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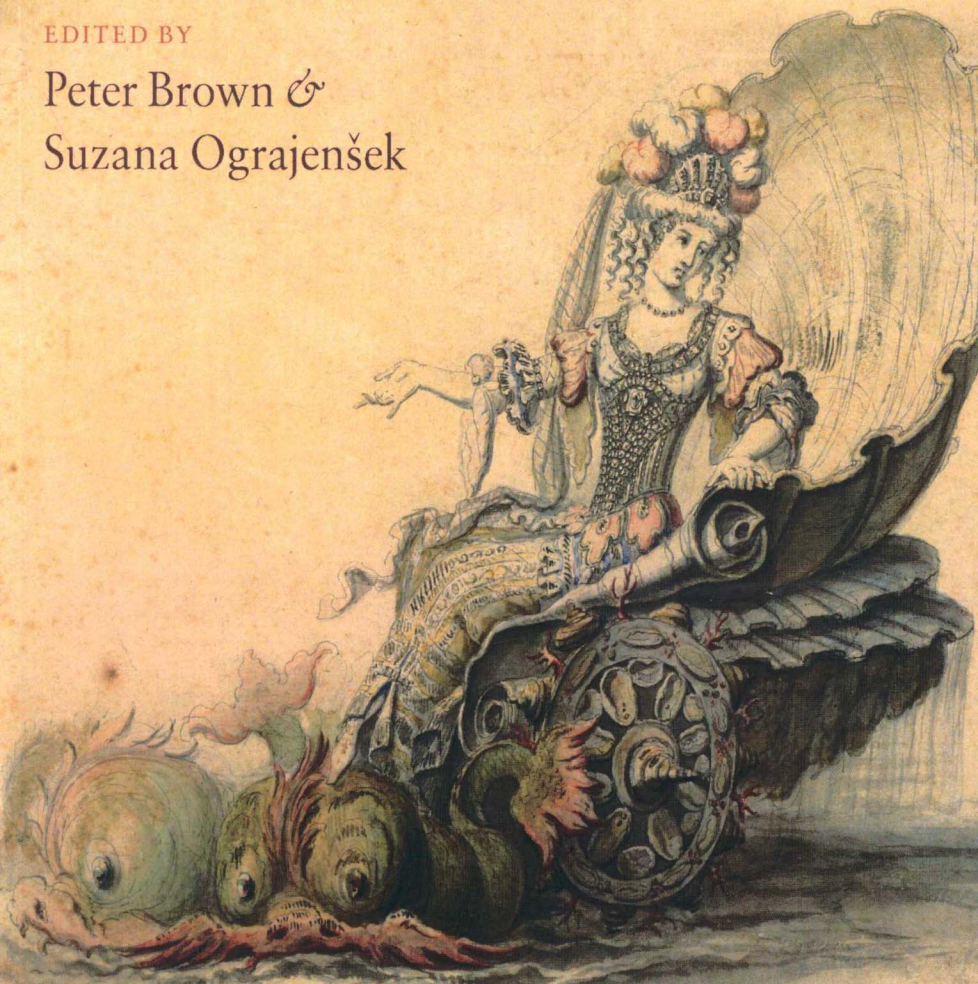
Ancient Drama *in* Music *for the* Modern Stage

EDITED BY

Peter Brown &
Suzana Ograjenšek



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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide.
Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

First published 2010
First published in paperback 2013

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN 978–0–19–955855–1
ISBN 978–0–19–967930–0 (Pbk)

Preface

This book explores the relationship between ancient drama and music for the stage from the late sixteenth century to the present day. It is a companion volume to Fiona Macintosh (ed.), *The Ancient Dancer in the Modern World* (Oxford, 2010). Like that book, it has been produced under the auspices of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama (APGRD) at the University of Oxford. Chapters 4–11 are based on papers given at the APGRD conference, 'Ancient Drama in Modern Opera, 1600–1800', held at the University of Oxford on 12 July 2007.[1] Chapters 13, 15, 16, and 19 are based on lectures delivered at Oxford for the APGRD. The remaining chapters have been written specially for this volume. In keeping with the objectives of the APGRD, the focus of the book is on works based on ancient plays, an area that has not been systematically explored to date, rather than more generally on ancient mythology or history. As well as concentrating on some of the earliest uses of ancient drama itself on the operatic stage, it charts the gradual assimilation of individual ancient plots into the operatic repertoire, discussing the relevant social, cultural, and intellectual context. The authors are experts in the fields of Classics, Musicology, Dance Studies, English Literature, Modern Languages, and Theatre Studies.

The first three chapters provide an introductory survey of various aspects of the subject; the remaining chapters are organized largely in chronological order. A full study even of this sub-branch of operatic history would be a very substantial volume indeed, and our aim here has been both to chart the main outlines of the subject and to advance it by offering new studies of important aspects. Most of the chapters are concerned with opera, but chapters 3, 15, and 19 discuss music written to accompany spoken performances of Greek tragedies: already in 1585, before the invention of opera itself, Andrea Gabrieli had composed music for the choruses in the production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* that inaugurated the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza, and such 'incidental music' has played an important part in the modern reception of ancient drama; Felix Mendelssohn's music for Sophocles' *Antigone* at Potsdam in 1841 is another striking example. Since tragedies have loomed much larger than comedies in the musical reception of ancient drama, the volume mostly concentrates on the tragic repertoire. In addition, however, there is one chapter (Chapter 13)

[1] We are grateful to the British Academy, the Classical Association, the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, and (within the University of Oxford) the Craven Committee and the Faculties of Classics and Music for their generous support of that conference.

discussing comic opera; this chapter also discusses relevant incidental music, ballets, and musicals.

The form of musical drama which we now call opera was invented at the end of the sixteenth century in part as an imitation or emulation of ancient Greek tragedy, in the belief that Greek tragedy had been sung throughout. That belief is now thought to have been mistaken, and it was disputed even at the time; it may also be suspected that a development on these lines would have taken place in any case, since the new form was not entirely uninfluenced by performing styles already in existence in genres such as the pastoral play and the *intermedii* (interludes) performed between the acts of spoken plays. Nonetheless, it was the interest of a group of Renaissance intellectuals (members of the Camerata at Florence) in ancient Greek music, and in the relationship between words and music in Greek tragedy, that stimulated the development of a style of performance—expressive monody—that gave particular attention to conveying the meaning and the dramatic and emotional force of the words being sung. This was an exceptionally fruitful development in the history of European music, and the relationship between words and music has been at the heart of debate about opera ever since.

However, the interest of the Camerata in the style of delivery of Greek tragedy did not extend to a desire to reproduce the plots of the plays, and it was sixty years before librettists took the surviving Greek tragedies themselves as the basis of their texts. This is perhaps not surprising, since the main focus of the Camerata's interest had been on Greek music rather than Greek drama, and in the cultural context of the time mythological and pastoral stories were more obviously acceptable—see in particular Chapter 9 below for a discussion of this point. Admittedly, a subject which early became popular was the story of Andromeda, staged as early as 1610 at Bologna; Euripides' play on this subject has not survived, and Ovid was undoubtedly the main source for the story, but anyone who knew Aristophanes' *Frogs* or *Women at the Thesmophoria* would know that it had formed the subject matter of a very famous tragedy.[2] So there was no absolute ban on Euripidean material. But it remains true that the use of *surviving* Greek tragedies can be traced back only to the 1660s, starting with *Antigona delusa da Alceste* ('Antigone tricked by Alcestis', libretto by Aurelio Aureli, music by Pietro Andrea Ziani, Venice, 1660), based in part on Euripides' *Alcestis* (but not at all on Sophocles' *Antigone*!).

The subject matter of ancient drama has not always been at the forefront of operatic composition, but it has been there at particularly important moments in the history of the genre. Those who have called for a reform of the theatre have tended to return to ancient drama to seek support for the ideas that they were promoting, for opera as well as for spoken drama. It is notable that Euripides'

[2] This point has been stressed by Blair Hoxby as part of his argument that the importance of Euripides for the early development of the genre has not been sufficiently appreciated: see Hoxby (2005), drawing attention to the fact that several of Euripides' plays have 'happy endings'.

Alcestis was the catalyst for two important debates about operatic reform: Jean-Baptiste Lully's *Alceste* (Paris, 1674) helped to win acceptance for French-language opera; and Christoph Willibald Gluck's *Alceste* (Vienna, 1767) had a preface to the score, signed by Gluck but probably written by his librettist Ranieri de' Calzabigi, outlining proposals for a return to the original ethos of the genre, with a renewed emphasis on poetic expression and dramatic force and a reduction in the opportunities for virtuoso singing. Calzabigi had been to some extent anticipated by Francesco Algarotti in his *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* ('Essay on Opera', 1755), which urged that all the elements of an opera should be subordinated to a unifying poetic idea; Algarotti concluded the treatise with the full text of a libretto for *Iphigenia at Aulis*, based on Euripides and Racine, as an example of the simple style he advocated. Algarotti also influenced Christoph Martin Wieland's approach to the creation of a German operatic tradition at Weimar in 1773; once again Alcestis was the subject, and the opera, with music by Anton Schweitzer, was a striking success.

Two notable operas called *Médée* and based ultimately on Euripides' *Medea* were those of Marc-Antoine Charpentier (Paris, 1693) and Luigi Cherubini (Paris, 1797), the latter particularly famous as a vehicle for Maria Callas in the mid-twentieth century. The subject of Jean-Philippe Rameau's first opera *Hippolytus and Aricia* (Paris, 1733) can be traced back to Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Seneca's *Phaedra*, though Jean Racine was an important intermediary, as he was for a number of the operatic librettos on classical subjects—see Chapter 7. Rameau's intensely dramatic composition seemed revolutionary at the time and provoked furious debate between *Ramistes* and *Lullistes*, supporters of Rameau and of his predecessor Lully respectively; it was the first musical work to which the (at that time) pejorative term 'baroque' is known to have been applied.

It was Richard Wagner's reading of Aeschylus that prompted him to reform opera in the nineteenth century, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal's interpretation of Sophocles' *Electra* that prompted Richard Strauss to compose his highly original version of that play (*Elektra*, Dresden, 1909). As Chapters 2 and 15–19 show, there was a particular flowering of interest in ancient drama among some of the most adventurous composers of the twentieth century, in terms of both operas and incidental music; and recent decades have seen a considerable interest in ancient drama on the part of composers from all over the world.[3] Among others, Mark-Anthony Turnage made his mark at Munich in 1988 with his first opera, *Greek*, based on the play of that name by Steven Berkoff which transposes the story of Oedipus to contemporary London; Turnage's opera was commissioned by Hans Werner Henze, who had himself composed the music for a notable version of Euripides' *Bacchae*, *The Bassarids* (Salzburg, 1966).

The book covers four centuries of musical production and could not possibly discuss everything of importance in that time. We have tried to offer a representative

[3] See Brown, P. (2004).

sample. Some major works are not included, either because they have been fully discussed elsewhere (e.g. Wagner's *Ring*, to which Ewans (1982) is devoted, and Strauss's *Elektra*, discussed by McDonald (2001), Goldhill (2002), and Ewans (2007)) or simply for reasons of space. Details of several hundred relevant musical works may be found in the database on the website of the APGRD (www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk).[4] The magisterial study of Flashar (1991, 2nd edn. 2009) gives an overall survey of modern productions of Greek drama, including an account of many key operatic productions; but his main focus is on productions of the ancient plays themselves, as he acknowledges explicitly in the preface to the second edition.

We are very grateful to Stephe Harrop for putting the list of References in order, to our eagle-eyed copy-editor Tom Chandler, and to Brenda Hall for providing the index.

For the paperback reprint (2013) some errors have been corrected and the contributors' biographies on pp. xiii–xvi have been updated.

P.B.; S.O.

[4] Work on this part of the database was made possible by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, with additional funding from the Onassis Programme at the University of Oxford; we are grateful to both bodies for their support. Much of the research for the database was carried out by Suzana Ograjenšek.

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SIMONE BETA is Aggregate Professor of Classical Philology at the University of Siena. His main research centres on Greek and Roman drama (mostly comedy) and on the reception of classical antiquity in opera. He is also interested in Greek and Latin epigrams, the ancient novel, and wine. His books include a commentary on Lucian's *On the Dance* (1992), a book on wine in Greek literature (*Oinos. Il vino nella letteratura greca*, with L. Della Bianca, 2002), a monograph on Aristophanes (*Il linguaggio nelle commedie di Aristofane. Parola positiva e parola negativa nella commedia antica*, 2004), an anthology of Greek epigrams on wine (*Vino e poesia. Centocinquanta epigrammi greci sul vino*, 2006), and an anthology of fragments of Greek Old Comedy (*I comici greci*, 2009).

PETER BROWN was Fellow and Tutor in Classics at Trinity College, University of Oxford from 1968 to 2011 and is a member of the Advisory Board of the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama. He has published extensively on Greek and Roman drama (mainly comedy), and his translation of the Comedies of Terence appeared in the Oxford World's Classics series in January 2008.

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catalogue of Metastasio's operas as performed in London. He is currently completing books on the staging of opera in London from 1660 to 1860 and on the London years of the soprano Regina Mingotti (1722–1808). He is President of the British Society for Eighteenth-century Studies, a Visitor of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and director of productions of New Chamber Opera, www.newchamberopera.co.uk.

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Simon Goldhill is Professor of Greek at Cambridge University. He has published very widely on many aspects of Greek literature, including the books *Reading Greek Tragedy*, *The Poet's Voice*, *Foucault's Virginity*, and *Who Needs Greek?*. He also has written *Love, Sex and Tragedy* for a broader audience as well as *The Temple of Jerusalem* and *City of Longing: Jerusalem*, which won the Gold Medal for History from the Independent Publishers Association. He is a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Director of the Cambridge Victorian Studies Group. His book *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction and the Proclamation of Modernity* was published in 2011. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Wendy Heller is Professor of Music at Princeton University and Director of the Program in Italian Studies. She has published extensively on Baroque opera, gender, and the classical tradition. A Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and the Villa I Tatti Harvard University Center for Renaissance Studies, Heller is the author of *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice.* She is currently completing a book on Ovid and opera in early modern Italy.

ROBERT C. KETTERER is a Professor of Classics at the University of Iowa. He has written on ancient drama and its reception in early modern Europe, and was co-editor of *Crossing the Stages: The Production, Performance and Reception of Ancient Theater*: *Syllecta Classica*, vol. 10. He has a special interest in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera, and is the author of 'Why Early Opera is Roman and Not Greek' (*Cambridge Opera Journal* 15.1) and *Ancient Rome in Early Opera* (University of Illinois Press, 2009).

MICHELE NAPOLITANO teaches Greek Literature at the University of Cassino. He is interested mainly in the Athenian theatre of the fifth century BC, above all comedy and satyr-play. In addition to numerous articles, he has published a commentary on Euripides' *Cyclops* (2003), and his translation with introduction and commentary of the fragments of Eupolis' *Kolakes* (*Flatterers*) appeared in 2012. An article on Luigi Dallapiccola's opera *Ulysses* appeared in 2009.

SUZANA OGRAJENŠEK is a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge and an Artistic Associate, formerly a Research Associate, at the University of Oxford's Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama. Her PhD dissertation (University of Cambridge, 2005) is a historicist study of the operas for the London Royal Academy of Music's infamous 'Rival Queens' period. She is a contributor to the *Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia* and is currently completing an edition of *ll pastor fido* HWV8a for the *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe*. As a soprano, her discography includes a DVD of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with William Christie (Virgin Classics, 2012). Recent and forthcoming operatic engagements also include Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and Gluck's *Armide* with Ivor Bolton.

ROGER SAVAGE taught for thirty-five years in the Department of English Literature, Edinburgh University, where he is now an Honorary Fellow. He has published essays on eighteenth-century poetry, on operas by Gagliano, Purcell, Rameau, Vaughan Williams, and Stravinsky, and on the Dido myth, the staging of court entertainments, neoclassical linkings of antiquity and nature, and the history of opera production.

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STEPHEN WALSH holds a personal chair in music at Cardiff University, is a former music critic of the Observer, Times, and Daily Telegraph, and the author of several books and long papers on Russian and Hungarian music. The second volume of his two-volume biography of Stravinsky was published in 2006.

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on Euripides. His introduction and notes for Tom Sleigh's translation of Euripides' *Herakles* in the Oxford Greek Tragedy in New Translations series was reissued in 2009.

AMY WYGANT lectures in early modern literature and culture at the University of Glasgow. She is a co-founder of Women in French in Scotland (WIFIS), and the editor of *Seventeenth-Century French Studies.* She is interested in witchcraft and demonology, tragedy, opera, and psychoanalysis, and her most recent monograph is *Medea, Magic, and Modernity* (Ashgate, 2007). She is currently working on early modern cookery and imagination.

Note to the Reader

For the most part, we have tried to use the forms of ancient names that are most likely to be familiar to English-speaking readers and to refer to ancient works by the title most commonly given to them in translated versions (though we have retained *Oedipus Tyrannus* as an exception). We have encouraged contributors to translate texts in any language other than English, even to the extent of providing translations of titles whose meaning will seem obvious to many readers; we have preferred to err in the direction of translating too much, though we are sure we have not achieved complete consistency.

We hope that readers will be familiar with basic musical terminology. In some chapters pitches are identified by the Helmholtz system, where middle C is identified as c′, the C above as c″ and the C above that as c‴; the C below middle C is identified as c, the c below that as C.

The abbreviation APGRD stands for the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama.

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Precursors, Precedents, Pretexts: The Institutions of Greco-Roman Theatre and the Development of European Opera

Roger Savage

The opera is set in Sicily in the twelfth century AD. As the curtain rises on Act III we see the ruins of an ancient Greek theatre there: auditorium to the right, stage to the left. It is night. Though the building is decayed, it still has its votive altar in place. Soon a Norman king sacrifices at that altar—and experiences a Nietzschean epiphany. The auditorium fills with spectral presences and the god Dionysus himself appears on the stage, an audible chorus attending on him, calling seductively to the king . . . This scene from *King Roger*, the symbolist opera of 1918–24 with a score (and much of the libretto) by Karol Szymanowski, must be the most complete evocation in the whole operatic repertoire of the physical theatre of antiquity: its shape, its performance conventions, its tutelary spirit, its allure.[1] However, significant evocations of aspects of that theatre had preceded it in the centuries since the first *Euridices* and *Dafnes* at Florence and Mantua in the late 1590s and 1600s, though they were used not as part of the decor and action of a particular work, but in support of projects which might affect the development of the operatic mode as a whole. For while we may tend to think of the contribution of ancient theatre and drama to opera very largely in terms of the later medium's adaptations of a dozen-or-so surviving performance-texts (*King Roger* as a reworking of Euripides' *Bacchae* is a case in point), the 'institutions' of ancient theatre as a practical concern—one involving architects, performers, and organizers—have had their parts to play too. The roles of four of these institutions are especially worth investigating: the singing of actors on the ancient stage; the presence behind that stage of a controlling or enabling figure; the shaping of the auditorium; and the placing of choric odes around the episodes of the drama. Each of these has been seen at one time or another as the precursor of some

[1] On this opera, see Robert Cowan, Ch. 17 in this volume.