

Influence of the Popularity of Opera during Risorgimento on Foreign Presence in Italy

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Abstract : As a result of the Italian Independence Wars starting in 1848, Italy began to change through unification. People gradually moved away from some of their traditional practices and values, such as the long-held belief that women were inferior to men, as part of the Risorgimento. Italians began to take interest in opera as a form of emotional release. As opera became more popular and prominent in their culture, it aided in the dissemination of ideas, especially stimulating the spread of imperialism, in the late 19th century, as Italy began extending its presence to other countries. In order to collect the information needed to analyze Italy's foreign presence, it was necessary to consult texts concerning the culture of the Risorgimento. These texts included primary sources from operatic composers and contemporary recorded accounts. Letters from Giuseppe Verdi, a leader in opera during the Risorgimento, have been scrutinized for indications of popular attitudes of the time. The cultural context of the Risorgimento is essential to understanding the Italian motives and attitudes towards the outside world. On the more political side, research has also entailed the study of historical data of general laws, policies, and their purposes concerning geopolitical boundaries and foreign affairs, such as Edward Said's thesis on Orientalism. By establishing these two characteristics of Italy, the paper will thoroughly illustrate Italy's presence in foreign affairs. Texts have been searched with the intent of using information that reveals Italian attitudes toward exotic countries to determine whether their demeanor was positive or condescending. Motives behind sources have been interpreted in context in order to form a complete picture of the Italian sentiment towards foreigners. Additionally, research pertaining to Italian nationalism and imperialism such as song and literature has been used. The primary form of research has been the division of sources that are culturally based and those that are political in nature. Opera had always been developing since its creation in the 17th century, and in the 19th century, the bel canto movement revolutionized opera and its role in Italian society. This paper uses evidence that popular sentiment was influenced by opera to support the belief that the evolution of opera was as a result of the nationalist sentiment, and in turn fueled the cultural movement known as the Risorgimento. In this way, opera proceeded to affect Italian culture by spreading the idea of imperialism.

Keywords : opera, Italian unification, music history, imperialism

Conference Title : ICME 2015 : International Conference on Musicology and Ethnomusicology

Conference Location : Amsterdam, Netherlands

Conference Dates : May 14-15, 2015