at every step. In Italy, voice is everything, and consequently my agents would send for me from distant cities to hear some ‘glorious soprano’ who looked like an animated haybag, or some ‘splendid tenor’ who weighed 20 stone. Shortly after I made a good beginning by hearing Signor Caruson, a baritone who had starred with Albani and Tamagno in New York, sing the part of Tonio at Genoa. This cast also included Signor Roussel as Silvio, the part he created at La Scala and as I already had the promise of Giraud, the original Canio, I only needed a Nedda to complete the cast of I Pagliacci. I went to Rome, Naples, Venice, Turin, and to all the principal theatres in Italy without finding my soprano, however, and it was not until my return to London that I was able to secure Signorina del Torre.

... even when I had formed the company, which took me six months, I had to persuade the principals to sing six nights a week, and this arrangement never could have been made but for the influence exerted by Signor Leoncavallo who... added, ‘Advise you engage Guerrera, a magnificent conductor who is popular with all of them’. Without loss of time all the contracts were then signed. There still remained the task of filling the evening’s programme, for the London expedient of a lever de rideau, which the fashionable people made a point of missing, was not suited to the Australian fashion of sitting out an entire performance. Finally, the Turquoisette Ballet was chosen as a novel diversion. I had already engaged Signorina d’Argo in Italy, and, as I could not find a second ballerina as young and pretty, I commissioned Signor Ceciti, one of the finest dancers of the day, to forward me the names of the dancers in Imperial Opera at Moscow and Petersburg. In this way I heard of Mdlle Bartho, who is quite at the top of the tree.788

Musgrove’s painstaking selection process proved beneficial: Melbourne appreciated not only the exceptional pedigree of the singers, but also their dramatic talents, skills which are particularly important in the verismo repertoire. Upon the première of Mascagni’s Cavalleria Rusticana many were astonished by the calibre of the acting:

The Turiddu of Signor Fiorello Giraud ... was an equally unmistakable triumph. ... Signor Giraud’s acting was natural and unforced, whether in his adoration of Lola, his heartless rejection of the loving, devoted Santuzza, the light-hearted gaiety in the drinking song, the leave taking from his mother, or the innate savagery with which he bites Alfio’s ear in the challenge. His fine tenor voice was in perfect form, and his rendering of the Brindisi with chorus brought the house down, and had to be repeated. Signorina Italia del Torre was also largely responsible for the general success of the evening. Her singing in the already mentioned Romanza was most touching, whilst her passionate pleading with her false lover, and the heartbroken, despairing cry as he thrusts her aside and follows Lola, were such as should soften even a heart of stone. Especially worthy of notice was Signorina del Torre’s clever acting, calculated to convey the impression that it was a fit of temporary jealous

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madness which caused Santuzza to denounce her despicable seducer to Alfio, and, that as she
recovered her reason she bitterly repented her action...Signor Guglielmo Caruson had proved himself
a good actor, as well as a vocalist in "Pagliacci," but last night he surprised even his many previous
admirers for in the concluding scene his openly expressed contempt for his antagonist in the duet was
as fine a piece of acting as has ever been seen upon any operatic stage in Melbourne.789

Notwithstanding the company’s strong, popular, and experienced cast, and its novel,
challenging, interesting repertoire, the economic conditions of Melbourne life at that time
erased any certainty of financial reward for the impresari. Yet, the Williamson-Musgrove
1893 company achieved an extraordinary level of both artistic and financial success. Indeed, even Musgrove and Williamson were surprised by the ardency of the company’s reception.790

The degree of the company’s success in Melbourne in the face of such unhelpful
economic circumstances raises the question of why the company and its repertoire
resonated so deeply with the city’s audiences. Perhaps it was the spectre of Melbourne’s
tardiness and inexperience of Wagner’s music-dramas, a continuing embarrassment to a city
that in all other respects had legitimate reasons for being proud of its operatic culture, that
led both the impresari and the public to champion verismo with such avidity. Perhaps, too,
the Melbourne public, which so admired strong acting in its lyric artists, enjoyed verismo
works because they afforded the singers greater dramatic scope. The more equal marriage
of drama and music in verismo works may have been an aesthetic principle to which
Melburnians were attracted.

On the other hand, Melbourne’s attraction to verismo may have been deeper than pride or
aesthetics. Perhaps, verismo’s appeal lay in its employment of ‘real life’ characters and
problems, which may have spoken to a population that so eagerly championed the rights
and life of the working-man. It may also be that verismo benefitted from the date of its
arrival, which coincided with a time of unprecedented financial hardship and loss. The high
emotion and tragic circumstances that plagued verismo’s characters together with narratives
that exposed real life as hard, unfair and filled with disappointment, must have had potency
in a city whose individual and collective self-assuredness had been recently rocked by the
financial panic, and the ensuing social and political volatility. This, like much cultural
history, is speculation; correlations are easier to discern than causations. There is no doubt,
however, that in order for an opera to find an audience it must speak to the people in it: the
Williamson-Musgrove Italian Opera Company, its artists, and its repertoire resonated with
the Melbourne public enough to overcome financial hardship and society’s demoralisation.
Even at the depths of the Great Panic, Melbourne had a strong interest in opera.

13th 1893, p. 8, and Gyger, Opera for the Antipodes, p. 87.
Opera after the Great Panic:  
The diversification of Melbourne’s operatic culture,  
1893–1901

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the existing research on opera in colonial Melbourne has mostly ignored any instances of operatic culture between the close of the verismo season and the turn of the century, and has attributed this non-existent operatic abyss to the Great Panic and the economic, political and social instability that marked its aftermath. Yet, the period 1893–1901 was rich in operatic culture. The lacuna in the scholarship largely results from a failure to recognize the myriad ways in which operatic culture was manifested. This section refutes the myth of an operaless Melbourne. It argues that while the Depression life had an effect on the way in which operatic culture was expressed (i.e. it encouraged diversification), opera continued to be an important part of Melbourne’s cultural life. Additionally, in its discussions, the section will also prove that, even though the city had lost some of its ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ shine, it continued to attract (and produce) international artists.

Diversification

Opera, music and theatre in Melbourne during the reign of verismo.

Even as *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* enthralled Melbourne, verismo was not the only operatic offering in town; opera (and oratorio) could be found in a most eccentric variety of guises and at an assortment of venues. On December 23rd 1893, for example, a Melburnian wishing to hear some opera could choose between Montague and Turner’s production of *Maritana* at the Exhibition Hall, a performance of Handel’s *Messiah* featuring Lalla Miranda, Ada Crossley and the Philharmonic Society at the Town Hall, a concert of Italian and French opera excerpts mounted by Italian and local artists, or a full-orchestral performance of the overture to Balfe’s *The Bohemian Girl* given at the Melbourne Cricket Ground as the pre-game entertainment for the Victoria vs. New South Wales Intercolonial match — and this was Melbourne’s off-season during a depression.791 Such diversity continued throughout the remainder of the decade, proving Melbourne continued access and patronage of opera.

Nellie Stewart’s Royal Comic Opera Company, 1894.

Only a few months after the Williamson-Musgrove company disbanded, Melbourne was being entertained by another company. In February 1894, one of Melbourne’s native daughters, Nellie Stewart (see Figure 13.6), who had found fame and esteem in London and America, established the Nellie Stewart Royal Comic Opera Company.

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791 All of these entertainments were advertised on page 12 of the *The Argus*, published December 23rd 1893.
Figure 13.6: Nellie Stewart, possibly as Princess Ida. Courtesy of the State Library of New South Wales.
Over the course of the year, Stewart’s company, which boasted over twenty-five artists (see Table 13.4), gave three seasons in which it presented the most popular works of fin-de-siècle French and English operetta repertoire: *The Gondoliers*, *The Mikado*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Princess Ida* by Sullivan, *Dorothy* and *The Mountebanks* by Cellier (the latter of which had been specially composed for Nellie Stewart), *The Vicar of Bray* and *Penelope* by Solomon, *La Mascotte* and *La Cigale* (both by Audran), *Paul Jones* (Planquette), *La Mie Rosette* (Lacomme), and Hervé’s *Mam’zelle Nitouche.*

Table 13.4: Nellie Stewart’s Royal Comic Opera Company, 1894.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ladies:</th>
<th>Gentlemen:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nellie Stewart</td>
<td>Joseph Tapley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elsie Cameron</td>
<td>George Lauri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Young</td>
<td>Charles Ryley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet Varley</td>
<td>Howard Vernon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May Pollard</td>
<td>Arthur Lissant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lena Cassellia</td>
<td>William Rosevear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Cobb</td>
<td>Sydney Deane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida Osborne</td>
<td>Thomas Grundy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina Osborne</td>
<td>Robert Fitzgerald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millie Osborne</td>
<td>Stannis Leslie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnie Everett</td>
<td>W’ Beaumont</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Mitchell</td>
<td>Wallace Brownlow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Kinnaird</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miss Peaty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MUSICAL DIRECTOR:** Leon Caron  
**STAGE DIRECTOR:** Henry Bracy

The argument may be made that, being an operetta company rather than a company that specialized in serious opera, the troupe was not a part of Melbourne’s operatic culture. At some level, such an assertion would be correct, for the company did not in any way continue the audience’s relationship with the works of the grand-opéra canon. Yet, to ignore Stewart’s company and its contribution to 1890s Melbourne would misrepresent the city’s understanding of, and relationship with, operatic culture. As discussed in Chapter One, any discussion of operatic culture in Victorian society cannot be based upon absolutist definitions of what is and what is not opera. Firstly, nineteenth-century audiences had flexible ideas and hierarchies of opera and opera-related genres. Secondly, opera is not a discrete cultural expression. It interacts with its milieu, at local, national and global scales; hence, when appraising whether a cultural phenomenon may be said to enhance or contribute to operatic culture, the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the event must be part of the criteria.

With reference to Stewart’s Comic Opera, there are two strong arguments for including it in any evaluation of colonial Melbourne’s opera history. The first is socio-cultural. Stewart’s audience members were the same as Melbourne’s typical ‘grand-opera’ audience and they appear to have considered the Stewart company to be operatic. Press reviews and personal reflections indicate that the Royal Comic Opera attracted much the same audience as undeniably operatic companies. Moreover, they adopted the behaviors, etiquettes and attitudes of the grand-opera world in their habits of patronage. Ladies dressed finely: opera glasses, cloaks, gloves and gowns were worn. Encores were demanded, bouquets were

792 ‘Advertisements’, *The Argus*, throughout 1894, usually on final page of the newspaper.
showered upon Stewart, libretti and ‘books’ could be bought before the show, and the audience members expected their fellows to be quiet throughout the performance. This was all status quo at the opera, but not at performances of more popular musical entertainments. Stewart’s own operatic background (her successful season as Marguerite in *Faust* only a few years earlier) also ensured that the performances had an operatic ring to them. Stewart's vocal talent was undeniable and since she was an ‘opera singer’, the productions were considered to be ‘operatic’.

The second means by which Stewart’s company may be deemed to be part of Melbourne’s operatic culture is with reference to the nature and definition of opera at this time. The *fin de siècle* was a period when music theatre was undergoing rapid change, with the emergence of two co-existing light lyric genres: Operetta/comic opera and musical comedy/musical variety. The former continues to be considered operatic, whilst the latter developed into the emblematic theatre genre of the twentieth-century: musical theatre. Operetta's roots in high-art music, the quality of the compositions and lyrics, the subject matter, its demand of operatic vocal range and technique were all elements which, according to both late-nineteenth century and early-twenty-first century standards, mark a work out as being operatic. The composers of operetta and comic opera, like their serious opera colleagues, usually had elite musical training, and composed instrumental or sacred works as well as their more successful stage works. Arthur Sullivan, for example, was also known for composing symphonies, overtures, concertos, hymns and art-songs; Edmond Audran had trained at the École Niedermeyer, where he won the composition prize in 1859, and during his career Audran wrote masses, oratorios and motets; Florimond Hervé, whom many consider to be the father of French operetta, studied at the Paris Conservatoire under Auber, and was a fine organist.

Hence, it is both appropriate and prudent to consider Stewart’s Royal Comic Opera Company to be a legitimate expression of operatic culture in Melbourne. The company and its remarkably successful three seasons are, therefore, firm proofs that Melbourne was not without a vibrant and professional operatic culture during the fin-de-siècle depression.

**Montague-Turner Opera Company June 1894**

Although misguided, the absence of any discussion of Stewart’s Royal Comic Opera Company in the existing scholarship may be attributed to the company’s repertoire. The same explanation, however, does not explain why the 1894 season of the Montague-Turner Company, a company to which historians have otherwise paid so much attention, is also missing from the annals of history. The company’s short, but nonetheless, valid season in June 1894 featured four operas, all of which are operas in even the strictest terms: *Maritana, Faust, The Bohemian Girl,* and *Lucrezia Borgia.* Although small by both local and global measures, the troupe boasted a fair amount of opera talent. Besides the two stars, Charles Montague and Annis Turner, there were Cicily Staunton, Arla Moxon, T. Gordon, Frank Sorats, G. Haswell, W. P. Morrison, and Edward Farley, all of whom were veterans of

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the Melbourne musical stage. In response to the economic difficulties afflicting so many of Melbourne’s population, the company made a point of reducing admission prices to ensure continued accessibility (the cheapest tickets were one shilling, which, even during the depression, was affordable for a sizable and representative proportion of the public). Its season may have been brief and its cast rather small, but the performances by the Montague-Turner company in 1894 demonstrate that opera, even in the strictest sense of the word, existed in depression Melbourne.

**Opera in Concert**

As discussed with reference to the 1840s and 1850s, operatic culture is not expressed solely on stage. During the 1890s, some very talented singers toured to Melbourne; however, their contribution to Melbourne’s operatic life has been overlooked because they performed this repertoire from the concert platform, rather than the theatrical stage. The following is a review of some of the opera artists who came to 1890s Melbourne, all of whom were artists of skill and international esteem, and their activities.

**Esty-Marsh Concert Company**

In 1895, the Esty-Marsh Concert Company, which was comprised of four singers, Alice Esty (soprano), Madame Enriquez (contralto), Robert Cunningham (tenor) and Alex Marsh (baritone), arrived in Melbourne. Three of the singers (Esty, Cunningham and Marsh) had been principals in Carl Rosa’s Opera Company in London. Alice Esty (see Figure 13.7) had sung with Adelina Patti in 1891 and was immediately hired to sing the leads in *Faust*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Carmen*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, which were some of the most prestigious roles to be had in London at that time. Her husband, Alex Marsh, had appeared in Wagner roles at Covent Garden, singing the role of Telramund opposite Nellie Melba’s Elsa and Jean de Reszke’s Lohengrin. Cunningham had a double claim on Melbourne’s favour: he was both a skilled tenor and an Melbourne success story. He also won the company much media support, being the brother of the editor of *The Argus*.802

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800 Ibid.
801 ‘The Esty-Marsh Concert and Opera Recital Company’, *The Argus*, May 8th 1895, p. 6. This article claims that Cunningham was born in Hobart, which seems to be true; however, later evidence suggests that he had trained in Melbourne, and identified as a Victorian. See ‘Mr. Robert Cunningham’, *The Advertiser*, October 25th 1895, p. 5.
802 ‘Mr Robert Cunningham’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 3rd 1906, p. 13.
While in Melbourne, the members of this operatic concert company performed arias, duets and even more sizable extracts (such as scenes or entire acts) from operas by Bellini, Bizet, Hattan, Rossini, Weber, Sullivan, Leoncavallo, Gounod, Wallace, Balfe, Verdi, and Wagner. The merits and successes of these productions varied. Cunningham was disappointing, described as being at ‘less than Bayreuth standard’ in his portrayal of Tannhäuser, but the company was admired for its execution of excerpts from Der Fliegende Holländer and its presentation of the whole of the Garden Scene from Faust.

Indeed, during its sojourn in Australia, this quartet of singers usually impressed the public and critics with the quality of both their acting and singing. Marsh’s performance of Canio’s scene from Pagliacci became an especial favourite, and led Melbourne to collectively bemoan the fact that they had to content themselves with concert productions of these operatic morceaux, rather than being able to see these opera singers in fully-staged works:

… In listening to his rendering of the I Pagliacci prologue, one could not help wishing that it had had its proper stage setting, though it must be at once admitted that Mr Marsh adapted himself to the platform surroundings with veteran-like skill, and, as a matter of course, brought the house down.

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804 Ibid.
The singers’ choice to form a small concert company rather than a large staged-opera troupe was a natural response to the economic realities of life in the closing years of the nineteenth century. A small concert company required less capital and increased the likelihood of profitability. Yet, the company’s design and style were also likely to be a preference of the artists themselves, giving them greater programme flexibility and managerial autonomy for far less effort. It is important to acknowledge that the economy was not the only factor shaping the face of Melbourne’s operatic culture.

Belle Cole Concert Company

The model of the Esty-Marsh company—i.e. a company of accomplished opera singers, presenting operatic excerpts, amongst other repertoire, in a concert setting—was quite common during the Panic. Another brigade of opera singers known as the Belle Cole Concert Company, arrived from London in 1894. The artists, Emily Spada (soprano), Belle Cole (contralto), Philip Newbury (tenor) and Charles Magrath (baritone), were popular singers at the Hallé Concerts and the London Crystal Palace Concerts, whilst also having had operatic experience. The Canadian soprano Spada, for example, had trained with Mathilde Marchesi, and was familiar with the French repertoire championed by the famous pedagogue.807 Her husband, Newbury, a New Zealander, had studied in Milan and Paris (where he had met Spada), and had found both operatic and concert work in London—in 1891, for example, he had appeared as the principal tenor in Der Fliegende Holländer.808 Although American, contralto Belle Cole (see Figure 13.8) had established her career in Britain, participating in countless concert series in London and the provinces. She came to prominence relatively late in life, at the age of 38, but her ‘dark, opulent voice’ made a strong impression on English musical life: she was Dame Clara Butt’s inspiration and favourite singer809 and was later remembered by Sir Henry Wood for her extraordinary range.810 The singers met with success in Melbourne equal to that they had enjoyed in Britain, they became regular soloists with the Melbourne Philharmonic Society, and Spada and Newbury stayed far longer than they had intended, forming a concert-oratorio company that performed over 2000 concerts across Australia throughout the 1890s.811

Clementine de Vere Sapio

Perhaps the greatest voice heard in Australia during the alleged operatic void was that of Clementine de Vere Sapio (see Figure 13.9), who came as an associate artist of violinist Camilla Urso’s 1894 tour.\(^{812}\) She was a coloratura soprano of extraordinary skill, with mellifluous technique in florid passages coupled with a clear, resonant voice and fine musicality.\(^{813}\) Already a great favourite in New York and Paris,\(^ {814}\) de Vere instantly won over Melbourne’s audiences:

… de Vere Sapio has already become a great public favourite. This is in no way surprising seeing that her remarkably fine soprano voice and faultless vocalisation must inevitably secure fame for her wherever musical culture is appreciated. In addition she exhibited musicianly understanding of a high order in her rendering (accompanied by orchestra) of a captivating aria from *Hamlet* (Ambroise Thomas) [which] was a truly astonishing display of vocal gymnastics that has certainly never been surpassed — if ever equaled — in Melbourne … shouts of applause from an insatiable audience were succeeded by encore numbers…\(^ {815}\)

During her visit to Melbourne, de Vere Sapio performed many of the emblematic works of her fach, including the mad scenes from *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Hamlet*, the Bell Song from *Lakmé* (Delibes), alongside standard soprano repertoire by composers such as Mozart, Weber, Glück, Bazzani, Gounod, Wagner and Massenet.\(^ {816}\) De Vere Sapio’s presentation of technically demanding arias, and her emphasis upon the Germanic and

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\(^{813}\) This is the personal observation of the author, based on recordings heard.


\(^{815}\) ‘Mdlle Urso’s Concert’, *The Argus*, May 18\(^{th}\), 1894, p. 6.

\(^{816}\) Various reviews throughout May and June 1894, *The Argus*.
French tradition, was remarkably important during a period when serious opera was less visible in Melbourne.

The modern German and French repertoire that de Vere Sapio so emphatically promoted during her stay found a more permanent advocate in the indefatigable G.W.L. Marshall-Hall, who had been a resident in Melbourne since 1891. A champion of Wagner, Beethoven and German Romanticism in general, Marshall-Hall not only founded the Conservatory at the University of Melbourne, which placed unprecedented importance on these composers, but also organized and conducted concerts alongside the German musical community. These concerts featured a great deal of Wagner, Weber and Beethoven’s operatic works, including whole acts of *Oberon*, *Fidelio*, *Tannhäuser* and *Tristan und Isolde*.

The ambition of de Vere Sapio, Marshall-Hall, and numerous German-Australians (such as soprano Elise Wiedermann and Minna Fischer) to foster an appreciation and appetite for Wagner’s music beyond a cultural status symbol, bore fruit by 1900, when Musgrove’s next opera company arrived in Melbourne. Although this company’s repertoire boasted depth and variety, its productions of modern French and German opera, such as *Carmen*, *Mignon*,

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818 Ibid.
Der Fliegende Holländer, Lohengrin and Tannhäuser outweighed the performances of old standards like The Bohemian Girl, Il Trovatore and Maritana,\textsuperscript{820} in terms of both popularity and number of performances. Musgrove's success in the modern, non-Italian repertoire, is yet another proof that, although opera was not so abundant during 1893–1900, Melbourne's operatic culture had continued to develop in significant ways during this time.

\textbf{Amateur Opera}

Outside of the professional arena, opera continued to be a significant part of amateur musical life. There were several amateur opera organizations, the largest of which was Melbourne Opera Club,\textsuperscript{821} which regularly rehearsed and performed operas. The Opera Club had many social and cultural functions. It was a meeting place for those who shared a love of opera and high-art music, particularly valuable for being an opportunity for men and women, both single and married, to meet and socialize outside of private parties. It was also a platform from which young singers with professional aspirations could launch careers by gaining experience and exposure. The Opera Club's success stories include Ethyl Haydon, who had performed with the company in the early 1890s and by 1895 had secured a contract as the prima donna of the Lyceum Theatre, London.\textsuperscript{822} Most significantly, the Melbourne Opera Club was another means by which Melbourne's opera culture was kept alive. During times when professional opera was absent, the Club launched performances that supported opera-going as both a social ritual and an artistic pleasure. When Melbourne hosted a professional opera company, the club acted as a ready-trained chorus unit, much as the Orpheus Union had many years ago. Amateurism also had the advantage of transforming a public that usually enjoyed opera at a passive level into active promulgators, engaging them in the creation, rather than mere support, of operatic culture in Melbourne.

\textbf{Reasons for the diversification of operatic culture}

The activities of the aforementioned artists (and the many others who have been omitted from this study for the sake of concision) demonstrate the inaccuracy of describing fin-de-siècle Melbourne as a city without opera. Opera continued to be an important part of the social and cultural life of many Melburnians, albeit in a less traditional fashion. A recognition of this continuity is crucial to any understanding of how Melbourne managed to produce so many world-class singers throughout the 1890s; the continuity also contextualises the explosion of opera in the early-twentieth century, because it accounts for the development and interest of the city's residents. Yet for all its diversity, there can be no denying that the operatic culture of the period 1893–1900 was neither so reliable nor so vibrant as it had previously been.

This is all the more puzzling considering that twentieth-century Melbourne's most devoted operatic impresari, J.C. Williamson and George Musgrove, were already resident and active in Melbourne. As evinced by the verismo season of 1893 (as well as their post-Federation careers), George Musgrove and J.C. Williamson had both the interest and the skills necessary for the successful organisation, presentation and management of long seasons of full-scale professional opera. Yet, after their 1893 season, Williamson and Musgrove spent

\textsuperscript{821} Later known as the Victorian Opera Club.
\textsuperscript{822} ‘An Australian Vocalist in London’, \textit{The Argus}, January 7th, 1895, p. 5
the next seven years presenting anything but opera. Using their 1893–91 careers as a case study, this section will consider the economic and non-economic factors influencing Musgrove and Williamson’s decision to occupy themselves with non-operatic artforms. In doing so it will become apparent that, as ever, opera was a product of its context.

Economic
The most obvious factor underpinning Musgrove and Williamson’s seven year eschewal of opera is the dire economic condition in which they had to work. The economic downturn effected operatic culture, as it effected all facets of Melbourne society, and did so in many ways. It became more difficult to borrow money, and the risk of failure was greater than ever before. In such a context it is only natural that Williamson and Musgrove put their efforts into entertainment genres such as variety, musical comedy and dramatic theatre, which demanded fewer financial and human resources. The profit margin was wider in these artforms than in grand opera, which was burdened by the cost of expensive singers, choruses, orchestras, lavish scenery, costumes and the inevitable sprucing up of a theatre which was necessary to meet the social expectations of opera’s patrons.

Furthermore, Musgrove and Williamson had already seen the financial and psychological damage which a failed operatic enterprise could bring upon an impresario. The insolvencies of Fannie and Martin Simonsen (in 1894 and 1897 respectively), were utterly ruinous and very public. According to her affidavit on her application for bankruptcy, Fannie Simonsen’s outstanding debts amounted to £2,161, a sum which was owed to both banks and singers. Such a sum is equivalent to approximately £1.04 million at 2009 values.823 The stress of such enormous debts led to destitution and health difficulties. Tragically, Fannie Simonsen died within two years, just as her daughter, Frances Saville, was beginning to find acclaim as a principal in Vienna.824 As referred to Chapter 12, Fannie’s husband Martin had also incurred great losses; the collapse of his 1888–9 operatic ventures left him with a debt of £4208/1/7. For the next eight years his whole income went to paying these debts; he was forced to sell all of his possessions, including his valuable violin, a fact that must have been heartbreaking for a man who had once been the solo violinist to European royalty. By 1897, he had no further recourse; with remaining debts of £908/19/7,825 (comparable to £423,000 as of 2009), Simonsen filed for bankruptcy, Two years later, reduced to the charity of his friends and personal despair, Martin Simonsen, committed suicide.826 The Simonsens’ story was, sadly, not unique but it was certainly the most public example of the risks inherent in so expensive and precarious a speculation as opera. It is possible that the Simonsens’ troubles, coupled with the widespread financial uncertainty, deterred Williamson and Musgrove from operatic pursuits for a while.

Personal
Another explanation for Williamson and Musgrove’s lack of engagement in opera during

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823 Lawrence H. Officer, "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 to Present," MeasuringWorth, 2011.
the 1890s lies in more personal matters. Like Lyster before them, both Williamson and Musgrove had interests in promoting the careers of their lovers: in Williamson’s case it was Maggie Moore, in Musgrove’s case it was Nellie Stewart. These women were both at the height of their fame and brilliance, finding success in the light, comic, escapist entertainments for which Melburnians during the Great Panic were so desirous. Supporting their partners’ endeavours was, thus, not only good business sense, but also a matter of personal interest. With such reasons to focus their energies on comedy and farce, Williamson and Musgrove had little incentive to pursue operatic ventures.

**Best Laid Plans...**

It should not be assumed, however, that Williamson and Musgrove had abandoned opera altogether. Indeed, throughout the 1890s, they were trying to secure the talents of an operatic act that, despite the recession, would be guaranteed to be profitable—they wanted Melba. Melba was not averse to the proposal, but her enthusiasm was overshadowed by more mercenary concerns. Musgrove and Williamson’s first began negotiations in 1894. The terms they initially offered were £350 per performance for 12 performances. Melba rejected this offer, asking for at least £450 a night, a very brazen demand considering she was not yet even earning the record £400 per night, which Covent Garden would pay her ten years later.827

The impresari could not afford so much, and once again offered £350 but increased the number of performances to eighteen. Melba accepted this offer, and was scheduled to come out in May 1895.828 In October 1894, the arrangements began to come undone. Covent Garden impresario A. H. Gye refused to release Melba from her contract, and so Melba’s Australian tour was delayed by three months.829 Yet Gye cannot be held solely to blame. Melba’s communications at this time reveal that she had reservations about the project. She believed it to be impossible for a sufficiently able company to accompany her or be formed within Australia (Williamson and Musgrove, naturally believed otherwise). Melba offered a compromise: she would not perform in whole operas, but she would ‘appear in acts of certain operas.’830

Soon, the arrangements were altered again; Melba’s tour was first rescheduled to 1896 and then it was postponed indefinitely. In her public apologies Melba shifted the blame to the impresario Mapleson, who, she claimed, refused to let her go to Australia.831 Gye and Mapleson’s typically jealous actions were certainly obstacles to Musgrove’s ambitions, but Melba was not a woman to be forced to complete contracts she was no longer interested in. Indeed, in 1896, the year she was supposed to have arrived in Australia, Melba broke ties with Mapleson in order to accept ‘a highly lucrative offer to visit Brazil’.832 Her actions suggest that Melba’s non-appearance in her native city had more to do with money than contractual obligations. Indeed, it is likely that the vicissitude she showed in her

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830 Ibid.
831 ‘General Cable News’, *The Argus*, November 15th 1895, p. 5.
832 ‘General Cable News’, *The Argus*, October 17th, 1896, p .5
arrangements with Williamson and Musgrove were Melba’s somewhat transparent attempt at diplomacy: she recognised that Australia may have been offended if she refused on solely pecuniary grounds, especially considering the scale of her success. She is also likely to have been aware that Australians would have expected her to be more generous when negotiating with her motherland.

Thus did Williamson and Musgrove’s attempts to bring Melba to Melbourne falter and fail. It was only in 1902, almost a decade after first trying, that Williamson and Musgrove succeeded in presenting Melba in the city that had given her both her start and her name. Yet, although she did not perform before Melbourne’s public during the 1890s, Melba still had an impact on the city’s operatic culture. The enormity of Melba’s international success, coupled with the attention that other, no less remarkable, Antipodean singers such as Ada Crossley, Frances Saville, Frances Alda, Otto Fischer, Nellie Stewart, and Amy Sherwin had attracted in Europe and North America were crucial to Melbourne’s identity as an important, and culturally authoritative, city. Although these artists were singing far away, as specimens of the ever-increasing flood of Australian singers who would come to dominate opera during the twentieth century, they were best advertisements of the strength of Melbourne’s operatic culture; and a tiny portion of applause lavished upon them by Old World hands surely belonged to the upstart city where they had all got their starts: Marvellous Melbourne.
PART FOUR

The foregoing sections have explored Calcutta and Melbourne’s operatic cultures from the cities’ infancies to the turn of the twentieth century. That century had seen the Calcutta transform from an EIC territory to the jewel of the British Empire to a city on the decline. Likewise over the span of less than one hundred years, Melbourne had gone from an illegal settlement of Van Diemen’s Land pastoralists to a bustling metropolis until it was declared the first capital city of the newly-federated nation of Australia.

The preceding sections have also argued that throughout the Victorian Era, both of these iconic British cities, to greater or lesser degrees, had shaped, and been shaped, by opera. For Calcutta the relationship between White Town and opera was deeply connected to ideas of racial and cultural superiority, British identity and prestige (both communal and individual). For all their differences, Melbourne’s residents had uses for, and attitudes towards, opera as a cultural institution that were similar to their Anglo-Indian counterparts. Whilst Melburnians may have aspired to very different ideals, they too exploited the socio-cultural potentials of opera to form concepts of culture, race and identity.

This fourth and final part of the thesis should be considered as a multi-sectional conclusion that brings together the threads that have been explored hitherto. By discussing the two case-study cities simultaneously and within the context of each other, the Asia-Pacific region and the Empire, Part Four will make observations and posit theories about the socio-cultural role that opera played in both Calcutta and Melbourne during the Victorian Era. In doing so, it will pay particular attention to ideas of empire and globalisation. Chapter 14 places the operatic culture of nineteenth-century Calcutta and Melbourne into a broader regional and global framework, examining the economic, political, technological and personal reasons that opera burgeoned on a global scale at this time. Chapter 15 and 16 explore the ways in which opera was used as a tool of colonisation by evaluating the xenophobic and self-serving ways in which opera became a method of asserting cultural superiority, constructing and performing white identity and promoting social ideals. The final chapter will summarise the thesis and discuss future directions in research.
Chapter 14:
Around the world in eighty years—Empire, travelling artists and the spread of opera around the globe, 1820–1900

Using the career of the Italian impresario Augusto Cagli’s as a case study, this chapter places Calcutta and Melbourne into a wider regional and global context. The chapter explores the reasons for the spread of opera, underscoring the role that touring impresari and artists played in the proliferation of opera across the world. In the course of the discussion, the chapter will also touch on the multiple roles that opera played (art-form, cultural artefact, industry) in British and European society during the nineteenth century, issues that have already been introduced in previous chapters and will be expanded upon in Chapters 15 and 16, in order to emphasise the universality of opera’s primary sociological roles, even where the ends may differ.

The spread of opera
By the beginning of the nineteenth century, opera was already an expert traveller. From its beginnings in Florence and Mantua, opera had spread throughout the Italian peninsula, then conquered Western Europe and Great Britain. It had travelled east too, reaching Russia in 1726 and Greece in 1771. As Governor-General Clive learned to his chagrin, the imperial networks of Portugal and Spain meant that opera had already spread to South America by the mid-eighteenth century. Opera had even had an outing to Qing-ruled China: in 1778, Father Amoretti, a Jesuit priest recently returned from China, reported that the Emperor, Qianlong, had ordered a production of Piccinni’s La Cecchina to be mounted in a purpose-built theatre in Peking by a troupe of Chinese artists trained especially for the occasion.

833 This chapter appeared in a modified form as a conference paper at ‘Worlds to Conquer: the travelling virtuoso in the long nineteenth century’, at the University of Bristol, July 2010.
836 Pierre-Louis Ginguené, Notice sur la vie et les ouvrages de Nicolas Piccinni (Paris: Chez la Veuve Panckoucke., 1800), p. 10. Many thanks to Litong Zhu, a fellow postgraduate student at the University of Bristol, for directing me to this valuable source. Thanks also to Chloë Hansen who obtained a copy of the text from Ghent University for me. This text is difficult to access, and I therefore take the liberty of reproducing the relevant excerpt here in full: ‘En 1778, les Jésuites chassés de la Chine étant revenus en Italie, le père Amoretti, l’un d’eux, de retour à Gênes, y publia que quelques jésuites italiens avaient apporté à Pékin, parmi plusieurs productions des arts de l’Europe, la partition de la Bonne-Fille, qu’ils l’avaient fait exécuter devant l’Empereur de la Chine; que ce prince en avait été si délicieusement ému, qu’il avait établi une troupe de musiciens chargés seulement de jouer la musique de cette pièce; qu’enfin il avait fait bâtir par d’hables ouvriers du pays une espèce de théâtre, et que sur les muraillas il avait fait peindre toutes les scènes de la Cecchina, afin de pouvoir la voir et l’entendre à la fois.’
Notwithstanding the exoticism of Qianlong’s Piccinni project, it was to the Americas that intercontinental singers first travelled on a meaningful scale. Opera’s first home in the Americas was Havana, where between 1811 and 1830, the resident company gave up to eighty performances annually. On the mainland, New Orleans had had a strong opera culture since the beginning of the century, and between 1827 and 1833, the city’s leaning impresario, John Davis, organised six tours of the New Orleans Opera to the northern cities of Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York. These tours were not New York’s first taste of opera, however. In Autumn 1825, tenor, composer, impresario and ambitious father, Manuel García Sr., had come to New York with a troupe of eight opera singers, half of whom were García’s immediate family. Over the course of its time in New York the troupe performed the Rossinian works that were the mark of the age (Il Barbiere di Siviglia, Cenerentola, Tancredi, Il Turco in Italia and Otello) as well as Don Giovanni (at the particular request of the opera’s librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte, who was resident in New York at the time), Giulietta e Romeo (Zingarelli) and two works by García and Rosich, L’amato astuto and La Figlia dell’aria. After New York, the García company played in Mexico City, before returning to Europe in 1829.

Other singers concentrated on Spanish and Portuguese America. The Pizzoni-Bettali troupe described in Chapters Three and Four had begun its intrepid career in Rio de Janeiro in 1828, after which it performed in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Valparaíso, Santiago and Lima. As both the dissertation and the scholarship of Benjamin Walton have demonstrated, the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe was a fairly motley assortment of mediocre singers whose reception in South America ranged from tepid to caustic. It is what the troupe did next, rather than the quality of its work, that set it apart from its contemporaries: the artists sailed to Asia. After traversing the wide expanses of the Pacific Ocean, the troupe appeared in a season of opera in Macau between April and October 1834. The troupe then introduced Italian Opera to India, arriving in Calcutta via Singapore in December 1833. Particularly relevant to this discussion about the spread of opera and its intersections with empire and colonialism is the ability of this very average troupe to inspire feelings of connectivity and cultural globalisation amongst its colonial audiences. Indeed, in his 1836 work The Chinese: A General Description of China and Its Inhabitants, British sinologist and Macau resident John Francis Davis described the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe’s appearance in Macau as ‘a singular instance of the Opera performing a voyage around the world’. Such artists were, however, the fascinating exception, not the rule, and the Asia-

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839 The troupe was Joaquina Sitchez (García’s wife - soprano), Madame Barbieri (soprano) Maria (later Malibran, García’s daughter - contralto), Manuel, Jr. (García’s son - bass), Domenico Crivelli (tenor), Madame Barbieri (soprano), Felix Angrisiani (bass), Paolo Rosich (buffo and librettist) and Manuel García, Sr. (tenor and manager). Please note that prior to García’s arrival in New York, ballad opera and some French works had been performed. See Irving Kolodin et al, ‘New York: Before 1800’, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online, (2010). See also ‘Manuel García’, The Musical Times, April 1 1905, pp. 225–226.
840 Preston, Opera on the road, p. 103.
Pacific Region continued to have extremely intermittent opera seasons for many decades to come.

The 1850s saw an explosion in the number of itinerant troupes touring outside of Europe. Moreover, these troupes were of better quality than their predecessors. Indeed, whereas international touring had previously been regarded as a refuge for the commonplace (the Schieroni troupe), the fugitive (Anna Bishop), the adventurer (the Wallace family), or the megalomaniacal (García), during the 1850s singers’ attitudes to international touring began to change. Increasingly, talented and in-demand singers actively chose to tour non-European centres rather than accept contracts in Europe.

There were several factors that influenced their decision. One was ‘The Jenny Lind Effect’. In 1850, Jenny Lind, the ‘Swedish Nightingale’ and darling of the opera houses and concert halls of Europe abandoned the great opera houses of Europe for the rewards of an American tour. This was the year in which Jenny Lind signed a contract with P. T. Barnum for $150,000 to tour America. Importantly, Lind was not just contracted for appearances in culturally established cities such as New Orleans, Boston or Philadelphia; Lind visited cities like Nashville, Natchez, Richmond, St Louis, Wheeling, Cincinnati etc. She toured the roads and rivers and ports rather than the cities of America. By legitimising touring to small towns, Lind also legitimised those who performed in them. No longer could aspersions be cast upon those opera singers and musicians who found their way to the burgeoning cities of the new world. This created a new sense of opportunity amongst travelling singers, novices and veterans alike. In doing so, Barnum had turned the prima donna into a touring entertainment, and Lind had helped to elevate touring into the realms of respectability for all opera singers to come.

This is not to suggest that Jenny Lind single handedly changed the face of touring opera. As described above, there had been instances of talented and esteemed singers touring outside of Europe before Lind found success in America. The work of scholars such as Katherine Preston and John Graziano exemplify this fact. So, too, do the careers of the singers who preceded Lind to America. Giuseppe de Begnis, had come to America in 1838. Clotilde and Antonio Barili, Adelina Patti’s step-siblings and very able singers in their own right, enthralled New York audiences throughout 1847. Eighteen forty-seven was also the year in which Anna Bishop, travelling prima donna par excellence, first arrived in America. Over the next nine years Bishop was based in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Ever-attracted to adventure, novelty and even a little danger, Bishop’s time in America was as likely to be spent in front of tortilla-eating, coffee swilling audience of

845 Alison Gyger, 'Flower, Sara Elizabeth (c. 1823 - 1865)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Supplementary Volume (2005), pp. 128-29.
846 Walsh, Catherine Hayes, 1818-1861: the Hibernian prima donna, pp. 146-47.
848 Graziano (ed.), Importing Culture: European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840-1900 ; and Preston, Opera on the road.
bandits in a Mexican cock-fighting arena, or soothing lonely, homesick men at a Californian goldmine as charming more respectable audiences in metropolises such as Boston, New York and New Orleans.\textsuperscript{850}

Yet there is evidence to suggest that Lind’s success did inspire artists who may not have otherwise considered non-European tours to travel further afield. Her successes were relentlessly publicised by the media in England and mainland Europe; on either side of the Atlantic, ‘Lind in America’ was a topic of private and public conversation. This publicity undoubtedly had some effect on Lind’s Europe based contemporaries. Whereas in the five years prior to Lind’s arrival in America there had only been a handful of singers, of which only Bishop and Barili might be considered ‘international’ standard, in Lind’s wake America was flooded by the world’s leading prime donne: Henriette Sontag, Marietta Alboni, Marietta Gazzaniga, Giulia Grisi were amongst the wave of singers to try their luck in America in the early fifties. Indeed, Irish soprano Catherine Hayes, actually credited Lind for her decision to tour America, referencing Lind mania and the fantastic sums reputedly being made by the Swede in her letters at the time.\textsuperscript{851} Lind’s successful American sojourn played a part in transforming transcontinental touring into a routine aspect of a prima donna’s career—albeit an interesting and exhilarating one.

Of course, the success of these travelling singers, including Lind, was facilitated the by social, economic and infrastructure developments. The huge strides made in transport technologies, such as faster boats and rail, made travel easier, quicker and more comfortable than it had been hitherto. As transportation infrastructure spread and improved throughout the nineteenth century, the world became smaller. Continents that had once been half a year away were now only a few weeks’ journey from Europe. These developments were accompanied by the invention and proliferation of new telecommunication utilities, which made the mental and emotional distance between Europe and the cities of America, Asia, Africa and Australasia as small as the physical distance that separated them. The speed and apparent ease with which opera began to spread across the globe in the wake of these technological breakthroughs demonstrates the dependence of opera, and indeed all art, upon that other cultural hallmark of the Victorian era: mechanical innovation.

It is no coincidence that America’s burgeoning operatic culture occurred during the 1850s, the decade in which gold and governments opened the American west, which in turn engendered an economic and population boom. The non-indigenous population of the United States grew by 35% between 1840 and 1850, and by 36% between 1850 and 1860.\textsuperscript{852} Governments were encouraging the settlement of the American west. Discoveries of gold, newly-founded nations and colonies, rapid and widespread growth in international trade and finance made touring more rewarding. As prosperous and populous settlements

\textsuperscript{850} Davis, \textit{Anna Bishop}, pp. 121-78; and Esmeralda Rocha, ‘‘Yellow Brick Road’: Opera on the Gold Rush Circuit (San Francisco and Melbourne, 1851-1861)’, conference paper delivered at American Musicological Society Annual Conference 2011.


sprung up across the American, Australian and Asian continents, travelling artists had more stops available on their tour. Instead of journeying hundreds of miles without any source of remuneration, artists could perform at each town along the way. As these smaller towns grew, they had more people willing and able to patronize the opera, so an artist or company’s sojourn could be also be lengthened, making the tour less tiring and more profitable.

As scholars such as Katherine Preston and John Graziano have demonstrated, operatic culture in the United States exploded during the mid-nineteenth century. Preston has noted:

From 1847 through 1860 and later, there would be no lengthy periods of hiatus in the performance of Italian opera in this country. Although it was not clear at the time, the genres had finally become firmly established in the United States.853

Indeed, for a while, America was the place to which opera companies flocked; there seemed an abundance of new towns and ever-growing audiences to claim and conquer, and no shortage of artists willing to try. The large cities such as San Francisco, New Orleans and New York had regular opera seasons by 1860, whilst opera companies were performing even in the newer and smaller centres of the country.854

The rapid enlargement and enrichment of Northern America was not only an enticement for European singers in and of itself, but also formed an ‘opera-bridge’ between Europe and Australia. A singer could now travel from Milano to Melbourne and have wealthy, ever-growing audiences along the entire journey. Boston and New York led to Philadelphia, which led to Chicago, which led to New Orleans, which led to the small towns that were daily springing up across the Western frontier, eventually leading to the west coast and the thriving opera scene of San Francisco. Once in San Francisco, many companies as well as individual opera singers embarked on one of the many clipper ships bound for Melbourne. The cities already had much in common: gold, good harbours, newfound geopolitical status, wealth, a population boom, close satellite cities.855 Together with their neighbouring towns (San Francisco had Sacramento, Stockton and Placerville whilst Melbourne had Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine as well as the capital cities of its sister colonies), the twin gold towns now formed a trans-Pacific touring circuit. The Pacific had been the last frontier of trade, transport and Western culture. Opera was one of the first Western

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853 Preston, *Opera on the road*, p. 141.
855 Rocha, ‘Yellow Brick Road’: Opera on the Gold Rush Circuit (San Francisco and Melbourne, 1851-1861).
cultural artefacts to be transported across that ocean, and it laid open the entire Asia-Pacific region for claim by any impresario or artist with the courage to try. One such impresario was Augusto Cagli.

Cagli in the Asia-Pacific and Africa

As described in Chapter 6, Italian impresario Augusto Cagli came to Bombay in 1864 with his wife, Gemma Onorati. Although he arrived as his wife’s companion, Cagli soon capitalised on his wife’s success in Bombay, declaring his intention to bring a full opera company to the city later that year. After a successful season in Bombay, the troupe journeyed across the subcontinent to Calcutta where, over the next five years, Cagli and his ever-evolving troupe established a vibrant operatic culture worthy of the prestige and self-conscious privilege of the “City of Palaces”.

Rather than remain in India to enjoy his monopoly, Cagli then formed a composite company with another Italian impresario also working in Asia, Giovanni Pompei, and journeyed to Australia, introducing the first regular seasons of Italian opera there. Over the next four years, the Cagli-Pompei company significantly improved the standard of opera in Australia and New Zealand, facilitating in that farthest corner of the globe a most resilient and dynamic operatic culture. Following his Australian residency, Cagli continued his attempt to ‘conquer the world’, touring companies of Italian and Australian singers to South Africa, Japan, Singapore, Colombo, Shanghai, Batavia, Java and The Philippines, remaining active in the Asia-Pacific region until his death in 1888.

As both Table 14.1 and Figure 14.2 reveal, Cagli’s operatic ventures led him to such diverse locations as South Africa, British India and Ceylon, the Dutch East India, Spanish Philippines and the Australasian British colonies. It was in Calcutta and Melbourne, however, that Cagli spent over half of his career. Such disproportion raises many questions. Why, out of the dozens of towns that Cagli visited did he keep on returning to Calcutta and Melbourne? What made these two centres so appealing to Cagli—and to other travelling artists as well? These questions, in turn, lead to others: why did Cagli and his artists travel to the region at large and, moreover, why did they leave Italy at all? This chapter will now address these questions in order to address the issues surrounding the translocality of Italian impresari and the globalisation of opera.

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856 For the purposes of this chapter, the term ‘Asia-Pacific’ refers to Oceania, South and East Asia— hence it includes India, China, Japan, Hong-Kong, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies (modern Indonesia), Australia and New Zealand. The author understands that this is a wide definition of that regional term, but reminds readers that this is not incompatible with political, economic and journalistic organisations such as the APIYN and the BBC.
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<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>LOCATION(S)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Bombay</td>
<td>First performance of Italian opera in Bombay</td>
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<td>1866</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>First Italian company in 30 years</td>
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<td>1867</td>
<td>Calcutta</td>
<td>Cagli builds India’s first opera house.</td>
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<td>1868</td>
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<td>1870</td>
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<td>1871</td>
<td>Calcutta (Jan–Mar, Nov–Dec); Melbourne, other Victoria, Sydney, New Zealand</td>
<td>With Giovanni Pompei and W.S. Lyster</td>
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<td>1872</td>
<td>Calcutta (Jan–Mar); Melbourne, other Victoria, Sydney, New Zealand</td>
<td>With Pompei and Lyster</td>
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<td>1873</td>
<td>Melbourne, other Victoria, Sydney, New Zealand</td>
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<td>1874</td>
<td>Melbourne, other Victoria, Sydney, New Zealand</td>
<td>With Pompei and Lyster</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Melbourne, other Victoria, Sydney, New Zealand, Adelaide, Hobart, Brisbane; Cape Town (Nov and Dec)</td>
<td>With Lyster.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
<td>First seasons of Italian opera in South Africa.</td>
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<td>1877</td>
<td>Cape Town</td>
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<td>1878</td>
<td>Bombay, Allahabad, Madras</td>
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<td>1879</td>
<td>Calcutta, Colombo, Singapore, Batavia, Java, Hong Kong</td>
<td>First performances of Italian Opera in Ceylon.</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>Hong Kong, Shanghai, Yokohama</td>
<td>First performances of Italian opera in Qing-ruled China (as opposed to European China)</td>
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<td>1881</td>
<td>Yokohama</td>
<td>First performances of Italian opera in Japan.</td>
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<td>1882</td>
<td>Dutch East Indies (tour)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Melbourne</td>
<td>Company deserts Cagli in Melbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Known to be touring the Asia-Pacific region with Lodovico Balzafore (tenor) and company.</td>
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<td>1885</td>
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<td>1887</td>
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Asia-Pacific in Focus

The previous chapters have examined the particular circumstances in Calcutta and Melbourne that led to the success and failure of operatic culture at particular times throughout the Victorian era. By examining global politics, ideas of empire, and regional development, this section will focus on the attractiveness of the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. In doing so it place Calcutta and Melbourne’s operatic developments into a broader geographic context.

As described earlier in the chapter, a variety of economic, demographic, geographical and technological factors led to the United States experiencing somewhat of an operatic explosion during the 1850s. However, when the US civil war broke in 1861, the economic disarray and safety concerns forced impresari to reassess the situation. The troupe of W.S. Lyster, for example, had been performing opera in both the metropolises and the heartland of American since 1855 (amongst the centres on its itinerary were Chicago, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Baton Rouge, Atlanta and San Francisco). As so many others had done before it, the troupe planned a year-long tour of Australia prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. However, the war (which had broken out whilst they were en route to Melbourne)

quickly changed their plans. A twelve-month tour turned into two years, then three, and still the war had not ended. Eventually, the troupe resided in Australia for seven years, partly because they were dissuaded from returning to a war-torn US, and partly because they were persuaded to stay in a prosperous, peaceful Melbourne.

Even for those companies that stayed in the US, the war made opera more difficult and less profitable. Many gave up life on the road, concentrating on cities in the North or the West, which were more secure and affluent. Of course, this does not mean that touring opera disappeared from the United States (the work of John Graziano and Katherine Preston alone would refute such a claim), but there can be little doubt that the political, economic and social circumstances caused by the American Civil War led some impresari (both Italian and Anglophone) to consider the potential of other destinations.

Similarly, South America was decreasingly living up to its Eldorado prophesy. There were wars between Brazil and Uruguay, between Colombia and Ecuador, whilst the multi-party Franco-Mexican War spanned most of the decade; Spain was at war with Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, while Paraguay was at war with all its neighbours. Like its northern neighbour, South America’s economic and political problems rendered it a less attractive destination for a travelling opera company during the 1860s; hence, travelling impresari and their companies began to look further afield for fresh opportunities. Their gaze increasingly fell upon Australia and Asia. Giovanni Pompei, for example, had been interested in taking opera to Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, but found the Dutch-East Indies, Hong-Kong and British India more enticing places to base a career as an impresario in the 1860s.858

Of course, for others the choice to base a career in the Asia-Pacific region may have been pure happenstance. There is no evidence to suggest that Augusto Cagli would have come to India, or indeed the Asia-Pacific region, had his wife not been invited to Bombay in 1864. Once he was there, however, he saw the potential that not only Calcutta, but the region as a whole offered to an enterprising impresario. The cities of Macau, Hong-Kong, Canton, Saigon and Manila were within (relatively) easy distance of each other and Batavia and Shanghai were major trading cities. By the 1860s, there were also signs that Japan was heading towards a relaxation of *sakoku* (the foreign relations policy of the Edo period in which the nation had operated under self-imposed seclusion) which would lead to further economic, political and cultural development in the region.859 The region’s prospects were also strengthened by the rising affluence and prestige of the Australian colonies, which also afforded good touring opportunities. As has been demonstrated in preceding sections and chapters, Cagli took advantage of all these developments over the coming decade, conquering the region for himself and in the processes becoming one of the most important and prolific global promulgators of opera of the nineteenth century.

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858 ‘Signor Pompei’, *The Times of India*, November 13th 1870, p. 3.
The Artists: Motivations to travel 1850–1900

Cagli’s interest in coming to the most remote corner of the globe to create an operatic empire is obvious: the prospect of not one but innumerable cities in which to establish a monopoly would seduce any businessman. The motivations of the artists who performed in the Asia-Pacific region between 1850 and 1900 are less apparent. Of course, some of the less-talented singers may have been in search of a more accommodating audience, but as has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, many of the singers who performed in the Asia-Pacific in the second half of the nineteenth century were skilful singers who had found gainful employment in some of the premier houses of Europe. So what induced these singers to perform in cities so far from home? Why travel away from comfort and career to cities in which the customs, climate and often language would be utterly foreign? The reasons are as varied as the singers themselves, but can be distilled into four main categories:

1. Wealth
2. Career
3. Settlement
4. Adventure/Personal Fulfilment

This section will explore these motivations, with the aim of dispelling the popularly-held belief that the singers who travelled and performed in the Asia-Pacific region during the Victorian era were mediocre singers looking to be ‘big fish in a little pond’.

Wealth

The old adage ‘money makes the world go round’ may not be accurate but it is certainly true that money can convince people to traverse the face of the globe, and Australia was the new Eldorado. Victoria’s gold fields averaged a yield of 90 tonnes a year between 1851 and 1861, which was worth approximately $657 million in the mid nineteenth century (a sum that is equivalent to $17 billion in today’s currency). By December 1851, the goldfield at Castlemaine alone was producing 23,000 ounces of gold per week. Some reported enormous wealth; John Sherer, for example, published a book about his fortunes, where he records finding between six to eight pounds of gold each day for a week. Such finds represent daily income of $1,982–$2,643 at 1852 prices, which is the equivalent of $385,000–$513,000 at 2010 values. With such sums to be made, men flocked to the Victorian goldfields, and the goldmines lured workers away from ever other field; ordinary wages, therefore, ballooned; the reaper who had been making 4 shillings a day in 1848 was now making 28 shillings a day. Indeed, visitor G. Butler Earp recorded that ‘a very large proportion of the population are earning highly remunerative wages and there are very few

863 Williamson and Officer, 'Measuring Worth', 2011.
who were not doing well. Although high inflation chased the heels of these high wages, the people earning it could not spend it fast enough. The population Melbourne consisted almost entirely of young, unmarried men; these men lived meanly, many in prefabricated homes or canvas tents, and apart from food, liquor and clothing, they had few personal expenses. Having no family commitments, the men also had an unprecedented amount of leisure time. This was particularly true of the gold miners who spent winter in town and were, therefore, unemployed for up to five months of the year.

The natural result of such social and financial circumstances was that the cities became consumerist paradises, especially with regard to entertainment. Indeed, every type of entertainment was to be found in Melbourne, from brothels and gambling houses to theatre and opera. In any and all of these pursuits, money was of no object. Audiences were as willing to pay premium prices for their opera as they were for their brandy, food or labour. There can be little doubt that the lure of extraordinary ticket receipts was at least part of the reason that so many opera singers, impresari and other musicians and artists made a point of visiting San Francisco and Melbourne.

We also know that the artists’ expectations were not disappointed. In 1849 and 1850, Catherine Hayes was earning £21 per concert and £42 per operatic performance. At the time she was in much demand at Her Majesty Theatre, London that year, and she had a reputed annual wage of £1300, an income which did not cover her travel, companions’ expenses or costuming. In coming to East Coast America, she signed a contract for £500 per month, all expenses paid, and a commission of 12.5% of all profits. This was a great improvement for the Irish singer, but it was in San Francisco and Melbourne that she really made her fortune. She earned $30,000 in six months. At one auction, the fire chief of the Empire Engine Company paid $1,125 for his ticket, and paid $19 per ticket for the rest of his company to attend a concert. Melbourne was similarly rewarding; Anna Bishop netted approximately £1000 for six opera performances, and even the prime donnes’s less famous and less talented rival, Belgian soprano Clarisse Cailly, was able to secure a contract for £100 per week performing opera at Melbourne’s Theatre Royal. Similar stories were repeated across the Asia-Pacific as gold fever swept across New South Wales, Queensland,
and Otago (New Zealand). Even those colonies that were not made wealthy by gold discoveries benefitted from the Australasia’s auriferousness. The companies and artists that were primarily attracted to centres like Melbourne later made their way to sister colonies—Catherine Hayes, for example, based her stay in Asia in Melbourne, but also paid a visit to India, Hong Kong and Singapore. Cagli’s company was based in Calcutta and then Melbourne, but (as Table 14.1 and Figure 14.1 above show) over twenty cities on three continents benefitted from the affluence of these two metropolises.

Career
Money, for all its attractions, was not the only incentive to journeying to the Asia-Pacific region. Many singers appear to have come to the opera stages of remote Australasia for professional reasons. Some came to escape the increasingly difficult working conditions of Europe; others came to gain experience, whilst, for others, Asia and Australia represented a chance to keep singing mother, fathers, husbands and wives together.

As John Rosselli explained in The opera industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: the role of the impresario, mid-ottocento Italy had no tradition of established companies or stable casts. The exceptions were the minor, low-prestige itinerant troupes, which, having grown out of the Commedia dell’Arte tradition, specialised in opera buffa and, of course, as Romantic- and Grand-Opera began to supersede comic genres, even this work began to dry up. Instead the Italian opera industry was dominated by seasonal employment; that is, each season, an impresario would assemble a company for a set number of performances, after which the company would be disbanded and the singers would be again in search of employment. Whilst there was plenty of work for a competent singer in Italy (particularly within the major Northern circuit which took in the innumerable cities of Northern Italy together with Napoli and the three main cities of Sicily—see Figure 14.2), it was a lifestyle of constant travelling and constant searching for the next engagement. This arrangement would not have been to every individual’s taste. No doubt many, particularly those with families, would have preferred the stability of the troupe, but the itinerant troupe’s low status in Italy’s operatic hierarchy meant that such employment was beneath both the dignity and the wage potential of those singers who eventually came to appear in Cagli’s companies.

873 Throughout the nineteenth century there had been an escalating trend away from buffa towards semi-seria or seria composition. Bellini was a composer only of tragedia-lirica or semi-seria. Rossini and Donizetti had both found early success in buffa, but increasingly devoted more time to serious opera. A generation later, Errico Petrella too found more success in his serious operas such as Ione, Marco Visconti and the semi-seria I Promessi Sposi than in the 1851 composition, Le Precauzione, which is often cited as an example of the continuing triumph of the opera buffa genre. Furthermore, whilst the comic works (Crispino e la Comare and Il Birraio di Preston) of the Ricci brothers, Luigi and Federico, indeed enjoyed ongoing success in Italy, they never found the same prestige as the serious operas of the Riccis’ contemporaries such as Mercadante, Apolloni, Ponchielli or Verdi.

The seasonality and unpredictability of opera may have been most acute in Italy, but it was occurring in other European opera markets, too. In England, the small itinerant troupes that had provided provincial towns like Bath, Bristol and Birmingham with opera began facing competition from London companies in the 1840s. By the 1850s, London’s stars routinely travelled to the provinces, squeezing out the peripatetic and local artists. Opera in France had always been particularly dominated by the metropolis and although some of the larger centres such as Rouen, Marseilles, Toulouse and Lyon are now renowned for strong operatic cultures, the mid-nineteenth century represented the nadir of independent provincial opera.875

875 Grand Théâtre de Rouen, for example, had been culturally significant up to the 1830s, but then fell into a period of decline until the 1880s, when it once again became a theatre of national importance. Lyon’s Grand Théâtre suffered from a similar ebb of vitality in the middle of the century, only to regain it by the 1870s. The Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse enjoyed its operatic heyday in the 17th and 18th centuries. In Marseilles, opera was regularly performed throughout the 19th Century, but with regard to its singers and repertoire, the theatre was very much a satellite of Paris. Frank Dobbins, 'Lyons', Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online (2010a), Frank Dobbins, 'Toulouse', Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online (2010b), David Hiley, 'Rouen', Oxford Music Online (2010b), André Sécond, L’Opéra de Marseilles 1787-1987 (Marseilles: J. Laffitte, 1987).
The shift from stable company employment to seasonal contracts and the treatment of provincial theatres as satellites of the metropolitan opera houses was compounded by the internationalisation of opera, which had begun in the 1830s. The stars of Venice and Milan were also the stars of Paris and London. The search for operatic perfection and the age of the diva were serving to further squeeze opera's diversity, even in the uppermost of echelons. By the late 1840s only the most popular of singers could count on securing enough work, season after season, year after year. In order to survive, the majority of singers had to either adapt to the risks and pitfalls of seasonal employment, abandon their profession, or claim professional autonomy by hitting the road as a touring singer.

Touring opera to remote destinations, however, minimised many of these problems. There was little to no competition, which made opera potentially more profitable and more secure a profession (for both the artists and the impresario). Moreover, the populations in isolated locations offered more encouragement and loyalty to those who made the effort to visit than the saturated opera markets of Italy. The vast distances that were travelled also necessitated longer seasons and more stable companies, attributes which reduced the volatility of the profession for both impresari and singers. In short, international opera companies combined the prestige of the Italian seasonal industry with the stability of the low-status itinerant opera buffa troupe.

Additionally many singers, particularly those at the beginning of their careers, benefitted from the opportunities that the Asian and Australian stages offered. Singers like Teresa Riboldi, one of Cagli's many singers, came to the region lacking much professional experience. Over the course of her employment in Cagli's company, during which she performed in India, Australia, Hong-Kong and New Zealand, Riboldi appeared in fourteen roles. Such a wealth of experience stood her in good stead. Upon her return to Europe, Riboldi's knowledge and expertise, along with her innate talents, led to engagements at major opera houses. Indeed, in 1879, she was the principal contralto at Madrid's Teatro Real, singing opposite singers such as Christine Nilsson, Enrico Tamberlik, and Jean de Reszke.876

It was not only the young and still unsuccessful that found professional opportunities in Australasia that were closed to them in Europe. Antonietta Link, for example, had found enormous success in Germany and Austria in operetta breeches roles. In coming to Australia, Link was able to prove her competency in the serious and prestigious repertoire of Verdi and Wagner. Whether the opportunities presented by a sojourn on the other side of the world were influencing factors in Link's decision to come to Australia cannot be verified, for there is no evidence that discusses her motivations, one way or another. Yet, it is possible that professional experience and freedom may have led Link to temporarily seek sunnier climes.

**Settlement**

Amongst the fortune seekers and opportunists, there were also artists whose primary motivation in coming to Australasia was not professional. Some came first and foremost as

private citizens, seeking to build new lives in new places. Madame Valadares, favourite singer of 1840s and 1850s Calcutta, had arrived in that city as a private citizen with her husband in the 1830s. Music was a profession the Valadareses adopted only after migrating to British India and pursuing other careers. George Loder and his new wife Emma Neville came to Australia to escape San Francisco, where Loder had lost his first wife and children to disease.\(^{877}\) Elizabeth Testar arrived in Melbourne in 1850, when she moved to Victoria with her new husband who had secured a job in Melbourne.\(^{878}\) Fannie and Martin Simonsen, who were to be such important figures in the operatic history of Melbourne did not come as part of a touring troupe, nor were they on their own personal world tour. Instead, they arrived in 1860s Melbourne as permanent migrants who happened to be musicians. Other singers may have initially come as members of touring opera companies, but were quick to settle in the cities in which they came, suggesting that migration was at least one of many factors that lead them to these new worlds. Pietro Cecchi, who became Nellie Melba's teacher, left the Agatha States Opera Troupe which visited Melbourne in 1871, after only a few weeks. Several members of Cagli's 1871 company became long-term or permanent residents of Calcutta or Australia, including Alberto Zelman, Alessandro Massa, Leandro Coy and Giulia Tamburini-Coy, and Pietro Favas. Migration may not have been their primary motivation in joining Cagli's travelling troupes, but the possibility of finding a new home may have been an incentive.

**Adventure/Personal Fulfilment**

Another incentive that lured some singers to travel the Asia-Pacific performing opera was the idea of adventure or personal fulfilment. As one of the last frontiers of the ever-shrinking world of the nineteenth century, the exoticism of places like India, Hong-Kong, Australia and New Zealand ought not to be underestimated as motive for the appearance of so many troupes and individual artists in the Asia-Pacific in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At a time when most people did not leave the town of their birth, the idea of travelling across the globe, living, meeting and working with all sorts of new people in new places must have been an exciting and rare opportunity. Moreover, the period 1850–1900 was a time in which Western culture became acutely interested in travel. World exhibitions, travel panoramas, tourist novels, advances made to travel infrastructure (both technological, such as rail and road and geopolitical, such as the Panama and Suez canals), archaeology, orientalist studies, literature and the political, economic and social structures of European colonialism itself contributed to the advent of international tourism.\(^{879}\) Singers were not immune to the fashion for travel to far and exotic places; indeed, opera itself was increasingly concerned with the foreign. Consider the rise in non-Western themes that occurred over the course of the nineteenth century: the representations of the exotic which had begun in works like *L'Italiana in Algeri*, *Semiramide* and *Il Turco in Italia* (Rossini), and *Le Caliphe de Bagdad* (Boïeldieu), and been continued by Mercadante (Emma d'Antiochia), Meyerbeer (*L'Africaine*, *Dinorah*, *Le Prophète* and *Il Crociato in Egitto*), had by the


\(^{878}\) Author Unknown, "Testar, Elizabeth (1819 - 1908)", *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online* (2007).

end of the century become a veritable flood: consider Offenbach’s *La Princesse de Trebizonde* and *Ba-ta-clan*, Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and *Djamileh*, Lakmé by Delibes, Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado*, Mascagni’s *Iris*, Massenet’s *Le Roi de Lahore, Le Mage* and *Thaïs*, Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*, Stanford’s *The Veiled Prophet of Khorasan*, and Verdi’s *Nabucco* and *Aida*.

Some singers commented on the role that a desire for adventure played in their determination to tour the Asia-Pacific. Anna Bishop, complex woman that she was, had many reasons to seek a career as a touring prima donna, including her abandonment of her husband, Sir Henry Bishop, and the scandal surrounding her questionable relationship with Bochsa. Yet, the scale of her incessant touring was also very much a product of her own vividly curious nature. She described this inclination for travel to the Australian press:

> In California, a longing took possession of me … to visit that great unknown land in the South Seas, and from thence to make a leap across to China and India. Not only did I wish to exchange some of my notes for gold… but I was consumed, as I have been ever since my wanderings commenced, by a thirst for *l’inconnu*, and here I am’ she exclaimed with a merry flash in her dark eyes.880

Such a mixture of financial and personal motivations is likely to have been quite representative of all those artists who decided to travel widely in the nineteenth century, and demonstrated the complexity and interconnectedness of the factors which induced talented singers to seek careers beyond the institutions of the Old World.

**Beyond Asia-Pacific: Opera in Africa, Central Asia, South America, North America and Europe.**

The Asia-Pacific was of course, not the only region to which opera was spreading throughout the nineteenth century. Opera made a very famous début in Egypt with the world première of Verdi’s *Aida*. French colonialism had seen opera being performed in Mauritius and Réunion Island as early as the 1830s, and by the early twentieth century, the Francosphere was awash in opera. Jann Pasler is currently researching opera in the French Empire, documenting performances and seasons of opera in French Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia etc), French Indochina, and even the French Pacific.881 McGill doctoral student Adalyat Issiyeva’s research into the intersections of Russia and Central Asia, whilst not strictly about opera, has some information about the spread of opera into Central Asia.882 Opera was performed with increasing frequency in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, a subject which has not, as yet, attracted specific attention from any scholars, but is a worthy subject of research, particularly given Constantinople’s links to Gaetano Donizetti through his brother, Giuseppe, who was the General Instructor of

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880 Gyger, *Civilising the colonies*, p. 81.
882 Adalyat Issiyeva, ‘Cabinet or Resuscitated Orient? Russian Fin-de-Siècle Sources on Asian Music’, *Canadian University Music Society/Société de musique des universités canadiennes* 2009 (Carleton University, Ottawa, 2009).
Imperial Ottoman Music under Sultan Mahmud II.\textsuperscript{883} In Southern Africa, Cagli was the first to present Italian Opera in Cape Town where he and one of his companies was based for two years. Cagli also (re)introduced Italian Opera to Qing China, Meiji Japan and the Philippines. Whilst not concerned with opera, David Irving’s work \textit{Colonial Counterpoint} offers insights into the spread of Western music to Manila.\textsuperscript{884}

Meanwhile opera continued to flourish in the Americas. By the 1880s, Canada and the US were producing their first generation of internationally acclaimed opera singers. Consider Alwina Valleria (the first American-born singer to perform a principal role at the Met),\textsuperscript{885} Emma Albani (the Québécoise soprano, who changed her name to honour to New York town where she first performed professionally),\textsuperscript{886} Minnie Hauk (who famously sang Carmen more than five hundred times in four languages),\textsuperscript{887} Ada Adini (who created the role of the Duchesse d’Étampes in Saint-Saëns’s \textit{Ascanio}),\textsuperscript{888} Lillian Nordica (who was principal dramatic soprano at Covent Garden between 1888 and 1893),\textsuperscript{889} Marie van Zandt (who created the role of Lakmé in 1883),\textsuperscript{890} the patriotically named Emma Nevada (a favourite of Ambroise Thomas), Alice Esty, Sybil Sanderson (darling of the Parisian Belle Époque, creating roles such as Esclarmonde and Thaïs for Massenet),\textsuperscript{891} and Emma Eames (one of Melba’s few true rivals). In South America, the peace and prosperity of the 1870s had seen the erection of dozens of opera houses; in Brazil alone there were many large opera houses built including the Teatro da Paz in Belém do Pará, Teatro Imperial Dom Pedro II, Theatro Lyrico Fluminense and Theatro São Pedro de Alcântara (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) and, the opera house made famous by Werner Herzog 1982 film \textit{Fitzcarraldo}, the Teatro Amazonas in Manaus. Composers and opera singers were also beginning to emerge from these countries in the late nineteenth century; Brazilian Antônio Carlos Gomes, author of \textit{Il Guarany} and \textit{Salvator Rosa}, is perhaps the most illustrious example of the former whilst Mexican Ángela Peralta (an accomplished soprano specialising in Bel Canto roles) and Puerto Rican Antonio Paoli (who, upon his Paris début, was declared ‘the Tenor of France’) perhaps being the most famous examples of the latter.\textsuperscript{892}

Even in Europe, opera’s homeland, the art form was spreading. Russia was no longer merely importing opera, but producing its own species of the genre, many of which were based on Russian subjects, as can be seen in the works such as \textit{The Queen of Spades}, \textit{Boris Godunov}, \textit{The Maid of Pskov}, and \textit{Prince Igor}. Composers in Eastern European nations


\textsuperscript{885} Thomspon, \textit{The American Singer: A Hundred Years of Success in Opera}, p. 141.

\textsuperscript{886} Pierre Vachon, ‘La Jeunesse, Marie-Louise-Cécile-Emma’, \textit{Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online} (XV: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000).

\textsuperscript{887} ‘Minnie Hauk, Famous Carmen’, \textit{The Boston Evening Transcript}, November 18 1912.

\textsuperscript{888} David Cummings, ‘Ada Adini’, \textit{Oxford Music Online}.

\textsuperscript{889} Katherine K. Preston, ‘Lillian Nordica’, \textit{Oxford Music Online}.

\textsuperscript{890} Davis, \textit{The American opera singer: the lives and adventures of America’s great singers in opera and concert, from 1825 to the present}, p. 143.

responded to the Nationalist political and cultural tendencies of the late-nineteenth century by adopting a foreign artform, opera, and transforming it into an emblem of their countries’ unique cultural heritages; consider, for example, operas like Vanda (Dvořák, 1876), The Branderburgers in Bohemia and The Bartered Bride (Smetana, 1863 and 1866 respectively), and Halka (Moniuszko, 1848/1858). Greece, whose mythology and history had for so long inspired Italian and French opera, also began to produce its own native brand of opera; Ionian composer Pavlos Karrer, for example, composed Markos Botsaris and I Kyra Frossini in 1858 and 1868 respectively. 893

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Although begun in the 1820s, when small troupes began to visit the Americas, opera’s spread across the globe was only fully-realised at the turn of the twentieth century. By this time, opera was being regularly performed in cities, and even smaller regional centres, in each of the world’s six inhabited continents. Moreover, there were complex political, economic, social, and artistic factors operating at local, regional and global levels that led to this proliferation of opera across the globe. Moreover, opera appears to have always been closely connected to ideas of identity. In some places, like Russia and Eastern Europe, opera became an emblem of a country’s unique cultural heritage and the people’s desire for greater political autonomy. In other places, such as Melbourne, opera was perceived to be a symbol of the city’s coming of age and cultural authority. In Calcutta, as in French Tunis or Spanish Manila, opera was a symbol of the hegemony of the city’s colonial rulers. Even in London, Paris, Vienna and Milan, opera’s eternal headquarters, opera was a mechanism by which individual and collective social identities were asserted, advertised and realised. The universality of opera’s spread suggests that opera was a uniquely potent weapon, which could be made to push a political and social agenda. The following chapters will explore the agendas that opera advanced in Calcutta and Melbourne with reference to two aspects of colonial identity: the other and the self.

Chapter 15:
Opera, Race and Hegemony

The nineteenth century was a period during which European powers raced to conquer the world—not only geographically, but also (more significantly) ideologically and culturally. As scholars such as James Belich have shown, the British were arguably the most determined and most successful colonisers of the era. The British Empire rose to its heights at this time, and as discussed in Chapter Two, Calcutta, the ‘City of Palaces’, became the jewel in the crown of British high-imperialism. Moreover, due to social, political and economic factors (consider the rise of the middle class, political upheaval in Europe and the Industrial Revolution), the nineteenth century saw opera ascend to the zenith of its accessibility, influence and prestige. The simultaneity of the rise of imperialism and the Golden Age of opera is a connection that has long been overlooked, yet between these efflorescences exists a nexus that illuminates the intersectionality of music, culture, politics and society in the nineteenth century.

Whilst there has been mounting scholarly interest in the nexus between opera and colonisation, these studies have consistently approached the opera-colonial relationship solely through analyses of the representational, that is, how imperialist notions of the ‘Orient’ or ‘other’ were created or reinforced by the operatic canon. By contrast, this chapter explores the interactions between opera, the coloniser and the ‘other’ in order to determine how opera supported polemic notions of race and identity in colonized lands. This analysis is divided into three sections, each of which is a case study. The first section analyses public discourses surrounding Italian Opera to demonstrate the extent to which opera was thought to be a useful means of asserting cultural superiority by the British colonists of 1830s Calcutta. The second section, which discusses 1860s and ‘70s Calcutta, shows how this attitude evolved into a protectionist model of cultural ownership, in which opera and European high-art culture more generally became contested spaces of power. The final section moves to mid-century Melbourne, and analyses the significance of the friction between Italian and Chinese operatic traditions. In looking at these three times and places, this chapter will highlight the fact that the majority of British colonists considered themselves to be culturally superior to both indigenous and fellow migrant groups. Indeed, at times even the Italian artists themselves were ‘othered’, even though they were providing the very means by which the British hoped to establish cultural hegemony. The

comparisons offered by this chapter will also demonstrate that opera’s role was dependent upon the specific economic, social and political contexts in which it was performed, rather than being uniform across the empire during the Victorian Era.

**Assimilation: Opera in 1830s Calcutta**

In his recently published work ‘Opera and the cultural authority of the capital city’, William Weber reveals that a thriving Italian opera scene was central to the perception of a city as an authoritative metropolis.\(^{896}\) Ironically, the cultural supremacy of London and Paris was achieved not through the assertion of a nationalistic culture, but instead through the construction of a cosmopolitan identity. By embracing a foreign art-form like Italian opera as the *ne plus ultra* of its capital’s culture, Britain enhanced rather than undermined its cultural supremacy. The British did not leave such notions at home and hence opera became central to many aspects of Calcutta’s social and political life.

Within months of the arrival of the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe, many of the Europeans in Calcutta declared their inchoate operatic culture to be a means of ‘civilizing the natives’ and encouraging anglicised education. Early in 1834, a letter to the editor of *The Englishman*, was published, appealing to the ‘Native community’ to support the Italian Opera Company; the author asserts that:

> the native community has been so supine and indifferent about this matter that with the exception of a few individuals, of I believe one name and family [Tagore] ... not a single one of the class alluded to has enrolled his name in the Subscription List!!\(^{897}\)

The author, using the nom de plume ‘Common Sense’, is disappointed by this lack of interest, not merely for its implications for the success of the art form, but, principally, because he sees Italian opera as a ‘civilizing’ force which is ‘eminently calculated to generate and confirm a taste for such recreations’.\(^{898}\) He then takes it upon himself to ask:

> the titled, the opulent and industrious classes of the native community on what ground they can pretend to exempt themselves from all participation in a project teeming with such beneficial promise, without subjecting themselves to the imputation of being indisposed to sympathize with objects of sentimental and moral pleasure.\(^{899}\)

‘Common Sense’ also stresses that by rejecting any connection to the opera, the Indian community is snubbing ‘the calls of humanity and justice towards those deserving Artists, [as well as] the favourable opportunity here presented of cultivating a more frequent and cordial intercourse with the leading and influential Members of Society.’

Such ideas were not the province of a vocal minority. The editor of *The Englishman* expanded upon the view raised by ‘Common Sense’:

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896 Weber, ‘Opera and the cultural authority of the capital city’, *in passim.*

897 Signed under the pseudonym ‘Common Sense’, ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, April 22nd 1834, p. 3.

898 Ibid.

899 Ibid.
We think Common Sense...has shewn [sic] that, in neglecting to support the Italian Opera, the natives of the upper classes are guilty of a species of disloyalty; and we are perfectly sure that they are depriving themselves of an important instrument of civilization.900

While admonishing the ‘natives of the upper classes’, the editor of The Englishman apparently deemed the natives of the lower classes to be beyond civilisation. Not only were the British exalting the usefulness of opera as a means of ‘introducing civilisation’, but they are conveniently using opera to support their exploitation of the existing caste system to create a power hierarchy in Bengal society with themselves at the zenith.901

The issue becomes more bizarre when the editor later claims that opera’s potential to civilise whole nations is evident from the role of opera in the artistic and educational development of the British themselves:

On reference to the history of the rise and progress of the Italian Opera in England, it will not be difficult to shew [sic] that it has had a very sensible effect on the surface of society, in introducing a degree of refinement and love for the fine arts which did not exist before we were made acquainted with its charms ... [T]here has scarcely existed in England a more potent agent in softening and humanizing the rough exterior of society than the music which has been given to it for the past 40 years by the accomplished natives of Italy.902

The opinions expressed by ‘Common Sense’, and supported by The Englishman, display not only the very worst of the condescending and narrow attitudes of British imperialism, but also grossly mistake the role and history of opera in England. Italian opera had thrived there for over hundred years, not forty, as it is suggested by the editor. The ‘civilisation’ of England and her people which took place over the course of the eighteenth century surely had more to do with early industrialisation and the enlightenment than opera. Moreover, the arrival of Italian opera cannot be seen, by any means, to herald the arrival of culture and the arts to England, which can trace a distinctive and rich tradition of music and the fine arts at least ten centuries.

After the conclusion of the 1833–34 season, and in a bid to encourage the support of his fellow Anglo-Indians for another season of Italian opera, another Englishman wrote to the newspaper lauding the civilising potential of opera. This time there was a different emphasis. This author argued that the promotion of European high-art entertainment amongst Indian people was a means of encouraging their acquisition of European language skills. The fact that Calcutta’s opera claimed the patronage of many non-Italophone Europeans, a fact that undermines the argument, is ignored:

876 Editor, The Englishman, April 22nd, 1834, p. 2.
902 Editor, The Englishman, April 22nd, 1834, p. 2.
We have reason to believe that the study of the English and other European languages [by Natives] in Calcutta has been greatly stimulated by Dramatic representations and a taste for the Drama and Opera [at the Chowringhee Theatre]; which, however liable to abuse, like all human conceptions, has been found in every country, and in every age, a mighty engine of civilization and national improvement.  

The same article goes on to reinforce the paternalistic and prejudiced sentiments which embody the cultural imperialism of the British at this time, boldly claiming that the entertainments which the Chowringhee Theatre had offered that past season were superior in quality to the Native amusements that most Indian people at that time enjoyed. Such attitudes demonstrates how the opera (both as art form and institution) was fundamental to Anglo-Indians as they sought to place their tastes, and therefore themselves, at the top of a cultural hierarchy:

Finally we trust that the Proprietors and the public at large will not cease strenuously to support the Chowringhee Theatre, and to encourage its appropriation to those uses for which it was erected. We feel persuaded that the Drama may be cause of civilisation and fostering a purer taste amongst the Natives of this country, by assisting to wean them from those childish or more objectionable exhibitions, which can only debase the minds and corrupt the habits of a people.

The infantilization of the native person, and his/her cultural tastes, is a well-recognised process of occupation, one which attempts to establish and justify the role of the ‘enlightened’ colonialist. It was not enough to emphasise the superiority of opera, and the other high-arts with which the British wished to associate themselves. For an idea of superiority to be determined, the dichotomy must be complete; hence, Indian theatrical arts and the ‘lower’ species of popular western arts that were slowly making their way to Calcutta had to be discredited. The language used by the writer at The Englishman not only infantilizes native culture, but, by referring to the Chowringhee as being able to foster ‘purer’ tastes, the article also makes it clear that Bengali arts are in some way tainted.

Exclusion: Opera in Calcutta, 1865–75

These discussions of opera’s role in its first season in Calcutta differ significantly from discussions during the art form’s golden age in Calcutta from 1865–75. In the interim period, India had undergone radical changes and growth. The EIC era had officially ended in the 1850s; now officially a dominion of the British Empire, India had moved from being ‘the farm of England’ to part of England. This changeover had awoken both British and Indian nationalism (indeed, each spurred the other on): British pride and pro-empire sentiment were quickly approaching their zenith, whilst Indian nationalists assembled and began to protest the presence and purpose of the British in India. Recent turmoil, such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857, had demonstrated to the British the precariousness of their

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904 Italian opera, French vaudeville, English drama and ballad opera.
881 ‘Chowringhee Theatre’, The Englishman and Military Chronicle, July 14th 1834, p. 4. [All emphases added.]
rule and they were, therefore, keen to assert their sovereignty. Discussions and documents (both private and public) reveal that the British were aware that their position was dependent upon more than just the might of their army and the structure of their government; the success of British rule in India was acknowledged to be contingent upon native Indians accepting the British as their rightful leaders. Such a notion is created not through political and militaristic battle but through asserting one's cultural superiority. As has been discussed previously, opera was an ideal instrument for this task.

This time, however, the Anglo-Indian population was divided about how opera could best do this. The 1830s had been marked by a tendency towards assimilation; that is, the British expected Bengali people, albeit of a very select class, to attend the opera and benefit from the art form’s supposed ability to effect educational and social development. By the 1860s and ’70s, the pendulum had swung, and the majority of Calcutta’s British residents appear to have conceptualised opera as site of exclusion, a space in which racial and social differences could be made physically and ideologically manifest.

Since opera had arrived in Calcutta, it had been a Continental affair—something that was organised, by Italians, the French and various other Europeans, which the British then appropriated and exploited. The treachery of Cagili, the various internal squabbles amongst Italian artists, and the continued dissatisfaction of the public with the repertoire and some of the singers, were matters that were, ultimately, connected to ideas of race. When Colonel Peter Wyndham took charge of Italian Opera in Calcutta for the 1874–75 season, one of the factors that won him the post was his argument that, like London, Calcutta needed an Englishman to look after the so important a cultural institution as Italian Opera.907 Upon its arrival in October 1874, Wyndham’s company was found to be far less effective than those of Cagili or Massa, but many of Wyndham’s compatriots were willing to overlook that issue, often making excuses for the impresario or emphasising his strengths. That is until he announced his bold plans to democratise Italian Opera.

As discussed in Chapter Seven, Wyndham’s plan to let the Opera House to the Great National opera bitterly divided Calcutta’s opera-going public, the majority of whom were not only British, but who, as members of the Indian Civil Service, were also built into the mechanism of the Raj itself. Many were appalled by Wyndham’s proposal, and even those who supported it did so on financial and self-interested grounds, rather than out of cultural interest or a sense of equity. Opera was a space in which the British hoped to express their cultural identity, an identity that was supposedly superior to that of the Bengali people. Had colonised and coloniser met in what so many British Indians referred to as their temple of art, they would have thought that superiority to be lost, and the temple ‘tainted’.908 Such an outcome would have undermined the justifications for British occupation and made British rule yet more precarious. Sharing cultural experiences, space and identity was simply antithetical to the principles and practices of the Raj.

907 Signed Agamemnon, ‘Letter to the Editor - Colonel Wyndham’s Operatic Accounts’, The Englishman, April 3rd 1875, p. 2. Here Agamemnon refers to Wyndham’s assertion that ‘both the Opera Houses in London have English managers and that therefore he [Wyndham] should be the manager of the Opera in Calcutta’ as something that had been repeated since the previous year.
The complicated racial politics that led to the collapse of Italian Opera in Calcutta, were not unique to that art form. The Town Band, which had long supported the city’s operatic culture with its repertoire that derived heavily from the operatic canon established by the Italian singers in Lindsay Street was also a site where the British ambition for cultural superiority and exclusivity was on full display. Like the Italian Opera, the desire of the British to ‘own’ the Town Band led to that institution’s demise.

In 1871, the Town Band, which played operatic excerpts and arrangements nightly on the Maidan, announced that it was forced to cease operation from lack of funds. The announcement elicited the disgust of The Englishman’s Editor who exclaimed that ‘it [was] bad enough in the first place for a city such as Calcutta to not be able to support a band, but worse still when it promises to do so and then fails.’909 For the editor, as for many in Calcutta, the Town Band’s survival, like that of the opera, was not a matter of ‘wanting good music’, but was, rather, a battleground for cultural supremacy.

The Town Band was saved from extinction only after the intervention of wealthy Indian elites, particularly Rabindranath Tagore who personally invested Rs. 1200.910 When Tagore and the other Indian men who had rescued the Town Band from liquidation requested that the Town Band be excused from the Maidan [in White Town] one night a week to play for Indian men and women in Beadon Square [now known as Rabindra Kanan], which was in Black Town, a cry of indignation arose from many quarters, despite the fact that this plan was aimed at increasing the band’s funds by getting subscriptions from Indian patrons. The Editor of The Englishman, otherwise so supportive of schemes aimed at supporting high-art music in Calcutta, rubbished the idea:

As for the Beadon Square proposition we doubt its advantages. Bandsmen, like other mortals, must have some rest, and six nights a week, besides hours of practice, is a little too much. Besides, we have no faith in the expected native subscriptions. No native, however accomplished, can appreciate or understand European music, and it is useless, as well as hopeless, to expect them to pay for what they would much rather do without.911

As was typical of the ever-complex race relations of nineteenth-century Calcutta, not everyone agreed with the Editor. One gentleman, ‘B.K.’ advocated that the band play more than once a week in Beadon Square and that many Indian gentlemen were very fond of European music.912 It is not made clear whether ‘B.K.’ is Indian or not; but while his race may influence modern interpretations of his plea, his letter undermines The Englishman’s argument, irrespective of his race. If he was British, then his sentiment betrays The Englishman’s Editor’s comments as out-of-step with his own contemporaries; if ‘B.K.’ was Indian, then his interest in the Town Band, and the European music it plays, explodes the Editor’s assumptions as myth. This small incident concerning the Town Band, and its ‘proper’ target, however, is important at revealing the complexities of the interactions between opera, colonialism, race and hegemony in nineteenth-century Calcutta.

Demonisation: Italian and Chinese Opera in Gold-rush Victoria

Background

As discussed in earlier chapters, the Victorian gold rush resulted in an enormous influx of immigrants. Although mostly British, these men came in such numbers that many new ethnicities were soon well represented. Europeans from further afield as well as Chinese and Middle-Eastern immigrants also flocked to the colony and established significant communities. Like other gold-rush migrants, many of the Chinese people who came Victoria in the 1850s and '60s were political and economic refugees; some had been supporters of the failed Taipang Rebellion in 1850s China, others sought asylum from the famine and poverty of life in Qing-dynasty China. Of the 313,000 settlers who arrived in Victoria between 1851 and 1860, approximately 40,000 were from China, and the Chinese represented between seven and ten percent of Victoria's total population by 1861. Like their European counterparts, not all of the Chinese immigrants came to mine gold; many were entrepreneurs and traders, who came to extract wealth from the miners, rather than from the earth.

White Australia’s attitude towards these Chinese immigrants varied according to time, place and individual; the general tendency, however, was that the British-Australians in Victoria, and Melbourne in particular, became increasingly opposed to Chinese immigration as the nineteenth century drew on. During the early 1850s, the discussion was surprisingly evenhanded. Some were hostile to the Chinese and their culture from the beginning; in 1854, for example, the Colonial Secretary, John Leslie Fitzgerald-Vesey-Foster, stood in parliament and accused the Chinese of being immoral, polygamist murderers and urged an amendment to a religious fund in order that ‘these people [who] were subversive of all morality according to Christian ideas’ not be able to claim a share of the fund. The majority of the house concurred. Other British-Melburnians, however, were more welcoming. When the first whispers of the Taipang Rebellion of 1853 reached the ears of William Kerr, Editor of The Argus, he unabashedly wrote in support of the rebels, claiming that the Chinese were ‘highly ingenious, polished, and active race of people’ whose freedom would be of benefit to both their country and to international trade. Many, such

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913 Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine Chinese immigration and musical culture in any depth, it is necessary to note that Chinese people had been migrating to Victoria before the discovery of gold. Indeed, between 1847 and 1852, at least four hundred Chinese workers had come to Victoria, and their presence in the predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon community had attracted both support and opposition from early on. See Damien Coughlan, ‘Gold Rush’, presentation given at University of Adelaide, November 2009.
917 'Legislative Council', The Argus, February 17th 1854, p. 5.
918 'Editorial - Revolution in China', The Argus, July 26th 1853, p. 4.
as Mr. H. Moore supported Chinese immigration and Chinese rights in Australia, finding them ‘to be hard workers, honest, clean, intelligent, peaceable, and well liked by their white fellows.’\footnote{Mr H. Moore, ‘Letter to the Editor: Chinese Immigration’, \textit{The Argus}, November 24\textsuperscript{th} 1848, p. 3.} Moreover, whilst some, such as Evan Hopkins, wished to see an end to the wave of Chinese, African-American and Hindu immigrants who came to Victoria’s goldfields,\footnote{Evan Hopkins, ‘Gold License Fee No. II’, \textit{The Argus}, September 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1853, p. 7.} just as many were eager to ensure that the Chinese newcomers were afforded humanitarian assistance. When rumours spread that a ship’s captain was simply dumping his Chinese passengers on the wharf and telling them to sleep there, many of Melbourne’s residents were outraged and forced the Captain, John Bowker, to make arrangements for their welfare.\footnote{John Bowker, ‘Letter to the Editor - The Newly-Arrived Chinese’, \textit{The Argus}, May 20\textsuperscript{th} 1853, p. 7.} Similarly, many white Victorians were concerned about their rights and freedoms: some likened the position of Chinese ‘indentured labourers’ to ‘slavery’,\footnote{See ‘John Chinaman’, \textit{The Argus}, March 24\textsuperscript{th} 1854, p. 4.} whilst others, concerned about the friendless condition in which many Chinese found themselves upon arrival in Melbourne, donated money and time to help newly-arrived Chinese immigrants find shelter, food, and blankets.\footnote{J. Knight Leake, ‘Letter to the Editor - The Chinese’, \textit{The Argus}, March 24\textsuperscript{th} 1854, p. 5.}

As time wore on, and Chinese immigration continued, the consensus started to turn. In 1854, the new editor of \textit{The Argus}, Edward Wilson, a progressive man who had formerly been quite pro-Chinese, began to question the place of Chinese people in Victorian society. Wilson’s discussions on the subject are uncharacteristically ambivalent and yet, even in his more sympathetic moments, his analyses of the situation were marked by the racist and paternalistic tendencies common to the colonial mindset in which he was steeped. He commended the work-ethic, tenacity, dependability and frugality of the Chinese people, but he only ever envisioned them as members of the ‘working class’, valuing them only for the manual labour that they could offer to white land owners.

Similarly, Wilson was mindful of the particular difficulties facing Victoria’s Chinese migrants, acknowledging:

\[\text{[they arrive] ignorant of our customs, laws, and language [and] exposed to a thousand insults and humiliations ... and [rendered helpless because] the law [does not] throw over them the aegis of its protection with anything like the efficacy which theoretically is supposed to be the case... Instead, [the Chinese are] denied justice altogether, [which] practically reduces the Chinese immigrant to the condition of an outlaw.}\footnote{‘John Chinaman’, \textit{The Argus}, March 24\textsuperscript{th} 1854, p. 4.}

Yet, for all this recognition and apparent sympathy for these disadvantages and injustices, Wilson’s solution to the issue was not to encourage and expect European liberality and tolerance, but to prevent further Chinese migration. Wilson also generalised about Chinese weaknesses, accusing the entirety of the Chinese populace of ‘an invincible tendency to falsehood and theft’. Over the course of the next ten years, public opinion and political policies would make Wilson’s equivocation look like a bastion of Chinese sympathy. Press reports overemphasised Chinese criminality, reinforcing the idea that the Chinese were all
thieves, gamblers, and gangs. Chinese ingenuity, formerly a positive trait, was now transformed into a negative characteristic—one which swindled unsuspecting and trusting Westerners.

It is important to note that xenophobia towards the Chinese and other non-Western communities increased inversely to the actual numbers of Chinese settlers in Melbourne and Victoria more generally. Chinese people had represented seven-to-ten percent of Victoria’s population in 1861; just ten years later, the Chinese community was only four-and-a-half percent of the population of urban centres like Ballarat, Bendigo, Castlemaine and Melbourne (much less when spread across the colony). Sinophobia was also inversely related to the degree of Chinese ‘assimilation’: ‘Yellow Peril’ hysteria reached its zenith towards the end of the century, even though the vast majority of Australia’s ethnically Chinese population, many of whom had been born in Australia, had adopted Western values, religion, dress, and spouses.

Music, and particularly opera, was a common feature of the discourse surrounding the ‘Chinese Question’ for music was an important means by which an ethnic group could situate itself within the social hierarchy. Anne Doggett has argued that racial discrimination was evident in song, particularly in the songs of the goldfields and the black-faced minstrel ballads, and studies by Harold Love and Wang Zheng-Ting support her assertions. Popular music genres were, sadly, not unique in this regard, however. Opera was another cultural space in which Chinese people were demonised.

Chinese opera was one of the few public examples of Chinese culture regularly on display to Westerners during the nineteenth-century. It was also one of the few aspects of Chinese culture discussed by the Western press. Peking opera was, therefore, a sort of ambassador for the Chinese people in Melbourne and the largely negative reception it found amongst Anglo-Australians had repercussions that are difficult to overestimate. In their dismissive, and occasionally hostile, reviews of Chinese opera, the Anglo-Saxon press contributed to the sinophobia of the nation.

Western interaction with Chinese opera generally fell into two areas: reception and representation. Both the critique of Chinese musical culture and its imitation were framed by Italian Opera. This section will discuss and analyse the ways in which British settlers in Australia responded to, and portrayed, Chinese musical culture in order to show how musical contrast was one of the means by which the Chinese were ‘othered’, marginalised and demonised in nineteenth-century Melbourne.

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925 See, for example, ‘Burglary’, The Argus, May 29th 1860, p. 7, which speculates about who could have committed a burglary: ‘There is a gang of Chinese gamblers on Forest Creek, who sleep all day and gamble and pilfer at night; these are supposed to be the burglars.’


928 Ibid., p. 47.
Reception

From its first appearance in Victoria, Chinese Opera (also known at this time as Peking Opera) was judged by European standards. In his discussion of Chinese opera on the goldfields, Harold Love noted that Western audience members and critics had difficulty in accepting Peking Opera as true opera, because the Chinese art form blended sung dialogue (a trait Westerners associated with ‘high-art’) with acrobatic mime, something that in the European tradition was associated with low-art entertainments such as vaudeville and circus. Indeed, Chinese opera was often categorised as a circus entertainment, for ‘the combination of acrobatics and canvas theatres [fit] only that particular slot in Anglo-Saxon experience.’929  Evelyn Percy Shirley Sturt, Superintendent of the Melbourne Police, categorised Lee Gee’s Chinese Opera Company’s productions as ‘Operatic performance with Gong accompaniment and Gymnastics’.930 The superintendent’s description may have been confused, but at least he attempted to be objective. The majority of the Westerners who commented on Chinese Opera approached the foreign art form with all the biases of imperialism and assumptions of European cultural superiority that came to define the nineteenth-century colonial experience.

The primary allegation levelled at Chinese Opera was that it was unmusical and unartistic. This stemmed from Anglo-Australia judging Chinese opera by Western aesthetics. In Chinese Opera, for example, a timbre of ‘controlled nasality’, a wide and slow vibrato, and an emphasis on high-pitches are highly-prized accomplishments,931 but in Italian opera, such traits would be deemed failings. This approach led to culturally insensitive descriptions of Peking Opera singers. In 1860, a review of a performance of a Chinese opera published in The Argus commented:

> The singing, if such it can be called, is for the most part in a key the shrillness and monotony of which must surpass in trying qualities anything that Verdi over dreamt of; and yet the Chinese appear to sustain it without fatigue.932

A decade later, a community paper expressed similar opinions in its critique of an evening at the Chinese theatre. This time the criticism was not reserved solely for the singers; the instrumental music is also disparaged for lacking musicality:

> The entertainment opened with the opera Chung Lan Guey [sic], or the adventures of a Chinese baby. There was a good deal of squalling during the opera — not by the baby, which was a dummy— but by the prima donna and primi tenori. There was a full band of five, who played on nondescript instruments, and occupied their seats at the back of the stage during the whole evening, playing continuously through the tragedy as well as the opera. Of these two were violinists, one a banjoist, the other a drummist [sic], and the fifth played on a wooden wind instrument, which emitted sounds that closely resembled the Scotch bagpipes. A visible hand from an invisible body at the wings kept up an incessant clamour on a gong, or varied the accompaniment with, a clanging of cymbals.933

933  'The Chinese Opera Company at Ballarat', The Cornwall Chronicle, March 21st 1872, p. 3.
The quote above, taken from *The Cornwall Chronicle*, is typical of Anglo-Australian reactions to Chinese Opera in the mid-nineteenth century. The author’s choice of language encourages a derogatory attitude to Chinese opera among his readership. The journalist’s decision to employ adjectives such as ‘squalling’, ‘incessant clamour’, and ‘clanging’ to describe Chinese opera placed the genre in the realm of noise rather than music. Similarly, in his description of the instrumental music, the writer uses Western instruments associated with folk musics (i.e. low-art music) rather than orchestral instruments (high-art music), a comparison that invites a low opinion of the skill and artistry of the Chinese opera tradition.

The inflammatory language employed by Western critics and audience members in their reports about Peking Opera was intertwined (both explicitly and implicitly) with political ideas about Chinese immigrants. Consider the following article from the *Mount Alexander Mail*, 1859.

We have had another visit from the Chinese opera and ballet company as we suppose they are entitled to be called. They took possession of a portion of the square opposite the Theatre Royal, and those who visited the Italian Opera had to run the gauntlet of the hideous discords and caterwaulings of the Oriental one… In the marquee, the instruments were of the rudest kind, and the enthusiasm of the performers only made the effect the more ear-splitting.934

An analysis of the language chosen by the *Mount Alexander Mail* article further reveals the prejudices that British society had towards the Chinese. Whereas the Chinese ‘took possession’, in other words invaded, the city, the Italian opera is apparently a guest, which the public ‘visits’ in a genteel manner. Furthermore, the Italian Opera’s patrons are victimised by the Chinese opera without even attending the performance. Its very presence is vexing, if not dangerous; indeed, three months earlier the same newspaper described the Chinese Opera in Castlemaine as a ‘standing nuisance’.935 The classification of Chinese opera as nothing more than ‘caterwaulings’, ‘hideous discords’ and a ‘gauntlet’ not only framed Chinese musical culture (and, by extension, the Chinese immigrants themselves) as unartistic and unmusical, exemplify the sinophobic attitudes prevalent at that time in Victoria. As discussed in previous chapters with reference to Italian Opera in 1830s Calcutta, one of the prevailing attitudes towards music in Western culture was that it was a public and social good. By categorising Chinese opera as ‘noise’ rather than ‘music’, British culture was eliminating any chance for Chinese culture to be recognised as a constructive or valuable force. Such attitudes contributed to the growing sinophobia in the White-Australian population.

These attitudes also facilitated the creation of a dichotomous relationship between Italian and Chinese opera, with the former being inherently musical whilst the latter was, therefore, an uncultured, unmusical public nuisance. Cultural artefacts are the product and reflection of the society that created them, the notion that Chinese Opera was primitive

935 ‘Chinese Opera’, *Mount Alexander Mail*, October 1st, 1858.
inevitably led to such ideas being formed about the Chinese people themselves, as this extract from a review of Chinese Opera from Melbourne in 1860 reveals:

To describe [Chinese Operas] is difficult, especially in the absence of any clue to their mysteries in the shape of bills or "books of the opera," but even a casual spectator cannot fail to be struck with the perfect keeping they exhibit with the national habits of the people. Long, wild, monotonous chants, apparently the vehicle of rhetorical discourses, taken up by one and another of the dramatis personae, to the music of gongs and tom-toms, and the squeaking of shrill stringed instruments, are, to a certain extent, characteristic of the unchanging manners of the people who can find in them amusement.936

Chinese Opera was considered primitive not only from an artistic standpoint, but also from a moral one. Echoing the concerns of the Colonial Secretary four years earlier, the editor of the *Bendigo Advertiser* expressed his shock at one opera's presentation of polygamy, promiscuity, and disloyalty. The reviewer was particularly dismayed by the end of the piece which, reversing the usual mode of a Victorian drama ‘conclude[d] with virtue punished and vice rewarded’.937 The narrative, like the music, was judged by European standards of aesthetics and civilisation and, of course, found wanting. In falling short of such standards, Chinese opera and the Chinese themselves were ‘proved’ to be inferior to British culture and British people.

It is worth noting that not all British-Australians were convinced of their own cultural superiority. Harold Love notes that one white settler, after seeing several Chinese patrons at a Melbourne production of an English pantomime, was reflexive enough to question what they would have thought of the ‘grotesque’ practices of the English artform.938

Occasionally, a report was published that countered the widely held belief that Chinese opera, and by implication Chinese people, were unmusical, immoral and uncivilised. *The Argus* in 1860 noted that Chinese operas were choreographed and performed with far more attention to detail than Western opera, and that the make-up and costumes were far more elaborate and accomplished than those then seen at the Italian opera.939

In 1863, the Editor of the *Ovens Advertiser* wrote an extensive review of a Chinese Opera, which was republished for the benefit of the Melbourne public in *The Argus*. In it, the editor claimed to have been ‘astonished and pleased’ by his experience. He describes the Chinese audience as ‘very punctilious and polite to strangers’ and thought that by ‘their most silent and decorous conduct’ they set a good example to Western audiences on appropriate behaviour at the opera. The author, who had previously been told that ‘the Chinese had no idea either of melody or harmony’, was pleased by the music and surprised that the opera had ‘regular airs and in them several thirds, fifths and octaves’. Rather than

937 ‘Victoria’, *The South Australian Advertiser*, October 5th 1858, p. 3.
939 ‘The dresses are some of them exceedingly costly, the art of "making up" is brought to perfection, and the faces of some of the performers are painted with a skill to which, our best artists can scarcely boast to have attained... The stage action is elaborately studied, and highly expressive, and every word and gesture appears to have been accurately rehearsed’, see ‘Chinese Opera’, *The Argus*, November 2nd 1860, p. 5.
finding fault with the different acoustic aesthetic of the Chinese operatic tradition, the author sought (and found) similarities to Western singing:

The voice of one of the women (boys, of course, in women's clothes) was quite an extraordinary soprano, with clear, loud, and distinct head notes, reminding one more of a piccolo than a human organ. The action, the movements, and gestures were quaint and dignified, and the acting altogether bore a strange—we cannot not say ridiculous—resemblance to that on our own stage, the words being slowly and separately uttered, and the voice modulated and emphasized, not unpleasantly even to us outer barbarians.940

With respect to morality, the Ovens’ Editor discerned nothing which would affront ‘even the most fastidious taste as being senseless or vulgar’. Indeed, the author was surprised by the similarity of the opera’s subjects (love, fidelity, and vice) to those of the Western canon and found nothing in the Chinese treatment of the themes to outrage or offend.

Yet even this sympathetic observer could not escape the idea of Chinese primitivism; he described Chinese instruments as ‘undoubtedly ... the progenitors of our violins and hautboys’, and declared that the scenes and costumes ‘displayed a high degree of barbaric taste’.941 Moreover, both his sarcastic reference to himself as an ‘outer barbarian’ and his very astonishment and surprise at his own enjoyment of the Chinese opera serve to emphasise the extent to which orientalist and imperial attitudes pervaded European culture and thought in the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

**Representations of Chinese Opera in Italian Opera and British Theatre.**

In representing Chinese opera, European artists (and the audiences that patronised them) reflected and perpetuated these culturally insensitive assumptions. One of the first Western artists to caricature Chinese Opera was Anna Bishop who, as discussed in Chapter Ten, was amongst the most prolific and important of gold-rush Melbourne’s operatic performers. Bishop’s Melbourne sojourn was an interesting part of Melbourne’s cultural development. Bishop was revered as an opera diva whose very presence was given almost alchemical powers. Rightly or wrongly, she was credited with establishing grand opera in Melbourne, and was believed to have endowed the city’s high-art musical culture with a sense of legitimacy. On the other hand, Bishop did not confine herself to ‘high-art’. She created and performed works that combined opera with elements of more popular musical and theatrical genres. In blurring the distinctions between high and low art, between performer and author, and between opera and theatre, Bishop and her operatic entertainments reached a diverse audience. Bishop was, therefore, even more culturally significant and influential than a ‘purer’ form of opera might have been. One of Bishop’s most culturally relevant (and sinophobic) ‘operatic extravaganzas’ was *Soprano Sfogato.*

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'Soprano Sfogato'

*Soprano Sfogato* was a musico-theatrical work of about an hour's duration. It had been originally performed in California, whence Bishop had come, but received its first Antipodean performance at Melbourne’s Olympic Theatre June 29th, 1856. The extravaganza had a thin narrative that served to parody opera, its personalities and its excesses whilst also serving as a vehicle for Bishop's considerable vocal talents. It begins with a potpourri-overture composed by Nicholas Bochsa, which mostly contained fragments of *Linda di Chamounix* and *Tancredi* but also contained sizeable quotations of ‘The Marseillaise’ and ‘The Last Rose of Summer’. The plot centres around the search by the impresario, Mr. Star Hunter, for a new diva. Auditions are held, and the manager and various colleagues are treated to a revolving door of divas, all played by Bishop, who assumed different guises. Amongst her staple characters were a 'timid, English vocalist carolling 'Home, Sweet Home'', a Neapolitan prima donna in queenly robes and jewelled crown who delivered a recitative and cavatina by Mercadante, a German peasant girl, with an appropriate song, an opera star from St. Petersburg performing a Russian melody, a Parisian chanteuse trilling Bochsa's chanson "Je suis la Bayadère" (itself an interesting example of exoticism and imperial orientalism); and, to conclude the extravaganza, Bishop would emerge as an Italian soprano with a brilliantly executed rondò-finale.

Beyond these 'standards', Bishop customised her extravaganza by including caricatures of non-Western cultures that were of particular relevance to her audience. In California, Bishop parodied Mexican and African-American music, whilst in Melbourne she imitated Chinese opera (which was currently being performed by Chinese artists on the goldfields) and (to honour the recent British victory in the Crimean War) she also parodied the music of Tartarstan. Just as Bishop shifted between high-art and low-art, so she moved between parody and satire. Whilst the majority of *Soprano Sfogato* was firmly planted within the realm of affectionate parody, when she came to portray the Chinese and Tartary singers, Bishop's approach was closer to the barbed-wire of satire. When representing the European characters, she bore herself with elegance and gentility; admittedly Bishop exaggerated these traits until they became postures and vanities rather than virtues, but the core representation was positive. Vocally, the European songs were presented 'operatically'. By contrast, Bishop's characterisation of a Chinese opera singer was steeped in the traditions of yellow-face minstrelsy and 'low-art'. She adopted grotesque postures, made a crude imitation of both pidgin-English and Cantonese, and depicted Chinese music as mere 'noise', screeching and squawking her way through the ‘Chinese aria’.

It might be argued that Bishop's decision to satirise some ethnicities and not others was a choice of art rather than politics; after all, as a travelling artist, Bishop had no vested

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944 “Je suis la Bayadère” was composed for Bishop by Nicholas Bochsa. It is about a ‘Bayadère’, or Indian nautch girl. The text reads:

Je suis la Bayadère dont le gai tambourin/ tra la la/ et la danse légère/ tra la la/ bannissent, bannissent le chagrin/ Enfans des bordes du Gange/ le plaisir est ma loi/ venez et qu’on se range/ en cercle près de moi.

[I am a nautch girl, whose merry tambourine and light dancing banish sorrow. On the shores of the Ganges, pleasure is my [only] law, come and arrange yourself in a circle close to me.]
945 ‘Coppin’s Olympic’, *The Argus*, May 30th, 1856, p. 5.
interest in Australia’s demographic profile or social culture beyond whether its cities furnished her with sufficient audiences to make her endeavour financially rewarding. Bishop may have been exploiting issues of race and belonging that were beginning to become subjects of political and social debate, but the work was not conceived of as a political product; Bishop’s operatic extravaganza was a light-hour of comedy, entertainment and music.

Yet, it is precisely because *Soprano Sfogato* was created as a piece of entertainment, rather than as a piece of propaganda, that the work is such a good illustration of the role of opera in colonial contexts. *Soprano Sfogato* was an operatic caricature, amplifying the stereotype of several national musics to the point of amusement, and like all successful caricatures, it resonated with the audience’s perception of truth. As the discussions of real Chinese opera discussed above illustrate, Chinese Opera, Chinese music, and, by extension, the Chinese themselves, were widely regarded as unmusical, unrefined and undignified. Bishop took these ‘truths’ to ridiculous ends, and created a popular work of art. In doing so, she perpetuated the racist perceptions of Melbourne’s European population.

‘The Chinese Question’

Twenty years later, similar notions of the inherent unmusicality and unartistic nature of Chinese lyric culture were still being repeated in Melbourne’s theatres, but to these allegations were added others, such as primitivism, immorality and incompetence. *The Chinese Question* was a farce that had originally been written in San Francisco, a city with which Melbourne had long had cultural and demographic ties, but it spoke just as well to the racial, social and cultural politics of 1870s Melbourne; indeed, *The Argus* admitted that, although of Californian origin, the play was equally ‘descriptive of what is true in this city’. The production was mounted by J.C. Williamson’s theatre company at the Theatre Royal, starring Williamson himself (who would later become Australia’s most successful operatic impresario) and his wife Maggie Moore.

The plot of the play centred around an old gentleman, Mr. Freewill, who is a self-described and unabashed sinophile. Against the advice and wishes of his family, he sacks his Irish-born domestic servants with the intent of replacing them with Chinese helpers. Wishing to put an end to the old man’s ‘Chinese Mania’, his family hatch a plan. They hire two Irish servants, Billy and Kitty (Williamson and Moore), who are disguised as Chinese people and are instructed to adopt stereotypical Chinese behaviours which would ‘disgust him forever with the whole Chinese race’. The family’s attempt is successful; the play ends with Freewill declaring his ‘complete renunciation of all sympathy for China and the Chinese forever after’.

946 “The most protean aspect of comedy is its potentiality for transcending itself, for responding to the conditions of tragedy by laughing in the darkness.” - Harry Levin

947 Rocha, "Yellow Brick Road": Opera on the Gold Rush Circuit, AMS 2011.

948 ‘Theatre Royal - Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in a new piece’, *The Argus*, November 24th 1874, p. 6

949 ‘Theatre Royal - Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in a new piece’, *The Argus*, November 24th 1874, p. 6.

950 ‘Theatre Royal - Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in a new piece’, *The Argus*, November 24th 1874, p. 6.
Williamson and Moore adopted the typical behaviours and stereotypes of nineteenth-century yellow-face minstrelsy in this project and fused them together with traditional English farce to misrepresent Chinese behaviours, culture and customs for comic effect. Hence, the Irish-cum-Chinese characters were given outlandish names: Billy became Kah Funga Tee Yung Slim whilst Kitty became Sam See Loo. The Chinese are represented as uncouth, clumsy and stupid: they are dirty, they drop plates, they’re seemingly unable to execute even the most menial of household chores, and their poor command of English is compounded by the exaggerated and stereotyped fake Chinese accents Williamson and Moore assumed in their roles.

One of their most potent weapons, however, was music. *The Argus* reports that Williamson and Moore ‘play[ed] upon ear-piercing instruments’ and ‘[sung] until [the old man] stamps his feet with rage and distraction’.951 Williamson and Moore’s musical representations were advertised as genuine ‘Vocal and Instrumental selections from a a favourite Chinese Opera’.952 Such a claim added legitimacy to the depiction of Chinese people and culture that was conveyed throughout the play. The claim, however, was false. Moore’s Chinese song and dance ‘Ping-a-ling-a, ching ching, chow chow chong’ (see Figure 15.1), was written and composed by Charles Schultz, a minor composer of vaudeville songs in Melbourne.953 Schultz’s work sets a nonsensical string of syllables to a rhythmically simple, very repetitive melody consisting of five notes either in step or octave leap. This melody is underpinned by a homophonic, and at times monophonic, accompaniment which uses only two chords (I (Ib) and V (Vd)), and a dominant pedal imitating a drone. Both musically and linguistically, the whole song and dance is an exercise in pejorative imitation, designed to make the Chinese culture seem backward, primitive, ugly and ungraceful.

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951 ‘Theatre Royal - Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in a new piece’, *The Argus*, November 24th 1874, p. 6.
953 The next year, Schultz composed another song for Moore. ‘When the Stars begin to Peep’ was written for Maggie Moore’s 1875 Farewell concert. See ‘Amusements - Maggie Moore’s Farewell Concert’, *The Argus*, August 5th 1875, p. 8.
When combined with the pidgin English, the babbling lampoon of the Cantonese language, the unflattering costumes, and the taped back eyes (see Figure 15.2), Williamson and Moore’s intentionally ugly singing, unmelodious plucking, and Schultz’s puerile ‘Chinese song’ served not only to disparage Chinese culture, but also to infantilise the Chinese people, and make them seem undesirable, worthless, and alien to European society.
Such depictions were contrasted against the sympathetic depictions of the European characters, which were facilitated by the wit of their dialogues and the popular Irish and English ballads they were given to sing. The most important among these British songs was Poole’s ‘No Irish Need Apply’ (1862), which not only framed the narrative well, but also elicited the sympathy of the audience. The musical juxtaposition between popular British ballads that engendered familiarity and the denigratory pseudo-Chinese songs that prompted ridicule and contempt symbolise the entire message of the farce.

The work’s success may be judged from the critical and popular support it received, and the level of elite patronage it garnered. Upon its première, *The Argus* reported that ‘the house was crowded and laughed more than the conventional “roar of laughter”’. The Governor of Victoria, Sir James McCulloch, and the eminent barrister and judge, Sir Redmond Barry (originally from Ireland) attended the farce more than once. *The Chinese Question* attracted uniformly positive attention from the Melbourne press, and became popular work in the company’s repertory for the next twenty years. The moral of the story, that the old man learned his lesson and would from now on do the right thing and support white immigration and employment, was very topical in many parts of the Anglo-world at that time, especially in Victoria. Over the next thirty years, the Victorian government would enact increasingly harsh migratory restrictions with the aim of keeping unwanted ethnic

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954 Charles Turner, ‘J.C. Williamson and Maggie Moore in *The Chinese Question*.’ (Melbourne, 1874), Lithograph.
955 ‘Theatre Royal - Mr. and Mrs. Williamson in a new piece’, *The Argus*, November 24th 1874, p. 6.
956 Moore was still performing the work, to popular and critical acclaim in 1893, when she took the work on tour to New Zealand. See ‘The Lorgnette’, *The Observer*, Volume XI, Issue 751, 20 May 1893, p. 7.
groups, particularly Asian people, from immigrating to the colony. By the turn of the century (the time of Australian Federation), these constraints had led to a rapidly diminishing Chinese population. Nevertheless, sinophobia still prevailed and Victoria’s strict migratory controls transformed into an infamously racist piece of national legislation known as the ‘White Australia Policy’. This policy prevented thousands of non-White, and even some from less desirable Southern and Eastern European backgrounds, from entering Australia until 1966.957

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Far from being a decadent or otiose entertainment, opera was a contended (and contentious) cultural space in British colonial society during the nineteenth century. Western opera’s relationship to non-Western peoples and art varied according to time, place, the type of colonialism being practised and the opinion of any individual. In 1830s Calcutta, Italian and French opera was feted as a tool that would encourage Bengali assimilation. When Bengali people showed less interest in Western opera than they ‘ought’, their disinterest became another justification for the presence and hegemony of the British. By the 1870s, the situation had altered, but opera was still a tool of colonisation. Some Bengali people were desirous of cultural exchange; they patronised and liberally supported Western opera, and wished to share their own arts with a Western audience and each other. The Raj, however, rejected these attempts at multiculturalism and hybridisation, for they perceived that such cross-cultural contact would undermine their own arts and, therefore, damage their pretensions to cultural superiority, upon which their rule was based. In mid-to-late nineteenth-century Melbourne, the British did not feel threatened by the culture of the region’s indigenous peoples, for they had already dismissed them as subhuman (see the discussion of the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* in Chapter One). White Australia was instead preoccupied with defending itself from the imagined threats presented by a few thousand Chinese people. Opera became a space in which the Chinese could be both proven inferior to British people and confirmed as a threat to them. Such ‘proof’ fuelled the ever-intensifying political debate about ‘The Chinese Question’, a debate and paranoia that eventually led to such racist legislation as the White Australia immigration policy and a xenophobic culture that persisted well into the twentieth (and some would argued the twenty-first) century.

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957 Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy', in Department of Immigration and Citizenship National Communications Branch (ed.), (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009).
Chapter 16: 
Opera and British Identity in Colonial settings

The previous chapter evaluated the role of opera in Calcutta and Melbourne with reference to the racial politics of two cities. It demonstrated that in Calcutta, a city which exemplified the high-imperialist lifestyle and attitude, Anglo-Indians framed the discourse around opera’s social function to support Britain imperial ambitions and the attitudes of the conquerers towards the conquered. By contrast, Melbourne, as a settler society that had by the 1850s already outnumbered and disregarded Aboriginal culture, was a site where opera was instead a means of othering a fellow settler group—the Chinese. Western opera’s relationship to marginalised ethnicities (and the reaction and representation of foreign opera by Western societies) is an important part of the history of opera in colonial communities, but it is not the entire story. Xenophobia, ultimately, is not about the persecution of others, but the fear of losing oneself. Therefore, in order to understand the colonial history of opera it is necessary to examine the role that the art form played within the British community.

This chapter will explore the ways in which opera, and art music more generally, were exploited by the British communities of Calcutta and Melbourne as a means of self-definition, both individual and communal. The first section will examine this issue with reference to mid-century Calcutta’s amateur musical tradition, highlighting the ways in which non-professional music-making intersected with British politics and facilitated the creation of an elite strata of Anglo-Indian society. The second section will focus on the role that opera played amongst Anglo settlers in Melbourne. Specific attention will be paid to the perception of opera as a piece of cultural capital that could help Melbourne assert a sophisticated and cosmopolitan collective identity as it sought to transcend its image as a gold-rush town. In both cases, opera was used as a means to structure British society along colonial lines and promote British cultural superiority.

‘Ars Musica reigns undisputed’:
Opera, amateur music and the British gentility in nineteenth-century Calcutta.

Amateur drama and music were important parts of the cultural heritage that Calcutta’s British colonists brought with them to British India. As noted by the London Post in 1776, amateur theatricals, in both domestic and collegial settings, had enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the late eighteenth century, especially amongst ‘people of rank’.958 The

popularity of amateur entertainments at home coupled with the isolation, boredom, and homesickness of life in a remote imperial outpost rendered amateur theatricals even more valuable and ubiquitous in Calcutta than they were in England. The earliest of amateur theatricals in Calcutta mostly took place in military barracks and featuring only male players for the amusement of a solely masculine audience. There are few explicit discussions about the musical dimension of such theatricals, but the dimension certainly existed. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, amateur concerts enlarged the world of non-professional music making. In 1797, for example, the city’s amateur musicians mounted a gargantuan performance of Handel’s *The Messiah*, complete with an orchestra of an astonishing fifty-six players (four flutes, six clarinets, two oboes, two trumpets, four horns, six bassoons, one serpent, kettle drums and bass drums, fifteen violins, six violas, six ‘celli and two double basses, plus a pianoforte), whilst the chorus numbered twenty-eight voices.\(^{959}\)

By the 1830s and ‘40s, amateur theatricals and musical events had fallen in to a decline in England,\(^{960}\) but in colonial societies like Calcutta, the tradition only gained strength. The scholar John Lowerson has attributed this divergence of colonial culture to the role that amateur music and theatricals played in bonding British expatriates together and underpinning British cultural hegemony.\(^{961}\) The following discussion concurs with Lowerson’s analysis and will demonstrate that amateur theatricals and concerts grew in prestige and importance as British Rule in India moved from an economic model under the EIC to a high-imperial model under the Raj.

In mid-century Calcutta, amateur musicality took four forms:

1. Amateurs performing with professionals in public, professional productions;
2. Amateurs performing with professionals in non-professional productions (usually private);
3. Amateurs performing in wholly amateur productions in public; and
4. Amateurs performing or rehearsing in wholly amateur productions in private.

The first and second instances was particular to the 1830s, when the first professional opera companies arrived in Calcutta. As described in Chapter Three, these troupes were fairly small and were, therefore, quite dependent upon local musicians to achieve a full complement of principals, chorus, orchestra and supernumeraries. These artists were either fellow professional performers or private citizens who took to the stage as amateurs.

The involvement of amateurs in professional opera was incremental. At first, amateur collaboration was limited to the orchestra, with keen instrumentalists augmenting the orchestra for specific productions. The men, for these amateurs were uniformly male, were either amateur gentlemen of means, or members of Calcutta’s various regimental or

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\(^{959}\) Head, ’Corelli in Calcutta’, p. 551.
\(^{961}\) Ibid., p. 209.
viceregal bands, whose services were volunteered by the officials that they served.\textsuperscript{962} By all accounts, these men were comparable in skill to the professionals alongside whom they performed.\textsuperscript{963}

Soon, however, amateur singers were also appearing on stage, both as chorus singers and principals. The strict social mores that defined the professional stage as an inappropriate vocation for people of class were easily circumvented by eager amateur thespians, who assumed \textit{noms de scène} and appeared anonymously. The names chosen usually reflected that performer’s most famous character, hence the cast lists from the 1830s were littered with names like ‘Almaviva’ and ‘Basilio’.

‘Almaviva’ is a particularly interesting case. He appears to have been well known, as both a singer and an actor, prior to his debut with the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe as Almaviva in Rossini’s \textit{Il Barbiere di Siviglia}, in December 1835.\textsuperscript{964} Despite his reputation, his first appearance provoked more amusement than admiration:

> Excepting that there were some occasional inequalities in the tones of the gay \textit{Conte d’Almaviva}, we found nothing that gave the critics scope for the ungracious portion of his duties – while of the acting we shall merely remark that it had to us the appearance of being modelled upon some foreign styles (perhaps the French) and was rather marred by the anxiety of the gifted amateur to be true to his music – or make his musicians true to him. It was amusing, in the midst of a quartetto to observe the gallant \textit{Almaviva} forget his identity, turn to the orchestra and beat time, with the vehemence of a maestro superintending a final prova.’\textsuperscript{965}

Despite the eccentricities of his début, ‘Almaviva’ became an invaluable asset to the Italians; they lacked a tenor, and ‘Almaviva’ had a tenor voice of sweetness and ease. He was, therefore, given further opportunities to perform and appears to have improved markedly. By March 1836, ‘Almaviva’ was earning laurels for his strength in ensemble passages, and sweet and graceful singing in \textit{L’Italiana in Algeri},\textsuperscript{966} whilst his combination of strong dramatic and musical skills made the critic’s only regret of \textit{Elisa e Claudio} that ‘Almaviva’ had so little opportunity to display his talents.\textsuperscript{967} ‘Almaviva’ remained a mainstay of Calcutta’s operatic and musical life into the 1840s, albeit always as an amateur.\textsuperscript{968}

Some amateurs, however, used the opportunities offered by the various visiting opera companies to launch professional careers. The most remarkable and noteworthy of these was Madame Valadares. She and her husband had been based in Calcutta since before 1826,\textsuperscript{969} but they only began performing in public after the arrival of the Italian and French

\textsuperscript{962} ‘Chowringhee Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, March 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1834 p. 2.
\textsuperscript{963} ‘Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, June 6\textsuperscript{th} 1834, p. 2, and ‘Chowringhee Theatre – Mr. Linton’s Night’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, March 7\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{964} ‘Chowringhee Theatre’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, December 18\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{965} ‘The opera – Il Barbiere – The Amateur’, \textit{The Oriental Observer}, December 19\textsuperscript{th} 1835, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{966} ‘Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, March 14\textsuperscript{th} 1836, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{967} ‘Italian Opera’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, February 15\textsuperscript{th} 1836, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{968} He was active at least until 1844, when he took several roles in French opera performed at the Sans Souci. See ‘Sans Souci’, \textit{The Englishman and Military Chronicle}, February 19\textsuperscript{th}, 1844, p. 3.
companies. Madame Valadares made her debut in November 1834 as Clorinda in the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe’s production of *La Cenerentola*. 970

Unlike ‘Almaviva’, Valadares’s début was an unqualified success; she was claimed to be an asset to both the company and the community, and was particularly applauded for her strength and mastery in the famous sextet ‘Siete voi’, 971 no small feat considering how demanding and exposed Clorinda’s part is in this number. She later received less favourable reviews, which criticised her lack of vocal range and physical awkwardness on stage; she was thought to be a poor Isaura (*Tancredi*), for example. 972 With time, however, Valadares seems to have improved and by 1836, Valadares had turned professional, organising her own solo concerts, and using her popularity to introduce her husband, a violinist, to the Calcutta public. 973 Madame Valadares’ road from amateur to professional is not a story unique to Calcutta. According to Joseph W. Donohue, it was common practice for those aspiring to a career on the stage in Britain to try ‘their wings as amateur performers before taking the considerable social and economic risk, amidst oppressive anti-theatrical prejudice, of turning professional’. 974

Over the coming years, the Valadares family improved both their skill and influence to an impressive degree. They established a series of musico-dramatic soirées in 1839, which brought together the talents of all resident musicians, many of whom had been part of the various itinerant opera troupes and had chosen to remain in Calcutta. 975 By the mid-1840s, Madame Valadares was Calcutta’s leading lady, as comfortable in French and German repertoire as she was with Italian opera and English ballads. Mr. Valadares became one of Calcutta’s leading conductors and its best violinist. The Valadares’ Annual Concert was one of the highlights of White Town’s cultural calendar; the 1844 Benefit was crowded by Calcutta’s beau monde. 976

The fluid and amiable partnership that arose between professional and amateur musicians during these years saw the professionals venture into the amateurs’ territory just as often as the amateurs’ assisted them in theirs. Amateur musicianship played a large role, relieving the boredom, loneliness, and cultural isolation experienced by the increasing numbers of women coming to live in British India. The diaries of Emily Eden reveal an almost feverish excitement about such private soirées and theatricals, and Eden herself gave such productions a surprising level of attention to detail. 977 Her diaries also reveal the extent to which these private, amateur performances were dependent upon professional musicians, actors, and crew. The Edens were especially reliant upon the Thonon Company (1836–37), which not only augmented the vocal and instrumental forces assembled to performed the

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976 ‘Calcutta: Mr. and Mrs. Valadares’, *Bengal Herald*, March 6th 1844, p. 3.
vaudevilles, plays, and operas Eden mounted at Government House, but also lent an air of refinement and legitimacy to the occasions. The contribution made by professional opera artists to private amateur music-making may have been motivated by the desire to secure the patronage of these rich and influential members of Calcutta society, but their ends were far more complex. The presence of the professionals seems to have galvanised the amateurs who became far more punctilious in their parts. The professionals also attracted larger audiences, adding social import to the occasion. These professional-amateur performances raised the status of the domestic theatrical and soirée, cementing music’s position as an elemental part of the social life of Calcutta’s elite.

The intersection between amateur and professional musicians during the 1830s had two significant effects upon the opera and high-art musical culture of early-Victorian Calcutta. Firstly, as the post-Pizzoni-Bettali careers of ‘Almaviva’ and Madame Valadares attest, the opportunity to develop professional skills and/or reputations transformed some of Calcutta’s British residents into ‘opera-reservists’. When, over the next twenty years, war, depression, and happenstance prevented opera from being imported (see Chapter 4), these former amateurs sustained and expanded upon Calcutta’s musical culture, mounting concerts and soirees in which both familiar and novel repertoire was performed.

This leads to the second way in which the professional-amateur culture shaped White Town’s musical life: the creation of a collective musical identity. In facilitating the performance of professional opera, the efforts of innumerable amateurs demonstrated the extent to which some sections of White Town cared about the art-form, and was thought to reflect well on the British residents of that city. Yet, the considerable time, skill, and grace that these dilettantes invested served purposes beyond temporarily enabling the visiting troupes to perform their repertoire more fully. British amateurism was a means by which the Anglo-Indians took greater pride and ownership of their local operatic culture. The public face given to musical gifts that had hitherto been enjoyed only in private led to an awakening of a new collective identity amongst White Towners: they began to perceive themselves as a cultivated and active citizenry. Such an identity sat well with the increasingly imperial attitudes towards civilisation and colonisation espoused by the institutions and residents of British India.

Once the opera companies departed Calcutta, amateur music became even more important to White Town’s collective identity. In a city that lacked an orchestra, a choir, an opera company, a theatre company, and even an operational theatre, evidence of inherent musicality amongst its residents was interpreted as proof that Calcutta was still a cultivated and artistic city worthy of its reputation as the ‘City of Palaces’. Public music-making by amateurs was the province of men, whilst domestic music making was dominated (though not the exclusive domain) of women. The reasons for this sexual divide are complex, but largely related to the prevalent gendering of public and private space in nineteenth century British society and the social and political function of music in colonial Calcutta. The following sections describe the separate roles that public and private amateur musicianship played in the creation and maintenance of British identity in mid-century Calcutta.
Public Music and Male Musicality

In nineteenth-century Western culture, the public sphere was traditionally the province of men, and musical exhibition was no exception, particularly amongst the conservative residents of White Town. Professional female musicians were, of course, accepted, but only in opera, operatic concerts and (occasionally) in church, places which depended upon women's voices and the keyboard skills in which which many women excelled because of the biases of their education. In the amateur realm, however, women were seldom seen in public performance: the amateur public stage was the province of white men.

Male musicality was surprisingly important to White Town's social and political structure. It is telling, for instance, that one of Calcutta's most powerful social groups was a professional-amateur musical group: the Philharmonic Society. The Society consisted almost entirely of amateur musicians although there was a core of professional musicians such as Philip Delmar (a conductor and flautist) and Henry Valadares (the violinist). The Philharmonic's members participated in a range of musical activities: there was an orchestra, a glee club, a choir, as well as other, more informal, ensembles. At its numerous concerts, the Philharmonic Society presented a variety of European music: its instrumental music ranged from opera overtures, symphonies, and string quartets to marches, waltzes and ballad arrangements, whilst the vocal music, too, spanned the wide gamut from arias and ballads to glees, and catches.

The musical activity of the Society, however, is not its most interesting feature. Far more significant are the links the Society established between musicality, social prestige and political power, to the extent that musicality (of the ‘right’ sort, of course) became a sort of shibboleth for the elite strata of colonial administration. The Society was established by those already in positions of economic and political power in Calcutta, such as Sir Frederick Halliday, the first lieutenant-governor of Bengal, Major-General George Plowden, and Sir Thomas Herbert Maddock, Deputy-Governor of Bengal and President of the Council of India. Those invited to join the Society gained access not only to a hobby club, but a social club consisting of Calcutta’s elite, dominated as it was by civil servicemen and high ranking militia. Through a complex system of patronage and privilege, membership to the Philharmonic Society became synonymous with membership of Calcutta’s beau monde and the world of political power. Indeed, culture and bureaucracy became so intertwined that membership (and accomplishment within the Society) was widely known to secure professional and social advancement. At first, examples of musical favouritism were minor and accepted with nothing more than passing jest. However, the nepotistic system soon ‘became a ground for serious complaint’, when (later Sir) Cecil Beadon, a very junior civil servant, was appointed Secretary of the Sudder Board of Revenue, an important and lucrative position, by Halliday. Acerbic squibs, such as the following, began to appear in the daily papers ridiculing this musical system of patronage:

979 Ibid., p. 436.
In Calcutta, 'tis clear, all advancement depends
Upon grounds never elsewhere computed
By sense or service you'll ne'er gain your ends
Ars Musica reigns undisputed.980

Other squibs targeted Beadon, Halliday and Sir Thomas Herbert Maddock more directly. This, published in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, alleges Beadon's appointment is due to being a fun host and a good trombonist.

People ask, well they may, what “Seed’un” has done
That so soon such a prize in the service he's won;
To me it is clear, for we all must acknowledge,
his zeal for the morals of young men in the college!
...
He's a host, too, you know, at all “Holiday” parties
Where he wisely has studied “fideliter artes”
And in fine, my dear Hurk, you must candidly own,
There is no one can play half so well the trombone.
So Donelly, Skipworth, Bill Tayler, and Crawford,
Though they wish they may get it, must wait til it's offered.981

An author published in *The Englishman* concurs:

For the trombone had B----n his gift ne'er displayed
He ne’er for the Board have been taken.

William Tayler provides us with an example directed at Maddock, who is accused of double-crossing his own kind (the civil service) and being taken in by the musical clique of which he is a part.

When King Tom of Civilians was made *primus nob,*
He vowed he would ne'er supersede one;
But oh! what a bass, what a double-bass job
Is this sudden promotion of “Seed’un”.

Tom swore to be led by the nose with a string,
To him was a wonder, a riddle;
But little he knew what a terrible thing,
Is the string of a very big fiddle.982

Ars Musica may have lead to the preferment of Beadon and others, but social and political advancement was not the only function of male amateurism. The musicality of those in

980 Excerpt from a squib by an anonymous author, published in various daily Calcutta newspapers, reproduced in Ibid., p. 437.
981 “Seed’un” is code for Cecil Beadon; ‘Holiday’ is a reference to Halliday; ‘fideliter artes’ is not used in its original sense, but in order to provoke a connotation to ‘fiddler’; ‘Hurk’ refers to the *Bengali Hurkaru*, the daily journal in which it was published. *Bengali Hurkaru*, July 18th 1848, p. 5.
positions of social and political power within White Town and the development of a system of social prestige and career progression that valued cultural aptitude and appreciation also enhanced the value of high-art music within the community.

Male musicality did not only serve individual interest; it also functioned on a communal level, promoting and preserving the collective identity of White Town and the Raj. As discussed in chapters three through seven, opera and high-art music were regarded as a means by which Calcutta could secure a reputation for being civilised and thoroughly sophisticated city. This self-concept was challenged when, during the 1870s, professional opera and music-making began to pass into oblivion. Such difficulties made White Town worry that it was gaining a discreditable reputation for being a soulless city, wholly without music, and, as such, an object of cultural contempt within the Empire. Such concerns prompted many Anglo-Indians to consider taking a more active role in the city’s musical culture, that is to step up from patrons with purses to musicians in their own right. They apparently did so as much to prove that ‘although we regard our comparative neglect of opera as not very creditable, wither to our energy or to our taste, we do not consider it to be absolutely indicative of a want or appreciation for music’, as for their own enjoyment. The idea that gained the most support, and the most censure, was the formation of a Musical Society.

When the idea of forming a “Musical Society” was first floated in May 1871, the office of The Englishman was inundated with letters on the subject. No one thought the idea itself to be flawed—high-art music enjoyed a position of utmost prestige and value in White Town, and any attempt to honour it was not to be disparaged. Many of the letters addressed to the newspaper's editor were supportive of the idea, and the editor himself lent support to the project, promising to collect a list of interested parties for the purposes of forming a committee. Many people, however, questioned whether Calcutta was able to put aside its social insularity and cliquishness to form a functional musical association. The danger, according to many, was that such a society was likely to become yet another elitist coterie where members were empowered and included on the basis of socio-economic position, rather than talent, taste or ability.

‘Veritas’, for example, blamed the insularity of various musical clubs within Calcutta, including the Philharmonic Society, for the inevitable failure of Calcutta’s other musical enterprises. He claimed that Calcutta was a singularly stratified community in which Civil Service people only mixed with the Civil Service people, merchants and clerks eschewed association with tradesmen and artisans, and uncovenanted people clustered in groups according to wealth. He believed that only when Calcutta had been divested of such ‘stupid class prejudices’ could ‘such a thing work’. ‘Infelix’ agreed:

have we not tried over and over again to form such a Society in Calcutta and has not every attempt been attended with humiliating failure?...how is combination to be rendered in a society composed

985 Various Letters to the Editor published on page two of The Englishman between May 4th and May 9th inclusive.
of such artificial distinctions, of such alkalis and acids as are the elements of society in Calcutta?... Those who belong to the upper crust of society will naturally assume a control ... without possession of the knowledge necessary to a dictator. And when the members meet, class distinctions may not always be forgotten, and some who are not known in the charmed circle of what of termed “society” might be allowed to come and go unnoticed, or, if noticed, it might be done in a manner which would make utter neglect preferable. Music in Calcutta … must be pursued in a social spirit, or not at all. … In England, where class distinctions do not obtrude themselves on your notice at every turn, ladies and gentlemen can unite without the feverish dread of being suspected of that sort of civility which implies equality towards those whom they are not accustomed to meeting in private; and there Musical Societies do succeed, but I fear they never will succeed in Calcutta, in the nineteenth century, on this account.987

The entrenched social divisions to which these men referred, and reported to be far more exaggerated in Calcutta than in England, were one of high-art music’s greatest threats during the 19th Century, and one of the foremost reasons for the ultimate failure of opera to take root there. Yet, as though these obstacles were not enough, Calcutta strict social codes ensured the exclusion of yet another demographic: women.

The Second Sex: Domesticity, musicality and femininity in British Calcutta.

As evinced by the popularity of salon music genres (such as solo piano music and lieder), the nineteenth century was a period in which economic and social factors combined to make domestic music-making an integral part of the social and cultural landscape of Western society. This was as true in India as it was anywhere else where Europeans lived. It was also true that at this time in European culture, the domestic sphere was a feminine space. The confluence of the rise of domestic music-making and the gendering of that space meant that amateur female musicality was encouraged in the home, but it also meant that domestic music-making was a woman’s responsibility. As a result, musicality became an essential accomplishment for any femme à marier. Calcutta’s unique social and cultural circumstances only amplified the importance of music in the home and, thus, of female musicality. Indeed, so important did musical talent become that, for the increasing numbers of single women coming to Calcutta in ‘fishing fleets’ (i.e. on the hunt for a husband) proficient singing and pianoforte playing had become essentials. Ethel Savi, a woman who spent much of her life in White Town, later recounted: ‘a girl had to play piano or be considered quite ineligible for matrimony and a social life.’988 Savi’s assertion is supported by the accounts of passengers to India, who complained of single women (and even some married ones) relentlessly practising on the available keyboard instruments for the entire duration of the journey.989

As typical specimens of Victorian British ladies, these women had been raised for the sole purpose of fulfilling their domestic destiny; hence, they were uniformly musically trained, although they naturally had differing degrees of passion and talent for music. The majority of these women would have been able to sing and played pianoforte, whilst the more

musical amongst them perhaps also played a suitably feminine domestic instrument, such as the harp. The high turn over of sheet music and instruments in Calcutta’s music warehouses implies that domestic music making was a popular activity through the Victorian era. Moreover, primary sources demonstrate that music-making in the home occurred in spite of significant obstacles, including the rapid deterioration of instruments, the high prices for charged for sheet music, and the relative difficulty of finding new music. That White Town’s women went to such tedious lengths to keep their domestic spaces as musical as possible indicates that the interest of many women was both earnest and legitimate. It also suggests that female music making was of social and personal value to the men who funded and encouraged it.

The importance of women’s domestic music-making to the professional and personal lives of White Town’s men should not be underestimated. An Anglo-Indian husband whose wife was a proficient musician would be able to keep a culturally respectable home and was, therefore, more likely to be able to draw the best society around him. This gave him an advantage in business networking and the construction of social esteem. Just as a man’s own musical prowess could lead to career advancement, it became apparent over the course of the nineteenth century that the musicality of his home—that is the musicality of his female relatives—also had the power to propel a man forward in his career:

A civilian with a turn for fiddling, a talent for the flute, or an incipient genius for the violoncello, was marked for preferment; a husband whose wife had a flair for the piano, or was blessed with a sweet voice, was equally happy and a new principle of preferment was gradually inaugurated.

Like the male amateurism of the public arena, female amateurism in the home was also thought to contribute to the strength of the Raj and the success of Britain’s imperial project. Alison Blunt has argued that ‘imperial domesticity, its supposed superiority to Indian domesticity, and the place of British women in maintaining such domestic superiority were all thought to bolster the success of imperial power’. Domestic music making was part of the cultural terraforming which underpinned colonialism in nineteenth century British India.

The role of women’s musicality as a support for both man and Empire was a structure modelled by the women of the city’s premier address: Government House. Following the arrival of Lord Auckland (Governor-General from 1836–42) and his sisters, the Misses Eden, one of Calcutta’s most prominent citizens, Joachim Hayward Stocqueler noted that Government House was increasingly the cynosure of British social and cultural life. He noted also that this was due in no small way to the activities and dedication of the Governor-General’s sisters. As the following excerpt from a letter by Emily Eden reveals, the Misses Eden were fully aware of the role that they, both as women and as cultural hostess, played in ensuring that their brother’s term as Governor-General was deemed successful:

991 Tayler, Thirty-eight years in India, Vol. 1, pp. 435-36.
However troublesome these gaieties may be, they are pleasant, as proofs of our “giving satisfaction”; for as long as it was considered a bore to come to Government House [i.e. in the days of Auckland’s predecessors, especially Governor-General Bentinck], eternal fagging at society was doubly fatiguing...but we have somehow risen rapidly in public estimation, and there is no end to the attentions they pay us. Calcutta is become so gay. In short “the wretched tools by which George means to make his arbitrary government popular” as ---- calls us [i.e. the Misses Eden], are turning to account; and that being the case, I no longer object to the trouble of the business. It is the only active duty we can perform here.

White Town’s men were obviously aware of the substantial contribution made to their comfort and status by the musicality of their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. Their gratitude, however, did not extended to welcoming the women in their lives into the world of public music-making. Whilst the exclusion of women from public life was being challenged and relaxed in Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, neither the increasing numbers of women in Calcutta, nor the strides that women back ‘Home’ were making, made any difference to the exceptionally housebound status of the women of the Raj. Indeed, as Alison Blunt has argued, Anglo-Indian society adhered to far stricter delineations of public/masculine and private/feminine spaces than ‘Home’ culture back in Britain, and, furthermore, saw empire as permeating both. It was thought that each gender had its own role to play in creating and supporting notions of empire; men did this through policy and force, whilst women were charged with building empire through nurture and domesticity. Hence, although public and private musicality had the same ends (the strengthening of the empire, community and self), White Town’s men considered public music to run parallel to domestic music making, rather than intersect with it. The music performed in the public sphere was analogous to British architecture, education, and the civil service itself; that is, it was monumental, virile, imposing and official representation of the civilisation and superiority of the Empire. By definition, therefore, men deemed that public music was anathema to Anglo-Indian femininity. Its connection to British rule similarly excluded non-whites and the non-official from significant participation. Their wives, sisters, daughters and mothers did not necessarily agree.

When The Englishman called for expressions of interest into the new Musical Society, the call was vociferously answered by White Town’s women. Yet, the Musical Society created in 1871 became a masculine zone, much to the chagrin of the city’s women. When the first meeting was convened on June 1st at the Dalhousie Institute, more than twenty women were present. The Englishman described the meeting as being very successful, but the women disagreed. Mrs. Mary Avery (a fine pianist and choirmistress who had accompanied Anna Bishop and many other visiting singers and conducted many charity choirs) complained of the way the men had brushed aside any of the women’s ideas or contributions at the meeting. She was also disappointed by their failure to recognise the talent and qualifications of the women. Despite her skills, education(she had trained at the Royal Academy in London) and years of service to Calcutta’s musical life, the men passed
over her offer to run a choir, at no charge, in favour of Herr Stoeckel, a long-time resident ‘Professor’ of music Calcutta, who was to paid for his services.995

Evidently, the women were dissuaded or ignored until they all left. The men chose repertoire that was for male voices only, or required instruments that were decidedly masculine (horn, trumpet etc) and, thus, the Musical Society became yet another bastion of elite, British masculinity. Women retired back into domesticity, where they played a supporting role in the tale of empire building. British men from the lower rungs of society, who lacked superior musical skills, languished in the depths of the Civil Service, never benefitting from the nepotistic patronage system so eloquently represented by the Philharmonic Society. British colonial identity, as expressed through non-professional musicality, was decidedly masculine, political and elitist. Music was adopted by the Raj as yet another powerful means of supporting the hierarchy of Empire, keeping women, natives and inferior British people in their place.

**Conceiving Marvellous Melbourne:**

**The role of opera in the transformation from gold-rush town to cultural metropolis.**

As described in earlier chapters, the settlement at Melbourne may have pre-dated the discovery of gold, yet until this mineral wealth had been discovered, Melbourne had been relatively small, undistinguished and unimportant town on the fringes of the Europeanised world. Then came the gold rush, whose resultant immigration, cosmopolitanism, wealth, and commerce thrust Melbourne onto the world stage. European nations began to send envoys and diplomats to the city,996 international trading houses and financiers began opening branches and operations in these cities; and news from Melbourne became regular features of the world’s leading journals.

It was soon clear that both Melbourne had the potential to grow into a shining metropolis. Before this potential could be realised, the city would have to develop its credentials. The gold rush had secured financial and, therefore, political pre-eminence for Melbourne, but this upstart gold-rush town lacked something which money could not buy: cultural authority. As William Weber has argued, cultural authority was a significant factor in determining a city’s general influence, prestige and potency, and the most formidable of all cultural commodities was opera.997 By the turn of the nineteenth century, the status of London and Paris as the cities at the apex of the hierarchy of world cities was accepted as fact.998 Their position was in large part due to their identity as cosmopolitan cities, rather than cities of a regional or national character. Such an identity, as Weber explores, was the result of many factors, but was powerfully asserted by the vitality and nature of Paris and London’s operatic cultures.

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996 Consider the appointment of Count Lionel de Chabrillan as French Ambassador to Victoria in 1853. Chabrillan, *The French Consul’s Wife*.
997 Weber, ‘Opera and the cultural authority of the capital city’.
998 Ibid., p. 165.
The leading position that London and Paris assumed on the world stage, and the extent to which opera was a part of their identity, made opera a necessity for any would-be metropolis. As the capital of the newly-independent colony of Victoria and the city at the heart of unprecedented auriferous wealth, Melbourne was a city that sought to improve and expand its geopolitical consequence. It was apparent to many in Melbourne that opera was a cultural commodity capable of establishing and advertising cultural authority. Melbourne’s press began to comment on the city’s operatic credentials as early as 1854, when the first wave of international opera stars began to arrive in Australia. They came, like other immigrants of the decade, chasing the wealth that the gold rush offered. Indeed, many of them were came directly from other gold rushes: Anna Bishop, Catherine Hayes, Clarisse Cailly, Emile Coulon, the Lyster company—all disembarked in Melbourne after having performed in San Francisco, the heart of the Californian gold rush.999 As Chapter Nine demonstrated, Melbourne rapidly developed a sense of the cultural position it could occupy in the region (and the world). Just three short years after the city’s first professional productions, Melbourne declared that with Anna Bishop’s season of opera at the Theatre Royal, the city ‘at last, [had] grand opera in a style worthy of the Victorian metropolis’.1000 Melbourne’s aspiration towards metropolitanism was surprisingly ardent, and there was, therefore, great urgency in promoting opera as a means of establishing the city’s collective cultural capital. By 1862, Melbourne’s leading citizens were urging businesses and politicians to support the arts, especially opera:

In conclusion, it may be observed, that the continuance of such operas must depend upon the public of Melbourne. Let it be remembered that commerce is the cause of art — art, the effect of commerce. Let our merchant reflect that the encouragers of Raphael, Michael Angelo [sic], Palestrina, &c, were the merchant princes of Italy. It will surely be conceded that the pursuit of art is most conducive to the progress of humanity, and to the cause of civilization. ... Let, then, commerce flourish: let physical enjoyments be cultivated: let also the arts of music, opera and painting above all be sought after, and in future years, as Victoria increases in wealth and in power, let there be schools of art for the young of both sexes, to compare with those noble institutions which, at home and in Europe, have fostered and developed the talents of those great men, whose names and whose works are alike revered and honoured even in this new land, thousands of miles from the hallowed places which gave them birth.1001

The author of the letter did not have to wait long for either the support or the results. The 1860s and ‘70 were marked by almost constant opera. By the 1880s Australia had begun to produce native singers whose talents and training took them to the top level of international opera. By the 1890s, one of the biggest names in the opera world was Melba, and Melbourne beat both Paris and New York to verismo opera, when the Musgrove and Williamson brought out some of the original cast members of Leoncavallo and Mascagni’s operas to perform a season in Melbourne.

999 For more information about the nexus between the nascent operatic cultures of 1850s San Francisco and Melbourne please refer to Rocha, “Yellow Brick Road': Opera on the Gold Rush Circuit’, AMS 2011.
1000 ‘Princess’s Opera House’, The Age, April 24th 1857, p. 3.
Of course, Melbourne’s rising star as the Australian city, and a city of the world, was dependent upon more than just opera. The city’s strong economic position (until the 1890s), its size, natural resources, the development of the idea of a White “Greater Britain” and the city’s geopolitical strategic importance were crucial to Melbourne’s evolution from small illegal backwater to the metropolis of the southern hemisphere. Yet, the city’s strong cultural credentials were also an essential component of Melbourne’s increasingly sophisticated identity. In 1852, Melbourne was famous for its gold; by 1892, it was famous for its opera singers.

***

Both Calcutta and Melbourne perceived opera to be a valuable asset in their ambition to become strong cities of the empire, important geopolitical centres, and prestigious bastions of Western civilisation. Both cities’ British populations used opera as a tool of colonisation, whether against the indigenous people of the area (the Bengali people in Calcutta) or a fellow migrant group perceived to be a threat to Western culture and society (the Chinese in Victoria). The cities differed only in the roles they ascribed to opera within British society. Calcutta’s White Town residents used opera as a means of reinforcing social exclusivity, whereas the British-Australians in Melbourne employed opera as a piece of communal cultural capital to prove the education and prestige of the general British population.

The difference between the role of opera in each city (and the subsequent strength of the operatic culture) reflects the nature, context and politics of the town’s British settlement. Melbourne was politically and economically egalitarian and progressive, allowing a greater number of people to be able and willing to participate in operatic culture. Its British population consisted entirely of free settlers who were making a new home in this land and were, therefore, invested in the city’s growth, reputation and cultural life. By contrast, Anglo-Indian society in Calcutta was conservative and rigid. The British were there temporarily, not permanently, and their role was to dominate, not populate, making them less invested in raising the prestige of the city than in maintaining and elevating their individual prestige. There were of course other factors at play. Melbourne undoubtedly owed a much of its operatic success to circumstances largely beyond its control: the wealth, both financial and human, that flooded the city as a result of the gold rush, and the convenient touring circuit that the city formed in conjunction with its sister colonies around Australia and New Zealand. Yet, these circumstances merely established favourable conditions for opera in the city of Melbourne; the true reason for opera’s success lay in its social and political role amongst its British citizens.
Chapter 17: Conclusions

The foregoing discussion has been concerned with building a detailed picture of the operatic cultures of two of the British Empire's most important cities, Calcutta and Melbourne, during the Victorian Era. This dissertation has also stepped beyond description into socio-cultural analysis. It has argued that the social role of opera in these colonial outposts was inextricably linked to the success and mode of the colonial project. The thesis has also asserted that, throughout the Victorian Era, opera became an increasingly global cultural artefact; its development in some of the Empire's most remote cities was both a reflection and tool of British imperialism, and its success or failure was often a confluence of local, regional and international factors.

The nexus between opera, identity, society, economics, politics and imperialism was common to both Calcutta and Melbourne. Of the two cities, Calcutta was both the oldest settlement and the first to see opera performed on its stages. After 1833, the year in which the Charter Reform Act began the transfer of governance from the East India Company to the British Crown, Calcutta had an elite, wealthy and highly-stratified Anglo-European population. This community governed Calcutta, and the rest of British India, as pseudo-aristocrats, assuming cultural, intellectual and ethical superiority to the rightful owners of the land. After a period of belligerence (1848–1860s), in which Indian lands were conquered with significant economic, social and political costs, Calcutta entered its Victorian golden age, a time marked by relative peace and prosperity. Yet even at this time, Calcutta's decline had begun. By the 1880s, Britain's cultural imperialism has inspired a nascent nationalism and cultural renaissance amongst Indians across the subcontinent, but especially in Calcutta, and by the turn of the twentieth century it was apparent to most stakeholders that Calcutta would soon be stripped of its status as capital of British India.

In Melbourne, opera had predictably slow beginnings; while the colony remained semi-pastoral, male-dominated, and small in number, operatic culture had a modest presence. As migrants arrived, first from Germany following the 1848 revolutions, then from all over the world in the wake of the discovery of gold in 1851, opera flourished. Singers came amongst the fortune seekers and, from then on, Melbourne was almost constantly furnished with opera. By the 1880s, Melbourne was the largest city in the southern hemisphere; as 'Marvellous Melbourne’ grew in fame so to did its singers—first Amy Sherwin then Nellie Melba. The Great Panic of the 1890s certainly dampened both Melbourne’s spirits and the health of its operatic culture, but both survived through the difficulties, and reemerged by the time of Australia’s Federation: Melbourne was Australia’s first capital city, and it was (and some would argue that it still is) Australia’s cultural capital.
Opera followed the fortunes of the cities. It prospered with stability and wealth and suffered from war and economic depressions. Ostensibly, that this should be so seems rather obvious: as an expensive art form that was often classed as a 'luxury', opera was coveted in times of feast and dispensed with in times of famine. Yet, as discussed in this thesis, throughout the opera's history, its classification as a costly luxury has not impeded the art form's success. The fluctuating fortunes of opera in Victorian Calcutta and Melbourne are, therefore, not a simple case of supply-demand economics; opera's fate appears to have been more closely connected with imperialism and the need for the British to express a separate identity and claim cultural authority. This revelation is perhaps one of the more surprising results of this doctoral research.

The extent to which opera was employed by the British community as a tool to advance, or at least secure, their imperialist cause, was common to both nineteenth-century Calcutta and Victorian Melbourne. This is where the similarities end, however, and the divergence in opera's success can be largely attributed to the differences between the cities' modes of imperialism, demographics, economies, political styles, and even the objects of their xenophobia. Whereas in Calcutta the British had aspired to high-imperial elitism, Melbourne's British community pursued an identity based on the egalitarian mythology of the city's beginnings, and the cosmopolitan settler metropolis it desired to become. Whilst Calcutta had a small, bureaucratic and non-settler population, Melbourne boasted an increasingly large, middle-class permanent resident population. Calcutta was funded by a classic imperial-economy, which diverted funds from the colony to Britain, and quashed secondary industry; by contrast, Melbourne became increasingly diversified throughout the century, shifting from primary industries like agriculture and mining to skilled industries like banking, manufacture and services. Where Calcutta tended to political and ideological conservatism, Melbourne was predominantly a radical and progressive society (by white, male, Victorian standards). Although both Calcutta and Melbourne were populated by Anglo-Irish communities that generally feared and/or demonised other cultures and races, the British in India feared a populace that was numerous, powerful and the rightful owners of the land; Melburnians, instead, focused their xenophobic paranoia on a minority migrant group—the Chinese. Each of these differences, as shown in this dissertation, impacted upon opera, its role, its performance and its success (or lack thereof) in the two cities discussed.

The strength of Melbourne, both a metropolis and an operatic centre, and the corresponding decline of Calcutta's geopolitical and cultural significance suggest that opera's success is closely correlated to its sociological role. In imperial cities, such a role was largely defined by the type and style of imperialism and colonialism practiced. This has implications not only for the way scholars might consider opera in other nineteenth-century colonial societies, but also within Europe, the birthplace of both opera and modern imperialism, and for opera in the twenty-first century. There has been a debate for several decades about the relevance of opera, its alleged decline, and its place in a global, multicultural society. This research, perhaps, will provide some insight for such discussions, for it shows that opera is as relevant as the society that engages with it; that opera is on a
seemingly endless loop of ascendency and decline; and that opera has long existed on a
global plane. Moreover, whilst the comparison between Victorian Calcutta and Victorian
Melbourne showed that the opera was employed to progress insular and xenophobic
agendas, the analysis demonstrates that these attitudes were endemic to the broader
Victorian British culture. Should the societies in question have been egalitarian (as
Melbourne was) or celebrated its multiculturalism, the operatic cultures would have
reflected this, and would likely have been to stronger for it. We in the twenty-first century
can take a lesson from this—if we don't like aspects of our operatic culture, we most likely
do not like aspects of our society. We need to change these first, before we can expect our
ideal operatic experience.

This thesis was by no means an exhaustive examination of even these two cities’
nineteenth-century operatic cultures, let alone the British Empire as a whole or opera
across the world. Moreover, although Calcutta and Melbourne have proved to be very
engaging and representative case studies, much research must yet be undertaken before a
comprehensive idea of the extent, scale and importance of operatic culture outside of
Europe and North America may be formed. Some of this work has already begun: Ben
Walton is currently tracing the Pizzoni-Bettali Company’s circumnavigation of the globe;
Jann Pasler is engaged in a similarly multi-local investigation of opera in the French
Empire, with a particular focus on North Africa. More remains, however, and it is my hope
that this work will eventually exist as but one thread in a tapestry of investigations into
opera beyond Europe and North America, its social, political and economic roles, and its
connection to ideas of empire, national identity, and culture. I believe that not only will
such research fill in the lacuna currently existing in musicology and post-colonial
scholarship, but it will also enrich our understanding of opera in Europe. After all, it is
from Europe that both opera and modern colonialism sprung.
Appendices
Appendix A
Governors-General of Bengal (later, Governors-General of India; Governors-General and Viceroy of India), 1773–1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governors-General of Bengal (1773–1833)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warren Hastings</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 October 1773 – 1 February 1775</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir John Macpherson (acting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 February 1785 – 12 September 1786</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Cornwallis, the Earl Cornwallis</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 September 1786 – 28 October 1793</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir John Shore</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 October 1793 – 18 March 1798</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Alured Clarke (acting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 March 1798 – 18 May 1798</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard Wellesley, the Earl of Mornington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 May 1798 – 30 July 1805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charles Cornwallis, the Marquess Cornwallis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 July 1805 – 5 October 1805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir George Barlow (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 October 1805 – 31 July 1807</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gilbert Elliot-Murray-Kynynmoun, the Lord Minto</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 July 1807 – 4 October 1813</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francis Rawdon-Hastings, the Earl of Moira</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 October 1813 – 9 January 1823</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Adam (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 January 1823 – 1 August 1823</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Amherst, the Lord Amherst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August 1823 – 13 March 1828</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Butterworth Bayley (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 March 1828 – 4 July 1828</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord William Bentinck</td>
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<tr>
<td>Appointed 4 July 1828; title changed in 1833; left office 20 March 1835</td>
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</tbody>
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GOVERNORS-GENERAL of INDIA 1833–1858

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOVERNORS-GENERAL of INDIA 1833–1858</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir Charles Metcalfe, Bt (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 March 1835 – 4 March 1836</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Eden, the Lord Auckland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 March 1836 – 28 February 1842</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Law, the Lord Ellenborough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 February 1842 – June 1844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wilberforce Bird (acting)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1844 – 23 July 1844</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Henry Hardinge</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 July 1844 – 12 January 1848</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Broun-Ramsey, the Earl of Dalhousie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 January 1848 – 28 February 1856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Canning, the Viscount Canning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointed 28 February 1856; title changed 1 November 1858; left office 21 March 1862</td>
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</tbody>
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VICEROYS of INDIA 1858–1901

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VICEROYS of INDIA 1858–1901</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Bruce, the Earl of Elgin</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 March 1862 – 20 November 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir Robert Napier (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 November 1863 – 2 December 1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir William Denison (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 December 1863 – 12 January 1864</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir John Lawrence, Bt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 January 1864 – 12 January 1869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Bourke, the Earl of Mayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 January 1869 – 8 February 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Strachey (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 February 1872 – 23 February 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Napier, the Lord Napier (acting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 February 1872 – 3 May 1872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Baring, the Lord Northbrook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 May 1872 – 12 April 1876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Bulwer-Lytton, the Lord Lytton</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Robinson, the Marquess of Ripon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Hamilton-Temple-Blackwood, the Earl of Dufferin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Petty-Fitzmaurice, the Marquess of Lansdowne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor Bruce, the Earl of Elgin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Curzon, the Lord Curzon of Kedleston</td>
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Appendix B

The Batman Treaty

The deed/treaty that John Batman established with the Wurundjeri elders, however, was paltry: in return for a trifling list of goods\(^{1002}\) (valued at £320p/a\(^{1003}\) — approximately £27,000 in 2010),\(^{1004}\) John Batman and his associates deemed that they had become the owners of the nearly 600,000 acres of land.

Beyond the obvious iniquity of offering so little to gain so much, the treaty was also of dubious legality due to its very design. What Batman and the other Port Phillip Association settlers interpreted as a land sale complete with the deed was almost certainly understood by the Wurundjeri elders as an exchange in order to effect a *tanderrum* (safe passage) agreement (similar to a treaty). Indigenous culture invests people with rights and responsibilities in relation to land, but not ownership in the Western sense. The relationship between people and land is about belonging not possession—hence, many people can belong to the land, but none of them may own it. In this sense, the Wurundjeri

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\(^{1002}\) Twenty Pair of Blankets, Thirty Tomahawks, One Hundred Knives and Scissors, Thirty Looking Glasses, Two Hundred Handkerchiefs, one Hundred Pounds of Flour, and Six Shirts [and] the yearly Rent or Tribute of One Hundred Pair of Blankets, One Hundred Knives, One Hundred Tomahawks, Fifty Suits of Clothing, Fifty Looking glasses, Fifty Pair Scissors and Five Tons Flour. John Batman, *The Batman Deed* [Melbourne] (The Port Phillip Papers, MS 13484; Melbourne: State Library of Victoria, 1835).


\(^{1004}\) Samuel H. Williamson and Lawrence H. Officer, ‘Measuring Worth’, <http://www.measuringworth.com/index.html>, accessed 10/09/2011. This calculation has been performed using the Retail Price Index (RPI), which gives the most conservative estimate. It is an appropriate method for this problem because it measures the cost in a given period of the goods and services purchased by a typical consumer in a base period. However, this £320 was being paid as out of the GDP of the Port Phillip District. Hence, to show how ‘affordable’ the £320 rent was to the colony, it is useful to calculate it as a share of modern GDP, which gives a figure of approximately £879,000 in the UK or $AU 869,200 in Australia.
elders were inviting Batman’s party to belong—not dispossessing themselves of—the land. As William Buckley reflected in 1852, the eight elders, including two ngurungueta (tribal leaders), who signed the ‘Batman Deed’ were not invested with the sort of power to buy and sell their tribal land. Buckley explained:

… unlike other savage communities, or people, they have no chiefs claiming or possessing any superior right over the soil: theirs only being as the heads of families. [...] I therefore looked upon the land dealing spoken of as another hoax of the white man, to possess the inheritance of the uncivilised natives.

Furthermore, the Wurundjeri gave the Batman party gifts of their own: woven baskets containing examples of their tribal weaponry and two possum-skin cloaks; both items bear great significance to the Wurundjeri. Neither Indigenous nor European culture has a tradition in which ‘sellers’ bestow upon ‘buyers’ precious gifts additional to the items for sale. The exchange of gifts, however, is common in both cultures at the signing of a treaty. So, too, are celebrations, rituals or festivities; the signing of this document was followed by a corroboree.

It was not only from the Wurundjeri people’s perspective that the Batman treaty’s claim to be a title of deed was illegal. The Parliament of the United Kingdom espoused a view of Australia as being terra nullius—unoccupied lands. This view negated any claim of Indigenous ownership/custodianship of the land, a notion not only offensive in its negation of the rights and humanity of an entire people, but also with legal consequences for the settlers. As British law did not recognise Indigenous claims to Australian land, it could not recognise the settlers’ treaty and ‘land trade’ with the Indigenous people of the Port Phillip district. This situation rendered the settlement of Melbourne illegal. Additionally, although Port Phillip was several hundred kilometres from the nearest legitimate British settlement, the land was still considered to be part of New South Wales.

1005 William Buckley was a British convict, transported to the failed penal colony near present day Sorrento, Victoria. He escaped and lived among the Wathaurung people as Murrangurk until the resettlement of Port Phillip in 1835. During his thirty-two years of life among the Wathaurung, Buckley developed a deep understanding of Indigenous beliefs concerning land, ownership, goods exchange and treaties. For further discussion of William Buckley please see his edited biography: William Buckley and Tim Flannery (Ed), ‘The Life and Adventures of William Buckley’, (Melbourne: Text Edition 2002).

Appendix C
Leaders of Port Phillip District/Victoria, 1835–1901, (with indication of origin)

*denotes that the person was born in Australia, or arrived before age 5;
† indicates that the figure was appointed (i.e. not a migrant);
^ arrived before gold rush;
#gold rush migrant; and
‡ arrived after the gold rush

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governors-General of New South Wales (responsible for Port Phillip District)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major-General Richard Bourke† 3 December 1831 – 5 December 1837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Sir George Gipps† 24 February 1838 – 11 July 1846</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Superintendent of Port Phillip District</th>
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<tr>
<td>Captain Charles La Trobe† 30 September 1839 - 30th June 1851</td>
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<tr>
<th>Lieutenant-Governors of Victoria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captain Charles La Trobe† 1 July 1851 – 5 May 1854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captain Sir Charles Hotham† 22 June 1854; title changed to Governor of Victoria 22 May 1855; left office 31 December 1855</td>
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<tr>
<th>Governors of Victoria</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Henry Barkley† 26 December 1856 – 10 September 1863</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir Charles Darling† 11 September 1863 – 7 May 1866</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Manners-Sutton, Viscount Canterbury† 15 August 1866 – 2 March 1873</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir George Bowen† 30 July 1873 – 22 February 1879</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Phipps, Marquess of Normanby† 29 April 1879 – 18 April 1884</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry Loch, Lord Loch† 15 July 1884 – 15 November 1889</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Hope, Earl of Hopetoun (later Marquess of Linlithgow)† 28 November 1889 – 12 July 1895</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Brassey, Earl Brassey† 25 October 1895 – 31 March 1900</td>
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<tr>
<td>George Clarke, Baron Sydenham of Combe† 10 December 1901 – 24 November 1903</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr William Haines^</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir John O'Shanassy^</td>
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<td>Dr William Haines^</td>
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<td>Sir John O'Shanassy^</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Nicholson^</td>
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<td>Richard Heales^</td>
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<td>Sir John O'Shanassy^</td>
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<td>Sir James McCulloch#</td>
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<td>Sir Charles Sladen^</td>
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<td>Sir James McCulloch#</td>
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<td>John Alexander MacPherson*</td>
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<td>Sir James McCulloch#</td>
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<td>Charles Gavan Duffy#</td>
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<td>James Francis#</td>
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<td>George Kerferd#</td>
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<td>Sir Graham Berry#</td>
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<td>Sir James McCulloch#</td>
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<td>Sir Graham Berry#</td>
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<td>James Service#</td>
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<td>Sir Bryan O’Loghlen‡</td>
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<tr>
<td>James Service#</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duncan Gillies#</td>
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<td>James Munro#</td>
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<td>William Shiels*</td>
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<td>Sir James Patterson#</td>
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<td>Sir George Turner*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allan McLean*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sir George Turner*</td>
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Appendix D
The artists of the Schieroni company and the company’s early history

Before arriving in Buenos Aires together, Teresa Schieroni and Margherita Caravaglia had enjoyed modest careers in Europe. Teresa Schieroni had appeared as the eponymous heroine of La Cenerentola at Pavia’s Teatro De’ Quattro Signori Cavalieri Compadroni during the 1818 Carnevale season. According to John Rosselli, she sang in comic opera in both Piacenza and Reggio Emelia, as well as taking the role of second woman in Elisabetta, Regina d’Inghilterra in Modena. Schieroni had also performed in Spain and Portugal, and had found particular success in Cadiz in 1827 as Ninetta in La Gazza Ladra. Schieroni appears to have come from a musical family. Adelaide Schieroni, possibly her sister but more likely her cousin, was a professional harpist, a fact that would explain Teresa’s mastery of that instrument; Teresa Schieroni’s granddaughter Luigia/Luisa Schieroni also became an opera singer, who appeared in provincial Italian theatres, the São Carlos de Lisboa, as well as retracing her grandmother’s journey to South America in 1841.

Like Schieroni, Margherita Caravaglia also came to South America with notable, if not prestigious, European experience. Caravaglia appeared on Italian stages as early as 1814, specialising in the travesti roles she would continue to perform in Calcutta. In Milan, she created the role of Edegardo in the première of Evelina (Coccia, 1814); it was a role she reprised five years later at the Carnevale season in Pavia, where she probably met Schieroni. Caravaglia also performed in the production of Mayr’s La Bianca Rosa e la Rossa during Verona’s Carnevale season, 1819. It is also apparent from her activities in South America that Caravaglia was a competent pianist, as she often accompanied her fellow artists on various keyboard instruments during recitals.

These two women travelled from Cadiz to Buenos Aires together, arriving in Argentina in 1829. It was in Buenos Aires, that Schieroni and Caravaglia met the other two principal

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1007 Archive number: Racc.dramm.6141/11, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milano.
1009 La Gazeta Cadiz, 1827, reprinted as ‘Schieroni as Ninetta’, The Englishman, April 15th 1836, p. 5.
1010 Archive Mus Z VII 10, Biblioteca Teatrale Livia Simoni, Milan and archive Dramm 896.5, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice. In both sources, Adelaide Schieroni is listed as the harpist for the Carcano orchestra.
1012 Archive number: Racc.dramm.6138/10, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milan.
1013 Archive number: Racc.dramm.6135/1, Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense, Milan.
1014 Lauro Ayestaran, La Musica en el Uruguay (1; Montevideo: Servicio Oficial de Difusión Radio Electrica, 1953), p. 304.
1015 Rosselli, Singers of Italian opera, p. 187.
singers of the troupe, Domingo Pizzoni and Giacomo/Joaquin Bettali, as well Signora and Signore Foresti. The sextet of singers soon began to perform in concerts and scaled-down versions of operas. In August 1829 they crossed the Plata, reaching Montevideo, where the company acquired some new members (Mayorga and Garate), and lost others (Sra and Sr Foresti). Uruguay was good to the troupe: the small community welcomed the singers warmly, with Schieroni, in particular, earning praise:

\[\text{tiene una hermosa vóz de contralto; sus notas bajas son muy poderosas y algunas producen gran efecto en un trío de “Isabel, reina de Inglaterra”}.\]

She has a fine contralto voice; her low notes are very powerful and, at times, were heard to great effect in the trio from Elisabetta, Regina d’Inghilterra.]  

It is likely that it was in Montevideo that the company also made the acquaintance of its conductor, Louis-Théophile Planel, who, despite his French ancestry, was born in Uruguay in 1804. Planel was young, ambitious and fairly well connected – his brother-in-law was the virtuoso violinist, Santiago Massoni, who had been the conductor of the first operas in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago. Planel’s connection to Massoni not only aided the band of singers, but also seems to have inspired them: they traced Massoni’s footsteps around the continent, and eventually followed his to Calcutta. First, they headed north to Rio de Janeiro, where they benefited from the vibrant musical culture that had burgeoned as the city hosted first the Portuguese court (1808–1821) and then the court of Dom Pedro I of Brazil (1822–1831). Next, the troupe headed around Cape Horn to Chile, where its first stop, in 1830, was Valparaiso. There, in the salons and mansions of the brothers José and Manuel Cifuentes, the Pizzoni-Bettali Company was responsible for Chile’s first opera season. The troupe débuted with *L'inganno Felice* (Rossini), but presented quite a large selection of operas over the following weeks including *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *Tancredi*, *Gazza Ladra*, *Edardo e Cristina*, *L’Italiana in Algeri*, and *La Cenerentola* (all by Rossini), *Elisa e Claudio* (Mercadante), *Agnese di Fitz-Henry* (Paër) and *I Portenti* (possibly by Paër).  

After three weeks in Valparaiso, the troupe then moved on to the Chilean capital, Santiago. There the company did not find the ready welcome that they had found in other centres of Latin America, as this review from *El Trompeta* reveals:

Jamás habíamos oído aquí berrear, mugir, desgañitarse como lo estamos haciendo ahora. Tenemos los chilenos bastante dosis de amabilidad y tolerancia, aplaudimos por urbanidad y por costumbre,  

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1016 Bettali is also spelled Betali and Vettali.  
1018 Ayestaran, *La Musica en el Uruguay*, p. 197. Translated by Esmeralda Rocha.  
1020 Ayestaran, *La Musica en el Uruguay*, p. 200  
1021 Luis Pradenas, *Teatro en Chile: huellas y trayectorias, siglos XVI–XX* (Coleccion Ciencias Humanas - Sociedad y teatro; Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 2006), p. 161. Pradenas cites an unknown opera “I Portinini” as having also been performed. It is possible that this is Paër’s *I Portent di magnetismo* (1792).
pero no somos tan insensatos que se nos oculten las horrendas mutilaciones y absurdos pastiches que se nos dan bajo el nombre de óperas.\textsuperscript{1022}

[At no time have we heard here such lowing, bellowing, shrieking as we are hearing now. We Chileans have a high degree of amiability and patience, we applaud out of politeness and custom, but we are not so foolish that as to accept horrendous mutilations and absurd pastiches under the name of opera.]

Despite the severe judgment of the Santiago critic, the Schieroni company remained in the Chilean capital for seven months, presenting the same repertoire as it had produced in Valparaiso, although this time many of the operas were performed in Castilian, for the benefit of the Spanish-speaking audiences.\textsuperscript{1023} Its efforts, therefore, could not have been as disastrous as some previous scholars have assumed. Had the company been wholly unwelcome in Santiago, surely the troupe would have curtailed its stay there in order to seek more sympathetic audiences.

The troupe left Santiago in February 1831, resurfacing next in Lima, Peru in May the same year. How they spent the intervening months is unknown. Also unknown is how long the troupe spent in Lima; the next place in which the company appears is Macao in early 1833, and although it is known that the company left for Macao from Lima, it is unlikely that the small ensemble would have remained in Lima for nearly eighteen months. As John Rosselli suggested, it is probable that the troupe toured to some of the smaller cities of South and Central America during this time.\textsuperscript{1024}

After the arduous journey by sail to Macao, the company set about enlarging its orchestra by engaging a number of local amateurs.\textsuperscript{1025} As in Latin America, the Pizzoni-Bettali troupe presented the (reconstructed) Bel Canto works which formed that core of its repertoire (see Figure 1, a playbill from Macau), remaining in the Portuguese city for approximately six months. For more information regarding the troupe’s activities in Macau, please see the works of scholar Ben Walton, who is currently researching the company.\textsuperscript{1026}


\textsuperscript{1024} Rosselli, \textit{Singers of Italian opera : the history of a profession.}, p. 187.


\textsuperscript{1026} Most recent among Walton’s works on this company is ‘Teresa Schieroni and the idea of global opera’, a lecture given as part of the John Bird Series at Cardiff University in February 2011.
It may be surprising to note that the Macanese playbill is written in English, rather than in Portuguese. Although the city had been a Portuguese trading post since the mid-1500s and would later become an official Portuguese colony (in 1887), the city had been demographically and militarily dominated by Britons since the 1780s, when the EIC bought or leased most of the city’s prime real estate. Indeed, during the recent Napoleonic Wars, Macao had been under the de facto rule of the British (a decision agreed to by both
England and the Portuguese Viceroy of Goa to protect Macao from the French). 1028
Hence, despite the nominal Portuguese rule in Macao, the Italian Company focussed its
attention on the majority English population. This was not only the troupe’s first
experience of presenting Italian opera to a predominantly British audience; it was also the
first time the Pizzoni-Bettali company had performed opera in a high-imperial setting.
Unlike Latin America, where associate artists and competitors, although rare, were
available, in Far East Asia, the company was utterly alone. The only amusements that
Macao had seen had been amateur theatricals or the music provided by the bands of the
Portuguese Governors-General and the EIC’s ships.1029

The company’s novelty was a double-edged sword. The ready-made monopoly was,
certainly, encouraging to the company; yet, there were no replacements to be had should an
artist fall ill or desert. Nor were there instrumentalists at hand to make up the numbers, let
alone instruments that could be relied upon. Gone also was the safety net of being one
ship away from Europe. Far East Asia in the 1830s was at least six-months from home.
Furthermore, there was a far larger and more gender balanced audience for opera in Latin
America than was available in Macao. The company could not afford to displease some as
they had in Santiago, for in such a small and tight-knit expatriate community, losing the
support of a handful of patrons may well have resulted in the entire European community
following suit. Undoubtedly, the troupe benefited from its acquaintance with the specific
challenges of presenting opera in remote and imperial settings, so that its arrival in Calcutta
was less jarring than it might otherwise have been.

1028 Ibid., p. 94, p. 106 and p. 149.
1029 Ibid., pp.146–147.
Appendix E
Selected biographies of the artists of Cagli’s Calcutta and Melbourne companies.

Orazio Bonafos
Orazio Bonafos was an experienced, talented and moderately famous singer. Bonafos achieved early fame in 1839 at La Scala with his interpretation of Israele Bertucci in Marino Faliero (Donizetti, 1835), a role he performed under Donizetti himself.1030 From the 1840s, Bonafos found acclaim specialising in buffa roles, such as Don Pasquale, Don Marco (Don Bucefalo, Cagnoni) Mustafa (L’Italiana in Algeri), Sir Tristan (Marta) at theatres in Milano, Firenze, Parma and Modena.1031 He was especially recognised for his Don Pasquale as well as the two roles he created: Tobia in the Ricci brothers’ Il Birraio di Preston (1847) at Teatro alla Pergola, Firenze and Don Basilio in Cagnoni’s 1848 opera Il Testamento di Figaro at Teatro Re, Milano.1032

Enrichetta Bosisio
Bosisio had enjoyed a very respectable international career before joining Cagli-Pompei’s company. In Italy, she had attracted much praise at all the principal theatres of the north. A notable critique from Il Corriere di Milano outlines her talents:

la bravissima Enrichetta Bosisio é una prima donna di bella presenza, di simpaticissima voce, di fina intelligenza; una cantante, insomma, ed un’attrice degna della sua reputazione.1033

[the most excellent Enrichetta Bosisio is a prima donna of beautiful presence, of a most lovely voice, and of fine intelligence; in summary, [she is] a singer and an actress worthy of her reputation.]

These powers as an actress, coupled with her personal attractiveness1034 and considerable vocal talent, were sufficient to assure her success outside her native Italy; Bosisio travelled further afield than Europe, appearing in New York and Philadelphia1035 during the 1860s. She was a prima donna in Max Maretzek’s 1865–66 New York opera season, in a company

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1034 ‘Music and Drama – Musical Notes’ The Sydney Mail, May 25th 1872, p. 9, describes Bosisio thus: ‘The Signora is rather over the middle height, of most attractive appearance, and possesses great power of facial expression, and, in this opera [Il Trovatore] displayed considerable histrionic power.’
that included Carlotta Carozzi-Zucchi, Clara Louise Kellogg, and Agostino Rovere. At the New York première of Petrella’s *Ione*, she earned especial commendation for her portrayal of the eponymous heroine; it was an opera for which Bosisio was eminently qualified, having studied under Petrella for much of her education. After two years in New York and Pennsylvania, Bosisio had returned to her native Italy and quickly garnered further praise in her representations of Marguerite (Gounod’s *Faust*), Violetta (Verdi’s *La Traviata*), Lalla-Roukh (in David’s opera of the same name) and Norina (Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale*) in the opera houses of Milano, Bergamo and Trieste.

**Filippo Coliva**

Baritone Filippo Coliva was arguably the biggest name of the company. His date of birth was 1826, and his career can be traced from 1852, making Coliva one of the most experienced members of the troupe. After early performances in the regional opera houses of Rovigo and Ravenna, Coliva appeared in Italy’s metropolitan opera houses, such as San Carlo (Napoli), Teatro Re (Milano), and Teatro del Corso (Bologna). He was the lead baritone for the 1863 Carnevale season at the Teatro Comunale in Catania, opposite another young and talented singer who was to become a great success in the Antipodes, Ilma de Murska. Just prior to joining Augusto Cagli’s Calcutta opera company, Coliva appeared as principal baritone in Seville, alongside Amalia Fumagalli and Giovanni Landi (the tenor who had created the role of Alfredo in revised version of *La Traviata* in 1854). Coliva’s wife, Spanish ballerina Juanina Coliva, travelled with Coliva whither he went. Like the Coys, it may have been the idea of staying together as a couple which led to the appeal of this globetrotting lifestyle.

**Giulia Tamburini-Coy and Leandro Coy**

The husband and wife team of Giulia Tamburini and Leandro Coy were an immediate success in Australia, a fact that, in light of their abilities, experience and overseas acclaim, is unsurprising. Leandro Coy, born in Tarragona, Spain in 1839, studied under Pietro

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1037 Ibid, p. 52.
Romani, Florence’s famous conductor and coach. At the age of 23, Coy made his debut at the carnival season in Fabriano, Italy appearing in Un Ballo in Maschera. His triumph at this performance led to engagements across the north of Italy. Following a performance of Rossini’s Semiramide opposite the famous Marchesi sisters, Coy appears to have enjoyed constant employment, performing as primo tenore leggiere in Bucharest, Agram (now Zagreb), and Barcelona, singing with such esteemed international singers as Ronconi and Tamberlik. When Isabella II, Queen of Spain, visited her summer residence in San Sebastian, Coy was engaged as the tenor for a royal command performance of La Sonnambula. Coy’s Amina was a young and talented Italian soprano, Giulia Tamburini.

Tamburini was born in Pesaro in 1844 to a prestigious operatic family; most notably she was the niece of Antonio Tamburini, the world-famous baritone who had occupied the central position in the London operatic scandal that led to the birth of Covent Garden Opera House. Giulia Tamburini’s pedigree saw her promising voice trained from early youth, and at the age of 19 she debuted, to great commendation, in the Bel Canto role that was to become the cornerstone of her Australian success: Lucia di Lammermoor. It was also in this role that she famously opened the new opera house at Fiume in 1864, the performances being so successful as to immediately secure her a contract in Spain. She was contracted as the prima donna assoluta del genero leggiero for the spring season of 1866 at the Seville opera house and, shortly after, Tamburini starred in Queen Isabella’s command performance of La Sonnambula in San Sebastian opposite Leandro Coy.

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1044 ‘Death of Signor Coy’, The Argus, (Melbourne: Argus Office, Tuesday 24th October 1911), p. 7. Pietro Romani was the coach of many of the 19th Century’s most admired singers, including Marianna Barbieri-Nini and Maria Piccolomini as well as director of the Florentine opera orchestra and friend of impresario Alessandro Lanari.


1046 ‘Death of Signor Coy’, The Argus.


1048 ‘Death of Signora Coy’, The Argus, (Melbourne: Argus Office, Saturday 19th April 1919), p. 14. Thomas Kaufman believes that Giulia was the daughter of Antonio Tamburini, rather than his niece. There is no documentation to support this claim, and no lists of Antonio’s children included a daughter by the name of Giulia. Furthermore, whilst no mention is made of this relationship in press reports, the media of both India and Australia make note of Giulia being Antonio Tamburini’s niece. One must assume that had she been Antonio’s daughter, she would have publicised this advantageous connection and, therefore, we should take the artist at her word and assume that she was the niece, and not the daughter, of Antonio Tamburini.

1049 Ibid.

1050 Ibid.

1051 Moreno Mengíbar, La ópera en Sevilla en el siglo XIX, p. 220. Note – she appeared under the name Giulietta, rather than Giulia. The season lasted from April 1 to June 30. According to p. 223 ‘...dadas las fechas, la calidad de los cantantes [de otoño] no podía equipararse a los de la compañía de primavera’ (translation: ‘according to the dates, the quality of the [autumn season] company’s singers was not comparable to those of the spring company’) a fact which further raises Tamburini’s status and implies her superior quality.
The pair was soon married and the match was obviously a happy one, for they remained married until Leandro's death fifty years later, and insisted upon being hired as a pair. The Coys, along with another couple who would also join Cagli Company, the Tourneries, then travelled to Brazil, performing in the state of Pernambuco in 1868. After the birth of their eldest children, Alice in 1868 and Carlos in 1870, Giulia and Leandro joined Cagli's 1870–71 Calcutta company. Initially, Giulia was hired only as comprimaria, presumably due to the recent (maternal) hiatus in her career, but she soon found such acclaim in Calcutta that Cagli offered her a principal position in his Australian bound enterprise. Whilst they eventually settled in Melbourne, where they both taught music and singing, the Coys continued to tour the Asia-Pacific region in various opera troupes over the next thirty years. Their daughter, Alice, and their youngest son, Annibal, were also prominent members of Melbourne's musical community.

Filomena Curti

Filomena Curti was already quite experienced when she arrived in Calcutta, having been a principal at Parma's Teatro Regio in 1869 and 1870. This position had given her the opportunity to perform many seconda donna roles such as Teresa in *La Sonnambula*, Clotilde in *Norma*, both the first Dama d'Onore and the first Zingara in *Les Huguenots*, Berta in *La Contessa d'Amalfi* (Petrella), and Elisa in *Il Fornaretto* (Sanelli). Curti may have been hoping that this opportunity would allow her to break into bigger roles, but Riboldi and Bosisio's success overwhelmed her, and the largest part she was given was Inez in *Il Trovatore*. Moreover, Curti was reputedly severely affected by the Indian weather, and was afraid of staying into the summer. These reasons, perhaps, account for the fact that this was her only season outside of Italy; she returned to the Teatro Regio di Parma, performing a variety of roles, before she moved on to bigger parts in Milan's Teatro dal Verme.

Ernesto Daneri

Perhaps the most famous singer, apart from Zenoni, to appear in the 1869–70 season was the primo basso, Ernesto Daneri. From 1860, he had portrayed many of the finest modern bass roles across Italy, including Barbarossa in Verdi’s *La Battaglia di Legnano*, Sparafucile in
Rigoletto, Gomez da Silva in Ernani, Don Pedro in L’Africana, Frate Arsenio in La Stella di Toledo (Benvenuti, 1864), both Fra Donato and Raimondo Caracciolo in Isabella d’Aragona (Pedrotti) as well as creating the title role in Gentili’s Werther, at the Teatro allo Canobbiana di Milano.1059

**Enrico Dondi**

Whilst a survey of pre-Australian careers and accolades is indispensable to determining the standard of the singers who entertained and enthralled Australian audiences in the mid-Victorian era, it is also valuable to consider the post-Australian careers of the singers who appeared here. An evaluation of the success and employability of singers after they departed the colonies underscores three important points; firstly, that a visit to the farthest corners of the world was not the death-knell of an artist’s career; secondly, that the singers who arrived on Australia’s shores were neither aiming to end their careers here, nor be ‘big fish in the little pond’; and, thirdly, that it is imprudent to assume that an artist who arrived in Australia without extensive experience or critical acclaim was substandard. Unlike the singers discussed above, primo basso Enrico Dondi did not owe his Australian career to either of the Italian impresari. Rather, it was Lyster who contracted the bass along with Lucia Baratti (soprano), Lucy Chambers (alto) and Mariano Neri (tenor) in Italy in 18691060. Dondi was successful enough over the next two years, however, to attract the attention of Cagli, who offered him a place in the new Italian Opera venture. Dondi had been active in Italy since at least 1864, when he played Gessler in the (overdue) Bologna première of Rossini’s Guglielmo Tell. It was not until departing Australia, however, that Dondi enjoyed near continuous engagement. Between 1876 and 1882, Dondi can be traced as primo bass in innumerable opera companies from Teatro Regio di Torino1061 and several houses in Roma1062 to Teatro Solís in Montevideo, Uruguay1063 and Teatro San José de San Paulo, Brazil.1064

Dondi’s career following his 1870–75 Australian residency was evidently the career of a popular and solid singer of the late nineteenth century. Australia served neither as a resting place nor a hideaway for this bass; rather, it appears to have been a nurturing environment in which Dondi was able to cement his experience in the principal roles of his fach and prove his mettle and versatility. Furthermore, Dondi’s resumé demonstrates that experience on Australia’s operatic stages was not dismissed once a singer returned to Europe.


1063 Marocci, La Voce Antica.

1064 Ibid.
Amalia Fumagalli
Despite her secondary status in Cagli’s company, the comprimaria, Amalia Fumagalli, was also a successful and experienced singer in Italy. She had recently been one of the principals of Teatro Regio di Parma, opposite the famous Teresina Stolz and Edoardo Mariani. At Parma, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, and Teatro allo Canobbiana di Milano, Fumagalli had represented many of the key roles of the light coloratura repertoire, with a particular aptitude for Donizetti’s works: Elisabetta in Otto Mesi in Due Ore, Gilda in L’Aia nell’imbarazzo, Adina in L’Elisir d’Amore, Serafina in Il Campanello dello speziale (all by Donizetti), Vittoria in Tutti in Maschera, Amina in La Sonnambula, Albani in Petrella’s Le Precauzioni ovvero Il Carnevale di Venezia, Principessa Eudossia in La Juive, Isabella in Robert le Diable and Oscar in Un Ballo in Maschera.1065

Filippo Giannini
Baritone Filippo Giannini had been a principal at Teatro Regio di Parma, Teatro Comunale di Bologna and Teatro Riccardi di Bergamo from the late 1850s, performing both comic and serious roles, including Cabrion in Pipele, Valentine in Faust, Abdala in Tutti in Maschera, and the eponymous heroes both of Crispino e la Comare and Torquato Tasso (Donizetti).1066

Amalia Peroni
Prior to performing in Calcutta, Amalia Peroni had been a principal at Teatro Regio (Parma) and La Fenice (Venice), performing roles such as Marguerite de Valois (Faust), Oscar (Un Ballo in Maschera) and Adalgisa (Norma).

Teresa Riboldi
Teresina Riboldi was very young and inexperienced, but made an impression on the audience in her debut, as Siebel, when her fresh voice, strong dramatic and vocal skills and beautiful rendition of the Flower Song ‘took the house by storm’.1067 She gained confidence throughout the season; she made a convincing and substantial Azucena in Il Trovatore, an extraordinary achievement given that she was playing mother to a singer almost double her age.1068 Riboldi, like Bossio, was invited to join the Australian branch of Cagli and Pompei’s exercise, where she would, over the coming years, continue to grow as an actress and performer. By 1879, she was the principal contralto at Madrid’s Teatro Real, singing opposite singers such as Christine Nilsson, Elena Varesi, Enrico Tamberlik, and Jean de Reszke.1069 Ironically for Riboldi, that season in Spain commenced with Massenet’s Le Roi de Labor. Riboldi would have been the only cast member with experience of British India, and it is tantalising to ponder what she thought of such Orientalised, Romanticised version of India.

1067 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 4th, 1871, p. 3.
1068 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 5th, 1872, p. 3.
Margherita Sereno Setragni and Pietro Setragni


Giuseppe Vecchi

Giuseppe Vecchi had been primo basso position at Teatro del Corso di Bologna, Teatro Comunale di Catania, Teatro Riccardi di Bergamo, Teatro Regio di Torino and La Scala. Such experience meant that he had performed almost every basso role of any merit, including Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Oroveso (*Norma*), Silvano (*Un Ballo in Maschera*), Raimondo (*Lucia di Lammermoor*), Martello (*Tutti in Maschera*), Gomez da Silva (*Ernani*), Walter Walton (*I Puritani*), Giovanni di Procida (*I Vespri Siciliani*), St-Bris (*Les Huguenots*) and Calatrava in *La Forza del Destino*.1071 Surprisingly, Vecchi’s vast repertoire did not include Mephistopheles in *Faust*, and he was obliged to learn the role in only a few days, since that opera had been chosen to open the season.1072 Despite his unfamiliarity with the part, he was a triumph, with the press declaring him to be ‘a capital devil, [whose] acting was certainly exceptional throughout the evening, and may be compared with that of any first rate Mefistofele at home.’1073

Margherita Zenoni

Like the Coys, Margherita Zenoni had an extensive and triumphant career in Europe, particularly in Italy, before coming into the employ of Augusto Cagli. Born in Torino around 1838,1074 she initiated a career without any training, relying on her natural gifts to secure minor roles and understudies. Achieving moderate success, she was advised to undertake proper vocal studies in order to aim for better work. Zenoni returned to her native Torino, where she studied with Marcello, and thence went to Milano to study with Boniorti.1075 Under both her instructors she made rapid progress and soon returned to the professional arena, taking the title role in *Gemma di Vergy* at the Teatro Nazionale, Milano. Prior to joining Augusto Cagli’s company, Zenoni appeared as the prima donna in many of Italy’s leading opera houses, such as San Carlo (Napoli), Venezia, Trieste, Bergamo1076 and

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1071 Ibid.
1072 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 4th, 1871, p. 3.
1073 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 4th, 1871, p. 3.
1075 Ibid.
1076 Ibid., p. 575.
Further afield, Zenoni performed in Valencia in leading Verdi roles, and became a favourite of the audiences of Bucharest and Constantinople (Istanbul). The *Dizionario Biografico* of 1866 described her thus:

In each place she shows herself to be an artist worthy of every tribute, uniting her beautiful and pleasant voice, which was trained in the purest school, with an exquisite sentiment, an ardent spirit and with second to none dramatic value. Margherita Zenoni, a flawless singer, is a truly excellent actress, worthy of the most remarkable scenes that she has tread over the years.

Indeed, Zenoni was the type of singer who inspired odes and poems in her honour. The following is an extract of a poem written for Margherita Zenoni’s benefit at the Teatro Civico in 1861:

O MARGHERITA, la tua voca a noi,
È qual di sogno, o inganno assai possente,
Quando cara, e d’amor pe’ labbri tuoi
Gronda su mille cor la nota ardente;
E quando al bramoso occhio tu vuoi
Celarti e già son l’alme teco intente,
L’armonia del tuo canto erra sul core
Come un triste e gentil senso d’amore.

Zenoni joined Augusto Cagli’s Indian company in the 1868–69 season. Following her Calcutta debut, the leading critic of that city declared her to be the finest singer that Calcutta had seen. The critic detailed her talents and strengths:

From her first note to her last she was listened to with astonishment and delight. Her voice, acting and singing completely took the audience by storm, and from the loud and continued applause which greeted every part of her performance, it is evident that Calcutta has now an *artiste* who will please everybody...She is thoroughly dramatic in all her action, versed in stage requirements – and looks thoroughly a Queen ... In the last scene she excels herself, and rises to an intensity of passion and love – most eminently tragic. She is a noble singer, a perfect dramatic artist and the best India has ever seen.
Whilst such accolades and odes may be illustrative of the effusiveness and floridity of the Victorian press or the bias of her supporters, they ought not be dismissed out of hand for that reason. The Calcutta quotes come on the back of a visit by Anna Bishop, who had achieved fame and respect amongst leading opera-houses and composers. The Italian quotes, demonstrative as they are of the state of opera in Italy as both a passion and a partisan sport, are proof of the partiality for Zenoni that existed in her homeland, and confirm her popularity prior to arriving in Melbourne.

Other Cagli careers

Many singers, such as the Coys and secondo basso Pietro Favas, found in Melbourne not just a promising career, but a place to establish a home and raise their families. They were, therefore, part of the company from its beginning to its end. Others, however, remained active within the company for only a season or two and throughout its residency, the company’s composition altered as some singers were deemed either substandard, or departed willingly to seek new adventures, retirement or domestic life. As described above, Clotilde Rosevalle was replaced with Enrichetta Bosisio in 1872. That year also saw the replacement of Augusta Cortesi, who had been extremely successful in opera buffa, by Teresina Riboldi. Unlike Rosevalle, Cortesi’s disappearance was self-designed; she had married Rosnati at the end of 1871 and decided to retire into domesticity. After a period of some years, both she and Rosnati would resurface in South America, becoming particularly influential in the burgeoning operatic culture of São Paulo, Brazil. The impermanence of the maternal/domestic hiatus in Cortesi’s career, like that of Giulia Tamburini-Coy, undermines assumptions about women’s public careers in the nineteenth century. As discussed in Chapter 14, the freedom of lifestyles that both opera and settler/colonial societies facilitated may account for the plethora of travelling women in the mid-to-late Victorian Era. The flexibility that the travelling singer had with regard to balancing work and family would have been a significant factor in attracting opera singers, both male and female, to such a lifestyle.

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1083 The Coys remained in Australia until their deaths in the 1910s. Pietro Favas met an Australian woman whom he married while here with Cagli’s company. They had at least one child, born in Melbourne during March 1878, well after the company had dissolved. ‘Favas’, Family Notices, The Argus, Tuesday 12th March 1878, (Melbourne: The Argus Offices: 1878), p. 1.

## Appendix F
Massa’s longlisted repertoire, 1875–76

<table>
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<th>Opera (date of composition)</th>
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<td>Fra Diavolo (1830)</td>
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<td>Bellini</td>
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<td>I Puritani (1835)</td>
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<td>Cagnoni</td>
<td>Don Buefalo (1847)</td>
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<td>Cimarosa</td>
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<td>De Ferrari</td>
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<td>Pipele (1855)</td>
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<td>La Regina di Gioconda (1828)</td>
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<td>Flotow</td>
<td>Marta (1847)</td>
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<td>Gounod</td>
<td>Faust (1859)</td>
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<td>Lecocq</td>
<td>La Figlia di Madame Angot (1872)</td>
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<td>Mercadante</td>
<td>Il Giuramento (1837)</td>
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<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>Dinorah (1859)</td>
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<td>Robert le Diable (1831)</td>
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<td>Mozart</td>
<td>Don Giovanni (1787)</td>
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<td>Le Nozze di Figaro (1786)</td>
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<td>Offenbach</td>
<td>La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein (1867)</td>
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<td>Pacini</td>
<td>Saffo (1840)</td>
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<td>Pedrotti</td>
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<td>Petrella</td>
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<td>L’Italiana in Algeri (1813)</td>
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<td>Thomas</td>
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<td>Composer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td><em>Un Ballo in Maschera</em> (1859)</td>
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<td><em>Ernani</em> (1844)</td>
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<td><em>La Forza del Destino</em> (1862)</td>
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<td><em>Luisa Miller</em> (1849)</td>
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<td><em>Rigoletto</em> (1851)</td>
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<td><em>La Traviata</em> (1853)</td>
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<td><em>Il Trovatore</em> (1853)</td>
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APPENDIX G
Reception of Massa’s Italian Opera Company, Calcutta 1877–78.

Bettina Capozzi
Capozzi was described as having ‘beautifully clear and flexible voice of pleasing timbre and her execution is really remarkable. To these merits she adds that of being an effective and graceful actress.’1085 She was later criticised for her heavy vibrato, which tended to ‘disfigure’ much of what she sang,1086 and she was not successful in the lighter roles, like Gilda (Rigoletto).1087 Despite these criticisms, she remained a favourite with critic and public alike, each becoming accustomed to her heavy voice and overtly passionate dramatic style. By the end of the season, Capozzi’s intensity was no longer a fault but an attraction, and left the audience feeling that her colleagues, despite being correct and careful, were ‘somewhat cold’.1088

Olimpia Trebbi
Trebbi’s lighter soprano voice was ‘of admirable quality, full and fresh, of great flexibility and considerable compass’ while ‘the care and correctness with which she sang the many difficult and intricate passages … besp[oke] great natural ability and much careful study and training’.1089 She did not always please as an actress (her Rosina was said to be particularly weak),1090 but Trebbi appears to have improved in this area as the season unfolded, with her portrayal of Rigoletta in Pipele earning the following praise:

Signora Trebbi never performs anything badly or even indifferently ...and her singing deserves unqualified praise; her acting also was bright and animated, and she altogether filled the character to perfection. Her singing in Scene 3, Act 1, “É sorte appena”, deserves special notice, and her brilliant execution of the final cadenza was most artistic.1091

Annina Orlandi
The company’s mezzo-soprano, Annina Orlandi, too, impressed audiences, even outstripping the memory of the beloved Augusta Cortesi. She was declared to own a ‘voice of great richness with some very brilliant high notes, and also … tragic power in a high degree … [She was] by far the most satisfactory contralto singer [ever heard] in Calcutta.’ This good opinion was not eroded by familiarity; several months later, on the eve of her benefit, she was once again proclaimed to be the best mezzo ever to come to Calcutta, earning especial encomia for ‘her splendid voice and real tragic power’. Some predicted that Orlandi would enjoy a great career upon her repatriation – a prophecy that largely came

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1085 ‘The Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 3rd, 1877 p. 3.
1086 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 4th, 1878, p. 3.
1087 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, January 31st 1878, p. 3.
1088 ‘The Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 8th, 1877 p. 3.
1089 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, March 25th, 1878, p. 3.
1090 ‘The Italian Opera’, The Englishman, November 8th, 1877 p. 3.
1091 ‘Italian Opera’, The Englishman, February 26th, 1878, p. 3.
true, for Orlandi went on to enjoy principal positions at the Teatro Regio and Teatro Reinach (Parma), Teatro Costanzi di Roma and Teatro Comunale di Catania.1092

**Ida Antonetti, Amelia Botticelli and Adele Ferrario**

The company’s three secondary female singers varied more widely. Antonetti’s acting was criticised for being ‘stagy and conventional’ but her singing was found to be quite respectable, especially in the role of Berta (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*).1093 Both Botticelli and Ferrario attracted hardly any attention, although, at the Calcutta première of *La Sonnambula*, the former was said to have been good despite her obvious nervousness.1094 For their performances as Lisa and Teresa in *La Sonnambula*, however, they apparently exhausted even the good will and generosity of *The Englishman*'s critic:

> We regret we cannot speak in terms of praise of Signoras Botticelli [sic] and Ferrario, who filled the parts, respectively, of Lisa and Teresa. The performance of both was deplorable; neither appeared able to act or sing.1095

**Luigi Columbana**

The talents of the male principals were more diverse than their female counterparts. Columbana was a fiasco. His performance, early on in the season, as the eponymous hero in *Ruy Blas* bordered on disastrous; he sang and acted poorly throughout, and fell apart entirely in the final act.1096 Unfortunately, he did not improve with the passing of time. He was a weak Faust and ruined the role of the Duke in *Rigoletto* by being ‘flat at the beginning, imperfect in his part throughout, and [omitting] two or three of the best solos in the Opera.’1097

**Astore Stucci**

By contrast, Columbana’s fellow tenor, Stucci, was an immediate favourite. Initially, he was celebrated for exhibiting all the attributes most admired in Calcutta.

> His voice is exceedingly good; he sings correctly; his intonation is good, and his acting is intelligent and natural. He was frequently very warmly applauded and we think he will be welcomed as a very clever artist and a valuable addition to the Company.1098

As the season wore on, it became apparent that Stucci had a propensity for overly straining his light tenor voice, probably due to poor breath support. Although he still pleased, there was a roughness of tone that robbed his performances of the shine they otherwise might


1093 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 8th, 1877 p. 3.

1094 ‘Le Precauzione or The Carnival of Venice’, *The Englishman*, January 25th, 1878, p. 3

1095 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, March 18th, 1878, p. 3.

1096 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 30th, 1877, p. 3.

1097 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, January 31st 1878, p. 3.

1098 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 8th, 1877 p. 3. The review, which reads like a shopping list of golden attributes that singers should exhibit (i.e. good natural voice, accuracy, intonation, strong acting), reveals as much about Calcutta’s attitudes to singers as it does about Stucci’s particular characteristics.
have had. Of his portrayal of Elviro in *La Sonnambula*, The Englishman remarked that it ‘was a performance of considerable merit, though towards the end of the opera he appeared unequal to the strain on his voice and consequently sang somewhat out of tune.’

Stucci was, however, the strongest tenor in the company – the comprimario Magliola only received one notice, which announced his utter failure – and, therefore, Stucci was vouchsafed Calcutta’s support and indulgence.

**Pietro Marucco**

The company’s lower voice singers appear to have been stronger than its tenors. In Usiglio’s *Le Educande di Sorrento*, Marucco was said to be ‘bright and genial throughout, thoroughly at home in his part, never missing a point or overdoing one, perfect in his singing and finished in his acting.’

He was said to be the best Malatesta and Figaro (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) ever seen or heard in Calcutta, and lauded for his naturalistic acting in *Pipile*. Indeed, Marucco earned so staunch a following over the course of the season, that he was exonerated for his poor portrayal of Mario in *Le Precauzione*, the press blaming his below-average performance on poor casting and insufficient rehearsal rather than on the artist, and the audience warmly applauded his singing despite ‘a certain unsteadiness at times’.

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1099 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, March 18th, 1878, p. 3.
1099 ‘Le Precauzione or The Carnival of Venice’, *The Englishman*, January 25th, 1878, p. 3
1099 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, December 10th, 1877, p. 3.
1099 ‘The Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, November 8th, 1877 p. 3 and ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, December 25th, 1877, p. 3.
1099 ‘Italian Opera’, *The Englishman*, February 26th, 1878, p. 3.
1099 ‘Le Precauzione or The Carnival of Venice’, *The Englishman*, January 25th, 1878, p. 3
Appendix H

Selected Biography of the Artists of the
Emelie Melville English Opera Company,
Calcutta 1885

Emelie Melville

The ‘vivacious and evergreen’ Emelie Melville (1850–1932), was born in Philadelphia and debuted in performance of *Po-ca-hon-tas* at the Olympic Theatre, New York in 1866. She came to Melbourne in 1875 as the prima donna in W. S. Lyster’s Royal Opéra-Bouffe company. She continued to travel between her homeland and the Antipodes, starring in the American debut of *A Summernight’s Dream* (Thomas) at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in October of 1877 and performing in Hess’s opera companies for a few years, before returning to Australia to manager her own company in 1882. After her inauspicious tour of India, Melville starred in several successful seasons of comic opera around Australia. Around 1887, Melville moved more firmly into comedy, proving her mettle as an actress and comedienne. She travelled to the Cape Colony in the early 1890s, apparently having lost much of her voice and charm, but resurfaced in San Francisco in 1895, taking the role of Pitti Sing in *The Mikado* at the Tivoli Theatre. She continued to act into her seventies, performing character roles to great acclaim in New York, where she died in 1932 at the age of 81.

Minna Fischer

Fischer (1858 – ca.1935) hailed from Tanunda, South Australia, where she grew up in a musical German family. At age 19, she made her professional debut as the seconda donna in Martin Simonsen's 1877 English Opera Company, touring the Australian colonies. After this engagement, she enjoyed near constant work, singing with Emily

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1105 ‘Calcutta Notes’, *The West Australian*, July 26th 1887, p. 3.
1107 Telegram from Tracy Titus to William Saurin Lyster, dated September 14th 1875, reprinted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 27th, 1875, p. 8.
1110 For example, her season at the Brisbane Theatre Royal, commencing October 17th 1887. (See ‘Theatre Royal’, *The Brisbane Courier*, October 12th, 1887, p. 2.
1114 ‘Country Correspondence – Tanunda’, *South Australian Register*, June 1st 1870, p. 3.
Soldene’s company, until she married and retired from stage work. After a few years, however, Fischer separated from her husband, reemerging from her domestic exile to join Emelie Melville’s India-bound troupe. Upon returning to Australia, Fischer sang in Amy Sherwin's Opera Company and, when the troupe disbanded, Fischer accompanied Sherwin to Europe to pursue greater opportunities. She lived with Sherwin in London, sometimes singing in Hans Richter’s concerts, whose passion for Wagner she shared. Fischer became one of the most successful singing coaches in London, tutoring many young Australasian singers who came to London to find their fortune, such as Ada Crossley, Meta Buring, Eva Mylott, and Amy Castles, and was a constant support to her brother, Otto, who found success in Wagner roles at Covent Garden.

William ‘Billy’ Walshe

Walshe was at this time unknown, but his smooth tenor voice and considerable dramatic talent soon led to engagements back in Australia with the Simonsen and the Montague-Turner companies. This experience, in turn, led to a good career in London, where he became a star at the Gaiety and Lyric Theatres. He performed opposite Ellen Terry in the West-End and Broadway premieres of Captain Brassbound’s Conversion (George Bernard Shaw, 1900).

Edward Farley

Farley (né Hughes), was a Welsh-born baritone who had been a chorister in the Carl Rosa Company before migrating to Australia. Farley had been known to Australian audiences since 1871, when he appeared alongside Alice May and Armes Beaumont in W. S. Lyster’s English Opera Company in Melbourne. Over the ensuing decade, Farley lent his ‘full, deep and melodious’ voice to innumerable antipodean operatic enterprises including Cagli’s Royal Italian Opera Touring Company, Lyster’s 1880 Opera Company, and the Montague-Turner Company. In the late 1870s, Farley worked for some time in London, appearing in the D’Oyly Carte English Opera Company, but he returned to Australia to continue his career, and by 1883 he was performing in Emelie Melville’s English and Comic Opera Company. Following the Melville tour of Asia, Farley

1117 ‘The Opera House – First Night of Mr. Lewis’ Management’, The Argus, July 2nd 1878, p. 7.
1118 She married Adelaide-based actor/manager Herbert Flemming in 1880, with whom she had two sons. During her marriage she performed only with liederfet and amateur organisations, and a handful of recitals.
1119 ‘Notes by Pasquin’, Otago Witness, March 27th, 1890.
1122 ‘The Late Billy Walshe’, Era, September 28th, 1910.
established his own opera company, which was especially popular in Brisbane and Sydney. He then pursued a career as a conductor, returning to opera only in 1892 when he once again was featured in the Montague-Turner company. In 1897, he formed his own opera company in Sydney with the intention of making opera accessible to the everyman. After a rather abortive attempt to forge a career in America, Farley returned to Australia, focussing on vocal coaching, and light comic roles. In Sydney, he soon discovered a rare vocal talent in Violet Mount, who would become one of Australia’s greatest singers.

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1131 ‘Farley’s Opera Company’, *The Brisbane Courier*, September 28th, 1886, p. 5, and ‘Queen’s Opera’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 18th, 1887, p. 2.
1132 ‘Organ Recital at St Mary’s Church, Maitland’, *The Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, September 24th, 1887, p. 4, and ‘Opening of St. Augustine’s Church, Merewether’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 7th, 1889, p. 5.
1134 ‘Farley’s English Opera Company’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 22nd, 1897, p. 10.
### Appendix I

**W.S. Lyster’s English and Opéra-Bouffe Company, Melbourne 1875–76**

#### Artists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emelie Melville</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clara Thompson</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Howard</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Wooldridge</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie Royal</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeannie Winston</td>
<td>Mezzo-Soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara Forde</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah Fox</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Morrison</td>
<td>Contralto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Bracy</td>
<td>Tenor (also director)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Bell</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Johnson</td>
<td>Tenor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Farley</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Forde</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Templeton</td>
<td>Baritone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James E. Kitts</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Leopold</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasper Hogan</td>
<td>Bass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percival St John</td>
<td>Actor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Chorus**            | **Women**: Mabel Smith, Parker, Collins, Brodie, Annie Bateson, Ellen Douglass, Blanche Leopold, D. Forde, Higgins, Kitty Ford, and May Colson.  
<p>|                        | <strong>Men</strong>: A. Farley, Thomholt, W. Gordon, F. Darbyshire, P. Leslie. |
| <strong>Conductor</strong>         | Alberto Zelman |
| <strong>Orchestra of fifteen players</strong> | Led by Thomas Zeplin |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auber</td>
<td>Les diamants de la couronne</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fra Diavolo</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balfe</td>
<td>The Bohemian Girl</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bellini</td>
<td>La Sonnambula</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benedict</td>
<td>The Lily of Killarney</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecocq</td>
<td>La Fille du Madame Angot</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giroflé-Girofia</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenbach</td>
<td>Barbe-Bleue</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Jolie Parfumée*</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Perichole</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La princesse de Trébizonde</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td>Maritana</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christmas Concert</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amateur Comedy Evenings for Charity</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Pantomime</td>
<td>Fortunatus and Harlequinade</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL:</td>
<td>13 Operas; 3 concerts; 2 pantomimes</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*denotes Australian première.
Appendix J
Selected Biographies of the singers of the Pompei-Lazar Company, Melbourne, 1877

Giovanni Gambetti
Giovanni Gambetti’s resumé boasted extensive experience; he had enjoyed acclaim as a tenor in Italy’s Northern provinces (especially Bologna and Parma) since at least 1857, with such roles as Arturo in Lucia di Lammermoor, Godvino in Stiffelio (Verdi), Aben Said in Sanelli’s Gusmano il prode and Jacopo Foscari in I Due Foscari. Now in his later years, he was unable to sing his old tenor roles, and instead appeared as the company’s baritone.

Pietro Paladini
Pietro Paladini was an example of a singer already in the midst of his moderately successful career. After having been employed intermittently at Pisa, he gained attention with his portrayal of the eponymous hero in Marchetti’s Ruy Blas in 1873. He then was hired by Mapleson, the formidable impresario of many London opera houses, for the 1874 season at Her Majesty’s Theatre, and counted Therese Tietjens and Christine Nilsson amongst his colleagues. He found no distinction there, however, and did not perform any credited roles. Paladini did slightly better on his tour of the British provinces (including Scotland and Ireland), taking the lead tenor role in Balfé’s posthumously produced opera Il Talismano in Liverpool; but he was not rehired by Mapleson, and soon became engaged by Pompei for the 1876–77 company. Paladini was received warmly by Melbourne audiences, but neither the critics nor the public found him as talented as Leandro Coy or Ferrante Rosnati, from Cagli’s 1871–74 company.

Eleonora Parodi Fabris
Eleonora Parodi Fabris had been an important singer at Parma’s Teatro Regio since 1860. In the course of her career, she had sung Isabella di Castiglia in L’Ebreo, Alba in Achille Peri’s Vittoria Pisani, Dalinda in Giuseppe Rota’s Ginevra di Scozia, Clotilde in Norma, Leonora in Pedrotti’s Isabella d’Aragona (interestingly opposite Margherita Zenoni), Ines in Il Trovatore, Lucrezia in Rota’s Beatrice Cenci, Agnese in Petrella’s I Promessi Sposi, and Donna Giovanna in Marchetti’s Ruy Blas, as well as having created the role of Amelia in Cagnoni’s La gerla di Papà Martin in Genoa in 1871.

1138 http://www.lavoceantica.it/Cronologia/P%20-%20Q%20-%20R/Ruy%20Blas.htm
1139 ‘Her Majesty’s Opera’ (Reviews), The Times, March 23rd, 1874, p. 7.
1140 See the reviews in The Times throughout 1874.
Augusto Tessada and Maria Caranti-Vita
Both Augusto Tessada and Maria Caranti-Vita (to whom Tessada was married in 1883) had been hired by Cagli in 1873 for the impresario’s Calcutta troupe.1143 Both singers were young (Tessada only 21,1144 and Cavanti could not have been any older) and had little, if any, experience behind them. Hence, Calcutta offered an opportunity to perform many of the lead roles that were essential to a career, and if they proved themselves, there was the potential to move up the ranks to join singers like Zenoni and Bosisio in Melbourne. Neither Tessada nor Caranti-Vita, however, had sufficiently impressed Cagli, and they remained in Calcutta, moving from one operatic enterprise to another, until Pompeii finally invited them to join his Australian troupe in 1876. For Tessada, the years in Calcutta paid off – he was popular with Melbourne audiences, and, upon his return to Italy, he was rewarded for his intrepidity with near-constant employment, particularly in the buffo roles that were his strong suit.1145 Caranti-Vita, on the other hand, was vocally weak and did not impress Melbourne’s audiences.

Careers of other singers
Other singers were simply ordinary. Despite rumours of having sung with Adelina Patti, rumours that were unable to be substantiated both in 1876 and in the twenty-first century, Camero seems to have found little more than occasional work in the operatic backwaters of Macerata.1146 Nothing at all can be discerned of the careers of Venosta and Cesari either before or after their engagement in Australia, although they were both said to have had some experience at the opera houses of Turin and Rome.1147 Although a mediocre singer, Carlotta de Baraty was to have a more lasting impact upon opera, setting up a music school in Sydney, which she ran until her death 1928.1148

1143 The singers were hired indirectly by Cagli, as he was persona non grata to the abused audiences of Calcutta. Instead, the season ran under his protégé Alessandro Massa’s name.
1148 ‘Signora de Baraty Ferrari’, Sydney Morning Herald, December 12th 1928, p. 17.
Appendix K
Artists of the Simonsen Royal Italian Opera Company, Melbourne 1886–88

Emilia Ciuti
Ciuti had been regularly singing lead roles at the Teatro Regio di Parma and Teatro Regio di Torino since 1869, with her repertoire including Neyda in *Il Negriero* (Manzocchi), Bice in *Marco Visconti* (Petrella), Lucia in *I Promessi Sposi*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, Leonora in *La Contessa d’Amalfi* (Petrella), Clemenza in *Il Fornaretto* (Sanelli), Maria of Spain in *Ruy Blas*, and the eponymous heroines of *Luisa Miller, Martha* and *Norma*.1149 She had also sung further afield in Russia and Havana.1150

Alice Rebottaro
The soprano Rebottaro was only 19 years of age when she arrived in Melbourne, but she had already performed principal roles in Naples, Florence, and São Paulo.1151 In Melbourne she took the light, coloratura roles, such as Lucia, Amina (*Sonnambula*), and Oscar (*Un Ballo in Maschera*).

Angiolina Tagliavia and Giovanna Cavalleri
Soprano Tagliavia had a modicum of experience, performing principal roles in second and third-tier theatres across Italy; in 1883, for example, she performed the role of Susetta in Teatro Reinach di Parma’s revival of Buonomo’s 1857 opera *Cicco e Cola*.1152 Simonsen’s contralto, Cavalleri, gained her reputation on the Italian stage and in the opera houses of Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro.

Attilio Buzzi
Like Ciuti, Buzzi was also very experienced, although his expertise appears to have been solely connected with the modern Italian repertoire, having performed Don Antonio De Mariz in *Il Guarany*, Shylock in *Il Mercante di Venezia* (Pinsuti), Daniele Charonzo in *Papà Martin*, and the title role in *Don Bucefalo* at the prestigious houses of Italy, including San Carlo, Napoli as well as opera-houses in the new world, such as the Teatro Solís, Montevideo.1153 Buzzi remained in Melbourne for six years, during which time he remained a great favourite of audiences, both on the stage and in the concert hall.1154

1152 http://www.lacasadellemusica.it/reinach/anni/1883.htm
1153 According to scores found at Biblioteca del Conservatorio di Musica S. Pietro a Majella, Napoli: Rari 10.1.9/6 and Biblioteche della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venezia: (Rolandi, R Pin, Pist) and the following dates at http://www.lacasadellemusica.it/reinach/anni/1883.htm., 24 Gennaio 1877, 19 Giugno 1872, 11 Giugno 1873, 19 Giugno 1873.
There were also many young singers in the company, who after appearing in Simonsen’s seasons went on to forge moderately successful careers. Although he had worked as a singer of minor roles in London, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, prior to arriving in Australia, Pasquale Lazzarini had only had one principal role, that of Alfredo (*La Traviata*) at Teatro Costanzi, Rome; after gaining invaluable experience in Melbourne Lazzarini found near-constant employment at the Salle Garnier del Théâtre du Casino (Opéra) in Monte Carlo from 1898–1909.1155

Even more successful was Lodovico Benucci, who, following his time in Melbourne, sang main roles, such as Roderigo (Verdi’s *Otello*), Rambaldo (*Robert le Diable*) and Gastone (*La Traviata*) at La Fenice, Venice and Teatro Regio, Parma.1156 Others of the singers, like Rebottaro and De Alba as well as the conductor, Roberto Hazon, and veteran, Buzzi, remained permanently in Melbourne and contributed to the operatic life of the city. Similarly, some singers like Pimazzoni and Cavalleri may not have settled in Melbourne, but they did maintain a relationship with the city, returning on several occasions to performing in other companies.1157

**Roberto Hazon**

Born in Parma, Roberto Hazon, the company’s maestro direttore d'orchestra, had been conductor at the Teatro Dal Verme, and the Filarmonica at Verona. He went on to build a large and comprehensive career in Australia, as both a instrumentalist and orchestral conductor. After fifteen, Hazon returned to Milan to conduct at La Scala, but he came back to Australia in 1910 to lead J.C. Williamson’s Grand Opera Company.

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1156 5 Marzo 1890, 25 Marzo 1893, 21 Gennaio 1899, 18 Febbraio 1899 in Ibid.
1157 Gyger, *Opera for the Antipodes*, p. 49.
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