

Music History and Cosmopolitanism / abstract & bio  
Walton, Benjamin (University of Cambridge, UK)  
Session 1a / Wednesday June 1, 2:30–4 pm

### **Global Opera?**

In his recent “global history of the nineteenth century,” *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, Jürgen Osterhammel proposes that “opera globalized early,” and the spread of opera companies and opera houses through parts of the Americas, Asia and Africa during this period would seem to invite a new narrative of operatic history that pays closer attention to global processes. But is globalization the best category for framing a transnational history of nineteenth-century opera? In my presentation, I will explore its potential – and limitations – for understanding the spread of Italian opera beyond Europe in the first half of the century. To do so, I want to consider overlaps and tensions with other explanatory (and disciplinary) frameworks, whether cosmopolitan, postcolonial or microhistorical. Meanwhile, I will also address critiques of the global turn as either modish or outmoded, or else, as in the view of Thomas Turino, naturalizing a story of capitalist expansion that might seem only to offer a familiar story of opera and elite culture retold on a wider stage.

As a focus for my discussion I will take as a case study the first opera troupe to circumnavigate the world, during the late 1820s and early 1830s, who took a repertory of Italian operas around South America and across the Pacific to Macao and Calcutta. Through an exploration of the ways that the troupe’s varied local receptions became caught in and shaped by a larger contemporary fantasy of “global opera,” I will argue that such intertwinings invite a history of opera that can productively loosen its ties to composers, works and premieres, towards an alternative account of performance-driven operatic mobility.

**Benjamin Walton** is University Senior Lecturer of Music at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Jesus College. His book on *Rossini in Restoration Paris* appeared in 2007; he edited (with Nicholas Mathew) *The Invention of Beethoven and Rossini* (2013), and he is currently editor (with Stefanie Tcharos) of *Cambridge Opera Journal*.