

Placing Warsaw on the Operatic Map of Eighteenth-Century Europe

The image of eighteenth-century operatic culture in Europe is incomplete. While musicology has been constrained by the borders of its principal focus on major musical centers, opera in the second half of the eighteenth century was unrestricted by geographical or linguistic boundaries and travelled throughout the entire continent. In the age of eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism, the ascension of bourgeois musical culture, and the opening of many new public theaters, operas circulated widely, often performed by the same singers in different locations. The newly established German, Polish, Russian, Danish, or Swedish operas relied on well-known Italian and French models, while they also struggled to initiate new national operatic traditions. It is only through this broad context that the cultural significance of classical-period opera can be fully understood.

Eighteenth-century opera in Poland is one of the neglected terrains in musicology that deserves more consideration. Operatic life of Warsaw became particularly hectic during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski (1764-1795), when specific political and socio-economic circumstances generated a vivid cosmopolitan environment. With the opening of the first public theater in 1765, Warsaw participated intensively in the European exchange of operatic works and performers, providing a platform for Italian, French, German, and Polish troupes.

My examination of the Warsaw public theater in the first period of its activity – as part of a European labor market for singers and impresarios, a medium for a growing collection of favorite works, and a place of rivalry between international operatic troupes – reveals an energetic opera center with extensive offerings. In this paper I will argue that the membership in the broad international opera network, which eventually gave an impulse for national production, determines the position of Warsaw on the operatic map of eighteenth-century Europe.

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Anna has presented papers at musicological conferences and research institutions in the United States and Europe, most recently at the 1st Transnational Opera Studies Conference in Bologna, Italy. At her home university, she has worked as a graduate teaching and research assistant. Anna was also awarded the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts (harpsichord performance) in 2014.