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Caryl Clark

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Directed by Jürgen Flimm

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Caryl Clark

Encountering Others: Haydn's "L'anima del filosofo" as directed by Jürgen Flimm

Haydn's last opera, "L'anima del filosofo, ossia Orfeo ed Euridice", written for the composer's first visit to London in 1791, is an unusual work with a very disappointing performance history¹. Composed for the King's Theatre in London in the early months of that year to a libretto by the iconoclastic poet Carlo Francesco Badini (fl. 1770–93), this opera is a rarity in Haydn's canon of large-scale vocal or orchestral works composed in the last decade of his career, owing to the fact that it was never performed during the composer's lifetime. In 1806 Breitkopf & Härtel issued eleven solo and choral excerpts from this "heroische Oper" based on the quintessentially operatic Orpheus myth, but otherwise the opera fell into oblivion until it was revived in the mid-20th century². The early demise of this opera in its own day sets it apart from all other

¹ Literature on the opera includes: Christine Fischer, *Inszenierte Geschichte. Joseph Haydn und Carlo Francesco Badinis "L'anima del filosofo" als Gattungspoetik*, in: *Basler Jahrbuch für historische Musikpraxis* 32 (2008), pp. 67–86; Owen Jander, *The Three Chapters of the Orpheus Myth As They Figure in Librettos of Operas: the Favorite Episode, the Subject Avoided and the Theme Cultivated*, in: *Words on Music: Essays in Honor of Andrew Porter on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday*, ed. David Rosen and Claire Brook, Hillsdale, N.Y., 2003, pp. 152–170; Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London*, vol. 1: *The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778–1791*, Oxford 1995, especially pp. 595–601; John Rice, *L'anima del filosofo*, in: *Haydn. Oxford Composer Companions*, ed. David Wyn Jones, Oxford 2002, pp. 203f.; Bernhard Waritschlag, *Die Opera Seria bei Joseph Haydn. Studien zu Form und Struktur musikalischer Affektdramaturgie und Figurentypologisierung in "Armida" und "L'Anima del filosofo ossia Orfeo ed Euridice"* (Musikwissenschaftliche Schriften der Hochschule für Musik und Theater München 2), Tutzing 2005; Helmut Wirth, *Joseph Haydn, Orfeo ed Euridice (L'anima del filosofo): Analytical Notes*, Boston 1951; and my *Revolution, Rebirth and the Sublime in Haydn's "L'anima del filosofo" and "The Creation"*, in: *Engaging Haydn. Context, Culture and Criticism*, ed. Mary Hunter and Richard Will (Festschrift in Honor of James Webster), Cambridge 2012, pp. 100–123.

² After the publication of this vocal score, with texts in the original Italian and German translation, Breitkopf & Härtel issued an orchestral score of these same eleven excerpts the following year, possibly to spur performances of the opera as much as sales. See Landon III, pp. 351f. No libretto was ever printed during Haydn's lifetime; however, Georg Feder constructed one based on the JHW edition of the opera: *Joseph Haydn, L'anima del filosofo ossia Orfeo ed Euridice. Drama per musica 1791. Libretto von Carlo Francesco Badini*, ed. Helmut Wirth (JHW XXV/13), Munich 1974.

large-scale compositions, in either vocal or orchestral genres, dating from Haydn's maturity – including the last six Masses, the twelve London symphonies, and the two late oratorios, “The Creation” and “The Seasons”, – all of which were widely performed and universally lauded shortly after their completion and first performances. And this fact is all the more remarkable when one considers that “L'anima del filosofo” was an opera by the most internationally recognized composer of the day on one of the most famous themes in operatic history.

Questions about the opera persist. For instance, the enigmatic title – the soul of the philosopher – what does it mean, and who does it refer to? Is the score complete as it stands³? If the opera was prevented from being performed in the spring of 1791 because of the absence of a theatre license to produce theatrical works at the King's Theatre, why was the opera not performed the following spring, or during the composer's subsequent return to London in 1794–95? Rather than dwell on the many unanswered questions circulating in the published literature about “L'anima del filosofo”, I wish to take a different approach. By focusing on how the opera has been interpreted in a recent production directed by Jürgen Flimm – first performed at the Wiener Festwochen 1995 conducted by Nikolaus Harnoncourt and repeated at the Zurich Opera House under the baton of Adam Fischer, followed by a run in London in 2001 conducted by Christopher Hogwood – I seek to understand how the musical and narrative dimensions of the opera intersect with the strong directorial reading provided by Flimm. This is by way of suggesting that the score's completeness (or incompleteness) doesn't really matter. Instead, my approach builds on recent studies in opera and theatre studies that consider opera in all its dimensions – not only in the “textual” domains of

³ Scholarly debate has raged over whether the work is in four or five acts. In a letter to his patron dated 8 January 1791, Haydn reported that he would soon receive a libretto for an opera “entitled ‘Orfeo’, in 5 acts”, (Landon III, p. 38), but the surviving sources (in Berlin) show four acts only – unless the final scene with the Bacchantes is understood as a self-standing act. The change of scene from the Underworld to the isle of Lesbos could signal the beginning of a new act, even though it is not labeled as such in the score. Presumably these discrepancies would have been cleared up had the composer had the opportunity to revise the opera during rehearsal; however, as it was never performed, the surviving source material is inconclusive. Critical opinion is divided as to whether the shocking ending, in which Orpheus is poisoned by the Bacchantes, and they in turn succumb to a violent storm, permits a satisfactory dramatic and musical conclusion. I believe it does – the whimpering close providing a suitable dramatic dénouement to a journey of unrequited love.

musical score and libretto, but in the domain of staging as well⁴ – in order to account more fully for other parameters of the work, including its actualization as a live event. For contemporary productions are rife with meaning, and in need of evaluation. In analyzing Flimm’s controversial interpretation, I wish to situate Haydn’s opera into contemporary discourses about the place of performance studies in musicology.

Ironically, precisely because “L’anima del filosofo” never reached the stage in Haydn’s time, productions of the opera today initiate a new field of inquiry that has long been denied this enigmatic work. Since its performance history has only been in existence for a little more than half a century⁵, this aspect of the opera’s history opens up the possibility of examining how a historic work resonates in contemporary contexts. As a vehicle for ambitious sopranos – Maria Callas at the premiere in Florence, Joan Sutherland at the Edinburgh Festival in 1966, and Cecilia Bartoli in the Flimm production – and recordings, the opera now seems destined for future stagings. And if we agree that it is important for Haydn’s operas to receive more regular stagings in order to become better known, and not remain silent on the page, then it behooves us as scholars to engage with these productions. For it is here that the aural and the visual meet, and are in turn projected to an audience, allowing (and inviting) engaged receivers to access the full dramaturgical dimensions of the operatic subject, with all its myriad signification and semiotic encoding.

Rooted in the belief that only in performance can the operatic medium be fully comprehended, renowned opera scholar Carolyn Abbate passionately defends the necessity of studying opera in performance. In her book, “In Search of Opera”⁶, and again in the article “Music – Drastic or Gnostic?”, Abbate advocates that we study not the abstract musical work, nor even video or DVD recordings of opera, but rather “live” performances⁷. By exploring

⁴ Formative work in this area was fostered by Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker in their co-edited volume, *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Berkeley 1989.

⁵ Unperformed for over 150 years, the opera was finally performed in Florence in 1951 under Erich Kleiber, with Maria Callas creating the role of Euridice. That same year, a recording featuring artists of the Vienna State Opera, conducted by Hans Swarowsky, was issued by the Handel and Haydn Society, with extensive notes by Helmut Wirth.

⁶ Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, Princeton 2001.

⁷ Music – Drastic or Gnostic?, in: *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004), pp. 505–536. For Abbate, live performance is “drastic” and exemplary of high-level risk-taking and

and unpacking how opera is mediated through stage productions, we come to know the work better. Stagings that “unsettle” the work, in the words of David Levin, or productions that impose strong directorial or interpretive readings on the operatic script such as those aligned with “Regietheater”, open up the possibility for close readings and hermeneutic explorations of a different kind⁸. By studying “strong” stagings – among them Flimm’s 1995 production of “L’anima del filosofo” performed in Vienna and Zurich, and remounted in London in 2001 – we not only engage in reception history or processes of mediation, we also engage in acts of interpretation, and in the process help others interpret what they are experiencing in the theatre: in other words, “h o w to receive”. By embarking on an Orpheus-like quest for enlightenment within Flimm’s probing production of an enigmatic opera, I hope to expose some of the more puzzling, and possibly disturbing, interpretive dimensions of the production. That I do so by studying a video-recording and YouTube clips is not without problems, since recordings and other technological mediations of opera provide imperfect texts. They are problematic in and of themselves, since they add a further level of mediation, which only adds to and complexifies the communication of meaning⁹. But as one of the few windows into an opera fraught with historical and textual problems, Flimm’s production – like the lost Euridice – beckons. By “looking back” at this production, we create new modes of inquiry.

“doing”, rather than merely “gnostic”. Her work intersects with that of theatre scholar Philip Auslander, who valorizes “liveness” in: *Liveness, Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd edition, London and New York 2008.

⁸ See the opening chapter of David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky*, Chicago 2007. Since the publication of Levin’s book, different kinds of “performance texts” are being recognized for their media distinctiveness, including sanctioned video-recordings (VHS and DVD), PBS broadcasts viewed at home on one’s TV or computer, Met HD broadcasts, YouTube excerpts, etc. These different kinds of mediations come with their own set of performance dynamics, including the guiding eye of a director, an auteur, who determines what we see and manipulates how we might perceive it.

⁹ The literature here is immense, spurred by critical perspectives emerging from theatre studies. See David Levin, *Staging a Reading / Reading a Staging*, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9 (1997), pp. 47–71; James Treadwell, *Reading a Staging Again*, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 (1998), pp. 205–220; David Levin, *Response to James Treadwell*, *ibid.*, pp. 307–311; Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Music and Discourse. Toward a Semiology of Music*, Princeton 1990; Clemens Risi, *Swinging Signs, Representation and Presence in Operatic Performance. Remarks on Hans Neuenfels, Jossi Wieler, and a New Analytical Approach*, in: *Arcadia* 36 (2001), pp. 363–373; Michelle Duncan, *The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body. Voice, Presence, Performativity*, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16 (2004), pp. 283–306; Mary Ann Smart, *Defrosting Instructions. A Response*, *ibid.*, pp. 311–318.

In May 1995, “L’anima del filosofo” was treated to an innovative staging at the Theater an der Wien in a co-production with Zurich Opera directed by the iconoclastic German stage director Jürgen Flimm¹⁰. This production was remounted with some dramaturgical changes at Covent Garden in the autumn of 2001 when Cecilia Bartoli selected this opera for her main-stage debut at the Royal Opera House. For these performances, Bartoli performed not just one, but two roles: that of the unlucky Euridice, who, near the end of the second act, dies on her wedding day after being bitten by a snake; and also that of the flamboyant sibyl, Genio, who guides Orpheus in the Underworld. In doing so, she echoed her performance recorded with Christopher Hogwood and the Academy of Ancient Music for Decca in 1997¹¹. In these performances at the Royal Opera House, Hogwood directed the Covent Garden orchestra on modern instruments, not his historically informed performance ensemble. As Hogwood confided, the “prima donna” on stage was decidedly *n o t* Bartoli (who by all reports was a delight to work with), but rather the opinionated stage director, Flimm. Hogwood claims to have disliked everything that was happening on stage visually. In his words, “it made looking up [from the pit to the stage] very difficult”¹².

Hogwood was not alone. The London critics were unanimous in their disdain for the opera, particularly in Flimm’s staging. Indeed, if any of these English critics had consulted the musicological literature on the opera, they would have had their views confirmed. H.C. Robbins Landon, usually an ardent fan of Haydn’s operas, pronounced “L’anima del filosofo” a “magnificent failure – despite unforgettable moments and points of real dramatic interest”¹³. Curtis Price (et al.) faults the “warped treatment of the familiar opera ‘topos’”, and Badini’s “bastardized and inchoate libretto”¹⁴. And Handelian opera scholar Winton Dean observes that “every

¹⁰ Born in Gießen, Germany in 1941, Jürgen Flimm has had a distinguished career as a stage director. Currently, he is artistic director of the Salzburg Festival (2007–2011) and “Intendant” of the Berlin State Opera (2010–2015).

¹¹ CD recording of *L’anima del filosofo* conducted by Christopher Hogwood, *L’oiseau-lyre* 452 668-2.

¹² Personal interview with the conductor at his Cambridge home, 26 October 2001, midway through the run.

¹³ Landon III, p. 351.

¹⁴ Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, I: The King’s Theatre Haymarket 1778–1791*, Oxford 1995, pp. 595f., 599.

dramatic opportunity is squandered”¹⁵. Part of the problem, of course, resides in the libretto fashioned by Badini, which records a highly unusual and convoluted version of the Orpheus myth.

Badini’s libretto is noteworthy for retelling the Orpheus myth through a complex intermingling of mythology and Christian allegory¹⁶. In the early Christian era, Orpheus, the singer whose music was able to charm animate and inanimate creatures, was equated with Christ. He was understood as a prophet, a teacher, a theologian, and a philosopher whose enticing song rivaled oratory and philosophical discourse in its powers of persuasion. The legendary singer symbolized harmony with God; his song, capable of calming wild beasts, became the prototype for Christ the Good Shepherd, his “New Song” symbolizing the Word incarnate. By shifting the scene where Orpheus demonstrates his musical-rhetorical skills from the Underworld to the real world, Badini emphasized this link to Christ, who performed miracles in the world. Savior-like, Orpheus descended to the world of the dead to rescue Eurydice, epitomizing Christ’s harrowing of Hell; however, unlike Christ, who succeeded in liberating dead souls and arose on the third day, Orpheus failed in his mission. He nearly attained his goal, but because he looked back at Eurydice and to material concerns, he lost everything. The moral for early Christians was clear: eternal life comes to those who can reject the pleasures of the world, and the temptations of the flesh and the Devil.

Allegory of this kind permeates “L’anima del filosofo”¹⁷. The libretto’s allusions to the transitory nature of earthly existence reveal a familiarity with Boethius’s 6th-century work “The Consolation of Philosophy” (524 AD). In Act 3 scene 3, for instance, Genio tells Orfeo: “If you wish to find an effective cure for a suffering heart, seek the c o n s o l a t i o n o f p h i l o s o p h y”. In this text, Philosophy consoles Boethius by reminding him of the sufferings of other thinkers, including Socrates. Orpheus’s Socrates-like death

¹⁵ Winton Dean, *Essays on Opera*, Oxford 1999, p. 100.

¹⁶ The following discussion is indebted to several articles found in John Warden (ed.), *Orpheus. The Metamorphosis of a Myth*, Toronto 1982; and Jon Solomon, *The Neoplatonic Apotheosis in Monteverdi’s “Orfeo”*, in: *Studi musicali* 24 (1995), pp. 27–47.

¹⁷ Like his compatriot, Lorenzo Da Ponte, Badini was a priest, and he appears to have been similarly well-versed in matters of religious and classical texts. His Orpheus libretto for Haydn quotes several poetic lines from Rinuccini’s libretto *Euridice* set by both Peri and Caccini in 1600. See Silke Leopold, *Haydn und die Tradition der Orpheus-Opern*, in: *Musica* 36 (1982), pp. 131–135, here p. 132.

at the conclusion of the opera, where the hero drinks the cup of poison offered by the Bacchantes, helps to make this connection.

It is this historic, contemplative dimension that I find Flimm attempting to emulate in his revisionist production. His conceptualization of the opera invites us to enter into another world, a different space or sphere of existence, as if we were travelers on an epic Orphic journey. Indeed, we might be just as awestruck and dumbstruck as Orpheus when encountering 'others' and experiencing 'difference' in the Underworld. Flimm invites us to embark on an unknown, mystical journey in a strange land, just as Orpheus did.

FLIMM AND THE PERFORMATIVE

"Regietheater", or director-driven "concept" opera productions are hardly a new phenomenon. Since the 1920s, after taking root in modernist Germany (starting with the Mahler/Roller productions of Wagner), adaptations, retellings or restagings of standard operatic repertory have demanded that critics and audiences engage in reading their interpretations. Building on the Brechtian model of estrangement (*Verfremdung*), proponents of "Regietheater" attend to the performative or "drastic" dimensions of production, and in the process demand that audiences engage in "complex seeing" – that is, simultaneous watching and reading¹⁸. How Flimm's production engages with these topics is the subject of the remainder of this article.

Performance studies is now an area of vital inquiry and lively debate within opera studies, as scholars move beyond the study of fixed "works" and take up the challenge of theorizing the ephemeral object of live performance¹⁹. Similarly, opera on film and video, and high-definition broadcasts of opera from the MET in New York, are demonstrating that opera is a medium of multiple mediations: as read text, as live performance, as listening or viewing experience in all its variants and complexities.

¹⁸ See for instance Joy H. Calico, *Brecht's Legacy for Opera. Estrangement and the Canon*, in: *Brecht at the Opera*, ed. Joy H. Calico (California Studies in 20th-Century Music 9), Berkeley 2008, pp. 140–163.

¹⁹ German university departments also employ the English term "Performance Studies".

Difficulties tend to arise when strong directorial readings are applied to non-canonic works – that is, when the text being acted upon is unfamiliar. So, while the Orpheus myth may be a canonic operatic trope, the narrative presented by Haydn and Badini is anything but. If audience members arrive at the theater anticipating that they are to see an Orpheus opera in the manner of say, Claudio Monteverdi or Christoph Willibald Gluck, they will be very disappointed. Even Haydn acknowledged that his opera was “very different from that of Gluck”²⁰. Thus to subject Haydn’s Orpheus opera to a strong directorial reading before audiences and critics have any, or only limited, familiarity with the work risks inviting criticism.

Many of Flimm’s directorial decisions appear to have left critics and audiences more mystified than enlightened. His production poses as many questions as it answers, and is especially difficult to decipher on a single hearing or viewing. But what if we were to consider that this is just the effect he was seeking? A production that fails to communicate *does* have dramatic verisimilitude, for this is indeed the fate of Haydn’s and Badini’s hero: initially Orpheus may “get the girl” by demonstrating his vocal prowess, but thereafter the power of song eludes him. In the Underworld, for instance, Orpheus’s lament is interpreted as a sign of weakness (unlike Gluck’s noble hero in “*Che farò senza Euridice*”), his loss of voice signaling his dejectedness. He moves from proud songster to vulnerable listener over the course of his travels in the Underworld. Indeed, he never regains his vocal powers, and laments pitifully after losing Eurydice a second time, rendering him easy prey for the malicious Bacchantes.

If it were Flimm’s intent to depict the hero’s perilous journey, precipitous decline, and disastrous end, then he succeeded magnificently. But by doing so, he relegated Haydn’s “*L’anima del filosofo*” to further oblivion. The leap from non-performance in 1791, followed by some 150 years of silence leading to the release of a problematic sound recording in 1950, created a huge gap in (mis)understanding. By the time the Bartoli-Flimm collaboration was undertaken in the 1990s, the contemporary drive for post-modern stage productions was on a collision course with traditional views of Haydn as a composer for the theatre. A further

²⁰ Letter to Prince Anton Esterházy dated 8 January 1791: “das neue opern büchl so ich zu Componiren habe, betitult sich Orfeo in 5 Acten, [...] dasselbe soll von einer ganz andern arth seyn als jenes v. Gluck” (Bartha, p. 253).

barrier was posed by the combination of a c o n t e m p o r a r y staging in conjunction with a h i s t o r i c a l l y - informed instrumental and vocal performance style. Together, these two conflicting performance aesthetics rubbed uncomfortably against one another. A highly stylized stage production, which at the best of times has the power to transform the operatic text, overlaying it with an interpretative perspective that demands deciphering, allied to a highly unusual retelling of the familiar Orpheus story, only compounded the problem.

Of the 20 odd reviews I consulted that appeared in the English press on Flimm's Covent Garden production of "L'anima del filosofo", two are excerpted here as a testament to the vehemence with which the production was greeted. Rodney Milnes captioned his review in "The Times" of 17 October 2001²¹:

Where to start, with Cecilia Bartoli or Joseph Haydn? One of the many interesting things about stars – and Bartoli radiates star quality as well as being a great singer – is what they do with their talent. The Royal Opera wouldn't dream of staging "L'anima del filosofo", Haydn's operatic version of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, if Bartoli hadn't chosen it for her UK stage debut; she has already championed the piece in Vienna and Zurich [...].

It's a funny old piece, commissioned for London in 1791 but not performed for reasons of theatre licensing. Scholars remain uncertain as to whether it is complete: could there be a missing fifth act? Is the downbeat ending, in which the Bacchantes, having poisoned Orpheus, drown off-stage [sic] and the music fades away to nothing, part of the work's "philosophical" message? Indeed, the mysterious "philosophy" of Badini's untidy libretto seems to consist of telling Orpheus (and us) to be moderate in all things and conquer grief with philosophical calm. I don't see the piece transferring to [George Bush's post-9/11] Washington in a hurry. [...]

As for Jürgen Flimm's production, all joke top hats and elongated arms, it could be described as the last word in contemporary opera direction or a load of old Eurotrash. I incline towards the latter view and, to judge from the booing at the end, so did many in the audience.

This is n o t a flattering review! And in "The Guardian" of the same day, Tim Ashley writes that Bartoli "foisted the piece on us" and that although she did not disappoint vocally, the opera itself

²¹ Rodney Milnes, Double Feature – Cecilia Bartoli's UK Stage Debut at the ROH Does Not Disappoint, But Staging Does, in: The Times, 17 October 2001.

did. "What surrounds her is dispiriting. The paucity of inspiration in the score is more than once apparent." Ashley concludes his review as follows²²:

Christopher Hogwood's conducting had moments of inaccountable dullness, and the staging by director Jürgen Flimm (booed at the end of the performance) is a symbolist mish-mash that helps nobody. The set is an apertured white box through which the chorus peers to interject comments. Euridice's death is heralded by an Alien-like creature erupting through the floor, while she is shoveled into her grave by characters who have strayed from [Samuel Beckett's 1953 absurdist play] *Waiting for Godot*.

In an attempt to come to terms with this production, I turn to a close reading of a key scene in the opera: Orpheus's dramatic entry on stage in the first act. In this scene we meet a captivating Orpheus, a tenor, calming the beasts with his lyrical song to the accompaniment of his lyre. His accompanied recitative, "Rendete a questo seno / il core del mio cor, l'anima mia" (Restore to my loving arms the heart of my heart, my soul), is followed by the showcase aria, "Cara speme" (My dearest), which opens with a classic *mezza di voce*.

ENCOUNTERING MONSTERS AND MUDMEN

Aristeus's henchmen have captured Euridice and are holding her hostage. Orpheus arrives on the scene to rescue her, but first he must calm the savage beasts who have abducted her. The scene opens on a proscenium stage with a low raked centre platform. The smooth, sophisticated lines of the stylized pseudo-Grecian structures on either side of the stage, and those of the stark, cleanly raked stage, mirrored in the pure white dress worn by Euridice and related white attire worn by the approaching Orpheus, contrast with the rough-looking enemy whose mud-caked bodies are also covered in war-paint. Bearing spears, these decidedly unsophisticated warriors hover around their forlorn prey. Orpheus, with stylized lyre (imitated by a harp emanating from the orchestra) begins to sing his enchanting song, during which the savage warriors or "beasts" are seen to come under his spell.

²² Tim Ashley, *L'anima del filosofo*, in: *The Guardian*, 17 October 2001: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2001/oct/17/artsfeatures4> (21 November 2011).

The costumes, masks and demeanor of these “beasts” are, curiously, modeled on the famous Asaro Mudmen of Papua New Guinea. In order to appreciate the full effect of this theatrical moment, one needs to know and interpolate the famous legend of the mudmen onto that of the Orpheus myth.

According to that legend, having been defeated by an opposing tribe and forced to flee to the Asaro River, the tribesmen waited until dusk before attempting to escape. Arising from the muddy banks of the river, all caked in mud and looking the color of death, they frightened their enemies, who thought these apparitions emerging from the mud were evil spirits. The enemy warriors were so frightened that they fled, leaving the mudmen victorious²³.

In this scene, then, as staged by Flimm, we have the collision of two myths: the magical musico-rhetorical powers of Orpheus intersect with the myth of the Asaro Mudmen and their tribal festival called a “sing-sing”. Yet not one London critic in the reviews I read picked up on this reference; indeed, the metaphorical meaning was lost on the entire critical community. As if that were not troubling enough, the imagery becomes more complex, even problematic, when Orpheus, who is shown working his magic on them, has them lay down their weapons and abandon their battle-like positions. As the mudmen sit demurely on the raked stage, Orpheus begins one-by-one to lift the protective headgear from their heads, thereby stripping them of their warrior status. At the same time we witness the racialized dynamics at work in this particular staging, since the de-masked warriors, although mud-caked, are dark-skinned black-haired natives. The unequal power dynamics depicted in this orientalizing staging problematize this magical musical moment with its introduction of racialized overtones. We are made to feel uncomfortable when the European “white guy” (Italian opera singer; Greek hero), who wields all the (historic) power, subdues the aboriginals, reenacting every imperialist agenda of the Self over the Other, and causing us to question the validity of Orpheus’s famed powers, or whether or not we ought to

²³ Various versions of the narrative are reported on many websites: google “Asaro Mudmen” to locate accounts and photo documentation of tribal festivals in the Eastern Highland province of Papua New Guinea. See also Wilfred N. Beaver, *Unexplored New Guinea. A Record of the Travels, Adventures, and Experiences of a Resident Magistrate amongst the Head-Hunting Savages and Cannibals of the Unexplored Interior of New Guinea*, London 1920.

sympathize with his plight. Perhaps Orpheus does deserve his ignominious end?

That Flimm copies the warrior-like costuming and headgear of the mudmen, but robs these look-alike characters of their mythical powers when confronted by a Western heroic archetype employing an elitist musical discourse, creates an uncomfortable and problematic moment on the contemporary operatic stage. The process of displacing aboriginal peoples and practices or appropriating their cultural heritage for personal or market-driven gain in the opera house is an unethical act of stereotyping and a blatant usurpation of authorship. As an act of cultural appropriation, it exploits the Other and in the process demeans their ethnic heritage. By knowingly staging an exploitive act of subjugation, however, Flimm may have loftier artistic aims. Not only have the descendants of the Asaro Mudmen and the mythologies surrounding their ancestors made them popular among well-healed travelers seeking ever-more exotic tourist destinations and experiences, fellow-countrymen in Papua New Guinea are also capitalizing on the phenomenon by performing Ersatz reenactments of the mudmen. Indeed, genuine ancestors claim that their culture is being bastardized by other ethnic groups around the country who are usurping and reenacting their heritage for profit²⁴. By engaging in a related act of artistic theft, Flimm was able to palimpsestically interpolate an exotic Eastern myth and performance (a “sing-sing”) onto a Hellenistic one, while also calling attention to multiple acts of cultural appropriation – all of which will inevitably end badly for the perpetrators. Flimm’s mudmen may be overcome for the moment, but the hero Orpheus will eventually receive his comeuppance. And we operatic tourists, “on safari” with him²⁵, will witness not only his downfall but ours as well.

This is just one of the inspired directorial choices Flimm makes in this production. But its significance was lost on audiences and certainly on critics – which is where scholars receptive to interdisciplinary theatre studies and opera criticism enter. To be sure, operatic “unsettling” and interpretive overlays work best when the particular operatic adaptation and its musical telling are equally familiar. In other words, operatic standards such as Wolfgang Amadeus

²⁴ www.pngbd.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-8455.html (20 April 2010).

²⁵ Matthew Head, *Musicology on Safari. Orientalism and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory*, in: *Music Analysis* 22 (2003), pp. 211–230.

Mozart's "Die Entführung aus dem Serail" and "Don Giovanni"²⁶ may weather strong directorial readings more readily than other less familiar operas. But if a little-known work is subjected to a strong reading, a director risks mystifying and alienating, not educating, the audience, and, more catastrophically, of relegating the given opera to the history books. Having been aborted in the late-18th century, Haydn's Orpheus opera can ill afford this fate in the 21st century. As musicologists studying opera, our "text" must be the printed score and the various media of production, for it is when opera producers push the limits of operatic spectatorship that our multi-disciplinary skills are needed the most.

ENCOUNTERING "OTHER" WORLDS

The above research is rooted in interdisciplinary theorization about opera, and lies at the intersection of theatre and performance studies and critical musicology. As such it is an outgrowth of my larger research project into interdisciplinary opera studies, of which I spoke briefly during the roundtable session on "Haydn's Operas" on the opening day of the conference. There, I advocated not only for more performances of Haydn opera, but also for more informed theoretical exploration of Haydn's dramatic subjects and operatic endeavors. In my recently published book, "Haydn's Jews: Representation and Reception on the Operatic Stage"²⁷, I argue that Haydn was fully cognizant of the lexicon of dramatic tropes associated with ethnic representation on the stage in the mid-18th-century and that he incorporated stereotypes in his theatrical works – not only Turks, Persians, and Muslims, but also Jews. Before the Enlightenment, when Jews were treated as a people apart, physical infirmities and other markers of "difference" were frequently caricatured on the comedic stage. Haydn was no stranger to these theatrical representations, and as I argue, indeed, he exploited the comic potential of the Jewish persona in

²⁶ The production of "Die Entführung" by Stefan Herheim (2003), which strips the opera of its orientalist imagery while introducing videos that amplify the emotional states and desires of the characters, or the production of "Don Giovanni" by Peter Sellars (1991) set in contemporary Harlem, which foregrounds the dual nature of Don Giovanni and Leporello by casting the characters as look-alike African-American brothers, are just two productions among many.

²⁷ Caryl Clark, *Haydn's Jews. Representation and Reception on the Operatic Stage*, Cambridge 2009. Klára Móricz describes the book in a review as "a bold first step to shedding light on this obscure area of Haydn's life and work." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22 (2010), pp. 109–114, here p. 114.

two works for the stage: “Der krumme Teufel” (The Limping Devil, 1752; revised 1759), and “Lo speziale” (The Apothecary, 1768). This latter work was also the first opera by Haydn to be revived in the modern era, brought to the stages of Hamburg and Vienna in the late 19th century as “Der Apotheker” by three assimilated Jews – Robert Hirschfeld, a Vienna-based critic and editor who edited the score; Gustav Mahler, who conducted the opera in both cities; and baritone Willy Hesch, who created the role of the apothecary in both locations.

As recounted in Chapter 1 of “Haydn’s Jews”, Haydn would have been introduced to Jewish caricature on the stage of the Kärntner-tortheater, home of the lowbrow German Theatre in Vienna, by the dynamic actor and impresario Joseph Felix von Kurz-Bernardon, who mentored the young and impressionable Haydn in theatrical arts during the 1750s. Among his comic arsenal, Bernardon specialized in playing the role of the Jew. Chapter 2 addresses the place of Jews in Haydn’s orbit, examining the Jewish settlements in both Eisenstadt and Vienna, and the overlapping ministries of the Barmherzige Brüder in those communities as well as Haydn’s connections to and musical interactions with this Order of Brothers. Traced in the third chapter are the many coded depictions of the apothecary as a Jewish character in Goldoni’s 1755 libretto, “Lo speziale”, to which Haydn responded with appropriate musical gesturing when setting this libretto for Prince Nikolaus I to celebrate the opening of the new opera house at Eszterház in 1768. That Haydn’s patron enjoyed theatrical entertainments featuring Jewish caricatures is supported by the evidence recorded in theatre archives, where it is revealed that every “Wandertruppe” engaged at court had at least one actor on the payroll who specialized in performing the role of the Jew²⁸. Indeed, in the summer of 1773 “Der Jude und der Bauer” was performed at court by Carl Wahr’s travelling troupe, and the following summer – the same season that “Lo speziale” was revived – the philo-Semitic play “Der redliche Bauer und der großmüthige Jude” was performed in the marionette theatre. How the Jewish caricature inscribed in the title character of “Lo speziale” / “Der Apotheker” resonated on the stage across a 150-year period forms the subject of the last two chapters of “Haydn’s Jews”.

²⁸ See Mátyás Horányi, *The Magnificence of Eszterháza*, London 1962, pp. 102, 130ff., 134.

Ultimately, “Haydn’s Jews” is embedded in a research trajectory that is as foreign to traditional Haydn Studies as the new world Orpheus encounters in Badini’s and Haydn’s “L’anima del filosofo”. And the stage world that audience members encounter in Jürgen Flimm’s highly imaginative yet dramatically-motivated production of the opera are similarly foreign. The methodology employed in this article and in my recent book is indebted to a critical musicology that crosses disciplinary boundaries. It is situated at the intersection of historical musicology, opera and performance studies, the politics of musical reception, and studies of ethnicity, difference and otherness on stage, and in life. These studies embrace Gary Tomlinson’s notion of the “web of culture”, in which he advocates looking closely at the interactions of many different kinds of artistic creators – including senders and receivers – across different historical and geographical locations, in order to capture the full potential of a musical utterance. As he reasons, “the extra-musical factors influencing music are not restricted to what the composer encountered and reacted to, but by more ingrained and invisible factors, such as the rules of discourse itself that underlay the way people understood things within the culture in question”²⁹. In his magisterial “Oxford History of Western Music”, Richard Taruskin too advocates studying art worlds through “processes of collective action and mediation, the very things that are most often missing in conventional musical historiography.”³⁰ To paraphrase Taruskin, “What did it take to produce [Haydn’s apothecary opera, or his Orpheus opera?] Anyone who thinks that the answer to that question can be given in one word – [Haydn] – needs to read [Howard] Becker [...]. But of course no one who has reflected on the matter at all would give the one-word answer”³¹. For “an ‘art world’, as Becker conceives it, is the ensemble of

²⁹ Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic. Toward a Historiography of Others*, Chicago 1992, p. 231.

³⁰ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. I: *The Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford 2005, p. XXVIII.

³¹ Taruskin’s original reads: “‘What did it take to produce Beethoven’s Fifth?’ Anyone who thinks that the answer to that question can be given in one word – ‘Beethoven’ – needs to read Becker (or, if one has the time, this book). But of course no one who has reflected on the matter at all would give the one-word answer.” He goes on to acknowledge that, “An explanatory account describes the dynamic (and, in the true sense, dialectical) relationship that obtains between powerful agents and mediating factors: institutions and their gatekeepers, ideologies, patterns of consumption and dissemination involving patrons, audiences, publishers and publicists, critics, chroniclers, commentators, and so on practically indefinitely until one chooses to draw the line” (*ibid.*, pp. XXVIIIff.).

agents and social relations that it takes to produce works of art (or maintain artistic activity) in various media.”³² Thus to embark on the journey of discovering that larger “art world” of interaction is part of the agenda for 21st century Haydn Studies that I hope to stimulate with this article³³.

³² Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (1982), 25th anniversary edition, revised and expanded, Berkeley 2008. A sociologist of art, Becker suggests that works of art do more than ‘reflect’ their enviroining society; indeed, they attest to deep and abiding networks of cooperation.

³³ I extend my sincere thanks to Nina Penner for her research assistance; to the students in my Fall 2009 Haydn graduate seminar at the University of Toronto; and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (grant: “Haydn in the Theatre”).