

Demie-journée d'études organisée par Nicolò Palazzetti (GREAM)

STRASBOURG

24 octobre 2019

de 9h à 12h45

entrée libre

# L'opéra dans le cyberspace médias, technologie, histoire

*Opera in the Web Age:  
Media, Technology and History*

**Dr João Pedro Cachopo** (Universidade Nova de Lisboa)

**Prof. Christopher Morris** (Maynooth University, Dublin)

**Dr Nicolò Palazzetti** (Université de Strasbourg)

**Prof. Emanuele Senici** (La Sapienza, Roma)



Salle des Conférences de la **MISHA**  
Maison Interuniversitaire des Sciences de l'Homme-Alsace  
5, allée du général Rouvillois 67000 Strasbourg  
Campus universitaire de l'Esplanade







# **Opera in the Web Age: Media, Technology and History**

## **L'opéra dans le cyberspace : Médias, technologie et histoire**

**Thursday 24 October 2019**

**Jeudi 24 octobre 2019**

**9h00 - 12h45**

MISHA (Université de Strasbourg)  
5 allée du Général Rouvillois  
67000 Strasbourg

salle de Conférence

**Invited speakers:**

Dr João Pedro Cachopo (Universidade Nova de Lisboa/University of Chicago)

Prof. Christopher Morris (Maynooth University, Dublin)

Prof. Emanuele Senici (La Sapienza, Roma)

**Convener:**

Dr Nicolò Palazzetti (Université de Strasbourg, GREAM)

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## Introduction

Cette demi-journée d'étude est consacrée à la production, la diffusion et la réception contemporaines de l'opéra, notamment dans sa relation avec le cyberspace et, plus généralement, avec les médias et les technologies de la communication et de l'enregistrement. L'attention portée sur les problématiques émergentes qui caractérisent l'actualité de l'opéra en tant que genre permettra également de repenser certains des enjeux cruciaux qui en ont marqué l'histoire, dont les phénomènes complémentaires des divas et du fanatisme. Les quatre interventions qui constituent cette demi-journée adoptent des perspectives différentes, issues d'études interdisciplinaires sur la musique. Emanuele Senici, tout d'abord, étudiera la persistance de la rhétorique de la fidélité à la partition musicale qui semble caractériser le discours, dramaturgique et épistémologique, autour de l'opéra contemporain. Nicolò Palazzetti se focalisera ensuite sur la résurgence et l'évolution de la mélomanie à l'ère du Web, notamment à la Scala de Milan. Christopher Morris se concentrera sur le caractère hybride du phénomène de la diffusion de l'opéra au cinéma. João Pedro Cachopo, enfin, analysera la survivance posthume des divas en tant qu'artéfacts technologiques (comme dans le cas du projet *Callas in Concert*).

This academic event is dedicated to the contemporary production, diffusion and reception of opera, especially in relation with the cyberspace and, more broadly, with media and technologies of communication and recording. The study of the issues characterising today's operatic world will also lead us to reconsider some of the key aspects that have informed the history of this genre, including the complementary phenomena of divas and fanaticism. Four interventions will explore these topics by drawing on different and interdisciplinary perspectives. Emanuele Senici will analyse the rhetoric of fidelity to the musical score that seems to characterise current dramaturgical and epistemological discourses around opera. Nicolò Palazzetti will explore the resurgence and evolution of opera fanaticism in the Web age. Christopher Morris will focus on opera cinecast and its 'hybridity'. João Pedro Cachopo will analyse the posthumous survival of divas as technological artifacts (such as in the case of the 'Callas in Concert' project).

# Programme

## **9h00 - 9h15: Introduction**

Alessandro Arbo - Professor of Music, Director of GREAM, Université de Strasbourg

Xavier Hascher - Professor of Music, Université de Strasbourg

Nicolò Palazzetti - Postdoctoral researcher in Music at GREAM, Université de Strasbourg

## **Session 1**

Chair: Aude Astier - Lecturer in Theater Studies, Université de Strasbourg

## **9h15 - 10h00: Emanuele Senici - Professor of Music History, La Sapienza, Roma**

*Medial Histories of Opera, the Rhetoric of Fidelity, and Mise en Scène as Interpretation*

## **10h00 - 10h45: Nicolò Palazzetti - Postdoctoral researcher in Music at GREAM, Université de Strasbourg**

*Opera Fanaticism in the Web Age*

*10h45 - 11h15: Coffee break*

## **Session 2**

Chair: Geneviève Jolly - Professor in Theater Studies, Université de Strasbourg

## **11h15 - 12h00: Christopher Morris - Professor of Music, Maynooth University (Ireland)**

*A Night at the Opera (at the Cinema)*

## **12h00 - 12h45: João Pedro Cachopo - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, Universidade Nova de Lisboa/University of Chicago**

*The Holographic Diva and the Life-or-Death Stakes of Remediation*

*12h45: End of the study day*

# Abstracts

**Emanuele Senici**

*Medial Histories of Opera, the Rhetoric of Fidelity,  
and Mise en Scène as Interpretation*

Director Olivier Py has recently explained his staging of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* with the following words: 'There is an orgy in the score, and therefore I stage an orgy. [...] I am completely faithful to the work'. For Py, then, staging an opera means making visible what 'is in the score', a course of action that ensures fidelity to the work. Such statements might seem rather uncontroversial to us now, but until the mid-twentieth century they would have been heard with bafflement: Why on earth should a director stage what is in the score rather than in the libretto? And why is the score equated with the whole work, so that being faithful to the score automatically means being faithful to the work? These imaginary questions from the past prompt more historical ones: How did such beliefs come about? And why?

I argue that the medial history of opera in the twentieth century might help us answer such questions. A comparison between audio-recordings and video-recordings shows radically diverging patterns of consumption, with the former dominating the medial landscape. This dominance, I suggest, contributed to a music-centred ideology of operatic dramaturgy. Such ideology has had a profound impact on the present-day discourse of *mise en scène* as a faithful interpretation of the music. This discourse, however, now sits uneasily in a medial context in which video dominates operatic consumption. In my conclusions, I explore a few consequences of this tension, focusing especially on the epistemological issues raised by the coupling of fidelity and interpretation.

*Emanuele Senici is Professor of Music History at the University of Rome La Sapienza. His research centres on Italian opera of the long nineteenth century, on the theory and historiography of opera, especially issues of genre and gender, and on opera on video. Recent publications include Giacomo Puccini and His World (Princeton University Press, 2016, co-edited with Arman Schwartz) and Music in the Present Tense: Rossini's Italian Operas in Their Time (University of Chicago Press, 2019). Between 2003 and 2008 he was co-editor of the Cambridge Opera Journal.*

**Nicolò Palazzetti**

*Opera Fanaticism in the Web Age*

The emergence and development of the Web, digital technologies and streaming media have apparently revolutionised the musical sphere since the late twentieth century. Opera makes no exception. In this paper, I will discuss the wide impact of digitisation and global computer network upon the presentation and reception of operatic music and culture, focusing on contemporary opera fanaticism in Italy. My enquiry is based on the field research that I have carried out – mainly in April and May 2019 – around some important Italian opera houses and their ‘noisy’ audiences, including the *loggione* of the Teatro alla Scala and an influential operatic weblog of the early 2010s (*Il corriere della Grisi*). Linking socio-historical considerations with different approaches coming from marketing studies, social media studies and performance studies, I will try to situate the long-lasting relation between opera singers, opera fanatics, (new) media and recording technologies in a broader perspective, both chronologically and sociologically. I argue that the ostensible success of opera in the Web age – as a musical genre, as a business and even as a passion – has a long cultural history that cannot be properly understood via the superficial dichotomy between the alleged operatic ‘obsolescence’ and the purportedly ‘amnesiac’ Web revolution.

*Nicolò Palazzetti is a musicologist and cultural historian specialising in twentieth-century music, music analysis, aesthetics and cultural transfers. From January 2019, he is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Laboratoire d'Excellence GREAM of the Université de Strasbourg, studying the impact of digitisation and streaming of opera upon the presentation, diffusion and reception of this genre. He completed a doctoral thesis in 2017 at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (Paris) dedicated to the reception of Béla Bartók in Italy. From September 2017 to December 2018, he served as a Teaching Fellow at the Department of Music of the University of Birmingham (UK). He has also been awarded a six-month scholarship from the Fondazione Giorgio Cini (Venice, 2015-2016) and a three-month scholarship from the Paul Sacher Stiftung (Basle, 2018-2020).*

## Christopher Morris

### *A Night at the Opera (at the Cinema)*

Now into its second decade, the opera cinecast has in some ways been normalized as a media phenomenon. Few opera devotees have not at least sampled a night at the opera in their local cinema, and the available statistics suggest a sustained appeal. Yet the cinecasts retain a peripheral quality. Certainly, these relays of live opera cut an odd figure among the blockbusters that are the staples of any multiplex. There are other reminders of the strange hybridity of the opera cinecast; my paper focuses on three.

First, an interception: a thread on a popular online television forum regularly communicates the frequencies of the satellite frequencies of the transmissions. The signal, after all, is nothing more than a standard HD television feed, something the opera companies gloss over as they trumpet the ‘cinematic’ experience of their relays. Second, an intervention: a Tweet from an enthusiastic viewer of the Royal Opera House Live Cinema series is screened during the broadcast intermission. The viewer then photographs her Tweet on screen and tweets the image. This sign of the liveness of the transmission equally foregrounds a ‘hypermediacy’ that threatens to compromise the impression of presence and immediacy so emphasised in the rhetoric of cinecasts. Third, an interruption: a vibration from the sub-woofer in an adjacent cinema signals an on-screen explosion or the approach of some immense spaceship. It is a reminder that the audiences around us are immersed in sensory and narrative experiences that belong, in more ways than one, to other worlds.

*Christopher Morris is Professor of Music at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. He is is author of Reading Opera Between the Lines: Orchestral Interludes and Cultural Meaning from Wagner to Berg (Cambridge, 2002) and Modernism and the Cult of Mountains: Music, Opera, Cinema (Ashgate, 2012), as well as chapters and articles on opera and film-music topics. Recent publications include “The Deadness of Live Opera,” in Performing Arts in Transition: Moving between Media (Routledge, 2018) and (co-edited with Joseph Attard) an issue of Opera Quarterly (34/4) devoted to opera cinecasts.*

## João Pedro Cachopo

### *The Holographic Diva and the Life-or-Death Stakes of Remediation*

In discussing the impact of technologies of reproduction and remediation on opera, many scholars have entertained the hypothesis that film, video, and new media have provided the genre with an opportunity for renewal, survival, or even resurrection. Not only do audiovisual media expedite, expand, and disseminate live performances of opera (in ways ranging from the use of video in stage productions to cinecasts), they also allow for the multiplication and perpetuation of their posthumous existence as technological artifacts. In this paper, I investigate ‘Callas in Concert’, a multimedia project in which the two above-mentioned aspects intertwine: on the one hand, the spectacle is presented as a *live* event (and an orchestra indeed performs on stage); on the other hand, the audience is invited to see and listen to digitally manipulated reproductions of a *dead* singer’s voice and figure, which incidentally take on the form of a (dis)embodied hologram of Maria Callas. Here, my interest lies in two interrelated issues. The first concerns the tension between the dead/alive and the body/voice binaries, and involves the question as to whether the visual or the aural dimension takes the lead in the attempt to playfully resurrect a deceased singer. The second revolves around the paradox that comes with the use of technologies of digital reproduction and remediation to emphasize the peerless uniqueness of Maria Callas’s artistry. In bringing together these two issues, my ultimate goal is to shed light on the artistic nuances and ideological implications that characterize today’s fascination with liveness.

*João Pedro Cachopo is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow with a joint affiliation to the Universidade Nova de Lisboa and the University of Chicago. His research spans the fields of musicology, philosophy, and cinema studies with a focus on issues of intermediality. He is the author of Verdade e Enigma: Ensaio sobre o pensamento estético de Adorno (Vendaval, 2013), which received the First Book Award from the Portuguese PEN Club in 2014, and the co-editor of Rancière and Music (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). His work has also appeared in journals such as The Opera Quarterly and New German Critique.*