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STRAUSS AND THE CITY: THE RECEPTION OF RICHARD
STRAUSS'S *SALOME*, *ELEKTRA*, AND *DER ROSENKAVALIER* WITHIN NEW YORK
CITY, 1907–1934

by

CHRISTOPHER G. OGBURN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

2018

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Christopher G. Ogburn

This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Strauss and the City: The Reception of Richard Strauss's *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* within New York City, 1907–1934

by

Christopher G. Ogburn

Adviser: Chadwick Jenkins

New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century was growing into its status as one of the world's great cultural centers. At the same time, across the Atlantic, Richard Strauss was emerging as Germany's preeminent composer. The city and Strauss, although seemingly unrelated, were more intertwined than it would at first appear. This study examines this connection through a reception history of Strauss's *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* in the city, beginning in 1907 with the New York City premiere of *Salome* and concluding in 1934 when the opera returned to the Metropolitan's stage. The reception of Strauss in the city provides a unique vantage point to observe the critical reactions to Strauss by his contemporaries. Removed from Europe, New York City's critics occupied an important distance from their European compatriots, which provided them with a distinct perspective. Along the way, I also utilize the music of Germany's most prominent opera composer to examine the German American community, who used music to foster a sense of communal identity. This study focuses on opera, rather than the popular theater, to explore both internal and external attitudes towards German Americans as a cultural and ethnic group. My ultimate goal is threefold: to

examine an important moment in New York City's cultural history, to shine light on an immigrant community that was critical in the formation of the city's cultural, social, and political identity, yet has now been largely forgotten, and to consider the contemporary attitudes towards a significant twentieth-century musical figure.

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Introduction

New York City at the beginning of the twentieth century—home to orchestras and opera houses, a thriving theatrical scene, and a robust industry churning out the popular tunes of the day on Tin Pan Alley—was quickly growing into its status as one of the world’s great cultural centers. At the same time, across the Atlantic, Richard Strauss was emerging as Germany’s preeminent composer. New York City and Strauss, although seemingly unrelated, were more intertwined than it would at first appear. This study examines this connection through a reception history of Strauss’s *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* in New York, beginning in 1907 with the New York City premiere of *Salome* and concluding in 1934 when the opera returned to the Metropolitan’s stage. Along the way, I utilize the music of Germany’s most prominent opera composer to also examine the position of the German American community in the United States. This study focuses on opera, rather than the popular theater, to explore both internal and external attitudes towards German Americans as a cultural and ethnic group during one of the most tumultuous periods in the community’s history. My ultimate goal is threefold: to examine an important moment in New York City’s cultural history, to shine light on an immigrant community that was critical in the formation of the city’s cultural, social, and political identity, yet has now been largely forgotten, and to consider the contemporary attitudes towards a significant twentieth-century musical figure.

When Strauss’s operas began to appear on the city’s stages, New York was coming into its own. Although it had attained its status as the operatic—and arguably cultural—capital of the United States, New York City still sought to compare itself with the cultural centers of Europe, while simultaneously shedding its legacy as a cultural backwater. Exploring how the city reacted

to Strauss's music at this moment allows for a closer look into this critical juncture in its cultural history.

Examining the reception of Strauss's music in the city also provides an opportunity to explore the use of music by the German-speaking community to foster a sense of shared identity. German Americans, as with all immigrant communities, struggled to find a place at the American table. Music became one of the most effective means by which to do that. Strauss's status as the most visible face of German music ensured that his connection to the German American community, although it may not have been the central focus of a lot of the coverage, was not ignored. This connection, however, was often complicated by many of the other themes that emerged around the composer, as well as by the political realities of the time.

This work is first and foremost a reception study of Strauss. A major composer of the twentieth century, Strauss has often been overshadowed by the likes of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Berg. There are several possible explanations for this, including his actions during the Third Reich and his seemingly backward moving aesthetic trajectory. Strauss, even at the height of his popularity, faced questions by critics regarding his status as Germany's leading composer. The reception of Strauss in New York City provides a unique vantage point to observe the critical reactions to Strauss by his contemporaries. Removed from Europe, the city's critics occupied an important distance from their European compatriots, which provided them with a distinct perspective. This can be seen in one of the common themes that emerged with Strauss's music: the question of modernism as a French or German innovation. Not having a stake in the claim, American critics could view this debate in a more objective light. Their status as Americans also imbued their discussions of Strauss with a degree of freshness. Foreign-language opera, which only came to New York in the nineteenth-century, had not been around that long when Strauss's

operas began to appear. Americans were still trying to figure out how to respond to this genre. Were they meant to serve as background noise for the city's fashionable elites? Or, should they be viewed as works of art? Perhaps the biggest question was how to understand Strauss, the supposed successor to Wagner. Was he an artist or a craftsman? A composer or a businessman?

The opening three chapters provide some context for understanding Strauss's reception in the city. Chapter 1 briefly describes the introduction of foreign-language opera to New York City. In this chapter, I discuss some of the issues around the importation of this genre, including the concern over fashion versus art, a debate that would continue even during the time of Strauss. Chapter 2 looks at the German Years at the Metropolitan Opera House. From 1884–1891, all operas given at the house were in German. This period marked the first time many non-German speaking New Yorkers heard this part of the repertoire, including many of Wagner's operas. As an introduction to German-language opera, this period provides a critical foundation from which to observe the reception of Strauss's operas in the following decades. In this chapter, I will also introduce some of the main music critics working for New York City papers. These figures include W. J. Henderson (1855–1937), who worked for the *New York Times* (1887–1902) and the *New York Sun* (1902–1937), and emerged as a strong advocate of Wagner, and Henry E. Krehbiel (1854–1923), the critic for the *New-York Tribune* (1880–1923) and a Germanophile with a penchant for Wagner and the First Viennese School.¹ Finally, in Chapter 3, I look at the German-speaking immigrant community in the city. The use of music by German Americans to

¹ Most of the music critics, as was customary at the time, did not sign their articles. As a result, I will often avoid using the author's name unless it is indicated in the article or there are clues as to the authorship. For example, there are often particular phrases that appear with regularity, which can provide some clue to the author's identity. At other times, passages from the articles reappear in published works by the critic, such as Krehbiel's *Chapters of Opera* (1908) and Henderson's *Modern Musical Drift* (1904), which point to the authorship of the articles.

foster a communal identity helped to shape both the image of German Americans in the United States, as well as the way in which music by German-speaking composers was received.

Chapter 4 marks the introduction of Strauss to the city's audiences through his tone poems. The themes that arose in this period—including Strauss's connection to Wagner, his craftsmanship versus artistry, and relationship to modernism—would naturally color the means by which Strauss's operas would be received. This chapter also looks at Strauss's 1904 American tour, which brought him to New York City. Some of the critics who make an appearance in this chapter are Richard Aldrich (1863–1937), who worked at the *New-York Tribune* (1891–1902) and the *New York Times* (1902–1923), and was slightly more open to modernism than Henderson or Krehbiel, and James Huneker (1857–1921), who at times worked for the *Musical Courier* (1889–1902), the *New York Sun* (1900–1902), and the *New York Times* (1918–1919), and emerged as a rare advocate of Strauss among the city's critics. In Chapter 5, I examine the American premiere of *Salome* at the Metropolitan Opera. In addition to the controversy that resulted in its removal, I also examine how the city's critics moved from thinking of Strauss as an orchestral composer to a composer of opera. Chapter 6 looks at the Manhattan Opera Company's productions of *Salome* and *Elektra*, both in French translation. The final chapter, Chapter 7, looks at perhaps the most tumultuous time for both Strauss and the German Americans. It includes a discussion of the reception of *Der Rosenkavalier*, but also examines the impact of World War One on the city's German-language cultural offerings. In this chapter, I also briefly discuss Strauss's final 1921 visit to New York City, the Metropolitan premiere of *Elektra*, and the return of *Salome* to the house's stage. The epilogue touches on the rise of the National Socialists and the impact this had on Strauss's reception in the city. Although

outside the chronological parameters of this study, it is a topic that is necessary to address and impossible to ignore.

Chapter 1

Opera Comes to New York: The Early Nineteenth Century Emergence of Italian and German Opera

By the time Richard Strauss's operas began to appear on New York City's stages at the dawn of the twentieth century, the city possessed both a permanent opera house and the third largest German-speaking population in the world, behind only Berlin and Vienna.¹ Just a century before the reality had been very different. In the early years of the nineteenth century, English-language operas—both original works and translations—comprised the bulk of the operatic repertoire available to New Yorkers, and the city was home to only a relatively small number of German-speaking immigrants. The discussions in the local press that accompanied the growth of both foreign-language opera and the German-speaking population paved the way for many of the debates surrounding Strauss's music in the twentieth century, including the role of opera in the city's cultural life, the emergence of musical modernism, public good versus artistic merit, and the notion of German musical supremacy in the context of New York's growing German American population.

The early reception of foreign-language opera in the city laid the groundwork for how Strauss's operas would be received, particularly when it came to the broader concerns over the social, nationalist, and financial implications of the institution. As described by Karen Ahlquist in her seminal book on the subject, New York's theatrical managers and would-be impresarios

¹ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 745.

had to confront different economic and social systems than those found in Europe.² For many people in the city, particularly those who viewed opera as an inherently “foreign” art, one criticism was the genre’s association with the European elite.³ This put it at odds with the egalitarian ideals of the young Republic. The audiences of these early performances, however, were often far more diverse than the charges of its intrinsic exclusivity would imply.

Throughout its history, opera in New York City relied on the financial, and to some extent cultural, support of all levels of society. When the various operatic experiments failed, which they almost all invariably did, it was partly the result of impresarios who focused on appealing to one particular class of society at the expense of the rest. Lawrence Levine argues that as the century progressed, opera “more and more . . . meant foreign-language opera performed in opera houses like the Academy of Music and the Metropolitan Opera House, which were deeply influenced if not controlled by wealthy patrons whose impresarios and conductors strove to keep the opera they presented free from the influence of other genres and other groups.”⁴ While the wealthy supporters were vital in providing the financial foundation that allowed the productions of operas to continue, the less well-to-do ticket holders, who made up a sizeable percentage of the audience, used their purchasing power to ensure that their favorite works, artists, and composers were represented on the stage.⁵ It was not enough to simply fill the boxes with annual subscribers. In order to be truly successful and survive in a capitalist market, a

² For a detailed description of the introduction of foreign-language opera to New York City, see: Karen Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, Culture in New York City, 1815-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

³ John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 51–52.

⁴ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 101–102.

⁵ Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 325.

house needed to fill every seat, including the parquet and gallery, the realm allotted to the city's working class and marginalized citizens. A complete picture of opera in New York's cultural—and social—landscape requires a comprehensive look at the interactions among the many different levels of society that gathered in the auditorium, including the growing contingent of foreign-born immigrants, particularly those from German-speaking Europe.⁶

Visitors to the city's opera houses often noted that the audiences seemed to be more socially diverse than those typically found in Europe.⁷ At least in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the clear, regimented social divides of European houses were slightly more blurred in their American counterparts. Part of this was the result of a commitment, at least rhetorically, to social equality.⁸ As a result, much of the pro-opera sentiment in the 1820s—meant to counter the image of privilege and snobbery—attempted to justify the need to support opera by focusing on its cultural, rather than social, worth. Opera was given a purpose. It could improve American tastes and lay the foundation for a musical culture that the new nation supposedly lacked.

The argument for opera as a tool of cultural improvement also worked to solve the lack of patronage found in the United States. In Europe, there was a system of state support that allowed opera to remain solvent regardless of the market. In many Italian houses, the box-holders paid a levy that went into an endowment often bolstered by the local governments. In this way, box-

⁶ While the impact of these groups on the decisions of impresarios and managers is debatable, the support of the city's working-class patrons was necessary for the ventures to survive. As can be seen in the fate of several operatic experiments, the upper class alone was not sufficient to ensure the survival of an opera house. Owing to high production costs, every little bit of income counted, including the sale of tickets to the less "fashionable" segments of the auditorium.

⁷ Dizikes, *Opera in America*, 52.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

holders emerged as both patrons and consumers.⁹ This was not the case in the United States. At the same time that foreign-language operas premiered in New York City, the American government was undergoing a shift towards a more hands-off approach to governance embodied by the rise of Jacksonian democracy. This resulted in little regulation of the arts, a system that was highly praised by Lorenzo Da Ponte, but also meant no governmental patronage.¹⁰ As a result, opera was essentially left to fend for itself in the open market, leaving opera managers with the nearly impossible task of turning it into a financially solvent business.¹¹ American managers, in order to justify its existence, argued for opera's ability to improve American musical life and end European derision of American coarseness. Some even argued that it could alleviate the city's societal ills.¹²

For opera to serve as a tool of improvement there needed to be a new way of understanding and discussing music in a dramatic setting. The foundation for this development came by way of English ballad operas and presentations of plays with music. As Ahlquist notes, the increased importation of English-language ballad operas, particularly in the second decade of

⁹ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy From Cimarosa to Verdi: The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 49.

¹⁰ The local governments providing financial support of opera on the Italian peninsula began to regulate various aspects of the enterprise. These regulations included ensuring singers appeared, managing discipline at rehearsals, upholding fire precautions, maintaining costumes, limiting sloppiness in performance, curbing immorality, controlling posters and other printed materials, and preventing insubordination by theater personnel. *Ibid.*, 85–86.

¹¹ The impracticality of opera as a business was clearly on display once the old systems of Italian government were replaced after the 1861 Italian unification. The rapidly escalating ticket prices, which in some areas tripled within a decade, demonstrated the extent to which earlier governments had subsidized opera. In order to survive, opera houses needed financial support beyond ticket prices, which often could not cover all of the necessary expenses. *Ibid.*, 70.

¹² “Because music was believed to possess the esthetic power to improve an individual’s social and moral temper, elevating a community’s musical taste could enhance the progress of civilization toward universal rationality and refinement. Taste was thus a sign of morality.” Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 47.

the nineteenth century, familiarized New York audiences with the idea of music and drama presented in tandem. Many critics, however, viewed these works as mere entertainment rather than as examples of high culture in the vein of Shakespeare.¹³ This view changed with a new generation of music critics, who gave the musical portions of theatrical presentations more serious treatment. Music was now viewed as an integral feature of the overall drama.¹⁴ This growing critical respectability helped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of foreign, i.e., Italian, opera's appearance in the city, a form of drama that relied entirely on music to carry the dramatic weight, since much of the audience could not understand the Italian text.

Arriving at the Park Theatre in November 1825, the Garcia Company brought Italian-language opera to the city. Led by Manuel Garcia, his wife, Joaquina Briones, and their children, Manuel and Maria, the company also included Felix Angrisani, Paulo Rosich, Madame Barbieri, and Giovanni Crivelli.¹⁵ They had been enticed to New York by Dominick Lynch, a local vintner, who had purportedly been encouraged by Da Ponte, then Italian professor at Columbia University.¹⁶ The appearance of the company came at an opportune moment for the city, as it was in the process of asserting itself as the most significant center of culture in the United States. With the construction of Washington, D.C. as the nation's political capital, New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and later New Orleans were in a constant state of competition, each trying to outdo the others to become the cultural capital of the nation.¹⁷ In Ahlquist's description, the

¹³ Ahlquist notes how music was often lumped with dance as a "trivial" and "unintellectual" pursuit unworthy of the new Republic. *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ Dizikes, *Opera in America*, 5.

¹⁶ *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "New York," by Irving Kolodin, et al., accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

¹⁷ In a review of the second performance of *Don Giovanni*, the *American*—quoting from Philadelphia's *National Gazette*—made sure to note that visitors had been arriving from "Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore" to see the opera in New York City. In the review, the

importation of foreign-language opera was part of a larger “spirit of improvement” that marked the period and led to a series of important civic developments, most notably the Erie Canal.¹⁸ For New York City, the introduction of foreign-language opera was another step in the process of shaping the city into the “Paris of the New World,” an idea first propounded by James Hardie.¹⁹ With the appearance of the Philharmonic Society of New York (1842) and other musical societies in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, including the Sacred Music Society (1823) and the Musical Institute (1844), the city was preparing to use music as a means of demonstrating its cultural superiority and to establish a link to the cultural capitals of Europe.

Yet, there was a fear, among certain circles, that New York was importing foreign cultural offerings too quickly. An illustrative example of this apprehension comes by way of a quote from the *United States Literary Gazette*, which appeared in the *American*, concerning the appearance of the Garcia Company:

The introduction of the Italian Opera in the United States is certainly an epoch of great interest in the history of music in our country, and one which the most enthusiastic votaries of the art could hardly have anticipated during the lives of the present generation. We have our fears, indeed, that the result of the experiment may prove, that it has been prematurely made; and that instead of promoting, it may retard the progress of music among us.²⁰

The writer worries that the failure of the Garcia Company would only serve to justify the stereotypes of American ignorance, cultural backwardness, and greed that seemed to abound in the minds of many contemporary Europeans. Opera represented more than just musical entertainment. It represented the cultural prestige needed to ensure the United States became a

Philadelphia paper expressed the desire for the Garcia Company to leave New York City for Philadelphia, noting that the only way for the opera to become truly successful in the United States was for it to become “ambulatory.” *New-York American*, 21 June 1826, 2.

¹⁸ Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 40–45.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁰ “Italian Opera,” *New-York American*, 10 March 1826, 2.

great nation. The article goes on to invoke the general spirit of “improvement”—noted by Ahlquist—that was in the air during the first decade of the nineteenth century: “the spirit of our age is one of enterprize [*sic*] and improvement, and it is employed about objects highly important to the public, and deeply interesting to individuals.”²¹ This spirit, though, was reserved for those things that were found “useful” or that could advance the “refinements and elegancies of life,” not the “liberal arts,” or at least the arts beyond architecture, which was admired for its utilitarian value.²² If the United States wanted to appear alongside the great powers, then it would need more than economic or political might: “The success of the Opera in every country in which it has been introduced, has been proportional to the progress of the people in refinement and cultivation.”²³ The danger came in dismissing opera—and art in general—as mere amusement: “the amusements of any society are indications of its character, and they have a reciprocal action upon that character.”²⁴ If the United States wanted to be a land of cultured, intellectual citizens possessing a good national character, then it needed to support a culture, such as opera, that instilled these ideals. As the *Evening Post* stated, “we cannot doubt the good taste of the city will bear out in it . . . It remains with the public to give [the Garcia Company] when they shall appear, such a reception as shall prove that young as we are, refined taste and generous patronage, are native to the soil.”²⁵

On 29 November 1825, the Garcia Company opened its season with *Il barbiere de Siviglia*. To prepare for this new genre, the theater had raised ticket prices throughout the house

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Italian Opera,” *New-York Evening Post*, 9 November 1825, 2.

with the exception of the gallery.²⁶ This increase in prices was likely meant to help offset the steep costs of opera, but it also served to show audiences that this was a special event. By charging more, the Park indicated a higher level of prestige. Unlike European halls, some of which were dedicated exclusively to opera, the Park had to demonstrate that opera was something “higher” than the other performances it offered. Authorities in Naples would not even allow matinees at San Carlo for fear of “cheapening” the theater.²⁷ The Park, however, like many theaters in the city, was home to a variety of entertainments catering to an array of audiences. The price of admission indicated that operatic performances stood apart. Furthermore, in an effort to alleviate the customary rush for seats and to imbue the evening with a sense of decorum, the Park allowed patrons to reserve seats in the pit. The Park, likely out of financial concern, also began to sell season tickets, which provided a base of money upfront and eased some of the apprehension over the unknown appeal of opera among the city’s audiences.²⁸ Regardless of whether or not people continued to appear night after night, the Park could rely, at least partly, on this financial foundation.

Understandably, this first exposure to non-English language opera gave rise to a great deal of excitement and confusion. In the many articles written to prepare New Yorkers for the upcoming performances, several critics chose to frame opera as a symbol of fashion, cultural education, and a vehicle of civic pride. In the weeks leading up to the Garcia Company’s

²⁶ Even in Italy, there was a degree of resistance against raising the ticket prices for the cheapest section, which housed the lowest level of society. As Rosselli notes, this could have been out of a fear of pricing out this segment of the population or a more general anxiety over upsetting this rowdy group, who were not afraid to express their opinion in a public fashion. Rosselli, *Industry*, 70.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁸ Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 50–51.

premiere, the local papers provided tips for behavior and clothing.²⁹ When the opening night finally arrived, the audience displayed a code of conduct, dress, and behavior that had been squarely laid out to them by the press. There were many, though, who found this quest for “fashion” absurd. The *National Advocate* published an anecdote on “opera cloaks” that served as a tongue-in-cheek indictment of the obsessive “fashionability” of the opera. In the article, Joe, a clerk for a clothing store, is tasked with advertising a shipment of ladies’ silk cloaks. After several attempts, Joe finds no success: “The fair creatures (meaning the ladies of course) approached—looked at them—tossed them—tumbled them, and turned up their provoking little noses.”³⁰ Attending the opera one evening, Joe was struck with an idea:

Joe’s head being full of the opera—the divine opera, wrote out in fair and legible characters, *Opera Cloaks—a bran [sic] new importation, &c.* Next morning, Joe was standing as usual behind the counter, and, behold! a blue eyed beauty came in—“have you any *opera cloaks*, sweet sir?” Joe down with the opera cloaks, and *Blue-eye* fitted herself in a trice, and paid the price without a single grudge. Another fair lady came in—“you have opera cloaks” said she. “To be sure we have” said Joe. Away went another opera cloak, and Joe laid violent hands on the cash. By this time many others came in, and it was—“have you any opera cloaks?” “have you any opera cloaks?” until the whole importation was gone, and Joe had secured the proceeds in the till.³¹

Blinded by the fashion of anything labeled “opera,” New Yorkers were desperate to prove their membership to this elite club. For its detractors, this anecdote corroborated their belief that opera was a genre of pretension, rather than art.

One of the other principal complaints against Italian opera was the unnaturalness of the endeavor. The debate played out in a series of “letters to the editor” that appeared in the *National*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 52–53.

³⁰ “Opera Cloaks – an anecdote,” *National Advocate*, 18 January 1826, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Advocate over the course of several days in January 1826, just a few months into the Garcia Company's season. In the first letter, "Will B. Fashionable" notes:

I have visited the Italian opera twice, and am unable to obtain any of those exquisite sensations, which the fashionables so boldly declare they receive at these Italian performances. Pray, Mr. Editor, do give me some light on this subject. I am really fond of good music; in fact, there is nothing more pleasant to me than the harmony produced by the human voice, accompanied by fine sentiments couched in elegant language. When I visit the opera, I see all the fashionables endeavoring to look as if they understood the singing and were delighted; and at stated periods, on a signal from some five or six prominent characters, all unite lauding and cheering, the same as if they really understood the cause, or had received some portion of the exquisite . . . to me, the whole business appears to be a hum-bug . . . it appears unnatural to *sing* a play . . . now it appears that it is exquisite to *sing a play*; —to sing when you laugh, or when you cry; when you fight, or when you are making love declarations—and to cap the climax, and make it still more delightful, it must be in a foreign language. I *beg* you, Mr. Editor, to give me the important secret of understanding this refined pleasure, and I will ever after be with very great affection, an exquisite admirer of every thing unnatural.³²

On the following day, the *National Advocate* included some of the letters written in response to Will B. Fashionable's initial inquiry. In the view of "Carlos Candid," the attitude of Will B. Fashionable was the result of his own ineptitude.

I know Will B. Fashionable much better than you probable [*sic*] do, and I dare be sworn he is the self same [*sic*] man of refined taste who almost fell asleep one evening in the centre of the pit near my left elbow. He pretend [*sic*] to taste in Italian music! He would do much better at adding up a sum in addition, for I would not venture any thing [*sic*] so far as the Rule of Three with him. If I am not mistaken it was during the second representation of *Tancredi* . . . he came in, sat down, and listened—and because the rest of the house would not applaud when he rapped the bench with his stick, he got into a great rage, and was determined to blow up the opera and all the Garcias together . . . Indeed, my dear Mr. Editor, Will B. Fashionable is altogether a disappointed man in the way of opera

³² The Editor made sure to include a disclaimer at the bottom of this letter indicating that Will B. Fashionable did not represent the views of the paper in this matter, while also offering his own critique of the author's criticism: "Mr. Fashionable must be also told that the Italian is by no means an unintelligent language . . . if our correspondent cannot admire the recitative of Miss Garcia . . . we sincerely pity his taste." "Mr. Editor," *National Advocate*, 27 January 1826, 2.

approbation, and the sooner he turns his attention towards circus amusements the better for his good sense and capacity.³³

As he goes on to write, this purported Will B. Fashionable was all too willing to “clap his hands, thump the benches, and roar out bravo” at the most seemingly inopportune moments.³⁴ A central concern for *Candid* was the distinction in decorum between opera and other theatrical performances. While many of those in the audience desired to act as though they were at a normal theatrical event, seen in the behavior of Will B. Fashionable, others felt as though the opera warranted a certain level of respect. A few days later, Will B. Fashionable responded to the letters written about him, particularly the one by *Candid*. In his response—which is worth quoting at length—the author covers many of the key issues surrounding the importation of opera into New York City:

Mr. *Candid* declares he knows me to be the same person who one evening fell fast asleep in the centre of the Pit; and in the next sentence he says that I “came in, sat down, and *listened*,” and that I got in a great rage because the rest of the house would not applaud when I cried “bravo, bravo” . . . I am willing to confess that they are all correct, provided I can only be satisfied that at that period I was *entranced* with musical powers, and was then enjoying the exquisites. . . . There is however another small difficulty in the way, but which I presume can be very rationally accounted for by imagining that the powers of the opera had taken effect before I entered the theatre, and that is, I am not conscious of having been in the Pit, or taken a seat there for years past. I believe it the best place for intellectual enjoyment, but it is not so genteel and fashionable as the boxes, and therefore I have long since avoided it. By the bye, I wish the managers would raise the price of Pit Tickets, then we could make it fashionable to appear in the Pit and give some *tone* to the place.³⁵

At this point, Fashionable launches into his biggest criticism of opera by referring to the state of opera in England, noting the class distinctions that had arisen. His primary concern lies in opera’s status as an art for the upper class.

³³ “Opera Squabbles,” *National Advocate*, 28 January 1826, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “For the National Advocate,” *National Advocate*, 31 January 1826, 2.

The more I have reflected on this subject, the more satisfied I am, that the introduction of the Italian opera is calculated to introduce into our society a degree of affectation, almost bordering on the ridiculous. To represent the various passions and emotions of ideal scenes of life, both comic and tragic, by the same monotonous musical strain, is striking at the very root of our common sense; and for one to approve of it, requires something more substantial than the mere fact that the gentry of England are its patrons and admirers. I am willing to concede, that the Garcias are not destitute of great talents and acquirements, and go as far to make an unnatural system palatable as any others could; but with all their qualifications, they could not for one week sustain an Italian opera in this country, if there was not a great predisposition among the would-be gentry, to ape the follies of the English nobility.³⁶

Will B. Fashionable's fear regarding the fashion and pretensions of the audience would come to define the place of opera within the cultural and social life of both the city and the country.

For many, there was a clear disconnect between the principles associated with opera and those of the Jacksonian-era United States.³⁷ Thomas Wignell, a Philadelphian theater owner, argued "the theater in a country like ours must depend entirely for permanent success, not upon individuals, however powerful, not upon clubs, cliques, factions, or parties, but upon the public alone."³⁸ For Wignell, the fate of the theater in the United States relied on the encouragement and participation of the entire public, rather than the inherited, elite ruling class of Europe. Opera, therefore, needed to be open to all, available to any who desired to see it. It would not do to have opera presented in New York City with the aristocratic associations that seemed so closely intertwined with the genre. This was partly demonstrated by the Garcia Company's experience at the Park. As the *National Advocate* noted, to revive the dwindling attendance rates towards the end of the season, the Park lowered the ticket prices of the second tier, which brought in an equally "respectable," if not quite as wealthy, segment of the population and

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 118–19.

³⁸ Dizikes, *Opera in America*, 62–63.

helped to buoy sales.³⁹ This openness to a broader public, though, ought to be taken with a grain of salt. While the theater was ostensibly opened to all, in reality it was opened to those who had the income available to afford a ticket, which was often priced higher than the normal ticket rates for spoken drama. There was still a significant portion of the city that was priced out of such a luxury. Any new operatic ventures had to walk a fine line between appearing open to the public and offering an important cultural education to the masses, while also providing a sense of social superiority to the wealthy patrons who supplied an important source of income necessary to keep the house afloat. While Europe had its social distinctions based on a rigid system of inherited privilege, the United States was developing its own system of privilege based on money.⁴⁰

At the end of the Garcia Company's first—and only—season, the *National Advocate* took the opportunity to summarize its successes and failures:

We all remember with what an overwhelming crowd of beauty and fashion the first opera was welcomed. . . . The gay audience on that night, however, showed nothing but the symptoms of curiosity and wonder. There might be a few to whom the opera was no stranger, but they were lost in the crowd, as a single bottle of champagne would be at a corporation dinner. The second and third, and several other nights of the same fascinating master pieces [*sic*] of Rossini's brought good houses.—But as yet it was still an experiment; wonder, surprise and curiosity were the prevailing feelings. . . . Our promiscuous audiences had not acquired yet a sufficient taste for their refinements. They were attended by the *ultras*, and genteel French and Spanish residents, but by few others. . . .

At last a brighter day dawns upon the Italian scene. Garcia became convinced that his operas would not succeed. The reformation of the opera commenced, and the powerful genius of Mozart in Don Giovanni brought all our fashionables within the Park Theatre once more. The prices of the second tier were lowered; and another class equally respectable and tasteful with the *ultras*, but not with such heavy pockets, made their nightly appearance in that quarter. The opera was now revived. . . . Strangers poured into our city and swelled the number of visitors. Independent of this however, our own citizens had their taste awakened, fixed, and now it has become permanent.⁴¹

³⁹ “The Italian Opera,” *National Advocate*, 12 August 1826, 2.

⁴⁰ Dizikes, *Opera in America*, 63.

⁴¹ “The Italian Opera,” *National Advocate*, 12 August 1826, 2.

After this introduction, there were subsequent attempts made to ensure that opera would remain a permanent facet of the city's cultural life.⁴² The cost of losing opera once the Garcia Company departed became a point of great distress among some of the press, as evidenced by the *National Advocate*:

During the time it has been among us the opera has received unequal attendance. Sometimes the house would be crowded and again it would be nearly empty. We are certain, however, that these inequalities arose not from the caprice of the public taste or the prevalence of any other amusement for a time. Since the introduction of the opera the taste for it has steadily increased. This is too well known to every person in New-York to need proof. The elements of the same taste may be found in Baltimore, Philadelphia and Boston. In some of these cities, perhaps the love of music—of refined music—throbs with a higher sensation than it can do in such a bustling, banking, brokering place as New York. . . . What is the reason then that some men of weight, character, taste and fashion do not step forward simultaneously in all these cities, including our own, for the purpose of combining to establish a permanent Italian Opera among us? . . . The fashionables of one city (even of New-York) are perhaps unequal to the task of offering sufficient inducements for the present excellent troop to remain among us. Let them unite together in these different cities, and insure at least the ordinary expenses attending these superior exhibitions. . . . How different the opening and supposed closing night of the opera in this city! Then it was all novelty and wonder—now all understanding and delight. There was the same crowd—the same fashion—the same applause, but with the last there was blended those feelings of regret that so much talent should be lost to us, at that very moment too, when we had learned how to value—how to relish its great attractions.⁴³

Perhaps inspired by this same desire to not move backwards, in 1826, less than a year after the Garcia Company's first performance, patrons of opera banded together to form a permanent opera company within the city. This venture, known as the New-York Opera Company, soon collapsed with very little to show for its effort. Despite this failure, the New-

⁴² The Garcia Company, minus Maria, who stayed behind, departed New York City for Mexico in November 1826. In the next year, the Park was home to a brief two-month presentation of French opera by a New Orleans based troupe that opened on 12 July 1827 with a performance of Isouard's *Cendrillon*. *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "New York," by Irving Kolodin, et al., accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

⁴³ "The Opera," *National Advocate*, 2 October 1826, 2.

York Opera Company established a default pattern for bringing opera into New York City that would continue into the twentieth century: wealthy individuals would join together to build an opera house and then hire a manager to run the enterprise.⁴⁴ It had become apparent with the Garcia experiment that opera needed additional support beyond the open market.⁴⁵ Although there may have been financial aspirations underlying these ventures, most were formed in the hopes of maintaining the cultural and social prestige that was seen to belong with opera. The continual fear was that if opera in the city failed, then the stereotypical image of American ignorance and cultural ineptitude would prevail. Some of the companies that were formed in the decades following the Garcia Company's performances included the Italian Opera House (1833–35), formed by an Italian Opera Association built from a group of New York City business and civic leaders; Palmo's Opera House (1844–47); Astor Place Opera House (1847–52); and the most successful of these early ventures, the Academy of Music (1854–84). These repeated attempts at bringing opera to the city demonstrate the determination by many New Yorkers to finally mold New York into a cultural capital for the nation. Each venture, however, once more brought into sharp focus the problems and risks attendant upon the business of opera in the American market.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 78.

⁴⁵ As the first season of the Garcia Company was coming to a close, the *American* presented the potential loss of opera to the city as not only a loss of a "rational and refined pleasure," but also a missed opportunity for tourist dollars. It was the hope of the *American* that the "lovers of music" and those of a more practical nature would work together to ensure that opera remained in the city. *New-York American*, 28 July 1826, 3.

⁴⁶ For a more detailed discussion of opera in New York City during the period between the Garcia Company and the formation of the Metropolitan Opera House, see Jennifer C. H. Jones Wilson, "The Impact of French Opera in Nineteenth-Century New York: The New Orleans French Opera Company, 1827–1845" (PhD dissertation, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2015); John Graziano, "An Opera for Every Taste: The New York Scene, 1862–1869," in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, ed. John Graziano (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 2006), 253–72; John Graziano, "The

At the same time that some New Yorkers were trying to establish foreign-language opera in the city, there were other important musical changes afoot. In 1848, the Germania Orchestra arrived on a tour that eventually turned into a mass immigration, following in the footsteps of so many Germans that came to America in the years following the 1848 uprisings. With this surge in German-speaking immigration, the ranks of the Philharmonic Society of New York were increasingly filled by German immigrants, who performed a predominately German repertoire. This marked a crucial shift in the city's musical demographics.⁴⁷ For the first time, the rising German-speaking population actively, and successfully, began to assert its influence on the city's musical life—as demonstrated by a short German-language opera season in 1845.⁴⁸ Although this decade witnessed a renewed effort to bring Italian opera into the city, it also saw the rise of German musical culture, which profoundly affected the latter decades of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ One outcome from this flourishing of public concert life was an intensification of the process of elevating music within the cultural esteem of New Yorkers. As a result, the intellectual and cultural value of music—the cornerstone in the upcoming debate concerning the musical value of German opera—was put into place.

Reception of Verdi in Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York,” in *Verdi 2001*, eds. Roberta Montemorra Marvin, Marco Marica, and Fabrizio Della Seta (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2003), 811–22.

⁴⁷ Ahlquist, *Democracy*, 130.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ As an example, the first opera by Richard Wagner heard in the city was *Tannhäuser*, performed on 4 April 1859, at the Stadttheater.

Chapter 2

The “German Years” and the Salvation of the Metropolitan Opera House: 1884–1891

After the closing of the Astor Place Opera House in 1852, the Academy of Music stood as the sole dedicated opera house in the city.¹ That remained true until 1883, when the Metropolitan Opera House, located at Broadway and 39th Street, opened on 22 October, with a performance of Gounod’s *Faust*.² The impetus behind this new venture was a mixture of money, fashion, and social grandstanding—unsurprising given the history of opera in the city. In her memoir, Lilli Lehmann (1848–1929) anecdotally noted that the opening of the Met was the result of an unnamed millionaire, whose wife, after not receiving the box that she had anticipated at the Academy, urged her husband to form a new house.³ Irving Kolodin (1908–1988), in his history of the Metropolitan, identifies this millionaire and his wife as Mr. and Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt.⁴ Despite their status as one of New York City’s wealthiest families, the Vanderbilts were relatively new in comparison to the “Knickerbocker” gentry—the old, at least by American standards, money, who maintained a virtual monopoly on the extremely limited boxes provided by the Academy.⁵ Unable to enter into the upper echelons of society represented by those

¹ It was not, however, the only place to see opera. There were other smaller venues that continued to present operatic performances, but these theaters presented opera alongside other theatrical offerings. *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. “New York,” by Irving Kolodin, et al., accessed January 16, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>.

² Quaintance Eaton, *The Miracle of the Met: An Informal History of the Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1967* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), 43.

³ Lilli Lehmann, *Mein Weg* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1920), 330.

⁴ Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

boxes, Vanderbilt, along with several other “new money” millionaires—including prominent names like Warren, Astor, Wetmore, Rockefeller, Morgan, Roosevelt, and Bennett—decided to build their own house with their own boxes.⁶ The catalyst for this rupture had been brewing since the 1820s. The schism resulted from an American definition of social distinction based on wealth, which allowed for the upper class to grow exponentially, unlike in Europe, where titles were passed on and strictly controlled. This all came to a head when the city’s social aristocracy outgrew the limited space of the old Academy. Those that were now left out of the old social privilege embodied by the opera’s boxes decided to use their wealth to create their own social prestige.⁷

A meeting was called between the directors of the Academy and those that felt shut out by the house’s current policies in an effort to “consolidat[e] the interests of both parties.”⁸ This preliminary meeting only served to spark rumors that a new house was on

⁶ Eaton, *Miracle of the Met*, 1.

⁷ “[T]here is not a sufficient number of choice seats and boxes to accommodate the large and increasing class of patrons who are eager to obtain the best seats and willing to pay correspondingly choice prices for them so that they are accommodated. A number of gentlemen of wealth and influence, not especially interested in the stock or management of the Academy, have recently had under consideration a project for the construction and establishment of a new and superb opera-house, among the number being William H. Vanderbilt, John J. Astor, Goelet, Roosevelt, and Frederick Stevens. Under the stockholders’ management of the Academy of Music 200 of the best seats in the house are allotted to them free for opera nights, and as they generally make use of their privilege, either for their own enjoyment or for the complimentary delectation of their families and intimate friends, these 200 seats are tolerably certain to be occupied. As a consequence, many wealthy and influential parties are at times unable to find suitable accommodation, and hence the movement for the new building.” “The Next Opera Season,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1880, 5.

⁸ As part of the meeting, a compromise was initially made to “add 26 new and elegant private boxes of the same capacity and description as the present proscenium boxes. To do this it would be necessary to set back the outer line of the balcony circle 18 feet, leaving the space beneath so cleared open to the dome. In the space on the parquette floor the boxes would be constructed, leaving the occupants ample opportunity to see and be seen, and giving them an ample range of view over the entire house, the line of private

the way. Just a few days later, on 7 April, the *Times* reported on a meeting that had happened the day before. At this meeting, the “wealthy gentlemen” that were interested in leaving the Academy met to discuss the finances of this potential venture. It was determined that \$600,000 would be necessary for the endeavor to move forward and that this sum had been guaranteed by “60 gentlemen of wealth and influence.”⁹ The next day, 8 April, the *Times* published another article discussing further details of the proposal. Included was a copy of the application for articles of incorporation. In addition to the names of those involved in the process—including George Peabody Wetmore, George Henry Warren, Robert Goelet, James A. Roosevelt, and William K. Vanderbilt—there were also some further details: “*First*—The name of the said corporation is to be the Metropolitan Opera-House Company of New-York, Limited. *Second*—The object and nature of the business for which said corporation is to be formed is for the business of encouraging and cultivating a taste for music, literature, and the arts, and for erecting and maintaining and renting a building, or buildings, for that purpose, and that the locality of the said business is to be in the City of New-York.”¹⁰ The proposed construction of the Metropolitan, as with every venture since the Italian Opera Company, was framed as a

boxes being thus extended from the proscenium boxes on one side all the way around until they joined with those on the other side. This change would add not only to the paying capacity of the Academy and to the supply of best places, but would increase the interior beauty of the house very largely.” *Ibid.*

⁹ “The New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1880, 5; There was some concern over this proposed amount of \$600,000, which did not seem nearly enough to support the building of a new house. In response, George Henry Warren replied, “we do not intend . . . to spend much on external decoration, but to put the money into the necessary features of an opera house. It would be possible, of course, to build a house that would cost 15,000,000 francs, like the Grand Opera at Paris; but we do not propose to do that’.” “Pushing on the New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 9 April 1880, 8.

¹⁰ “The Proposed New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1880, 5.

means of “encouraging and cultivating” the arts and culture.¹¹ In an interview with the *New-York Tribune*, James A. Roosevelt (1825–1898) summarized the construction of the new house as a matter of convenience: “It is needed. The Academy of Music is not large enough to hold all the people that wish to go to the opera, and it is, moreover, too far down town—too far away from the opera-going public.”¹² It was noted that there would be sixty boxes sold at a price of \$10,000, thereby ensuring the proposed \$600,000 estimated to be needed, and that these boxes would be distributed “as nearly as possible equally.”¹³ The certificate of incorporation was returned from Albany on 10 April, laying the groundwork for the process of building the new house.¹⁴ On 28 April, the company was formally organized at Delmonico’s.¹⁵ It was at this meeting that the by-laws were put

¹¹ As noted in the description of the company outlined in the *Times*, the Metropolitan Opera House Company was a real estate venture. The company would construct the opera house and then rent it to managers.

¹² “Local Miscellany,” *New-York Tribune*, 8 April 1880, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ The company was required by law to have at least 31 subscribers. At the time that the certificate of incorporation was received on April 10, there were 25 subscribers, each buying 100 shares—of 6,000 total shares—and paid in 10 per cent. According to the *Times*, the 25 initial subscribers were: George Henry Warren, James A. Roosevelt, P. G. Haven, William K. Vanderbilt, George Peabody Wetmore, Robert Goelet, Ogden Goelet, G. Henry Warren, H. W. Gray, C. Fellowes, William H. Vanderbilt, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Hamilton McK. Twombly, A. W. Sherman, Luther Kountze, J. Pierpont Morgan, E. P. Fabbri, Bradley Martin, W. A. Tillinghast, J. N. A. Griswold, James H. Stebbins, José F. De Navarro, R. T. Wilson, George F. Baker, and William M. Rhineland. “The Proposed New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 11 April 1880, 5.

The *Herald* noted that John Jacob Astor and Mr. Van Hoffman had been floated as potential subscribers to the enterprise; however, the Academy was adamant that the two men were stockholders of the Academy and not interested in the Metropolitan. “The New Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 11 April 1880, 10.

On April 15, however, Astor was included on a list of new subscribers to the venture, having bought 100 shares (at \$100 each) of the new company. “The New Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 15 April 1880, 4.

¹⁵ Present at this meeting, as appearing in the *Times*, were J. A. Roosevelt, G. G. Havens, C. K. Vanderbilt, J. H. Stebbins, G. H. Warren, Henry Clews, G. P. Wetmore, Robert Goelet, Ogden Goelet, C. Fellowes, H. W. Gray, Luther Kountz, E. P. Fabbri, Bradley

into place and the various positions within the company were elected, including the Board of Directors, who were essentially in charge of running the company, electing the Executive Committee, and holding regular monthly meetings.¹⁶ The ultimate purpose of the Metropolitan was clear, regardless of any rhetoric about bringing culture and taste to the city; the house was built for wealthy New Yorkers to buy social respectability. For the price of 100 shares, at \$100 a share, one could purchase a box at the house, regardless of “name.”¹⁷ When asked about the new venture and its effect on his own house, the Academy of Music, James H. Mapleson (1830–1901) stated the situation as plainly as he could: “The Academy of Music is in the hands of the oldest families of wealth in this city, and they naturally feel inclined to adhere to it. The new opera house is being built by men whose fortunes are of more recent growth.”¹⁸

Once the company was officially drawn up, the actual construction of the house met with some complications, particularly in regard to location and expense. Although

Martin, J. N. A. Griswold, R. T. Wilson, G. T. Baker, J. F. Navarro, W. Rhineland, B. Winthrop, David King, Jr., and E. A. Wickes. In the proceedings, J. A. Roosevelt was elected Chairman and G. G. Havens was elected secretary. “The New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1880, 8.

¹⁶ The Board of Directors, which had to consist of at least seven people, was made up of James A. Roosevelt, George Henry Warren, William K. Vanderbilt, George Peabody Wetmore, G. G. Haven, Robert Goelet, E. P. Fabbri, George Fearing, John N. A. Griswold, David King, Jr., Johnston Livingston, L. P. Morton, and Buchanan Winthrop. The Board of Directors also elected John N. A. Griswold as President, George Henry Warren as Vice-President, E. P. Fabbri as Treasurer, and the Executive Committee, consisting of James A. Roosevelt, G. G. Haven, Robert Goelet, William K. Vanderbilt, and George Peabody Wetmore. *Ibid.*

¹⁷ The complete details of the proposed plan, including a discussion of the auditorium and its decorations was detailed in the *Herald* on 7 October 1880. The chosen architect was Josiah Cleveland Cady. In this description of the proposed house, the *Herald* made note of the electric lights, ventilation system, and the elaborate fire prevention plans that were put in place. “The New Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 7 October 1880, 4.

¹⁸ “The Opera Season,” *New-York Tribune*, 9 October 1882, 5.

several locations were considered as potential sites for the new house, including Vanderbilt Square—the area directly opposite Grand Central Terminal—the company ultimately decided on the block between Broadway and Seventh Avenue, bounded by Thirty-ninth and Fortieth Streets.¹⁹ After purchasing the site, however, the company immediately faced a number of obstacles that blocked construction, including a drawn out eviction process that resulted from the death of one of the property owners.²⁰ Rumors suggested that the entire enterprise would be abandoned and that the committee would resort to its original role as a real estate company by constructing apartment houses.²¹

¹⁹ The reason given in the *Times* for not purchasing the Vanderbilt Square location concerned a clause that had been inserted in the current leases forbidding the erection of any building other than residences—supposedly enacted to ensure that another train station was not built directly across the street in competition. While this could have been overcome, it was deemed too costly and time consuming. “A Site for the Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 9 March 1881, 5.

The deeds for the purchased location on Broadway were filed in the Register’s office on 12 April 1881. As reported in the *Times*, the price was \$597,700 and included the 20 building lots that were located on the plot. It was anticipated that construction would begin on 1 May 1881, and last for approximately 18 months. “The New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1881, 8.

²⁰ The *Tribune* laid the problem at the feet of W. A. Pietch, a tenant at Fortieth Street and Seventh Avenue, who himself was subletting portions of the property to a butcher and another tenant. Pietch, who owned a marble and granite works, argued that he warranted a \$22,500 bonus for the breaking of his lease, further claiming that his subtenants demanded a total of \$8,000 for the breaking of their own leases. “The New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 March 1881, 8.

²¹ By March 1882, the costs had grown considerably compared to the original projections. The estimates had risen from the original sum of \$600,000 to \$1,050,000 in February of 1881. Later on, the projected cost was increased to \$1,250,000 before further ballooning to \$1,525,000. The price of the boxes had also risen to \$15,000—from the earlier price of \$10,000—although James A. Roosevelt was quick to ensure that they would not increase to the rumored \$23,000. “The Opera-House Scheme,” *New York Times*, 14 March 1882, 1; “The New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 March 1881, 8; “The Proposed New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 15 March 1882, 8.

At a company meeting held at the end of March 1882, it was ultimately decided to continue with the construction, at a vote of 37 to 14, regardless of the rising costs. At that meeting, the new estimated total was put at \$1,676,000—if the corner lots of the property were left as is—or \$1,876,000 if they were developed. “Events in the Metropolis,” *New*

When asked about the increasing costs of the project and its hope for success, Roosevelt—who had been elected as the company’s second president—stressed that the ultimate goal of the enterprise was not to make money. As quoted in the *Times*: “we never expected that it would pay. None of us went into it with the idea that we would ever get our money back, but simply for the enjoyment to be derived from having a first-class opera-house. No opera-house in the world has ever paid as an investment, and none ever will pay.”²² In April 1882, work finally began to pick up on the construction of the house.²³ By October the building was beginning to take shape. The *Herald* reported that the outside and interior walls of the auditorium had reached the level of the balcony and that the stage portion of the building was now sixty feet above street level.²⁴ Speculation began as to who would lead the new house. Early on, Herbert F. Gye (1844–1906), manager of the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, was floated as a possibility;

York Times, 28 March 1882, 8; “The Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 28 March 1882, 10.

The *Tribune* provided a detailed breakdown of the projected costs as provided by a special report of the Building Committee, including individual estimated costs for materials, plumbing, lighting, and decorations. “The New Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 28 March 1882, 5.

²² It should be noted that not everyone who became involved in the enterprise might have shared this sentiment. As is true of many things, people became involved in the house for varying reasons, both personally and financially. As the president of the company, however, Roosevelt’s opinion stands as an important marker of attitudes within the organization. While he may have been making these comments to lower public expectations and save face if the house proved to be financially disastrous, he also points to one of the important dichotomies regarding operatic business ventures in New York City since the Garcia Company first brought Italian opera to the city in the 1820s: the pursuit of fashion—couched in the name of “culture”—and the desire to thrive as a business. “The Opera-House Scheme,” *New York Times*, 14 March 1882, 1.

²³ “The New Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 23 April 1882, 9.

²⁴ It was estimated at this point that the entire structure would be roofed by 1 December 1882, and that the house would be ready for the season beginning in October 1883. “The New Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 8 October 1882, 13.

however, this seemed unlikely when it was reported that Gye's Royal Italian Opera and Mapleson's Her Majesty's Opera Company, the two major opera houses in London, had essentially joined forces. Mapleson, also the manager of the Academy of Music, had signed a contract requiring him to forgo presenting Italian opera in New York City at any house other than the Academy for five years.²⁵ The fear, apparently, was that Gye and Mapleson would team up and form a monopoly.²⁶

At the end of the year, the company announced Henry E. Abbey (1846–1896) as the manager for the Metropolitan's first season.²⁷ In an interview with the *Times*, Abbey declared that the house would have its opening night on 22 October 1883 and feature a season of twenty different Italian operas, all produced with "a scale of grandeur that has never been equaled in the City."²⁸ As part of his plan for the year, Abbey laid out his ideal season:

I shall have a season of ten weeks in the Fall and Winter and a five weeks' season in the Spring. There will be no operatic representations during the month of January by the Italian company. The opera-house may then be used for balls, or for other entertainments if I choose, as I have absolute and entire control of the house for the single season for which I have

²⁵ "Italian Opera in New York," *New York Herald*, 8 October 1882, 13. In elucidating the situation to its readers, the *Herald* wrote a lengthy article on the subject, comparing the two managers and their "operatic campaigns" to the military ventures of the English in Egypt. "Sir Garnet Mapleson and Admiral Gye's Operatic Campaign," *New York Herald*, 10 October 1882, 8.

²⁶ "The New Opera House," *New York Herald*, 31 December 1882, 8.

²⁷ This contract was for one year with the option of renewal once the year was over. According to the contract, Abbey was given complete control over most aspects of the productions, including stage arrangements, costumes, the engagement of singers and orchestra, and the disposition of the building. It was reported that the choice of manager had been whittled down to Abbey and Herbert F. Gye, the representative of the Royal Italian Opera Company of London. "Mr. Abbey's Opera-House," *New York Times*, 31 December 1882, 7.

²⁸ Abbey assured the *Times* that the company would include Campanini, Nilsson, Del Puente, and Valleria as his principal quartet. *Ibid.*

secured it. During that season I shall certainly produce German opera and probably both French and English operas also.²⁹

Abbey's potential inclusion of German, French, and English operas was to be supplementary to the standard Italian-language repertoire. In an interview with the *Herald*, Abbey stated his intention to devote February and a portion of March to the presentation of German opera exclusively, which he proposed "to give in a manner equal to that of Italian opera."³⁰

Despite the fanfare surrounding the opening night performance of *Faust*, the first season of the Metropolitan Opera House was far from a success. As the season neared its conclusion in the early months of 1884, rumors began to fly in the local press regarding the house's finances. The situation was dire enough for the Met to reportedly ask its stockholders for more money: "there is bitter complaint on the part of a few of the stockholders in the opera house company because it is proposed to call upon them for \$3,500 apiece."³¹ Overall, the deficit was rumored to be in excess of \$200,000.³² By February, Abbey officially announced that he would not return for the 1884–85 season. This news left the city speculating whether or not the house would remain open.³³

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "The New Opera House," *New York Herald*, 31 December 1882, 7.

³¹ "Will Mr. Abbey Go Out?," *New York Sun*, 14 February 1884, 1.

³² Henry Krehbiel, the music critic for the *Tribune*—and someone that would eventually play an important part in the reception of Strauss's works in the city—published his account of the history of opera in the city, drawn from his own writings, reflections, and personal anecdotes, which was entitled *Chapters of Opera*—originally published in 1908, revised in 1911. In this work, he estimated the losses were closer to \$600,000, based on a letter from John B. Schoeffel, a partner of Abbey. Henry Edward Krehbiel, *Chapters of Opera* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1980), 91.

³³ Abbey's departure from the Met was on fairly amicable terms. Many commentators in the press made note that the problems Abbey faced at the Met were indicative of providing Italian opera in the city, not necessarily the result of his failed leadership. As a

As the months passed and the beginning of the next season approached, a number of candidates arose as potential replacements for Abbey. In March, Ernest Gye (1845–1900)—whose brother and partner at the Royal Italian Opera Company of London, Herbert, had briefly appeared as a potential candidate for manager the year before—was rumored to be the favored choice for the next manager. Examining his purported plans for the house, the press made note of Gye’s proposal to bring over a German company to alternate with the Italian one on successive nights. It was not greeted with enthusiasm: “The stockholders of the Metropolitan would not consent to such an arrangement. It would, in fact, be impracticable. German opera cannot be given at the same prices as Italian, and to have opera one night at \$5 a seat and the next night at \$8 was considered to be out of the question.”³⁴ While Abbey had also proposed to present German-language opera at the Met, his plan had been to present it during the off-season. To show German-language opera alternating with Italian-language opera was seen as a non-starter, both for practical and fashionable reasons. For one, it was viewed as inconvenient—and possibly confusing—to charge different admission prices on different nights of the week. This price difference was the product of the second issue, the fashionable quality of Italian opera, which supposedly demanded higher ticket prices. For some critics, it would not do to have fashionable Italian-language opera presented on one night followed by the less desirable German-language opera on the next. To solve the first problem—the issue of cost—the simple remedy would seem to have been to either lower the price of Italian

sign of this relative good will, a benefit was held for him in April to help offset some of the losses he suffered.

³⁴ “The Expected Impresario: Ernest Gye Probably to Manage the Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1884, 5.

opera admission, or to raise the cost of tickets for the German performances. This solution only worked if Italian and German opera were treated as equal. For many of the city's elite, Italian opera possessed a unique social cachet and the price, therefore, needed to reflect its status.³⁵ As a result, this early suggestion to diversify the musical offerings by combining the two languages into one season was quickly put to rest.

Despite the nearly weekly promise that Gye's contract had been approved and that the plans for the next season were virtually locked in place, by the summer it had become clear that his contract with the house would no longer come to fruition. At the beginning of August, just weeks before the season began, it was officially announced that Gye would not be coming.³⁶ The day following this announcement, the press offered its own ideas for bringing opera to the city and keeping the Metropolitan alive.³⁷ Among the many possibilities listed, the *New York Times* proposed bringing "a series of representations of German opera, and these, at popular prices, might draw passable audiences, at the sacrifice of the fashionable reputation of the house."³⁸ Although clearly

³⁵ The "Italian" and "German" labels generally referred to what language the opera was being performed in at the time, not necessarily its original language. There were instances in which works by German composers were performed in Italian translations and, as will be seen when German-language opera becomes the policy, performances in which the opposite was also true.

³⁶ "Metropolitan Opera House," *New York Times*, 2 August 1884, 8.

³⁷ It would later be revealed that Gye's London-based Royal Italian Opera House, which he had planned to bring with him to New York City and combine with the Metropolitan's company, was in serious financial difficulties. In discussing the reason behind Gye's contract falling through, George L. Rives noted, "[The financial difficulties] are not to be wondered at, for the season at Covent Garden was a wretched failure . . . the only occasions on which there were crowded houses were when Patti sang, and she sang very seldom. The fact is Italian opera has gone out of fashion, and the outlook for it is even worse in London than in this country." "Will There Be No Opera?," *New York Times*, 9 September 1884, 4.

³⁸ "Amusements: Operatic Prospects," *New York Times*, 3 August 1884, 6.

less than desirable, German opera could serve as a cheaper, last-ditch alternative to salvage the house. A choice had to be made between filling the seats and keeping the house financially afloat or maintaining the sophistication and exclusivity that came with Italian opera.

Later in August, the Metropolitan officially announced Leopold Damrosch (1832–1885), the German-born conductor and composer, as the next manager of the house. Although there had been virtually no mention of Damrosch prior to this, the announcement was met with surprisingly little fanfare.³⁹ In explaining the situation, the *Times* noted the procedure that went into choosing Damrosch:

After the failure of the negotiations with Mr. Gye, [the Metropolitan Opera House Directors] did really open communications with Col. Mapleson [manager of the Academy of Music], but after an examination of his contract with the Academy of Music they decided that its nature was such as to preclude the possibility of their entering into any arrangement with him. This seemed to put Italian opera out of the question, and hence the Directors turned their eyes toward German opera as the only alternative. Negotiations were opened with Dr. Leopold Damrosch, of this city, and these resulted finally in the selection of Dr. Damrosch as the Musical Director of the Metropolitan Opera House.⁴⁰

Immediately following the announcement, an effort was made to ensure New Yorkers that “unlike many of his fellow-countrymen and ‘men of progress,’ [Damrosch] has respect and admiration for the human voice and a thorough knowledge of its possibilities and requirements; and although he belongs to the advanced school of German musicians, there is reason to believe that he does not sympathize with the wild theories of the ultra-Wagnerites.”⁴¹ As the *Times* reassured its readers, there was no reason to fear the

³⁹ The *Times* likened it to “the victory of a ‘dark horse.’” “Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1884, 6.

⁴⁰ “German Opera at the New House,” *New York Times*, 14 August 1884, 4.

⁴¹ “Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1884, 6.

invasion of *Zukunftsmusik*. By September, Damrosch's intention to forgo Italian-language opera for an all-German season was a certainty and attention therefore turned to what exactly this meant for the city.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, the German American community embraced Damrosch's plan. The *Staats-Zeitung* saw the prospects for this venture as "not only favorable, but rather positively brilliant."⁴³ For those less convinced of its potential for success, an early concern was whether or not German-language opera was actually less expensive than its Italian counterpart. As evidenced by decades of experience, Italian opera was notoriously costly. On top of the costumes and sets, there was the added expense of the stars themselves, whose enormous salaries were often the source of much speculation, rumor, and gossip. When asked if he would take over the Metropolitan from Abbey in the period before Damrosch had been chosen, Cleofonte Campanini (1860–1919) dodged the question by offering his opinion on the Italian star system, "the stars get too much money entirely. I wish the stars would go to the deuce, myself as well. Why, it is a perfect shame the large salaries they command. Just think of Patti getting \$5,000 a night. It is enormous! The whole company have to work just for the stars and the manager."⁴⁴ This image of the over-paid diva was popularly viewed as a problem exclusive to Italian-language opera.⁴⁵

⁴² "Dr. Damrosch's Plans," *New York Times*, 14 September 1884, 8.

⁴³ "Musik," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herald*, 19 November 1884, 4.

While it is true that there were several German-language newspapers in print in New York City during this period, I will be focusing on the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herald*, which had the largest circulation and catered to the widest swath of the German American community. This broad audience provided the paper with a viewpoint that was less narrow than some of its competitors, which served smaller segments of the German American community.

⁴⁴ "Campanini Talks About Stars," *New York Times*, 24 February 1884, 1.

⁴⁵ The issue of the cost of the star Italian opera singers became the focus of much of the coverage over the change in management. In a comment that was typical of the coverage,

In presenting German-language opera as a cheaper alternative to its Italian counterpart, Damrosch and his supporters relied on this cliché of the overblown, decadent Italian system. The reality was a bit more complicated. Although stars like Adelina Patti (1843–1919) were making some of the highest salaries of the time, the most famous German singers were often paid comparable amounts. George L. Rives (1849–1917), one of the directors of the Metropolitan at the time—as well as a descendant of some of New York City’s most distinguished lines, including the Schuyler, Van Cortlandt, and Delancey families—openly questioned the practicality of an all-German season on these grounds:

The principal German artists have all of them regular engagements, besides being the recipients of Government pensions, and they would not be willing to come to this country unless their forfeits were paid for them. I had occasion while abroad to inquire into the chances of engaging a celebrated German artist. I found that she was getting a salary of about \$6,500 a month and, besides that, she was extremely reluctant to leave her home.⁴⁶

As Rives indicates, in addition to the fairly high salaries received by many of the more notable singers, those employed by the courts of German-speaking Europe were provided with a pension.⁴⁷ This lack of a steady—and guaranteed—income in New York City

the *Herald* wrote: “They say that German opera ought to pay, and as to Italian the prices demanded by the singers are getting to be almost prohibitive. Signor Mazzini wanted [\$30,000] a month to sing at the Metropolitan.” “Opera in German,” *New York Herald*, 17 September 1884, 4.

⁴⁶ “Will There Be No Opera?: The Gloomy Outlook at the New House and the Academy,” *New York Times*, 9 September 1884, 4.

⁴⁷ This concern for costs—particularly as a sign of decadence on the part of the singers—was a frequent theme in coverage throughout the next several years. Even in 1888, nearly four years after the German-language productions began at the Met, the *Times* again brought up this concern, “the artists of the Fatherland have been gradually raising their terms, and last year Mme. Lehmann and Herr Niemann . . . commanded salaries almost as large as the rare birds of sunny Italy . . . It is to be hoped for the sake of all that is high and noble in music that the present state of affairs does not point to the decadence of German opera.” “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 20 May 1888, 2.

compounded the difficulty inherent in luring singers to an unknown land.⁴⁸ Furthermore, with the exception of *Lohengrin*, the Met was not equipped with the scenery for staging these new German-language productions, which meant the additional costs of all-new costuming and set construction.⁴⁹

The financial problems faced by Damrosch were compounded by the intense rivalry with the Academy of Music. As the Metropolitan's inaugural season came to a close, Mapleson was quick to criticize the failing company, which he viewed as the result of Abbey's leadership, "if he had only acted squarely he might have lived and let me live. As it is, he has made us both suffer."⁵⁰ The audience for Italian opera, as many had feared, was essentially split between the two houses, resulting in less than satisfactory attendance at both venues. For this reason, Damrosch's plan to present a German-

⁴⁸ To circumvent the salaries of the highest paid German stars, the *Times* speculated that Damrosch would focus on building a strong company, rather than one consisting of a few notable stars. "Amusements: German Opera at the New House," *New York Times*, 14 August 1884, 4.

⁴⁹ "Excepting the 'Lohengrin' sets there is no scenery at all in the Metropolitan for the production of German opera. The scenery for 'Tristan und Isolde,' for example, is very elaborate and very expensive." "Will There Be No Opera?: The Gloomy Outlook at the New House and the Academy," *New York Times*, 9 September 1884, 4.

In his *Chapters of Opera*, Krehbiel provides some financial details of the German seasons. In his breakdown, Krehbiel notes that the average cost per productions was \$3,400 (with the largest being \$4,000). This was lower than the costs of producing Italian-language works, which he argues came from the salaries of the singers being substantially lower for the German singers. Krehbiel, *Chapters*, 138.

⁵⁰ Mapleson himself faced intense financial difficulties following his own season at the Academy of Music. As a sign of the difficulties surrounding the presentation of Italian opera in the city, Mapleson found himself deep in debt. Following a dispute with the Board of Directors, the Bank of the Metropolis attempted to confiscate the scenery and costumes at the Academy as collateral to ensure that Mapleson would repay his debts. "The Sheriff in the Academy," *New-York Tribune*, 1 May 1884, 4; "Her Majesty's Colonel," *New York Sun*, 2 May 1884, 1.

language alternative would appear to have eliminated this competition.⁵¹ Mapleson remained unconvinced, warning Damrosch of his own experiences with the German repertoire, “I wish them luck. I tried Wagner at Her Majesty’s, under the great composer’s personal supervision. I had the best of singers, and the scenery, dresses, armor, properties, and steam engines were loaned me from Munich, by command of the King of Bavaria. My loss on the six weeks’ season – one-half of the total loss – was about \$80,000.”⁵² Always the consummate salesman, Mapleson concluded his warning with an advertisement for his own upcoming Italian season.⁵³

On top of the logistical concerns, there were also substantial worries about the repertoire that was to be performed. The effort by the *Times* to distance Damrosch from Wagner tapped into the anxiety surrounding a potential Wagnerian season. There was a need to define what exactly was meant by this new German-language policy.

German opera, as popularly, if not wisely, understood, is often considered as typified by the “Trilogy,” by “Tristan und Isolde,” and by “Parsifal.” These elaborate and ponderous compositions have their admirers, but there is no gainsaying that their frequent performance is widely regarded with an apprehension somewhat akin to the feeling that would be aroused by the threatened visit of an epidemic. The friends of Dr. Damrosch, who, though a musician of the period and a “man of progress,” is not a fanatic, are justly anxious that the impression should not gain ground that the audiences at the Metropolitan are to be put upon an exclusively Wagnerian regime. Some of the earlier works of the great master will, indeed, be heard, and great productions of “Rienzi,” “Lohengrin,” and “Tannhäuser” may be awaited, but unless the frequenters of the house rise en’masse and

⁵¹ There were many in the press that recognized the spirit of rivalry would not die quickly: “Whether the distinction that is to exist for the first time this year of German opera at one house and Italian at the other will tend to quell animosity and lay low the demon of jealousy is more than doubtful.” “What Is Going On In Society,” *New York Sun*, 2 November 1884, 4.

⁵² “London News and Talk,” *New York Times*, 14 September 1884, 1.

⁵³ The rivalry between the two houses eventually concluded in 1886, when Mapleson’s regime at the Academy of Music came to its end. For the next few years, the Met became the primary center of opera in the city. Krehbiel, *Chapters*, 139.

cry for “‘Parsifal’ or death” it is believed that the representation of that solemn achievement and of certain similar operas may be averted.⁵⁴

Typical of much of the coverage, the *Times* noted that a German season did not explicitly mean that only operas by German-speaking composers would be performed.⁵⁵ Instead, the paper noted the distinction between “German opera” and “opera in German,” which would include many of the standard Italian works that were familiar to audiences, now translated into the German language: “To persons who have shuddered at the possibility of ten weeks of a Wagner regime this assurance ought to be as grateful as rain in a season of drought.”⁵⁶ Wagner was viewed as the musical style that epitomized German opera, but also the style that was necessary for the Metropolitan to avoid. Part of this fear was that German music—and the attention it demanded of its audience—was incongruous to the atmosphere of the opera houses of New York City, which relied on the core Italian repertoire to function as background noise for the fashionable to see and be seen. This back and forth over the role of opera—as fashionable entertainment or serious art form—would become one of the central themes of the coverage.

Despite the concern over a potential Wagnerian season, there were many in the city who held a special affinity for the German composer. In April 1884, well before the

⁵⁴ “Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1884, 8.

⁵⁵ There were some exceptions to this German language policy at the Met. For example, in 1888, during the fifth season of the all-German period at the house, Herr Alvary—scheduled to sing the role of Faust—took ill and was replaced by Signor Perotti, who sang the role in Italian: “when he addressed Margareta in the kirmess scene, and she began her reply by saying, ‘Non, Signor,’ it suddenly was revealed that the Fräulein had become Signorina Föhstroem for the evening, and was also warbling in Italian. Fischer [as Mephisto], however, remained a Herr, and sang in good, guttural German . . . the orchestra played the instrumental parts in the universal language of music . . . the ballet did not say a word, but it danced in pure German.” “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1888, 2.

⁵⁶ “Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1884, 6.

idea of a German season was even considered a possibility, the Metropolitan hosted a traveling Wagner concert series, which many would retroactively view as a type of warm-up for the Damrosch experiment.⁵⁷ For decades, New York City audiences had heard occasional works by Wagner, both staged and in the concert hall, and interest in the composer often went beyond any local performances. The 1876 opening of the *Festspielhaus* was covered in all the local papers, many of which sent reporters to Bayreuth to cover the event.⁵⁸ There was clearly an audience, both German and non-German speaking, for these works already in place. Owing to its close chronological proximity to the all-German season, the Wagner concert series provides an important barometer for examining the attitude of New Yorkers towards German-language opera generally, but also Wagner's operas specifically. The concert series proved so popular that Thomas scheduled a second series at the Metropolitan in May.⁵⁹ The program for both series was similar, consisting of selections from Weber's *Euryanthe* and excerpts from several of Wagner's dramas, including *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*,

⁵⁷ This was part of the Theodore Thomas tour, which started out in Boston before touring the major cities of America, including New York City, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Memphis, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago. As part of the tour, Thomas engaged the singers Mme. Amalie Materna, Herr Herman Winkelmann, and Herr Emil Scaria, who had emerged as three of the top Wagnerian singers in Europe, including Bayreuth. "The Wagner Concerts," *New York Herald*, 6 February 1884, 10. In addition to the soloists, the chorus was to draw from the New-York Chorus Society, the Brooklyn Philharmonic Choir, and the German Liederkranz. Further, the orchestra was expected to consist of nearly 150 instrumentalists. "The Wagner Concerts," *New-York Tribune*, 7 April 1884, 5.

⁵⁸ One of the correspondents sent to cover the opening of the house was Leopold Damrosch, who had been sent by Charles A. Dana—editor of the *Sun*—for the sum of \$500. Walter Damrosch, *My Musical Life* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), 13.

⁵⁹ "Grand Wagner Concerts," *New York Sun*, 7 March 1884, 4; "A Second Series of Wagner Concerts," *New-York Tribune*, 10 April 1884, 5.

*Lohengrin, Die Meistersinger, Parsifal, Das Rheingold, Die Walküre, Siegfried, and Götterdämmerung.*⁶⁰

In its description of the first performance in April, the *Herald* noted: “it was evidently an audience of music lovers. All had come solely to listen to the music, and consequently there was the most marked attention paid throughout to the performance, and a most absorbing interest taken in the noble rendering which the Wagner selections on the programme received.”⁶¹ This thoughtful, attentive behavior by the audience provoked comment in the review likely owing to it being out of the ordinary. These Wagnerian performances appeared to draw a different crowd from the usual Metropolitan performances.⁶² The *Sun* made a similar observation regarding the audience: “it was drawn from the most musical part of the community, and very largely from those in accord with Wagner’s art theories, for all the Wagnerites were there in force.”⁶³

One important feature of the April and May performances was that they were unstaged. This led many of the reviewers to comment on the effect caused by hearing Wagner’s works in such a fashion:

It is to be regretted for the sake of the performers, as well as for many other reasons, that [Materna, Winkelmann, and Scaria] should not have been brought forward in one or more of Wagner’s operas. The most

⁶⁰ “A Second Series of Wagner Concerts,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 April 1884, 5.

⁶¹ “Amusements,” *New York Herald*, 23 April 1884, 12.

⁶² The *Sun* mentions that the performances were sung in English translation. In regard to Senta’s ballad from the Saturday matinee performance in April, the *Sun* noted: “It was all the more enjoyable to the audience because sung with the English words and with a remarkably excellent translation, the directness and simplicity of which were in very strong contrast with the sadly twisted, involved, and almost incomprehensible translation of the words of the ‘Nibelungen [*sic*] Ring.’” “Amusements: The Wagner Matinee,” *New York Sun*, 27 April 1884, 9.

The translation of these works is not mentioned in any of the advertisements or other reviews of the performances, either in April or May.

⁶³ “The First of the Series of Wagner Concerts,” *New York Sun*, 23 April 1884, 3.

finished rendering of excerpts. . . . convey but a faint idea of the Wagnerian conception, and, after all the arguments in behalf of the truth of nature and the absurdity of Italian operatic music, it is somewhat inconsistent to introduce to an audience Wotan in a modern dress suit, and Brünnhilde in corn-colored silk and long gloves.⁶⁴

Others were less impressed by the “Wagnerian conception” to begin with:

[A]ll enterprises with which the name of Wagner is connected are heralded with a pomp and conducted with a solemnity utterly out of proportion to their importance. . . . [S]ome doubt may reasonably be felt as to the vitality of a form of art that makes unheard of demands upon its interpreters and admirers, it is well, perhaps, that in a series of Wagner concerts, even the frequent sense of *ennui* should be produced by Wagnerian means.⁶⁵

Despite the less than ideal presentation, this series of Wagnerian selections provided one of the first opportunities for the English-language press to reflect on Wagner’s theories and to compare them with the standard Italian repertoire that dominated the city’s stages up to that point.

Several months after these concerts, once Damrosch’s plan for the Metropolitan was accepted, the coverage shifted from concern over the practicality of the season to buzz over which artists he would be able to secure on such short notice.⁶⁶ As for why these singers were willing to give up pensions and move to an unknown land, some of the

⁶⁴ “Amusements: The Wagner Concerts,” *New York Times*, 23 April 1884, 4.

⁶⁵ “Amusements: The Wagner Concerts,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1884, 8.

⁶⁶ Some of the prominent vocalists secured for the first season included Marianne Brandt (1842–1921), Amalie Materna (1844–1918), who had been heard in the April and May Thomas concerts, Marie Schröder-Hanfstängl (1848–1917), Auguste Seidl-Kraus (1853–1939), the wife of the conductor Anton Seidl, and Anton Schott (1846–1913). Gerald Fitzgerald, ed., *Annals of the Metropolitan Opera: The Complete Chronicle of Performances and Artists*, vol. 1 (New York: Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1989), 11.

As the policy proved successful, the Met was able to secure a number of prominent singers—who would quickly become the faces of Wagnerian opera in America—including Emil Fischer (1838–1914), Max Alvary (1856–1898), and Lilli Lehmann (1848–1929), all of whom made their Metropolitan debuts in the second season of German-language opera (1885–1886). *Ibid.*, 16.

coverage posited “national” honor: “the idea of forming a company of German artists to produce grand opera in New York appealed to them with all the force of novelty, and furthermore touched their national pride.”⁶⁷ For some of the singers, this experiment carried with it an excitement at the prospect of bringing their art to a new audience, largely unfamiliar with their culture (see the Appendix for a list of the premieres from the seven seasons of the Metropolitan’s German-language policy).

Starting on 17 November 1884, with the premiere of *Tannhäuser*, all operas performed at the Metropolitan Opera were presented in German, regardless of their original language.⁶⁸ As became clear over the course of the season, Damrosch’s plan to bring German opera to the city was a success.⁶⁹ What had originally been considered a desperate last-minute attempt to rescue the house from complete financial collapse soon became the identifying feature of the Met until 1891, when the house reversed course and

⁶⁷ “German Artists in America,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1884, 2.

⁶⁸ This production of *Tannhäuser* marked the first time that a German opera was performed in the original language at the Metropolitan. Fitzgerald, *Annals Metropolitan Opera*, 11.

⁶⁹ By most accounts, the first season of the German Years at the Met was financially successful. Prior to the Met officially deciding to continue the German experiment for the next season, the *Times* noted that it would be the most financially sound choice to make: “Taking the total receipts thus far, and calculating the average drawing power of each opera, it would seem that . . . opera in German, and not exactly German opera has proved most attractive. ‘Die Walküre,’ it is true, brought more money into the treasury than any other work, but, had it been given as frequently as ‘The Prophet,’ it would probably have been less profitable. German thoroughness, rather than Wagner’s repertoire, has, in truth, attained the brilliant results recorded in connection with the current season. The average amount drawn by each of the operas performed was as follows: ‘Die Walküre,’ \$3,200; ‘The Prophet,’ \$3,000; ‘The Huguenots,’ \$2,819; ‘The Jewess,’ \$2,700; ‘Lohengrin,’ \$2,515; ‘Tannhäuser,’ \$2,500; ‘Don Giovanni,’ \$1,862; ‘William Tell,’ \$1,602; ‘Masaniello,’ \$1,519; ‘Der Freischütz,’ \$1,829; ‘Fidelio,’ \$1,276; ‘Rigoletto,’ \$1,138. These figures stand for the moneys received at the box office, and are in excess of the subsidy.” The amount listed for *Der Freischütz* in the paper is \$1,829. Considering that the list is in descending order, this may have been a misprint. “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 18 February 1885, 5.

went back to Italian opera.⁷⁰ The German-language policy at the Met outlasted Damrosch, who died before the first season was completed in 1885, and was replaced by his son Walter (1862–1950) and Anton Seidl (1850–1898).⁷¹ During these seven intervening seasons, the press took advantage of this unique opportunity to further its examination of German opera—especially in comparison to the older Italian model.⁷² The ideas laid forth in the English-language press were informed not only by the growing estimation of Germans as the people of music, which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, but also by the shifting demographics of the city, and the changing tide of musical tastes that resulted.⁷³

⁷⁰ This did not mean that Italian was not heard in the house during this period. There were some exceptions. For example, on 26 December 1888, Max Alvary (1856–1898) was scheduled to sing the role of Faust when he was taken ill. His replacement, Giulio Perotti (1841–1901), sang the part in Italian. Following his lead, Alma Fohström (1856–1936), as Marguerite, also sang in Italian, while Emil Fischer (1838–1914), as Méphistophélès, performed in German. Apparently, the orchestra “played the instrumental parts in the universal language of music . . . the ballet did not say a word, but it danced in pure German.” “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1888, 2.

⁷¹ The death of Damrosch was quick and unexpected. As outlined in the *Tribune*, Damrosch conducted the final performance of *Lohengrin* for the season on Monday evening, 9 February, and by Tuesday evening, 10 February, was found to be suffering from pneumonia after he was unable to complete a rehearsal of Verdi’s *Requiem* with the Oratorio Society. He died at 2:15 p.m. on Sunday, 15 February. “Death of Dr. Damrosch,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 February 1885, 1.

⁷² Comparisons between the Italians and Germans occasionally went beyond musical differences. In a tour of the house, a reporter from the *Sun* asked the costume manager—a Miss Berg—if the costumes from the first season of the Met could be reused in this new German season. To this inquiry she replied, “it isn’t an easy matter to fit the costumes for these German singers. They seem a stronger, more stalwart race than the Italians.” “A Tour Behind the Scenes,” *New York Sun*, 25 January 1885, 3.

⁷³ There were some who also took the opportunity to draw comparisons between German opera and other schools, such as the French. In a review of *Masaniello* during the first all-German season, which is worth quoting at length for its depiction of German music as the embodiment of Western musical culture, the *Sun* wrote: “Auber is not a composer of the mettle of Beethoven, Mozart, Meyerbeer, Weber, or Wagner. We Americans are capable of appreciating what is good in the art of every nation. As to music, however, we are bound by a close bond of sympathy to German methods, and perhaps the French style

Much of the debate on the merits of German opera was fueled by the near constant speculation on whether or not it would remain the policy of the house. Every few months, the press would begin to wonder if the German experiment would continue.⁷⁴ The following excerpt is from a *Herald* article—written near the close of the 1889 season, during one of these periods of speculation—that asked several respondents the question: “What do you think of opera in German?” The *Herald*, which had emerged as one of the more vocal critics of the all-German seasons, reported on the reaction of

appeals less strongly to us than any other. After all, France has given little or nothing to the foundation of music. Its fountain head, its original root was never there. The great plant was first nourished in Germany’s soil, and only slips from it found their way into the neighboring garden. It is true, talented composers have come out of France, wise theorists, and, above all, brilliant virtuosos, but how do the best names of France compare with those of Germany? Measure such men as Herold Boilldieu, David, Halévy, Offenbach—who was French by adoption if not by birth—Bizet, Thomas, Gounod, and even Berlioz with Beethoven, Handel, Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Schumann. Do these last not stand as demi-gods to men? In Auber we have a thorough type of the French disposition and bent of mind. He was gay, light, frivolous, of a sharp intelligence, and possessed of elegant tastes. Following of necessity, his melodies are wanting in originality, though they are neatly turned and always well suited to the voice. His harmonies are ingenious and sometimes full of pungent modulations, but for power he substitutes a noisy excitement *à la Française*.” “Amusements: A French Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Sun*, 30 December 1884, 3.

Not everyone, however, was so dismissive of the French. In 1891, as French and Italian-language opera returned to the Met, the *Herald* noted “France, has, for ten or fifteen years past, done most for music . . . the triumph of French art, at least where music is concerned, means the supremacy of that most rare of virtues—Taste.” “The Opening of the Opera,” *New York Herald*, 20 December 1891, 28.

In general, many of those in the press agreed that with the exception of Verdi, Italian opera had little to offer by the end of the nineteenth century; however, it was in France that “a group of gifted and scholarly composers for the stage” were providing a new, modern sound that would hopefully find a home in New York. “The Reaction in Opera,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1891, 4.

⁷⁴ As Krehbiel notes, the stockholders, unwilling to provide any security to the manager and the company, created this constant state of unrest by renewing the German-only policy from season to season, rather than provide a long-term contract. The reason that Krehbiel gives for this state of affairs was that “the activities of the Germans were not to the taste of the stockholders, who were getting serious art where they were looking for fashionable diversion.” Krehbiel, *Chapters*, 177.

several operagoers.⁷⁵ Commodore Elbridge T. Gerry found the music “grand and gloomy,” arguing that the lifeless music had a “depressing influence” on the house.⁷⁶ W. C. Andrews echoed Gerry’s evaluation of its heaviness, while also finding explanation for its popularity among the German-speaking population in its connection to a shared cultural tradition.⁷⁷ The presence of German-speaking audience members was noted by many of the people interviewed. James Stillman likely summed up the response of the Metropolitan’s directors when he noted, “the German people are the best patrons of opera.”⁷⁸

The debate between the two forms of opera was not confined to the pages of New York’s newspapers. In 1889, W. J. Henderson (1855–1937)—the critic for the *Times*, and later the *Sun*, who published a volume on Wagner entitled *Richard Wagner: His Life and His Dramas* (1902)—gave a lecture for the Nineteenth Century Club at the Metropolitan Opera House Assembly Rooms on the “Influence of Wagner upon the Opera of the Future.”⁷⁹ The talk was supplemented by commentary from Luigi Monti (1830–1914)—

⁷⁵ After the Met decided to revert back to Italian opera, Gustave Amberg—manager of the Amberg Theatre—remarked in an interview with the *Herald* that “he considered the coming of French and Italian opera a victory for the HERALD.” In his words: “The HERALD . . . has been advocating light music all along, and when Wagner’s operas are dead in this city the HERALD ought to receive the credit for the change.” “Germans Clamor for Wagner’s Operas,” *New York Herald*, 17 January 1891, 6.

⁷⁶ “Opera in German,” *New York Herald*, 13 January 1889, 10.

⁷⁷ “I apprehend that the chief reason why the German opera is so popular to the German population in this city is because it is the ‘Cinderella’ and the ‘Jack the Giant Killer’ of the Germans. In other words, the legend they were brought up on, and consequently the legend that they never forget.” *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Henderson frequently utilized his position, both at the *Times* (1887–1902) and the *Sun* (1902–1937), to promote the cause of Wagner in the city. At the occasion of the first American performance of the complete *Ring* trilogy in order—minus *Das Rheingold*—at the Met in 1888 (the complete tetralogy would be performed in March of 1889), Henderson published a signed article on the merits of Wagner’s conception of the music

who provided the pro-Italian side—and Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923), the music critic for the *New-York Tribune*, who apparently provided “a scientific and ultra German standpoint.”⁸⁰ Henderson, one of the more vocal supporters of Wagner in the city, upheld the composer as “the champion of truth in dramatic music, and the reformer whose work had created a new art world.”⁸¹ To support his stance, Henderson declared the music of Bellini and Donizetti dead.⁸² At this, Monti, an instructor of Italian at Harvard, argued that even though he “knew nothing about music . . . he was an ardent lover of melody and could not hear Italian opera spoken of as dead without a protest. Because the austere and phlegmatic German, cold as his own icebergs, could not appreciate the sensuous strains of the South, was that reason for condemning them as worthless?”⁸³ In outlining these comments for its readers, the *Herald* described the invasion of the German “barbarians”:

In this country a bitter war had been waged against Italian music for the last twenty years. As when the barbarians had swept down upon the

drama, particularly Wagner’s uplifting of poetry—complete with a brief discussion of Wagner’s alterations to the original mythological sources—and the status of these works as modern musical-dramatic epics that should be equally considered as works of poetry as they are works of music. It is these passionate defenses of Wagner’s works and ideas that helped to build an important fan base for the composer in the city. “Wagner’s Dramatic Poems,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1888, 12.

⁸⁰ Krehbiel worked for the *Tribune* from 1880 to 1923. He was a staunch advocate of German music, particularly Wagner and the First Viennese School. As he grew older, he became more and more conservative, often denouncing the work of Mahler and Strauss. “For and Against Wagner,” *New York Herald*, 14 March 1889, 5.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The *Tribune* outlined the central argument of his paper as a prediction “that in the future there would be a transfusion of blood between the Wagnerian, or ultra-dramatic, and the Italian, or ultra-melodic, forms of opera, and a combination of the Italian wealth of melody with the intellectual symmetry and logic of form and development of the German.” “Discussing Wagner and his Operas,” *New-York Tribune*, 14 March 1889, 7.

⁸³ As a further argument for the beauty versus intellect debate, Monti also offered the following anecdote: “He once asked a learned German which he would prefer to hear upon a moonlight night when sailing on a Venetian canal, a Bach fugue or the serenade from ‘Don Pasquale,’ and the German had admitted that the latter would be best.” “For and Against Wagner,” *New York Herald*, 14 March 1889, 5.

civilization of the Latin world, so the new barbarians in art were attacking the lovely art of modern Italy. In America it was perhaps best that we have learned harmonies in place of spirited, fiery music, for the typical American works hard and needs rest in the evening rather than excitement. Any one who watched the audiences at the Metropolitan Opera House could see how Wotan's long addresses soothed the tired business men into blissful oblivion.⁸⁴

Both sides in the debate used the city's opera going public to reinforce their stance, either insisting that New Yorkers desired the beautiful distraction of Italian opera, or the intellectualism of the German school. To bolster his own support for the German cause, Seidl, in a somewhat unusual move for the time, argued that the city's audiences were on par with those found in Germany: "I think I can say that for good will, for intelligence and discrimination an American audience—a New York audience at least—may be safely ranked with the people living in the most musical centres of Germany."⁸⁵

When the Metropolitan officially announced that it would return to Italian-language productions the *Herald* quickly criticized the pro-German supporters:

The indignation of the Wagnerites at the proposed operatic changes may be natural, but it is unreasonable.

For just seven years, their time of plenty, they have had things their own way. They have been able to attend such performances of their favorite as they could hardly have enjoyed in any German theatre . . .

And now, because these stockholders consult their own taste and resolve to have some pleasure for their money, "they rage, they burn," they forget all the amusement that has been provided for them and they foretell disaster to the coming management.⁸⁶

The *Herald*—unsurprising given its stance on the topic—presented the Metropolitan's decision as a matter of entertainment.⁸⁷ As will be discussed later, this attitude fit into a

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ "German Opera," *New York Herald*, 1 March 1886, 10.

⁸⁶ "More Melody Than Harmony," *New York Herald*, 18 January 1891, 10.

⁸⁷ The author does lament that there is no house able to support the presentation of alternating French, German, English, and Italian works, which was to become a reality in

pervading argument during this period concerning the function of opera as either a tool of amusement or art. The supporters of the German policy were also not shy in voicing their disapproval. In the Met's lobby, the *Herald* reported overhearing "Rabid Wagnerians" complaining over the changes that were to come: "One young gentleman objected to the change because the soloists would probably be encored and allowed to repeat their solos and concerted numbers; another did not like the idea of Italian opera, because the conductor would probably wave white gloves over the prompter's box."⁸⁸ In the same manner that Italian opera supporters had stereotyped German opera as overly complex and dull, those supporters of the old German policy now reverted to the stereotypes of Italian opera as the music of the inane star system. Almost immediately, there were schemes designed to ensure that Wagner's operas did not fully disappear from the city's stages, including rumors of Oscar Hammerstein starting a Murray Hill Opera House to provide productions of operas in German.⁸⁹

a few years. In the article, however, the author presents this mixed repertoire as an impossibility, leading the author to encourage the "300,000 Germans in New York" to start their own house. Ibid.

⁸⁸ "Germans Clamor for Wagner's Operas," *New York Herald*, 17 January 1891, 6.

⁸⁹ This did not come to fruition; however, Hammerstein would become an important player in the early twentieth century with his Manhattan Opera Company, which brought *Salome* back to the city after its notorious opening night at the Met. "The German Opera Will But Change Its Home," *New York Herald*, 19 January 1891, 3.

There had been other attempts, such as the American Opera Company, which was founded by Jeannette Thurber in 1885, and employed Theodore Thomas as music director. The goal was to present opera in English translation. In its repertoire were Italian, German, and French works, such as *Lohengrin*, *Galatea*, and *Aida*. After its first season, it was reorganized as the National Opera Company for the 1886–87 season; however, it failed to find a firm footing and eventually collapsed after Thomas left. *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "American Opera Company," by Dee Baily, accessed August 19, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

In the *Staats-Zeitung*, the decision by the Met was framed in terms of war. At one point, the paper described Abbey's decision as his personal Waterloo. Arguing that the majority of the subscribers were German, the *Staats-Zeitung* presented the new policy as the product of a "war cry" on the part of the "enemies of German opera," rather than as a sound business decision. To drive this home, the paper described the Board's actions as happening with "eerie rapidity" in the middle of the night, as though they were "afraid of the bright light of the day."⁹⁰ Ultimately, Krehbiel summed up the situation as follows:

To understand the story of the overthrow of German opera managed by the owners of the opera house, and the reversion to the system which had proved disastrous again, it is well to bear the fact in mind that instability was, is, and always will be an element in the cultivation of opera so long as it remains an exotic; that is, until it becomes a national expression in art, using the vernacular and giving utterance to national ideals. The fickleness of the public taste, the popular craving for sensation, the egotism and rapacity of the artists, the lack of high purpose in the promoters, the domination of fashion instead of love for art, the lack of real artistic culture—all these things have stood from the beginning, as they still stand, in the way of a permanent foundation of opera in New York. The boxes of the Metropolitan Opera House have a high market value today, but they are a coveted asset only because they are visible symbols of social distinction. There were genuine notes of rejoicing in the stockholders' voices at the measure of financial success achieved in the first three seasons of German opera, but the lesson had not yet been learned that an institution like the Metropolitan Opera House can only be maintained by a subvention in perpetuity; that in democratic America the persons who crave and create the luxury must contribute from their pockets the equivalent of the money which in Europe comes from national exchequers and the privy purses of monarchs. This fact did eventually impress itself upon the consciousness of the stockholders of the Metropolitan Opera House, but when it found lodgment there it created a notion—a natural one, and easily understood—that their predilections, and theirs alone, ought to be humored in the character of the entertainment. . . . The stockholders created an art spirit which was big with promise while rich in fulfillment, and then killed it because its manifestation bored them.⁹¹

⁹⁰ "Musik," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 18 January 1891, 4.

⁹¹ Krehbiel, *Chapters*, 207–208.

As Krehbiel notes, as long as opera remained reliant on the capitalistic whims of the American public, it was doomed. While the reversion to Italian-language opera at the Met put an end to seven seasons of exclusively German-language opera, it did not sound the death knell for German-language operas at the house, which resumed in 1896 and remained a revolving part of the repertoire until its suspension during the First World War.⁹²

Couture or Kultur: Attitudes Towards Italian and German Opera at the Metropolitan

Over the course of the seven seasons, there were common themes that emerged in the coverage of the Metropolitan's German-language policy. One popular topic was the growing impression of German opera as the primary expression of musical modernism, seen largely through the discussion of Wagner. Another consistent idea concerned the perceived values of Italian-language opera versus German-language opera, particularly evident in the debate over fashion versus art. Lastly, many of the papers could not ignore the connection between the German-language works appearing on the Metropolitan's stage and the German-speaking audiences filling its auditorium.

Prior to the start of the first German-language season, the press attempted to prepare New Yorkers for what to expect of this new policy.⁹³ The *Times* stressed that the

⁹² When German-language operas were reintroduced to the repertoire for the 1896–97 season, the Met charged the same fees regardless of the language of the production. “New Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Times*, 29 November 1896, 11.

⁹³ The performances of German-language operas at the Met were not the first performances of German opera in the city, which had been around to some extent for a few decades. One significant source of German-language productions was the Anschütz German Opera Company, led by Carl Anschütz (1813–1870). Leonard Grover (1835–1926) also had a German-language troupe, Grover German Opera Company, which presented some works at the Academy of Music. The first presentation of a German opera in the original German-language was a performance of *Der Freischütz* announced

coming season was not just for the “German-American lovers of the lyric drama, but by all persons for whom music is a study and a relaxation.”⁹⁴ As already noted, there was some effort to ensure audiences that the new policy would not be as daunting as it first appeared. The policy, after all, called for “opera in German,” not exclusively “German opera.” This meant that there would be “the best operas written by German composers, and the best operas composed by Italians, with German text wedded, in the latter case, to the original music.”⁹⁵ There was even some hope that this could potentially breathe new life into the Italian repertoire through “a series of representations undertaken with such praiseworthy and withal practical ideas,” which may also “strengthen public admiration for the best music of every description.”⁹⁶ That Italian opera was a dying art in need of resuscitation was an idea popular in some circles—specifically, at least according to the author of this article, “pessimists” and “ultra-Wagnerites.” This illustrates a critical divide in attitude towards Italian-language and German-language opera at the time. Italian opera increasingly became associated with the old-fashioned and traditional, while German opera—typically synonymous with Wagner—came to embody the new and modern.⁹⁷ Krehbiel, music critic for the *Tribune* and a staunch advocate of German opera

by the *New York Herald* for 22 January 1842. As was common of the time, the work had received its first American premiere in English on 2 March 1825. In the years prior to the all-German seasons at the Met, many New Yorkers encountered German operas in either English or Italian translations, rather than the original German, which was often—although not exclusively—reserved for performances in the small theaters of *Kleindeutschland*, the enclave for German-speaking immigrants. John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 21.

⁹⁴ “German Opera,” *New York Times*, 16 November 1884, 8.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ While some felt that the new German policy would mark an abrupt departure from the first season, there were others that argued Abbey had laid the groundwork for non-Italian

and Wagner, viewed Wagnerian opera as the new sound to lead opera into the future: “As one school of art in sculpture, for instance, had displaced another, so it was with music, and when the need of it came and the elements were properly developed, expression to things thought inexpressible before would be given; that was why we had Wagner, and that was why the Italian opera had no longer a voice for the people of the nineteenth century.”⁹⁸

In his take on this transition from an Italian to German repertoire, Krehbiel saw an important shift in the manner in which the opera was presented. Under the Italian system—i.e. the “star” system—everything revolved around the singer. This new German model was not focused on the individual singers, but rather the ensemble, staging, and overall dramatic effects.⁹⁹ The thrill of vocal acrobatics and celebrity performers was replaced with a sense of seriousness and the centrality of the complete musical and dramatic experience. Seidl, when asked about the difference between the two schools, noted that “in the German opera people go to hear the music—they go to hear Beethoven, Mozart and Wagner . . . in the Italian opera they do not go to the theatre to hear Lucia, Dinorah, Leonora, Rosina or Marguerite—they go to see Patti.”¹⁰⁰

In an article that would eventually appear in his *Chapters of Opera* (1908), Krehbiel addressed the question of why Italian opera had become synonymous with

productions with the repertoire of the inaugural season. In a retrospective article on Abbey’s career, the *Tribune* praised him for cultivating the musical tastes of New York City audiences by presenting *Faust*, *Lohengrin*, *Don Giovanni*, *Les Huguenots*, *Robert le Diable*, and *Le Prophete*. “Music and the Drama: Mr. Abbey’s Operatic Season,” *New-York Tribune*, 12 April 1884, 4.

⁹⁸ “Discussing Wagner and his Operas,” *New-York Tribune*, 14 March 1889, 7.

⁹⁹ Krehbiel, *Chapters*, 117.

¹⁰⁰ “German Opera Set Aside,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 January 1891, 4.

fashion, while also exploring its stagnation and the absurdity most English-speakers—both in England and America—recognized in the form. In the process, he also presents German opera as the necessary means for opera’s future survival:

We do not wish to be understood as belittling the compositions by Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, or yet as criticizing the judgment of those who love them. It is not a question of sentiment, but of fact; and the spectacles presented by the lyric stage in Germany, France and England shows unmistakably what course opera, as an art-form, must take to live. Gluck, Weber and Wagner, all Germans, marked out the new path. National opera is recognized as necessary even in Russia . . . If America is to have a musical art in the near future, the supplanting of Italian opera by German in the principal house of the country cannot be without significance. It is true that we shall still have foreign artists singing in a foreign tongue, but it will be a tongue which a considerable proportion of the population can understand. And though the repertory is to include the master-pieces of Italy and France as well as Germany, the effect of the season, as a whole, will be to promote an appreciation and understanding of truthful, dramatic expression in an art-form which claims close relationship with the drama.¹⁰¹

One of the reasons cited by Krehbiel for the appropriateness of German opera in New York City is the simple fact that since English-language opera was not going to be produced, at least more people in the city could understand German, as opposed to Italian.¹⁰² The language issue aside, the larger concern for Krehbiel was that the Italian style of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti was out of date. This transition to German-language productions symbolized a larger movement away from the hegemony of Italian-language opera—i.e. the old fashioned “hurdy-gurdy” style—towards the development of a new style epitomized by the “German model,” which brought the music and the drama closer together in a more equal partnership. As Krehbiel wrote in a later article:

¹⁰¹ “Italian and German Opera,” *New-York Tribune*, 6 October 1884, 4.

¹⁰² It is important to remember that this was written immediately before the huge wave of Italian immigration radically altered the city in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

When pretty melodies are the first consideration and words are merely a skeleton on which to hang them, then the Italian style with all its sentimentalities is the only vocal style. And so far as the training and developing of the voice is concerned the Italian method cannot be superseded, and there is no talk of superseding it. The Germans, who have developed their opera out of their old *Singspiel*, view the form from an entirely different position. With them it is the dramatic idea which is of primary importance, and this being so, merely sensuous beauty of tone sinks into an inferior position to truthfulness of expression. Dramatic declamation steps into the foreground, and receives the tribute of the composer's first consideration. . . . In them, music without losing its dignity as an independent art, joins hands with poetry and pantomime to give expression to the play. . . . For the class to whom the higher, or—not to quarrel with anybody—the broader ideal of the modern German school makes appeal, there will be continued keen enjoyment at the Metropolitan.¹⁰³

For him, the music of the Germans represented a more complex and intricate approach to opera through its combination of music, poetry, and pantomime—the ideal Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

In admittedly over-simplified terms, the proponents of Italian-language opera tended to view the music as a tool and product of fashion, while proponents of German-language opera chose to view the music as a tool and product of art and culture. Admission prices supported this divide. From the beginning, it was acknowledged that the German-language season would run on a reduced price scale from the Metropolitan's inaugural Italian-language season. As a point of comparison, on 4 November 1883, the *Times* printed an advertisement of prices for the inaugural Italian season—slightly altered from the opening night performance of 22 October, as a result of some modifications to the auditorium—that listed the “NEW SCALE OF PRICES . . . FOR ALL PERFORMANCES to be given during the Italian opera season.”¹⁰⁴ The prices were as follows: Family Circle, \$.50;

¹⁰³ “A Week of Opera,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 November 1884, 6.

¹⁰⁴ “Metropolitan Opera-House,” *New York Times*, 4 November 1883, 15.

Reserved Seats (Family Circle), \$1.00; General Admission (to all parts of the house), \$2.00; Balcony Stalls (reserved), \$2.00; Dress Circle Stalls (box tier), \$3.00; Orchestra Stalls, \$5.00; Second Tier Boxes (4 seats, plus salon), \$20.00; Center Boxes (second tier, 6 seats, plus salon), \$40.00; Baignoir Boxes (6 seats, plus salon), \$40.00.¹⁰⁵ Nearly a year later, in October of 1884, the *Herald* announced: “A reduced scale of prices for the season of opera in German was decided upon.”¹⁰⁶ The prices as advertised were: Family Circle, \$.50; General Admission (to all parts of the house), \$1.00; Front Row of Balcony, \$1.50; Other Balcony Seats, \$1.00; Dress Circle, \$2.00; Orchestral Stalls, \$3.00; Second Tier Boxes (4 seats), \$10.00; Second Tier Boxes (6 seats), \$20.00; First Tier Boxes (6 seats), \$50.00; Baignoir Boxes (six seats), \$35.00.¹⁰⁷ While the prices for the cheapest seats—the Family Circle—stayed the same, there was a decrease in all other sections.¹⁰⁸ The change in price demonstrated that German-language opera lacked the social cachet of its Italian counterpart. This was one of the odd dichotomies between the two forms of music. German opera may have possessed the cultural prestige, yet it could not compete with Italian opera’s social standing.

One reason for the reticence of the city’s elites to embrace German-language opera was concert manners. There was an idea—likely the result of Wagner’s policies at

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ “Prices and Decoration at the Metropolitan Opera House,” *New York Herald*, 2 October 1884, 10.

¹⁰⁷ “Metropolitan Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 17 November 1884, 7.

¹⁰⁸ This reduction in price did not translate to the Academy of Music, which maintained its Italian-language repertoire and continued the price scale that was comparable to those found during the Italian season at the Met. From a performance of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*—with Patti as Rosina—the *Times* listed the following prices at the Academy: Gallery, \$.50; Family Circle, \$1.00; General Admission, \$1.50; Balcony (first three rows), \$3.00; Balcony (remaining rows), \$2.00; Parquet, \$3.00; Boxes, \$12.00 and \$20.00. “Academy of Music,” *New York Times*, 9 November 1884, 15.

Bayreuth—that listening to German opera required a level of attention that many of the Metropolitan’s box-holders were unwilling, or even unable, to give to operatic performances. The *Sun*’s rumination on the Met’s inaugural season captured this sentiment: “the social element will probably suffer no abatement during this spring season of opera, as it is called, and ladies will be as dressy, diamonds as plenty, and conversation as general as they always are. The only people who will not enjoy themselves are the small number who love music and go to hear it.”¹⁰⁹ This, however, was beginning to change. Even during the first Italian-language season, fissures in the audience were beginning to form. In February 1884, the *Sun* detailed an incident that occurred during a performance of *Le Prophete*, which captured these competing notions of operatic etiquette:

The singers at the Metropolitan Opera House on Friday night were surprised toward the end of the third act of “Le Prophete” by a storm of applause, which began in the stalls and went over the house like thunder. Then a gentleman, who had risen to his feet and addressed a few words to the occupants of one of the parterre boxes, sat down again. The applause subsided, and the audience turned its attention to the stage.

The gentleman was Mr. Edwin R. Root, a lawyer, residing at 92 East Tenth street. During the whole performance the talking and whispering in the private boxes had seriously interrupted the attention of those who had come to hear the opera. Angry looks cast in the direction of the occupants of the boxes failed to produce the desired quiet. In this act there was so much noise made in one of the boxes that Mr. Root got up, and, facing the Astor box, which is said not to have been tenanted by its owners, said in tones loud enough to be heard all over the opera house:

“Will the ladies and gentleman in that box be kind enough to keep quiet, so that those who desire to hear the opera may do so?”

The censure kept all the occupants of boxes quiet for the remainder of the performance. When the curtain fell half a hundred grateful lovers of music grasped Mr. Root’s hand, and thanked him for his timely interference.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ “What is Going on in Society,” *New York Sun*, 2 March 1884, 4.

¹¹⁰ “A Speech to the Opera Boxes,” *New York Sun*, 23 February 1884, 1.

The incident highlights the growing divide within the opera audience between those that had come for socialization and those that had come for the music. This divide was as much about music as it was about class. It is notable that the group being shamed for talking during the performance was seated in the Astor box—although the *Sun* is sure to mention that it was not the Astors themselves—while the man doing the shaming was described as a lawyer, a representative of the bourgeoisie. A distinction is drawn between the fashionable, somewhat superficial upper crust and the educated, cultured middle-class. In a follow-up to this incident, the *Sun* noted, “that the noise, laughing, and talking in the boxes of the Metropolitan Opera House all through the season have been a nuisance.”¹¹¹ This type of behavior is what caused concern for the supporters of German-language opera. If the fashionable attendees could not sit quietly through an Italian—or in this case an Italian translation of a French—opera, how could they possibly sit through one in German, which was seen as being more dramatically and musically demanding? The *Sun*, which seems to have taken a particular interest in this issue, published a lengthy article on this topic in the weeks before the first German-language season began:

To render German opera fashionable will be a difficult task. If the stockholders want it to pay they must make it popular, and be content to see the house filled with real lovers and students of music, who will stand no nonsense in the way of chattering women and peripatetic young men. But then the wives and daughters of the stockholders are very fashionable and go to the opera mainly to chatter and amuse themselves, and how the discordant elements are to be harmonized only time will show.¹¹²

The *Sun* noted a few days later that it had erroneously named Edwin R. Root, when in reality, the man who confronted the box attendees was Mr. H. A. Root of Brooklyn. “Mid-Week Echoes,” *New York Sun*, 27 March 1884, 2.

¹¹¹ The paper also notes that while Mr. Root’s outburst was appropriate to the occasion, the more general response to such an occurrence should be “good, sound, general hissing.” “Mid-Week Echoes,” *New York Sun*, 27 March 1884, 2.

¹¹² “What Is Going On In Society,” *New York Sun*, 12 October 1884, 4.

In order to ensure that this German-only scheme worked, the *Times* argued that the Board of Directors would need to rebrand German opera as the new music of fashion:

There is in this city quite as large a “floating public” for good German opera at reasonable prices as for Italian opera, but to make the performances brilliantly attractive the seal of fashion must, unhappily, be set upon them by wealthy and “socially distinguished” theatregoers. If this small but influential part of the public enjoy excellent ensemble representations all will be well. If they only care for Italian voices in Italian song – the loveliest voices and the loveliest song, be it said, known to the world – they may not be interested by work that will surely please the genuine lover of music.¹¹³

As before, there is an undercurrent of class division. The “genuine lover of music,” interested in good music for “reasonable prices,” stood as a countercurrent to the small tide of fashionable elites that held so much sway. In 1890, nearing the end of the experiment, the *Times* debated how much longer German-language opera could remain at the Metropolitan. While the paper noted that the box-holders desired the return of the Italian-language repertoire, it argued that the general public, which had greatly advanced in taste over the past few years, demanded German opera: “the popular demand now is for a logical, coherent, and vital lyric drama, not for a meaningless costume concert.”¹¹⁴ The issue was money. As the *Times* argued, “the financial ability of the public to back its demand cannot be imposed upon. The people will pay what they can; and, as we have said, serious art has no charms for the social butterflies who could best pay for it. The serious, lofty, musical dramas . . . get the bulk of their patronage from people who do not

¹¹³ “Opera at the Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1884, 6.

¹¹⁴ “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 2 March 1890, 13.

count their wealth in seven figures or more.”¹¹⁵ Despite drawing large houses, the German repertoire appealed to the wrong segment of society.

There was often a connection drawn, whether implicitly or explicitly, between these “lovers of music,” who supported the “serious, lofty, musical dramas,” and the growing German-speaking population. Returning to the *Sun*:

The curtain will be rung up at the Metropolitan, and the grand notes of the overture to “Tannhäuser”—Damrosch himself leading his perfectly trained musicians—will burst upon the ear. Fickle Fashion, of course, will rush “to see the new decorations,” and to find out “who is there.” There will be no lack of beauty and diamonds in the boxes, and the crimson and gold of the hangings will make a background for the sparkle and color of the ladies’ costumes, with which no one can find fault. The parquet may very likely be in striking contrast to the boxes, and will be filled with that large portion of our German residents who know music, love and enjoy it, but who have never in their lives entered a ballroom or assisted at a society gathering. The social critic, by whom we mean he who listens carelessly for half an hour, and then discourses learnedly upon the “timbre,” “quality,” “register,” &c., of the singers’ voices, will be rather at a standstill for the first few nights, as not a “first frau” in the whole company, with the exception of Materna, has a name that any but a German scholar could pronounce. This will be a drawback, but one that time may overcome.¹¹⁶

The city’s growing German-speaking community, which reached its peak period of immigration at this time, is described as possessing a deep love of music, yet none of the social accouterments of those in the boxes. This description clearly sets up the divisions in the house: poor versus rich, art versus fashion, and Germans versus non-Germans.

The following response by the *Times* to a letter to the editor—written in regard to an interview with Col. Mapleson that had appeared in the paper the day before—is worth quoting at length for its glimpse into the debate over the two forms of opera and the

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “What Is Going On In Society,” *New York Sun*, 2 November 1884, 4.

ethnic direction that the discussion occasionally took. The editor of the *Times* was asked to explain what Mapleson meant when he used the term “sauerkraut opera.”

We are not quite sure, but we have some reason to believe that . . . [he] meant to indicate German opera. The context points to this construction. “The sauerkraut opera,” observed Col. MAPLESON, “cannot last. Italian opera is the only opera that can depend upon fashionable support.” So it was not Italian opera to which he referred, and it can scarcely have been French, English, or Boston opera, inasmuch as no one of these forms of art has of late exhibited any signs of vitality. Besides sauerkraut, as our correspondent is doubtless aware, is a German word.

Why Col. MAPLESON should have described German opera as the “sauerkraut opera” we cannot undertake to explain. Sauerkraut is, however, a heavy food, and may on that account be taken as the dietary analogue of intricate, contrapuntal, and polyphonous music. In reference to its persistence and indigestibility it may be appropriately called, at the time of eating, the food of the future. It is pervading and general, like the “forest melodies” of WAGNER, and answers the function of an orchestral envelope to the “leit-motiv” of Frankfort sausage, to which it is the usual accompaniment. These considerations may have led Col. MAPLESON to denote the performances of WAGNER, BEETHOVEN, and MEYERBEER at the Metropolitan Opera House by the general name of “sauerkraut opera.” Another correspondent, who signs himself “A Born American of German Descent,” is not at all puzzled, like the correspondent to whom we have thus far been replying, but he is extremely indignant. His indignation has led him to overlook the obvious fact that it was Col. MAPLESON and not THE TIMES that applied the epithet “sauerkraut” to some form of opera other than Italian; for he observes with severity: “I always thought THE TIMES was a paper for gentlemen to read; I see it is not.” He has produced a neat and effective repartee to Col. MAPLESON’S characterization of German opera, for he inquires tauntingly why “the ash barrel opera left New-York last Fall.” Until within a few years the Irish opera would have been supposed to be alluded to by this phrase, since the emptying of ash barrels was one of the public functions assumed by our fellow-citizens of Irish descent, and upon one St. Patrick’s Day it was currently reported that the ash barrels were to be removed from the line of march on account of the inveterate habit of stopping at these receptacles which the chargers in the procession had formed. It appears, however, that our correspondent refers to the frugal and minute researches of our Italian residents into the contents of the ash barrels. Perhaps he intends to intimate that these industrious persons are retired prima donnas and tenors, driven into secluded industry by the change of the popular taste in music. Or perhaps he means only that the same persons explore the ash barrels in the dull

season of Italian opera, and rejoin Col. MAPLESON'S chorus in the dull season of barrel exploration.¹¹⁷

This editorial response touches on a number of the themes already observed in much of the coverage, yet is far more explicit in describing the ethnic tensions present in the city. In the sarcastic comparison between Wagner's works and sauerkraut (the "dietary analogue of intricate, contrapuntal, and polyphonous music"), there is a passing dig at *Zukunftsmusik*. More notable, however, are the references to the city's shifting demographics, which were rapidly altering the ethnic and social landscape of the city. The use of "sauerkraut" came from a common signifier of the growing German-speaking immigrant community, which had increasingly been used as a dismissive label of difference.¹¹⁸ Also problematic is the "ash barrel opera" reference by the German American reader, which the *Times* assumes must refer to the growing Italian-speaking community and the stereotype of poor Italian-speaking immigrants searching through ash barrels.¹¹⁹ The German American reader writing in to belittle the Italian-speaking community through a common ethnic stereotype is not just a defense mechanism on the part of one ethnic community against another, but also a glimpse into the city's movement away from the period of "old" immigration—the Irish and the Germans—to

¹¹⁷ "German and Italian Opera," *New York Times*, 22 April 1885, 4.

¹¹⁸ As will be discussed in the following chapter, the German-speaking immigrant community occupied a complicated place within the city's social and cultural communities. There were two common—and competing—images of the German immigrant: the potbellied, sauerkraut eating drunkard and the arbiter of unparalleled musical culture.

¹¹⁹ This explanation of the meaning behind "ash barrel opera" was not without its own ethnic stereotyping of the Irish, who along with the German-speaking immigrant community, were the most heavily maligned of the early nineteenth century immigrants to the city.

the “new” immigration of the Southern and Eastern Europeans.¹²⁰ This is also one of the first instances in which the Italian immigrant community was evoked in this larger debate over the two forms of opera. While Italian immigrants, such as Lorenzo Da Ponte, had been crucial in bringing Italian opera to New York City in the 1820s, the audience predominately consisted of the city’s elites, rather than the Italian-speaking community, which was fairly small until the wave of immigration that began in the 1890s. This was not the case with German opera, which rose to prominence in the city at roughly the same time that German-speaking immigration peaked, thereby linking them in a way that was not the case with Italian-speaking immigrants and Italian-language opera.¹²¹

¹²⁰ This period of “new” immigration not only changed the demographics of the city, it also altered the way in which members of the “old” immigration were viewed. As Italian immigration began to increase towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was growing concern expressed regarding these new immigrants. In 1890, George Starr, Commissioner of Emigration and Vice President of the board of Castle Garden, testified before the sub-committee of the joint Congressional Committee on Immigration that, in his opinion, “the Hungarians, Poles, and Italians were the worst immigrants, and the Scandinavians, Germans, and Irish the best.” As a new group became increasingly prevalent, the older groups, i.e. the Germans and Irish, became the lesser of two evils in the eyes of many people. At this same meeting, Henry J. Jackson, Secretary of the Commissioners of Emigration, asserted, “of all the immigrants [he] regarded the Italians as the most undesirable.” It was clear that a new national scapegoat had arrived. Notably, all of this was going on at the same time that the Met was switching back to an Italian-based repertoire; however, mention of Italian immigration never became a part of the conversation. “Jackson Again a Witness,” *New York Times*, 10 April 1890, 8.

¹²¹ As a case in point, when the Met announced its decision to return to an Italian and French language repertoire, the *Tribune* enquired about the judiciousness of this decision in light of the house’s patrons, remarking: “Mr. Stanton will confess, if asked, that three-fourths (he once placed the estimate as high as seven-eighths) of the regular patrons of the opera outside the boxes are Germans and the descendants of Germans. That fact explains the growth of the institution in stability; it also explains the popular attitude toward the operas that have been given this year . . . is the contingent which the new regime will appeal to as devoted to art, as faithful and generous in support of operatic enterprises, as that which is now smarting under the disappointment provided by the action of the directors?” “The Operatic Revolution,” *New-York Tribune*, 20 January 1891, 6.

It was impossible to ignore the sizeable contingent of German-speaking audience members in the Metropolitan's auditorium. In July 1889, the *Herald* published an article on the typical audiences found at six theaters in the city. When it came to the Metropolitan, the *Herald* noted:

You have only to look round the huge auditorium at the Metropolitan Opera House on a Wagner night to see how strong a hold the Germans have on the metropolis of this country. Fashion and finance hold court in the boxes, caring little whether the opera be French, German or Italian so that they may chatter and display their splendor. But in the orchestra and in the galleries frivolity gives place to earnestness. The gallery is one vast *Schwärmerei*. They take St. Richard's dogma *au sérieux* near the roof of the Metropolitan. Everything Wagnerian is colossal, and everything non-Wagnerian is trivial and *oberflächlich*. We have not nowadays any such exclusive audiences as those which a quarter of a century ago made the old Academy in its way as remarkable as Covent Garden or the Paris Opera House. But an ordinary house at the Metropolitan is at least thoroughly representative of Wall street and of "the third greatest German city in the world."¹²²

Perhaps unique to the city, the house was a mixture of the wealthy box-holders, there for social entertainment, and the rest of the auditorium, which was filled with attentive Germans, eager to hear the operas of Wagner. This divide became crucial to understanding both the Metropolitan as an institution as well as the place of opera in the city. In covering the opening production of *Tristan und Isolde* for the 1887–88 season, the *Herald* began with an anecdote from Emerson, who, upon attending a performance in Boston that was interrupted by an exclamation from someone in the audience, remarked "Alas! what fools these mortals be."¹²³ The reason for providing this story was to highlight the behavior of the audience at the Metropolitan, particularly those "dear people

¹²² "Before the Footlights," *New York Herald*, 7 July 1889, 7.

¹²³ "Music of the Spheres," *New York Herald*, 3 November 1887, 8.

who sat in the first tier boxes . . . and chatted delightfully from beginning to end.”¹²⁴ German-speaking spectators—in much the same way that German-language operas signified a shift away from the star-system of the Italian repertoire—came to embody changing norms. Their behavior signaled a new way of approaching opera as an art that demanded respect and attention, rather than as background to the gossip and social activities of the upper class.¹²⁵ The stockholders were very clear on where they stood: “the parquet wants German opera, the boxes do not.”¹²⁶ German opera required its listeners to adopt this new way of listening: “a work of such high art lends itself with a very ill grace indeed to scenes of social flutter.”¹²⁷ When the Metropolitan decided to return to the Italian-language repertoire, the *Times* summarized the house’s decision as “escaping the rigorous claims of culture and enjoying the pleasures of sin.”¹²⁸

The German Years at the Metropolitan introduced German operatic culture to the city’s audiences at a time in which German-speaking immigration was reaching its

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ There are several articles that go into further detail regarding this debate. For one particularly noteworthy example, see “The Battle of the Operas, *New York Herald*, 3 February 1889, 10.

¹²⁶ This opinion was expressed by Elbridge T. Gerry. Earlier in the article, Henry Clews noted that the German operas were fine, but could use some changes: “I believe these great German operas are too long. They keep us there till after midnight. It is like going to a ball to witness one of them. For this reason they defeat, in a measure, the very object of their existence—that of amusement. Let them be cut down so that we can get out by say 11 o’clock.” “The Opera House Question,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 January 1888, 5.

As similar comment was made in the *Times* a few years later, “[Italian operas] contain long spaces of arid recitative, which not even the Italians themselves ever listen to, because recitative is pretty much the same thing all the time; and the spaces afford opportunities for that social chatter which is, according to some of the Directors, the chief object of the opera house.” “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 2 March 1890, 13.

¹²⁷ “Music of the Spheres,” *New York Herald*, 3 November 1887, 8.

¹²⁸ “The Reaction in Opera,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1891, 4.

climax. The arguments for and against German opera, along with the tropes of complexity, truthfulness, and dramatic expression that accompanied these productions, not only familiarized New Yorkers with the important theories of Wagner and his followers, but also laid the groundwork for how future productions of German operas in the city would be received and discussed. When Strauss's operas began to appear in the city in the early twentieth century, the stage had already been set by these pivotal years at the Metropolitan. Of equal importance, however, was the growing German-speaking community and its changing relationship to New York's social and cultural life.

Chapter 3

Germans in the New World: The Nineteenth-Century Immigration Boom and the Building of a German Metropolis

One reason cited for the success of the Metropolitan's German Years was the growing, and increasingly influential, German-speaking population. Possessing an unfamiliar language and a distinct set of customs, German Americans occupied a unique, and frequently fraught, position within the larger New York City community.¹ The often-negative attitudes towards this group inevitably spilled over into how its culture was received. For better or worse, this musical culture became a primary means of defining what it meant to be German American, both for those inside and outside of the community.²

From its inception as an outpost of the Dutch West India Company, New York City had long been recognized for its diverse citizenry. Among the earliest Germans to arrive were the Palatine Germans, who had been pushed off their land by the armies of Louis XIV during Queen Anne's War. Around 2,500 Palatines eventually arrived in North America during the summer of 1710. Although a significant number of them died

¹ It is essential to remember that the German Americans do not constitute one monolithic entity. Rather, the group that is commonly labeled "German American" consists of a vast array of German-speakers with different regional, national, and religious affiliations. Even the language itself consisted of various regional dialects and derivations. For ease, I will be using the term "German American" to refer to this large community with the understanding that it is a simplification of a broad and diverse group.

² A similar discussion on the background of the German-speaking community may be found in my article, "Brews, Brotherhood, and Beethoven: The 1865 New York City Sangerfest and the Fostering of German American Identity," *American Music* 33.4 (2015): 405–440. In order to provide some context for this project, however, I will include, and in some cases elaborate upon, some of the more pertinent details found within that article.

in quarantine on Governor's Island, or were moved north to settlements on the banks of the Hudson, somewhere around 350 Germans remained in the city. This group became indentured servants to the crown until a suppressed mutiny led to their release by Governor Hunter. Although many would scatter to other colonies, a small group remained, forming one of the first sizable German-speaking communities in the city.³

In the years following American independence, many of the Hessians hired by the British remained in the city. They were soon joined by increasing numbers of German-speaking immigrants. As a sign of this growing German immigration, German-born residents of New York City founded a German Society in 1785 to encourage and support immigration from the Fatherland.⁴ The Society, however, was vetoed by the state Council of Revision out of fear that it would inspire other groups to do the same and thus encourage the presence of "undesirable" immigrants. After operating unofficially for years, the society was eventually awarded a charter in 1804.⁵ Over the next few decades, the number of German-speaking immigrants steadily increased until the 1840s, when famines, economic depression, and the 1848 revolutions resulted in an explosion of new immigration.⁶ Better educated than previous groups, these immigrants nurtured a growing

³ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129–130.

⁴ Other immigrant groups formed similar societies. One of the more prevalent during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, created to aid Irish immigrants coming to the city. While many of these societies operated in good faith, a number of them were also founded to exploit the newly arrived immigrants.

⁵ Frederick M. Binder and David M. Reimers, *All the Nations Under Heaven: An Ethnic and Racial History of New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 34–35.

⁶ Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 736.

desire to resist complete assimilation in favor of a hybrid German American identity.⁷

This was largely fostered through social clubs, singing societies, and other cultural venues and institutions—including the Philharmonic Society of New York—that were designed to maintain a distinct sense of identity rooted in the traditions of the *Heimat*.⁸

An examination of the census numbers for New York County highlights the expansion of the German-born population during this period (see Table 3.1).⁹ These numbers only reflect those New Yorkers born outside of the United States. As was the practice of the census bureau, children of foreign-born parents who were born in the United States were counted as “American.” When the 1890 census included information

⁷ Many of these immigrants in the post-1848 period would also prove instrumental in forming workers’ rights groups in the city. The *Turnverein*, made up of many members who had fought in the 1848 uprisings, became one of the most vocal supporters of these causes, including the formation of unions. Groups like the *Turnverein*, which became the New Yorker *Socialistischen Turnverein*, also published their own German-language papers, including the *Turn-Zeitung* and *Republik der Arbeiter*, which were dedicated to spreading socialist ideals. Although they often had little influence outside of the German-speaking community, these groups championed many of the causes that would lay the foundation for workers’ rights movements at the turn of the twentieth century. *Ibid.*, 769-70.

⁸ Don Yoder, “The Pennsylvania Germans: Three Centuries of Identity Crisis,” in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, ed. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 51.

The term “Heimat” is being used with the understanding that it is also a simplification of much more complicated idea with degrees of nuance and interpretation. While there is little consensus on the translation of the term, there have been numerous attempts to discuss the formation of the ideal *Heimat* through different means, including culture. As will be discussed, the reception of Strauss’s works in the city was part of this overall cultural process—one that was also witnessed in relation to the German Years at the Met. For more on this, see Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

⁹ New York County encompasses the borough of Manhattan and was considered the entirety of New York City before the 1898 consolidation of Brooklyn, the Bronx, Richmond County, and the western portion of Queens County into the modern five-borough City of New York.

on the origin of foreign-born parents, 425,876 “white persons” were listed with either one, or both, parents born in Germany.¹⁰ This accounted for a sizeable portion of the German American community that had not been factored into the community’s overall totals in earlier census reports.¹¹

TABLE 3.1. Foreign-Born German-Speaking Residents of New York County

Census Year	German-Born	Austrian-Born	Swiss-Born	Total German/Austrian/Swiss-Born	Total Foreign-Born Residents
1860	118,292 (31%)	1,692 (.4%)	1,771 (.5%)	121,755 (32%)	383,717
1870	151,216 (36%)	2,737 (.7%)	2,178 (.5%)	156,131 (37%)	419,094
1880	163,482 (34%)	4,748 (1%)	4,545 (.9%)	172,775 (36%)	478,670
1890	210,723 (33%)	27,193 (4%)	4,953 (.8%)	242,869 (38%)	639,943

Note: Percentages shown are out of the total of all foreign-born residents.

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census of Population and Housing, 1860. *Nativity of the Population of the City of New York, New York.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864; U. S. Bureau of the Census of Population and Housing, 1870. *Nativity of the Population of the City of New York, New York.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872; U. S. Bureau of the Census of Population and Housing, 1880. *Nativity of the Population of the City of New York, New York.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1883; U. S. Bureau of the Census of Population and Housing, 1890. *Nativity of the Population of the City of New York, New York.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895.

In the city, many of the new German-speaking arrivals found a surrogate home in *Kleindeutschland*, an area bounded by Fourteenth Street to Division Street and the Bowery to Avenue D.¹² By 1875, the area was home to nearly half of New York City’s

¹⁰ As with the term “German American,” there was nuance within the “German” category. Overall, German, Austrian, and Swiss-born residents made up the largest categories of German-speaking immigrants; however, the “German-born” label was further divided into regional categories, including Baden, Bavaria, Brunswick, Hamburg, Hanover, Hessen, Lübeck, Mecklenburg, Nassau, Oldenburg, Prussia, Saxony, Weimar, Württemberg, and a generic “non-specified” category.

¹¹ Of New Yorkers with foreign-born parents, roughly 35% had parents of German origin. U. S. Bureau of the Census of Population and Housing, 1890. *Foreign Parentage: New York City.* Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895.

¹² Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 745.

German-speaking community.¹³ As the neighborhood grew, Avenue A, the Bowery, and the lower portion of Broadway became the sites of beer halls and small ethnic theaters, which served as crucial tools in the process of German cultural maintenance.¹⁴ As the “New Immigration” of Italians and Eastern Europeans increased at the end of the century, the displaced German-speaking enclave migrated north to Yorkville, occupying roughly East Seventy-Ninth Street to East Ninety-Sixth Street and bounded by the East River and Third Avenue. When Strauss’s works began appearing in the city in the early years of the twentieth century, it was Yorkville that housed a significant portion of the city’s German-speaking community.

As to be expected in a group as diverse as New York City’s German-speaking community, there were significant divisions within *Kleindeutschland*. When it came to settling down, many immigrants chose to live near those of similar regional or religious affiliations. Areas emerged for Jews, Catholics, Bavarians, Prussians, and Austrians, to name a few. These regional identities were particularly important before the unification under Bismarck in 1871.¹⁵ First generation German Americans often joined the *Landsmannschaft* associations of their parents, maintaining a loyalty to their parents’ regional identification.¹⁶ Even some singing societies, such as the *Schwäbischer Sängerbund*, *Suabian Sängerbund of New York*, and the *Thüringer Sängerbund*, were

¹³ Binder and Reimers, *Nations*, 76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ For instance, in 1860, ninety percent of Bavarians living in the city were either married to fellow Bavarians or they were married to Germans from the surrounding regions of southwest Germany. *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁶ As will be discussed, this regional self-identification—and reluctance to accept a broader pan-German identity—was often one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the creation of a broader German American identity. Music soon became one of the means by which to overcome this difficulty.

built off of shared regional identities, rather than a more inclusive, pan-German identity.¹⁷

As evidenced by *Kleindeutschland*, the German American community was somewhat removed from its fellow New Yorkers. This was largely the result of deliberate choice, fostered, in part, by the German Protestant church. In contrast to the Irish immigrant community, a significant portion of German immigrants were affiliated with Protestantism, rather than Catholicism.¹⁸ As a result, German Protestants—unlike German Catholics, who had to contend with an entrenched Irish hierarchy in the city and the overarching formal structure of the Catholic Church—were able to form their own ethnic congregations, which were relatively independent from those found throughout the rest of the city. As Peter Conolly-Smith has discussed, this practice of establishing independent congregations dated back to the beginning years of German-speaking immigration.¹⁹ The significance of these institutions went beyond the salvation of the soul. As bastions of the German language, these churches were responsible not only for maintaining the language—thereby providing the most elementary link to the *Heimat*—

¹⁷ *Music in Gotham: The New York Scene, 1862–1875*, accessed July 15, 2014, <http://musicingotham.org/>.

¹⁸ Even though many Germans associated themselves with the Protestant faith, many of them chose to not attend church. Furthermore, there was a significant portion of the community, particularly following 1848, that chose to identify themselves as “Free-Thinkers,” rather than members of an established Christian denomination.

¹⁹ Formed in 1767, Swamp Church became the first German-language church in the city. Several years later, in 1784, it joined with another congregation to form the United German-Lutheran Church of New York. Although the church had both English and German-language services, a congregation later broke away to form the German-Protestant-Lutheran St. Matthew Church in 1830, where services were held exclusively in German. Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 25–26.

but also the championing of German identity through access to German-speaking schools, clubs, and other community activities.²⁰ German Protestants, rather than accept complete assimilation, actively strove to separate themselves from the larger English-speaking community and maintain a strong connection to their ethnic identity. Over time, this cultivation of ethnic identity moved beyond the church and into the secular world through the German-language press and the concert hall.²¹ Efforts to maintain a degree of cultural separation grew exponentially in the years following the 1848 influx of political refugees, who took a different stance towards the relationship of the community to its new homeland. Many of these new arrivals had little desire to completely drop the German portion of their identity. A newly formed “German American” identity would need to prove strong enough to withstand the tide of complete assimilation. For many of those involved in this effort, musical culture emerged as a possible means by which to create an indispensable niche that would allow the community to partially assimilate, while also retaining a necessary link to the cultural roots that would ensure against complete absorption. In her work on German American identity, Kathleen Conzen has described this process as the third, and final, part of assimilation.²² The two earlier phases—ethnic

²⁰ Binder and Reimers, *Nations*, 80.

²¹ A number of German-language papers appeared in the city catering to several facets of the community, including the *Demokrat* and the *New-Yorker Volkszeitung*. Despite the presence of so many German-language newspapers in the city, for the purposes of this study, I will be focusing primarily on the *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, which had the widest readership. In its effort to appeal to a broader audience than many of the other papers—which often catered to a specific regional or political audience—it more accurately serves as a representative voice for the community as a whole. For more on the German-language press in the United States, see Carl Wittke, *The German-Language Press in America* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957).

²² Kathleen Neils Conzen, “German-Americans and the Invention of Ethnicity,” in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-Hundred-Year History*, ed. Frank

separatism and the melting pot—had both proved unsustainable.²³ This third phase, which Conzen argues occurred primarily in the years following the Civil War, strove to showcase the means by which German musical culture could thrive within a pluralistic American musical culture. In the long run, German Americans desired to preserve, yet also create, their own cultural identity—from beer halls to Beethoven—which they found superior to anything else found in America. Out of the disparate regional, religious, and national strands that constituted the broader German-speaking community, there was an effort to forge a pan-German American identity, which would allow the community to survive within the larger American landscape by relying on the strength of a common, united culture. It was eventually music, rather than beer halls, Goethe, or Kant, that became the primary means by which German Americans sought to retain a distinct identity, ensuring that they did not disappear entirely into the American melting pot.²⁴

John Koegel in his seminal work on the German immigrant theater describes a similar process of assimilation and cultural maintenance. Koegel outlines eight overarching patterns of cultural maintenance, conflict, and accommodation that commonly appear in theories of immigrant identity and acculturation: “1) migration, 2) the establishment of immigrant neighborhoods, 3) the creation of institutions for the community, 4) the encouragement of literacy through language maintenance and the establishment of language schools and newspapers, 5) the development of societies in

Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 134.

²³ Within this melting pot phase, there was a reliance on a limited idea of mutual exchange by both German and non-German Americans with an emphasis on maintaining and sharing German cultural traditions. *Ibid.*

²⁴ This was at least true until the beginning decades of the twentieth century, when various forces increasingly eroded the idea of a distinct German American identity.

which many artistic, economic, religious and social needs were met within the community, 6) the institutionalization of ritualized festivals, 7) initial rejection and ultimate acceptance by mainstream society, and 8) acculturation and/or assimilation.”²⁵ While Koegel uses this pattern in the context of popular theater, it applies equally well to opera, which was arguably more accessible (or at least more readily embraced) by the non-German community, who frequented performances at the Metropolitan, but was less likely to travel down into *Kleindeutschland* to attend performances at the ethnic theaters.²⁶ As can be seen, the Protestant churches and numerous social and musical clubs took many of the early steps described by Koegel. Later on, as German Americans began to move closer towards assimilation, music became a critical element in the effort to achieve acceptance by mainstream New York society.

Despite any efforts at assimilating—or not assimilating—many German-speaking immigrants, regardless of their national, regional, or religious identities, faced resentment and misunderstanding at the hands of their new countrymen. Their Irish counterparts, who constituted the other half of the “Old Immigration”—the period of European immigration from 1815 to 1880—provide a useful barometer to measure the German-speaking experience.²⁷ Despite arriving in the city at roughly the same time, there were marked differences between the treatment of the two communities by New Yorkers—and often a certain degree of animosity that arose between the two groups as a result.

²⁵ John Koegel, *Music in German Immigrant Theater: New York City, 1840–1940* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2009), 4.

²⁶ This is by no means to say that they did not. As Koegel points out, a significant number of non-German speakers attended the performances presented on *Kleindeutschland*'s numerous stages.

²⁷ Binder and Reimers, *Nations*, 38.

Particularly early on, the most blatant difference between the two groups was language. For all their cultural and economic differences, the Irish immigrants at least shared a common language with their new city; however, this was clearly not the case with the growing number of immigrants from German-speaking lands. While this would appear to have given the Irish immigrants a leg-up, the German immigrants, in general, tended to be better educated, possessed a higher literacy rate, more financial stability, and a wider set of skills than comparable Irish immigrants.²⁸ Trades, including baking, shoemaking, tailoring, and carpentry, soon became virtually the exclusive province of German workers. Hence, despite the language gap, it was the German immigrant community that ultimately found more favor in its adoptive land. Frequent comparisons appeared in the press, even in situations that would not seem to warrant them. As a case in point, the *Tribune*, while reporting on a typical Sunday at Jones's Woods—a park located along the banks of the East River—laid out the difference between the Irish and German participants:

A noticeable difference, however, is to be observed between the Irish and German guests. The merry day of the former almost invariably ends in a row. Black eyes, bloody noses and aching bones with them appears to be a necessary encomium to the other proceedings, and the station-house is their final resting place. . . . [T]he German is entirely different. He talks loudly, gesticulates earnestly, and even frowns angrily, but he seldom or never comes to blows. The phlegmatism of his disposition underlies his effervescence, as the deep, golden, mellow soul of wine underlies the bubbling froth of its sparkling surface. The consequence is that the attendant policemen have little need for even a smattering of the German tongue—most of the protestations and oaths with which they have to deal being usually a broad volley of square Saxon, or enriched with the rich brogue that bespeaks the native of Erin.²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁹ “The Lungs of Manhattan,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, 10 July 1865, 1.

German Americans were often presented as the lesser of two evils, but an evil nonetheless. Accused of monopolizing skilled trades and driving down prices for goods, the German community was often castigated for its success in business. Other points of attack included their language, tendency to form insular ethnic enclaves, radical political tendencies (at least in regard to the Forty-Eighters), and religion (particularly for Catholic and Jewish Germans). As with the later European immigrant communities that would arrive in New York, German—and Irish—immigrants were not immediately thought of as white. As John Tehranian notes in his study of whiteness under the American legal system, “whiteness was determined through performance. . . . Successful litigants demonstrated evidence of whiteness in their character, religious practices and beliefs, class orientation, language, ability to intermarry, and a host of other traits that had nothing to do with intrinsic racial grouping.”³⁰ What determined whiteness was the Anglo-American mainstream and the ability of the immigrant community to assimilate to this standard.

When it came to cultural differences that separated the new German-speaking community from the Anglo-American establishment, a popular line of attack was the tendency of those in the German-speaking community to celebrate Sundays with music and beer. This approach to the Sabbath rubbed many of the city’s more proper-minded Protestants the wrong way and led to some intense debates surrounding the so-called “Sunday Laws.”³¹ For many non-German New Yorkers, the German American

³⁰ John Tehranian, “Performing Whiteness: Naturalization Litigation and the Construction of Racial Identity in America,” *The Yale Law Journal* 109, no. 4 (January 2000): 820–821.

³¹ Binder and Reimers, *Nations*, 75.

community's behavior on Sunday was proof that they stood outside of acceptable codes of conduct. While the debate had been ongoing for decades, it became particularly heated in the early 1860s, culminating in the 1862 Anti-Concert Saloon Bill, which prohibited the sale of alcohol on Sundays.³² This did not, however, completely stop enterprising managers of the city's ethnic theaters. The Atlantic Garten—a popular theater and beer garden that had been opened in 1858 by William Kramer—continued to serve Weiss beer.³³ As it was lighter and less alcoholic than lager beer, Weiss beer was thus deemed permissible under the law.³⁴ Venues like the Atlantic Garten also began to label these Sunday evening performances as “sacred concerts,” thereby allowing managers to get around the prohibition of theatrical performances on Sundays. The term “sacred” was often used quite loosely and could refer to works with questionable religious merit. On 1 July 1865, an article in the *New York Clipper* described a crackdown on these “Sunday German Concerts.”

The Police Commissioners are getting “down on the Sunday Dutch,” and Sunday German Garten and Restauracioners [*sic*]. It must be borne in mind that our American citizens of German descent, not having the fear of our Sunday laws in their mind's eye, make a regular holiday of the Sabbath, which *we* are taught to keep holy. . . . As our own places of amusement are closed on Sundays, it is thought to be but right and proper that the foreign element be tarred with the same brush, for some of these Dutch shanties are bad places, leading many adult people astray, and seriously affecting the morals of our youth of both sexes. . . . These places the police are now attempting to shut up. *We* don't believe they'll succeed in it. They may squelch them for a few Sundays, but the Dutch will triumph in the end, for their “political influence” will be brought to bear, and then, who shall prevail against them? The “political business” is the curse of New York; it enables the evil-doer to triumph over law and order;

³² Koegel, *Immigrant Theater*, 83–84.

³³ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁴ “It Was ‘Weiss Beer.’: The Atlantic Garden Permitted to Keep Its License,” *New York Times*, 18 February 1885, 3.

it places the city government in the hands of the roughs and rogues; it surrenders the Sabbath day to lawlessness and disorder.³⁵

This push for the enforcement of the “Sunday Laws” was met by resistance on the part of many in the German American community, who organized an association to counter the increasingly aggressive police tactics:

Some years ago a number of Germans organized a protective society in opposition to the “so-called” Sunday law, the enforcement of which has been repeatedly attempted. This association has been reorganized in consequence of the late attempts by the police authorities to enforce the old Sunday laws, prohibiting music and song.³⁶

While many non-German New Yorkers viewed the crackdown on these establishments as a consequence of the morally suspect behavior of the Germans, there were some papers that recognized an element of hypocrisy in the condemnation of the Germans for partaking of their day of rest in such a fashion. In one instance, the *Herald* noted that the city’s upper classes could often be found on Sunday drinking Chablis, playing cards, and engaging in mindless gossip, which were all somewhat questionable, yet considered tolerable. Meanwhile, the concerts that featured the music of Mozart and Beethoven—music that the *Herald* felt best embodied God’s gift to mankind—were criticized because they included beer.³⁷ Much of this attack against the German-speaking community relied on the by-now familiar image of the German man as the beer guzzling—often-bearded—drunkard. As Peter Conolly-Smith has shown, this figure soon came to represent the German in the political cartoons of the period, thereby instilling a common derogatory trope of German American identity linked to the consumption of alcohol.³⁸ The criticism

³⁵ “City Summary,” *New York Clipper*, 1 July 1865, 94.

³⁶ “An Association in Opposition to the Sunday Laws,” *New York Herald*, 9 July 1865, 4.

³⁷ “The Saengerfest,” *New York Herald*, 17 July 1865, 5.

³⁸ Conolly-Smith, *Translating America*, 31.

of these concerts was not about the music. Instead, these events served to bolster a disparaging image of the German American that was used to set him apart from his fellow Americans.

While the condemnation of these concerts was not aimed at the music, the mention by the *Herald* of Mozart and Beethoven suggests the complex relationship emerging between the German American community and its adoptive land. As German Americans were being criticized for their insularity, strange language, and propensity for beer on Sundays, the Germans were becoming increasingly associated with music. While this musical expression of German national identity was particularly important in the years before unification, it did not stop with the creation of a new political state. As a means of creating a sense of community and commonality, the musical definition of German identity was crucial not only in defining what it meant to be German within the newly formed nation itself, but was also vital for those that had left Europe to immigrate to the United States.³⁹

The use of German-language opera as a marker of German identity was part of a gradual process that began in the decades prior to the official formation of a German nation and was an outgrowth of a larger debate regarding the definition of a German national identity. What constituted this German identity was—and still remains—the subject of much debate: common language, shared values, collective culture, or

³⁹ Nagel compares the process of ethnic cultural construction to a shopping cart: “We can think of ethnic boundary construction as determining the *shape* of the shopping cart (size, number of wheels, composition, etc.); ethnic culture, then, is composed of the things we put in the cart.” An ethnic community decides what cultural items go into this cart. For those seeking to form a German identity in the nineteenth century, music became one of these indispensable items. Joane Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,” *Social Problems* 41, no. 1 (February 1994): 162.

hypothetical racial markers have all been cited as means by which German ethnic identity was crafted.⁴⁰ Joane Nagel has argued that for “newly forming ethnic and national groups”—an appropriate descriptor of the Germans at this time—“the construction of community solidarity and shared meanings out of real or putative common history and ancestry involves both cultural constructions and reconstructions.”⁴¹ When it came to these “cultural constructions and reconstructions,” music quickly emerged as a vital aspect of defining “Germanness.”⁴² A shared musical culture provided German-speakers—both at home and abroad—a sense of unification.⁴³ Borrowing from Simon Frith’s study of identity formation through popular music, the German-speaking community came to know itself “as [a social group] (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgment.”⁴⁴ Early on, the group primarily responsible for instilling this

⁴⁰ Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, and Nancy Reagin, eds., *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 8.

⁴¹ Nagel, “Constructing,” 164.

⁴² The newly formed discipline of musicology proved especially useful in cultivating the image of Germans as the most musical of all people. German scholars were able to construct a particular musical lineage and history that centered on the achievements of German-speaking composers and musicians, thus emphasizing the centrality of music in the German national character.

⁴³ During the nineteenth century, Italian identity, which was also formed without the benefit of a unified political “nation,” was also to some degree connected to its musical heritage, particularly in regard to its opera. Perhaps the biggest difference between the Italian and German uses of music in this process has to do with the relative newness of German music. Unlike Italian music, which had been recognized and praised for centuries, a distinctly German musical culture, free of French or Italian influences, was largely constructed in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Prior to that, Germans were recognized for their ability to emulate and synthesize the music of other cultures, rather than their ability to form a uniquely “German” musical style. In this way, the very idea of a distinctly German music was nearly contemporary with its use as a signifier of a pan-German identity.

⁴⁴ Simon Frith, “Music and Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2011), 111.

sense of musical commonality was writers.⁴⁵ Figures such as Johann Forkel (1749–1818)—whose landmark 1802 biography of Bach provided one of the cornerstones of musicology—and E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776–1822) used literature to establish music as the supreme marker of Germanness.⁴⁶ Hoffmann further contributed to the construction of a German musical lineage by positioning the works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven as the pinnacles of instrumental music.⁴⁷ Eventually, as the Western canon developed during the nineteenth century, the superiority of German music seemed additionally solidified by the sheer number of works that emerged as staples of the repertoire. It is no coincidence that the key figures of the eventual canonic repertoire—Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven—were all connected to post-1871 Germany, or the larger “Grossdeutschland,” which ignored established political boundaries in favor of a broader cultural definition of German identity.⁴⁸ In the early years of musicology, the critical editions of the complete

⁴⁵ In particular, Applegate points to the blossoming of music criticism, music education, musical associations, literary depictions of music, and popular attitudes towards music that began this process. Most of these were the effects of music becoming an important element of the nation’s *Bildung*. In order to be a well-rounded, cultured individual, musical knowledge was considered a vital element. See Celia Applegate, “What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of the Nation,” *German Studies Review* 15 (1992): 27.

⁴⁶ Celia Applegate, “How German Is It? Nationalism and the Idea of Serious Music in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *19th-Century Music* 21, no. 3 (1998): 294-296.

⁴⁷ In a revised essay on the subject that was published in 1813 in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, Hoffmann planted the seeds that were to become the standard orchestral canon, built on the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. E. T. A. Hoffmann, “Beethoven’s Instrumental Music,” in *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ruth A. Solie, vol. 6 of *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Oliver Strunk and Leo Treitler (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 1194.

⁴⁸ From the nationalism of Mendelssohn to that of Wagner, there was a wide array of difference and nuance within the larger debate concerning German identity and the role that music served. Significantly, the German cultural nation was also not the same as the eventual German political nation. In the discussion of a “German” musical lineage, the question of Haydn, Mozart, or Schubert being Austrian, or in the case of Haydn

works of Bach (1851), Handel (1858), Mozart (1876), Schubert (1883), and Beethoven (1884) served to strengthen both the perceived superiority of German music and the overarching lineage of a German musical tradition.⁴⁹ Outside of academia, this connection between music and the German national spirit was promoted among the larger German-speaking community through the burgeoning musical press—exemplified by Johann Friedrich Rochlitz (1769–1842), who founded his *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in Leipzig with the intention of emphasizing the importance of music for the German national character.⁵⁰ Some critics, such as Adolf Bernhard Marx, editor of the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, used the pulpit of the press to promote the music of German composers, while also arguing that Germans possessed a national musical spirit superior to other Europeans.⁵¹ Some people did worry that this connection to music may have been detrimental to the development of other fields. In 1907, Kuno Francke (1855–1930), professor of history at Harvard and curator of the Germanic Museum, wrote an article extolling the virtues of German visual art, arguing that “even educated German-Americans are convinced that there is no German art outside of

potentially Hungarian, did not come into play. The notion of cultural German identity was something that superseded various attempts at drawing political boundaries.

⁴⁹ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, “Germans as the ‘People of Music’: Genealogy of an Identity,” in *Music and German National Identity*, eds. Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.

Of course, even though German composers represented a large percentage of these complete works, they were not the only composers whose works were included. For instance, there was also a complete edition of Chopin’s music by Breitkopf and Härtel around this time. For a discussion of the reception of Chopin’s music in New York City, see Francisco Javier Albo, “Images of Chopin in the New World: Performances of Chopin’s Music in New York City, 1839–1876” (PhD dissertation, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2012).

⁵⁰ Applegate and Potter, *German Identity*, 4–5.

⁵¹ Sanna Pederson, “A. B. Marx, Berlin Concert Life, and German National Identity,” *19th-Century Music* 18, no. 2 (Autumn, 1994): 87–107.

music . . . it is hardly suspected in America that there is feverish activity in the literary and art life of the Germany of to-day.”⁵²

A catalyst behind this effort to emphasize music as a central feature of German national identity was the changing consumption of music that occurred in the early years of the nineteenth century. As the music industry shifted, patronage declined, leaving the number of positions for composers and musicians rapidly diminished. In order to prove relevancy in the new economy, musicians needed to shed the stigma of frivolous court culture—or dogmatic religious observances—and prove to the rising educated elite that music was an essential, and serious, component of society.⁵³ It was out of this effort that music, along with art and literature, became one of the core elements of the *Bildung* of the nation, increasingly presented as a vital part of a person’s education, particularly if that person happened to be German.

For New Yorkers, one of the easiest—or at least seemingly less complicated—ways of understanding the newest arrivals to the city was through their musical offerings. In addition to the presentations at the Metropolitan and the performances by the Philharmonic Society of New York—which offered a predominantly German repertoire beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century—the city was also home to less formal musical presentations, including small ethnic theaters and amateur singing societies.⁵⁴ Similar to those found in German-speaking communities throughout Europe,

⁵² “Upholds German Art,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1907, 7.

⁵³ Applegate, *How German*, 286.

⁵⁴ In 1853, Eduard Hamann established the Deutsches National Theater Company, one of the earliest fully professional German theater companies in the city. Dedicated to presenting both classical and popular drama, the company was housed at the St. Charles Theater (17-19 Bowery). This theater eventually closed following the opening of the Stadttheater—the city’s first truly successful German theater—in 1854. For a

the singing societies in the city played a vital role in the life of German-speaking immigrants. They demonstrated the importance of music in the formation of German identity by emphasizing the place of music in the lives of the everyday people—or *Volk*—that comprised the ranks, while also serving as important centers of socialization and support—similar in function to other societies found within the German-speaking immigrant community, such as the Turners, who utilized gymnastics to achieve the same goals. Much of the appeal came from organized social events, including picnics and Summer Night’s Festivals, which included plenty of food, dancing, and music by both singing societies and orchestras. In New York City, the earliest society, the *Liederkrantz*, was formed in 1847.⁵⁵ Like many cities, New York was home to several different societies, which served various factions of the larger German American community. In addition to concerts, picnics, festivals, and other social events, the singing societies were dedicated to creating a pan-German national identity through the shared experience of song, as demonstrated by the German Singers’ League’s 1862 charter, which advocated for “the promotion of German feeling through the unifying power of German song. . . . to preserve and enhance the German national consciousness and a feeling of solidarity among German tribes.”⁵⁶ This was a popular sentiment held by many of the choral groups spread throughout various regions of Germany and abroad, once more demonstrating the

comprehensive examination of the ethnic German theaters in New York City, see John Koegel’s work on the topic. Koegel, *Immigrant Theater*, 30.

⁵⁵ Suzanne Gail Snyder, “The Männerchor Tradition in the United States: A Historical Analysis of Its Contributions to American Musical Culture” (PhD dissertation, University of Iowa, 1991), 43.

⁵⁶ Applegate and Potter, *German Identity*, 18.

belief that music could be used to transcend differences—regional, religious, or otherwise—and create a more uniform German identity.

For German Americans, the singing society provided an important, if tenuous, connection to the Old Country and its culture. As the German-speaking population grew in number during the second half of the nineteenth century, so too did the societies. The presence of these numerous singing societies also served the non-German populace in understanding this growing community. The following article from the *Herald*, published during the 1865 New York *Sängerfest*—a festival of German song comprised of singing societies drawn from the Northeastern region of the United States under the auspices of the *Northeastern Sängerbund* (1850)—utilized the festival as an opportunity to further explore the German-speaking population through its music.⁵⁷

The Germans are essentially a musical people. Far removed from the enthusiast, a character entirely opposed to Teutonic stolidity, they are the most earnest devotees of the deity presiding over music. With them there are no two opinions as to the relative merit of Apollo and Pan, and we imagine had Midas been a German he would never have had his ears elongated to the assinine [*sic*] standard in consequence of his want in giving old Pan with his reed the preference to Apollo with his lyre. From the German's infancy the art of music is laid before him as the highest of all arts. Before the days of spoon-feeding are over he is expected to be fully acquainted with the theory of sound, and long ere his infantile limbs have attained the perambulating faculty his hands have been taught to finger the fugues of Mendelssohn and the cantatas of Haydn. Even the crying of the German baby is harmonious and its chubby fist in anger is shaken in common time. Before the mysteries of the alphabet are unfolded to his youthful mind he is initiated into the reading of quavers,

⁵⁷ Local singing societies throughout the United States joined into regional associations that were responsible for holding these large-scale music festivals. The first association was the *Nord-amerikanische Sängerbund* (1849), which was formed initially as a national organization; however, it had to compete later on with the Northeastern (1850), which included New York City, the German-Texan (1855), and the Northwestern (1856). These semi-annual festivals were major events that included picnics, song competitions, concerts, parades, and a wide array of entertainment and socialization meant to showcase the respective host city. Snyder, *Männerchor Tradition*, 150–153.

semiquavers and demisemiquavers, understands the meaning of *staccato*, *allegro*, and other terms, and can write a “score” before he can “pothooks and hangers.” Educated after this manner it is but natural to expect him to be adept at a very early age, and to form a valuable acquisition to the sangerbund of which he becomes a member before he begins his scholastic career.⁵⁸

This love of music was something that seemed to transcend all class boundaries within the German community. For many, it was simply understood to be a part of their blood, a component of their national character that had been taught to them since birth. While there may be a certain level of sarcasm within the article—particularly in the idea of a musical education that superseded the development of basic motor skills—this article does demonstrate the success of the efforts to instill music as a marker of German national identity. The *Times* also used the same festival to demonstrate that a love of music was pervasive throughout the German community, citing the “red hot passion for the sacred art” that runs through the “entire nationality” from the “best citizens and prominent merchants . . . of German birth” to the “drinking, swelling, paunchy Germans, who smoke much, drink more and swell considerably.”⁵⁹ In recalling the myth of Midas—who chose the music of Pan over Apollo and was thereby awarded with a pair of donkey’s ears—the article further distinguishes the German listener from the average dilettante. Noting that a German would never have chosen Pan, the author stipulates a certain refinement and education—and perhaps traditionalism—on the part of the German that is absent from other listeners.

Many German Americans also held this impression of a special sense of refinement and education. In a speech to participants of the 1865 *Sängerfest*, Friedrich

⁵⁸ “The Saengerfest,” *New York Herald*, 17 July 1865, 5.

⁵⁹ “The German Festival,” *New York Times*, 19 July 1865, 5.

Kapp (1824–1884) encouraged the participants to both remember their ties to the fatherland and to cultivate culture in the New World.⁶⁰

The times have happily gone by when the German, dazzled by the material achievements of the New World, made haste to cast his memories and his attainments behind him, in his overweening anxiety to out-Herod the Herods of practical Americanism. The memorable occurrence known as the Know-Nothing movement made manifest to the dullest perception that the German does not rise in the scale of being by apeing American manners and babbling American phrases. The more firmly we cling to the intellectual treasures of our nationality, the more will we be respected by the native population. What firmness of character is to the individual, national pride is to a people – the source at once of self-esteem and of the regard of others. . . . We have a better destiny than that of the raw material in the hands of the citizens; we were not as manure to be absorbed into the particles of a foreign soil. We have a place in the ranks of civilization, battling against barbarism. . . . To constitute a German nation in the bowels of the American, is impossible; but to lend our influence to the struggle for the best interests of man, is not only feasible, but a solemn duty, and our influence will take the firmer hold, and wear for itself the wider bed, the more highly we prize the fruits of our German culture. . . . Hail, then, to the land of our sages, our poets, our composers! Hail to the great republic which has given us a kindly welcome, which has crushed rebellion, and reset the foundation-stone of liberty!⁶¹

For Kapp, and many like him, it was the duty of German-speaking immigrants to instill culture into their new home by ensuring that German music became a part of the culture of the United States.⁶² Although this speech was made in 1865—nearly twenty years

⁶⁰ Kapp was a journalist and writer who penned a number of works on subjects ranging from slavery in the United States to biographies of notable German Americans, including Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben and Johann Kalb. His *Geschichte der deutschen Auswanderung in Amerika* (1868) received some criticism among members of the German American community for its apparent warning against the durability of maintaining a unique ethnic identity in the United States.

⁶¹ “The German Saengerfest,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1865, 8.

⁶² As Kathleen Conzen has argued, the public festival provides a particularly important opportunity for the ethnic community. As a moment of public display, the festival allows the community to present a carefully crafted image to mainstream society that serves as a vital tool of self-identification. For those on the outside of the community, it is also an opportunity to either confirm or reconsider ethnic stereotypes. Conzen, “Invention of Ethnicity,” 131–147.

before the Metropolitan Opera House was opened—the sentiments expressed by Kapp were the driving ideals of Damrosch and his supporters. The desire to bring German culture to the New World was cited by many of the German singers drawn to participate in Damrosch’s experiment. Furthermore, one of the main arguments used to support the enterprise was the idea that German opera would serve to cultivate taste and culture in the city—another weapon in the battle “against barbarism.” For all their differences, it was clear that in the world of high culture, the Germans had contributed much to their adoptive land. In response to that same singing festival, the *Times* credited the German Americans with bringing music to an unmusical land:

It is here that the Germanic race, resident among us, beside the other great benefits they have conferred upon America, are doing us an incalculable service. In every city or village of the land where there are a few hundred Germans, they have their Sangerbund, and from these, there is growing up through the whole country, and among all its population, a love and knowledge of the works of the great masters of the art of music, as well as of the more popular melodies which spring from and appeal to the universal soul.

We welcome this noble gift to our country. It will purify our manhood, develop our tastes, enrich our character, make life more worthy and less selfish, and elevate us above the gross materialism to which we are prone.⁶³

This attitude displayed by the *Times* was indicative of the dichotomy that would come to define the German American community within New York City: a sense of social inferiority oddly coupled with cultural superiority. As was displayed in much of the coverage of the German Years at the Metropolitan, the music of Wagner was upheld as the height of Western culture, yet the German audience members were often presented as social outsiders, who diligently listened to the performances, yet occupied a world far

⁶³ “The German Singing Festival,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1865, 4.

removed from the glittering realm of the box-holders. At the turn of the twentieth century—when Strauss's tone poems were beginning to appear in the repertoire of the Philharmonic Society of New York, his operas were receiving coverage in the local press despite not yet having been presented in the city, and a North American tour brought him to New York City for the first time—this dichotomy remained the defining attitude towards German American New Yorkers by their non-German compatriots. As a result, the early coverage of Strauss in the city would revolve around this conflicting image of German Americans: the pot-bellied, beer-swilling drunkard and the arbiter of Western music's greatest works.

Chapter 4

Strauss Comes to the City: The Tone Poems and the 1904 Visit

On 13 December 1884, in the midst of the opening weeks of the first all-German season, the Philharmonic Society of New York—under the direction of Theodore Thomas (1835–1905)—introduced New Yorkers to the music of Strauss through the world premiere of his Symphony in F Minor.¹ Over the following decades—culminating in Strauss’s 1904 American tour—all of his tone poems would eventually be heard in the city (see Table 4.1). The orchestral works therefore provide an important foundation from which to observe the later appearance of his operas. In addition, Strauss’s 1904 visit—which included the world premiere of his *Sinfonia Domestica*—brought the composer into direct contact with New Yorkers, who were inundated with extensive biographies and analyses of his work by the local press, along with numerous performances of his music.²

¹ “Philharmonic Rehearsal,” *New York Times*, 13 December 1884, 4.

² There were so many performances that the *Sun* cheekily praised a recital by Susan Metcalfe, soprano; Pablo Casals, cello; and Mrs. David Maunes, piano, because “the name of Richard Strauss did not appear on the programme. There was balm in Gilead at last.” “Singing and ‘Cello Playing,’” *New York Sun*, 9 March 1904, 7.

TABLE 4.1. New York City Premieres of Strauss’s Symphony in F Minor and the Tone Poems

Work	Premiere Date	Performing Ensemble	Director
Symphony in F Minor	13 December 1884	Philharmonic Society of New York	Theodore Thomas
<i>Aus Italien</i>	20 March 1888	Theodore Thomas Orchestra	Theodore Thomas
<i>Don Juan</i>	8 December 1891	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Arthur Nikisch
<i>Tod und Verklärung</i>	9 January 1892	Philharmonic Society of New York	Anton Seidl
<i>Macbeth</i>	2 April 1892	Symphony Society of New York	Walter Damrosch
<i>Till Eulenspiegel</i>	27 February 1896	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Emil Paur
<i>Also Sprach Zarathustra</i>	16 December 1897	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Emil Paur
<i>Ein Heldenleben</i>	7 December 1900	Philharmonic Society of New York	Emil Paur
<i>Don Quixote</i>	18 February 1904	Boston Symphony Orchestra	Wilhelm Gericke
<i>Sinfonia Domestica</i>	21 March 1904	Wetzler Symphony Orchestra ³	Richard Strauss

The Orchestral Works: An Introduction

Programmed by Thomas—who had been a close friend of the Strauss family—the Symphony in F Minor was generally well received.⁴ The *Times* noted that “its merits are chiefly those of form and instrumentation. Of great originality of thought the composition supplies no evidence.”⁵ The paper did admit that it deserved “high commendation” for being the work of such a young composer—Strauss was twenty at the time of the

³ According to his obituary, Hermann Wetzler (1870–1943)—German American composer, conductor, and organist—founded the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra in 1903. There are, however, advertisements for orchestral performances led by Wetzler that appear in November 1902. The group was disbanded when Wetzler left for Germany in 1905. “Herman [*sic*] Wetzler, Composer, 72, Dies,” *New York Times*, 30 May 1943, 26.

⁴ Matthew Boyden, *Richard Strauss* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 24.

⁵ “Philharmonic Rehearsal,” *New York Times*, 13 December 1884, 4.

premiere.⁶ In remarking on the performance, the *Tribune* noted the “seriousness of purpose which actuates this, the noblest musical organization of which the country boasts.”⁷ Despite this “seriousness of purpose,” the paper criticized Thomas’s decision to program the work alongside Beethoven’s *Coriolan* Overture, Volkmann’s Concerto for Cello, op. 33, and Schumann’s Symphony No. 3, as it demanded too much of the audience. This all-German programming linked the performance to the ongoing debate at the Metropolitan on the cultural and educational value of German music: “it is understood that the people who go to the Philharmonic concerts are willing to accept the judgment of the society as to what it is good for them to hear, and have intelligence enough to appreciate the educational value of its schemes.”⁸ The music offered by the Philharmonic therefore functioned—at least according to the “judgment of society”—as a tool of cultural and intellectual improvement. In examining the audience, the *Tribune* remarked, “that so many people listen attentively and applaud judiciously a programme like that of yesterday . . . is a fact which is exceedingly complimentary to the taste and culture of our musical public.”⁹ German orchestral music, as with German-language opera, provided the bar by which to judge cultural offerings and the audiences in attendance. By its inclusion in the performance, Strauss’s music was allied with this rhetorical idea of German musical supremacy. By implication, it was also joined to Wagner, who stood as the face of German music at the time. This was a connection that would remain attached to Strauss’s music whenever it appeared in New York.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Music and the Drama,” *New-York Tribune*, 14 December 1884, 9.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

As was also true in Europe, the first substantive introduction of Strauss to New York audiences was his tone poems. Examining the reception of these works illuminates common themes: his relation to Wagner, his musical craftsmanship, and connection to modernism.¹⁰ These themes not only informed how New Yorkers approached the young composer, but also colored how he would be viewed throughout his career, even as he became increasingly associated with his operas, rather than his orchestral works.

Is This the Future of Zukunftsmusik?: Strauss and the Legacy of Wagner

Written in the afterglow of an extended holiday in Italy, *Aus Italien* premiered nearly four years after the Symphony in F Minor.¹¹ As the first example of Strauss's program music, the work signified his shift towards the increasing influence of the *Neudeutsche Schule*. For the *Times*, this connection to Wagner was paramount:

[*Aus Italien*] is another of the efforts of recent composers to write like Wagner. The master of Baireuth [*sic*] is not half so easy to imitate as he seems to be. Strong and impressive peculiarities of style are readily enough perceived, but not so readily assimilated. . . . Herr Strauss is not without ideas, but they are distorted and obscured by his anxiety to follow the composer of "Tristan und Isolde," which opera has him in a merciless grip. . . . His work is hardly worthy of extended analysis, but it is worth while to mention that the first and third movements are the most meritorious, and of these the first, viewed as absolute music, is the best . . .

¹⁰ For a more thorough examination of the reception of the tone poems, see Mark-Daniel Schmid, "The Tone Poems of Richard Strauss and Their Reception History from 1887–1908" (PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1997). This work examines the reception—with a focus on the technical features of the music—of nine of Strauss's tone poems in Germany, England, Austria, France, and the United States, which helps to provide a broader context for understanding the reception in New York City compared to other cities.

¹¹ The work was first heard on 15 March 1888 at a public rehearsal of the Theodore Thomas Symphony in Steinway Hall. It was then repeated in Brooklyn twice that weekend and officially premiered on March 20. "Tenth Thomas Public Rehearsal," *New-York Tribune*, 16 March 1888, 4; "Tenth Thomas Concert," *New York Herald*, 21 March 1888, 5.

The third movement is a very laborious imitation of Wagner, but has an effective and well-scored climax.¹²

This early comparison to Wagner would become a central feature of Strauss's reception. The reference to *Tristan*, a work often cited as a crucial step towards modernism, squarely placed Strauss within the Wagnerian tradition, although it is claimed that he occupied this position rather unsuccessfully. In its review, the *Herald* took this occasion to note Wagner's fondness for the "other Strauss' waltzes"—a fact that was irrelevant, but also deliberately insulting to the young composer.¹³ As is clear in these early reviews, Wagner—whose musical influence on Strauss would only continue to strengthen under the guidance of Alexander Ritter (1833–1896) and his growing association with Cosima Wagner (1837–1930)—was already associated in the city with all things “modern” and “German.”¹⁴ Anything that fell into either, or both, of these categories was therefore colored by his long shadow.

In reviewing *Macbeth*, the *Times* explicitly credited Strauss's success with his connection to Wagner's widow: “[Strauss] owes much of his public favor to the kind coddling which he receives from that uncommon woman, Frau Cosima Wagner, relict of

¹² “Steinway Hall,” *New York Times*, 16 March 1888, 4.

¹³ “RICHARD STRAUSS' depressing ‘Italy Symphony,’ which was heard here last week, recalled to mind a fact which is very little known, viz., that Wagner was exceedingly fond of the other Strauss' waltzes. He would run through them on the piano by the hour, and to the amazement of his surroundings derive keen enjoyment from them, remarking upon one occasion:—‘How much better a good waltz is, after all, than a bad symphony.’” “In the Scenic World,” *New York Herald*, 25 March 1888, 8.

¹⁴ This association was further helped along by the young Strauss himself, who was gradually moving away from the Classical upbringing of his father—the horn player for the Bavarian Court Opera—and was embracing the musical leanings of the Bayreuth circle, particularly Cosima, with whom he would eventually have a long and complicated relationship until her death in 1930, and Alexander Ritter, who is often cited as one of the major influences in driving Strauss towards Liszt, Wagner, and Schopenhauer. Boyden, *Strauss*, 31–34.

the genius of Baireuth [*sic*].”¹⁵ Rehashing the old debate between Wagner and Eduard Hanslick (1825–1904), the paper cited Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854):

In this work, which aims to present the esthetics of music, Dr. Hanslick holds that the foundation of a beautiful composition is a beautiful theme, and that this must be developed with true musicianly [*sic*] skill. Now, Richard Strauss, in his “Macbeth,” has produced a composition founded on two principal themes, not disagreeable in themselves, and he has developed them with a fine display of musical ingenuity and learning; and the result is one of the ugliest compositions that ever outraged the ears of mortal man. Shakespeare wrote “Glamis hath murdered sleep, therefore Cawdor shall sleep no more.” If Shakespeare had lived till to-day, he would have written Strauss instead of Glamis.¹⁶

Even years later, when *Also Sprach Zarathustra* was premiered, Wagner’s influence remained central to the coverage. This review, likely written by W. J. Henderson (1855–1937), the critic for the *Times*, invoked this legacy:

Mr. Strauss owes something to Wagner. He has borrowed some rhythms, some melodic progressions, and some instrumental diction from him. You shall hear, if you attend, the voices of Tannhäuser, Tristan, and the strident Valkyrs in this work. But they had text to explain their song, and there was an organic union which resulted in complete information for the listener. But Strauss has endeavored to effect an organic union with a scheme of thought dissociated from his music and unknown to the hearer. He had neglected to observe the boundaries that lie between music and poetry. He has striven with thunders of sound and intricate tricks of instrumentation to convey to us the feelings of a Zarathustra whom we do not know and who is not a typical being anyhow. We are puzzled, troubled, amazed, if we think at all. If we do not, we are stunned by the fury of it all. We are left in the dark. We cannot solve this world-riddle of music. Perhaps that is the state in which Strauss aimed to leave us. He has done it.¹⁷

This lack of an “organic union” refers to the idea that Strauss was writing in the wrong style for his chosen genre. His Wagnerian features lost their effectiveness in the orchestral setting.

¹⁵ “The Symphony Concert,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1892, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ “In the World of Music,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1897, 6.

The shadow of Wagner appeared in the review for the *Sun* as well, which praised Strauss's orchestration skills, while criticizing the work's reliance on its opaque program for meaning—all the while repeatedly referring to him as Johann Strauss.

All that Strauss has as yet done Richard Wagner had accomplished before him, and better. Strauss has not added a ray of light to the world that Wagner had not long ago illuminated it with. In Strauss's writing there is the constant show of intellectual effort which no magic veil of inspiration either decorates or hides. But in contrapuntal skill he is a giant, as he is also in fertility of thought. He is even more wonderful in his unbounded cleverness of orchestration, possessing in this regard a mixture of the qualities of Berlioz and Wagner, the two most remarkable men in this department of art that ever lived.

. . . Without the elucidation given in the programme pamphlet from the competent pen of H. Reimann of Berlin, scarcely any mortal could imagine just what Strauss intended to convey of intense thought and high philosophy in his involved musical themes and sentences. With this guide, however, all becomes plain—that is to say, as plain as Nietzsche [*sic*], whose frenzied abnormal poem Strauss has here illustrated, will allow things to become . . . At least his “Zarathustra” demands the contemplation of wildest imaginings to an unhealthful degree—and it is a question open to discussion whether music has not been asked to go out of its true and legitimate sphere when it is made to illustrate incoherent delirious fancies.¹⁸

The *Sun* makes mention of Berlioz, but in many reviews, a related—and perhaps more apt—comparison came in the form of Liszt, who emerged as a point of reference owing to Strauss's reliance on the tone poem.

In its review of *Tod und Verklärung*, the *Tribune* labeled Strauss “the young successor of Liszt.”¹⁹ As the tone poem became his expressive vehicle of choice, these comparisons grew increasingly common. When *Macbeth* was premiered in the city, the *Tribune*—like most of the press—made the same connection:

The obvious ambition of this young man is to take a step beyond Liszt in the field of symphonic music. It is a step made in seven-leagued boots,

¹⁸ “Boston Symphony Orchestra,” *New York Sun*, 17 December 1897, 3.

¹⁹ “Music. Third Philharmonic Concert,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 January 1892, 7.

and it might be said to be a fair question whether it does not reach some distance beyond the extreme boundary line of music. In view of the amazing changes which have been wrought in popular appreciation, as well as executive capacity, within the last fifty years, we have considerable hesitation in saying what we think will be the outcome of such strivings. . . . The composition is a most extraordinary one, a phantasmagoria in tones, a bewildering succession of distorted phrases and astounding harmonies, a marvelous series of instrumental effects. Some day the meaning of it may become clear.²⁰

This notion that Strauss was taking a “step beyond Liszt” speaks to an idea that he was a product of romanticism, yet also pushing it to its limits.

Many critics were concerned with Strauss’s connection to what had come before. Henderson, in one of his frequent denunciations of Strauss and his musical style, referenced composers and works that were becoming—or had already become—recognized as canonic, a group in which Henderson deliberately excludes Strauss.²¹ Part of his argument centers on the idea that one does not need to plumb certain avenues for inspiration—that there is still something to be said about old ideas:

If a man be really great, he will find new music for the old thought. For 250 years men had been writing operas before one thought of singing the doctrine of salvation through woman’s love. With the “ewig weibliche” of Goethe staring them in the face, not even Beethoven or Weber penetrated its meaning, but left it for Wagner, who hung four of his immortal works upon that theme. Who shall say that there is no material left for the composer? Why, if he can do naught else, let him go back and sit at the

²⁰ “Yesterday’s Music,” *New-York Tribune*, 3 April 1892, 7.

²¹ This idea that Strauss was not yet to be ranked among the “giants” of music was explicitly stated by Henderson in a lengthy article he penned to comment on the concert celebrating the conclusion of the Philharmonic Society of New York’s sixtieth season. For the program, Emil Paur scheduled Beethoven’s first and last symphonies with an “air” from Strauss’s *Guntram* in the middle. At this, Henderson bristled: “That Mr. Strauss of Munich should be accepted by the conductor of the Philharmonic Society as the only composer worthy of being associated with Beethoven is singular. It may be that the time will come when Mr. Strauss will be welcomed in such company, but the time is not yet, and I for one protest against it. A classic master should have had the seat of honor beside the master of them all.” “Orchestras Permanent and Fleeting,” *New York Times*, 6 April 1902, SM9.

feet of Mozart, the apostle of pure beauty in music, and write sweet melody for its own sake. But let us have no more of this romanticism run mad. This Strauss makes the world weary with his “world-riddles.”²²

As the leading figure of German music in the 1890s, Strauss found himself repeatedly being compared to the tradition of German music that had been crafted over the course of the century. Any step he took that seemed to go against this tradition, or moved in a new direction, earned him condemnation. Henderson’s reference to Mozart, Weber, Beethoven, and Goethe’s *Faust*—as well as his earlier statement that Strauss could not compare to the work of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, or even Humperdinck—makes it clear that Henderson had a certain idea of German music in mind and that Strauss was not it.

Almost from the beginning, concerns were raised as to how Strauss would fit into the trajectory of music history. Reviewing *Ein Heldenleben*, the critic for the *Times* mused, “Every critic of music knows how hard it is to estimate justly the value of anything which violates established law. Yet it is only by innovations that the art of music has advanced, and every composer, even the honeyed Rossini, has been abused for writing ugly music.”²³ After all, “the critic cannot be a prophet.”²⁴ With this caveat in place, the author quickly launched into his critique of Strauss’s music:

[T]he present writer can only say that the composer of “Ein Heldenleben” has undertaken to express in music much that cannot be clearly conveyed to the hearer by musical symbols, and that he has chosen to make his symbols harsh and repulsive. Nevertheless we must remember that a few years ago men said just these things of Wagner, who is now seen to be nearly always perfectly melodious. We should, then, quarrel less with Mr. Strauss for his diction than for his deliberate attempts to say definite things to us in music. Mood pictures are all that music can paint. That fact is

²² “Music,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

²³ “The Philharmonic Society,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1900, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

pretty thoroughly established by centuries of experiment. The ugly noises, the harsh harmonies, the abnormal instrumentation, and the infernal din of this work may all tickle the ears of our grandchildren as music as the luscious instrumental songs of “Tristan und Isolde” now tickle ours.²⁵

There is something prescient in the critic’s acknowledgement that his judgment will likely not stand the test of time. Despite this, he ends the article with a passionate defense of the Classical aesthetic: the “older art of music” that was notable for its “lofty serenity . . . purity of style, and the clearness of diction.”²⁶ These are elements absent in Strauss’s composition, which implies that even if later critics do change their mind regarding Strauss, he still lacks the substance to fall among the ranks of the older masters.

In the *Tribune*, the review of the dress rehearsal for *Ein Heldenleben* was given an entire column on the front page. Referring back to a review of the performance from Cincinnati that had been printed on 13 May, the *Tribune* continued with its assessment that the work was essentially a mess.

If it were not for the incontrovertible fact that Richard Strauss is so puissant a representative of a tendency that he has coerced the world to consider him with a solemnity that seems almost abysmal we should like to dispose of “Ein Heldenleben” with a repetition of the thoughts sent over the wires from Cincinnati seven months ago and add to them the expression of a conviction which must be made with deep regret that if the composer is not already a bedlamite he is on the high road to Bedlam and will reach his goal, young as he is, within half a decade. Such things are not to be said lightly, and they are not said in this case, but with profound seriousness and equally profound sorrow.²⁷

On this occasion, the *Tribune* remarked on Strauss’s changing reputation in the city, noting that since the Symphony in F Minor was first heard, Strauss had gone from a “natural symphonist” to a “genius . . . getting into erratic courses, and that, like Phaëton,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Music,” *New-York Tribune*, 13 May 1900, 9.

he was plunging along either to his own destruction or that of the world of art.”²⁸ Strauss, the rising star, had taken a wrong turn.²⁹ For this reason, the *Tribune* once more attempted to put Strauss into some form of historical context:

The advocates of Strauss contend that these works illustrate a higher form of programme music than that cultivated by Berlioz and his immediate predecessors. As a matter of fact, they are a century behind Berlioz in everything except the mastery of the technics of composition and orchestration. “Ein Heldenleben,” as a composition intended to delineate a procession of ideas, images, concepts, is as naively dependent on words for its exposition as any old descriptive sonata by Kuhnau, and it falls short of the Kuhnau standard in degenerating into blatant noise in its pursuit of realism which Kuhnau[’s] music never did. It is no excuse to say that absolute beauty has no place in a picture of battle because a battle is not a beautiful thing to contemplate. There may be characteristic beauty which will appeal to the fancy and stir the emotions without painfully assaulting the ear drums. And in the contemplation of such a subject as Herr Strauss has chosen here—the life history of humanity’s hero—the first demand that is made upon all the arts is idealization. It was not without significance that the overture to “Egmont” stood at the head of the programme yesterday, and that the annotator of the Philharmonic Society drew attention to the manner in which Beethoven told the story of the oppression of the Netherlanders, the death of their idol and the liberation of their country from Spanish tyranny, in tones which made appeal in every direction, and would have done so had the programme contained in the simple title been wanting.³⁰

In the grand scheme of history, Strauss is shown as falling short of Berlioz and Beethoven—and even Kuhnau, who at least remembered to remain “musical” in his overly descriptive attempts at program music. This concept of musicality becomes particularly important in the context of Beethoven’s *Egmont* Overture, which depicted a similar set of circumstances, yet in the words of the reviewer maintained “appealing”

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The allusion to Phaëton seems to imply that Strauss—a young and impressionable composer—was given the reins to music at too early a stage. Like his mythological counterpart, he simply could not harness his power and was thus doomed to failure.

³⁰ “Music,” *New-York Tribune*, 8 December 1900, 9.

tones that would have succeeded regardless of a descriptive title or not. It is worth highlighting—particularly in light of this article, which was likely written by Henry Krehbiel (1854–1923), the music critic for the *New-York Tribune*—that the past glories to which Strauss is constantly being compared, and supposedly falling short of, are German.³¹ With the exception of Berlioz, who was often lumped into the *Neudeutsche Schule* with Liszt and Wagner, the composers that repeatedly appear in the reviews by Krehbiel, Henderson, and others, are Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Wagner, and Brahms, the figures that had been used to create and then cement the concept of German musical supremacy in the nineteenth century. In this way, Strauss’s failure, as described by these critics, is to live up to history, but more specifically, to a German history of music.

Expanding upon this idea, the *Tribune*, in a review of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, considered Strauss’s approach to program music:

Ponder the words of Schumann, the ideal composer of programme music: “It will always be a bad sign for a composition if it requires a superscription. Such music cannot have gushed out from the soul, but must have been instigated by external agencies. That our art is capable of giving expression to many things, even the progress of an occurrence on its way—who will venture to deny that? But those who wish to test the effect and the value of their creations of such origin have a simple means—they need but to erase their superscriptions.”³²

³¹ As was customary of the time, the music reviews within the *Tribune* were unsigned. As Henry Krehbiel was music critic for the *Tribune* from 1880–1923, it seems likely that he wrote the majority of the reviews.

³² “Musical Comment,” *New-York Tribune*, 20 December 1897, 7. Included in this article was an excerpt from Riemann’s program notes on the work; a brief anecdote about George H. Derby (1823–1861), whose satirical musical review, “Ode Symphonie par Jabez Tarbox,” written under the pseudonym “John Phoenix” and published in *Phoenixiana; or, Sketches and Burlesques* (1855), utilized the format of a fictional musical review of a work called “Ode Symphonie” of “The Plains” by “Jabez Tarbox” to poke fun at excessively programmatic works, while also parodying the proliferation of Germans in American music, noting that the work had been performed by the “Sauer Kraut-Verein” with solos by “Herr Tuden Links” and recitations by “Herr Von Hyden

By bringing in Schumann, the article contributes to the argument that Strauss was the overripe product of the nineteenth century—a figure that had taken the ideas of romanticism and extended them beyond decency.³³ When compared to earlier composers, Strauss—in the eyes of many critics—seemed to forget to be “musical.”³⁴ In reviewing *Ein Heldenleben*, the *Times* emphasized this idea that Strauss was building upon the concepts of the nineteenth century to a nearly incomprehensible level:

As absolute music this work has two aspects. Technically it is colossal, and it is bold in the conception of its extraordinary proportions. Heine’s huge nightingale, Berlioz, shrinks into normal size beside this Strauss. His themes are big with musical power, but his development in the old symphonic sense is not at all remarkable. His weaving of the several themes, however, is masterly. He wields the amazing complexity of modern polyphony, the polyphony of the hazardous cross-paths in acrid harmony, the impinging chromatic curves, with consummate ease. His themes wind about one another with the luxuriance of intertwining vines in the depths of a tropical jungle. And if you grant the premises of the programme, the form is clear and satisfying. And you must grant these premises, or throw overboard your Schumann, Liszt, and Berlioz. The orchestration is notable in the Strauss method, with all its splendors and all its idiosyncrasies. Sometimes when Mr. Strauss aims at producing new and startlingly ugly instrumental colors, he does it by the very simple process of wresting instruments from their natures. It is not an evidence of

Schnapps”; and a historical discussion of program music, looking back at the works of Johann Jakob Froberger (1616–1667) and Johann Kuhnau (1660–1722).

³³ One particularly interesting note in this article was the use of Wagner, who was obviously a common figure in discussions of Strauss; however, the *Tribune* was the only paper to note the falling out that had occurred between Wagner and Nietzsche and the irony of Wagner’s musical disciple choosing to set this work to music. “Were Nietzsche [*sic*] clothed in his right mind, instead of a mournful madman, we fancy he would long ago have protested against the effort of one of the foremost disciples of Wagner to put his philosophical fantastics into tones, for the last great passion of his life in the outer world was rage against the poet-composer who once had been his god; but he is a pitiful dweller in the world of intellectual night, and knows not what is going on in music under cover of daylight. When his god, Wagner, turned to clay, he flew to Bizet, and if he were now to hear the music of Richard Strauss we can fancy that he would specialize one of his frenetic generalizations and proclaim that the composer instead of man must be overcome: ‘Once ye were apes, and now are ye more an ape than ever was an ape.’” Ibid.

³⁴ “Music,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

the possession of genius to write a spiccato passage for an oboe, or attempt to imitate a glissando on a clarinet, or a pizzicato on a trumpet. These things belong to that region of art in which dwell the purple cow and the yellow aster.³⁵

It is clear when reading these reviews that many critics believed Strauss possessed technical skills. The problem was that he seemed incapable of using them to create art.

The Sound and the Fury: Technique vs. Art

The tone poems not only introduced Strauss's musical style, they also demonstrated his areas of interest. This led to one of the earliest criticisms lobbed at Strauss, namely his choice of subject. Reviews of *Don Juan*, which had its New York City premiere in December 1891, demonstrate this form of denunciation. From the *Tribune*:

The work was called "Don Juan," and the listeners were invited to discover in it musical equivalents for some rather impassioned sentiments set forth by the German poet Lenau. Whether or not the composition can be looked upon as in any sense a translation into tones of Lenau's poem, is a question which we have not temerity enough to discuss today. Doubtless there were many who felt that the poem was a bar rather than a help to enjoyment. The strongest impressions made by it were wonder at the disparity between its melodic contents and its extent and sonority and admiration for the technical skill of a writer who having little to say says it with so much sounding euphony.³⁶

The disconnect drawn between the music and the literary inspiration for the piece—in this case Nikolaus Lenau (1802–1850) and his unfinished poem *Don Juan*—would

³⁵ This seems to be a reference to Gelett Burgess's (1866–1951) comic poem "Purple Cow" (1895): "I never saw a Purple Cow,/I never hope to see one;/But I can tell you, anyhow,/I'd rather see than be one." Published in *The Lark*, this poem soon became extremely popular and represents a strand of nonsense poetry that Burgess became well known for writing. With this "nonsense" quality in mind, it is not a stretch to imagine why this particular author chose to draw this connection to Strauss's music. "The Philharmonic Society," *New York Times*, 8 December 1900, 8.

³⁶ "Boston Symphony Orchestra," *New-York Tribune*, 9 December 1891, 6.

become a common theme in the reception of Strauss's music. In 1892, when *Tod und Verklärung* received its New York City premiere, the subject matter came under similar scrutiny. In putting forth the ultimate trajectory of man's triumph over the body, Strauss's work had apparently crossed a line of decency:

It is evident enough that the spiritual aspect of such a battle and victory may be illustrated in music in such a manner as to disarm criticism. Think of the C-minor symphony of Beethoven! But Richard Strauss, with the love for picturesqueness, or pictorialness, which has become all too common of late, chose to adopt what must be called a materialistic view of this opportunity. . . . He fairly revels in the delineation of the awful struggle, and seems to rejoice that his art enables him to do what the painter, Parrhasius, in the old poem vainly longed to do—to paint a dying groan. Such a marriage of music and pathology seems to us an error in a symphonic work, which by its very nature must be idealistic even when its subjects are such as would be beautiful if presented by imitation. . . . That the music fascinates is true, but it is in part an awful fascination, void of aesthetic charm.³⁷

In comparison to Beethoven, Strauss's depiction of death—at least in the eyes of the *Tribune*—lacked a certain sense of spirituality. Its biggest crime was being, perhaps, too literal and not uplifting enough. This attack against the music's realistic depiction of the subject continued with *Till Eulenspiegel*. In describing Strauss's musical interpretation of the legendary trickster, the *Times* remarked that Till “never played any such trick on any one as Strauss played on orchestral music in his attempt to illustrate the story.”³⁸ It went on to describe the various antics of the instruments, which it ultimately deemed “a horrible example of what can be done with an orchestra by a determined and deadly decadent.”³⁹

³⁷ “Music. Third Philharmonic Concert,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 January 1892, 7.

³⁸ “The Boston Orchestra,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1896, 4.

³⁹ “Flutes chased one another all over the ledger lines; oboes squeaked convulsively; clarionets coughed cracked staccati in their highest register; stopped cornets wailed in nasal tones; trombones bellowed; triangles and tambours rattled; and the tympani player

Strauss soon developed a reputation that put him at odds with many of the critics working in the city. Some evidence of this may be glimpsed in the treatment of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which premiered in the city in December 1897, yet had received its American premiere in Chicago back in February. To mark its first performance in the United States, the *Times* included a discussion of the work, which it deemed “one of the most complex and technically difficult compositions ever offered to an orchestra.”⁴⁰ In a departure from its past reviews—likely because a correspondent, rather than Henderson, wrote it—the *Times* now offered a more approving view of Strauss’s efforts:

It is the drama of the soul. Starting out with high aspirations, encountering difficulties from without and from within, attempting all things human, from the acquirement of knowledge to the indulgence of joy, and finding all vanity, the poor soul makes its loud complaint, and at last resigns itself to the course of things. No modern composition has more subtle insinuations of discontent; none appeals more insistently to the emotions.⁴¹

This was in stark contrast to the coverage of the New York premiere. On this occasion, the *Times*—now likely authored by Henderson—noted a “courteous applause” in regard to the “conquests of difficulty,” but nevertheless mentioned that there seemed to be “no evidence of public joy.”⁴² In a statement reminiscent of the descriptions of audiences that

lost his patience and several pounds of flesh in his desperate attempts to thump his three kettledrums as often and as hard as the score demanded. There was no doubt about the humor of it all; it would have made even a doctor of music laugh. But it was a vast and coruscating jumble of instrumental cackles for all that. Here and there Strauss permitted the sacred form of music to rear its lovely front. That was when Till was making love. And immediately a stinging thump on one of those kettledrums seemed to indicate that the maid had properly boxed his ear. At any rate, the ears of the hearers were boxed by Strauss.” Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Strauss’s Tone Poem,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1897, 7.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “In the World of Music,” *New York Times*, 17 December 1897, 6.

had flocked to hear Wagner's operas at the Metropolitan, the *Times* noted that "an audience of evident refinement with silent wonder" attended the performance.⁴³

A strong grievance was the necessity of a program—in this case, an English translation prepared by W. F. Apthorp (1848–1913) after the notes for the Berlin Philharmonic written by Heinrich Reimann (1850–1906). As the *Times* remarked:

Not every one has read the reflective rhapsodies of Friederich Nietsche [*sic*], a German writer, beside whom Nordau is as Mozart beside Wagner. Nietsche's [*sic*] Zarathustra is conceived to be the "mysterious solver of the world-riddle"—whatever that may be . . .

. . . "Thus Spake Zarathustra" is not a composition that courts analysis in print. No doubt a person thoroughly familiar with Nietsche's [*sic*] book will find in it a grandiose musical embodiment of the moods of the work. But to any one who has not read the book this composition must remain a tonal riddle, to which the title offers no key . . .

. . . As a whole "Thus Spake Zarathustra" is not a successful work. It leans altogether too heavily upon thought outside of itself. It undertakes altogether too much. Music is incapable of definite story telling, and when it tries to illustrate purely mental processes, as it does over and over again in this work, it is bound to fail. Who can construct from this composition either the personality or the thought of Zarathustra? One can recognize alternating moods of somber gloom, tragic despair and equally tragic rejoicing, but what is it all about?⁴⁴

The subject, as with *Tod und Verklärung*, did not seem appropriate for such musical treatment. In particular, Strauss was criticized for his efforts at musically dramatizing abstract ideals, thereby asking too much of the medium. One of Strauss's greatest weaknesses, in the view of the author, was his constant effort to illustrate a "definite" story through instrumental music. The review from the *Tribune* also focused on the same issue:

"Thus spake Zarathustra!" How? With a barbaric yawp like Walt Whitman's and a corybantic whirl of words falling over each other in their drunken eagerness—with colossal effrontery and a frenzy of egotism

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

possible only in a man for whom the madhouse was already yawning—with a bewildering parade of symbols and metaphors such as are affected by the end-of-the-century poets in Paris and their imitators here. Zarathustra proclaimed his contempt for humanity and the things which have appeared good and sacred to humankind—religion, morality, science, marriage, happiness . . .

. . . Strauss's symphonic poem is the latest, we fear not the last, word of cacophony, instrumental combination and thematic transmogrification in music, but in principle it illustrates a reversion to the aims and methods of the programmatic composers who lived in the babyhood of programmatic music.⁴⁵

This criticism, while in some respects more pointed, basically hinged on the same denunciations found in the *Times*.⁴⁶ Once more, Strauss is critiqued for his choice of subject, his music's overreliance on the program, and a tendency to push the orchestra too far.

An undercurrent to this criticism was the feeling that Strauss was working in the wrong genre. As seen, one common complaint was that Strauss consistently stretched the music beyond what was acceptable—or even reasonable—for instrumental music. The *Tribune's* review of *Tod und Verklärung* questioned the appropriate medium for such a story:

Despite the eloquence of the music, its marvelously graphic character, the ingenuity of its structure and elements, we cannot persuade ourselves that

⁴⁵ "Musical Comment," *New-York Tribune*, 20 December 1897, 7.

⁴⁶ It had even emerged in discussions of the work of other composers. In the review of the second symphony by George Templeton Strong (1856–1948), the son of the famous diarist of the same name, the *Times* noted that it was based on Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's (1777–1843) *Sintram*, which caused the reviewer (likely Henderson) to digress on the topic of musical literalism: "Ever since Beethoven showed how the inarticulate utterance of the orchestra could voice the secret emotions of the heart, composers have been trying to elaborate the details of musical speech. Within the past few years we have been shown how a lack of aesthetic sense, coupled with a morbidity, inspired by the cemetery literature of Ibsensim, could carry forward this line of musical development to the point at which repugnance must be produced in every healthy mind. Richard Strauss . . . is the horrible example of what may be done in this prostitution of a noble art to a nasty realm." "A Week's Musical Topics," *New York Times*, 5 March 1893, 13.

the physical aspects of death form an appropriate and beautiful subject for symphonic illustration (if it were dramatic music the case would be different); and so we doubt whether this tone-poem can correctly be said to achieve complete justification for itself notwithstanding its forcefulness of expression.⁴⁷

In his choice of subject, Strauss was attempting something that would have been better suited to the opera house. After *Ein Heldenleben* premiered in 1900, the *Times* noted:

It must be said that only a very anxious, sympathetic, and skilled hearer will find it possible to follow the intricate workings of all its themes. It is a leitmotif work; every theme has a meaning, and so has every development of a theme. One must, as the programme note of Mr. Krehbiel wisely says, concede to the composer not only the right to attempt the expression of the broader emotional moods, which lie so surely within the province of musical utterance, but also every variety of each emotion. And here the hearer must take the composer at his own word or be lost in hopeless confusion. One really requires a handbook to help him through this composition. In an opera, where the text makes plain the intent of the most subtle music, the hearer need not be at a loss, but in absolute music, when the typical-theme plan is carried out in all its ramifications, how is one to know precisely what is meant?⁴⁸

Anticipating his next professional turn, the *Times*—as the *Tribune* had done earlier—argued that Strauss’s approach to composition might be better suited for the world of opera, rather than instrumental music.

Despite the frequent attacks, there was a prevailing sentiment that Strauss was clearly very talented, but that his music often indulged in excess complexity and stressed technical precision over melodic interest.⁴⁹ Although Strauss’s connection to modernism will be discussed in more detail later, this form of objection is an offshoot of that debate.

⁴⁷ “Music. Third Philharmonic Concert,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 January 1892, 7.

⁴⁸ “The Philharmonic Society,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1900, 8.

⁴⁹ The *Tribune* had made a similar comment in regard to *Aus Italien* in 1888 when it noted that Strauss had “been trained in a vigorous school and he emphasized that fact by his excessive use of bass.” “Tenth Thomas Public Rehearsal,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 March 1888, 4.

Overt complexity—often juxtaposed with the deliberate simplicity of the Classical composers—was a common complaint against those associated with modernism. As a composer, Strauss’s penchant for dense, complex music situated him within the style of the period; however, it also demonstrated his unique technical prowess, which did not go unnoticed.

This concern was raised with *Don Quixote*. The Boston Symphony premiered the work in New York City in 1904—just weeks before Strauss’s visit. With Strauss’s arrival imminent, the atmosphere surrounding the performance was quite different from any of the previous works. In the *Times*, Richard Aldrich (1863–1937), who had taken over as the paper’s music critic when Henderson departed for the *Sun* in 1902, penned a lengthy article on the work, complete with musical examples and a detailed breakdown of the score.⁵⁰ Aldrich viewed the performance as a means of providing the city with a “clean record” for Strauss’s arrival.⁵¹ The reason for the delay, in Aldrich’s opinion, can be found within the score:

It is in all its aspects perhaps the most daring and unconventional, as it certainly is one of the most difficult, of all Strauss’s revolutionary productions. And so it may be well that “Don Quixote” has been left to the last, till we have become somewhat inured to the Strauss manner as well as the Strauss matter—have begun, even, to find some of the earlier Strauss easy, like “Aus Italien,” and possibly “Don Juan” and “Tod und Verklärung,” and to find enjoyment in and feel the fascination of “Till Eulenspiegel.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Aldrich worked for the *Times* from 1902 to 1923. Prior to that he had worked for the *Tribune* (1891–1902), where he expressed more sympathetic views to modernism than Henderson or Krehbiel.

⁵¹ Theodore Thomas, who had premiered the Symphony in F Minor in New York City, was also responsible for the first American performance of *Don Quixote*, which had occurred in Chicago in January 1899. “Strauss’s ‘Don Quixote,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1904, 25.

⁵² *Ibid.*

It is at this point that Aldrich turns more directly to the music at hand and Strauss's overall musical style.

The kinship of the Spanish visionary and the Teutonic rascal is, perhaps, not very close; but there is this much in common between Strauss's pictures of them—that humor, irony, quaintness, and all the extravagances of fantastic story telling, the phantasmagoria of wild adventure, form a great portion of what he has undertaken to express in music. Music, it has been truly observed, is a grave thing and laughs unwillingly; but Strauss can compel her to it, and he can equally compel her to all the subtler fantasies that it has been considered a part of her mission only to hint at . . . Mr. Newman has pointed out Strauss's primary concern with "character in movement" . . . [and] his interest in human life as a whole, not in "the one wearisome episode of the eternal masculine and the eternal feminine." He has "thrown over the old erotic tags of the musician," as Mr. Newman says, in order to tell the story, in the true modern spirit, of other elements in human life that also have their poetry and their pathos. "Don Quixote," we are assured, is a notable exemplification of this quality of Strauss's genius.⁵³

From the outset, the shift in tone is noticeable. Where earlier Strauss had been portrayed as unmusical, the Aldrich article instead embraces the aesthetic changes and experimentations of the composer—particularly his ability to use music to new purposes.

One critique of *Don Quixote* was the recurrent idea that it pushed music too far: "In this composition Strauss has carried to the furthest point his theories and practices concerning the delineative function of music. He has gone to such extremes in his representation of the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as more than once take him beyond the pale of music, and into the domain of imitative noise."⁵⁴ As seen in the earlier discussion, there is also a more sympathetic analysis of Strauss and his technique, but not without some hesitation:

The thematic material out of which the piece is composed is of the characteristic Straussian quality; much of it is rich in beauty, in

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ "The Boston Orchestra," *New York Times*, 19 February 1904, 9.

suggestiveness; much of it has real distinction. Of the marvelous technical mastery of the orchestra and of the thematic treatment it would be idle to dwell at this time. They are not to be fully taken in at a single hearing, but it is always plain that the master is at work, that his touch is precise, that for good or ill he is accomplishing precisely what he is aiming at, without faltering, without uncertainty . . .

There is much to bewilder and to amaze in the work; much to offend the ear, even the ear that has been inured to the matter and the manner of Strauss through the hearing of his other works.⁵⁵

Although it is not signed, the review from the *Sun* of this performance contains the same language and sentiments typical of Henderson. The *Sun*, regardless of Strauss's forthcoming visit, was not interested in sugarcoating its opinion of the "extraordinary discomposer."⁵⁶ The first complaint—as common with much of the earlier commentary, which the *Sun* readily admits—is the notion that the music relies too heavily on a program and is therefore incomprehensible without the aid of a text. As the paper declares: "[Strauss] is the arch romanticist of his time, and he proclaims in no uncertain terms his faith that he can say whatsoever he pleases to say in musical phraseology."⁵⁷ In response to the idea that the work was written as a means of poking fun at his own hyper-realistic approach to music—an idea that had been proposed in the review found in the *Times*—the *Sun* replied:

When did this huge combination of egotism and humor see the ludicrous side of his own nature? "Don Quixote" was composed in 1897, and in the following year Strauss wrote "Ein Heldenleben," in which he bodied forth in a magnificent proclamation his opinion of his own glory. Did not this Gargantuan funmaker mean in this composition to speak his mind about the puny romanticists who could not write as did the author of "A Hero's Life?" Is not this Strauss's criticism of his contemporaries?⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "'Don Quixote' by Strauss," *New York Sun*, 19 February 1904, 7.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

The review goes on to echo the concerns for Strauss's penchant for literalism and tendency to delve into the unmusical:

The composition has all the familiar earmarks of its writer's style. The harmonies of it are at times outrageous, wicked, obscene. It snorts and snarls and barks and squeals. It writhers in a wild confusion of disordered counterpoint, which is superb in its shattering of all accepted patterns and its triumphant demonstration of the author's mastery of technic. For in all the mad reeling of sounds, in this tumultuous orgy of dissonance and screaming instrumentation, a clear and tangible musical design is manifest. The fundamental themes are always in evidence; their contours form the framework of every development. These are Rabelaisian variations, indeed, but they are variations nevertheless, and not mere formless rhapsody.

The instrumentation is magnificent in its daring, in its picturesqueness and its wonderful ingenuity. . . . Possibly it is not a lofty musical achievement to make an orchestra imitate the bleating of a flock of sheep, but done as Strauss does it, it cannot fail to fill the mind with speculation as to the resources of music in gross materialism.

. . . Strauss has once more shown us that he has a huge fund of Gulliver-like humor. He has again set before us a composition of which the technics are simply stupendous. There is no other man living who can write with such complexity, yet with such absolute mastery of form. There is not now, and there never was, another master who dared to outrage the nature of instruments as he does, yet he almost justifies his tortures by the results he obtains.

Whether all this detailed tone-painting is true musical art is a question which is bound to trouble the sincere mind. Certain it is that such music without the key is incomprehensible. Equally certain it is that there is in it a vast amount of crass ugliness. But let it be said that there is also much that is beautiful when considered simply as absolute music. Of high thematic invention there is not a great deal, yet the motives are thoroughly characteristic and perfectly adapted to the composer's purpose. Have we a right to ask for more than that?⁵⁹

Although it would be a stretch to call the *Sun's* review praising, there are moments when the author acknowledges a certain level of skill on the part of Strauss. The occasional complimentary notes of this review were certainly not repeated in the *Tribune*, which posited that the work was "a wonderfully great musical composition or it is music gone

⁵⁹ Ibid.

mad.”⁶⁰ One thing was certain, Strauss was a composer willing to push boundaries. Whether or not this was a good thing was still up for debate.

Brave New World?: Modernism and the Decline of Civilization

The *Times* utilized *Don Juan*'s premiere to examine Strauss's relationship to the emergent movement of modernism. This article, written by Henderson, is worth including at some length for its attitude towards changing aesthetics in music and drama at the end of the nineteenth century—ideas that will resurface in the debates around both *Salome* and *Elektra*.⁶¹ To begin, Henderson launches an attack against this new aesthetic trend:

It seems that centuries have characters. The *fin de siècle* mind is no new thing under the sun, for every epoch has been closed up with a snap like the shutting of a volume in the history of humanity. The closing of the present century bids fair to end with something like a midsummer madness in art, especially in music and the drama. What with Ibsens, Maurice Maeterlincks, and Richard Strausses, plucking like heartless ghouls upon the snapping heartstrings of humanity, treating the heart as a *scientific monochord* for the measurement of intervals of pain, and finally poking with their skeleton fingers in the ashes of the tomb to see if they cannot, perchance, find a single glowing ember of human agony, we have attained a state of morbidity in art which is, or ought to be, appalling.⁶²

After this more general attack, Henderson focuses specifically on Maeterlinck, noting that when art turns towards the “brothel” and the “asylum” for inspiration, then it is time

⁶⁰ “The Boston Symphony Orchestra,” *New-York Tribune*, 19 February 1904, 9.

⁶¹ As was the custom of the time period, Henderson does not sign this article. It was, however, written during his tenure at the paper—before he left to write for the *New York Sun*—and contains a number of references to Strauss as the musical equivalent of Maeterlinck, Ibsen, and other prominent figures of late nineteenth century modernism. These references appear throughout the *Times*'s coverage of Strauss and are directly referenced in an article on the New York premiere of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* that Henderson did sign for the *Times* in 1897, see: “Music,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

⁶² “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1892, 12.

for a new “renaissance.”⁶³ He then sets his sights on Strauss, arguing that the composer is not a disciple of Wagner, but instead “a musical Maeterlinck [*sic*], a tonal Ibsen.”⁶⁴

Vague, indefinable fancies, grotesque and monstrous mysticisms, gaunt shapes, and horrid impossibilities are his substitutes for clean, strong, pure vital ideals. To sing in music the gross yearnings of a Don Juan, proclaiming them to be representative of the aspirations of humanity; to prod the dying man to more gasps, and record them with phonograph and metronome for future reproduction on trombones in syncopated rhythms—these seem to be worthy objects for the art of music in the mind of Richard Strauss.

Technic? Yes, he knows how to say his dire sayings; but compared to such writers as Maeterlinck and Strauss, Emile Zola is a Theocritus, and Guy de Maupassant a Hesiod. The Frenchmen are realists; they tell things that might better be untold, but they are things that are and will be, and that must be met. The Scandinavian, the Belgian, and the German are mystics, and they speak the things that are not, or, at least, are not typical. Art has no right to treat as types things that are not types. It is falsehood of the deepest and most accursed kind.⁶⁵

Part of his critique follows the earlier argument that Strauss’s choice of subject was inappropriate. This partially explains the label a “tonal Ibsen.” An early complaint lodged against the Norwegian writer by American critics was that his plays were obscene.⁶⁶ In its description of the plays that had been seen in the United States, the *Times* referred to *Ghosts* (1881) as “nasty and horrible,” while *Hedda Gabler* (1891) was a “tainted and morbid work.”⁶⁷ The only work to escape this condemnation was *An Enemy of the People* (1882), the play written in response to the condemnation of *Ghosts*, which the *Times* noted was “at least a wholesome piece.”⁶⁸ Ibsen, as a Scandinavian writer, also ties into a

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Orm Øverland, “The Reception of Ibsen in the United States: A Mirror of Cultural and Political Concerns, 1889–1910,” *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai – Philologia* 51.3 (2006): 93–103.

⁶⁷ “At the Play and With the Players,” *New York Times*, 21 January 1900, 16.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

different concern for Henderson in respect to Strauss's role as a German composer. Citing the "realism" of the French, Henderson argues that the Germans—along with the Scandinavians and Belgians—have traditionally been "mystics," concerned with the unknowable. As an admirer of Wagner, Henderson presents the composer's art and aesthetic viewpoints, represented by the mysticism of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* and *Parsifal*, as indicative of German art. In contrast to French realism, an early movement of modernism, German mysticism represents the height of romanticism, which Henderson now believes is in decline. This altered aesthetic world—evidenced by the rise of Strauss as the voice of German music—is what most concerns Henderson. For this reason, he begins to question which country will deliver the necessary corrective to the current state of musical aesthetics by way of a new renaissance:

Whence is it to come? From Germany?

. . . Richard Wagner is dead, but his works are sufficient for the time. Germany feeds upon them and is content, even though Strauss tries to apply the Wagnerian dramatic style to absolute music and goes mad for want of text and action. Strauss should compose music for one of Maeterlinck's plays.

Is the redemption to come from France? Where is the organ voice of Gaul? Gounod is old and his hand trembles. Saint-Saëns does not know what his own ideals are, and Massenet worships at the feet of the scarlet woman. Who sings there? Where is the *fin de siècle* Rameau?

Is it Italy? Shall the nursery of human song rear a new babe? Is his name Mascagni? Or is he only the *avant-coureur*, the herald proclaiming in the heat of battle, "This is the fashion of the new peace—a peace that doth not pass understanding"? Is the "Cavalleria Rusticana" simply a proclamation of the new renaissance that is to come, at once a model and a mandate? The writer of this column once said: "When a composer arises who will know how to superimpose upon the anatomy of the Wagner music drama the fair exterior of a finished vocal art we shall have a form of opera in which ideal beauty shall go hand in hand with consummated significance."

Is that what Mascagni is pointing at—perhaps himself a thoughtless tool in the hands of destiny? Has Germany thrown back into

Italy the lesson which Italy first taught the world—how truthful and expressive music should be written?⁶⁹

While he is somewhat ambivalent about Italy, Henderson is straightforward in his distaste for the state of French and German art. It is clear that he does not see any redemption coming from these countries. Henderson, who frequently bemoans the degeneration of art, offers his take on the trajectory of musical history in order to provide an explanation for how we got to this point. This path, moving from the overt complexity of the late medieval and early Renaissance into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leads to his ultimate condemnation of the present, which he sees as a product of romanticism taken to the extreme:

Formal beauty worked itself out to the most infinitesimal perfection of detail with the classical composers. Romanticism of feeling had been growing in music till it finally burst the boundaries of form and sang its heart forth in new manners and with new manifestations. Now it may be that, with romanticism gone mad—overworked and stricken with paresis—we have reached the limits of development, and with the close of the century a bubble will burst into smoke and the volume will close with a snap.

Surely if the charnel-house art of Maeterlinck and Strauss is to be regarded as a morbid condition of romanticism, developed by too much introspection, it were a good thing to take our modern methods, our splendid instrumentation, our leit motiven [*sic*], our independent treatment of the orchestra, our mighty Wagnerian declamation, and our glorious Italian arioso, and go back with them to the chaste beauty of classic antiquity for inspiration.⁷⁰

Henderson ends his article with the concluding lines of Emerson's "The Poet" (1844) as a call for artists to return to "beauty" for inspiration.⁷¹ Out of this lengthy article comes Henderson's persistent image of Strauss as a decadent symbol of artistic denigration—the

⁶⁹ "Live Musical Topics," *New York Times*, 17 January 1892, 12.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

product of a diseased mind and the culmination of romanticism run amok.⁷² The direct and most obvious result of Henderson linking Strauss to Ibsen and Maeterlinck was to place him into the emergent movement of modernism—a principal figure of the musical avant-garde. This is a connection that would only seem to grow in the years following the premieres of *Salome* and *Elektra*.⁷³ Another sign of the times is Henderson's use of Wagner.⁷⁴ In the article, Wagner stands as a nostalgic reminder of romanticism, which had purportedly been debased by the work of Strauss.⁷⁵ Wagner, who had just a few years earlier been the model of musical modernism, was now being upheld as the bastion of a fading culture.

Henderson, as becomes apparent in reading his columns, took no qualms in laying out his strong opinion on symbolism, decadence, and other artistic movements that were

⁷² One means by which this denigration plays out in the tone poems is through the musical form. Henderson praises the formal beauty of the classical composers, while noting that the romantics broke free from these conventions in order to better express themselves. Strauss's complex handling of form was viewed by Henderson as the breakdown of formal conventions and the limit of compositional practice.

⁷³ It should be noted that Strauss never explicitly placed himself in this position among the avant-garde. Unlike Schoenberg, Stravinsky, or some of his other contemporaries, Strauss did not appear to be directly interested in throwing off the shackles of tradition in such a self-conscious manner. This is not to say that his music did not achieve such ends, only that Strauss does not seem throughout his letters, writings, or documented conversations to be positioning himself as the leader of the musical avant-garde.

⁷⁴ Henderson had been a vocal supporter and admirer of Wagner as his music began to be performed in the city.

⁷⁵ Notable—in the light of what was to come—is the comment Henderson makes regarding Strauss driving himself “mad” at his attempts to apply Wagnerian techniques to absolute music without the aid of text and action. Although he sarcastically suggests setting one of Maeterlinck's plays to music, it does presage an important shift from orchestral to operatic music that Strauss was on the brink of attempting at this point. Further, his *Guntram* (1893) and *Feuersnot* (1901)—both indebted in direct and indirect ways to Wagner—proved to be failures. It was only with his setting of Oscar Wilde's *Salome*—a work of the very *milieu* that Henderson so heartily disapproved—that Strauss was able to find success as an opera composer, thereby inadvertently proving Henderson correct in his assertion that Strauss should set a play by Maeterlinck.

coming to define art of the *fin de siècle*. His arguments provide a clear and defined blueprint for the discussions that would arise in the wake of *Salome*. The work that provided the most gristle for Henderson was *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. In connection to the work's premiere, Henderson penned a lengthy article that ran to several columns. It is worth quoting at length because of its contemporary take on Strauss and its synthesis of many of the views on him from the time. Right from the beginning, Henderson pulls no punches: "Zarathustra spoke to Gotham in vain. The heathen raged and the people imagined a vain thing. But it was not quite so vain a thing as that which Richard Strauss imagined when he wrote 'Thus Spake Zarathustra.'"⁷⁶ As part of his discussion, Henderson examines Nietzsche, whom he notes:

was afflicted with seven different kinds of dementia. He began his intellectual life with a wild craving to be different. He was dissatisfied with every accepted standard of truth, beauty, and goodness. He was convinced that all the people who had lived in all the countries of the world's life were wrong and that he had come to set everything right. . . . All great men—great in the eyes of the world—are not great at all, but simply crazy. . . . Any man who writes music like Wagner's, which moves people to tears, or plays like Shakespeare's, is insane.⁷⁷

Henderson draws a comparison between Nietzsche and Max Nordau (1849–1923), whose *Entartung* (1892) had attacked so-called "degenerate" strands of modernist art, including the symbolist, decadents, and even Wagner. Despite their shared distaste for most modernist works, it was likely Nordau's criticism of Wagner that earned him Henderson's disapproval. There is, however, an underlying similarity in their view of the current state of art, particularly evident in Nordau's conflating of modernist art

⁷⁶ "Music," *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

movements with a type of societal illness.⁷⁸ Nordau's book caused some controversy when it first appeared in English translation in 1895. While there were some that agreed with his basic premise, others found fault with many of its aspects.⁷⁹ In the months, and even years, after Nordau's work first appeared, articles referencing his ideas regularly popped up in the press. Although most of the coverage was critical, Nordau did have some supporters in the city, including certain members of the Nineteenth Century Club, such as Richard Burton, who told the group following a discussion of the work that he "believe[d] in Nordau's thesis, but . . . deplore[d] his method."⁸⁰ There were three main points of attack for those who opposed the book: his methodology; his reliance on the work of Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), the Italian criminologist who advocated for criminal atavism; and a general impression that he was a quack.⁸¹ A number of works were written to oppose Nordau's theories, including E. C. Spitzka's (1852–1914) *The Degeneration Chimera*, which compared the "pseudo-science" of Nordau to the "pseudo-anthropology" of Lombroso, and William Hirsch's (1857?–1937) *Genius and Degeneration: A Psychological Study*.⁸² Despite these attacks, Nordau's view of

⁷⁸ The viewpoint that this period was diseased was not uncommon. James Huneker (1857–1921), who would later work for the *Sun* as the music critic from 1900–1902, also viewed Strauss as the product of a diseased age. In his work *Mezzotints in Modern Music* (1899), Huneker described Strauss's music as "complex with the diseased complexity of the age." James Huneker, *Mezzotints in Modern Music: Brahms, Tschaiikowsky, Chopin, Richard Strauss, Liszt and Wagner* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 153.

⁷⁹ The first review of the book in the *Times* noted that Nordau's conception of societal degradation would incite strong partisan reactions; however, it praised Nordau as "deeply learned and with active sympathies." "Nordau's 'Degeneration,'" *New York Times*, 24 March 1895, 31.

⁸⁰ "Are We Degenerating," *New York Times*, 17 April 1895, 5.

⁸¹ "Quack Science," *New York Times*, 6 December 1897, 6.

⁸² "Dr. Spitzka's Views of Nordau," *New York Times*, 24 August 1895, 3; "Dr. Hirsch on Max Nordau," *New York Times*, 21 November 1896, A2.

civilization's deterioration had its supporters, including—despite his voiced opposition—Henderson.

It is impossible to ignore the parallel between the two men. Even at the time, this did not go unnoticed by his readers. In a letter to the editor from 1901, Leopold Jaches took issue with Henderson's evocation of Nordau alongside Nietzsche, Maeterlinck, and Ibsen. As Jaches notes, these are the same people that Nordau condemned in his own work. Jaches cautions that Henderson should not be so quick to condemn Nordau on the basis of his assault on Wagner, especially since the two share many beliefs.⁸³ For his part, Henderson refused to acknowledge this bond. In his complaint against contemporary critics, Henderson lumps Nordau into this "set of thinkers" who attack the art of the past:

Now let us have a few words of truth about these fellows, because they have their feeble imitators right here in New York—critics of music, who will tell you that Beethoven and Mozart are pitiable weaklings compared to Liszt and Rubinstein, critics of the drama who condemn all decent plays and sing the praises only of Ibsen and Maeterlinck. The same lot will tell you that Wordsworth was not a great poet, nor Tennyson, nor Browning, and will invite you to worship at the shrine of Paul Verlaine or Francois Villon. Anything that is pure, simple, fundamental, and universal in its elements of truth and beauty is repugnant to all this set of thinkers from Nietzsche [*sic*] and Nordau down to the poor things who are constantly striving to prove that their obscure weeklies are more wise in art than the great dailies.⁸⁴

⁸³ "Mr. Henderson then goes on to make exactly the same prognosis for art as Nordau, the teacher of 'wild philosophy.' For he states there that 'the decadent idea is not one upon which a healthy art can be reared; this kind of writing will not endure.' And Nordau ... says: 'The aberrations of art (meaning the works of Nietzsche, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, and others) have no future. They will disappear when civilized humanity shall have triumphed over its exhausted condition.'" "The Critic Criticised," *New York Times*, 28 February 1901, 8.

⁸⁴ "Music," *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

As with Nordau, Henderson's line between "modernism" and "traditionalism" leaves little room for nuance.⁸⁵ Even the figures that Henderson attacks (with the obvious exception of Nordau himself) are the same as those that Nordau condemned. Referring to the champions of modernism, Henderson writes:

The plain truth about all these writers is that they are hopelessly dishonest. They do not really believe what they write; unless they are insane as Nietzsche [*sic*] was. It took some years for Nietzsche's [*sic*] friends to find out that he was insane, but they finally put him in an asylum, and he's there yet. It is a pity that all the rest of his tribe are not there with him. They fill a clean mind with unutterable disgust.⁸⁶

In this excerpt, Henderson presents Nietzsche as the model modernist, arguing that the "pitiable intellectual weaklings" that truly support modernism deserve the same fate. In his book, Nordau devoted an entire chapter to condemning Nietzsche as the philosophical voice of the movement and one of the leading figures responsible for society's moral decline. For both men, Nietzsche's mental health exemplified the diseased minds behind the aesthetic changes of the period.

Of particular concern for Henderson was the subject matter of these artists who "are incapable of one fine or substantial thought about the glories of life, and so for fear that they may sink into utter obscurity, they deliberately set about making a religion of nastiness."⁸⁷ This sentiment is worth remembering, as the "nasty" subject matter of *Salome* would become an issue later. As with Nordau, Henderson was particularly appalled by what was deemed worthy of artistic depiction:

They make it the business of their lives to poison human minds with foul ideas of art, of theology, of morals. They publish papers in which you are

⁸⁵ It was at this time that Strauss was making his name as a conductor primarily of the works of Wagner and Mozart.

⁸⁶ "Music," *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

invited to study the psychology of the brothel and the metaphysics of the opium den. For fiction you are offered the Augean filth of the Parisian unmentionables. For poetry you are offered the vile fancies of absinthe drinkers. For criticism you are asked to accept ill-written assaults upon everything which the world holds most dear in literature and art. In short, these creatures, for the sake of a poor notoriety, which is their only available substitute for honorable reputation, roll in a mire of the dirtiest thought and ask you to share their bed.⁸⁸

It also echoes—albeit in a far more extreme manner—the criticism of Strauss’s subject matter for his tone poems. At this point in his article, Henderson turns specifically to Strauss and writes a lengthy tirade against his musical offerings:

Nordau and Nietzsche [*sic*] are the apostles of this church. Ibsen is its psalmist—a man of gigantic powers, wallowing in mire. Richard Strauss is its musician. He cannot write a symphony as Mozart and Beethoven did, and he is keen enough to see that he could not touch even the hem of Brahms’s garments. He cannot write an opera after the manner of Wagner, nor even of Humperdinck. Indeed, in the presence of Humperdinck’s babes in the wood such musical pictures as those of Strauss are as Mephistopheles in the presence of Marguerite. There is only one thing for a man like Strauss to do if he desires to escape oblivion, and that is to plunge into the grossest materialism in music and seek to puzzle or shock you, because he cannot touch your heart.

I challenge any living man to say honestly that he ever came away from the performance of a symphonic poem by Richard Strauss with any finer impulse of his nature quickened, with any high emotion warmed, or with any sweeter sensibility touched.

Could I fling such a challenge in the face of Mozart’s quartets, Haydn’s “Creation,” Beethoven’s fifth symphony, or Brahms’s “German Requiem”? These works are noble, elevating, inspiring.

The compositions of Richard Strauss do not even leave a clean taste in one’s mouth.

Look at his compositions, dear reader; reflect upon them; call up the feelings which they aroused in you when you first heard them. “Don Juan,” “Death and Apotheosis,” “Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks,” and “Thus Spake Zarathustra”! These are some of the works by which we have been asked to judge Strauss, the local god of the sordid, heartless Munich coterie. What was his “Don Juan”? An attempt to put into music the sensuality of a libertine, his final satiety, and utter coldness of heart.

“Death and Apotheosis.” A weird attempt to portray with musical instruments the horrors of dissolution, the gasps, the struggles, the tremor

⁸⁸ Ibid.

mortis, the death rattle. Realism, realism! Yes, gross and disgusting materialism; that is what this is.⁸⁹

Henderson fervently believes that art must be “uplifting.” His pantheon of German composers—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, and Humperdinck—provide music that elevates the listener.⁹⁰ Strauss, on the other hand, is forced into the realm of the sordid and shocking because he supposedly does not have the talent to uplift. To further emphasize his point, Henderson quotes his own review of *Till Eulenspiegel*, and then includes a few other excerpts from some of his earlier writings on Strauss, noting, “some of this I have said before. All of it I shall say again—and again and again, as long as there are decadents in the world, as long as there are preachers of the doctrine of gross materialism in art, as long as there are composers who walk the hospitals for their inspiration, till death stops me.”⁹¹

Much of what Henderson condemned—and connected to Strauss—was associated with France, including the symbolists, Maeterlinck, the decadents, and even his condemnation of realism as embodied by Zola. While not explicitly stated, there does seem to be an undercurrent to Henderson’s denunciation that Strauss represents a form of art that is un-German. When citing good, uplifting music, Henderson specifically

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Not directly addressed by Henderson is how Mozart’s depiction of the Don Juan story, *Don Giovanni*, does not fall into the same trap of morbidity and sordidness as Strauss’s version. Despite both composers ostensibly handling the same subject, Mozart does not earn Henderson’s condemnation. Rather, in a list of noble, beautiful works that Henderson upholds as a model for composers, he notes that “Donna Anna [is] unapproachable.” If anything, Lenau’s version of the myth presents Don Juan as a more sympathetic figure, who is driven to promiscuity by his desire to find the perfect woman. It would seem that Henderson’s primary complaint was against the music, rather than the subject. “Live Musical Topics,” *New York Times*, 17 January 1892, 12.

⁹¹ “Music,” *New York Times*, 26 December 1897, IWM6.

references works by Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms. Strauss, however, falls in line with the “diseased” art associated with a particularly French aesthetic.⁹² It is this line of thought that once again connects Henderson’s view of modern art with that of Nordau. In his work, Nordau laid much of his critique of modernistic aesthetic at the feet of the French. In addition to allotting several chapters to symbolism, the decadents, and Zola—the same movements and artists attacked by Henderson—he devotes his first section of the book to the proliferation of the term “fin-de-siècle” as a symbol of France’s influence on the mood of the period. In its review of the work, the *Times* drew attention to Nordau’s preoccupation: “From the conspicuous position he gives France, the thorough and exhaustive analysis he presents of its romantic literature of to-day, you might fancy that Germany was steeped through and through with the modern Gallic poison.”⁹³ It is not hard to imagine Henderson making a similar claim in respect to contemporary German music.

As one of the more prominent composers in Germany, Strauss came to embody the state of music at the end of the nineteenth century. For better or worse, he symbolized all that was new and different.⁹⁴ Throughout the years when Strauss was making a name

⁹² One thing that Henderson seems to take particular pleasure in is Strauss’s less than favorable reviews in the London press, which like Henderson, tend to focus on the music’s programmatic aspects. To this end, he includes excerpts taken from reviews that appeared in *The Standard* and *The Telegraph*, which were more complimentary than Henderson thought appropriate. He also praises the negative review printed in the *Tribune*, while noting that the included picture of Strauss serves as an interesting tool for the study of physiognomy. Ibid.

⁹³ “Nordau’s ‘Degeneration,’” *New York Times*, 24 March 1895, 31.

⁹⁴ This is an important issue to remember as Strauss matured, particularly in the years after *Salome* and *Elektra*, when Strauss repeatedly found himself being described as a relic of the nineteenth century, a composer that was too rooted in the past and unwilling to change with the new aesthetics of the period.

for himself as a composer of complex tone poems, he also provided an important barometer by which people could explore the impact of modernism on art. As the *Tribune* wrote in 1904: “all boundaries, and even foundations, seem to be shifting.”⁹⁵ The very idea of the role of music—and more broadly art—in society was being called into question: “all the old notions of propriety and limitations have been wafted away.”⁹⁶ Recognized as the leading German composer of the time, Strauss represented many things for many people—he was still, however, regarded as a composer of programmatic orchestral music, not opera. Although this was soon to change, the criticisms—and vague praises—marked the state of Strauss’s reputation as he embarked on the first of his two visits to the city.⁹⁷

Strauss in America: The 1904 Tour

On 24 February 1904 Strauss disembarked the *Moltke* and set foot on American soil for the first time. The decision to travel to the United States—or other parts of North and South America—for concert tours was not uncommon among European composers. As had been the case with some of the singers who traveled across the Atlantic to appear in the German-language operas of the 1880s, the United States represented a seemingly untapped market filled with economic opportunities. The occasion of Strauss’s visit was

⁹⁵ “The Boston Symphony Orchestra,” *New-York Tribune*, 19 February 1904, 9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ This trip to the United States was not the first talk of Strauss coming to America. There had been rumors that Strauss would be offered the directorship of the Metropolitan Opera House, along with rumors that he would potentially take over the Philharmonic Society of New York amid reports that Walter Damrosch was threatening to quit, which he eventually did after leading the group for the 1902–1903 season. “Damrosch May Quit the Philharmonic,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1903, 7.

notable because of his mixed reputation in the city—praised as both the preeminent German composer of his generation and the beacon of musical degeneracy.

The coverage prior to Strauss's arrival focused on fleshing out his image for New Yorkers. For those unfamiliar with him, the papers attempted to provide some context by describing his place within the German musical tradition:

At forty Strauss is the most commanding figure in the musical world of today. It will be an interesting disclosure for future years to make as to how much of his lifework he has already accomplished, and whether the salient characteristics are already fixed and contained in what he has done, or whether this is but a preparation. We may be reminded that on their fortieth birthdays Mozart and Schubert had put the final seal upon their work. Mozart five years before, Schubert nine. Beethoven had given to the world his first six symphonies, his "Fidelio," and the "Leonore" overtures, the "Coriolanus" overture, the "Egmont" music, the five piano concertos, and the violin concerto, nine string quartets, including those dedicated to Count Rasoumoffsky; the "Kreutzer" and the earlier violin sonatas, the "Waldstein" and the earlier piano sonatas. Wagner had written "Rienzi," "The Flying Dutchman," "Tannhäuser," "Lohengrin," "Eine Faust Overture," and had conceived and partly executed "The Ring of the Nibelung." And yet these two had not given the finest fruitage of their genius. What Strauss has done in his younger manhood will not, perhaps, be counted of greater worth. Whether, like these two at his age, he will go on to further development may also be curiously questioned, and whether he will turn aside from the path in which he has started. On that path he seems already to have reached the furthest confines of the territory he has traversed.⁹⁸

In hindsight, the most notable remark from this article is that Strauss was indeed on the brink of turning "aside from the path in which he ha[d] started" and beginning his career as an operatic composer. As with earlier coverage, Strauss is also presented as falling short of the German tradition that he is tasked with upholding. This tension—the push

⁹⁸ "Richard Strauss the Composer: Some Facts About the Famous Musician Who Is Coming to New York This Week," *New York Times*, 21 February 1904, SM5.

and pull of tradition and modernism—would continue to follow Strauss. From the same

Times article:

As one of his admirers has pointed out, Strauss in his career as a composer, of, say, twenty years, has gone through all the stages of development of music in the last two-thirds of a century. They can be clearly traced through his works from the very beginning to the present time. In taking his first steps he leaned heavily upon the romantic Germans, who held to the classical traditions of an earlier period; upon Schumann and Mendelssohn. He made himself at home in the forms of absolute music, and his earlier works show his mastery of them and of the art of thematic development conditioned upon their requirements. The neo-classical spirit of Brahms wrought strongly upon him in these earlier years, and its influence persisted after the others had been left behind. He was brought into relations with the music of Liszt and Wagner; and that for a time was a controlling factor in his own trend of thought. His authoritative exponent, Gustave Brecher, records “*Tod und Verklärung*” and the opera “*Guntram*” as marking a “reaction” toward Liszt and Wagner—we have gotten so far in these days!—to be followed by a return to the true Strauss in the vast realistic conceptions of “*Don Quixote*” and “*Ein Heldenleben*.”⁹⁹

Since Strauss’s career supposedly encapsulates the trajectory of nineteenth century German music, he also becomes, for some critics, the embodiment of what went wrong.

A common source of attack was his biography and past success. In the earlier coverage of his tone poems, Strauss was often described as technically proficient, yet lacking in artistry. For some, Strauss’s understanding of his role as an artist was to blame. Fault was even found in his financial achievements: “Strauss, indeed, has been a Prince Fortunatus of music. Poverty has been kept from him, the poverty of a Mozart, a Schubert, a Wagner, even of a Bach and a Beethoven.”¹⁰⁰ Even when the article goes on to note that he does not need the inspiration, or drive, that comes from these biographical circumstances, its insistence that his music is the product of hard, persistent work belies a

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

certain reputation that had already begun to emerge around the composer—the man who approached music as work, rather than as art.¹⁰¹ This image seemed to be confirmed by Strauss’s decision to perform two concerts with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra at Wanamaker’s Department Store during his time in the city. While this decision was partly presented as a means of bringing Strauss’s music to a wider audience—roughly 5,000 people reportedly attended the first performance—there was also a sense that this event represented a crass mixture of art and commercialism.¹⁰² This was something that remained with him for years to come. In his introduction to Ernest Newman’s *Richard Strauss* (1908), part of the *Living Masters of Music* series, Alfred Kalisch remarked on Strauss’s reputation as a businessman more interested in money than art.¹⁰³ In particular, Strauss’s decision to perform “a concert in a room above a large store in the afternoon while the ordinary business of the establishment was going on downstairs” was used as evidence to confirm this image.¹⁰⁴ Kalisch went so far as to declare it “Prostitution of Art.”¹⁰⁵ In response to this attack, Strauss—as noted by Kalisch—argued, “the room was, or was turned into, an excellent concert room with very good acoustic properties, and that it was stipulated beforehand that all traces of business should be removed. Further, he had

¹⁰¹ There was some hint at this in an article for the *Sun* that made note of Strauss’s involvement with “a recently formed society by which German composers are seeking to protect their work. They propose to try immediately to have the law enforced or interpreted in a way more to their advantage.” “Richard Strauss’s One Thought,” *New York Sun*, 6 March 1904, 7.

¹⁰² “Dr. Strauss at Wanamaker’s,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1904, 7.

¹⁰³ Even the *Staats-Zeitung*, which provided the most sympathetic coverage of Strauss’s visit, made note of the large profit that Strauss stood to gain from the tour. “Richard Strauß,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 28 February 1904, 34.

¹⁰⁴ Alfred Kalisch, introduction to *Richard Strauss*, by Ernest Newman (London: John Lane, 1908), xix–xx.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

one of the best orchestras in the States at his disposal, and better opportunities for rehearsal than were granted by some of the most prominent artistic institutions.”¹⁰⁶ While the quality of the orchestra was probably a bit exaggerated, Strauss’s justification for the performance did little to quell his critics.¹⁰⁷

Some of the preparatory articles focused on introducing him to New Yorkers who may not have encountered his music. Despite his reputation as the leading German composer of the period, there were still some who apparently had never heard of him: “At the outset to prevent any misunderstanding and to please Herr Strauss, it should be said that he is not the ‘waltz king.’ This Herr Strauss doesn’t like to be mistaken for his namesake, and he showed it yesterday when a green reporter got them mixed.”¹⁰⁸ Strauss was commonly presented as an atypical “artist”—a bourgeois composer and family man. In descriptions of Strauss—and often his wife as well—his regular, traditional appearance was often stressed, “the couple would not be picked out anywhere by their appearance for distinguished musicians.”¹⁰⁹ From the introductory article that appeared in the *Sun*:

There was never such a puzzle to the persons who have come into contact with him as Richard Strauss. To be the most famous composer of the day and to be striking in no particular in appearance or in manner, to have no eccentricity that might be looked upon as a mark of genius—such a state of affairs is enough to confuse the average searcher for the picturesque.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ This episode, as will be seen in the following chapters, became shorthand for Strauss’s commercialism. It also likely stoked anxiety on the part of American critics regarding European perceptions of American commercialism. Strauss’s performance in a department store seemed to feed into the stereotype of American greed and consumerism. The anger on the part of some critics may have been designed to distance themselves—and by implication American audiences—from Strauss’s decision.

¹⁰⁸ “Enter Herr Richard Strauss,” *New York Sun*, 25 February 1904, 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ “Richard Strauss’s One Thought,” *New York Sun*, 6 March 1904, 7.

This is an interesting line of thought given the past descriptions of his music. As seen, Henderson frequently compared Strauss to the leading modernist artists that were purportedly responsible for the degradation of modern society. Yet in appearance, Strauss was everything that his music supposedly destroyed. While the English-language press devoted much of their time to introducing the composer to New Yorkers, the *Staats-Zeitung* repeatedly referenced the city's familiarity with Strauss's works. In the build-up to his arrival, the paper declared that Strauss would not find an "uneducated audience" here—particularly among the readers of the *Staats-Zeitung*.¹¹¹ Much of this seemed to be done in an effort to demonstrate that the city could stand alongside any of Europe's cultural capitals.¹¹² In a later article, the paper went so far as to proclaim that Strauss would not encounter "musical barbarians" in the city.¹¹³

As it did in Europe, the relationship between Strauss and his wife caused considerable interest. After the reporter for the *Sun* referred to her husband as a genius, Pauline reportedly responded, "Oh, no . . . He is not a genius. We don't think that, either of us, he or I. He happens to be the greatest composer that Germany has at this time, and for that reason he has become famous. But he ought to be more particular about the way he dresses."¹¹⁴ Falling back on a common ethnic stereotype, the *Sun* also noted: "His

¹¹¹ "Musikalische Angelegenheiten," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 21 February 1904, 16.

¹¹² After the premiere of the *Sinfonia Domestica*, the *Staats-Zeitung* declared that Strauss might have anticipated a more naïve audience than in Berlin; however, New York City "is as familiar with Strauss's orchestral works as that of any European city of music." "Das letzte 'Strauß Festival' Konzert," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 22 March 1904, 16.

¹¹³ "Musikalische Angelegenheiten," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 28 February 1904, 16.

¹¹⁴ "Richard Strauss's One Thought," *New York Sun*, 6 March 1904, 7.

allowance of other luxuries of the palate is equally meagre. He smokes at the most five cigarettes in a day and sometimes fewer. Wonderful to tell of a German and a musician at that, he never drinks more than two glasses of beer a day. In summer he sometimes forgets even those two. Wine he touches only when at large dinners.”¹¹⁵ When it came to his music, the *Sun*’s reporter noted in a separate article: “Herr Strauss impressed his interviewers as a very practical person. . . . He also said that he likes to walk and to describe the events of life in his music. He brings with him a bundle of batons, all of which he cut in his strolls in the woods near his home.”¹¹⁶ Part of this coverage, including the mention that he made his own batons, was done to perpetuate the idea that Strauss was seemingly down to earth. In this way, there emerged the dual nature of Strauss’s character—a duality that would continue to confound people throughout his career. He was in some respects, especially during this period around the turn of the century, the leading figure of musical modernism—a title that had clearly earned him the ire of many New York City critics.¹¹⁷ At the same time, he was presented as a traditional figure of the bourgeoisie. This dualism would only become more convoluted after *Salome* and *Elektra*.

The schedule for Strauss’s visit, which also included stops in other American cities, including Boston and Chicago, combined a mixture of conducting obligations, orchestral performances, chamber music recitals, and social events (see Table 4.2 for a selected list of Strauss’s performances in the city). The reviews for these performances echoed many of the same themes as before.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ “Enter Herr Richard Strauss,” *New York Sun*, 25 February 1904, 7.

¹¹⁷ In its review of his first concert in New York City, the *Times* had gone so far, whether ironically or not, as to label him the “new evangel in art.” “Richard Strauss Appears,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1904, 7.

TABLE 4.2. Selected New York City Concert Appearances of Strauss in 1904

Date	Time	Location	Performance Details
27 February 1904	8:15 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss
1 March 1904	3:00 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Lieder Performance with Pauline Strauss
3 March 1904	8:15 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss
9 March 1904	2:00 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss (Original Date for <i>Sinfonia Domestica</i> Premiere)
16 March 1904	8:15 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss
18 March 1904	8:15 p.m.	Mendelssohn Hall	Chamber Music Performance with the Mannes Quartet
21 March 1904	8:15 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss – The Premiere of <i>Sinfonia Domestica</i>
25 March 1904	2:00 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Guest Conductor of the Philharmonic Society of New York
26 March 1904	8:15 p.m.	Carnegie Hall	Guest Conductor of the Philharmonic Society of New York
16 April 1904	Evening	Wanamaker's Department Store	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss
18 April 1904	Evening	Wanamaker's Department Store	Orchestral Performance with the Wetzler Symphony Orchestra and Pauline Strauss

A common focus was his status as the leading figure of modernism. In an article proposing the humor of Strauss's music, the *Times* noted, "Richard Strauss in one way is especially a representative of the modern spirit in art—in the vast divergency [*sic*] of his

interests, the wide view he takes of life in all its aspects. He would make music all-inclusive in its scope, expressive of everything that comes into the range of human life and experience.”¹¹⁸ The *Times*, perhaps embracing its role as host, put a polite spin on its earlier criticism that Strauss’s music illustrated topics that were best left alone. For the *Staats-Zeitung*, Strauss’s status among his contemporaries became a crucial focal point. The paper, admitting that not everyone enjoyed his music, argued that no living composer could match Strauss’s greatness of ideas and mastery of execution.¹¹⁹ Referencing Strauss’s critics, the paper did not disguise its condescension. At one point, the *Staats-Zeitung* championed its readers as educated enough to understand Strauss’s significance, unlike the “poorer Philistines” who “scream woe, woe, woe.”¹²⁰

To some extent, the premiere of his *Sinfonia Domestica*, along with the reviews and articles that appeared before and after the performance, provide a useful summary of the attitudes towards Strauss held by many of the city’s critics. These critics, despite Strauss’s presence, repeated many of the less than enthusiastic sentiments from before. The *Times* expressed confusion over his choice of subject:

When rumors got abroad a year or so ago that Dr. Richard Strauss was at work on a new symphonic tone poem to be entitled “Symphonia Domestica,” and dealing, it was said, with family life, with a day’s doings of “Papa, Mamma, et Bébé,” they were treated as a joke. It was supposed that the serious-faced composer of “Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks” was indulging in one of his own for the mystification of the public. From the philosophy of Zarathustra, the stirring life and noble achievements of a hero, the romantic phantasms of Cervantes’s rueful hero, to the intimacy of the domestic circle, seemed so long a step as barely to be credited as

¹¹⁸ “Richard Strauss, Humorist,” *New York Times*, 28 February 1904, SM5.

¹¹⁹ In this same article, Strauss was compared to an evangelical preaching the gospel of his music to the city. “Musikalische Angelegenheiten,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 21 February 1904, 16.

¹²⁰ “Musikalische Angelegenheiten,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 28 February 1904, 16.

possible. But Dr. Strauss seems capable of anything prompted by originality and daring—especially if it is salted with humor and the opportunity for a little bewilderment of the ultra-conservatives.¹²¹

Of particular interest were the programmatic elements of the piece—again, not a new concern.¹²² The difference now was that Strauss asked for the program of the piece to be suppressed until after the performance.¹²³ “The symphony, he declares, is sufficiently explained by its title, and is to be listened to as the symphonic development of its themes.”¹²⁴ Strauss’s decision to perform the work without a printed program addressed one of the major criticisms that had been thrown at him—primarily the idea that he tended towards gimmicky, illustrative techniques at the expense of his music. By not having the program distributed at the performance: “He believes, and has expressed his belief, that the anxious search on the part of the public for the exactly corresponding passages in the music and the programme, the guessing as to the significance of this or that, the distraction of following a train of thought exterior to the music, are destructive to the musical enjoyment.”¹²⁵ Of course the *Times*, in its review of the performance, found the chance to criticize this decision:

Dr. Strauss’s desire to have this work heard as music and to speak for itself under its title is an inexplicable one. The title alone gives little help,

¹²¹ “Strauss’s ‘Symphonia Domestica’: The German Composer’s Latest Tone Poem,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1904, 25.

¹²² The *Tribune* addressed this issue by providing a “model” of how music—in the vein of Strauss—could depict an Englishman that traveled abroad, changed religion, and lost his umbrella. “Dr. Strauss and His Music,” *New-York Tribune*, 4 March 1904, 9.

¹²³ “One of the most interesting circumstances concerning the production of this new work in New York relates to Dr. Strauss’s wishes as to the way it shall be presented to the public. He intends that no ‘programme’ of it shall be set forth in advance of the performance. He wishes it to be taken as music, for what it is, and not as the elaboration of the specific details of a scheme of things.” “Strauss’s ‘Symphonia Domestica’: The German Composer’s Latest Tone Poem,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1904, 25.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

or is worse than useless in stimulating the hearer's imagination. It is either too much or too little. What starting point is there for the listener in the knowledge that a "domestic symphony" is to be set before him? What is a "domestic symphony"? If he listens to a tone poem on "Don Quixote" or "Don Juan," or even on "Till Eulenspiegel" or Zarathustra's sayings, he knows or may know what the subject matter is, or if he hears an overture by Mendelssohn on "Fingal's Cave" or an "Ocean" symphony by Rubinstein he has in the title a stimulus that may make his fancy keep pace with the music. But he does not even know that a "domestic symphony" is a day in the composer's or anybody else's family life.

Is not the hearer constantly impressed, in hearing this one, that something of apparently tremendous import is going on of which rightful knowledge is denied him? Is he not tantalized by sounds that are plainly meant to be to the mind something more than they seem to the ear? It was very difficult to perceive for Dr. Strauss's performance of this enormously complex and detailed piece of programme music without a word of explanation any sufficient cause. Even with a knowledge of all his intentions, the "Symphonia Domestica" does not reach complete success in characterization, notwithstanding all its prodigious cleverness. Without that knowledge the music rarely explains itself or justifies itself as music. The fact that his programme has served his own purpose in inspiring him to its production is not sufficient. Their experience last evening ought to be full of suggestion to all who heard the "Symphonia Domestica" as to the philosophy of programme music.¹²⁶

Strauss could not win. His choice to suppress the program only seemed to confirm the idea that his program music leaned too heavily on the program. In a review of Henderson's *Modern Musical Drift* (1904) that appeared in the *Times* a few months after Strauss's visit, the topic of Strauss's tone poem and its lack of a printed program returned:

Dr. Strauss's purpose [in suppressing a program], as explained by him, was to have the "Symphonia Domestica" listened to at its first performance and judged purely as a piece of music. He apparently did not intend to deny that it had a programme, a very definite and materialistic one indeed, but wished to put forward in this work some sort of an answer to the critics who maintained that without a programme his music was unintelligible. He apparently expected them to find this piece, cast in four general divisions corresponding to the four movements of a symphony,

¹²⁶ "'Symphonia Domestica,' With Composer Leading," *New York Times*, 22 March 1904, 5.

sufficient unto itself as symphonic music. However mistaken he was in that, it is well to give him credit for his purpose.¹²⁷

The *Sun* echoed this sentiment.¹²⁸ In its review, the paper attempted to provide its own program by turning to Henry Cuyler Bunner (1855–1896), the writer and editor who helped to build *Puck* into one of the leading humor magazines of the period. Bunner had once written a parody of “Home, Sweet Home” in the style of various literary figures, including Swinburne, Pope, and Harte. Using the theme of domesticity as a starting point, the *Sun* envisioned Strauss’s tone poem as a musical analogue to this exercise.

Comparing Strauss’s music with Bunner’s satirical poets, the *Sun* pointed to Walt Whitman as the closest relation.¹²⁹ Far from complimentary, the *Sun* remarked on the pseudo-Whitman’s verses “prancing around” on John Howard Payne’s (1791–1852)

¹²⁷ “Music. Mr. Henderson’s Views on ‘Parsifal’ and Richard Strauss,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1904, BR732.

¹²⁸ The *Sun* holds a particularly complicated relationship in regard to Strauss. In an article that was published prior to Strauss’s visit, the critic for the *Sun* addressed the role of the critic and the constant criticisms that are often laid at his feet. In his article, he noted: “It may be as well to add that the same correspondent expresses the opinion that the music of Richard Strauss is nothing but a concatenation of meaningless sound and discord and therefore not to be taken seriously. The reporter of THE SUN tried a number of years not to take this music seriously, but the rest of the world declined to imitate his example. Therefore he decided that it behooved him to sit up and take notice. The music of Strauss is to-day the only new thing a serious critic has to talk about, and he is grateful for its existence.” “Music and Musicians,” *New York Sun*, 28 February 1904, 30.

¹²⁹ In the article, the *Sun* included a brief excerpt demonstrating the “Whitman” version:
 “I, Walt, I call to you! I am all on deck! Come and loaf with me! Let me tote you around by your elbow and show you things.

You listen to my ophicleide!

Home!

Home I celebrate. I elevate my fog whistle, inspired by the thought of home.

Come in! Take a front seat; the jostle of the crowd not minding; there is room enough for all of you.

This is my exhibition—it is the greatest show on earth—there is no charge for admission.

All you have to pay me is to take in my romansa.” “The ‘Symphonia Domestica,’” *New York Sun*, 22 March 1904, 7.

lyrics.¹³⁰ Whitman's reputation for breaking from the confines of poetic meter and crafting complex poetry—often on unlikely, or even taboo, topics—likely struck a nerve with the music critics who felt that Strauss was guilty of the same thing.¹³¹

One benefit of Strauss's tour was that it provided New Yorkers with the opportunity to hear a different side of his repertoire. In particular, Pauline's performances of his Lieder allowed the city to hear an important chunk of Strauss's vocal music.¹³² Although some of his Lieder had been heard before, the presence of Strauss as the accompanist added weight to the occasion and ensured commentary by the press:

Though they stand as a means of expression at the opposite pole from his great symphonic tone poems, they bear no less unmistakably the hall mark [*sic*] of Strauss, of his musical quality, and, notably some of the later ones, of his fearless and uncompromising style that hesitates at nothing that will express and characterize what he wishes. Some of them are of the highest beauty, of rare distinction and originality, of true lyric inspiration, and have compelled acceptance as among the best of modern songs.¹³³

The year of the tour would mark a crucial moment in Strauss's professional life. When *Salome* premiered the next year, Strauss's reputation shifted away from his orchestral

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ There had been other references made between Strauss's music and Whitman's poetry. In a review of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, which was quoted earlier, the following line appeared: "'Thus spake Zarathustra!' How? With a barbaric yawp like Walt Whitman's and a corybantic whirl of words falling over each other in their drunken eagerness." "Musical Comment," *New-York Tribune*, 20 December 1897, 7.

¹³² It also provided an opportunity for New Yorkers to become familiar with Strauss's wife. Although Pauline had always incurred a mixed reaction among those who met her, perhaps the oddest reaction to her came from a performance in Philadelphia. After appearing to become weak and unable to perform, Pauline seemed to be magically revived by a few comments from her husband. She then went on to sing with a renewed vigor. The *New York Evening World*—following some of the rumors coming from the audience—proposed the possibility that Pauline had been hypnotized in the manner of du Maurier's Trilby and Svengali. "Is Mme. Strauss Another Trilby," *New York Evening World*, 7 March 1904, 3.

¹³³ "Strauss Song Recital," *New York Times*, 2 March 1904, 9.

music towards his operas. This movement may be seen—to some extent—with the coverage of this tour. While his orchestral works still received a bulk of the attention, Strauss's vocal music began to garner new levels of attention. In particular, critics began to grapple with Strauss's treatment of the human voice. Notably, these reviews tended to be more positive. In a review of one performance—which it noted was less than ideal—the *Sun* praised Strauss's music: "They are good songs. Some of them are exquisitely beautiful; others are wonderful creations of poetic atmosphere, and still others are extraordinary mood pictures. There is no question at all that some of these songs are genuinely great."¹³⁴ Very few critics would have called any of Strauss's orchestral works "genuinely great." Considering the complaints against Strauss's tone poems, perhaps the different reactions are not so surprising. For many critics, Strauss's works suffered from his overt realism and overreliance on a program—a problem that is clearly not an issue with vocal music. In some respects, Strauss's move to the voice seemed the natural course for him to take.

Although it was not a major theme in most of the coverage, Strauss's connection to the larger German American community was not entirely ignored by the English-language press. In his public engagements outside the concert hall, Strauss appeared at obligatory dinners held by various clubs and organizations, such as the Lotos Club—the famous literary club founded in 1870. For this particular dinner, the *Times* noted that the guests included "the German Consul General, Carl Buentz, Walter Damrosch, Fritz Scheel, the leader of the Philadelphia Philharmonic Orchestra; Charles H. Steinway, who brought the composer to this country, Herman Klein, Chester S. Lord, Arthur von

¹³⁴ "Songs by Richard Strauss," *New York Sun*, 2 March 1904, 7.

Briesen, Pablo Casals, E. Francis Hyde, and Samuel Adams Simons of Buffalo.”¹³⁵

Several prominent figures delivered speeches. Buenz, the German Consul General, noted his pride that Strauss had been received so warmly and enthusiastically in the United States.¹³⁶ As the only speaker to address the attendees in German, von Briesen emphasized Strauss’s importance for the German cultural community:

“I should call the attention of the guest of the evening to the fact,” said Mr. von Briesen, “that the club has recently shown special German leanings, since it was only a little while ago that we had Mr. Conried with us, as a tribute to his devotion to the first Richard in the Empire of Music. The second Richard of that Empire we have with us to-night. Soon there will be a George, a native of Germany, and a leader among Celts among us.

“That Dr. Strauss has attained the highest rank among the composers of the day is well known. His songs live among us. His great compositions have been heard and appreciated. His operas ‘Guntram’ and ‘Feuersnoth,’ [*sic*] so far as I know, have not yet been produced upon our stage, but that they will be soon is my hope.

“Dr. Strauss has come to us in a season replete with music. Our Metropolitan Opera House, under the splendid management of Heinrich Conried, has drawn hundreds of thousands of dollars, and directors from all parts of the civilized world have conducted in our midst. When Richard Strauss appeared, however, he soon proved that he was the greatest of them all. Was ever character painted as he paints it in the world of music? Was ever wit expressed musically as he expresses it? Was ever, what would formerly have been called discord, turned into lines of beauty until he came?

“We have every reason to be proud of him as our guest and friend, as well as proud of him on account of the great future that is before him. I ask you to drink to his long life and happiness.”¹³⁷

It is noteworthy that von Briesen mentions Conried and the Metropolitan Opera. At this time, New York was embroiled in a debate over Wagner’s *Parsifal*, which Conried was

¹³⁵ “Ask Strauss to Set Skyscrapers to Music,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1904, 7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

producing against the expressed wishes of Wagner and his widow Cosima.¹³⁸ To cite Conried as a great champion of Wagner at this point in time would have been surprising to Bayreuth, which was far from pleased with his actions. When pressed by an interviewer, Strauss himself had noted his disapproval at Conried's actions for going against Wagner's last wishes. Beyond praising Strauss as the greatest living composer, von Briesen's comments also demonstrate the hegemony that German music had achieved by the beginning of the twentieth century. It is perhaps apt that von Briesen compares German music to an Empire. By the beginning of the century, German music had come to dominate the Western canon and German composers, such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, had become the figures that epitomized Western music. As seen during the German Years at the Metropolitan, this process of German musical domination had begun years before, yet was seemingly in place by the first years of the new century. Of course, much like an Empire, the tide of German music was often at the expense of local national cultures. Von Briesen's choice of language was perhaps more on point than he may have realized. His comments also play into the increasingly popular idea that Strauss ("the second Richard") was emerging as the most likely successor to Wagner ("the first Richard").¹³⁹

¹³⁸ There had been concert performances of the work, including in New York City, but Conried wanted to present the first staged version outside of Bayreuth. The Wagner family had done everything in its power to prevent such performances, citing Wagner's desire that Bayreuth maintain a monopoly on productions of *Parsifal*. To halt Conried's production, the family attempted a civil suit in New York; however, there were no copyright agreements between Germany and the United States, so there was no basis for legal action. The performance therefore went on as planned. For the rest of her life, Cosima never forgave the Metropolitan. Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 161–62.

¹³⁹ Everyone did not necessarily share this view of Strauss as the continuation of a German musical lineage. After a concert in which Strauss conducted Mozart's Symphony

This was a frequent theme in the coverage by the *Staats-Zeitung*, which presented Strauss as standing on the shoulders of Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner.¹⁴⁰ A popular point of comparison for the paper was the early reception of Wagner to that of Strauss. In many of its columns, the *Staats-Zeitung* considered the impact of time on a composer's legacy. Arguing that the early supporters of Wagner were often criticized for judging his music with their hearts, rather than reason, the paper conjectured that the supporters of Strauss now found themselves in a similar situation.¹⁴¹ The *Staats-Zeitung*, looking back on the early part of Wagner's career, noted the damaged reputation of those, such as Wilhelm Tappert (1830–1907), who opposed Wagner's music.¹⁴² Not wanting to suffer the same fate, the paper encouraged its readers to view Strauss as someone paving a new path forward for music.¹⁴³ In an argument that appeared in more than one column, the *Staats-Zeitung* contended that just as this generation had been born with “Wagner-ears”—accustomed to the dissonance and stylistic features that had caused an uproar when his

No. 41, the *Sun* took the chance to compare the two composers: “Why did Mr. Strauss conduct Mozart? One skeptic said because it was easy. Another said in order to show the contrast between that music and his, not necessarily to prove that his was the better, but just to give a lesson in musical history and a glimpse of the development of orchestral composition from 1788 till to-day. Let us credit Mr. Strauss with a sincere admiration for Mozart. He has expressed it often. Sometimes he even writes a little like Mozart. It is very little, but for even a fragment of Mozartian cantilena in a Strauss tone poem a man would forgive much immoderate modulation and many deferred resolutions toward a diatonic life.

Mr., or Dr., Strauss conducted Mozart's ‘Jupiter’ symphony as if he honestly believed pure melody to be a good and wholesome thing in music and that it was possible to be an artist without being perennially cerebral.” “Dr. Strauss Again Conducts,” *New York Sun*, 26 March 1904, 10.

¹⁴⁰ “Musikalische Angelegenheiten,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 28 February 1904, 16.

¹⁴¹ “Richard Strauß,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 27 March 1904, 2–3.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

music first appeared—the next generation would be born with “Strauss-ears,” making this current debate largely moot.¹⁴⁴ At least for the *Staats-Zeitung*, the important aspect of Strauss’s career—whether you liked his music or not—was that he was pushing the German tradition forward into the twentieth century.

Outside of certain circles, Strauss’s nationality was not always considered an asset. One criticism of him, as both a conductor and accompanist, was that he exhibited a sense of aloofness. While this could be attributed to a number of factors, including a justifiable feeling of exhaustion, there were some that found explanation in Strauss’s Germanness:

There is a growing impression that Richard Strauss of Munich is laboring under a delusion quite common in the German Empire. His attitude toward his own work leads to the belief that he has come to America thoroughly imbued with the general German belief that this is a nation of ignorant barbarians, for which anything is quite good enough. A large number of European musicians cross the western ocean every year under the impression that here their names and reputations will suffice and that they may be as careless and as callous as they please without endangering the flow into their pockets of those highly civilized dollars which they, in common with the merchants of their native lands, deeply respect.¹⁴⁵

As seen earlier, some German Americans did approach their new home as a land desperately in need of musical culture. While many of their American compatriots shared this opinion, embracing—with various degrees of reluctance—the culture that this new group brought with them, there were some that did not share this sentiment. Once more, the image of the German American community—in this case through the prism of musical culture—was imbued with this complex intertwining of the positive and the negative. For a certain segment of the American populace there was a deep-seated

¹⁴⁴ “Richard Strauß,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 28 February 1904, 34.

¹⁴⁵ “The Strauss Concerts,” *New York Sun*, 4 March 1904, 7.

resentment toward the German American community built on a cultural inferiority complex.¹⁴⁶ For this group, the presence of the German composer and his behavior at various events and performances was a reminder of what German musical culture symbolized at the time and what American musical culture supposedly lacked. Following a particularly successful performance with Pauline at Carnegie Hall, the *Sun* noted: “The composer was on his good behavior yesterday. He seemed to have reached a realization that while the New York public might not be wholly worthy of art, of his variety, it possibly could tell when it was offered funeral baked meats in lieu of a festal repast.”¹⁴⁷ Strauss’s presence felt to some New Yorkers like a condescending grab for money: the German musician capitalizing off the New York public, while simultaneously looking down his nose at the American barbarians, who did not know any better.

While Strauss’s visit to the city had invoked a range of responses, the moment marked the culmination of a particular phase of his career. Despite any expressed animosity among critics and New Yorkers, within just a few months of Strauss’s departure, his name would once again appear across the pages of the city’s papers as word of his latest work and the scandals that ensued floated across the Atlantic. After 1905, Strauss’s image would be forever altered.

¹⁴⁶ There was also a sense of cultural inferiority on the part of German Americans as well. After a disastrous performance of the Wetzler Orchestra, the *Staats-Zeitung* lamented the state of musical culture in New York City. Noting the complexity of Strauss’s music, the paper argued that he should have been provided with a well-rehearsed Philharmonic Society of New York to ensure a successful performance. “Musik,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 6 March 1904, 16.

¹⁴⁷ “Strauss Conducts Again,” *New York Sun*, 10 March 1904, 9.

Chapter 5

“Schreckliches Kann Geschehn”: *Salome* Takes the Stage

Despite *Salome* not being heard in the city until January 1907, over a year after its 9 December 1905 premiere, the local press closely followed the events in Europe—preparing audiences for what they could expect when the opera did finally cross the Atlantic. One of the earliest accounts of the new opera appeared in the *Times* on 22 October 1905. Filed from Berlin, the report noted the excitement that was building around the work, which “musicians well informed assert . . . will be one of the most interesting features of this year’s opera season.”¹ Particular attention was given to the connection between the opera and Oscar Wilde’s play, since Strauss “has followed [the play] word for word.”² The reporter, however, expressed reservation about Strauss’s musical contribution: “ears . . . used to diatonic sounds undoubtedly will be tortured by an abundance of disharmonies, and moral fanatics will fume at the immorality and perversity of the music.”³ The dissonant sound and perverse subject would come to form the core criticism of the work. Later in the same article, the reporter also mentioned the clamor for seats. This juxtaposition encapsulated the reaction to Strauss’s opera throughout Europe and later the United States—a mixture of disgust, anger, and fascination.

After the opera’s premiere, attention turned to the controversy that it inspired. The correspondent from the *Sun* asserted that the work was the biggest sensation in the

¹ “Strauss’s Opera, ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 22 October 1905, X2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

operatic world since *Falstaff* (1893)—conveniently ignoring *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902)—while also simultaneously questioning its actual musical merits.⁴ As has now become part of the lore around *Salome*, a significant portion of the controversy centered on the subject of Wilde’s play:

It is improbable that the larger opera houses will immediately accept the work, in spite of its great success in Dresden. The German Emperor has indeed decided that it shall not be sung at the Royal Opera House in Berlin. His objections to it are figured on Oscar Wilde’s Biblical libretto. It is also doubtful if Gustav Mahler will accept the work for Vienna.

These two opera houses are closed to “Salome” for reasons in no way connected with the qualities of the music. The libretto has elements that render it unfit for performance in court theatre. In Vienna the censor suggested the impropriety of performing it. But the obstacles will be removed from the path of the opera if it is as remarkable a work as some of the critics declare.⁵

Strauss’s difficulty in getting the work performed garnered huge interest in the United States. As various cities declared their intention to block the work, notices appeared in the city’s press. These notices were often colored with a slight sense of American, particularly democratic, superiority. After Berlin and Vienna declined to present the work, the *Sun* remarked on its appearance in Cologne, where “the opera house . . . is not a royal institution and the prejudices of monarchs are not so important in determining its repertoire.”⁶ The irony of this antiroyalist condemnation would only be apparent later after an American capitalist’s prejudices would go on to determine the repertoire of the

⁴ “‘Salome’ Makes a Sensation,” *New York Sun*, 4 February 1906, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ “Notes of Music in Europe,” *New York Sun*, 15 April 1906, 7.

Metropolitan—although this should not have been surprising, as the wealthy supporters of the house had been influencing the productions since its inception.⁷

Some of this early commentary fell back on themes familiar from the tone poems. This was clearly on display in the *Sun*, which noted not only the massiveness of the endeavor, particularly with respect to the size of the orchestra, but also the inherent difficulty of the music, requiring rehearsals “more numerous” than anyone thought would have been necessary.⁸ An obvious—yet crucial—difference between the reception of the tone poems and *Salome* was the presence of a text. The specter of Wilde loomed large. In its review, the *Sun* pointed to an intense curiosity surrounding Wilde in Germany as a partial explanation for the high level of interest in the opera. This was largely caused by the now infamous 1895 libel suit and his later trial on charges of homosexuality. In the early part of the century, Germany had led the way in establishing Wilde’s artistic legitimacy—as evidenced by Max Reinhardt’s (1873–1943) celebrated 1902 production of *Salomé* at Berlin’s *Kleines Theater*, which inspired Strauss to compose his opera.⁹ By 1905, Germany was in the midst of what Robert Vilain—quoting Arthur Roebler (1877–1955)—has referred to as “Wilde-mania.”¹⁰ Robbie Ross (1869–1918), Wilde’s literary

⁷ When the opera was premiered in Berlin, the *Sun* noted, “no member of the royal family was present to give the occasion the countenance of royalty.” “London’s Seasons of Opera,” *New York Sun*, 16 December 1906, 10.

The Met’s lack of royal patronage was frequently championed as a symbol of American democratic values. The influence of the wealthy benefactors as a form of capitalistic stand-in for monarchical power, however, was often glossed over.

⁸ “‘Salome’ Makes a Sensation,” *New York Sun*, 4 February 1906, 9.

⁹ Stefano Evangelista, “Introduction: Oscar Wilde: European by Sympathy,” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 7.

¹⁰ Robert Vilain, “Tragedy and the Apostle of Beauty: The Early Literary Reception of Oscar Wilde in Germany and Austria,” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 173.

executor, noted in 1908: “Oscar Wilde’s regenerated reputation was made in Germany.”¹¹ From 1900 to 1934, there were some 225 German translations of Wilde printed—including an edition of his complete works from 1906–08 that predated a British edition by two years.¹² In Germany, much of Wilde’s success came from the popularity of *Salomé*, although his other works grew more popular over time.¹³ Many critics viewed the scandals in Wilde’s personal life as inseparable from his art.¹⁴ This led some to uphold him as both a champion of modernism and enemy of repressive Victorian morality.¹⁵

As an icon of *fin de siècle* modernism, Wilde embodied the style associated with the symbolists, decadents, and other similarly-minded groups. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, these were the same strands of modernism linked by some critics to Strauss’s tone poems. The choice of Wilde’s play for his third opera seemed to confirm Strauss’s association with these aesthetic trends. While the source material was a departure from Strauss’s previous attempts at opera—*Guntram* (1893) and *Feuersnot*

¹¹ Evangelista, “Introduction,” 7.

¹² Rainer Kohlmayer and Lucia Krämer, “*Bunbury* in Germany: Alive and Kicking,” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 189.

¹³ In Vienna, the comedies, such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), soon eclipsed *Salomé*, which largely disappeared from Viennese stages after Strauss’s opera appeared. Bernard Shaw explained Wilde’s popularity in Vienna as the result of his embodiment of the “artistic culture of the eighteenth century,” which supposedly appealed to the “regressive” nature of Viennese. Sandra Mayer, “When Critics Disagree, the Artist Survives: Oscar Wilde, an All-Time Favourite of the Viennese Stage in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 203.

¹⁴ Vilain notes how many of the German-language reviews of Wilde’s works, particularly *Salomé*, focused on the “doubtful moral implications and overblown eroticism” that seemed to coincide with the personal life of the author. Vilain, “Tragedy,” 173.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

(1901)—some critics found little difference in the actual music, which the *Sun* argued contained “the same lack of melody—‘economy of thematic construction’ his admirers call it.”¹⁶ In what became a major theme in the coverage of the opera, the *Sun* also remarked on the choice of some critics to describe the dissonant music as “perverse.” This charge of perversity was, at least partially, a matter of guilt by association with Wilde’s play.¹⁷ The *Staats-Zeitung*, which understandably adopted the most supportive stance towards Strauss’s opera of any New York City paper, expressed regret that Strauss’s “bold and undisputed innovation” was spent on such a perverse subject.¹⁸

Some critics, as they had done with Strauss’s earlier orchestral works, considered *Salome*’s place in the current repertoire. The *Sun* included an analysis of the most popular operas in Germany in an effort to situate the new work within the contemporary field of German opera. The primary goal of this exercise was to demonstrate that it did not belong.¹⁹ When *Salome* premiered, the most performed operas in Germany—according to the *Sun*—were *Lohengrin* (1850), *Tannhäuser* (1845), *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), *Carmen* (1875), *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), *Pagliacci* (1892), *Der Freischütz* (1821), *Die Fledermaus* (1874), and *Frühlingsluft* (1903).²⁰ With the exception of the Italian works—which demonstrated the popularity of the *verismo* strand of modernism—these operas

¹⁶ “‘Salome’ Makes a Sensation,” *New York Sun*, 4 February 1906, 9.

¹⁷ “Drama and Music Abroad,” *New York Times*, 3 July 1892, 11.

¹⁸ “Richard Strauß’ ‘Salome,’” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 20 January 1907, 4.

¹⁹ “‘Salome’ Makes a Sensation,” *New York Sun*, 4 February 1906, 9.

²⁰ *Frühlingsluft* is an operetta based on the music of Josef Strauss (1827–1870). The libretto was written by Karl Lindau (1853–1934) and Julius Wilhelm (1871–1941), while additional music was supplied by Ernst Reiterer (1851–1923). Despite being written over thirty years after his death, *Frühlingsluft* is the only operetta contributed to Josef Strauss, who primarily wrote dance music.

were all squarely within the parameters of romanticism. The appearance of *Salome* into an operatic world largely defined by these works partly explains why it became such an important symbol of modernism and why Strauss himself emerged as a potential leader of the movement. His new modernist aesthetic signified for many critics a larger shift in German music from romanticism into modernism.

Early reviews in the city's papers often came from musicians in Europe. One such figure was Marcella Sembrich (1858–1935), who attended a performance of the opera in Dresden with her husband, Wilhelm Stengel (1846–1917), and Heinrich Conried (1855–1909)—the general manager of the Metropolitan since taking over from Maurice Grau (1849–1907) in 1903. As related in the *Tribune*:

In a letter to a friend she says that the director of the Metropolitan Opera House described the effect of the opera as overwhelming upon himself, and said that he considered it a duty to present it in New York. Mme. Sembrich's own opinion is very different. She writes: "The orchestra, under the direction of Schuch, was perfectly wonderful, but the music is unexampled lunacy. It can scarcely be called music at all—a chaos of 103 instruments playing in different keys at the same time, while the singers sing—beg pardon, screech—in other keys. It is interesting, but very little of it is beautiful. The subject is repulsive—perverse."²¹

Sembrich's language is typical of many reviews. In describing Wilde's subject as "perverse" and Strauss's music as evoking feelings of "lunacy," Sembrich falls in line with the *Sun*'s earlier assessment. In another instance, an unnamed musician—referred to only as a "well known New York musician"—penned a letter to a friend regarding his impression of the work:

The whole thing is a Hymn to the Ugly. In order to express his fear Herod sings in A minor, the orchestra plays in A flat major, the audience gets the bellyache! From beginning to end it sounds as if every singer sang what he

²¹ "'Salome' Everlasting—Mme. Sembrich on Strauss's Opera," *New-York Tribune*, 5 August 1906, 5.

pleased, and as he pleased, without regard to anybody's ears. There is not a moment of reconciliation. Even the orchestration fails to interest, since we know all the little tricks from his earlier works. In order to get the bad taste out of my mouth I took a bath of purification the next day in the shape of a performance by the choir of the Church of St. Thomas of an eight-part motet by old Rust.²²

A new form of criticism here is Strauss's orchestration, which had generally earned him at least some begrudging respect in the past. It would seem that the novelty had worn thin among some. The *Times* echoed this sentiment by including a brief quote from Carl Krebs (1857–1937), who noted, “the whole opera consists of instrumental spots of so-called music and incoherent illustrative details.”²³

Despite the criticism of Strauss's music, the performance was generally well regarded. In a report from Berlin, a correspondent for the *Times* noted this discrepancy: “the leading critics, while warm in praise of the performance, unanimously condemn the music.”²⁴ While the music may have been terrible, at least the presentation—particularly that of Emmy Destinn (1878–1930), who performed the title role under the conductorship of Strauss—was worth seeing.²⁵

The press coverage of *Salome*'s trek across Europe naturally increased the anticipation for its eventual performance in the city. By June 1906, the *Sun* reported that Conried intended to put the work on the Metropolitan's stage the following season. It was

²² It is unclear who the Rust is that the musician references in this article. One likely candidate is Wilhelm Rust (1822–1892), who was known for his sacred choral works. Rust was part of a musical family that included his father, Wilhelm Karl Rust (1787–1855), and grandfather, Friedrich Wilhelm Rust (1739–1796). “Musical Comment,” *New-York Tribune*, 5 August 1906, 5.

²³ “Berlin Notes,” *New York Times*, 6 January 1907, X8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ “She did not scream, but sang with warmth and temperament. . . . She admirably portrayed the unbridled savagery and iniquity of Salome.” *Ibid.*

also suggested that Strauss was interested in returning to the city and conducting the performance.²⁶ The confirmation of a performance of *Salome* came on 12 September—the day after Conried returned to the city following a five-month European sojourn.²⁷ With this announcement it was also mentioned that Strauss would not be returning to the city as he was caught up in his work in Berlin. That did not mean Strauss’s influence would not be felt. In his announcement of the upcoming season, Conried deliberately mentioned that Alfred Hertz (1872–1942), the conductor scheduled for the performance, had studied with Ernst von Schuch (1846–1914), who had led the premiere in Dresden under Strauss’s guidance. Hertz also reportedly met with Strauss and became “thoroughly familiar with all his theories about the music.”²⁸ Conried also announced that Olive Fremstad (1871–1951) would be appearing in the title role.²⁹ In the words of Conried: “I consider that the production of ‘Salome’ will be the most notable musical event in New York since the first performance of ‘Parsifal.’”³⁰ Conried likely hoped that the interest in hearing *Salome* would provide enough attention to ward off the new Manhattan Opera Company begun by Oscar Hammerstein and help to recoup the losses resulting from the 1906 San Francisco Earthquake, which had destroyed the touring company’s music, sets, and costumes. The logistics, though, proved to be a bit more difficult than anticipated. As a result of the large orchestra required by the score, the first two rows of orchestra seats would have to be removed in order to enlarge the space for the necessary musicians.

²⁶ “Mme. Ternina to Sing Again,” *New York Sun*, 3 June 1906, Third Section, 1.

²⁷ “Conried Opera Plans,” *New-York Tribune*, 12 September 1906, 7.

²⁸ “Conried Plans a Great Year,” *New York Sun*, 12 September 1906, 4.

²⁹ There was even some talk of including *Salome* as part of a double-bill, which Conried claims had been approved by Strauss. The problem for Conried was finding an opera that would “combine suitably” with Strauss’s opera. *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

These seats belonged to the subscribers, which meant that the performance of *Salome* could not occur at any of the subscription concerts—leaving the subscribers in a tizzy over the possibility of missing what was being hailed as the “sensation of the coming season.”³¹

For the German-language press the greater concern was over how *Salome* would be received. The *Staats-Zeitung*, in the build-up to its arrival, wondered if the local reaction would be the same as in other cities. After noting that the critical reception had been less than warm, the paper argued that Strauss’s latest work should be considered “an experiment . . . a revolution” and the beginning of a new operatic art.³² It did, though, throw some cold water on the flame by admitting that it was perhaps a tad early to be declaring *Salome* the official beginning of a new epoch.³³

Once the season began in November, articles preparing the way for *Salome* appeared with growing regularity. As part of his preview of the upcoming season, Henderson joined the chorus of commentary on Strauss’s opera, while continuously returning to the images and associations that he had used in describing Strauss’s

³¹ Another problem concerned the orchestral parts, which did not arrive until October 12, causing the rehearsals to be delayed. “‘Salome’ Not For Subscribers,” *New York Sun*, 13 October 1906, 5.

As recounted in the *Tribune*, the delayed rehearsal schedule for *Salome* consisted of separate daily rehearsals for strings and winds that were to last for several weeks. This lengthy rehearsal process was more attention than most operas received. Even the act of announcing the arrival of the orchestral parts and the intended schedule for rehearsing served as a means of building anticipation for the performance and demonstrates a certain level of interest among New Yorkers. “Musical Comment,” *New-York Tribune*, 28 October 1906, 7.

³² “Richard Strauß’ ‘Salome,’” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 20 January 1907, 4.

³³ The *Staats-Zeitung*’s ultimate assessment was that it was a “rebellious work by an ingenious scout.” *Ibid.*

orchestral music. Before even discussing *Salome*, Henderson did manage to praise Conried for bringing new works to the stage of the Metropolitan, proclaiming, “the opera house is actually going to do something.”³⁴ When it came to *Salome*, however, Henderson resorted to his old criticisms, particularly in response to Wilde’s play, which he described as “weird and powerful . . . revolting yet alluring in its brutal and naked display of human rottenness, its passionate voicing of sheer animalism. Yet the thing has atmosphere and dramatic expression akin to some of the dramas of Maeterlinck.”³⁵ As in the past, Henderson used Maeterlinck as a stand-in for modernism.³⁶ In his condemnation, Henderson also pointed to what he saw as a disconcerting trend in contemporary music: “sensationalism is rampant in music at present and a manager cannot prevent it. The ‘Salome’ of Richard Strauss is the topic of the hour in Europe and it must be produced here. That it will arouse a great to-do is absolutely certain.”³⁷ While Henderson had not heard the work performed, he did note, “it is said that Strauss has outraged music on every page of his score with positively startling effects.”³⁸

Feeding off the work’s popularity, Otto Neitzel (1852–1920), a German critic and musician, who also served as the musical reviewer of the *Cologne Gazette*, presented a “lecture recital” on *Salome* at Mendelssohn Hall. The lecture was essentially a crash

³⁴ “An Overture to a Season,” *New York Sun*, 4 November 1906, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ There is also the reappearance of descriptors like animalism, rottenness, and revolting that formed the core of criticism.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ His last comment on the opera also seems worth noting. It concerned the performer Olive Fremstad: “Much, too, is to be expected of Miss Fremstad, who as *Kundry* has already proved herself a past mistress of the art of depicting the disrobed female soul.” It is an interesting observation in light of what would soon happen around the figure of *Salome*—particularly in discussions surrounding her literal and figurative disrobing—once the work was performed. *Ibid.*

course in the opera, including musical examples, a breakdown of Wilde's play, and an overall discussion of the musical and literary works that inspired both Wilde and Strauss. In its review of the lecture, the *Times* referred to Neitzel as one of the more "appreciative" of the critics in Germany.³⁹ Neitzel, remarking on the current controversy, observed that "like the 'Nibelungen Ring' a generation ago, it has stirred up hate and set up a 'Salome question.'"⁴⁰ This "Salome question"—namely its potential for future success—echoed statements made by earlier critics of Strauss's orchestral works, who also noted changing tastes and the possibility that Strauss's music might undergo a future reassessment. Also familiar was Neitzel's comparison of *Salome* to the "'demivierges' of modern France."⁴¹ The evocation of France is not without cause, since Wilde's play had originally been written in French; however, it does echo Henderson's earlier criticism that Strauss's compositions were in some way indebted to a particularly French aesthetic, or at the least an un-German one. In describing the opera, Neitzel argued that it "belonged to the decadent school of art," thereby explicitly connecting it to a strand of modernism traditionally associated with France.⁴² This French connection would have been embraced by Wilde, who carefully cultivated relationships with leading French cultural figures, while looking towards French writers, such as Mallarmé, for inspiration.⁴³ The importance of France for Wilde may also be seen in the refuge that it

³⁹ Neitzel had studied under Liszt and written his doctoral dissertation on the subject of program music. It is perhaps not surprising that he would have listened to Strauss's opera with a more sympathetic ear.

⁴⁰ "Dr. Neitzel's Lecture," *New York Times*, 9 November 1906, 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² "Dr. Neitzel on 'Salome,'" *New York Sun*, 9 November 1906, 7.

⁴³ Richard Hibbitt, "The Artist as Aesthete: The French Creation of Wilde," in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 68.

seemed to provide him in the wake of professional and personal crises, including the banning of *Salomé* in London and the aftermath following his imprisonment.⁴⁴ Despite never becoming a French citizen, for all intents and purposes, Wilde was a French writer.⁴⁵ Anatole France (1844–1924), French journalist and writer, went so far as to brand Wilde an “English symbolist.”⁴⁶ It was clear to many critics that Strauss’s decision to set Wilde’s text linked him to these same cultural traditions.

Neitzel’s other concern was for *Salomé*’s historical significance. This did not go unnoticed by the *Tribune*: “it was a special plea, but one put forward with wise moderation and with full understanding of its anomalous and revolutionary character. He made no bones of confessing that it was frequently the evangel of ugliness, and yet he presented what he conceived to be its amiable elements most ingratiatingly.”⁴⁷ After admitting—or in the words of the *Tribune* “proclaim[ing] emphatically”—its “decadence,” Neitzel insisted that the work was not “perverse.” This was an important break from earlier critics, including Krehbiel, the author of this article. As evidenced by the reception of the tone poems, supporters of Strauss among the city’s music critics were few and far between. At the end of his review of Neitzel’s lecture, Krehbiel does not obfuscate his own expectations for the opera: “it will be two months before the odor of death which seemed like incense to the fabled daughter of Herodias will assail our

⁴⁴ Emily Eells, “Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an *homme de lettres*: The French Reception of *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* (1895–1922),” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 80.

⁴⁵ For the French, Wilde’s works seemed a bit too familiar. Charges of plagiarism became rampant in the French press, many critics labeling Wilde’s writing as little more than “heated up left-overs” of French authors. *Ibid.*, 80–81.

⁴⁶ This ignored the fact he was Irish. Hibbitt, “Aesthete,” 74.

⁴⁷ “Dr. Neitzel’s Lecture,” *New-York Tribune*, 9 November 1906, 7.

nostrils at the Opera House, and till then we may be able to exist without having our ears also haunted by the musical symbols.”⁴⁸ As a sign of the public’s growing curiosity, Neitzel’s lecture was repeated on 28 November.⁴⁹ Perhaps an even greater symbol of the work’s growing popularity was the lecture recital given by Henderson—one of Strauss’s biggest detractors in the city—at Mendelssohn Hall in January 1907, just a few weeks before the opera was set to open. In format and topic, the lecture was similar to that given by Neitzel, although it is difficult to believe that Henderson was quite so enthusiastic about the music.⁵⁰

Interest in *Salome* was partly fed by a general malaise around the current state of musical offerings.

It is unquestionably a time of dullness in the world of music. Creative gifts are pitiably scarce. There has never been a period in which the world was so completely convinced that it possessed no genius in music. Even in Germany, with all the discussion of the compositions of Richard Strauss, there is no general hope that he will prove to be a permanent power. It is conceded that he has certain unmistakable abilities and that his music excites the nerves to the point of distraction. But no one pretends to find in listening to it that deep and serene satisfaction of the soul which follows the hearing of the C minor symphony of Brahms.

. . . Strauss towers a giant amid an army of pygmies. With his clanging orchestral marches in shrieking triumph across Europe and the peoples bow before him as before a new god. But the mills of time will grind him to his proper size. He will shrink away in the future. He is shrinking now. His most imposing thoughts are found to be sound, not sense. His orchestration is not evolution and proportion, but convolution and distortion.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Notes of Music Events,” *New York Sun*, 18 November 1906, 10.

⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the brief mention of the lecture and synopsis of its content that appeared in the *Times* did not include any direct quotes from Henderson to provide some insight into what he said during the event. “Talk on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 10 January 1907, 9.

⁵¹ “Record of the Dying Year,” *New York Sun*, 30 December 1906, 6.

This commentary, which appeared as part of Henderson's end of year retrospective on the musical events of 1906, presented a dreary outlook on the state of contemporary music—an outlook consistent with Henderson's penchant for Classicism, yet particularly harsh in regard to the state of Germanic music, which he often upheld as the height of the musical arts, evidenced in his wistful nostalgia for Brahms. For Henderson, Strauss's newest opera was destined to become another vanishing novelty act. Its transience was a symbol of the decline of contemporary, and specifically German, music. This bleakness aside for the moment, in the early weeks of January 1907, as the premiere of what Henderson dubbed the “only operatic novelty worth of even passing study” inched ever closer, the press turned its focus towards preparing audiences for what was to come.⁵²

Salome Arrives in New York

After all the anticipation, *Salome* finally slinked across the boards of the Metropolitan Opera House on 22 January 1907. The controversy that ensued, ultimately resulting in the opera's removal from the Metropolitan's repertoire for nearly twenty-five years, would have ramifications far beyond the island of Manhattan. Before opening night, however, such a response seemed unlikely. Prior to its first performance, *Salome* inspired such intense interest that theater managers throughout the city rushed to grab a piece of the pie. The Lyric Theatre, for one, performed Hermann Sudermann's (1857–1928) *Johannes* (1898), a version of the Salome story, the day before the Metropolitan premiere. As the *Tribune* noted, “Miss Marlowe, as Salome, will beat Miss Fremstad by a

⁵² Ibid.

day in disclosing the dance of the seven veils.”⁵³ Reflecting on the furor for *Salome* that seemed to transfix the city, the *Tribune* branded this “Salome week in New York.”⁵⁴

As in Europe, Strauss’s choice of subject became one of the primary sources of apprehension. In its discussion of the work, the *Times* delved into the idea that the opera—and by proxy Wilde’s play—was a work that spoke to the particular anxieties of the period. In its setting, the story depicted “the ancient world in its first collision with the basis of Christianity, a disclosure of the light of divine revelation upon the darkness of soul and the riot of sensuous desire. Furthermore, this disclosure is ‘a reflex of our own nature.’”⁵⁵ Otto Roese (1853–1925), in his *Richard Strauss: Salome, Ein Wegweiser Durch Die Oper* (1906), which is mentioned in the *Times* article, proposed that the opera embodied the turn of the century *Zeitgeist*, specifically in its longings and neural deficiencies. The *Times* also considered the possibility that Strauss had chosen the subject not for any particular cultural reason, but solely owing to its popularity.⁵⁶ In his characteristic verbosity, Krehbiel contemplated the same theory in respect to Strauss’s depiction of the final moment between Salome and the severed head of Jochanaan:

It is obvious on a moment’s reflection that, had Strauss desired, the play might easily have been modified so as to avoid this grewsome [*sic*] episode. A woman scorned, vengeful and penitent would have furnished forth material enough for his finale and dismissed his audience with less disturbance of their moral and physical stomachs. But Strauss, to put it mildly, is a sensationalist despite his genius, and his business sense is large, as New Yorkers know ever since he wound up an artistic tour of

⁵³ “Salome Come to Town,” *New-York Tribune*, 20 January 1907, B6.

⁵⁴ As noted in the *Tribune*, the entr’acte music came from Massenet’s *Hérodiade* (1881), rather than Strauss’s opera. *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “Richard Strauss’s ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 20 January 1907, X5.

⁵⁶ “Others say that Strauss chose the subject of Salome chiefly because of the great sensation Wilde’s play was making at its performances in Berlin, just as he chose ‘Also sprach Zarathustra’ as a subject when there was a Nietzsche excitement prevalent in Germany.” *Ibid.*

America with a concert in a department store. When Nietzsche was the talk of Germany we got “Also Sprach Zarathustra.”⁵⁷

Once more, business supposedly superseded artistry for Strauss. With *Salome*, and later *Elektra*, this image played a crucial—and complicated—role in the conversation regarding his position as the leading figure of German modernism.

When the night of the premiere arrived, New Yorkers and visitors to the city flooded into the Metropolitan, including Puccini, who happened to be in New York on tour at the time. Although there had been a good amount of publicity and interest leading up to the performance, it was noted in the *Tribune* that the usual subscribers “were not very liberally represented in the audience. Many boxes were occupied by outsiders, and all over the orchestra were strange faces. Several boxes were entirely unoccupied, the holders having failed to turn them in to sell, and not using them themselves.”⁵⁸ According to the *Staats-Zeitung*, the rest of the house was filled to a degree not seen since the premiere of *Parsifal*.⁵⁹ As it was not a subscription night, the general public had its choice of seats with the exception of the boxes, which could not be rented out without the owner’s permission.⁶⁰ The *Times* noted that the “three balconies over the horseshoe were packed” and that “in the orchestra the seats were all filled, and the aisles behind the seats and at the sides were packed with standing men and women.”⁶¹ These descriptions of the

⁵⁷ “Music: The ‘Salome’ of Wilde and Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

⁵⁸ “‘Salome’ Disgusts Its Hearers,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

⁵⁹ “‘Salome’ Siegt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 23 January 1907, 1.

⁶⁰ The boxes in the Golden Horseshoe that were owned could not be rented out without the owner’s consent. When the second tier boxes were later opened to lease it created further class divisions between those that owned boxes and those that rented. Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Knopf, 1966), 55.

⁶¹ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ The First Time Here,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

audience could speak to the work's appeal among the different levels of society. By mentioning the missing box-holders, the *Tribune* implied that interest in *Salome* failed to reach the city's upper crust. The lower- and middle-class patrons occupying the rest of the house, though, were clearly curious. Added to the mix was the *Times*'s mention of "many Germans" in the audience, which lent the class divisions a further ethnic bent.⁶² This is worth noting because these divides would become an important component of the upcoming fracas.

After the performance, the reactions to Strauss's music varied. One common refrain—familiar from the coverage of the tone poems—was Strauss's technical achievement and his status as a craftsman of orchestration. In its review, the *Times* claimed, "Strauss has in this work carried the modern art of the orchestra to another and a still more advanced stage, as he has done in each orchestral work he has ever penned."⁶³ The praise that his music garnered was often backhanded. Many critics felt that his music was indeed well written and technically impressive, yet lacking in emotionality—intellectual rather than beautiful. This was explicitly stated in the *Times*: "Strauss speaks to the understanding; rarely or not at all to the heart. . . . Of true emotion there is little or none. The appeal is almost always what is called 'cerebral' rather than emotional."⁶⁴ In a later article, the *Times* argued that the work was "not productive of beauty," but "powerful in execution, of inexorable logic."⁶⁵ For many critics, Strauss's music was

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ "Richard Strauss's 'Salome,'" *New York Times*, 20 January 1907, X5.

⁶⁴ "Some Afterthought on 'Salome,'" *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

⁶⁵ "Strauss's 'Salome' The First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

intellectually powerful and clearly illustrative, yet it was somehow empty; the quintessential “sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

In describing Strauss’s style of writing, the *Times* noted: “‘Salome’ surpasses ‘Don Quixote,’ ‘Ein Heldenleben,’ the ‘Symphonia Domestica’ in its minute orchestral illustration of incident. Not a word, not a motion, not a passing thought upon the stage escapes him, and he has resources for the depiction of each in orchestral tone.”⁶⁶ The review then went on to describe Strauss’ portrayal of the events on stage through the music:

Salome speaks scornfully of the Tetrarch’s mole eyes that are fixed upon her beneath his shaking eyelids, and the blinking gaze is expressed in mocking trills. The Princess gazes down into the dark depths of Jokanaan’s prison, and the hollow blackness is reverberated in the orchestra, Salome in hysterical revulsion finds Jokanaan’s hair like a crown of thorns upon his head—thorns that the prickling staccato of the Glockenspiel brings to the mind’s eye.⁶⁷

A similar commentary appeared in the *Tribune’s* review, which also emphasized Strauss’s orchestral coloring, noting that the “orchestra paints incessantly.”⁶⁸

Devices made familiar by the symphonic poems are introduced with increased effect, such as the muting of the entire army of brass instruments. Startling effects are obtained by a confusion of keys, confusion of rhythms, sudden contrasts from an overpowering tutti to the stridulous whirring of empty fifths on the violins, a trill on the flutes or a dissonant mutter of the basses. The celesta, an instrument with keyboard and bell tone, contributes fascinating effects, and the xylophone is used—utterances that are lascivious as well as others that are macabre. Dissonance runs riot and frequently carries the imagination away completely captive. The score is unquestionably the greatest triumph of reflection and ingenuity of contrivance that the literature of music can show.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ “Some Afterthought on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ “Music: The ‘Salome’ of Wilde and Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

This list of orchestral effects from both the *Tribune* and the *Times* speaks to the idea of Strauss as the intellectual craftsman diligently working to precisely mimic the action on stage.⁷⁰ Strauss's work in this area could also be seen as an effort towards naturalism in his music. In his study of German modernism, Walter Frisch points to these moments of musical illustration as examples of what Walter Niemann (1876–1953) referred to as “painterly naturalism.” In this way, the illustrative aspects of Strauss's music could be understood as an extension of the techniques from his tone poems, but also a continuation of the tradition of naturalism often associated in German music with Wagner.⁷¹

In praising the orchestral writing, many reviewers, both implicitly and explicitly, criticized his writing for the voice. This is somewhat unexpected in the context of Strauss's reception. In the coverage of the 1904 tour, the few works that garnered praise were his Lieder. *Salome* was clearly a different beast. The *Times*, along with several other papers, referenced an anecdote concerning Strauss's comments during rehearsal:

When protest was made that his orchestra covered up the voices of the singers, he is said to have remarked indifferently, “I don't care a snap for them; here is where the music is.”

. . . It is undeniable that Strauss has treated the voices in a manner that can be described as more instrumental than vocal. There is little melodic line in his voice parts. There is comparatively little attention to what may be expressed by declamatory fitness in those parts; little of that “heightened expressiveness of speech” through music which Wagner put before himself as an ideal in writing for the singer.⁷²

⁷⁰ The references to Berlioz and Wagner also serve to place Strauss squarely into the *Zukunftsmusik* tradition that his earlier orchestral works had prefigured.

⁷¹ Frisch also views the “deeply psychological, nerve-sensitive naturalism” of *Salome* and *Elektra* as important precursors to expressionism that grew out of the nineteenth century interest in naturalism epitomized by Wagner. Walter Frisch, *German Modernism: Music and the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 82–87.

⁷² “Some Afterthought on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

In the coverage of his tone poems, Strauss had been criticized for demanding too much of the genre. Following *Salome*, this debate resurfaced in a new light.

Many critics struggled with how to understand the work. The *Times* picked up on the popular view of *Salome* as “a huge symphonic poem, with obligation action upon the stage.”⁷³ In its descriptive quality, *Salome* seemed to be a logical step in Strauss’s musical evolution:

The music is closely knit with the text in substance and follows in every minute shadow all its changing expression, as the symphonic poems follow the composer’s definite programme. It carries to the furthest extreme Strauss’s ideas about the delineative power of music. . . . Music has come to mean to him principally, not beauty, nor even suggestion through a beautiful medium, but the crassest kind of pictorial draughtsmanship. Everything in this score is calculated to that end.⁷⁴

This way of viewing the opera followed from the belief that Strauss was at heart a craftsman, rather than an artist. This was another means of asserting that his music was more intellectual than it was beautiful—one of the overarching arguments used by opponents of modernism in all branches of the arts.⁷⁵ In this same review, the critic goes on to note that Strauss’s music contains a “cold perversity . . . and much that seems purely cerebral in the calculation of its effects, but it is, at all events, wonderfully expressive of what he aimed to express. He extorts from the listener’s intelligence what

⁷³ While this article is in reference to the later Manhattan Opera Company production, the *Times* echoes the same sentiments regarding the work’s form and place within Strauss’s oeuvre as those expressed following the opera’s New York City premiere. “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ At The Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1909, 9.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ For those opposed to Strauss’s music, the work of Eduard Hanslick, particularly *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854), provided an academic grounding for their description of the beautiful. As seen with the tone poems, Henderson utilized Hanslick’s work to critique the supposed intellectualism of Strauss’s compositional practices and its penchant for pictorialism. Henderson and the other anti-Strauss critics did the same with the operas.

he is unable to gain from his sympathy and musical feeling.”⁷⁶ The *Times* argued that there was a larger dramatic purpose for Strauss’s technique:

The new instruments and the new combinations, the ultimate divisions of the separate groups, as of the violins, are for the expression of some definite and perfectly calculated effect. This effect is wonderful throughout the score, the color, the variety, the range from the thinnest delicacy to the uttermost crashes of sound. It is an essential quality of this music that it is orchestrally [*sic*] conceived in the completest manner. And one of the most elusive, yet unescapable [*sic*], facts in listening to it is the manner in which the orchestral coloring has mollified so many of the crassest discords in the harmony, brought apparently irreconcilable groups of sounds together and made them sometimes bearable, sometimes strangely charming.⁷⁷

Of course this more positive take on Strauss’s orchestral technique again relates back to the overarching sentiment that he was a master of technique and orchestration, which was itself often used as a means of criticizing his artistry.

Strauss’s technical precision led some critics to caution against its demands on the listener. The *Times* warned: “such a score as Strauss’s ‘Salome’ is not to be apprehended at its full significance at once by any public, even the most instructed.”⁷⁸ To grasp what Strauss was doing required a commitment on the part of the listener to treat this work differently than the average opera. This argument recalls the debate during the Metropolitan’s German Years that Wagner’s works would prove too demanding for the average operagoer, particularly those occupants of the Golden Horseshoe.⁷⁹ That level of commitment, however, was not necessarily going to pay off in this instance. While noting that Strauss’s music reached a level of “complexity and technical achievement hitherto

⁷⁶ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ At The Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1909, 9.

⁷⁷ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ The First Time Here,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

⁷⁸ “Some Afterthought on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

⁷⁹ The “golden horseshoe” was the nickname given to the private boxes reserved for the Metropolitan’s wealthy clientele.

unknown,” the *Times* also interjected that in the course of doing so, Strauss “disregarded or put into the background many of the conditions which composers of dramatic music have been wont to regard as indispensable.”⁸⁰ It was not enough to treat *Salome* differently than most other operas—in its very makeup the work rejected those features central to the genre itself.⁸¹

Appearing in the *Tribune*—and therefore likely the work of Krehbiel—this review delves not only into the difference between *Salome* and Strauss’s earlier tone poems, but also the larger issue of genre and its limitations.

There is a vast deal of ugly music in “Salome,”—music that offends the ear and rasps the nerves like fiddlestrings [*sic*] played on by a coarse file. We have taken occasion in a criticism of Strauss’s “Symphonia Domestica” to point out that a large latitude must be allowed to the dramatic composer which must be denied to the symphonist. Consort a dramatic or even a lyric text with music and all manner of tonal devices may derive explanation, if not justification, from the words. But in purely instrumental music the arbitrary purposes of a composer cannot replace the significance which must lie in the music itself—that is, in its emotional and aesthetic content. It does not lie in its intellectual content, for thought to become articulate demands speech. The champions of Richard Strauss have defended ugliness in his last symphony, the work which immediately preceded “Salome,” and his symphonic poems on the score that music must be an expression of truth, and truth is not always beautiful.⁸²

Seeking an explanation for the “ugly” music, Krehbiel turned to the drama, which now gave the music “explanation, if not justification.”

In a happier day than this it was believed that the true and the beautiful were bound together in angelic wedlock and that all art found its highest mission in giving them expression. But the drama has been led through devious paths into the charnel house, and in “Salome” we must needs listen to the echoes of its dazed and drunken footfalls. The maxim “Truth

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ This harkens back to the sentiment expressed earlier by Krehbiel that Strauss’s music never quite fit within the parameters of its respective genre, whether it was the earlier tone poems or his latest efforts at opera.

⁸² “Music: The ‘Salome’ of Wilde and Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

before convention” asserts its validity and demands recognition under the guise of “characteristic beauty.” We may refuse to admit that ugliness is entitled to be raised to a valid principle in music dissociated from words or stage pictures on the ground that thereby it contravenes and contradicts its own nature; but we may no longer do so when it surrenders its function as an expression of the beautiful and becomes merely an illustrative element, an aid to dramatic expression. What shall be said, then, when music adorns itself with its loveliest attributes and lends them to the apotheosis of that which is indescribably, yes, inconceivably, gross and abominable?⁸³

Krehbiel, now unable to criticize Strauss as an orchestral composer, turned his focus to what happens when music illustrates what he deems abominable. While he concedes that dramatic music must reflect the drama, he calls into question the state of drama itself. For Krehbiel, this movement to the “charnel house” was indicative of a larger movement towards decadence and degradation. By hitching his music to Wilde’s drama, Strauss had dragged his art down into the muck of modernism. Krehbiel, like Henderson, saw modernism as a symptom of contemporary society’s decline. This sentiment may be seen in his description of the ending, which he characterized as the product of a poet and composer of “our day.”

Crouching over the dissevered head of the prophet, Salome addresses it in terms of reproach, of grief, of endearment and longing, and finally kisses the bloody lips and presses her teeth into the gelid flesh. It is incredible that an artist should ever have conceived such a scene for public presentation. In all the centuries in which the story of the dance before Herod has fascinated sculptures, painters and poets, in spite of the accretions of lustful incident upon the simple Biblical story, it remained for a poet of our day to conceive this horror and a musician of our day to put forth his highest powers in its celebration.⁸⁴

The story of Salome was obviously not new, but in Wilde and Strauss’s version, Krehbiel finds a particularly horrific interpretation. In his view, the two have infused the Biblical

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

story with the stench of modernism by seemingly elevating, and celebrating, this moment of passion between Salome and the severed head. While he is no fan of Strauss, Krehbiel reserves most of his criticism for Wilde. Strauss's music, according to Krehbiel, is at least justified by the subject it is describing. Krehbiel instead criticizes Strauss's decision to use music to portray such a "vile" subject in the first place, thereby debasing music in the process, regardless of how beautiful it may sound.

Also raising Krehbiel's ire was Strauss's decision to label the work a "drama," rather than an "opera . . . a lyric drama, or a musical drama, or a melodrama (which is what it is), or even a drama with music."⁸⁵

If put to it he would probably not call the extravagantly complex and sumptuous tonal integument with which he has clothed it music, except in parts, and then with the understanding that the word be received with a new significance. In "Salome" music is largely a decorative element, like the scene, like the costumes . . . it gives emotional significance to situations, helping the facial play of Salome and her gestures to proclaim the workings of her mind, when speech has deserted her; it is at its best as the adjunct and inspiration of the lascivious dance. In the last two instances, however, it reverts to the purpose and also the manner (with a difference) which have always obtained, and becomes music in the purer sense.⁸⁶

The role of the music in this opera is, at least for Krehbiel, a decorative element, emphasizing his criticism of Strauss's music, particularly the orchestral score, as overly descriptive, too dominant over the voice, and removed from its traditional role—now imbued with the "new significance" that he refers to as indicative of Strauss's attitude

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

toward music in the drama. The question of the relationship between the music and the drama also fed into the increasing comparisons between him and Wagner.⁸⁷

The *Staats-Zeitung* occasionally took to calling Strauss “Richard II.”⁸⁸ For the English-language press, the central debate concerned whether Strauss was continuing Wagner’s legacy or taking it too far. An easy starting point was Strauss’s utilization of a *Leitmotiv* system. From the *Times*: “the music is Strauss, and purely Strauss. The suggestion of Wagner in it is solely in the use of the leading motives as material out of which to build up the orchestral fabric.”⁸⁹ The presentation of these themes supposedly failed to live up to the musical standards of the first Richard: “It has already been pointed out how few of the forty-odd themes out of which Strauss has constructed his score are by themselves valuable or potent material as music.”⁹⁰ This criticism was founded on the belief that Strauss was more interested in the illustrative aspects of his music than in its inherent beauty, which therefore restricted the music’s melodic quality: “Is it not rather that he now deliberately devises his musical material with a view chiefly to what he considered its descriptive quality, in the first place, and its plasticity in the next? . . . Only a few of them have allurements of melody or warmth of expression in and of themselves.”⁹¹ These comparisons to Wagner often present Strauss as pushing Wagner’s

⁸⁷ Wagner was also utilized to provide some context for the vitriol surrounding Strauss’s newest work: “Many of those most violently criticizing the opera have never witnessed its performance, and base their attitude upon sensationally exaggerated reports. It may be remembered that the appearance of Richard Wagner on the musical horizon not so many years ago was greeted with a storm of hostility and vilification.” “‘Salome’ Withdrawn; Conried Fully Yields,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1907, 3.

⁸⁸ “Richard Strauß’ ‘Salome,’” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 20 January 1907, 4.

⁸⁹ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ The First Time Here,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

⁹⁰ “Some Afterthought on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

musical and dramatic theories to the extreme. The *Times*, noting Strauss's treatment of the immense orchestra, observed that it had the effect of making "'Tristan' and 'Götterdämmerung' seem to have the simplicity of Haydn."⁹²

The elevated status of the orchestra found in *Salome* was also viewed by some critics as another vestige of Wagner, who the *Times* noted "erected a statue in the orchestra and the pedestal upon the stage; making the orchestra the thing of chief importance."⁹³ Strauss's use of the method, though, was seen as outdated.⁹⁴ When it came to the primacy of the orchestra borrowed from Wagner's *endliche Melodie*, Strauss tipped the scales too far in favor of the instruments. From Krehbiel's lengthy review of the opera:

With all his musical affluence, Wagner aimed, at least, to make his orchestra only the bearer and servant of the dramatic word. Nothing can be plainer (it did not need that he should himself have confessed it) than that Strauss looks upon the words as necessary evils. His vocal parts are not song, except for brief, intensified spaces at long intervals. They are declamation. The song-voice is used, one is prone to think, only because by means of it the words can be made to be heard above the orchestra. Song, in the old acceptance of the word, implies beauty of tone and justness of intonation. It is amazing how indifferent the listener is to both vocal quality and intervallic accuracy in "Salome." Wilde's stylistic efforts are lost in the flood of instrumental sound; only the mood which they were designed to produce remains.⁹⁵

Strauss had often been described as taking romanticism too far. The same argument is at play here. For Krehbiel, Strauss's use of Wagner's practices moves so far to the extreme that *Salome* ceases to function as a drama, but instead becomes a tone poem accompanied

⁹² "Strauss's 'Salome' The First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

⁹³ "Some Afterthought on 'Salome,'" *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

⁹⁴ The *Times* noted that although this idea of orchestral primacy had largely been outgrown, "it scarcely seems likely that we shall have to outgrow it in the case of Strauss, so far as his ideals are represented by 'Salome.'" *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ "Music: The 'Salome' of Wilde and Strauss," *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

by action. As his tone poems had exceeded the boundaries of program music, Strauss now does the same with his opera. This commentary is par for the course with Krehbiel. When Strauss was composing tone poems, Krehbiel frequently derided the music as being too descriptive and in desperate need of outside meaning provided by a text. When discussing Strauss's opera, Krehbiel criticizes its extreme orchestration at the expense of the voice. The common thread is that Strauss's music consistently runs counter to the principles of its genre.

There were specific moments in *Salome* that seemed to highlight the gulf between Wagner and Strauss:

Salome sings, often in the explosive style of Wagner's *Kundry*, sometimes with something like fluent continuity, but from her song has been withheld all the symmetrical and graceful contours comprehended in the concept of melody. Hers are the superheated phrases invented to give expression to her passion, and out of them she must construct the vocal accompaniment to the instrumental song, which reaches its culmination in the scene which, instead of receiving a tonal beatification, as it does, ought to be relegated to the silence and darkness of the deepest dungeon of a madhouse or a hospital.⁹⁶

In another instance, Krehbiel compared the conclusion to Isolde's "Liebestod":

There was a scene before the mental eye of Strauss as he wrote. It was that of Isolde singing out her life over the dead body of Tristan. In the music of that scene we do not hesitate to say again, as we have said before, there lies the most powerful plea ever made for the guilty lovers. It is the choicest flower of Wagner's creative faculty, the culmination of his powers as a composer, and never before or since has the purifying and ennobling capacity of music been so convincingly demonstrated. Strauss has striven to outdo it, and there are those who think that in this episode he actually raised music to a higher power. He has not only gone with the dramatist and outraged every sacred instinct of humanity by calling the lust for flesh, alive or dead, love, but he has celebrated her ghoulish passion as if he would perforce make of her an object of that "redemption"

⁹⁶ Ibid.

of which, again following Wagner but along oblique paths, he prates so strangely in his opera of “Guntram.”⁹⁷

It is, once again, Strauss’s attempt to outdo Wagner that leads him astray. The orchestral fabric, the vocal style, and Wilde’s text, all demonstrate that Strauss’s opera can be seen as a Wagnerian music drama twisted by the influence of a new form of modernism. New is the use of Wagner as a symbol of tradition. Within the span of roughly two decades, the dangerous modernity embodied by Wagner and the all-German seasons of the Metropolitan were replaced by a new decadent modernity epitomized by the work of Wilde and Strauss. In the light of the new century, the works of Wagner did not seem quite as dangerous anymore.

As seen through the comparisons with Wagner, Strauss became one of the prominent faces of German musical modernism. For those critics who did not approve of the opera, explanation for its popularity was found in the shock value:

It was the first performance in this country of a work that for more than a year has been the storm centre of the musical world, about which discussion has raged on many points—about its repugnant features of realism, its alleged immorality, decadent spirit, artistic perversity, or about its significance in a philosophical way; its depiction of types and human desires and passions, its showing of a turning point in human development, the first collision of the pagan world with the basis of Christianity.⁹⁸

Later in this same review, the *Times* described the atmosphere of the opera as “a baleful disclosure of decadent human character in a period of universal decadence.”⁹⁹ For this critic—likely Aldrich—the era depicted in the opera was “one of those periods at the end of an epoch in history, when weakened and corrupted human nature is ready for the

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ The First Time Here,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

universal collapse from which shall rise new forces to infuse into society new blood and bring new ideals.”¹⁰⁰ While Aldrich does not explicitly make this point, his description of the Biblical era portrayed in *Salome* reads as a potential description of his own time—at least in the eyes of critics like Krehbiel, who clearly viewed the rise of artists like Wilde and Strauss as the symbols of a “weakened and corrupted human nature.”¹⁰¹ *Salome* was in some respects the opera of its time—a decadent depiction of human depravity that mirrored Nordau’s vision of societal collapse.

The work’s morality became a topic of discussion among those involved in the production. In the midst of the brewing controversy, Olive Fremstad, who sang the title role, was asked about her attitudes towards the work: “We all realize that the theme is revolting. Certainly it is not ‘Parsifal.’ But I am concerned in the art of it. And then I wanted to do the part, because it was difficult to do.”¹⁰² The final scene, unsurprisingly, elicited her greatest interest:

So far as the end is concerned, I think Strauss glorifies that. In the Wilde play it is only degenerate. Even in the opera *Salome* is the worst sort of degenerate, but Strauss makes something more of her at the last, where she gets her idea of what love means. Her instinct toward good comes into play when she sees the head before her. She is goaded into admiration for Jochanaan because he is the only one in the court who repulses her advances, and her demand for his head is largely a feeling of revenge. When she sees his severed head she feels the only love of which she is

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ His description of the atmosphere contains many of the same themes found within a review by Krehbiel: “The time is one in which immorality, weak superstition, erotic sensuality, and grisly cruelty were the prevailing forces, into which is set forth the stern figure of the Baptist with his proclamation of a new light and a new ethical standard. The whole is weighed down with a stifling and heavily erotic atmosphere, like a fantastic and oppressive nightmare. A strange and intangible feeling of horror pervades it, a sense of indefinable dread.” Ibid.

¹⁰² “Take Off ‘Salome,’ Say Opera House Directors,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

capable, and her feeling is partly passionate and partly ideal. Strauss tells me this. Wilde tells me nothing.¹⁰³

Fremstad's assertion that Strauss elevated Wilde's degenerate text was a particularly supportive interpretation of Strauss's music that was missing from most of the critical coverage, which preferred to criticize the composer for choosing Wilde's text in the first place. As the controversy grew, the performers emerged as Strauss's strongest advocates. Karel Burian (1870–1924), who sang Herod, complained: "If this play is not allowed, Max Klinger's statues should be suppressed and a great deal of Ibsen, including 'Ghosts.'" ¹⁰⁴ For Burian, *Salome* was modernism—his reference to Ibsen being particularly noteworthy considering Krehbiel and Henderson's frequent, and dismissive, comparisons between Strauss and the writer.

Given the passion incited by the work, *Salome* soon came to represent more than itself. Debates emerged regarding both the state of art at the time, but also more broadly the idea of what constituted a work of art. The *Times*, for one, examined Strauss's continual pushing of boundaries:

The achievement of "Salome" suggests numberless questions as to the future of the art that produced it, and of the aesthetic principles of that art. Is further progress in this direction, we will not say desirable, but possible? The same query has been put forward after each of Strauss's works, and he has himself answered it. Will he always be able to answer it in the same way? There must be some limit to the increasing orchestral forces, for Opera Houses must find room for listeners as well as orchestral players. "Salome" more than any of its predecessors in the list of Strauss's works demands a new view of the aesthetics of musical art.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ "Some Afterthought on 'Salome,'" *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, X5.

As the *Times* noted, Strauss's penchant for repeatedly pushing the limits of music was not something new—every new work had gone just a bit further than the one right before it.

Salome raised the possibility that he had reached, or was about to reach, a point of no return. Now that he had made the jump from tone poems to drama, what was left?

Will the aesthetics be revised and extended and liberalized to suit him? It will all depend upon the final outcome of his attempts to force his ideas upon the art and upon the world. If he succeed it will be his title to greatness. If he fail, it will put him down into the ranks of the technicians who have enlarged the means and resources of the art, for some greater man to come along and to "take his own wherever he finds it." The history of all art has shown to a greater or less degree the cultivation of the field by men who have been supplanted and forgotten when the real husbandmen have come along. Whether or not "Salome" is a great work, one that the future will preserve, it is unquestionably one that must be reckoned with, mastered, assimilated, in some degree. Strauss himself is now at work upon his next opera, an "Electra." It may be decisive as to whither he, still a young man, will direct his future. But now and hereafter musical art can not be exactly the same as it was before "Salome" was added to it.¹⁰⁶

Whether or not *Salome* would become a significant part of the repertoire was not necessarily the primary concern of some critics of the time; however, as the *Times* remarked, the style of music and the experimentations of Strauss would invariably influence later composers. For better or worse, the cat was already out of the bag.

Any mention of modernism at the time was sure to include calls of degeneracy. This had been true of the tone poems and rapidly became the case with *Salome*. The *Tribune* took the lead in these attacks. In his review of the opera, Krehbiel opined that "a reviewer ought to be equipped with a dual nature, both intellectual and moral, in order to pronounce fully and fairly upon the qualities of the drama by Oscar Wilde and Richard

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Strauss.”¹⁰⁷ While this seems like a fairly even-tempered introduction, it rapidly descends into his usual morass:

He should be an embodied conscience stung into righteous fury by the moral stench with which “Salome” fills the nostrils of humanity, but, though it make him retch, he should be sufficiently judicial in his temperament calmly to look at the drama in all its aspects and determine whether or not as a whole it is an instructive note on the life and culture of the times and whether or not this exudation from the diseased and polluted will and imagination of the authors marks a real advance in artistic expression, irrespective of its contents or their fitness for dramatic representation.¹⁰⁸

There is little doubt left regarding Krehbiel’s opinion of Wilde’s drama and its place among his list of degenerate modernist art—although his reference to the “diseased and polluted will and imagination of the authors” confirms his opinion that Strauss is a co-conspirator in this degeneracy. His description of the critic’s role also serves as a launching pad for him to critique the state of criticism at a moment when he felt that music was becoming increasingly difficult to grasp, yet “the multitude of his readers receive [the music] as contributions to their diversion merely and permit [it] to be crowded out of their minds by the next pleasant or unpleasant shock to their sensibilities.”¹⁰⁹ Above all else, Krehbiel argues that to do even the most basic form of criticism: to explain the drama, describe the music, and state whether or not these two elements work harmoniously together to achieve the greater artistic goal, the critic must put aside “notions which have long had validity.”¹¹⁰ Echoing the sentiment expressed by the *Times* that *Salome* required special effort on the part of the audience, Krehbiel posits

¹⁰⁷ “Music: The ‘Salome’ of Wilde and Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

that *Salome* cannot be treated in the same manner as previous operas because it rejects and lacks many of the features that were central to the genre. Describing what he sees as an increasingly intimate connection between the music and the drama, particularly the role of music in opera to reflect and take part in the depiction of the dramatic action, Krehbiel argues that “music has acquired its new power only by an abnegation of its better part.”¹¹¹ It was clear to Krehbiel that Strauss’s music had added nothing to Wilde’s text, which he describes as “abhorrent, bestial, repellant and loathsome.”¹¹² While others—such as Fremstad—had laid the majority of the blame for the opera’s perversity at the feet of Wilde and argued that Strauss’s music had in some fashion elevated the debased subject matter, Krehbiel argues that there was no such elevation provided by the musical accompaniment, only further decadence and degeneration.

Not to be lost in the discussion over the merits of *Salome* was the degree to which it was considered a work of German art. This could be seen in the repeated connections to Wagner, but also through the commentary on the number of Germans present in the audience.¹¹³ In a similar vein, some papers examined how the reaction in the city compared to reactions in Germany. Burian observed that in Germany, “there is no feeling about it. Young girls go to this opera there and enjoy it.”¹¹⁴ In an offhand comment, Krehbiel essentially said the same thing when he noted that the work had achieved acceptance in several German cities.¹¹⁵ This degree of tolerance seemed to highlight the

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Strauss’s ‘Salome’ The First Time Here,” *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

¹¹⁴ “Take Off ‘Salome,’ Say Opera House Directors,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹¹⁵ “Music: The ‘Salome’ of Wilde and Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

work's status as a German opera, while also underscoring the divide between German and American audiences.

As *Salome* became a symbol of modernism in German music, Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893) emerged as its traditional counterweight.¹¹⁶ This opera was upheld as a direct—and occasionally indirect—challenge to *Salome*. When Krehbiel and other critics pointed towards a work that stood as the antithesis to *Salome* and the decadence that it represented, *Hänsel und Gretel* often filled that role. Humperdinck, in the commentary on Strauss's tone poems, had also stood for the traditionalist path that so many of the critics desired for Strauss to take. For those that feared sensationalism would inevitably trump musicality, the anecdote in the *Times* of audience members leaving *Hänsel und Gretel* to gossip over *Salome* was probably particularly exasperating.¹¹⁷

On the whole, the initial reactions among the city's critics were mixed. The one thing missing was a strong call to ban the work. Even among the more critical voices like Krehbiel, there was no mention of taking the opera off the stage for the sake of propriety. As he argued in his initial review, it would be up to the public to determine the longevity of Strauss's newest opera. The picture he painted of the audience's reaction implied that he felt it would not be too long before it was relegated to the dustbin of history:

[I]n the audience . . . the effect of horror was pronounced, many voices were hushed as the crowd passed out into the night, many faces were white almost as those at the rail of a ship, many women were silent, and men spoke as if a bad dream were on them. The preceding concert was forgotten; ordinary emotions following an opera were banished. The grip

¹¹⁶ Notably, Richard Strauss conducted the premiere of *Hänsel und Gretel* on 23 December 1893.

¹¹⁷ "Take Off 'Salome,' Say Opera House Directors," *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

of a strange horror or disgust was on the majority. It was significant that the usual applause was lacking. It was scattered and brief.¹¹⁸

This, however, marked the height of the early criticism. The *Staats-Zeitung* actually took the opportunity to congratulate the city, noting that the audience had behaved well and not in the same “charged manner seen elsewhere.”¹¹⁹ The day after the premiere, there was even news that Strauss was considering another American tour. The *Times*, writing about this potential return, indicated the intention of the Metropolitan to present three more performances of the opera, while also noting that Conried had sent a cablegram to Strauss “congratulating the composer on the success of ‘Salome’ in New York.”¹²⁰ In the days immediately following the performance, there was no indication of the controversy that would soon embroil the house.

Guten Morgan: The Salome Scandal Erupts

It did not take long for the conversation to change. The earlier, more tempered reviews that had focused on the music, staging, and costuming were soon overshadowed by rumors of disgruntlement among the Met’s stakeholders. This change in tone is reflected in the placement of the story within the papers. The initial reviews were primarily relegated to the typical cultural sections, usually around page six or seven. The controversy bumped *Salome* to the front-page. The opera was clearly in the forefront of the city’s consciousness.

¹¹⁸ “‘Salome’ Disgusts Its Hearers,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1907, 7.

¹¹⁹ “Musikalische Angelegenheiten,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 27 January 1907, 16.

¹²⁰ “Strauss to Tour America,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1907, 9.

Beginning around 27 January, the city's papers began to report on calls to have the work taken off the stage. On the front page of the *Times*, the paper noted that the "wealthy men who own the Metropolitan Opera House have put their ban on 'Salome.'" ¹²¹ The reason given was that the opera was "objectionable and detrimental to the best interests of the Opera House." ¹²² The *Tribune* also published the story on its front page, noting that the complaints against the opera "started in the family of one of the most influential and powerful of the boxholders, who is also a member of the executive committee of the real estate company." ¹²³ As is now well known, the unnamed boxholder was J. P. Morgan (1837–1913), whose daughter, Louisa Pierpont Morgan (1866–1946), was a vocal critic of the work. ¹²⁴

There was a general sense of confusion regarding what was to happen. As the *Tribune* noted, the advertisements for future performances were still appearing in the papers and the tickets, if any remained, were still available for sale. ¹²⁵ There was a lot riding—financially and culturally—on the success of the opera. Not only had Conried invested months of rehearsals and money for performers, costumes, and scenery, he had also contracted with Strauss to perform the work ten times during the season. ¹²⁶ This was further complicated by the first performance having been a benefit for Conried, which meant that the company had netted zero profit. On top of the financial losses, the opera had been presented as the artistic victory of the season. In a letter that was printed in

¹²¹ "Take Off 'Salome,' Say Opera House Directors," *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ "Try to Stop 'Salome,'" *New-York Tribune*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹²⁴ Kolodin, *Metropolitan*, 185.

¹²⁵ "Try to Stop 'Salome,'" *New-York Tribune*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

many of the papers, Conried argued that *Salome* had been recognized as “one of the most important, if not the most important musical production since Wagner.”¹²⁷ After listing some of the cities that had either shown the opera, or were in preparations for a performance, Conried noted “it was his duty to the musical public of New York to produce this work.”¹²⁸

The rumors continued for days.¹²⁹ It was noted, by some, that the condemnation of the work made little sense, considering its familiarity to the public. As the *Times* observed, “the great moral uprising on the part of those who control the ultimate destinies of the Metropolitan Opera House against the further representation of RICHARD STRAUSS’S ‘Salome’ seems to be a case of belated conscience.”¹³⁰ It was also made clear that if the Directors were successful in having the work stripped from the stage, then it would prove disastrous for the city’s cultural standing abroad—an image that it had been striving to improve since the importation of foreign-language opera in the 1820s. Anton van Rooy (1870–1932), the Jokanaan of the Metropolitan’s production, noted, “Europe will never get over laughing at America if this work of art is taken off the stage.”¹³¹ Van Rooy specifically addressed the work’s purported decadence, “[Jokanaan] is a noble

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ On 28 January, the *Times* was still reporting that, to the best of their knowledge, the scheduled performances of *Salome* were still going to take place, although none of the directors would speak to the rumors that were circulating. The *Times* did report on the major figures involved in the production, noting that the scandal had caused Conried’s illness to worsen, Ernest Goerlitz—the acting manager of the house—to retreat to his home while discussing tour arrangements, and Olive Fremstad to leave for Atlantic City until a production of *Carmen* in Philadelphia scheduled for 29 January. “No Decision on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 28 January 1907, 3.

¹³⁰ “A Case of Belated Conscience,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1907, 8.

¹³¹ “No Decision on ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 28 January 1907, 3.

character. Think, for instance, how much lower the Wotan in Wagner's Ring is . . . And there are many things in opera and drama more horrible than anything in the Wilde-Strauss work."¹³² To further his argument, van Rooy noted a similarity between Salome's final monologue and Isolde's "Liebestod."¹³³ These, incidentally, were also the very same moments used by Krehbiel to support his own low opinion of the opera.

In the days between the initial rumblings of dissatisfaction and the official announcement by the Metropolitan, the press outlined alternatives that could save the opera. One option was a series of modifications made to the work that would make it "acceptable" to the Directors—an idea that was not entirely unfeasible, as it had previously been done in Europe. It was also being reported that Conried was considering moving the opera to an alternative venue, the New Amsterdam Theatre, but even that caused some controversy when the managers of "Brewster's Millions," which was currently in production there, argued that it would be a violation of their contract with Klaw & Erlanger, the managers of the theater.¹³⁴ Supposedly unconcerned by the extreme difference in seating—with the New Amsterdam containing 1,702 seats to the Metropolitan's 3,400—Conried claimed that the work was a "labor of love" and that his only interest was in allowing Americans to "hear the best in music," an argument that

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ One aspect that seemed to particularly incense van Rooy was the amount of work that had gone into the production, particularly on the part of himself, Fremstad, and Hertz, and the possibility that the Directors would only allow it to be shown once. He did, however, acknowledge that he could likely transfer the role to Europe. Ibid.

After a review of the successful dress rehearsal of *Salome* in Paris, the *Times* noted that Fremstad was slated to take over the title role after the fourth performance. "'Salome' in Paris," *New York Times*, 7 May 1907, 9.

¹³⁴ "Fight to Keep 'Salome' From Another Theatre," *New York Times*, 30 January 1907, 3.

unwittingly harkened back to the earliest proponents of Italian-language opera, who also couched their own self-interest in the guise of public good.¹³⁵

Finally, on 31 January, the announcement appeared in the *Times* that *Salome* would be officially withdrawn.¹³⁶ In the statement released by Conried, he noted that he had been given the option to present the work outside of the Metropolitan; however, he declined to do so under the auspices that he wished to remain on working terms with the landlords. As soon as the announcement was made, blank paper was used to cover the posters hanging outside the house.¹³⁷ Along with the announcement, the *Times* and *Tribune* published a defense of the work issued by the Board of Directors, which stressed the artistic loss such an action would cause. Arguing that they leased the house with a conscious awareness of the “dignity and prestige of the Metropolitan Opera,” the Board stressed that “no financial or other consideration would have induced us to perform ‘Salome’ in this house had we not felt that its merit as a superb work of art entitled it to be heard.”¹³⁸ Once again, the popular refrain of artistic value superseding financial interest took center stage in their defense of the newly banned opera.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “‘Salome’ Withdrawn; Conried Fully Yields,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1907, 3.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ “‘Salome’s’ Deathblow,” *New-York Tribune*, 31 January 1907, 7.

¹³⁹ In its attempt to flatter the box-holders, the Board thanked them for maintaining the institution of the house for the benefit of the public, despite the financial hardship: “we beg to say that we recognize with profound appreciation the debt which the musical public of New York owes to your board for the splendid service which you have rendered to the cause of art by erecting the Metropolitan Opera House, by establishing for it an unparalleled prestige and position, by insisting from the beginning upon the highest standards of operatic performances, and by making financial sacrifices year after year to maintain the opera during the long period when grand opera in New York meant loss and disappointment.” Ibid.

Despite the ban, the figure of Salome did not disappear.¹⁴⁰ Larry Hamberlin has described the appearance of Salome in the lyrics of popular songs.¹⁴¹ She was also present in the theater. On numerous vaudeville stages, versions of Salome performed interpretations of her infamous dance. These presentations occurred nearly simultaneously with the opera's removal. The use of Strauss's score was not always a prerequisite, as witnessed in a popular performance by Madame Pilar-Morin, the pantomimist and later silent-film actress, who danced to the music of Massenet.¹⁴² Cashing in on the controversy, Bianca Froehlich (1883–1977)—who performed the “Dance of the Seven Veils” for the Metropolitan production in place of Fremstad—also successfully transplanted her version of the dance to the popular stage.¹⁴³ Much of this was spurred on by an intense interest in the forbidden. As described by Percival Pollard (1869–1911) in the *Times*, “on the heels of that first performance in the Metropolitan Opera House a very disease of Salomania broke out in the land.”¹⁴⁴ Later in the year, a “school for Salomes” was opened with the intention of preparing dancers for a career in

¹⁴⁰ For his part, Conried remained convinced that he could bring the opera back to the Metropolitan. In an interview with the *Times* from March, Conried stated his intention in bringing *Salome* back to the house the following year, noting, “that the feeling against ‘Salome’ will entirely disappear. When I get back to the Opera House I shall change certain features of the production.” “‘Salome’ Next Year, Says Herr Conried,” *New York Times*, 7 March 1907, 9.

¹⁴¹ Larry Hamberlin, “Visions of Salome: The Femme Fatale in American Popular Songs before 1920,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 59.3 (2006): 631–696.

¹⁴² “The Dance of the Seven Veils, so famous in ‘Salome,’ is immediately to be seen in vaudeville, beginning next Monday at the Fifth Avenue Theatre. Mme. Pilar Morin, the pantomimist, is to do the dancing to the strains of Massenet’s music. Meanwhile the Baroness von Elsner is to describe the movements of the song, explaining the meaning of each of the seven veils as they are discarded.” “Salome’s Dance,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1907, 9.

¹⁴³ Hamberlin, “Visions,” 650.

¹⁴⁴ “The Regnant Wave of the Sensational Dance,” *New York Times*, 23 August 1908, SM7.

vaudeville.¹⁴⁵ This fascination was not confined to the city; New Yorkers were further intrigued by the effect of *Salome* on their foreign counterparts. In 1908, well over a year after the initial craze had struck the city, an article written by an unnamed “veteran diplomat,” described the decaying effect of *Salome* on the “impressionable” women of English society:

[T]he *Salome* presented by Manager Heinrich Conried was a pattern of respectability, both in her attire and in her dancing, when compared with the almost entire nakedness and the repulsive contortions that are indulged in by Maud Allen [*sic*], and by her now numerous imitators in England, on the Continent of Europe, and here in America. In fact, at the present moment there is hardly a theatre or roof garden in New York that does not offer to its audience a *Salome* dance . . . At the present rate, it is probable that *Salome* dances will invade the fashionable drawing rooms of New York during the coming Winter, as they have those of the London Great World during the season which has just come to an end.¹⁴⁶

Additional distress was caused by a reported “Maud Allan” dinner dance hosted by an unnamed London society lady, who invited her fashionable female acquaintances to dine in *Salome* dress and demonstrate their best interpretation of Allan’s “Dance of the Seven Veils” to the sounds of “*Salome* music tinkled by an orchestra hidden discreetly behind the fortification of palms and flowers.”¹⁴⁷

In addition to the vaudeville acts, there were also occasional appearances of the music at the Metropolitan itself, which provided audiences with a chance to hear at least part of the work that had been yanked from the stage.¹⁴⁸ On 25 February, Alfred Hertz

¹⁴⁵ Udo Kultermann, “The ‘Dance of the Seven Veils.’ *Salome* and Erotic Culture around 1900,” *Artibus et Historiae* 27.53 (2006): 205.

¹⁴⁶ “The Spread of Bohemianism in English Society,” *New York Times*, 16 August 1908, SM6.

¹⁴⁷ “*Salome* Dinner Dance,” *New York Times*, 23 August 1908, C3.

¹⁴⁸ A performance of the *Symphonia Domestica* by Muck and the Boston Symphony Orchestra on 23 February also provided an opportunity for the *Tribune* to comment on the brouhaha surrounding Strauss. As Krehbiel noted, “In the vicinage of Boston, it is

(1872–1942), the conductor of the Metropolitan Opera premiere of *Salome*, presented the “Dance of the Seven Veils” with an orchestra of 106 musicians as part of a Sunday evening concert.¹⁴⁹ In its review of the event, the *Times* noted that it “aroused more enthusiasm than has been heard in that theatre on any other occasion this season except on certain Caruso nights.”¹⁵⁰ As the applause “grew deafening,” Hertz returned to the orchestra and led them in a playing of the music that accompanies Jokanaan’s descent into the cistern.¹⁵¹ As demonstrated by the behavior of the audience, the concert clearly scratched the city’s *Salome* itch, “seldom has a Sunday night audience listened more attentively.”¹⁵²

After *Salome* was removed, much of the press coverage turned to assigning blame. There were a few common culprits. One of these, which had roots going all the way back to the beginnings of foreign-language opera in the city, concerned class and the revival of the old debate between fashion and art. Hints of this can be found in the description of the opening night from the *Times*:

Puccini and Mme. Cavalieri were in a box. In the grand tier the seats began to fill a few minutes before the musical tragedy began. Although it was not a subscription night and the public had its choice of seats, there was a rustle of gowns and a craning of necks in the pit which told of the arrival of this or that social celebrity.

After the curtain went up on “Salome” there was no sensation until the dance began. It was the dance that women turn away from, and many

said, it was felt that a solemn obligation to Art demanded the performance of this masterwork, since the olfactories of New York had been found too delicate for the odors of ‘Salome.’” Krehbiel also made note of the decision of the “thrifty composer” to present the work at Wanamaker’s during his earlier tour of the city, which had caused “the musical public of New York” to weep “because of the deprivation.” “Music: Strauss and His Domestic Symphony,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 February 1907, 7.

¹⁴⁹ “Laurels for Alfred Hertz,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1907, 9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

of the women in the Metropolitan Opera House last night turned away from it. Very few men in the audience seemed comfortable. They twisted in their chairs, and before it was over there were numbers of them who decided to go to the corridors and smoke.

But when, following the lines of Wilde's play, Mme. Fremstad began to sing to the head before her, the horror of the thing started a party of men and women from the front row, and from Boxes 27 and 29 in the Golden Horseshoe two parties tumbled precipitately into the corridors and called to a waiting employee of the house to get their carriages.

But in the galleries men and women left their seats to stand so that they might look down upon the prima donna as she kissed the dead lips of the head of John the Baptist. Then they sank back in their chairs and shuddered.¹⁵³

This *Times* review is notable for its insight into the reactions of the different social classes. When the final monologue began, it was the upper-class audience members from the front row and boxes that stood up and departed; however, the reaction in the upper gallery, home of the lower class and marginalized, was of curiosity and a desire to see what was happening on stage.

The revival of this old debate between fashion and art primarily focused on the absurdity of the city's upper crust. In an interview, one "operagoer" noted that the scandal around *Salome* had caused such an intense interest in the work that "boxholders who have never before perused a libretto have read this one."¹⁵⁴ He then went on to note that "if the boxholders knew what they were seeing on the stage at some presentations of opera they would probably be just as squeamish."¹⁵⁵ There was an undisguised feeling of disgust at the reaction of the box-holders to the opera, particularly in light of how well-known it was before the Metropolitan premiere.

Many of those who are now protesting were present at the dress rehearsal, when the work was heard and seen exactly as it was to be presented to the

¹⁵³ "Strauss's 'Salome' The First Time Here," *New York Times*, 23 January 1907, 9.

¹⁵⁴ "No Decision on 'Salome,'" *New York Times*, 28 January 1907, 3.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

public. It had been in preparation for months before. It had been produced in Germany more than a year ago, and many accounts of it were accessible here in several languages. WILDE'S play, which the composer has followed almost word for word, had long been in print, and nothing that happens in the music is absent from the dramatic text.¹⁵⁶

This article, indebted to a common stereotype, underlined the fashionable set's cultural ignorance. By pointing out the various means by which the story had been available prior to the opening night performance, the *Times* portrayed the city's elite as culturally oblivious. The message was clear. Anyone with even an ounce of cultural cognizance would not have been shocked by what appeared on the Metropolitan's stage that evening.

This criticism of the city's fashionable set harkened back to debates of the nineteenth century. There were numerous parallels, including the concern for the city's cultural reputation abroad. After news of the decision, Hertz, the conductor of the premiere, gave his opinion on the matter, bluntly stating: "If the opera is not produced again it will not hurt the opera, but it will be a set-back to musical art in America."¹⁵⁷

This was a sentiment echoed by many of those involved in the production. When defending his decision to produce the work, Conried noted that the opera had been "produced in many of the most important Opera Houses in Europe, including the Royal Opera Houses of Dresden and Berlin, as well as La Scala, in Milan, and in Turin, Italy, and is now in preparation for production at the Imperial Opera House in Vienna and the Grand Opera House in Paris."¹⁵⁸ This list of European cities was designed to deliberately show New Yorkers that they had an opportunity to be ranked among these places as an

¹⁵⁶ "A Case of Belated Conscience," *New York Times*, 29 January 1907, 8.

¹⁵⁷ "Take Off 'Salome,' Say Opera House Directors," *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

important cultural center, feeding into the persistent inferiority complex that had plagued the city's music critics and audiences for generations. It was also a not so subtle reminder of what they had to lose. The *Times* noted that *Salome*—an opera “recognized by the consensus of the most competent critics of modern music as a monumental work, probably the greatest which musical genius has produced in this generation”—had been performed “in more than twenty European cities, including many of the foremost Court theatres, in which a strict standard of censorship prevails.”¹⁵⁹ Once again, *Salome*'s appearance in European capitals of culture was utilized to demonstrate the necessity of maintaining the opera. By allowing it to go forward, the city could achieve a cultural standing on par with that of Europe, while also proving that it was not as restrictive as these “Court theatres.” The official statement of the Board of Directors echoed these sentiments: “After the enthusiastic reception accorded to the work in Europe, where its performance everywhere was considered a musical event of the first magnitude, we considered it our obvious duty to bring it before the New York public.”¹⁶⁰ What was good enough for Europe was good enough for the city. Perhaps realizing that the fight over morality was lost, defenders of the opera turned to its educational value. When interviewed over the dispute, Fremstad proclaimed, “Strauss has made Wilde grandiose. It is wonderful music. It means something entirely new in music-drama, and for educational purposes, if for nothing else, people should hear it.”¹⁶¹ The *Times* expressed the same concern, noting that it was impossible to fully grasp the work from a concert

¹⁵⁹ “‘Salome’ Withdrawn; Conried Fully Yields,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1907, 3.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ “Take Off ‘Salome,’ Say Opera House Directors,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

version and that “it will be a shame if those who want to know of the latest developments in music are shut off from an opportunity which has been opened to them.”¹⁶²

Of all the city’s publications, the *Staats-Zeitung* expressed some of the most vehement outrage at the behavior of the upper class and the implications of their actions. In numerous articles, the paper castigated the influence of the moneyed elite on the city’s musical offerings. As the paper noted: “with deep embarrassment, we are talking about the fact that we once again are ridiculed by the whole art world.”¹⁶³ The people responsible for this state of affairs were the “high nobles” who would not themselves “feel this embarrassment in their godlike resemblance” because of their proclivity to look down on the “immoral, septic” Europe.¹⁶⁴ Ironically echoing the criticism of some English-language papers against the monarchs of Europe censoring Strauss’s opera, the *Staats-Zeitung* blasted the ability of a small, privileged group of individuals utilizing their money to bend the greater majority to their will. It noted that Protestant and Catholic cities, Kaiser Wilhelm, Franz Joseph I of Austria, and even the Pope had allowed the production of *Salome* to continue. In particular, the paper condemned the “old puritanical spirit” that had doomed many works as a result of misguided religious morality.¹⁶⁵ The *Staats-Zeitung* was particularly incensed at the seeming arbitrariness of it. Citing the immorality of *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Die Walküre*, and every Broadway musical show with its “voluptuous temptations,” the paper wondered why this particular piece?¹⁶⁶ At the

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ “Musikalische Angelegenheiten,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 February 1907, 20.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

conclusion of the article, the *Staats-Zeitung* declared: “We stand with ‘Salome’ . . . we desire the freedom of art in the land of the free.”¹⁶⁷

Considering that one of the leading arguments for maintaining the opera was the need to remain on par with other cities, it is not surprising that much attention was given to *Salome*’s reception abroad. One convenient point of comparison was Paris, which held its premiere of the opera in May.¹⁶⁸ Aldrich, the critic for the *Times*, who had been present for the January premiere in the city, was also in Paris for this performance, thereby providing him with an opportunity to compare the two productions. Based on what he saw in France, Aldrich declared, “the New York performance was something to be proud of.”¹⁶⁹ In particular, Aldrich noted that the cast in New York had proved more effective, singling out Emmy Destinn’s version as “less sensuous and feline than Fremstad’s.”¹⁷⁰ He also mentioned that “the disagreeable features of the much debated episode of the severed head were minimized” in the Parisian production, which shifted some of the blame for the controversy onto Conried.¹⁷¹ One effect of Aldrich’s report was to demonstrate to New Yorkers that they possessed a musical culture that could rival anything found in Europe, even Paris. By mentioning the “fashionable” and “distinguished” audience and its enthusiasm at the close of the performance, Aldrich does—whether intentionally or not—draw a distinction between Europeans and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Paris had seen the premiere of *Salomé* in 1896, while Wilde was in prison. Inspired by Flaubert’s *Hérodias* (1877), Wilde’s play was originally written in French and would seem to have the necessary French pedigree to make it a success. This, however, was not the case. The play was only performed one night and received mixed reviews. Eells, “Naturalizing,” 84-85.

¹⁶⁹ “‘Salome’ in Paris Creates a Furore [*sic*],” *New York Times*, 9 May 1907, 9.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Americans. While he makes no reference to the events that transpired in the city, it would be impossible for New Yorkers not to have this in mind while reading his article. They may have possessed houses and artists capable of presenting productions that artistically rivaled or surpassed those presented in Europe, but the difference in audience reactions seemed to confirm the anxiety of American cultural ignorance. This was further exacerbated by the actions of the *Libre Parole*, a paper notorious for its anti-Semitism, which almost immediately raised concerns regarding the work in “a campaign similar to that which occurred in New York.”¹⁷² In its condemnation, the paper noted “the success of the opera is an example of the decadence of French morals and . . . ‘worthy of inspiring the lamentations of a new Jeremiah or the sarcasm of another Juvenal.’”¹⁷³ While the *Times* connected this incident to what had happened in the city, it also stipulated that the Parisian example was an extreme opinion held by a minority paper. The argument that had successfully resulted in *Salome*’s removal in the city was branded in Paris as a zealous viewpoint held by a crackpot organization. The very next day it was reported in the *Times* that Strauss was expected to receive the Legion of Honor following President Fallières’s personal congratulations. The *Times*, further strengthening the divide between the American and French reception, added, “Parisian musical critics are unanimous in declaring that Strauss is the greatest living German musician. Several find much to criticise [*sic*] in Wilde’s poem as the outcome of sensual decadentism.”¹⁷⁴ The

¹⁷² As a symbol of this anti-Semitic rhetoric, the *Times* noted that the paper placed blame on the work as a production of the Jews: “‘two of whom,’ it says, ‘organized the production of the work of a third.’” “‘Salome’ Divides Paris,” *New York Times*, 11 May 1907, 4.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ “Strauss May Get the Cross,” *New York Times*, 12 May 1907, C1.

city's critics had also discussed Strauss's music in relation to Wilde's text; however, many of them, such as Krehbiel, viewed Strauss's music as having fallen victim to Wilde's corruptive influence. The French seemed capable of drawing a distinction between the poet and composer in a way the Americans were not. To further rub salt in the wound, the *Times* made sure to mention that among the many notable Americans present in Paris and attending the performance, "so far as can be learned, J. Pierpont Morgan has not attended any performance yet."¹⁷⁵ The reaction of the Parisians towards *Salome* remained popular fodder for the city's press for weeks following the performance. Nearly a month later, the *Times* returned to the subject, focusing now on the French reaction to the New York incident, particularly the charges of "Puritanism" being aimed at the city.¹⁷⁶ Echoing the fear of the 1820s, New Yorkers again felt that they were being viewed as cultural buffoons.¹⁷⁷

Paris was not the only point of comparison. Hertz, the conductor of the Metropolitan's production, expressed deep disappointment over the decision by pointing out that even in conservative Imperial Germany the work had been allowed upon the stage: "[I]t is a shame to deprive the thousands interested in the development of modern

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ "'Salome' in Paris," *New York Times*, 1 June 1907, 8.

¹⁷⁷ New York critics failed to note the irony of the French condemning American audiences of letting their "morality" get in the way of art. When *Salomé* premiered in 1896, much of the reception had been colored by Wilde's imprisonment. In positive and negative reviews, French critics found fault in the playwright's so-called immorality. This was par for the course with the French reception of Wilde, which is covered extensively in Richard Hibbitt's "The Artist as Aesthete: The French Creation of Wilde" and Emily Eells's "Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an *homme de lettres*: The French Reception of *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* (1895–1922)." Wilde's decline in popularity in France, which reached a peak in 1896, was partly the result of his homosexuality. Hibbitt, "Aesthete," 74–75.

music of a chance to hear this epoch making opera. I thought Americans were advanced enough in matters of taste to put their prejudices aside. Why, even the German Emperor would not yield to the wishes of the Empress and deprive his subjects of a chance to hear this great work.”¹⁷⁸ Interest in what happened at the Metropolitan spread to Europe, which was then relayed back to the city. In one instance, the *Tribune* published a lengthy description by an Austrian journalist, Dr. Baumfeld, who had spent time in New York City and was now attempting to parlay that experience into a career as an “expositor of commercial and artistic affairs in America.”¹⁷⁹ In a Viennese publication, Baumfeld characterized those that had opposed the opera as influenced by “the Protestant Episcopal Church, of which Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan is ‘a sort of one-third secular pope.’”¹⁸⁰ For Baumfeld, it was the moneyed elite who were to blame, “a class that has become degenerate by reason of its enjoyment of abnormal wealth, a class which respects nothing except money.”¹⁸¹ The *Tribune* pushed back against this characterization, arguing that Baumfeld conveniently neglected to mention the controversy over the work that had erupted in Vienna.¹⁸²

In most accounts from abroad, Conried came off looking heroic in the face of philistinism. This depiction of New Yorkers became an understandably sore subject among the local press.

¹⁷⁸ “Try to Stop ‘Salome,’” *New-York Tribune*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹⁷⁹ “The Weekly Calendar,” *New-York Tribune*, 17 March 1907, B2.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² “It is not without significance that the newspaper which yields the better part of two pages to the lucubrations of Dr. Baumfeld has uttered, so far as we know, no word of protest against the prohibition of ‘Salome’ at the Court Opera in Vienna, although the most popular plays at the Viennese theatres of late have been a couple of Oscar Wilde’s and Mr. B. Shaw’s celebration of bawdry, ‘Mrs. Warren’s Profession.’” *Ibid.*

German understanding of operatic and theatrical conditions is illustrated by a statement in a German newspaper of first class importance that the “courageous Conried,” undeterred by the long struggle which he had made to have Strauss’s opera performed at the Metropolitan Opera House, had been encouraged to produce it at the “German Theatre,” and that it was expected a “theaterskandal” would be instigated by the “muckers.” A still more precious report which was printed in a Vienna newspaper some weeks ago told with admiration of Herr Direktor Conried’s sarcastic humor in meeting an objection to Oscar Wilde’s play at the Irving Place Theatre by withdrawing it and giving instead Mme. Birch-Pfeiffer’s “Fanchon the Cricket.” The New York correspondents of German newspapers seem to have little luck in educating the editors of those papers concerning local affairs, or else they do not try.¹⁸³

While the appearance of articles in German papers detailing the treatment of Strauss in the city is unsurprising, the repeated references to these articles in the New York press speaks to the sense of musical inferiority on the part of Americans. To be spoken of in such dismissive terminology by the German press was disconcerting to the city’s musical critics, but also represented a much-feared step backward in cultural recognition.

Echoing the criticism found in the *Staats-Zeitung*, cries of hypocrisy became increasingly common. In the above article criticizing Baumfeld, the *Tribune* called out the stage manager Dr. Paul Marsop for an essay that appeared in the monthly publication *Musik*, which criticized “the hypocrites and prudes who object to the language and pictures of ‘Salome,’” while nearly simultaneously protesting “against the exhibition of the severed head and Salome’s slobberings over it, suggesting a new arrangement of the stage.”¹⁸⁴ The *Staats-Zeitung* was not the only paper to notice the inconsistency in

¹⁸³ “The Weekly Calendar,” *New-York Tribune*, 31 March 1907, B2.

¹⁸⁴ August Spanuth (1857–1920), a musical figure of importance in New York City, who had taken up permanent residence in Berlin, was mentioned in the article for his essay that had appeared in Leipzig’s *Signale für die Musikalische Welt* that relieved New York’s critics of any fault in the matter—an issue of some contention among New York’s musical critics, who were being blamed abroad for having contributed to the furor around the opera. “The Weekly Calendar,” *New-York Tribune*, 17 March 1907, B2.

banning *Salome* while other operas were allowed to appear, “We have had other disgusting subjects on the stage. Take the love of Sieglinde and Siegmund. They were brother and sister. Wotan’s pranks are too well known to need mention. And the affairs of ‘Tristan und Isolde’ were scarcely decent.”¹⁸⁵ There was a popular sentiment that if those who were up in arms against *Salome*—i.e., the wealthy and fashionable—were more familiar with the repertoire there would not have been such a demand to have it removed. When interviewed regarding his opinion on the uproar, Hammerstein noted that his house had enough horrible topics to go around: “In . . . ‘Tosca’ we had the spectacle of a man being tortured with a crown of steel thorns, while a man mad with lust pursues Tosca round and round the room. Later the tortured man is shot in full view of the audience. In Halevy’s ‘La Juive’ the heroine is boiled in oil.”¹⁸⁶ Supporters justified *Salome*’s story by claiming that opera was built on scandalous, inappropriate subjects that were then made acceptable—or perhaps go unnoticed—as a result of the gloss provided by beautiful music.¹⁸⁷ The wealthy denizens of fashion failed to notice these stories because they were lost in the pursuit of socialization at the expense of the art. Addressing this hypocrisy, the *Times* wrote:

It is true that the author has put one very disagreeable episode into his play that STRAUSS has made much of in his musical setting, and that has caused the property man some labor with papier-mâché. Artists for three or four hundred years have also been considerably occupied with this detail, and have made much of JOHN the Baptist’s “decollation,” as may be seen in

¹⁸⁵ “Take Off ‘Salome,’ Say Opera House Directors,” *New York Times*, 27 January 1907, 1.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ “It is commonplace to state that the libretto of all operas is a subordinate feature, and that what people go to hear is not the text, but the music. Not a few of the operas of the classical repertoire are based upon plots and contain language which would be decidedly objectionable if they were not overshadowed and idealized by the beauty of the music.” “‘Salome’ Withdrawn; Conried Fully Yields,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1907, 3.

any gallery. We are not upholding the validity of this particular detail from the artistic point of view. But everybody knew that it was coming. And, at any rate, the young German composer cannot be charged with “making vice attractive” in his opera. There are a good many operas on the lists of the Metropolitan Opera House (to say nothing of the Manhattan) that are quite as much open to this reproach as “*Salome*.” We tremble to think what the result may be if the newly aroused conscience of the Directors of the Opera House and Realty Company, seeking what it may devour, should be turned in this direction. Not only “*Salome*,” but a good many other musical masterpieces would be put upon the Index.¹⁸⁸

The *Times* broadened its criticism of the complaints against *Salome* by noting that the subject of John the Baptist and his beheading was far from a new topic for artistic representation. In addition to being one of a number of morally questionable operas, *Salome* was based on a story that had inspired poets, playwrights, novelists, artists, and composers for generations. To single out this particular work for prohibition was to ignore the long line of artistic works that had also crossed—or at least flirted—with the border between decency and immorality.

While many of the critics had been dismissive or disapproving of the music when the opera was first premiered, the decision to take *Salome* off the stage was met with a general feeling of distaste. The music and subject were clearly open to criticism; however, the ban had gone too far. The damage done to the city’s international reputation, the sense of hypocrisy on the part of the work’s biggest critics, and the general feeling that the city’s fashionable elite lacked a necessary cultural background all came together to form the bulk of the swift and vociferous denunciation against the Metropolitan’s decision to remove *Salome* from the stage.

¹⁸⁸ “A Case of Belated Conscience,” *New York Times*, 29 January 1907, 8.

Chapter 6

Richard and Hammerstein: The Manhattan Opera Company and the Return of Strauss

Just two years after *Salome* premiered at the Metropolitan, the opera reappeared in the city, this time at Oscar Hammerstein's Manhattan Opera House.¹ The shadow of the 1907 Metropolitan performance was inescapable for Hammerstein's production, which relied heavily on the earlier controversy for its publicity. Mary Garden (1874–1967), tasked with the role of Salome, also had to contend with the legacy of Fremstad—who sang the role at the Metropolitan—and Froehlich—who performed the Dance of the Seven Veils—as their interpretations provided the only barometer for New Yorkers.

As early as April 1908, the *Times* was reporting on Hammerstein's efforts to reintroduce *Salome*. In his announcement to the press, Hammerstein presented the performance as a way of bridging the rift between Strauss and the city. This was strengthened by early reports that Strauss intended to return to New York City in order to conduct the performances. As Hammerstein commented to the *Times*: “I found Strauss still hurt at the attitude New Yorkers assumed when ‘Salome’ was produced at the Metropolitan. He was quite ready, however, to adopt a different set of impressions, and

¹ Hammerstein had been working for years to craft the Manhattan as an alternative to the Metropolitan. After his first season, Hammerstein reportedly declared his intention to make his second season grander and more elaborate in order to place his house in direct opposition to the Metropolitan. The means by which he intended to make this change was through the incorporation of German opera into his repertoire, albeit in French translations. “German Operas for Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1907, 9.

already is looking forward with pleasure to his visit to New York.”² Hammerstein released a statement to the press that was designed to make a case for the opera:

I regret more than I can express that the musical critics of some of the New York dailies persist in dwelling upon what they conceive to be the abnormality or sensuality of “Salome.” Why do they do this? Why will they see only the material side of this great work of art? Why are they blind to the inwardness of this creation of the two master minds, Wilde and Strauss?

Is not a perfect human being composed of two fundamental elements? First of all, there must be a perfect physical body—a body all of whose functions are perfect—a body replete with vitality in which no physical passion is wanting to make it complete as a physical thing. Then add to it a perfect soul—a soul that is attuned to the beauty of nature in its widest, deepest and loveliest sense. There you have a perfect man or woman, an ideal human being as far as human mind can conceive one to be.

That, I contend, is what has happened in the case of “Salome” as a music drama. Oscar Wilde furnished the body; Richard Strauss has breathed into it a soul. I don't care what Wilde may have intended; I don't care what he may have thought; I brush aside the theories which are based upon his tragic mental deformity; he has given us a beautiful body; if you will, such a body as one might conceive a human being absolutely lacking in a moral and spiritual sense might be, but intensely vital from the physical side. You have only to listen with open ears, open minds and open hearts to the heavenly music with which Richard Strauss has clothed Salome's apostrophe and appeal to all that is left to her of the one man who had ever inspired her with the passion of love to feel that this love was a love sublime and holy, the love of a repentant, chastened, etherealized woman.

Why don't the critics lead the public mind in this direction, so that this great work of art may receive a just appreciation?³

Ever the salesman, Hammerstein's reading of the opera was clearly meant to dispel the lingering stench of its immorality. Whether or not he actually bought his own defense of holy love is another question.

² It was also reported here that Hammerstein had made a deal to bring *Elektra* to New York City. “Strauss to Conduct ‘Salome’ Here,” *New York Times*, 23 April 1908, 1.

³ “Mr. Hammerstein on ‘Salome,’” *New-York Tribune*, 1 February 1909, 7.

Salome's potential return naturally aroused interest beyond the city.⁴ In a special report, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* provided a description of the work and Mary Garden to its readers, although as it noted: "there is really no sound reason for public excitement about Richard Strauss' 'Salome,' even though Oscar Hammerstein has clothed it in gorgeous scenic garments and Mary Garden, almost without a garment, has danced a dance."⁵ Unsurprisingly, Berlin was also interested. In a special cable to the *Times*, a correspondent remarked on the reaction among Germans to the report that *Salome* was returning: "People wondered how the Manhattan impresario managed to assuage Strauss's outraged artistic feelings."⁶ It was no secret that Strauss harbored ill will. In one telling incident, the New York Liederkrantz sent a request to Strauss to contribute something to its upcoming Goethe memorial album. As reported in the *Times*, Strauss responded: "Of all human vices hypocrisy is to me the most offensive. Of what use are art treasures and artistic thoughts of the Old World to beautiful America, when intelligent appreciation of what they mean and whence they spring remains on this side of the ocean?"⁷

In bringing *Salome* back to New York City, Hammerstein made one significant alteration, to give the work in French, rather than German. This led the *Chicago Daily Tribune* to ponder the difference between a German and French *Salome*:

Everything is French—text, impersonation, scenery, attire, action, musical treatment, and the reading of the score by Mr. Campanini. At the

⁴ The interest in the return of *Salome* to American stages could even be seen in the early announcements that Hammerstein had secured the rights to the opera that began to appear in April 1908. "Mary Garden to Play Salome," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 23 April 1908, 10.

⁵ "New Salome; Fewer Clothes," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 January 1909, 1.

⁶ "Big Change in Strauss," *New York Times*, 10 May 1908, C2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Metropolitan we had a German Salome, a creature strange and inexplicable, complex and psychic, but singing from her entrance to her death above the organ point of faith.

At the Manhattan we have a French Salome, volatile, sinuous of mind and body, quivering with emotions that lie upon the pearly surface of her flesh, a throbbing yet contemplative explorer of physical reservations, a creature who, like her sister, Faustine, “could do all things but be of a good or chaste mien.”

This creature hurls herself helplessly in a paroxysm of carnality against a Jokanaan, not the petrified and appalling image of moral law, but a shocked and pained celibate, outraged by the public disclosure of a young woman’s lamentable inclinations. Even the Herod, the tetrarch of this production, never ruled in Judea, but sat in solemn judgment in some little medieval barony in the shadow of the Pyrenees, where Arabian color found its way into his face, even as Moorish lines crept into his architecture.

“Salome” in French is French to the core, and it serves to satisfy us that the Gallic text in manner is nearer the chaste and elegant ideals of Oscar Wilde than the German treatment could ever come.⁸

In a twist on the earlier sentiment that Wilde’s play had been the corrupting force, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* placed some of the blame for *Salome*’s notoriety on Hedwig Lachmann’s (1865–1918) German translation.⁹ Even though little time had passed, the perception of Wilde, in certain circles, had clearly changed. None of the 1907 reviews would have referred to Wilde’s play as “chaste” or “elegant.”

The use of French was not universally applauded. The translation of the opera—despite French having been the original language of the play—struck some critics as

⁸ “New Salome; Fewer Clothes,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 January 1909, 1.

⁹ There were some critics that argued the choice of language was largely meaningless given Strauss’s treatment of the voice in relation to the orchestra. This idea refers back to the anecdote concerning rehearsals of *Salome*, when Strauss supposedly claimed that the voice was not as important as the orchestra: “Nor is there need of much discussion of the effect of the French text on the music. By the composer’s own confession, words and the human voice are only tolerated by him as necessary evils.” “Music: Manhattan Opera House,” *New-York Tribune*, 29 January 1909, 7.

incongruous to the actions depicted on the stage, particularly in respect to the “neurasthenic” atmosphere crafted by Wilde and subsequently Strauss:

Naturally there is one point of view from which the consorting of such music as Strauss’s with the French language seems anomalous. Elegance of expression is inherent in all forms of French art; dramatic truthfulness and strength, sometimes to the verge of uncouthness, of German. The nervous chatter of Burrian’s German Herod was much more characteristic of the neurasthenic created by Wilde than was the more or less tuneful singing of Dalmores’s Tetrarch.¹⁰

The *Sun* also declared that *Salome* was more appropriate in the German language, which supposedly best painted the necessary effect. Noting the predominance of German singers and contributors to the 1907 Conried production, the *Sun* argued that its “German character” was “probably the best atmosphere after all for Strauss’s opera.”¹¹ Some contended that Strauss’s use of German meant that it was the only language appropriate for the work: “It is certain that the German text is better suited to the Strauss music, which sounds strangely inharmonious at times with the French text.”¹² Lending some credence to this argument was the fact *Salome* had premiered in France with the original German libretto.¹³

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “Your Choice in ‘Salomes,’” *New York Sun*, 28 February 1909, 7.

¹² Ibid.

Barely a month later, the *Sun* would take the complete opposite stance, arguing that the work was truly “French” in essence: “It was obvious that Mr. Hammerstein must decide to produce the work in French, for he had the singers to give it in that language, and not in German. Furthermore it must frankly be admitted that although Strauss set his music to the German text, the thing is French in essence and in style and it fits altogether better a French atmosphere.” “Mr. Hammerstein’s Season,” *New York Sun*, 28 March 1909, 8.

¹³ There had been a production in Brussels on 25 March 1907 that was presented in French. For this performance, Strauss adapted his score to fit the French translation. This, however, proved to be an exception. Emily Eells, “Naturalizing Oscar Wilde as an *homme de lettres*: The French Reception of *Dorian Gray* and *Salomé* (1895–1922),” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 89.

For her part, Mary Garden was quite vocal in connecting her performance to a French aesthetic. Leading up to the performance she noted that her costume was “a composite idea taken from three pictures by Gustave Moreau. . . . One of these pictures was Oscar Wilde’s inspiration.”¹⁴ Her mention of Moreau is notable given Strauss’s later written intentions for this scene, which also called for a regal, demure figure, deeply indebted to these images. At one point, Strauss explicitly urged the dancer to strike a pose directly taken from one of these paintings.¹⁵ Garden, who claims to have worked directly with Strauss in preparing for the role, attempts to place her interpretation comfortably within this tradition. In the process, it also connects the work—albeit indirectly—to the late nineteenth century Decadent movement by way of Jean des Esseintes, the protagonist of Joris-Karl Huysman’s (1848–1907) *À rebours* (1884), the example par excellence of literary decadence. In the novel, des Esseintes frequently muses on these paintings of Moreau.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Mary Garden Talks of Salome Costume,” *New York Times*, 12 July 1908, C1.

¹⁵ Lawrence Kramer, *Opera and Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 164. Strauss further reiterated this idea in the 1940s. Looking back over his early career, Strauss urged his performers to look towards the images of “Oriental” women for inspiration, “anyone who has been in the east and has observed the decorum with which women there behave, will appreciate that Salome, being a chaste virgin and an oriental Princess, must be played with the simplest and most restrained of gestures.” Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Strauss: A Critical Guide* (London: Grange Books, 1995), 41.

¹⁶ Coming full circle, des Esseintes is considered a source of inspiration for Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, which is made explicit in the novel when Dorian compares himself to Huysman’s protagonist after receiving a copy of the book from Lord Henry. Dorian is so taken by the book that he procures nine copies of the first edition, each one bound in a different color in order to suit his “various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control.” Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1908), 165.

A somewhat surprising argument among certain critics was that the degenerate subject and diseased atmosphere of the opera was more aligned with the Germans:

“Salome” gained its first popularity as a play in Germany, where it became a repertoire drama in the court theatres and housewives watched its action with composure. The vogue of Richard Strauss’s opera is still great in his country, and “Salome” appeals to the taste of the public there in any form. The favorite ice in middle class families is now said to be a chocolate and vanilla head resembling that of *John the Baptist* and floating in a strawberry sauce. Every confectioner is said to have the mould in stock.¹⁷

In the earlier discussions of Strauss’s music, critics like Henderson, had used the French as symbols of artistic degeneracy. Strauss’s alignment with artists like Maeterlinck was meant to show his path away from Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Wagner. The anecdotal story of the Jochanaan dessert included in this article now seems to depict Germans as morally suspect. German housewives are described as unmoved by the work and middle-class families supposedly devour the iced visage of John as though the beheading of the Baptist was just another fad designed for their consumption, rather than a troubling depiction of a Christian icon’s martyrdom. This portrayal placed Germans in direct opposition to Americans, while also glossing over the reality that Strauss’s work inspired an intense degree of controversy in his own country. This depiction of the Germans was perhaps not without precedence. In the descriptions of the Metropolitan’s premiere of the opera, it was in the gallery, a section popular with the city’s German Americans, that the audience members were described as leaving their seats to get a better glimpse of Salome kissing John’s severed head.

¹⁷ “Your Choice in ‘Salomes,’” *New York Sun*, 28 February 1909, 7.

The debate over a “French” or “German” *Salome* coincides with a different, yet somewhat related, idea: the place of modernism in national identity.¹⁸ This is seen in Aldrich’s commentary on the new production. Aldrich, in the context of explaining both *Salome*’s importance and the earlier controversy, noted:

“Salome” is in reality not a work of revolutionary import. Since the single hearing that we had of it here two years ago there has been a lyric drama produced here of which it can truly be said that it is of revolutionary import; and that is Claude Debussy’s “Pelléas et Mélisande.” It stands at the diametrically opposite pole from “Salome” in most respects, but in none more than in the fact that it says many new things in a new way.

The composer uses a new language; he has started out with a fundamental new sort of musical idea. He is not saying in a louder or a more emphatic or a more highly colored or a more complicated way things that have already been said. His material is new. It may or may not be vital and lasting; it may or may not have in it the potency of a new departure in music. But it is what Strauss’s music is not—a new utterance.¹⁹

For all the apparent novelty of Strauss’s music, Aldrich argues that the work can be seen as the continuation of Wagner and the techniques Strauss utilized within his tone poems. His mention of *Pelléas et Mélisande* as a new musical utterance underscores a view held by some that modernism in the early twentieth century was being led not by the Germans, but rather the French. Where Wagner had once represented the modern in music, Aldrich points to Debussy as embodying a new direction.²⁰ Strauss was not the only German-

¹⁸ It was often debatable at this time which country best seemed to embrace the new tide of modernism. In discussing *Salome*, Krehbiel noted, “Oscar Wilde thought France might accept a glorification of necrophilism and wrote his detestable book in French. France would have none of it, but when it was done into German, and Richard Strauss accentuated its sexual perversity by his hysterical music, lo! Berlin accepted it with avidity.” While some viewed Maeterlinck and the Symbolists as the quintessential example of modernism, there were some that saw Germany as still occupying a central role. “‘Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1913, 9.

¹⁹ “Strauss Opera Appeals to the Public,” *New York Times*, 24 January 1909, X7.

²⁰ Debussy’s name also appeared in a conversation with Mary Garden. In describing her take on the music of Strauss, Garden told a *Times* reporter: “Much as I admire Strauss, however, I do not consider him a genius, like Debussy, the composer of ‘Pélleas et

speaking composer to receive this treatment. As Matthew Mugmon has shown, Mahler was presented to American audiences as a composer who exhibited elements of musical modernism, yet maintained an important link to romanticism, which distanced his music from some of the more revolutionary compositions associated with France.²¹ Mugmon cites a quotation from Alfred H. Meyer's review of *Das Lied von der Erde*, which argued: "Mahler is no modernist, though he wrote when the innovations of Debussy had all been made."²² Like Strauss, Mahler seemed unable to fully break from the traditions of the nineteenth-century, which limited his ability to write music that was truly innovative. This, for some critics, is what separated French and German composers. When *Elektra* appeared, Strauss may have solidified his position as one of the most prominent leaders of German musical modernism, but some critics wondered whether there was anything for him to lead.

Here We Go Again: Elektra Comes to New York

Not even a year after *Salome* was yanked from the Metropolitan's stage, news began to appear of Strauss's next opera. On 10 November 1907, the *Times* published a special dispatch from Berlin detailing Strauss's work on a new piece that would "out-sensationalize 'Salome' when the eager public is permitted to hear its music and ponder

Mélisande." While Garden did seem to have a penchant for French roles, her invocation of Debussy's opera as a superior work to Strauss's seems noteworthy in the context of Aldrich's comments. "Mary Garden Says 'Salome' Isn't Hard," *New York Times*, 25 January 1909, 9.

²¹ Matthew Steven Mugmon, "The American Mahler: Musical Modernism and Transatlantic Networks, 1920–1960" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2013).

²² *Ibid.*, 178.

over its realistic theme.”²³ Just a few weeks later, the *Times* published a complete breakdown of the plot, which also included a history of Hofmannsthal’s play and the various source materials from which it was drawn. Of the play, the *Times* noted “there are tremendous potentialities in the work for a man who, like Strauss, is fond of dealing with the bizarre, the perverse, the morbid, the pathological, the hysterical, the soul shrieking. All of these are an obsession with him.”²⁴

By January 1909, frequent dispatches from Europe described the build-up to *Elektra*’s premiere. On 16 January, the *Times* commented on the frenzy in Dresden: “The excitement in musical and artistic circles of Germany over the premiere of Richard Strauss’s ‘Elektra’ in Dresden on Jan. 25, is at the boiling point. The management of the Royal Opera there is working day and night answering letters and telegraphic appeals for tickets, literally from all quarters of the earth.”²⁵ After the performance, a special cable from Berlin reported on the audience’s reaction: “‘Numbed,’ ‘stunned,’ ‘hypnotized,’ are some of the terms employed to describe the state of mind to which the first performance of Strauss’s ‘Elektra’ reduced the brilliant international audience in Dresden.”²⁶ In the opinion of the “American critic” interviewed by the *Times* correspondent the premiere was an unequivocal success for Strauss. In contrast to the sensationalized coverage of *Salome*, *Elektra* was presented as an intense tour de force that left the audience in stunned

²³ It was also noted that Strauss was trying to win the favor of the Kaiser, and by proxy the Kaiser’s censor, through a series of marches and concerts dedicated to him. “New Opera Sensational,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1907, C1.

²⁴ “‘Salome’ Outdone in Strauss’s New Opera,” *New York Times*, 24 November 1907, SM5.

²⁵ “Excited Over ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 17 January 1909, C3.

²⁶ “‘Elektra’ Stuns Hearers,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1909, C2.

silence before bursting into a “spontaneous roar of cheers and applause.”²⁷ In the words of the unnamed critic: “The audience was kept in an incessant paroxysm of ghastliness and horror. The orchestra barked and growled with hellish realism. The singers shrieked and moaned in accents which were something more than agonizing. The tone production which resulted marks Strauss for all time as a genius and wizard.”²⁸ There were numerous positive reviews, including from the *London Times*, which the *New York Times* published in full. The London critic, in describing the “striking dramatic-musical event,” referred to Elektra’s invocation to Agamemnon as “the finest piece of dramatic music since Wagner.”²⁹

There were—as to be expected—a fair share of less generous reviews as well. In a “special cable” to the *Times*, an unnamed correspondent described the Berlin premiere as a “riot of musical thunder . . . never before perpetrated within the walls of the Kaiser’s theatre.”³⁰ The correspondent went on to dismiss the voluminous cheers as the product of the “energetic teamwork of a gallery full of Strauss cohorts.”³¹ While the New York cast had been some of Strauss’s strongest supporters during the fiasco surrounding *Salome*, the same could not be said in Dresden. The *Times* published an interview between a Boston reporter and Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861–1936), the originator of Klytemnestra, who voiced her opinion on Strauss’s vocal writing, noting “he does not

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Much of this review was focused on the illustrative nature of Strauss’s music.

“Strauss’s New Opera ‘Electra,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1909, X7.

³⁰ “Berlin Hears ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 16 February 1909, 9.

³¹ In a tongue-in-cheek comment on Strauss’s writing, the correspondent noted, “an orchestra of 115 members fully interpreted Herr Strauss’s ideas of cyclonic effects, but the singing could occasionally be heard.” Ibid.

need singers; his orchestral score so paints, so draws the picture.”³² As to his place in history, she argued, “there is nothing beyond ‘Elektra.’ It can go no further. One has lived and touched the uttermost of that art—Richard Wagner. He has made use of the furthest outlines in vocal writing. Richard Strauss goes beyond him, and his singing voices are lost. One cannot go further than ‘Elektra.’ We have come to the full stop. I believe Richard Strauss himself sees this.”³³

Nearly a year after *Elektra* premiered in Dresden, the opera came to the city.³⁴ The reception was largely similar to *Salome*, including many of the same themes; however, there was a more tempered tone—an indication, perhaps, that audiences were growing accustomed to these types of works. Unsurprisingly, there was also more talk of Strauss’s position as the leader of German musical modernism. As seen with *Salome*, the press utilized the days leading up to the performance at the Manhattan Opera Company to prepare the audience. The opera—which was pushed back to 1 February, a week after its original premiere date, reportedly owing to its extreme difficulty—provoked a wide array of discussion.³⁵ Contributing to the debate was Hammerstein, who released a statement on the opera, similar to one published prior to his production of *Salome*.³⁶ While lengthy,

³² “News of the Music World,” *New York Times*, 21 November 1909, X5.

³³ As can be seen, Schumann-Heink’s comments regarding Strauss’s relationship to Wagner and his writing for the orchestra at the expense of the voice are nearly identical to the criticism he received after *Salome*. Ibid.

³⁴ As a result of the bad blood engendered by *Salome*’s removal, Strauss refused performance rights to the Metropolitan, instead granting them to Hammerstein and the Manhattan Opera Company. *Elektra* would not be performed at the Metropolitan until 3 December 1932.

³⁵ “At the Manhattan,” *New-York Tribune*, 23 January 1910, B2.

³⁶ Despite Hammerstein’s repeated attempts to antagonize the Met, including his presentation of *Salome* and fostering a relationship with the spurned Strauss, this season would prove to be the Manhattan Opera’s swan song. On 28 April, just a few months after the premiere of *Elektra*, the *Tribune* announced Hammerstein’s decision to close the

it is worth including for Hammerstein's defense of the work, which argued for repeated hearings—a savvy marketing tool at least—and his disparaging view of the city's music critics, who “bamboozled” the public with talk of madness, riotous cacophony, and “words, words, words.”³⁷ Hammerstein, perhaps anticipating that the local critics would not be thrilled with the opera, worked to discredit them as best he could:

No use in going to hear “Elektra” unless you have prepared yourself beforehand. First of all, get your mind rid of all cant. Do you remember what a lot of rot was talked and written about “Salome” before and after its first production? A lot of wooly wiseacres filled columns with words, words, words! They didn't understand the opera themselves, and they didn't want anybody else to understand it, or at least they were afraid that somebody else would know more about it than they did, and they wanted to head off that somebody. The man with the honest, open mind said:

“Let's look into this thing; let's wait a while; let's hear it two or three times and see. Perhaps it isn't as obscure, as incomprehensible as Mr. Fizzle Witz says in his elaborate musico-philosophic discussion upon the Strauss music drama.”

And those same students of music and the development of operatic art who saw and heard the opera without prejudice soon discovered the beauty of the score, the skill with which the composer had written music to the text, and the charm with which he had imbued the entire work. After a few hearings the whole structure of “Salome” stood before them as sharp and clear as an etching.³⁸

Hammerstein, seeing a way to establish *Elektra*'s significance, accentuated Strauss's role as a proponent of a new style for a modern era:

They saw that there is no waste [*sic*] music material in it; that Strauss had built it with the same mathematical precision that a modern architect uses in erecting a twenty-five story steel skyscraper. Once you have clearly

house, the result—at least according to his son Arthur—of the outrageous salaries demanded by the singers. “Hammerstein Out of Grand Opera,” *New-York Tribune*, 28 April 1910, 1.

For a discussion of the rivalry between the two houses, particularly as it impacted American composers, see Carolyn Guzski, “Otto Kahn and Americanism at the Metropolitan Opera,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 65.3 (2004): 409–452.

³⁷ “The Proper Mood to Enjoy ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 31 January 1910, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

grasped the musical ideas in “Salome” the opera is as clear as daylight, and you marvel that others think it obscure or lacking in beauty.

So with “Elektra.” Don’t be bamboozled with the idea that “Elektra” is musical rot; that it is artistically “impossible”; that it is composed by a mad man to a poem written by a mad man about a mad woman, and possibly that only a mad impresario would think of producing it. That is all current cant. Forget it!³⁹

In his defense of the opera, Hammerstein upholds modernism as a symbol of progress.

His comparison of *Salome* to a skyscraper was clearly meant to arouse the sympathy of New Yorkers, whose Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower currently held the status as the world’s tallest building.⁴⁰ While Krehbiel and his ilk had presented the encroachment of modernism as a symbol of decay and decline, Hammerstein presented it as a march towards the future. Once more downplaying the critic’s voice, Hammerstein urged the audience, “when the opera is finished and you are left gasping in your seat, then ask how well or how ill Mr. Strauss has embodied in music the words, emotions, action, and spirit of this tremendous work.”⁴¹

The day after this statement appeared in the city’s papers, the *Times* responded in kind:

It is very like Mr. HAMMERSTEIN to prelude the first performance of RICHARD STRAUSS’S “Elektra” to-night by a pronunciamento in its favor, a remarkable document truly, quite unprecedented in its quality and purpose, we believe, in the record of public utterances by entrepreneurs. Mr. HAMMERSTEIN is annoyed by the circulation of reports that the music of “Elektra” resembles a multitudinous catfight, accompanied by the noises of a boiler factory in the rush season for boilers. . . . It was the late EDGAR W. NYE (called “Bill”) who discovered that WAGNER’S music is a

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The Metropolitan Life Tower held the distinction from 1909-1913. It was preceded by the Singer Building and eventually surpassed by the Woolworth Building, both also located in New York City. “Metropolitan Life Tower,” The Skyscraper Center: The Global Tall Building Database of the CTBUH, accessed August 3, 2017, <http://www.skyscrapercenter.com/building/metropolitan-life-tower/1383>.

⁴¹ “The Proper Mood to Enjoy ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 31 January 1910, 7.

great deal better than it sounds. In his day and generation the “wooly wiseacres” found WAGNER empty, noisy, ear-blistering, and unworthy of the attention of the student of MOZART and ROSSINI. How times have changed! WAGNER, to the ear of the present generation, coos as softly as any dove. Cacophony is no longer ascribed to him. Let us admit that the world, whatever the magnitude of its debt to him, owes much to his expounders and interpreters.

Mr. HAMMERSTEIN must make up his mind that the music and the drama of STRAUSS are as yet caviar to the general. To be sure, the general no longer shun caviar. But they take it up in their eagerness to know all things. They will take up “Elektra.” Thousands will hear it, but only some hundreds of them in the beginning will seriously try to understand it. The others will take their impressions as they come. They will talk “words, words, words.” They will say you cannot hear the music for the sound. But “Elektra” will be the “sensation” of this musical season. It may be an abiding joy in later seasons. STRAUSS may live to be out-Straussed, and to the ears of the rising generation his music may seem as sweetly simple as MENDELSSOHN’S. But for the present it is well to expect vehemence, tumult, strange discord in “Elektra.”⁴²

The *Times*, even in its less than enthusiastic description of the music, gives *Elektra* the benefit of the doubt not seen with *Salome*. Although it was only a few years later, there is more willingness on the part of some critics to admit that musical tastes were changing.

After the first performance, the *Staats-Zeitung* noted that the audience was unusually receptive. In addition to the abnormal fullness of the house, including a standing room of “musical friends” seven rows deep, the audience exhibited an unaccustomed openness to the music: “We have rarely seen as devout a listening audience in an American theater.”⁴³ When it came to the score, a number of critics commented on its difficult—and perhaps unpleasant—qualities, yet often chalked it up to its modernism and the need to elicit the appropriate atmosphere for Hofmannsthal’s text. This was, overall, the tenor of the reception. The warnings of Western civilization’s demise that had

⁴² “The Prelude to ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 1 February 1910, 8.

⁴³ “‘Elektra’ triumphirt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 February 1910, 7.

accompanied so much of *Salome*'s coverage were largely missing. By 1909, the musical world had changed—this was after all the same year Schoenberg composed his *Fünf Orchesterstücke*, Op. 16, and *Erwartung*, Op. 17. Oddly enough, the only group that vociferously demanded its removal was a collective of Greek Americans led by Raymond Duncan (1874–1966), the brother of Isadora (1877–1927), who was married to a Greek woman, Penelope Sikelianos (1882–1925), and became an advocate for classical Greek attire and the culture of antiquity.⁴⁴ In reaction to the opera, Duncan called a meeting at the Greek Church of the Evangile to protest what he saw as “a defamation of the work of the classic Greeks.”⁴⁵ Hammerstein, apparently, was not convinced.

Much praise was given to Mariette Mazarin (1874–1953), whose opening night performance as Elektra so taxed the singer that she reportedly fainted before the audience during her curtain call.⁴⁶ Discussing her preparation for the part, Mazarin noted that she had been inspired by visits to a mental health institution.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ This insistence on dressing in classical clothing had resulted in Raymond Duncan's son, Menalkas, being taken by the Children's Society just a few weeks prior to this on 8 January 1910, when the boy was seen walking through the city wearing a “blouse stretching from his neck to half way below his knees, a pair of sandals, and, apparently, nothing else.” “Bare-Legged Boy Shocks a Policeman,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1910, 3.

⁴⁵ The largest complaint by Duncan was the “modern” and “degenerate” presentation of the drama, which he compared to being held in “much the same light [by the Greeks] that they do their Bible,” a sentiment that clearly paralleled the 1907 reaction against *Salome*. “Greeks Condemn Opera of ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 8 February 1910, 9.

According to the *Times*, nearly 1,000 people attended the protest held at the church, which was primarily led by Duncan. “‘Elektra’ Defames Classics, Say Greeks,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1910, 7.

⁴⁶ “Mme. Mazarin in Faint,” *New-York Tribune*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁴⁷ Mazarin's decision to speak to the *Times* regarding her preparation for the role was partly to quell a series of rumors that had begun to spread regarding her mental state. In its introduction to the interview, the *Times* noted that some have conjectured Mazarin had been left in a “constant state of nervous excitement” and that the long rehearsals and taxing performance was becoming too much for her. There was even talk that she could

I have learned many of the gestures I use in “Elektra” in a sanitarium for the insane. At one time I had a friend who was a nurse in such an institution, and I spent six months there myself. I thought of becoming a trained nurse at that time. I have no fear of an insane person. I have no fear of anything. But I studied the movements of these people. They interested me. The most violent patients became tractable in my hands. I had merely to look at them and they subsided. At the time this experience of mine appeared to be valueless, but all experience acquires a value if you live long enough. So I found that I could use this when I took up the study of “Elektra.”⁴⁸

While Mazarin’s comments are far from an indictment of Strauss’s opera, her choice to present this character as a sufferer of mental illness fits into a pattern of how some chose to view his music. It is impossible not to be reminded of the cries of degeneracy and disease that had accompanied Strauss’s work for years.

At the same time that Strauss’s music was being branded “pathological” by some of his detractors, the actual study of the pathological was increasingly being associated in the United States with Sigmund Freud, a leading figure of Austrian—and by implication German—intellectualism. In the months before *Elektra* was introduced to American audiences, Freud’s theories were gaining ground in the United States—particularly following his 1909 lectures at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts.⁴⁹ Over the next few years, the American public would have access to Freud’s work through the publication of the English translations of his major works, beginning with the 1913 publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and continuing with *A General Introduction*

only remember the part by studying the score as she was about to walk on stage. Mazarin staunchly denied all of this. “Elektra Studied in Lunatic Asylum,” *New York Times*, 14 February 1910, 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ F. H. Matthews, “The Americanization of Sigmund Freud: Adaptations of Psychoanalysis before 1917,” *Journal of American Studies* 1.1 (1967): 39–40.

to *Psychoanalysis* (1920) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922).⁵⁰ A sign of his rising esteem was his October 1924 appearance on the cover of *Time*.⁵¹ Not everyone, however, was fond of the Austrian psychoanalyst. Critics of Freud often focused on the purported sexual perversion found within his work. This was, notably, a similar accusation thrown at Strauss for both *Salome* and *Elektra*. These similar reactions point to an opinion held by some in the United States towards Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century. In a review of Stewart Paton's (1865–1942) *Human Behavior in Relation to the Study of Educational, Social, and Ethical Problems* (1921), the *Times* noted Paton's optimism for the future, which relied on a critical self-study that rejected many of the ideas of the past few decades.

He finds his hope upon the emerging willingness of man to study himself by actual investigation and to direct his conduct by its results rather than by theories spun out of air. He is quite sure that if man had begun to study mankind in this way fifty years ago there would have been no World War. For he believes that the military party in Germany was not so much responsible for the Germanic development that led to the catastrophe as were the intellectual processes and ideals of that nation, which would have been recognized as the harbingers of national madness if mankind had had a better acquaintance with itself.⁵²

Much of Paton's condemnation of the German state around the turn of the twentieth century was embodied in the work of Freud, whose work he approached with undisguised disdain. Paton's criticism was not isolated. For those that viewed Strauss's music and Freud's theories as symbols of Western decline, Germany represented the archetypal

⁵⁰ Raymond E. Fancher, "Snapshots of Freud in America, 1899–1999," *American Psychologist* 55.9 (2000): 1026.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Paton was a leading figure in eugenics and had served for a period as president of the Eugenics Research Association. "'Carrying On' Without Freud," *New York Times*, 29 May 1921, 36.

nation in decay, a shell of its former self.⁵³ When Henderson or Krehbiel decried Strauss as the arbiter of musical degeneration, they were also decrying what they viewed as the deterioration of German music overall.

Krehbiel, unsurprisingly, tore apart Strauss's newest opera. In explaining Hofmannsthal's modernization of the Elektra story, he described earlier versions, including Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, before turning his attention to Hofmannsthal, who he argued led the audience "into the shambles and the charnel house; we must also go with him into the presence of the mentally diseased into the madhouse."⁵⁴ Krehbiel, as in the past, utilizes the charnel house and mental illness as symbols of the work's degeneracy. Criticizing the state of modernism, Krehbiel further notes: "things which were once too sacred to be treated lightly are the piquances [*sic*] of the decadent poets and dramatists of to-day."⁵⁵ This tendency towards decadence finds its counterpart in Strauss's score, specifically in its effort to create an atmosphere for the text, which he argues was also true of *Salome*. For Krehbiel, the music is mainly decorative: "It illuminates the psychological and physiological bestiality of the people of the play. It does not, as music in its best estate in the compositions of Wagner does, act the part of the antique Greek chorus, in commenting on and reflecting the horror (and

⁵³ This is an inescapable subject in German literature of the period—one particularly famous example being Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924). In the novel, Hans Castorp, the visiting protagonist who soon finds himself unwilling to leave the sanatorium, is associated with degeneracy. Throughout the novel, Castorp is described as too workmanlike, too bourgeois, too vulgar, too realistic, and lacking in artistry—all accusations thrown at Strauss throughout his career. As a stand-in for Germany, Castorp emerges as the symbol of a nation in decline, in much the same way that Strauss did for many critics of the period.

⁵⁴ "Music: Richard Strauss's 'Elektra,'" *New-York Tribune*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

when it may the cheer) of the drama, but revels in it and glorifies it.”⁵⁶ While he describes the music as “virtuoso music of the highest order,” Krehbiel criticizes this brilliance and vibrancy as essentially empty:

In spite of the potency of the modern music, what a difference in the potential melos! Marvel as we may at the music of this lyric drama in its newest phase, there can be no other conclusion than that its brilliancy is the strongest proof of its decadence. The age of greatest technical skill—“virtuosity,” as it is called—is the age of greatest decay in really creative energy.⁵⁷

As Henderson had argued with Strauss’s tone poems, the beauty of traditional music—represented by Haydn, Mozart, and Wagner—represented a universal and eternal art, while the modernism of Strauss signified disease. When describing the staying power of the opera, Krehbiel argues that public interest “burns itself out speedily because it finds no healthy nourishment in them; nothing to warm the emotions, exalt the mind, permanently to charm the senses, awaken the desire for frequent companionship or foster a taste like that created by a contemplation of the true, the beautiful and the good.”⁵⁸

Once more equating modernism with disease, Krehbiel further notes:

Pathological subjects belong to the field of scientific knowledge—not to that of art. A visit to a madhouse or an infirmary may be undertaken once to gratify curiosity; aesthetic pleasure can never come from frequent contemplation of mental and moral abnormalities or physical monstrosities. No pleasure can accrue to lovers of beauty from the fact that there is harmony between such dramas as “Salome” and “Elektra” and the musical investiture which Richard Strauss has given to them. Taste for the plays is likely to be paired with taste for the music; and the reason is that the taste, like the things which it approves, is unhealthy. Curiosity is easily satisfied; the taste for truly beautiful things grows with its gratification, and though it changes its ideas, it changes them slowly and never departs wholly from its fundamental principles. Even with the deplorable tendency of to-day toward nervous degeneracy, with all its

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

sorrowful consequences, there is no need to fear that neurasthenia will overwhelm all forms of art, or even dramatic music, speedily. Mozart and Beethoven have not yet been dethroned, and the banishment of their music to the limbo of forgotten things is not imminent. We shall enjoy “Hänsel und Gretel” next Saturday; and be comforted.⁵⁹

While some may have argued that Strauss’s music pointed to a vibrant future, Krehbiel chooses to find solace in the past, believing that Strauss would not soon supplant Mozart or Beethoven.⁶⁰ This review underscores Krehbiel’s belief that modernism in the arts reflected a certain neurosis that was indicative of modern life. Mazarin’s inspiration for the role would hardly have surprised him.

The denunciations of disease often focused on the libretto in much the same way they had with *Salome*. In some instances, the connection between Hofmannsthal and Wilde was made quite explicit: “it can be seen that Strauss has not abandoned his taste for the perverted drama.”⁶¹ Links between the two writers had been drawn before. As Robert Vilain documents, one of the earliest comparisons between the two appeared in 1906 with the publication of Gustav Landauer’s (1870–1919) “Drei Damen und ihre Richter.”⁶² In his study of Wilde’s reception in Germany and Austria, Vilain discusses Hofmannsthal’s reaction to Wilde, whom he viewed as a crucial representative of “Ästhetismus”—a translation of the French “estétisme.”⁶³ This shared interest in the aesthetic movement is what seemed to mark the two writers as kindred spirits. Vilain

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Curiously, *Hänsel und Gretel*, as was also seen with *Salome*, appears as an antipode to the modernism of *Elektra*.

⁶¹ “Elektra,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1910, SM4.

⁶² Robert Vilain, “Tragedy and the Apostle of Beauty: The Early Literary Reception of Oscar Wilde in Germany and Austria,” in *The Reception of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Stefano Evangelista (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 176.

⁶³ Ibid.

notes that this may not have actually been the case. Throughout the 1890s, Hofmannsthal had worked to distance himself from the aestheticism of Wilde.⁶⁴ In a number of his novels, essays, and poems Hofmannsthal rejected Wilde's view of art above all else. At one point, he referred to Wilde's *Intentions* (1891) as "strong narcotic magic, sophisticatedly seductive, inelegantly paradoxical."⁶⁵ This effort to distance himself did not work. Hofmannsthal, when it came to *Elektra*, was viewed by many critics as another Wilde.

The *Times* used Romain Rolland's (1866–1944) *Jean-Christophe* (1904–1912)—a novel concerning a German musician named Jean-Christophe Krafft that encompassed ten volumes and was referred to by Rolland as a "musical novel"—to understand Hofmannsthal's relationship to modernism.⁶⁶

Romain Rolland in a romance called "Jean Christophe," writes: "Recently a German, Stephen von Hellmuth, has mingled Ibsen, Homer, and Oscar Wilde in a piece which he calls 'Iphegenia.' Agamemnon is neurasthenic and Achilles impotent. All the energy of the drama is concentrated in Iphegenia, an Iphegenia who is nervous, hysterical, and pedantic, who gives lessons to the heroes, declaims furiously, lectures to her audience in a vein of Nietzschean pessimism, and, mad to die, kills herself in a fit of insane laughter."

Perhaps Rolland was referring to von Hofmannsthal's "Elektra" in his description of an imaginary poet's imaginary drama. At any rate a single detail is changed. No one is impotent in "Elektra," but, on the other hand, everybody is neurasthenic!⁶⁷

In *La Révolte* (1905), Hellmuth, whose work is described as a mixture of Ibsen and Wilde, is forced upon the composer, Krafft, as his librettist. By linking Hofmannsthal

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Notably, Rolland's German musician spends the vast majority of the novel outside of Germany, particularly in Switzerland and Paris, a commentary on the shift away from German musical dominance caused by the emergence of modernism.

⁶⁷ "Elektra," *New York Times*, 16 January 1910, SM4.

with Hellmuth, the *Times* suggests that Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* is also a mixture of the decadence, disease, neurasthenics, and modernism that Wilde, Ibsen, and their works represented. The *Times* may also be suggesting that the blame for the work's degeneracy rests primarily with the poet, rather than the composer. Strauss, however, chose to set Hofmannsthal's work to music, which demonstrated a pattern of behavior on the part of the composer. As the *Times* noted: "Strauss's choice of the subject for his latest production was quite on a par with his choice for 'Salome.' It is a treatment of an ancient theme in the sensational spirit of what calls itself 'modern'; a spirit that is morbid, neurotic, exaggerated."⁶⁸ Both *Elektra* and *Salome* wallowed in the same atmosphere of delirious decadence, yet *Elektra*—for some—managed to push the boundaries even further.⁶⁹ After the opera concluded, the *Times* warned that the audience was "left in a state of mind bordering on delirium. One experienced the same feeling after hearing 'Salome,' but in a lesser degree."⁷⁰

Given Hammerstein's decision to present the work in French translation, there were obvious connections drawn to his production of *Salome*. Since Strauss was the dominant face of German opera at the period, this decision did not go unnoticed. As with *Salome*, some debated what this did to the work. *Elektra*, according to the *Tribune*, was German.⁷¹ In its article, the *Times* noted the same thing:

Von Hofmannsthal's "Elektra" is no more Greek drama than Oscar Wilde's "Salome" is the Bible. Walter Eaton has called it a "backyard

⁶⁸ "Strauss's 'Elektra' at the Manhattan," *New York Times*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁶⁹ "[Strauss] saw in it the same sort of opportunity for his extraordinary musical expertness; and he deliberately endeavored to go beyond his former achievement in piling up the effects of 'Elektra.' This, he himself avowed, should be a 'Salome' raised to a higher power." *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "Elektra," *New York Times*, 16 January 1910, SM4.

⁷¹ "At the Manhattan," *New-York Tribune*, 6 February 1910, B2.

Sophocles,” a clever reference to the fact that the German playwright has shifted the action of the drama from the front to the rear of the palace of Agamemnon. And here it is that the strident, bloodthirsty, German, Elektra tears at her rage, digs up the hatchet which has slain Agamemnon with her fingers, and finally dances a delirious dance of triumph over the death of her mother and Aegisthus, which ends in a swoon as do the dances of the whirling dervishes, a Sadic dance, a dance of blood.⁷²

Similar to the debate over the “Germanness” of *Salome*, the *Times* referred to Elektra as “strident,” “bloodthirsty,” and, perhaps most significantly, “German.” Many critics described the opera as demonstrating a particularly German sensibility—although often not clarifying exactly what it was that made it so. The *Staats-Zeitung* devoted less time to this opera than it had *Salome*, possibly because of its French translation. Its commentary on the language though was far less disapproving than some of the English-language press. Mazarin, the paper assured its readers, had successfully performed the role of Salome in French and had earned numerous laurels for her work on the French stage.⁷³ In reference to Hofmannsthal’s text, the paper observed that the French language did not diminish its “many poetic beauties.”⁷⁴ It seems that the *Staats-Zeitung* was more interested in New Yorkers finally getting to hear *Elektra*—a work it described as having been simultaneously lifted to heaven with praise and condemned to hell by critics—than in what language it was performed.⁷⁵

A familiar topic in the coverage was whether to consider Strauss a craftsman or an artist. For those who considered him a technician, astonishment was expressed at the recognition scene between Elektra and Orestes. As the *Times* noted: “Some critics have

⁷² “Elektra,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1910, SM4.

⁷³ “Die Musikwelt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 30 January 1910, 15.

⁷⁴ “‘Elektra’ triumphirt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁷⁵ “Die Musikwelt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 30 January 1910, 15.

been surprised to discover emotion in ‘Elektra.’ Strauss has so long been referred to as an ‘intellectual composer,’ a composer of the brain rather than of the heart, that anything in his music which produces a different effect is sure to evoke a new interest.”⁷⁶ To bolster this assertion, the *Times* included a lengthy quotation from Pierre Lalo (1866–1943), French critic for *Le Temps*, who described this moment as emotionally compelling, yet also criticized Strauss’s overt complexity, excessive ornamentation, and heavy reliance on strange harmonies and unusual orchestration to achieve excessively descriptive music.⁷⁷

The *Times* reiterated this criticism in a different review:

The orchestral score is a kaleidoscope of themes and thematic fragments, by which Strauss has endeavored to illustrate in the minutest detail every utterance, every reference, and allusion upon the stage, every action, every suggestion of passion, mood, and motive. It is the Straussian principle carried to its ultimate limit, that everything can be expressed definitely and intelligibly in musical terms. . . . Strauss, in his later works, has become more and more indifferent to the purely musical quality of his material, to its potency for specifically musical development. He seeks only such as admits of plastic or picturesque development, superficial suggestion, all sorts of ingenuities in manipulation, combination; bits that might serve for the purposes of a Chinese puzzle, or that could be pieced together as a mosaic.⁷⁸

This commentary could easily have been found among the reviews of the tone poems, which also described his music as too technical to be musical.⁷⁹ Later in the same article, the *Times* described the music as “written with a more reckless disregard for what has hitherto passed for tonal beauty and expressiveness than any other Strauss has produced.

⁷⁶ “Elektra,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1910, SM4.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “Strauss’s ‘Elektra’ at the Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁷⁹ “What with this material and with his use of orchestral effect Strauss is able to create an atmosphere that, for want of another name, may be called musical, and impose the mood of the drama, is undeniable. The extraordinary complication of this orchestral part is the instant reflection of every aspect of the drama. In it Strauss’s wonderful technical skill is shown at its highest.” *Ibid.*

He puts his motives together with absolute unconcern as to harmony or the preservation of tonality.”⁸⁰ Returning to the familiar attack that Strauss put description over emotion, the *Times* remarked: “Strauss clings even closer to the letter than the spirit in his dramatic illustrations, and he has again made his score teem with fantastic exaggerations of all sorts of verbal details.”⁸¹ The *Staats-Zeitung*, recognizing the tendency of the English-language press to brandish Strauss a technician, declared: “Technique, yes, but the technique is genius.”⁸²

Familiar from the coverage of *Salome*, there was also concern over Strauss’s ability to write vocal parts, which the *Times* described as “unsingable.”⁸³ Examining the vocal lines, the *Times* argued that “they have nothing melodic, nothing thematic, nothing that has any recognizable outline even as musical declamation. As one critic has remarked, Strauss uses the voices merely for a kind of characteristic shouting. It is in itself of little or no expressiveness.”⁸⁴ All of this to say that the treatment of the voice was anything but musical. These comparisons being drawn between *Salome* and *Elektra* were made easier by Hammerstein’s decision to include *Salome* as part of the season’s repertoire.⁸⁵ After seeing *Elektra*, some now began to view Strauss’s previous opera in a

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² “‘Elektra’ triumphirt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁸³ “Strauss’s ‘Elektra’ at the Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ In his typically dismissive style, Krehbiel proffered the following reaction to Hammerstein’s decision to present *Salome* and *Elektra* on the same day, which also happened to coincide with a concert by the Boston Orchestra featuring *Sinfonia Domestica*: “whether any public was ever before asked to endure five hours or more of Richard Strauss in a single day is not of record. It was a gracious Providence that made it impossible for any one person to hear it all.” “Music: No End of Richard Strauss’s Music,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 March 1910, 7.

more sympathetic light: “[*Elektra*] is inferior to [*Salome*], inferior in its dramatic interest and inferior in the opportunities it gives to the musician, especially along the line of sensuous beauty. ‘*Salome*’ doubtless contains much that is merely ugly in the way of sound, but it stands out in clear melodic outline when placed beside the later music drama.”⁸⁶ While the passage of time had smoothed some of *Salome*’s rougher edges, it was the intensity of *Elektra* that had shown the work’s softer side. Some critics were even beginning to argue that *Salome* would endure and become a regular fixture of the repertoire. The same, though, could not be said of *Elektra*.⁸⁷ The *Staats-Zeitung*, which also tended to favor *Salome*, did not go this far, although it did contend that *Elektra* was far more aggressive in its modernism. Referring to comments made by Richard Specht (1870–1932), the paper labeled Strauss a “noble anarchist,” while also remarking on the difficulty of the score, which made *Tristan und Isolde* seem like “child’s play.”⁸⁸

In an interview for the *Times*, Max Fiedler (1859–1939), German conductor and composer, addressed this issue: “Yes, certainly; this music will endure. We are too close to Strauss to be able to make an estimate of his final place in music, but there is no doubt whatever that much of his work is for all time. . . . It is the ultimate judgment of musicians which will decide his comparative merit.”⁸⁹ Pressed on Strauss’s complexity and boundary pushing music, Fiedler remarked, “you may be sure that to Strauss it has a

⁸⁶ “*Salome* Heard Again at the Manhattan,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1910, 4.

⁸⁷ “The fact is that the most determined opponents of this composer and his methods must admit that the dramatic force of the work, with the musical expression which grows out of it, bites deep into the consciousness of all who see and hear it. Like it or not, believe in it or not, there is a power in it which is not to be lightly shaken off.” *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ “‘*Elektra*’ triumphirt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 February 1910, 7.

⁸⁹ “Does ‘*Elektra*’ Belong to the Music of the Future,” *New York Times*, 6 March 1910, SM7.

meaning, all of it; indeed, it has so many meanings that they become confused.”⁹⁰ The lengthy interview touched on many of the themes already discussed, including *Elektra*’s relation to *Salome*: “‘Salome’ has more beauty and will attract many who would be repelled by the unalloyed horrors of ‘Elektra.’ I do not mean that ‘Salome’ is not sufficiently horrible at times, but the music is sweeter and the dissonance less startling.”⁹¹

Returning to a subject much discussed with *Salome*, Fiedler was also asked about Strauss’s connection to Wagner:

Wagner was the great founder of the school to which Strauss belongs. He broke away from all the conventions and raised opera and music drama to heights never before attained. Strauss is his only follower of genius. Therefore it would be difficult to overestimate the influence which Wagner has had upon his follower’s work. But you must not understand me to say that Strauss is not original in many things. He has won his place among the masters and belongs now to the Strauss school. He has produced orchestrations such as Wagner never thought of producing. Wagner, of course, was an infinitely greater genius, and Strauss will never reach the heights on which Wagner moved. You can classify the two composers easily enough in the two categories I spoke of a while ago. Strauss describes to you what you see. Wagner expresses that which is invisible. Strauss sees what is outside; Wagner what is within. Therefore it is not possible to make a just comparison.⁹²

The expansive interview covered an array of topics, including the development of Strauss’s compositional style, which Fiedler contended paralleled the history of Western music over the course of the nineteenth century:

The first stage was what might be called the Mendelssohn-Schumann period when the composer was a devoted admirer and student of those masters. . . . This was followed by a time of discipleship to Brahms And then followed his violin sonata, in which the real Strauss began to appear. At that time he began to break away from all established precedents. In the beginning of this period of emancipation he was devoted to Liszt and Wagner, but before long he proposed to throw them

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

also overboard. He gave up the last pretense to classical form and began his tone poems, in which at last we have the real Strauss at his greatest originality and his best ability.⁹³

Strauss's career trajectory as outlined by Fiedler—moving from the early Romantics, Mendelssohn and Schumann, to the later Romantic style of Brahms before turning towards Wagner and Liszt—was meant to embody the movement of German music from romanticism to modernism. Notably, Fiedler remarks that Strauss would likely be incapable of composing another symphony, since he had broken from that vein. Fiedler, while not as pessimistic as someone like Krehbiel, still viewed Strauss as representing the end of one era and the beginning of another. There was no going back.

If Strauss's career up to this point embodied the larger shift from romanticism to modernism, his next opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*—the first direct collaboration between Strauss and Hofmannsthal—seemingly represented a dramatic about-face. After an absence of nearly six years, it would also mark the return of Strauss to the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House, albeit at a time of great change. Within the span of just a few years, the city would witness the outbreak of a world war, a temporary ban on all German-language operas, a second visit by Strauss, and the return of *Salome* to the Metropolitan stage. While *Rosenkavalier* would become one of Strauss's greatest successes in the city, this period also marked a turning point as the dark clouds of Nazism grew on the horizon.

⁹³ Ibid.

Chapter 7

Strauss and the Specters of the World Wars

Der Rosenkavalier and the Met

Following the extravagances of *Salome* and *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* called into question the modernist persona Strauss seemed to embody. Like his earlier works, *Der Rosenkavalier* garnered extensive coverage in the New York City press, which was largely enthusiastic, although many critics pondered the direction that Strauss's music was taking.¹ As Henderson sarcastically surmised in his written preview of the opera, “those who go expecting to hear a score bearing any resemblance to those of ‘Salome’ and ‘Elektra’ will be cheerfully disappointed.”²

An early article from the *Times* entitled “What is the Difference Between Richard and Johann Strauss?” provides a representative example of the confusion caused by Strauss's aesthetic about-face.³ The article, printed in 1911, appeared years before New

¹ Mostly free of the controversy that had greeted *Salome* and *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier* was presented as a success for the composer. In its review of the Dresden premiere, the *Times* argued that Strauss's newest work had been received with far more immediate praise than its two predecessors. There were reports, however, that even *Der Rosenkavalier* was not free from some condemnation. In describing why Dresden was chosen as the site for the premiere, the *Times* noted that Berlin had been taken off the table when the Kaiser declared it “too immoral for that city.” “Author of ‘Salome’ and ‘Elektra’ Proves Sensational Also in His Lighter Effort,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1911, SM14.

² “‘Rosenkavalier’s’ First Performance Here Tuesday,” *New York Sun*, 7 December 1913, 4.

³ This was not the only time that Richard Strauss was confused with another Strauss in regard to this opera. In its introduction to the work, the *Staats-Zeitung* recounted an anecdote in which there had been talk of an English-language version of *Der Rosenkavalier* coming to America. These plans had reportedly been dropped when the would-be impresario realized that this was not an operetta by Oscar Straus (1870–1954)—the Viennese composer of songs and operettas, including the popular *Ein*

Yorkers would get a chance to hear Strauss's latest experiment; however, it worked to prepare audiences for what they could expect. The *Times* positioned Richard Strauss as the paragon of modernism: "discord, violence, horrible shrieks in the night, possible police interference—that's what Richard Strauss has always meant."⁴ Johann, on the other hand, was the essence of traditionalism.⁵ *Der Rosenkavalier* upset this status quo. The *Times*, seeking to explain this development, outlined two popular theories. First, Strauss was an opportunist. Seeing the success of operettas like *Die lustige Witwe* (1905), Strauss emulated such lighter fare to garner financial success.⁶ A similar line of attack had been lobbed at Strauss for his efforts at copyright protections, performances at Wannamaker's in 1904, as well as his choice of subject matter—including *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *Salome*, both of which had been described as attempts to cash in on topics of popular interest.⁷ Second, some writers argued that the Strauss of *Der*

Walzertraum (1907) and *Der tapfere Soldat* (1908)—but was instead an opera by the composer of *Salome* and *Elektra*. "Die Musikwelt," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 17.

⁴ "What is the Difference Between Richard and Johann Strauss," *New York Times*, 26 March 1911, SM5.

⁵ As an exercise for amusement and edification, the *Times* encouraged readers to find a friend "who simply dotes on modern music" and ask him if there is any difference between Richard and Johann—of course, the *Times* does suggest that you first buy him a drink so that "he can't insult you." *Ibid.*

⁶ Among the ideas put forth to explain Strauss's stylistic shift was the theory that he had written the opera as an ironic take on "waltz operas." This theory was used to explain why Strauss's waltz themes seemed so fragmentary. "Week Before Christmas Shows Usual Crowded Schedule of Concerts," *New York Times*, 14 December 1913, X8.

The *Times* outlined a similar theory—which it described as a "harsh judgment"—noting the suggestion by some that this change was the result of a "diminishing number" of performances of *Salome* and *Elektra* coupled with the public's movement towards "comic opera of the 'waltz' type." The turn towards *Der Rosenkavalier* could be read as another instance of Strauss the businessman. "General News and Notes of the Music World," *New York Times*, 7 December 1913, C12.

⁷ This taint of commercialism would even be brought up by Krehbiel in his review of the opera at the Met. Questioning why the opera had been presented outside of the

Rosenkavalier was in fact the real Strauss.⁸ This was an argument made by Jean Chantavoine (1877–1952), who pointed to the earlier works of Strauss as indicative of a mind prone to “sentimental melody and facile harmony.”⁹ To support his argument, Chantavoine highlighted the small melodious moments of *Salome* and *Elektra* as examples of Strauss’s penchant for such music. It should be mentioned that these were the same moments singled out by many of Strauss’s critics as evidence of his musical chicanery and penchant for cheap effects.¹⁰

When *Der Rosenkavalier* did make the eventual jump across the Atlantic, it appeared at a moment of great political and social change.¹¹ Although not the harbinger of such transformations, *Der Rosenkavalier*’s New York City premiere on 9 December

subscription series, Krehbiel ruminated on the possibility that Strauss—“the embodiment of the commercialism of the period”—had forced this increase in prices as part of his contract with the Metropolitan Opera House. “‘Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1913, 9.

As further evidence of this reputation, the *Sun* made an identical claim in its coverage of *Der Rosenkavalier*, noting “Dr. Richard Strauss believes in making the art of composition profitable . . . Dr. Strauss is a luxury. An impresario can get Verdi or Wagner for half the money.” “‘Der Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New York Sun*, 10 December 1913, 7.

⁸ These complaints of Strauss’s aesthetic shifts, monetary interests, and public persona formed the basis of Adorno’s blistering critique of Strauss. For more on this, see Richard Wattenbarger, “A ‘Very German Process’: The Contexts of Adorno’s Strauss Critique,” *19th-Century Music* 25.2-3 (2001-02): 313–336.

⁹ “What is the Difference Between Richard and Johann Strauss,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1911, SM5.

¹⁰ In a conciliatory tone, the *Times* argued that perhaps those who believed it was an operetta and those that believed it was Strauss’s most modern work were in some way both partially correct. “Author of ‘Salome’ and ‘Elektra’ Proves Sensational Also in His Lighter Effort,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1911, SM14.

¹¹ There were rumors that Strauss would come to New York City as a symbol of reconciliation following the *Salome* controversy. To this end, the production of *Der Rosenkavalier* at the Metropolitan would serve as the “treaty of peace” between the two parties. This idealized reconciliation, which never came to fruition, also included a return of *Salome* to the Met under the directorship of Strauss and the American premiere of *Ariadne auf Naxos*. “Mr. Strauss Coming,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 January 1913, 9.

1913 coincided with the end of an era. Just a few years later, the United States would become embroiled in the First World War, German-language operas would be banished from American stages, and the once prevalent German American community would shrink into the shadows, assimilating itself to a point of near oblivion.¹² For this reason, the treatment of *Der Rosenkavalier* both before and after the war serves as an important marker not only of Strauss's position in the city's cultural consciousness, but also, more broadly, the evolving stance towards German culture in the United States by way of America's largest city.

The early reviews of the opera following the New York premiere were generally positive, particularly in light of what critics had come to associate with the name Strauss. As the *Evening World* noted, "the stormy petrel is become a cooing dove, when he isn't a lilting nightingale."¹³ In its review, the *Times* noted the overall lightness, specifically in the treatment of the voice, which had not been the case with *Salome* or *Elektra*, both of which had been widely criticized for seeming to place the voice in secondary position to the orchestra.¹⁴ Another source of praise was Strauss's orchestration, which again was not

¹² In *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*, Russell A. Kazal describes several trends of the 1920s—including the declining memberships in German American societies, the shuttering of German-language newspapers, and decreasing German-language religious institutions—as indications of assimilation on the part of German Americans. While his work is on the German American community of Philadelphia, Kazal's observations are also true of New York City. For more on this subject, see Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 197–212.

¹³ "Richard Strauss's 'Rosenkavalier' Rich in Melody," *New York Evening World*, 10 December 1913, 17.

¹⁴ Although it was quick to add that Strauss frequently slipped back into old habits: "there are places enough . . . where he uses all the batteries of his orchestra to pile up the fracas of a comic situation till it might be the announcement of the Judgment Day." "Der Rosenkavalier Greeted by Throng," *New York Times*, 10 December 1913, 11.

something new, although the *Times* did note that Strauss was utilizing an orchestra much smaller than those employed in his previous operas.¹⁵ There was also less focus on the immorality of *Der Rosenkavalier* than there had been with either *Salome* or *Elektra*; however, objections were not entirely absent. In particular, Henderson criticized the opening scene between the Marschallin and Octavian and the third act's suggestive nature, which he viewed as symptoms of the period's increasingly immoral theatrical scene.¹⁶ For Henderson, the work's saving grace was that it was in German and would therefore go unnoticed by most of the audience, who "pay precious little attention to the text."¹⁷ In the eyes of the *Tribune*, "the great Goddess Lubricity is ever potent in her appeal."¹⁸ Perhaps trying to quell any controversy, the *Staats-Zeitung* noted that the presence of the bed in the first act was not in itself unprecedented, but it did admit that this may have been the first time it was not presented as a site of death, as in *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, or *Otello*.¹⁹

In its initial review, the *Staats-Zeitung* also took up the question of Strauss's aesthetic shift: "Was it a reversal? Was it a new development? None of these. People simply overlook that Strauss likes to make people think with his works . . . he wants with

¹⁵ Although as the *Times* noted, Strauss still utilized a varied instrumentation. "General News and Notes of the Music World," *New York Times*, 7 December 1913, C12.

¹⁶ In his preview of the work, Henderson described the story as more "Gallic than Teutonic, for it revels in situations which are usually described as risky. In these days such things are accepted as matters of course and the liberal display of beds will probably shock none but the very delicate." "'Rosenkavalier's' First Performance Here Tuesday," *New York Sun*, 7 December 1913, 4.

¹⁷ "'Der Rosenkavalier' Viewed as a Work of Art," *New York Sun*, 14 December 1913, 4.

¹⁸ "'Der Rosenkavalier' Will Be Sung Tuesday," *New-York Tribune*, 7 December 1913, B4.

¹⁹ "Der Rosenkavalier," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 15 and 17.

each work to find a new style.”²⁰ In this desire for experimentation, the *Staats-Zeitung* drew a connection between Strauss and Wagner; however, it cautioned that this comparison should not be further developed. The principal concern of the *Staats-Zeitung* was the deficit of Strauss operas in the repertoire. Since the disastrous incident with *Salome*, none of Strauss’s other works for the stage had been mounted at the Metropolitan.²¹ The paper viewed the success of *Der Rosenkavalier* as a sign on the part of the audience of its approval of Strauss and disapproval of *Salome*’s removal seven years before.²² It did not, though, suffer any illusions that this would herald a new era of Strauss productions.²³

There were also the usual voices of dissent.²⁴ The *Tribune*, as to be expected, was at the front of much of this criticism.²⁵ First condemning the decision to call it a “comedy for music,” rather than an *opera buffa*, the *Tribune* then focused its animosity on Strauss’s use of a *Leitmotiv* system, which the paper viewed as a deliberate act designed to avoid comparisons with Mozart.²⁶ After making this claim, the *Tribune* went on to do

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Die Musikwelt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 17.

²² “Der Rosenkavalier,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 15 and 17.

²³ “Die Musikwelt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 17.

²⁴ Even in regard to the treatment of the voice, the *Tribune* admitted that *Der Rosenkavalier* marked an improvement over Strauss’s earlier operas, yet still criticized the composer for “overburdening” the voice to the point of unintelligibility.

“‘Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1913, 9.

²⁵ In its review, the *Evening World* presented the reaction to the work as mixed, noting that fewer than a dozen people left before the final curtain and that many stayed behind to repeatedly call out the performers; however, there was much “shaking of heads and wagging of tongues in the lobbies between acts by the musically learned.” “Richard Strauss’s ‘Rosenkavalier’ Rich in Melody,” *New York Evening World*, 10 December 1913, 17.

²⁶ “‘Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1913, 9.

just that by presenting a series of comparisons between Strauss's opera and *Le nozze di Figaro*.²⁷ At its core, this line of attack could be neatly boiled down to the familiar dichotomy of traditionalism versus modernism seen in the earlier comparison between Johann and Richard Strauss.²⁸ While this was obviously not a new form of criticism, Strauss's homage to an older idiom naturally complicated his customary role as modernist. Mozart may have been the obvious foil; however, Wagner's legacy was also evoked as a point of reference. In describing the fragmentary nature of Strauss's moments of melodic beauty, the *Tribune* presented this lack of "melodic flow" as Strauss's "confession of his inability to either continue Wagner's method, to improve on it or invent anything new in its place."²⁹

Not to be outdone, the *Sun* was equally critical of Strauss's composition. Stressing that the work was not the usual "turmoil of ugliness," the *Sun*—likely Henderson—went on to describe the score as "light, frequently charming, sometimes almost beautiful, often

Mention of Wagner's Leitmotiv system also appeared in the *Sun*, which described the score as "leading motive music," yet "only a few of the themes have any real importance." "Der Rosenkavalier' At Metropolitan," *New York Sun*, 10 December 1913, 7.

²⁷ In its preview of the opera, the *Times* had commented on some of the similarities between *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Figaro* before noting that these comparisons between the two would not stand up to further examination: "Strauss has not made himself, nor attempted to make himself, into a Mozart, nor is von Hofmannsthal a Beaumarchais or a Da Ponte. There is practically nothing in the musical style and treatment of this opera to suggest Mozart." "General News and Notes of the Music World," *New York Times*, 7 December 1913, C12.

The *Staats-Zeitung* took the comparison between the two works as simple fact, noting that the figure of Octavian must have his origins in that of Cherubino. "Der Rosenkavalier," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herald*, 10 December 1913, 7.

²⁸ In decrying the use of the waltz as an anachronism, the *Tribune* further criticized Strauss's penchant for interrupting the melody with "dissonant thorns and thistles." "Rosenkavalier' At Metropolitan," *New-York Tribune*, 10 December 1913, 9.

²⁹ Once more, Humperdinck is upheld as the one composer who successfully continued and built upon the legacy of Wagner. *Ibid.*

prosaic, dull and lifeless.”³⁰ Condemning both Strauss and Hofmannsthal in their treatment of the comedic moments and the love triangle, the *Sun* proclaimed: “no one would have expected anything delicate or captivating in style from the two eminent collaborators who so foully debauched the classic story of Electra. . . . Woodchoppers cannot cut cameos.”³¹ Addressing the publicity that had arisen around the work, the *Sun* declared that “far too much importance” had been given to Strauss’s newest opera.³² Henderson returned to the opera on 14 December in order to reevaluate the work upon further hearing.³³ His ultimate judgment: “The thing has no standing as a work of art. It is not even a good piece of workmanship. It is filled with manifestations of stupidity in construction and absence of stagecraft.”³⁴

Despite these negative reviews, *Der Rosenkavalier* eventually became a fixture on the Metropolitan’s stage. As audiences—and critics—grew more familiar with the work, attitudes towards it became a bit more fixed.³⁵ More so than with either *Salome* or

³⁰ In a somewhat unusual stance, the *Sun* was particularly disapproving of the final ten minutes, which it described as “a ridiculous and meaningless piece of pantomime.” Even in the *Tribune*, which had been equally dismissive of the opera, the concluding moments of the opera were upheld as a bright example of musical beauty. “‘Der Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New York Sun*, 10 December 1913, 7.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Henderson was often concerned with the role of the critic. He was particularly worried about the perceived diminishment of the critic’s influence: “[I]n the end it has to be the public which makes the decision as to the worth or worthlessness of a production. . . . Of all the people wholly unfitted by habit and attitude of mind to arrive at a correct judgment of a new play or opera the confessed first nighter is the worst.” “‘Der Rosenkavalier’ Viewed as a Work of Art,” *New York Sun*, 14 December 1913, 4.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ In a review from 1916, the *Times* noted a vitality on the part of the opera before suggesting that when it came to Strauss, one could never be sure if performances were given because of the work’s popularity or as the result of “conditions imposed by contract with the composer and his representatives, who are both astute and severe in their

Elektra, which had both elicited strong sentiments of support or antagonism, the opinions were somewhat ambivalent. The *Times*, which had been one of the less critical voices following the premiere, attributed these “mingled emotions” to the “singular inequalities of the work.”³⁶ Strauss’s attempt at comic opera resulted in “passages . . . of great beauty, passages of feeling and emotion, of teeming life, of delicate and subtle evocation of mood. There are long and wearisome passages of rude and elementary horseplay; matter no better than much that has been long discarded from theatres of the second class, and that would not be tolerated in such.”³⁷ When it came to the comedy, one source of complaint was the work’s nationality. From the *Tribune*: “Cuts are needed, and needed badly, especially in the scenes of so-called humor—humor that is so utterly Teutonic that much of it is incomprehensible to nations possessing less of Prussian kultur.”³⁸ The *Tribune*’s commentary clearly suggests a degree of separation between the German-speaking and non-German-speaking Americans in attendance at the Metropolitan.³⁹ This line of critique became one of the central complaints of the *Tribune*, which criticized Hertz for not “curtail[ing] . . . the Teutonism.”⁴⁰ For its part, the *Staats-Zeitung*

requirements.” “‘Rosenkavalier’ Brilliantly Given,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1916, 9.

³⁶ “‘Rosenkavalier’ At Metropolitan,” *New York Times*, 21 November 1914, 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

This passage would also appear word for word in a review of a November 1916 production of the opera, which lifted much of its commentary from this earlier review.

See, “‘Rosenkavalier’ Brilliantly Given,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1916, 9.

³⁸ “Strauss Opera Pleases Throng,” *New-York Tribune*, 21 November 1914, 7.

³⁹ It was around this time that *Kultur* was taking on political associations. Some Germans, following the signing of the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” in October 1914, began upholding the protection of *Kultur* as a reason for war. Those who objected to art being used for such purposes met this rhetoric with condemnation. Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 198–199.

⁴⁰ “Der Rosenkavalier Sung,” *New-York Tribune*, 3 December 1914, 7.

commended any new work in German as a welcome addition to a languishing German-language repertoire at the house. Unlike its English-language counterparts, however, the *Staats-Zeitung* stressed the opera's Austrian—rather than generically Teutonic—pedigree, noting its use of Viennese dialogue—along with the admittedly anachronistic waltz melodies—as features that made it distinctly Austrian in flavor.⁴¹

Overall, the pre-war reception of *Der Rosenkavalier* was, with some exceptions, more positive—and obviously far less controversial—than Strauss's previous endeavors. Like so much else though, *Der Rosenkavalier* would not be able to stay above the fray resulting from the escalation of war in Europe and the eventual entry of the United States.

Over There: The World War and the German Enemy at Home and Abroad

In any discussion of German cultural traditions in the United States during the first part of the twentieth century, the First World War marks a clear schism. For opera in the city, the disruption from the war came by way of a ban on German-language works at the Metropolitan beginning with the 1917–18 season.⁴² The first shot across the cultural bow was from Germany, which forbade members of the German Stage Society from making contractual agreements with American theaters.⁴³ In a half-hearted attempt to feign neutrality, Nikolaus Graf von Seebach (1854–1930) argued that the ban had nothing

⁴¹ “Der Rosenkavalier,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 7 December 1913, 15 and 17.

⁴² Somewhat ironically—considering the later ban—news of the declaration of war was delivered during a performance of *Parsifal*. Irving Kolodin, *The Metropolitan Opera, 1883–1966: A Candid History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 269.

⁴³ In addition, any singer who accepted an American engagement was punished with a five-year ban from German stages. This agreement was first proposed by Count von Seebach, director of the Dresden Court Theatre, and included directors from both German and Austrian theaters. “Teuton Opera Boycott Effective Against US,” *New York Times*, 5 June 1917, 9.

to do with the war, but was instead a means of “self-defense and self-preservation,” which he claimed was necessary to halt artists trained and supported by German teachers and audiences from maturing and taking their talents to America.⁴⁴ Addressing German Americans in particular, von Seebach maintained that they were first and foremost Americans, rather than Germans—a sentiment not shared by many non-German Americans at the time.⁴⁵

On 2 November 1917, the press announced a ban on German-language opera at the Metropolitan.⁴⁶ As reported in the *Sun*: “The directors of the Metropolitan have reached the conclusion that the performance of German opera here might have a bad political effect and be used in Germany as evidence that the United States is divided in sentiment regarding the war.”⁴⁷ This decision was somewhat unexpected.⁴⁸ The *Times* noted that as late as the beginning of Fall, it still seemed as though the German portion of the repertoire would continue unabated, yet there had been “a general protest arising” that led to the house’s decision.⁴⁹ The *Staats-Zeitung*, as late as 2 November, was still holding

⁴⁴ “Artists will have to choose between America and Germany. Nothing need be feared from the proposal for German influence, for where is that influence now? It is in vain to desire to win Americans with civilities and sentimentalities.” Ibid.

⁴⁵ Suspicion of German American loyalties escalated once the United States entered the war. German Americans were often forced to express loyalty towards the American cause or face repercussions, including the loss of jobs, vigilante attacks, or even arrest. Any expression of Germanness, including speaking the German language, could be viewed as an act of disloyalty. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 171–194.

⁴⁶ Kolodin, *Metropolitan Opera*, 269–270.

⁴⁷ “German Opera Under Ban By Metropolitan,” *New York Sun*, 2 November 1917, 1.

⁴⁸ It was not an overnight decision. In his work on the subject, Conolly-Smith outlines how this removal of German-language opera happened gradually. First, Humperdinck and Strauss were taken out of the repertoire—since they were both still living. Later, all German composers were dropped. As he describes, this decision was part of a longer process of re-evaluating *Kultur*. Conolly-Smith, *Translation*, 193–216.

⁴⁹ As noted in the *Times*, this ban predominately effected the works of Wagner as the operas of Strauss and Humperdinck were already not included in the upcoming season’s

out hope that this would not be the official policy.⁵⁰ The next day, however, it too reported on the Board's decision.⁵¹ As part of this ban, certain artists who had reportedly expressed pro-German sentiments were dismissed, including Johanna Gadski (1872–1932) and Otto Goritz (1873–1929).⁵² The *Staats-Zeitung* noted that some German singers—such as Frieda Hempel (1885–1955), who had performed the role of the Marschallin at the Metropolitan's premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier*—would likely continue to appear in Italian, French, and English productions.⁵³ Perhaps wanting to assuage its readers, the paper suggested that the ban did not necessarily mean the death of German opera.⁵⁴ Instead, it suggested that the new policy only pertained to performances in the German language and that the Metropolitan might turn to English translations of Wagner

repertoire owing to them being the “works of living German composers, whose copyrights fall under the ban of ‘enemy trading.’” “Metropolitan Bars Operas in German,” *New York Times*, 3 November 1917, 13.

⁵⁰ “Deutsche Oper in Gefahr?,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 November 1917, 11.

⁵¹ “Keine Opern in deutscher Sprache,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 November 1917, 1.

⁵² “German Opera Under Ban By Metropolitan,” *New York Sun*, 2 November 1917, 1.

Not all singers willingly accepted this banishment. Margarethe Arndt-Ober (1885–1971) sued the house for \$50,000 citing a breach of contract. In response, the Metropolitan charged that she had been dismissed owing to a “strong public sentiment” that had been fanned by reported anti-American behavior: “at various times [she] openly and outwardly manifested her sympathy with the cause of Germany and her hostility to the United States of America.” The Met had originally attempted to bar the suit entirely on the grounds that she was an “alien enemy” and could thus not bring a suit in US courts during a time of war. This was rejected, and she was allowed to sue the company; however, she lost the case. “Mme. Arndt-Ober Pro-German, Says Metropolitan Co.,” *New-York Tribune*, 27 April 1918, 18.

⁵³ “Keine Opern in deutscher Sprache,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 November 1917, 1.

⁵⁴ “Die Musikwelt,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 4 November 1917, E3.

and other staples of the German-language repertoire.⁵⁵ This was not to be.⁵⁶ Over the course of the ban, the only exceptions were Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), Weber's *Oberon* (1826), in its original English, and an English translation of Liszt's *Die Legende von der heiligen Elisabeth* (1873).

The press was left to speculate on the reason for this decision, since, as the *Staats-Zeitung* observed, the announcement was kept brief and contained no explanation from the Board.⁵⁷ The *Tribune* posited that it was not based on the music, but rather the language: "When American casualty lists begin to mount and New Yorkers are stirred to deeper wrath against all Kaiserdom, it is not believed they will listen willingly to any production in the German tongue."⁵⁸ There was truth in this sentiment. Suspicion of the German language had been steadily growing since the passage of the Espionage Act of 1917 in June. Branded across the top of the page on which the *Staats-Zeitung* announced the ban was the following notice: "Published and distributed under permit (No. 7), authorized by the Act of October 8, 1917, on file at the Post Office of New York, New York. –By order of the President. A. S. Burleson, Postmaster General."⁵⁹ Under the Espionage Act, Burleson (1863–1937), the Postmaster General, had been granted the authority to decide which publications could be distributed through the mail. The *Staats-Zeitung*, as a German-language paper, was one of the publications that had to receive

⁵⁵ "Die Musikwelt," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 11 November 1917, E3.

⁵⁶ Wagner did not return to the Metropolitan until 19 February 1920 with an English-language production of *Parsifal* translated by Krehbiel.

⁵⁷ "Die Musikwelt," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 4 November 1917, E3.

⁵⁸ "Opera Directors Announce Ban on German Works," *New-York Tribune*, 3 November 1917, 16.

⁵⁹ "Keine Opern in deutscher Sprache," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 November 1917, 1.

permission. It is a vivid reminder of the atmosphere of suspicion and paranoia that was aroused by anything German. In response, some German Americans began blaming each other. Alongside the article announcing the ban, the *Staats-Zeitung* included an interview with Walter Damrosch. In this article, Damrosch attributed the anger towards German culture as the product of people like Karl Muck (1859–1940), conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, who had sparked outrage in the American press by failing to conduct the national anthem before a performance in Rhode Island on 30 October. Damrosch viewed Muck's actions as antagonistic and lamented that the anger caused by this event was now being directed at the "great German masters of the past."⁶⁰ This was not a new stance for Damrosch. As far back as 1914, Damrosch had been urging the members of his orchestra to "forget the war," while reminding them that they were Americans above all else.⁶¹

While the *Staats-Zeitung* noted that the ban was part of a larger movement against the German language, the paper also pointed to an argument being made that the continual presentation of German-language operas in the city was making a bad impression abroad.⁶² On 4 November, the *Staats-Zeitung* published commentary by Bernard H. Ritter, one of the owners and publishers of the paper, which addressed this concern. Published in English, the article forcefully condemned the behavior of the Metropolitan: "A spirit of blind, unreasoning prejudice seems to be stealing its way into

⁶⁰ "Walter Damrosch Erklärung," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 November 1917, 8.

⁶¹ "Neutrality in Music," *New York Times*, 7 October 1914, 8.

⁶² "Deutsche Oper in Gefahr?," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 2 November 1917, 11.

every channel of American life, under the cloak of ‘patriotism.’”⁶³ Ritter specifically responded to an article from the *New York Globe* that had argued the performance of German-language opera would show Germany that the United States was “weak-kneed” and would serve as a “confession of German superiority.”⁶⁴ Calling this argument a “confession of weak-kneed intelligence,” Ritter contended that the opposite was true.⁶⁵ The presentation of German-language operas would demonstrate the strength of the American will. The war, Ritter maintained, was against the current Imperial German government not the “master minds of Teutonic genius.”⁶⁶ This policy would not be a punishment for the Germans, but rather a punishment for American audiences. Ritter, citing their “vigor” and “sublimity,” declared that the works of Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, Humperdinck, and Strauss would live on long past this war. Banning them from the city’s stages would have no lasting impact on their legacy. Instead, “we can only suffer ourselves to be punished by our self-appointed censors of art, who drag ‘political reasons’ into precincts that should be kept free and uncontaminated by them.”⁶⁷ For Ritter, it came down to a “petty spirit” that was incapable of distinguishing “among things German those against which we are contending, from those which it is the world’s privilege and obligation to protect.”⁶⁸

A few days after the ban was announced, the *Times* published a letter to the editor that was meant to represent the many conflicting viewpoints on this decision. Although

⁶³ “Art and Asininity,” *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 4 November 1917, 1 and 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

the writer—Ernest M. Skinner—focused on the banning of Wagner’s music specifically, his commentary is worth mentioning for its illustration of a somewhat broader, and changing, perception of German musical culture. Perhaps most controversial for the time was Skinner’s stance that Wagner’s music was universal music: “he belongs to the world and not to Germany.”⁶⁹ As discussed earlier, many nineteenth century writers and composers sought to make German musical culture the default universal musical culture. This effort was predominately—although not exclusively—centered on orchestral music. Wagner, as the leading figure of German-language opera, symbolized, for many New Yorkers, a particularly German musical sensibility. When Strauss emerged as his heir apparent, he too was treated as the next voice of German, rather than universal, opera.⁷⁰ Skinner’s premise that Wagner’s music actually transcended nationality looks toward a more complete process of universalization of German culture that would not take place until the decades following the First World War, when German American identity underwent its own process of complete assimilation.⁷¹ In his letter, Skinner goes on to ask

⁶⁹ As part of his argument, Skinner does ask what Wagner had to do with Germany, stating “Germany nearly starved Wagner to death, kicked him out of the country, and hooted at his music.” “Metropolitan Ban on Wagner the Theme of Many Letters and Conflicting Views,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1917, 77.

⁷⁰ To be fair, in the debate regarding the banning of Wagner’s music, Strauss was treated as an altogether different matter. In another letter to the editor, W. H. Humiston (1869–1923), a composer and former student of Edward MacDowell (1860–1908), questioned the reason behind banning Wagner’s music outright—arguing that he had in fact been a “man who fought for liberty in Dresden in 1848–9”—and instead pushed for English-language performances of Wagner’s music as could be found in England. As support for his claim, Humiston called for the banning of works by living German composers, e.g., Strauss, yet claimed that the banishment of Wagner’s music amounted to the “Hun . . . destroying works of art.” While Humiston’s reasoning was couched in terms of a financial punishment, it does contribute to an argument that distance in time alleviates national connotations in favor of universality. “Wagner Operas,” *New York Times*, 15 September 1918, X2.

⁷¹ Kazal, *Old Stock*, 261–281.

why stop at Wagner: “why not throw out all German literature from our libraries and the old masters from the art galleries? A suitable headline would then read: ‘America throws Wagner, Bach, Goethe, Rembrandt, and Martin Luther in the ash barrel.’”⁷² These cultural artifacts were obviously not discarded; their perceived universality clearly superseded any national connotations. There is, however, a certain status afforded German music over these other products of culture. It is not literature, art, or Protestantism that was called to be banned, but music. Perhaps in some way this speaks to the familiar trope that German music represented a degree of Germanness that other cultural works simply could not embody. The *Times* said as much: “sooner or later, doubtless, German opera will return. Music is the most nearly unblemished product of Kultur . . . and it is the highest product of Teutonic genius.”⁷³ These comments, at the bare minimum, demonstrate that the effort in the nineteenth century to align German identity with music had been successful. Of course, they also show how slippery the line can be between music as ethnic and national signifier and music as pure art.

Expanding what had been an institutional decision by the Metropolitan, John F. Hylan (1868–1936), the mayor of New York City from 1918–1925, officially banned German-language opera from all theaters until the signing of a peace treaty. This action resulted in German operas being taken off the stages of all New York’s German-language theaters, including the Lexington Theatre, which had unsuccessfully attempted a season of German-language opera by the Star Opera Company. This decision was fought in the court system but was ultimately upheld by Leonard A. Giegerich (1855–1927), who

⁷² “Metropolitan Ban on Wagner the Theme of Many Letters and Conflicting Views,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1917, 77.

⁷³ “Parsifal,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1920, 10.

served as a Justice of New York Supreme Court from 1896–1925.⁷⁴ In his decision, Giegerich claimed, “the production of German opera is an act innocent in itself. It does not follow, however, that an act innocent under ordinary circumstances may always be done regardless of time, place or conditions.”⁷⁵ He went on to cite public antipathy towards the German language, rumors regarding the loyalty of the cast and managers, the “passions of war,” and riots that had accompanied performances on 20 and 22 October 1919. It was Giegerich’s ultimate decision that German opera was not a constitutional right, but rather a privilege: “after considering the unimportant nature of the privilege, the transitoriness [*sic*] of the Mayor’s prohibition . . . and the serious consequences and injuries to the community at large which might arise from a further production of operas in German, [Giegerich] declares there is little doubt as to the wisdom of the Mayor’s decision.”⁷⁶

In the context of American attitudes towards German culture, the debate regarding where to draw the line between what was acceptable and what was not underscores the pliability of Germanness as an identifying marker. As already discussed with Skinner’s letter to the editor, the composer’s death provided a point of delineation. For Skinner, Wagner should not be implicated in the current conflict owing to his distance from the actual events. The *Staats-Zeitung* agreed. The banning of Strauss for the duration of the

⁷⁴ Notably, Giegerich was born in Bavaria before immigrating to the United States at the age of one. James Wilton Brooks, *History of the Court of Common Pleas of the City and County of New York* (New York: New York Bar, 1896), 130.

⁷⁵ “Intimate Appeal from Court’s Ban on German Opera,” *New York Evening World*, 28 October 1919, 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

war was only natural since he was still alive, but Wagner and Beethoven were innocent.⁷⁷ When the Orchestre de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire came to New York City in October 1918, Henderson commented on the group's decision to perform Beethoven. In particular, he commended the ability of the French to draw a divide between living and deceased composers. As he laments, a general German ban deprives New York audiences of Beethoven's symphonies and piano sonatas, Mozart, and "above all Bach."⁷⁸ The passage of time apparently lessened any overt, or covert, nationalism of the music. It should also be noted that the works mentioned by Henderson are predominately instrumental. This is a sign of the impact of the nineteenth century rhetoric around German instrumental music's collective appeal, while also highlighting the obvious distinction between a German opera and a German symphony—the presence, or absence, of a text. By being in the German language, opera possessed a fundamental stumbling block in the process of transitioning from "German" music to "universal" music.⁷⁹ This is a difficulty that instrumental music conveniently sidesteps. The operatic works of Wagner and Strauss will always in some way or other be thought of as "German" in a manner that Haydn's string quartets, Mozart's concerti, or Beethoven's symphonies will not.⁸⁰ In Chapter 3, it was noted that one of the first means by which German identity was

⁷⁷ "Keine Opern in deutscher Sprache," *New-Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, 3 November 1917, 1.

⁷⁸ "French Orchestra Will Play German Music To-Night," *New York Sun*, 20 October 1918, 7.

⁷⁹ This is equally true of *Lieder*, which Henderson mentions in his article is a genre that should be banned owing to its language; however, he also qualifies this ban by offering performances of certain songs in translation: "Certain German songs, those which are not too characteristically German, may perhaps be sung in English." *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Krehbiel stated as much in the years following the war. Questioning the decision to ban German-language opera—particularly the works of Wagner—from the Met, Krehbiel pointed to the language "which has become hateful to us because of the nation that uses it

fostered was through the literature of Goethe, Schiller, and the many poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Language was the most natural and elemental means by which to start forming a collective German identity. In some way, language also served as one of the final strands by which this cultural Germanic identity maintained a last grasp of cohesiveness in the face of its unraveling. While arguments were being put forth to lift the ban on translated German literature, art, and instrumental music, the same sentiment was not expressed towards Lieder or opera.⁸¹ In reference to the German ban in the city, Henderson squarely announced the underlying reason: “Concertgoers do not wish to hear the German language.”⁸² When there were calls to bring back Wagner, both during and immediately following the war, it was a Wagner in English translation, but even these efforts largely came to nothing.⁸³ Despite being compared to Shakespeare by his supporters, Wagner could not overcome the associations of his own language.⁸⁴ Even when the war was over, many New Yorkers found that “the sound of the German

as a vernacular” as the catalyst for this decision. Less clear is his attitude towards contemporary German and Austrian works, including those by Mahler, which he largely dismissed as modernist. It is notable that all the examples he uses are pre-1900. “German Art, German Artists and The Tribune’s Creed,” *New-York Tribune*, 13 November 1921, C5.

⁸¹ Language clearly superseded time in the issue of Germanness versus universalism. In his discussion of Lieder performances, Henderson explicitly references performances of “classic German writers with the original text” that were met with much antagonism. “French Orchestra Will Play German Music To-Night,” *New York Sun*, 20 October 1918, 7.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ It was also specific to *Parsifal*, which was viewed as being free of the overt Teutonicism of his other operas. The February 1920 production of *Parsifal* in English-translation was the first time Wagner was heard at the Metropolitan since the ban went into effect. “Parsifal,” *New York Times*, 7 February 1920, 10.

⁸⁴ “Multitudes of opera-goers feel that what the drama would be without SHAKESPEARE, opera would be without WAGNER. If the ban were continued indefinitely, musical art would be the loser.” Ibid.

language is still obnoxious, stirring complexes of emotion that easily quicken to pain and resentment.”⁸⁵

Noticeably absent from the English-language commentary regarding the removal of German-language performances was the impact that it had on the city’s still large German American community. Only a few attempts were made at including this community in the debate. An illustrative example of this treatment may be seen in the reaction to a benefit concert performed by the Star Opera Company. This performance was designed to help alleviate the financial burdens placed on German singers no longer allowed to perform. The *Sun* covered the performance, which it commended for its “neutrality” and lack of incident. After describing the policemen posted outside, the *Sun* noted the limited use of German, “while Italian, French, Latin and even English flourished, for the opera company is not so grand as to ignore English. Not even an accent slipped out during the entire performance.”⁸⁶ The only German spoken was in “announcing the names of several selections which were to be played by Edward Grasse [a violinist].”⁸⁷ Turning to the spectators, the *Sun* noted, “most of the audience were obviously of German birth or extraction, and many spoke German, but they were neutral, applauding all the allied languages sung impartially.”⁸⁸ It is telling that the *Sun* spends so much time noting the neutrality of the performance and the behavior of the German

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ “Germans Sing and are Undisturbed,” *New York Sun*, 3 November 1919, 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

American audience members, rather than the actual music. In this way, it demonstrates the larger net of suspicion cast over German Americans during this period.⁸⁹

A Return: Strauss's 1921 American Tour and the Reappearance of Der Rosenkavalier

Once the war came to its end, those German-language works that had been banned from the stage slowly began to return. This reappearance was not without complications. On 19 April 1919, the *Times* published a lengthy article detailing the return of German-language performances and clubs to the city. Peppered throughout the article were the familiar tropes of otherness: “While they may not have taken the trouble to learn the language or the customs of the people in the land of their adoption, they are finding recreation for their war-torn souls.”⁹⁰ The title alone lays bare Nativist sentiments that would not be unfamiliar to most immigrants facing xenophobic backlash: “Revival of German Entertainments: Teuton Syllables Echo in New York Halls Patronized by People Who Don’t Like American Language.”⁹¹ This palpable unease towards the German American community was obviously not new, yet it was now exacerbated by the recent conflict. In *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*, Russell A. Kazal describes this tide of “100 percent American’ nationalism” that arose in the wake of World War One.⁹² For some Americans, the “hyphen” was viewed as a symbol of disloyalty towards the United States. Reminders of German culture—such as music and

⁸⁹ Kazal has demonstrated how in the view of many “German culture and German political aims were inseparable . . . together they formed a subversive *Kultur*.” Kazal, *Old Stock*, 177.

⁹⁰ “Revival of German Entertainments: Teuton Syllables Echo in New York Halls Patronized by People Who Don’t Like American Language,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1919, 81.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Kazal, *Old Stock*, 232–234.

language—became entangled in this controversy and quickly became fodder for Nativist attacks.⁹³

While far from sympathetic, the 19 April 1919 *Times* article on the reinstatement of German-language entertainments recognized that this community had been deprived of the companionship provided by “German opera from the Metropolitan Opera House and the Lexington Avenue Theatre and of German plays from the Irving Place Theatre and the Yorkville Theatre, not to mention the cessation of the entertainments they used to have in Terrace Garden.”⁹⁴ The disruption of these cultural venues, which had provided a means of community assembly, ripped apart the already tenuous German American community. Even once the entertainments were restored, the community struggled to recapture the pre-war sense of camaraderie. Recounting the experience of “a New York woman who is especially interested in music,” the article goes on to describe a performance of German folk songs by Johannes Sembach, Hermann Weil, Otto Goritz, and Carl Braun—all former singers of the Metropolitan:

The treat of the evening was a series of German folksongs. There was an appreciable stir in every seat. Everybody bent forward in close interest. The first words heard were “Nach der Heimat Moecht Ich Wieder; Nach dem Teuren Vaterort” . . . Somewhere out of the darkness a sob arose, then other sobs. Song after song was revived, and each time there was sobbing.⁹⁵

⁹³ Some German American organizations, fearing this backlash, chose to become secret societies. New York’s Steuben Society of America, founded in 1919, is one such example. Michael Wala, “Reviving Ethnic Identity: the Foreign Office, the *Reichswehr*, and German Americans during the Weimar Republic,” in *German-American Immigration and Ethnicity in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Wolfgang Helbich and Walter D. Kamphoefner (Madison: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2004), 330.

⁹⁴ “Revival of German Entertainments: Teuton Syllables Echo in New York Halls Patronized by People Who Don’t Like American Language,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1919, 81.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

The use of music to evoke memories of the *Heimat* was not exclusive to the folk repertoire. The Metropolitan was also utilized as a site of community development. This anecdote highlights the importance of these venues in the building of identity, but also the impact on the community of taking them away.

Part of the relative disappearance of “German American” as a marker of identity was the result of a new generation of German Americans coming of age in the early decades of the twentieth century. In the above article, some attention is given to the re-formation of German clubs, which brought together several generations of German Americans. In regard to the singing societies that had held such importance in the years prior to the war, the *Times* noted: “the German singing societies are now going as strong as ever, or planning to revive their programs. The songs of the Vaterland are sung. The Turnvereins in various sections of the country are coming into their own once more.”⁹⁶ The difference between the pre- and postwar societies may be seen in the following anecdote: “Just a few days ago the younger members of one of them in Brooklyn tried to pass a resolution forbidding the speaking of German at their meetings. The older members objected, and the rule was not passed.”⁹⁷ While there was still enough of the older generation that desired to maintain a link to their German identity to ensure the continuation of the German language, the times were clearly changing.⁹⁸ For various

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ A similar issue faced German-language churches, which were also forced to confront dwindling German-speaking congregations, primarily of an older generation. Many began to offer English-language services to appeal to a younger, and more diverse, populace. Kazal, *Old Stock*, 209.

reasons, younger generations soon began to favor an assimilated American identity.⁹⁹ This process in itself was not new. Adrienne Fried Block noted in “New York’s Orchestras and the ‘American’ Composer: A Nineteenth-Century View” that the second-generation German Americans of the 1870s were far more likely to speak English or find work outside of the community than their parents.¹⁰⁰ The difference was in degree. In quoting from Fredrik Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*—“a drastic reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups . . . does not correlate in any simple way with a reduction in the organizational relevance of ethnic identities, or a breakdown in boundary-maintaining processes”—Block notes that the behavior of the second-generation did not in itself disrupt the maintenance of ethnic identity.¹⁰¹ While second-generation German Americans of the 1870s may have spoken more English than their parents, they still desired to be members of the German American community overall. The same, though, may not be said of the young German Americans coming of age after the war. Their effort toward complete assimilation was likely encouraged by the deep-seated suspicion of their compatriots:

A short time ago the Social Scientific Club, formerly known as the Deutschen Gesellig Wissenschaftlicher Verein, was scheduled to hold a concert at the Hotel McAlpin. It was asserted that the aim of the club was the furthering of German kultur, art and science. This was subsequently denied by its President, who declared the new aim of the organization was “to imbue the foreign-born with American ideas and ideals, and help create a real American culture embodying the best of the culture of all

⁹⁹ Generational divides also affected the German-language papers, which appealed to an older segment of the population. *Ibid.*, 200.

¹⁰⁰ Adrienne Fried Block, “New York’s Orchestras and the ‘American’ Composer: A Nineteenth-Century View,” in *European Music and Musicians in New York City, 1840–1900*, ed. John Graziano (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 118.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

nations.” Apparently the aim as outlined did not satisfy the management of the hotel, which caused the concert to be canceled.¹⁰²

Even with the war over, many Americans still viewed German “kultur” with trepidation.¹⁰³ This concern was not short lived. Nearly three years after the conflict was over, the *Herald* felt compelled to publish a defense of the paper’s music department and its decision to cover German artists and works in the face of backlash and accusations of German propaganda. As a form of defense, Henderson—somewhat naively—declared, “art is not a political subject.”¹⁰⁴ The need to publish such a statement in 1921 speaks volumes about the legacy of the war and its lingering effects on American perceptions of German music.

German-language works were slow in returning to the repertoire of the Metropolitan.¹⁰⁵ Before Strauss’s works returned to the stage—or at least *Der Rosenkavalier*, since *Salome* had not been seen since its premiere and *Elektra* had yet to be performed at the house—Strauss himself would make a second, and final, visit to the

¹⁰² “Revival of German Entertainments: Teuton Syllables Echo in New York Halls Patronized by People Who Don’t Like American Language,” *New York Times*, 13 April 1919, 81.

¹⁰³ In his work on the immigrant press and American popular culture, Conolly-Smith argues that this decline of German-language *Kultur* was not the direct result of the war but had been happening for decades. While Nativism had an impact on German-language cultural decline, it was only a part of this process, rather than the catalyst. Conolly-Smith, *Translating*, 244.

¹⁰⁴ “Music Notes and Comment on Activities of the Early Season,” *New York Herald*, 16 October 1921, 4.

¹⁰⁵ There was even some debate in the years after the war regarding whether or not Strauss’s music would even come back into the repertoire. After Humperdinck’s death on 27 September 1921, the *Herald* argued that only *Hänsel und Gretel* had managed to infiltrate the repertoire in the same way as Wagner. *Salome* and *Elektra* were dismissed as fads with little staying power, while *Der Rosenkavalier* “had two more or less popular years, but it is doubtful if it ever took deep root in the hearts of music lovers.” “Short Life for German Operas,” *New York Herald*, 10 October 1921, 6.

city on another American tour.¹⁰⁶ As had been the case with his first tour, the performances—twelve total in the city—did not include his operas.¹⁰⁷ The similarities, though, largely stopped there.¹⁰⁸ The tour faced, in addition to the changed political world, a city that now knew the musician not as the young orchestral composer of overtly realistic tone poems, but as the writer of *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*.¹⁰⁹ For some people, the passing years had done little to improve his reputation. Aldrich used the announcement of Strauss's return to decry all of Strauss's work following *Salome*, noting "it has generally been agreed that most of what Strauss has produced . . . has been inferior

¹⁰⁶ To some extent, Strauss avoided some of the anti-German backlash by having maintained a quiet public stance towards the war. In a twist on the familiar impression of Strauss as the money hungry opportunist, Krehbiel noted the absence of Strauss's name on the "Manifesto of the Ninety-Three," which had been published on 4 October 1914 as a show of support for German military action. This document included the names of Humperdinck, Siegfried Wagner, and Felix Weingartner as the representatives of music. Krehbiel's proposed explanation for Strauss's decision to not sign the document rested on him being too shrewd to "endanger his prospect of future royalties from the United States." "The Second Coming of Herr Richard Strauss," *New-York Tribune*, 29 May 1921, B6.

¹⁰⁷ That does not mean that excerpts from several of his operas did not make appearances. Perhaps the most notable, given its history, was a performance by the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Metropolitan Opera House of the "Dance of the Seven Veils" conducted by Strauss. Although there was no actual dancing, the *Herald* noted that its performance allowed Strauss to "take his little revenge upon the Metropolitan." "Strauss Conducts His 'Salome' Dance," *New York Herald*, 16 November 1921, 10.

¹⁰⁸ One parallel between this visit and the 1904 trip was the continued confusion over the Strauss name. As in 1904, there were some who heralded Strauss as the "waltz king," or possibly the "son of the waltz king." "Richard Strauss Not Related to the 'Waltz King,'" *New-York Tribune*, 16 October 1921, C12.

¹⁰⁹ While he may have become better known as a composer of opera, Strauss was still criticized for his overly descriptive music. Preparing for Strauss's tour, Krehbiel gave a summary of Strauss's previous trip, which soon descended into a list of criticisms on Strauss's penchant towards "delineat[ing] external things by musical means." Looking beyond the tone poems, Krehbiel also included moments from *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Salome* as examples of this tendency. "The Second Coming of Herr Richard Strauss," *New-York Tribune*, 29 May 1921, B6.

to his earlier works, and much of it very inferior.”¹¹⁰ His condemnation also included Strauss’s most recent operas, which had not made the jump across the Atlantic, yet demonstrated “the lowest level to which Strauss has found his powers reduced.”¹¹¹ When it came to the music, most of the reviews followed the same themes of Strauss’s first visit, although now with a feeling that it was all old hat. There were, however, some new topics that emerged in the wake of the many changes that had occurred since 1904.

Salome was understandably at the center of the coverage. This was, after all, Strauss’s first visit to the city since the Metropolitan’s notorious production. Of particular interest was the impact of the event on Strauss’s opinion of the city. A few months before the visit, the *Herald* published an article in which Strauss denied making disparaging remarks regarding America in an interview with Henrietta Straus, music critic for *The Nation*.¹¹² In its coverage of the controversy, the *Times* quoted Strauss as having said: “America has no culture. Culture will always come from Europe. . . . Europe does not need America—only her dollars.”¹¹³ Whether or not Strauss had actually made these remarks, they fed into the belief held by many in the city that he possessed a less than

¹¹⁰ The one semi-bright spot was *Der Rosenkavalier*, which Aldrich labeled “the only dramatic work in which he has made a real success.” Aldrich couches his praise in the statement that “there is a certain distinction in much of it that is none too frequent in these later works—and also much commonplace and artistic vulgarity.” “Music: The Return of Richard Strauss,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1921, 66.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Strauss, however, denied ever having given the interview. “Strauss Denies Disparaging U.S.: Didn’t Say One Month Here Was Enough,” *New York Herald*, 11 September 1921, 4.

In a visit with the press in October, Strauss admitted that he had spoken to Henrietta Straus; however, he blamed the controversy on “an amateur interviewer who did not speak German.” “Strauss Says Art Must Be Happier,” *New York Times*, 29 October 1921, 18.

¹¹³ “Strauss to Visit America,” *New York Times*, 16 September 1921, 17.

enthusiastic impression of New York following the fiasco of the Metropolitan's *Salome*. These remarks also spoke to the cultural inferiority complex that had plagued the city, and America, for centuries. The European—particularly German—composer appearing to critique a lack of American musical culture hit at the heart of many people's anxiety, seemingly confirming their worst fears.¹¹⁴ In the *Tribune*, Katharine Wright presented Strauss's comments as one of the "instances of ingratitude on the part of foreign artists."¹¹⁵ After being drawn by American dollars, European artists returned home and proceeded to "unburden themselves to sympathetic interviewers concerning the vicissitudes suffered at the hands of the barbarians across the water."¹¹⁶ The focus on this issue by the press is not surprising given the historical precedent; however, it takes on added weight in the context of the political climate. As Germany lay in ruins and the United States enjoyed an unprecedented global presence, American cultural critics were still focused—for months—on the alleged slights of a German composer.¹¹⁷ American

¹¹⁴ In a letter written to commemorate Strauss's farewell performance in New York City, Otto Kahn brought up this issue: "It is in American nature to love music and to pay homage to great art. Indeed, more and more, this country, mistakenly termed 'the land of the almighty dollar,' is taking its rank among those foremost in striving for the higher things in life, for spiritual attainments, for the realization of ideals." "Strauss Closes Second Tour Here," *New York Times*, 2 January 1922, 17.

¹¹⁵ "Richard Strauss Speaks His Mind About America," *New-York Tribune*, 28 August 1921, C5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ In an article marking Strauss's departure, the *Times* expressed hope that Strauss would avoid the trope of European composers finding musical talent in America yet returning to Europe and either remaining silent or flatly denying this situation: "As Dr. Strauss occupies a uniquely strong and unassailable position in Germany and Austria, it might be assumed that he would feel bound by no such compulsion, but would tell what he had really found here. And yet some will be surprised if he does." "Music: Farewell to Dr. Strauss," *New York Times*, 8 January 1922, 73.

audiences—in the eyes of some—still lagged behind their European counterparts, regardless of the political and economic realities.¹¹⁸

Even in 1921, Strauss's appearance in the city could not escape the legacy of the war.¹¹⁹ In response to his official greeting, Strauss remarked:

I am not so immodest as to accept this great honor only for myself, but as a representative of the noble German music I may be allowed to thank you most heartily for giving such a new and generous welcome to German music, hitherto always a welcome guest in this impressive country, always received with richest understanding and broad sympathy.¹²⁰

These sentiments were expressed as part of a welcoming ceremony held in Strauss's honor at City Hall.¹²¹ They were also delivered in German, a fact the *Tribune* felt worthy to be included in the headline.¹²² Comments along these lines dotted the coverage—particularly in the articles appearing in the *Tribune*. Reviewing Strauss's first

¹¹⁸ In one of his first meetings with the press, Strauss was questioned regarding his opinion of American music. Speaking of jazz, Strauss declared it “worth while [*sic*] music and interesting . . . because of its new rhythmic forms.” In respect to American composers, Strauss answered, “I look for some very excellent music from America, as this country possesses much talent, great power and originality.” “Jazz is Worth While Music, Says Dr. Richard Strauss,” *New York Herald*, 29 October 1921, 9.

¹¹⁹ There was no strong consensus on whether to read Strauss as a political figure or not. In describing the first performance at Carnegie Hall, Krehbiel presented the audience's “expressions of approval” as “glowing and irresistible as a stream of lava hot from a volcanic crater, yet it proclaimed only honor for the artist—not a political or national tone could be heard in it unless one chose to perceive a dissonance in the circumstance that one of the two magnificent floral offerings laid at his feet was decorated with what may have been German colors and was certainly not American.” “Strauss Given Welcome Here Only as Artist,” *New-York Tribune*, 1 November 1921, 8.

¹²⁰ “Dr. Richard Strauss Gets City's Welcome,” *New York Herald*, 1 November 1921, 12.

¹²¹ “Strauss is Guest at the City Hall,” *New York Times*, 1 November 1921, 18.

¹²² “Strauss, Welcome to City by Hylan, Replies in German,” *New-York Tribune*, 1 November 1921, 8.

performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra at the Metropolitan, Krehbiel noted that the audience seemed “wholly German.”¹²³

The *Tribune* and Krehbiel became prominent voices in the debate over the presence of German culture in the city. In the midst of Strauss’s first weeks on tour, Krehbiel waded into the controversy in a lengthy article that was inspired by a piece that had appeared in the *Staats-Zeitung*, which had criticized him for his alleged anti-German sentiments.¹²⁴ In response, Krehbiel condemned all such statements as lies. He went on to claim the ability to separate “German art and German politics,” which he then argued was the stance of the *Tribune* overall.¹²⁵ Many of the sentiments expressed by Krehbiel in this article are nearly identical to the statements discussed earlier by Henderson in the *Herald*.¹²⁶ On the surface, both papers argued for a universality of music that transcended national politics, but the actual personal motivations of the critics were far more ambiguous, particularly when it came to living composers like Strauss.

¹²³ “German Audience Fills Metropolitan to Cheer Strauss,” *New-York Tribune*, 16 November 1921, 10.

¹²⁴ The catalyst for this condemnation was Krehbiel’s dismissive review of Johanna Gadski (1872–1932), whose husband, Hans Tauscher (1867–1941), had been accused of sabotage during the war. There had also been rumors of Gadski singing a song belittling the victims of the Lusitania, which contributed to the belief that she had been pro-German throughout the war. Krehbiel’s criticism of her performance was viewed as a broader critique of Germans as a whole. In addition to questioning his stance on German art and artists, the *Staats-Zeitung* writer had also commented on Krehbiel’s name and his own German ancestry. “German Art, German Artists and The Tribune’s Creed,” *New-York Tribune*, 13 November 1921, C5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Krehbiel again addressed these issues a week later in response to a series of letters that criticized him for anti-German sentiments and commending him for drawing a distinction between art and politics. “German Art and Artists and Unfettered Criticism,” *New-York Tribune*, 20 November 1921, C5.

Krehbiel, in particular, felt the need to address why this tour was seemingly more popular than the one in 1904, despite “those of his works which have been composed since and performed here—the operas ‘Salome’ and ‘Elektra’ and the ‘Alpine Symphony’ cannot be said to have enhanced his reputation in America.”¹²⁷ He went on to ask, “whence come then this extraordinary desire on the part of an element of our population to do him honor?”¹²⁸ Even though the “element” goes unnamed, Krehbiel’s statement of doubt that Vincent d’Indy would receive the same ovations on his upcoming tour points to an ethnic connotation.¹²⁹ If there was any uncertainty over what he meant, it was resolved in the weeks after Strauss’s departure. Once more noting the large audiences that had flocked to Strauss’s performances, Krehbiel flatly declared: “these audiences were composed overwhelmingly of the German element in our population and showed little if any discrimination in their demonstrations of approbation.”¹³⁰ For Krehbiel, the biggest insult in Strauss’s support by German American audiences—which he views as distinctly and unequivocally political—is that Strauss was not a composer deserving of such treatment, which he argues by way of comparison to the treatment of Saint-Saëns during his 1906 visit to the city. For Krehbiel, Saint-Saëns, “unlike the man whom America has recently honored . . . was no time-server and never degraded his art

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ The presence of d’Indy provided Krehbiel with a point of comparison to Strauss. Comparing the repertoire of the different concerts given by both musicians, Krehbiel criticized Strauss for solely performing his own compositions, while referring to the more “liberal spirit” of d’Indy’s concerts, which included works by Monteverdi, Mozart, and Lalande. “D’Indy More Liberal Than German Rival,” *New-York Tribune*, 3 December 1921, 8.

¹³⁰ “The Late Camille Saint-Saens and his Visit to the United States,” *New-York Tribune*, 8 January 1922, C5.

by making it subservient to commercialism and self-profit.”¹³¹ Even here, the tried and true condemnation of Strauss’s purported commercialism was never far away.

After Strauss departed, his operas began to slowly return to the city’s stages. For the 1922–23 season, the Metropolitan announced the return of German-language opera in its original language: “German operas in German by a company of German singers.”¹³² Among the restored works was *Der Rosenkavalier*, which returned to the house on 17 November 1922.¹³³ Opinions of the critics toward the work had not changed despite the passage of several years. Henderson doubled down on his belief that “the music occasionally rises to high levels of psychological subtlety and emotional expression. But much more frequently it descends to the grade of crass and shameless realism.”¹³⁴ Absent is any mention of politics, aside from the cursory acknowledgment of reestablished “friendly relations.”¹³⁵ Henderson goes on to blame—somewhat incorrectly—the removal of the work on the behavior of the German cast, rather than on the language or Strauss’s nationality, which serves to free the work, at least rhetorically, from any political stain.¹³⁶ In the *Tribune*, mention of the work’s nationality came through

¹³¹ Ibid.

A “time-server” refers to a “person who merely fills a job or position, without showing commitment or enthusiasm.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “time-server (*n.*),” accessed September 14, 2017, <http://www.oed.com>.

¹³² “Music: The Changing Opera Season,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1922, 100.

¹³³ “Opera,” *New York Times*, 18 November 1922, 23.

¹³⁴ “Strauss Revival at Metropolitan With New Singers,” *New York Herald*, 18 November 1922, 9.

¹³⁵ “Strauss Revival at Metropolitan With New Singers,” *New York Herald*, 18 November 1922, 9.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Krehbiel's commentary on the opera's Teutonic features, which he described as beer to *Le nozze di Figaro's* champagne.¹³⁷

The Prodigal Daughters Return: Salome and Elektra at the Met

Once *Der Rosenkavalier* returned to the Metropolitan's repertoire, the house eventually turned towards Strauss's other works, including a short-lived production of *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928).¹³⁸ *Elektra*, which was performed on 3 December 1932, was the next opera by Strauss to make its appearance on the Metropolitan's stage.¹³⁹

Unlike *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Elektra* was not a reinstatement. Up until this appearance,

¹³⁷ Krehbiel made no attempt to disguise the removal of *Der Rosenkavalier* and other German operas as anything other than political: "it was submerged together with greater works under the wave of popular hatred of all things German against which aesthetic arguments were of no avail." "Rosenkavalier' Well Produced at Metropolitan," *New-York Tribune*, 18 November 1922, 10.

¹³⁸ Strauss's *Die ägyptische Helena* (1928) received its American premiere at the Met on 6 November 1928. Jeritza, who had sung the role in Vienna, appeared in the title role. There were a number of cuts made to the work, which was performed seven times that season. As a result of its short run—it has only been performed fourteen times at the Met, including a revival in 2007—and little attention given to its performance, I have chosen to not include it in the larger discussion of *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier*, which all incited far more vigorous reactions. According to a review in the *Times*, the house "cannot be said to have displayed unprecedented enthusiasm . . . we were listening to a piece inherently empty, and likely to rank, creatively speaking, as the most distinguished dud of the season." "American Premiere of 'Egyptian Helen,'" *New York Times*, 7 November 1928, 31.

On the occasion of the performance, the *Tribune* spent a large portion of its coverage attempting to show the trajectory of Strauss from early modernist to "an academic, a conservative, a reactionary." "Strauss's New Opera Has American Premiere Next Tuesday," *New-York Herald Tribune*, 4 November 1928, F7.

Feuersnot, Strauss's second opera, also received its American premiere during this time on 1 December 1927, albeit in Philadelphia. "'Feuersnot' Gets U.S. Premiere in Philadelphia," *New-York Herald Tribune*, 2 December 1927, 19.

Its New York premiere was 11 December 1985 at the Manhattan School of Music. "Opera: 'Feuersnot,' Strauss One-Act," *New York Times*, 13 December 1985, C36.

¹³⁹ The performance was also broadcast live on WJZ. This was the second opera to be broadcast in full since the practice of broadcasting from the stage started in 1931. "Opera House Premiere of 'Elektra' on Radio," *New York Herald*, 27 November 1932, F9.

New Yorkers had only seen *Elektra* in French translation at the Manhattan. Probably the most noteworthy aspect of its coverage this time around was the praise that it now received. The *Times* branded the opera “Strauss’s greatest work for the lyric stage” and argued that the timing was ideal for this work to be brought before an audience.¹⁴⁰ Looking back at its initial performance, the paper argued that much of its downfall—and part of the reason for its prolonged absence from the stage—was the result of several factors concerning its premiere, including the charged atmosphere caused by *Salome*, an audience unaccustomed to the intense dissonance, a story that was grim and frightful, and the demands placed on the singers and orchestra by the complex music.¹⁴¹ As the *Times* wrote, “some measure of this new comprehension was doubtless due to the harmonic water which has flown under the bridge since 1910.”¹⁴² The passage of time had inevitably smoothed over the more jagged edges of its modernism.¹⁴³ From the *Tribune*: “a huge audience . . . wondering, perhaps, why a score which by many was considered iconoclastic a quarter of a century ago should now sound, through much of its extent, as

¹⁴⁰ “Strauss’s ‘Elektra’ Creates a Furor,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1932, 34.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ The *Times* was even complimentary of Hofmannsthal’s libretto, which had been one of the biggest sources of criticism after the first performance. *Ibid.*

In its review of the second performance, the *Times* praised the work of Hofmannsthal as “fully in the Greek spirit,” further noting, “its dominant motive is the Greek motive of cleansing tragedy, of holy vengeance decreed by fate.” This was a far cry from the early condemnations of Hofmannsthal’s libretto as anti-Classical. “Rossini Work Heard Here First Time,” *New York Times*, 10 December 1932, 19.

A similar sentiment was also echoed by the *Tribune*, which noted the tendency of Classical dramatists to borrow from previous sources and presented Hofmannsthal’s text as a part of this tradition. In his review, Gilman dismisses the complaints against Hofmannsthal’s “modernization” of the story as “irrelevant,” while noting that the derivative echoes of Maeterlinck, Ibsen, Wilde, and Shakespeare serve to blemish what is at times a work of “enormous and irresistible power.” “‘Elektra’ Comes to Broadway,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 4 December 1932, 24.

mellifluous as ‘Der Rosenkavalier.’”¹⁴⁴ Despite praising the work as a masterpiece, the *Tribune* also noted its weaknesses: “For Strauss is never consistently at his best, never the unflawed master; and in this score, as elsewhere in the course of even his most triumphant writing, he offends and disheartens us by his unabashed commonness, his arrant sentimentality, his bland and unpretentious emptiness.”¹⁴⁵ Strauss, even in his triumph, was never far from criticism.¹⁴⁶

In attempting to understand the wildly different reaction between the 1910 and 1932 audiences, Olin Downes (1886–1955), writing for the *Times*, looked towards the disparate aesthetic worlds of the two performances. Downes offered two reasons for this shift. The first was the standard course of time argument: “our harmonic horizons are considerably broader . . . after liberal doses of Hindemith and Schönberg and the Berg of ‘Wozzeck’ . . . we are not so easily frightened.”¹⁴⁷ Downes’s second explanation pointed specifically towards the works of Eugene O’Neill, particularly *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), a retelling of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. For Downes, O’Neill’s “feast of horrors” prepared the Metropolitan’s audience for Hofmannsthal’s comparatively tame

¹⁴⁴ “‘Elektra’ Comes to Broadway,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 4 December 1932, 24.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ There was also some attempt to more strongly differentiate between the style of Wagner and Strauss, rather than emphasizing the role of Strauss as Wagner’s successor. One way in which this was manifested was through Gilman’s criticism of the casting of Gertrud Kappel (1884–1971) as Elektra: “This cherishable [*sic*] artist, a moving and noble Brünnhilde, an admirable Isolde, is hopelessly unfitted for such a role as Elektra. Yesterday she was merely a distracted Wagner heroine wandering in an alien land.” *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ As part of this explanation, Downes includes a claim of “esthetic degradation . . . hand in hand with . . . a perversion of morals.” This is an idea born out of the repeated correlation between artistic modernism and societal and moral decay that had met both *Salome* and *Elektra* in the early years of the twentieth century. “Opera Becomes ‘Elektra,’” *New York Times*, 11 December 1932, X8.

adaptation.¹⁴⁸ O'Neill's work also provided Downes with a specific example by which to observe the impact of time on reception, "Hofmannsthal's libretto seemed to 1910 in America to be a lurid and base perversion of Greek tragedy. Today by the side of O'Neill's drama Hofmannsthal's is cool, sculpturesque [*sic*] and classic. What will be the verdict upon these two works in 1952?"¹⁴⁹ It is the passage of time by which "the threat to the sense of security is removed and emotional tensions permitted to relax."¹⁵⁰ The effect of this distance is to alter the audience's point of view by removing the danger of immediacy.¹⁵¹ Downes, however, does argue that taste is a pendulum. While *Elektra* may be an accepted part of the repertoire in 1952, Downes posits that at some point in the future—in his example 2002—the work could be used as a model of the "decadence, social and artistic, of the early twentieth century."¹⁵² Ultimately, criticism can only be a clear reflection of the "viewpoint of the period."¹⁵³ In an abrupt departure from the criticisms of 1910, Downes lays the success of *Elektra* at the feet of its purported classicism, particularly its "Greek sense of proportion and strength and symmetry of structure, coupled with the irresistible invocation of destiny."¹⁵⁴ It is also worth noting that Downes primarily credits Hofmannsthal, not Strauss, for *Elektra*'s success.

¹⁴⁸ "There is little doubt that 'Mourning Becomes Electra' had done something in the way of advance publicity for the 'Elektra' of Strauss and von Hofmannsthal. At least the great public knew something of what 'Elektra' was about!" Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ As an example, Downes argues that the return of *Salome* would likely be very similar to that of *Elektra*. Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ "In its terminology 'Elektra' is modern—modern, if you like, to the point of neuroticism. At its core it is classic drama that purges the spirit and uplifts it. And the drama has done the same thing to Strauss the composer." Ibid.

Also revealed by the coverage was the willingness of the city's audiences to reevaluate Strauss's work. This would be tested by the return of *Salome* to the stage of the Metropolitan in 1934, providing the perfect litmus test for the impact of time on audience reactions. Despite having been banished from the Metropolitan, *Salome* never completely disappeared from the city. In addition to the Manhattan performances, music from *Salome* periodically appeared at various venues. In 1910, excerpts from the work were presented at an outdoor performance of Nahan Franko's (1861–1930) Orchestra at the Central Park bandstand. The performance, reportedly drawing 8,000 spectators, included a "Fantasie" of *Salome* arranged by Johannes Doebber (1866–1921), which was met with great approval by those in attendance.¹⁵⁵ There had also been a series of performances of the opera at the Manhattan Opera in February 1922 when Mary Garden and her Chicago Opera Association, which she directed from 1921–1922, came to the city for a five-week engagement.¹⁵⁶ The performances were given to benefit the Committee for Devastated France and were greeted with full houses.¹⁵⁷ As was customary with Garden, the opera was performed in French translation, which avoided some of the difficulties facing other German-language works in the post-war era.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ "Salome's Music Given in the Park," *New York Times*, 27 June 1910, 7.

¹⁵⁶ The Chicago Opera Association dissolved in bankruptcy at the end of the 1922 season. It is perhaps most notable for having given the world premiere of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges*, which it also brought to New York City on this tour. "Chicago Opera Novelty," *New York Times*, 1 February 1922, 26.

¹⁵⁷ "Opera," *New York Times*, 5 February 1922, 19.

¹⁵⁸ It was still, however, not without its controversy. A month prior to the New York tour, Mary Garden had given in to calls to have the opera banned in Chicago as a result of its degeneracy and immorality. "Salome May Return to Metropolitan; Owners Vote Today," *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 1.

On 8 November 1932, excerpts from *Salome* were performed at a benefit concert on the Metropolitan stage with Maria Jeritza (1887–1982) as Salome and Nelson Eddy (1901–1967) as Jochanaan.¹⁵⁹ Although it was not a complete performance, the excerpts from the concert were presented as a return of sorts for Strauss’s prodigal opera.

It is reassuring to think that Mr. Gatti-Casazza, present chief of the Metropolitan—which is now, we must remember, an educational institution—had nothing to do with re-importing this maleficent Salome of his predecessor Conried into the improving classrooms of our opera house. Such an action on his part would scarcely have been cricket. But Charity, with its capacious cloak, could accomplish what the prophylactic Metropolitan could not; and whatever degree of moral disintegration may follow last night’s return of the shameless damsel may well be overlooked. For it will have been risked in a good cause.¹⁶⁰

This small step towards reintroducing *Salome* into the “classroom” of the Metropolitan was crucial in paving the way for the work’s return. In his 13 November review of the performance, Downes upheld the concert as a strong argument for the opera’s reinstatement.¹⁶¹ Time, as was the case with *Elektra*, had dampened much of the

¹⁵⁹ The program listed the excerpts as “Seduction scene,” “Dance of the Seven Veils,” and “Lament of Salome.” When it came to the dance, the music was presented without movement on the part of Jeritza, who had “only a thinking part” during this selection. “The Banished Salome Returns to the Metropolitan—But Not for Long,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 9 November 1932, 20.

Jeritza had been at the center of a series of rumors from 1922 regarding the Met bringing back *Salome*. Partly inspired by the financial returns of Mary Garden’s performances at the Manhattan, the owners of the Metropolitan agreed to allow the opera to be performed after a meeting held on 14 February. This production, which was rumored to star Jeritza, never came to fruition. In reporting on the meeting, the *Times* noted that it had received its information via an “authoritative source,” yet there was no public statement by the board to confirm this decision or that a meeting had even occurred. “Lift Ban on Salome, May Sing it in 1923,” *New York Times*, 15 February 1922, 1.

¹⁶⁰ “The Banished Salome Returns to the Metropolitan—But Not for Long,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 9 November 1932, 20.

¹⁶¹ Downes’s argument for the return of the opera was far from unequivocal praise. Much of the article is spent comparing the style of Strauss—particularly the orchestration—to Wagner. In Downes’s view, Strauss does not fare particularly well. In the context of

controversy: “the score . . . is no longer a revolutionary document . . . it is now conventional in most of its harmonic substance. But that is equally true of every one of the Strauss symphonic poems, and it is not an argument against them.”¹⁶² While *Elektra* and *Der Rosenkavalier* may be more successful works, *Salome*, in Downes’s opinion, was still a work of “the utmost intensity, color, imagination” and therefore deserved to be presented on the stage as intended by Strauss.¹⁶³ It would, however, not be until 13 January 1934 that New Yorkers were given this opportunity to view the complete opera on the boards of the Metropolitan.¹⁶⁴

The critical preparation for the first performance largely echoed that of *Elektra*, particularly the reflections on changing attitudes: “we do not, of course, need the case of ‘Salome’ to remind us that most of our outbursts of moral and esthetic indignation over works of art are likely to seem decidedly foolish to a later generation—including ourselves, if we happen to survive; yet it is always salutary to recall such instances for the

traditional arguments against Strauss, it is worth noting that much of Downes’s criticism boils down to the idea of Strauss as the meticulous craftsman versus Wagner’s innate artistry. “A Salome Revival? Beauty of Concert Version a Strong Plea for Producing Strauss’s Opera,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1932, X6.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Göta Ljungberg performed the title role. “Metropolitan Will Produce ‘Salome’ Jan. 13,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 3 January 1934, 16.

Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi* was scheduled to precede *Salome* on all performances except the first, which was presented on its own. “Strauss ‘Salome’ is Set for Jan. 13,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1933, 27.

1934 would also see the first performance of Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* in New York City, which premiered on 5 December at Juilliard. The student performance, based on Alfred Kalisch’s English translation of Hofmannsthal’s original libretto, would be given four performances that were ostensibly open to the public free of charge; however, there was a waiting list for those interested in seeing the performance that already numbered 5,000 in early November. “Other Notes Here, Afield,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1934, X6.

possible fortification of our sense of humor.”¹⁶⁵ In the *Tribune*, Lawrence Gilman (1878–1939) chose to focus on the music’s place in history. While Strauss’s name was clearly not absent from the general discussions of modernism, his contribution to the movement—as seen from the vantage point of the 1930s—was diminished owing to charges of materialism, craftsmanship, and an apparent abandoning of modernist aesthetics in the more traditional sounding works that followed *Elektra*.¹⁶⁶ Decades of commentary on his business sense had worked to corrode Strauss’s image as an artist.

¹⁶⁵ “Some Notes on ‘Salome’ I.,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 31 December 1933, D8.

¹⁶⁶ A particularly strong example of this was the occasion of Strauss’s sixtieth birthday in 1924. To commemorate the event, the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna asked several figures to provide writings regarding the legacy and impact of Strauss. In New York, the *Times* took the tributes as evidence of musical figures striving to write something pleasant regarding a figure that “looms and has long loomed so large.” In his summary of the occasion, Aldrich points towards a fairly consistent underpinning, namely that Strauss embodies “more a figure of the past than of the present.” In his tribute, Romain Rolland argued that Strauss had more in common with the musicians of the early nineteenth century than the “violent, still uncertain” followers of Schoenberg and Stravinsky. Quoting from André Messager’s (1853–1929) tribute: “We are now in a chaos, but behind this chaos may be concealed the work of the seventh day. . . . In a word, the art of Strauss is an ending, the culmination of an epoch, and with this art the Viennese master has written his name large in the history of music.” Those moments of polytonality and examples of early modernism that Gilman and Downes work to expose and credit in *Elektra* are, for Aldrich, exceptions in Strauss’s music, not the rule. “Richard Strauss’s Sixtieth Birthday,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1924, X5.

In regard to the Dresden premiere of *Arabella* in 1933, the *Tribune* branded Strauss: “the last great Romantic.” “Strauss Opera ‘Arabella’ Has Dresden Debut,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 2 July 1933, 12.

In a later reflection on *Arabella* following subsequent performances in Dresden, the *Tribune* commended Strauss for turning to “the three R’s of music—melody, harmony and rhythm—in ‘Arabella.’ More significant is the fact that he has done this at this particular moment when other living composers are seeking all the odd and tortuous turnings in the endeavor to achieve originality and acclaim in the musical world.” This turn was perhaps more significant coming from Strauss, “who at feverish points of his career . . . upset all musical calculations by his ‘modernistic’ trends.” As is apparent, Strauss emerged for some as a “protector” of an earlier style, which lessened his image as an early pioneer of musical modernism. “Strauss’s ‘Arabella,’” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 16 July 1933, D4.

Among these stories was an anecdote in which Strauss, late for a performance, asked the doorkeeper to pay the driver of the cab who had brought him to the Royal Opera. Later asking to be reimbursed, the doorkeeper was made to produce exact change so that Strauss would not be out “one cent.”¹⁶⁷ To show its indignation, the *Sun* listed Strauss’s purported worth, including his salary as Royal General Music Director, the sales of *Salome* and *Elektra*, and the royalties that he received from each work.¹⁶⁸ In other stories, Pauline was presented as the instigator, forcing her husband to ask for royalties, even in the case of satirical works written by other composers that had been based on his music.¹⁶⁹ Strauss, regardless of who was behind the business decisions, was presented as a miser, interested exclusively in accumulating more wealth. These penny-pinching qualities contributed to the image of Strauss as a bourgeois gentleman: “In spite of the subjects that he chooses for his operas his private life is most exemplary and it is his devotion to his wife and child that he has more than once advanced as an answer to the charge that the terms he demanded for his works showed him to be avaricious and grasping.”¹⁷⁰ The same day this account was published in the city, the *Baltimore Sun* published an article entitled: “This John D. Rockefeller Of Music Earns \$150,000 A Year.”¹⁷¹ Its premise was that Strauss was the “richest musician that ever lived,” which it explained by listing his royalties and salaries.¹⁷² The article is filled with instances of Strauss’s business interests overshadowing his artistic ones: “Strauss has no false ideas

¹⁶⁷ “Strauss and ‘Elektra,’” *New York Sun*, 14 March 1909, 7.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ “This John D. Rockefeller of Music Earns \$150,000 a Year,” *Baltimore Sun*, 14 March 1909, 13.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

on the subject of art and business. In his shrewd mind there is nothing about them that cannot be united. He is willing to give to the world the profoundest inspirations of his muse, but in his conception every note must be literally a golden note to be paid for at the highest market price.”¹⁷³ It further juxtaposes his image with the romantic notions of the bohemian artist: “starving in a garret may have been all right a century ago, but Strauss is teaching the world that even in art the world’s business sense moves along.”¹⁷⁴ Listing the financial troubles of composers throughout history, including Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, and Wagner, the *Baltimore Sun* positioned Strauss as someone different, explicitly referring to him as the “composer business man.”¹⁷⁵ The implication is clear—Strauss’s monetary interest disqualified him from being a true artist.¹⁷⁶ Never the biggest fan of Strauss, Krehbiel often took a particularly harsh stance on this issue. In regard to the premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier* in the city, Krehbiel remarked, harkening back to Strauss’s 1904 tour:

When he was in New York he said to one of its best musicians that he would polish stoves if only the occupation could be made remunerative enough: and there need be no surprise that he was willing to humor the decadent taste of the German stage in his “Rosenkavalier,” inasmuch as by doing so he was able to command larger royalties and enforce more rigorous demands than had ever been heard of before for its production.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ As part of this same line of thought, articles would frequently appear covering financial disputes between Strauss and the managers of various houses. One such example occurred in 1910 in regard to the *Rosenkavalier* premiere. The *Times* covered some of the controversy that arose around Strauss’s financial demands, which reportedly included prices twice as high as normal and the provision that *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* would all appear at least four times each year. “Opera Heads Unite to Defeat Strauss,” *New York Times*, 11 September 1910, C3.

¹⁷⁷ “Why Not \$20 for Rosenkavalier,” *New-York Tribune*, 25 November 1913, 9.

For Krehbiel, and those like him, Strauss's monetary interests superseded everything else.¹⁷⁸ Even the somewhat scandalous opening scene of *Der Rosenkavalier* was purportedly included to induce higher titillation and therefore higher prices, rather than for any purely artistic or dramatic purpose. Gilman, however, worked to counteract this perception, noting:

But what gives the score of "Salome" its cardinal interest for the student and the historian is the fact that it anticipated certain of the innovations which we are too generously inclined to credit to the ultra-modernists who came after Strauss. He could say, with reverence and truth, "Before Modernity was. I am." That prime and favorite device of the tonal radicals of the last two decades or so, the superposing and opposition of tonalities was used—and used with genius—by Strauss in the score of "Salome" before Schönberg had yet invented the technique that has made him famous; while Stravinsky, then a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakoff, was busy with *juvenilia*; while Hindemith, a boy of ten, was rolling marbles in the streets of Hanau.

Whatever we may ultimately decide to think of "Salome," let us make no mistake about its place in the pageant of musical history: it was an epoch-making work; and it remains, for all its faults, a masterpiece.¹⁷⁹

If nothing else, Gilman's comments provide an important—if somewhat isolated—attempt at reimagining Strauss's legacy, which had long been colored by the charges listed above.¹⁸⁰ That being said, the faults that Gilman notes are not entirely

¹⁷⁸ This view of Strauss was not limited to American critics. In his dissertation, Richard Wattenbarger demonstrates that this impression of Strauss as an opportunistic composer concerned largely with monetary gain was also central to the composer's image among many of the leading academics of the twentieth century. Richard Ernest Wattenbarger, "Richard Strauss, Modernism, and the University: A Study of German-Language and American Academic Reception of Richard Strauss from 1900 to 1990" (PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2000).

¹⁷⁹ "'Salome' Returns to the Metropolitan After 27 Years," *New-York Herald Tribune*, 7 January 1934, D8.

¹⁸⁰ "It is better to emphasize the truth that no other living composer could have written this score, with its incomparable intensity, its gorgeous and dazzling color, its consummate mastery of musical means. Beside the costive futilities of certain musical Lilliputians of our day who would like to throw the venerable Richard to the wolves, this

inconsequential. As Gilman writes, “the work still seems . . . a typical example of Strauss’s critical inner censor.”¹⁸¹ His complaint is at the heart of many complaints against Strauss voiced by his detractors: “he has never known when he was speaking with the tongue of genius, and when he was uttering pretentious and banal platitudes. . . . At one moment he is shaking us with the power and passion of his discourse; the next, he is proving to us that it is possible for an imaginative tone-poet to write like one of the lost souls of parlor balladry.”¹⁸²

One significant shift in both Gilman and Downes’s recounts of the 1907 incident was the shifting of blame away from Wilde and Strauss and onto Conried, who “out-Straussed Strauss.”¹⁸³ Both writers note Conried’s disregard for the stage directions, which called for the blacking out of the stage at the point of Salome’s necrophilic kissing of Jochanaan’s head. Conried instead chose a well-lit and centrally situated staging.¹⁸⁴ With the 1934 production, Downes noted: “it was evidently the management’s intention to disclose Strauss the poet and dramatist rather than the realist or decadent.”¹⁸⁵ Concerning the other infamous moment of the opera—the Dance of the Seven Veils—the biggest controversy of the 1934 production was arguably Göta Ljungberg’s (1898–1955)

score towers like a masterwork.” “‘Salome’ Back at Metropolitan After 1907 Exile in Disgrace,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 14 January 1934, 1.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “Revival of Strauss’s ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 7 January 1934, X6.

¹⁸⁴ “The episode of the Judean Princess caressing the severed head of John the Baptist was enacted in a spot brightly lighted and much nearer the front of the stage than the composer’s directions had called for. Instead of a nocturne—a stage in deep shadow, a gleam of moonlight falling on the sensual woman, with her song of love and death, there was a degree of realism which caused the coolest to catch their breath, and the press of the day to break out in wholesale denunciation.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ “Salome is Revived After 27 Years; Once ‘Shocking’ Opera is Modified,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1934, 1.

decision to dance the part herself, rather than rely on a professional stand-in. While many of the critics were less than enthusiastic about the results, Ljungberg fired back that Strauss had informed her performance: “I danced it as he intended.”¹⁸⁶

Downes, much like Gilman, worked to present *Salome* as an important product of its time, noting the connections to the philosophic and literary movements of the period, while also pointing out moments that looked toward later developments in modernism.¹⁸⁷ At one point, Downes even compared the work to French impressionism; however, he fails to disclose how this was achieved and only notes that it came by “ways which are his own and imitated from nobody.”¹⁸⁸ Compared to *Der Rosenkavalier*, whose post-war revival had incited at least some discussion of its German pedigree, neither *Salome* nor *Elektra* were treated or discussed as “German” works.¹⁸⁹ This ability to ignore—

¹⁸⁶ Ljungberg argued that her portrayal was in line with Strauss’s idea of the character, rather than Wilde’s conception. “‘Strauss told me,’ she said, ‘he didn’t want the dance to be hoppy and jumpy. It was a thought dance, in his conception. And to him the actual movements of the dance were secondary, symbolical.’” “Salome Quick to Defend Her Dance of 7 Veils,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 15 January 1934, 13.

¹⁸⁷ Recalling a comment from Henderson that some of the passages seemed to be more spoken than sung, Downes notes “this was before Schönberg had elaborated his ‘Sprechstimme.’” “Revival of Strauss’s ‘Salome,’” *New York Times*, 7 January 1934, X6.

¹⁸⁸ “Salome is Revived After 27 Years; Once ‘Shocking’ Opera is Modified,” *New York Times*, 14 January 1934, 1.

¹⁸⁹ For some, both *Salome* and *Elektra* also managed to age better than *Der Rosenkavalier*, which was viewed by many critics as the product of a bygone era. In a summary of the 1938 season—which had marked the first time these three operas had been performed in the same season—Olin Downes described *Salome* and *Elektra* as the “Strauss masterpieces,” while noting that *Der Rosenkavalier* “is inferior . . . as a stylistic achievement, this opera is remarkable and highly entertaining. There are, moreover, pages of more than ephemeral nature. But as a whole the score is a patchwork, a mosaic, a virtuoso trick by a master of his medium.” It is also worth mentioning that this season was viewed by some as heavily Germanic, particularly in its embrace of Wagner, which the *Times* attributed to “the growing public appreciation of his art.” In a breakdown of the season: “Wagner led with forty-one performances of nine operas. Verdi was given twenty-seven performances of five operas. Richard Strauss had twelve performances of three operas and Puccini had eight performances of two. These are very different

consciously or not—the nationality of Strauss would become increasingly impossible as the decade wore on. As these three works became fixtures in the Metropolitan’s repertoire during the 1930s, political realities were shifting. These changing tides would not only dramatically alter perceptions of the composer, but also larger perceptions of German American identity and culture.

balances from those of ten years ago.” Coming at the beginning of 1938, this rising tide of Wagnerism at the Met seems particularly noteworthy. “Season in Review: Ascendance of Wagner Continues,” *New York Times*, 20 March 1938, 155.

Epilogue

Tidings to Come: Strauss, the National Socialists, and the Dissolution of “German” America

In any discussion of Strauss’s reception in the United States it is impossible—and irresponsible—to avoid an examination of his connection to Nazism. While this period falls just outside of the scope of this study, it warrants discussion, particularly as it colored views of Strauss for decades to come. Concerns had been raised regarding the state of German musical culture almost immediately after the end of the First World War. In 1923, the *Times* published an article from Alfred Einstein, which had originally appeared in the *London Times*, examining the state of music in post-war Germany. One topic of concern was the changing attitude in Germany towards “greatness” in music. The composer that Einstein singled-out as the greatest victim of this shift was Strauss, who had been reduced in estimation as “time has revealed an artificiality and luxuriousness in his art.”¹ Einstein also exhibited a certain foresight for what was to come: “The contest between ‘old’ and ‘new’ is highly inflamed. Music of the older schools is prized as true German art, whereas the ‘new music’ is stigmatized as international, unracial and Bolshevist.”² The sentiments observed by Einstein would reverberate throughout the 1930s, when German musical culture became synonymous with the chauvinistic goals of

¹ “Music in Germany Today,” *New York Times*, 15 July 1923, X4.

² Einstein singles out Pfitzner as a composer who “has risen in esteem. He is emphatically a national musician. His polemical writings against the ‘futurist’ Busoni and the author of ‘Aesthetiker der Impotenz’ (Esthetician of Incompetence), Paul Bekker, have caused a great sensation, and, as in Wagner’s time, have caused party division. There are Pfitzner societies more nationalistic than Pfitzner himself.” Ibid.

the National Socialists and charges of “international” and “unracial” would appear with disturbing regularity.

One composer who emerged as a flashpoint in this new state of “Germanness” was Wagner. Writing in 1924, Olin Downes had observed this changing role for Wagner in the German mind: “there was a constant cry at the time of the World War, and it was not least audible from Germany, that music should be kept separate from politics; that neither Beethoven nor Wagner caused the war. . . . The curious thing to observe, in the light of those remarks, is the manner in which Wagner and politics are inextricably interwoven today in Germany.”³ Wagner, as evident in the debate over whether or not his music should have been removed during World War One, represented many things to many people. As Downes notes, Wagner could be an “embodiment of monarchism” or “the exemplar of what is greatest and highest in German thought.”⁴ Included were quotations from an unnamed “professor of Göttingen,” who represented the voices opposed to Wagner’s symbolic status. One of his biggest complaints was that Wagner stood for the music of the past, which “was characterized by the hyper-romanticism, the pride and megalomania which were to bring the nation and the world to disaster.”⁵ At this point, the professor goes on to explain what it means to be an artist in post-war Germany, noting that in the days of the Kaiser, “our poets and artists had to look crazy with their hair, their dress and their bluff in the cafes, and everybody stared and wondered.”⁶ Now, however, “they cut their hair, and a Weingartner or a Furtwängler looks just as simple

³ “Wagner a Political Storm Centre,” *New York Times*, 24 August 1924, X5.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

and unpretentious as any other man.”⁷ Included in this list could just as easily have been Strauss, the embodiment of the bourgeois craftsman. This professor then goes on to uphold Handel and the icons of the eighteenth century: “our turning back to the sanity, the impersonality, the emotional balance of our great classics . . . in the works of the old masters we shall rejuvenate and cleanse ourselves, and discover again our true thought and our destiny as a people.”⁸ The composer responsible for leading Germans astray was naturally Wagner, whose coterie of supporters included the wild-haired Liszt. From the vantage of history, it is easy to read, whether rightly or wrongly, some of these statements—particularly images of “cleansing”—as precursors to many of the ideas embraced by the National Socialists in later years. It is also easy to see how the treatment of Wagner is a product of the nineteenth-century notion that Germans possessed a particularly strong relationship to music. Downes says as much when he writes: “There is no question that Wagner is performed and felt here very deeply, and that in Munich and Baireuth [*sic*], when they sing the final choruses in ‘Die Meistersinger,’ they sing with their whole souls of all they cherish most in the art of their native land.”⁹ Writing about music in the Nazi era, Pamela Potter notes that it was Wagner who emerged as one of the more problematic musical figures among exiled German writers, such as Emil Ludwig (1881–1948) and Thomas Mann (1875–1955), who criticized the composer for helping to lay the foundation for what was to come. As Potter points out, Adorno argued that Wagner’s *Ring* provided a necessary source of mythology for the regime, while Mann eventually presented Germany’s close connection to music—embodied by Wagner—as

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

the source of its downfall in *Doktor Faustus* (1947).¹⁰ Even decades later, Susan Sontag noted the persistent references to Wagner in Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler: A Film from Germany* (1977) as a commentary on Wagner's role—as a symbol of German musical romanticism—in the rise of Hitler.¹¹ As is clear, music of the past, being so deeply intertwined with Germanness, could not exist free of the rising political turmoil.

As these debates were entangling deceased composers, those who were still alive could not avoid the changing political tides. When the Nazis did eventually assume power, Strauss joined the party. At the time, some critics rightly questioned how a man who had refused to sign the “Manifesto of the Ninety-Three” could choose to join with the Nazis. Many critics sought an answer to this question by pondering his commitment to the cause. In one instance, a commemoration of Strauss's seventieth birthday, a concert was held in Vienna under the leadership of Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886–1954). Writing from Vienna, Herbert F. Peysner (1886–1953) covered the event, while also making note of Strauss's absence, despite having appeared at similar performances in Dresden and Berlin. As Peysner writes, the Viennese were not “ugly” about Strauss's absence, knowing that his presence in the other cities was required by the Nazi regime: “They realize that Strauss is too old to swim against the stream as he did when he refused to sign the wartime manifesto of the German ‘intellectuals,’ and that, if he seems to be traveling in

¹⁰ Pamela Potter, “What Is ‘Nazi Music’?,” *The Musical Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (Autumn 2005): 447–448.

¹¹ Sontag shows that Syberberg's connection to Wagner is ambivalent. Although he positions Wagner as partially responsible for creating the conditions that allowed for the rise of Hitler, Syberberg is also deeply indebted to Wagner's art. Sontag notes that the film is Wagnerian in its conception and contains many parallels to the aesthetic vision and theories of Wagner's music dramas. Susan Sontag, “Syberberg's Hitler,” in *Susan Sontag: Later Essays*, ed. David Rieff (New York: The Library of America, 2017), 97–118.

its general direction, it is only because he is passively letting himself be carried along on the seething current.”¹² While the excuse offered by his age soothed some of his supporters, it did not—and still does not—cleanse him of his sin of complicity.

In the United States, much ink was spilled in dissecting Strauss’s seemingly ambiguous connection to the Third Reich. On 12 June 1935, the *Times* published an account of Strauss losing his position as president of the *Reichsmusikkammer* as a result of his collaboration with Stefan Zweig (1881–1942) on *Die schweigsame Frau* (1935).¹³ As the *Times* implies, Strauss’s stance was less political than it was self-serving, noting the difficulty in finding a suitable librettist.¹⁴ The *Tribune* took a similar, if more pointed, approach to the news, noting that “the Nazis, in their extremity, make no allowances for their friends.”¹⁵ Both papers were quick to jump on Strauss’s refusal to take a stand against the regime, while the *Tribune* also pointed out the absurdity of a composer even needing to appease the authorities: “If Strauss is open to criticism it is because he was too complacent towards the Nazis. . . . But even this has nothing to do with his art. The very fact that an honorable man of his standing should have felt impelled to ‘get in right’ with

¹² “Furtwaengler in Vienna,” *New York Times*, 8 July 1934, X4.

¹³ There was some concern that the opera’s premiere in Dresden would become the site of political demonstrations; however, this did not come to fruition. Notably, both Hitler and Goebbels failed to appear. “Strauss Premiere Politely Received,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1935, 15.

¹⁴ “Strauss, observers recalled, has tried hard to adapt himself to Nazism, even forsaking his colleague, Wilhelm Furtwaengler, when that famed conductor incurred the displeasure of the Nazi regime.” “Strauss to Lose Nazi Music Post,” *New York Times*, 12 June 1935, 9.

¹⁵ “The ‘Crime’ of Richard Strauss,” *New-York Herald Tribune*, 16 June 1935, A8.

the authorities is itself the best proof that the German policy in this respect is as unworthy as it is degrading.”¹⁶

To say the least, Strauss’s relationship to the regime was complicated. The same could be said for any artist actively working during this time. In his work on the topic, *The Twisted Muse*, Michael H. Kater argued that there was a three-stage process concerning musicians and policy-making in the Reich: first, musicians of high quality and loyalty to the party were guaranteed success; second, musicians exhibiting strong loyalty, yet questionable talent, often struggled to find work; third, musicians with vast talent, but who exhibited little to no commitment to the Nazis, could often have successful careers, as long as they did not antagonize the authorities. In the process he lays out, Kater places Strauss in this third stage.¹⁷ For many, Strauss’s complicity was most apparent in his decision to lead the *Reichsmusikkammer*. Kater conjectures that Strauss was not a die-hard Nazi, but rather—as many had branded him in the past—an opportunist.¹⁸ Strauss saw in the authoritarian regime an opportunity to raise the level of musical training in Germany, increase the profit share of serious composers over popular

¹⁶ “When other German musicians resented the action of the Nazis in forcing out various German musicians and conductors, like Bruno Walter, because of their Jewish origin, Strauss gladly played safe with the Nazis.” Ibid.

¹⁷ Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

¹⁸ Notably, Kater does not argue, as many have before, that Strauss was apolitical. Instead, Kater views Strauss’s actions as both a product of his upbringing in a country repeatedly changing governmental systems and of his desire to improve the state of music in Germany. For Strauss, the dictatorship of Hitler provided the type of strong government necessary to make the changes he felt were required. Kater presents Strauss’s dismissal from the *Reichsmusikkammer* and the incident of the confiscated letter to Stefan Zweig that was critical of the Nazis as partly coming from Strauss’s growing disillusionment with what the party could accomplish. Ibid., 203–208.

composers, such as Franz Lehár, and extend the period of copyright protections.¹⁹ This should not, however, be viewed as exculpation. From the vantage of history, it is clear that Strauss made the wrong decision. At least in his choice to lead the *Reichsmusikkammer*, Strauss turned a blind eye on the realities of the time in order to advance his own self-interests and goals. This was not out of character for him, but it was obviously more serious than performing at a department store or choosing to set a play by Oscar Wilde. Kater argues that the image of Strauss as a devoted Nazi has been overdrawn. He cites the treatment of Strauss's Jewish daughter-in-law Alice and her family, many of them murdered in the camps, along with his attempts to help enemies of the regime and the harassment, both large and small, that he received at the hands of the Nazis as signs that Strauss was not the collaborator portrayed by many.²⁰ In her article on the subject, Potter suggests that a middle-ground approach would likely be the most fruitful for understanding the reality of musicians during this period: "having witnessed early acts of terror and intimidation . . . the majority of Germans led their lives as before and took advantage of opportunities that came along but considered the path of least resistance as the best way to proceed."²¹

In the 1930s, American interest in Strauss's relationship to the Nazi regime grew, particularly as Europe became embroiled in a war that soon engulfed the United States. Beyond Strauss, in the years leading up to the declaration of war, questions of German American allegiance became increasingly common.²² Many German Americans chose to

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰ Ibid., 203–211.

²¹ Potter, *Nazi*, 446.

²² Some attempted to draw a distinction between those German Americans that supported the Reich and those that did not, even after the situation had grown direr in the final

downplay their connection to the Old World.²³ There were others, though, who took a more vocal stance on the need to maintain relations between Germany and the United States. On 20 January 1935, the *Times* published a letter to the editor written by F. K. Krüger in response to the paper's coverage of a speech he had given at the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik. Krüger, who had written *Government and Politics of the German Empire* (1915), espoused a staunchly nationalistic stance on the Nazis. In Krüger's view, German Americans were "only those American citizens of German blood who still speak German and who are still conscious of their German culture, their Goethe, Kant, Beethoven, Luther, &c."²⁴ In addition to excluding those who had assimilated, Krüger's concept of German American identity relied heavily on a cultural definition. It is this cultural definition that echoed calls from the nineteenth century for German Americans to

months of 1938. In an article on the House of Un-American Activities Committee investigation into the German-American Bund, which had been accused of being a branch of the Nazi party, the *Times* quoted John C. Metcalfe (1904–1971)—the committee investigator and investigative reporter for the *Chicago Daily Times*, who had spent several months undercover with the Bund—as saying that "the Nazi ranks in the United States are not really German-Americans but rather American Germans. They consider themselves the identical type of minorities as the Polish-German minorities, the Austrian-German minorities who brought about the annexation of Austria, or the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia." "Hitler Rules Bund, Says Dies Witness," *New York Times*, 29 September 1938, 5.

The German-American Bund became so closely connected to Nazism that some German American organizations chose to drop the "Bund" from their own organizations, including the German World War Veterans in America, Inc. Many of these organizations deliberately stressed their distance from the Reich: "Commander Frank Samuels of Jersey City, who was re-elected, said most of the German veterans in his organization had become American citizens and that the organization had nothing to do with foreign movements." "German Veterans Here Drop Use of Word 'Bund,'" *New York Times*, 24 October 1938, 10.

²³ Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 264–265.

²⁴ "Citizens Who Have Adopted the United States as Their Country Urged to Further Understanding," *New York Times*, 20 January 1935, E5.

contribute to the United States: “intelligent Americans will agree with the German-Americans that the latter can render the greatest service to America by contributing their own peculiar national gifts in music, science, literature, &c., to the general culture of the land of their choice.”²⁵ This statement could easily have been written in the nineteenth century, when German American identity relied heavily on a sense of cultural superiority to warrant a place at the American table. For Krüger, it was the role of the German American to provide a bridge between Germany and the United States—a bridge that was built on German cultural offerings—in order to maintain peaceful relations. The reality was far more complicated. This was particularly true for works dismissed by the Nazis. In *The Politics of Display: Exhibiting Modern German Art in America, 1937-1957*, Jennifer McComas describes how works of art belonging to German modernism took on political implications throughout the 1930s. Displaying modernist works that had been condemned as *Entartete* could be viewed by some as an act of protest against the Nazi regime.²⁶ Art, whether implicitly or explicitly, was ensnared in politics.

Understandably, this issue was particularly sensitive. Around the same time that Krüger was arguing for German culture to bridge the divide between Germany and the

²⁵ In one of the more chillingly misguided statements from Krüger’s letter, he posits that German Americans “as people of German blood” should be “interested in the honor, dignity and well-being of their people across the ocean. From this standpoint they are glad that the New Germany has made the government service again honest, that it has restored religion and family virtue, that it has cleaned the stage and the film, that it has destroyed bolshevism, that it has abolished class struggle and class distinction, and that it has asserted its right to equal standing and a respected position in the family of nations.” In respect to the disturbing reports coming out of Germany, Krüger laments American newspapers “unable to distinguish between the sensational by-products of the German revolution and the normal state of affairs.” *Ibid.*

²⁶ Jennifer McComas, “The Politics of Display: Exhibiting Modern German Art in America, 1937–1957” (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2014).

United States, Thomas Mann was also grappling with the reality of a new role for German culture in the age of Nazism. In a letter to the editor of the *Times*, on the subject of an Academy dedicated to preserving and cultivating German art and culture in the face of Hitler's oppression, Mann wrote an impassioned plea to separate German culture from the taint of the political. For Mann, German culture was never confined to a German nation: "German culture has never been geographically confined to the Reich. To the extent to which German culture transcends beyond the borders of the Reich ethnologically and linguistically, its conception is higher than that of the State. That is Germanic freedom. No president of an official chamber of culture can subdue it."²⁷ In the next section, Mann addresses German Americans and other German-speaking immigrants around the world. He points to the need to save Germanic culture "outside the sphere of dictatorship," but recognizes that this is impossible for the intellectuals left on German soil. It is also not the sole responsibility of those Germans living abroad. Instead, "it is the task of the world to proclaim this—of that world which cannot forget the sympathy and gratitude with which it time and again welcomed the question and creative German spirit in the days of its moral autonomy and self responsibility. It must be the profound concern of that world to safeguard, support and sustain that spirit."²⁸ Mann also calls for a bridge, but it is a bridge "not only between the German culture of yesterday and the German culture of tomorrow but also between the spiritual life of Germany and that of other peoples."²⁹ At the heart of Mann's argument is the belief that German culture had

²⁷ "Seeking to Preserve German Cultural Freedom," *New York Times*, 12 December 1936, 18.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

indeed achieved a universality that transcended national or political boundaries. In this way, his pleas belong to this history—already discussed in regard to composers like Mozart and Beethoven—of viewing German culture as universal culture.³⁰

When war did become a reality for the United States, cultural institutions, such as the Metropolitan, were once again forced to consider the treatment of works associated with the Germans. Critics confronted this dilemma in the first full season that followed the entry of the United States into the war. The decision to continue with performances was explained as “the belief that music is not a luxury but a necessity of humankind, perhaps more necessary in times of national stress than in easier periods.”³¹ Included in this season was a production of Wagner’s *Der Ring des Nibelungen*—with Kirsten Flagstad (1895–1962) as Brünnhilde—and Strauss’s *Salome*.³² On 5 December, the *Times* addressed the issue of German-language music appearing in a time of war. At the beginning of the article, the writer makes clear that this “could not have happened here in the First World War.”³³ After noting the presence of Strauss’s *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier* in the Met’s repertoire, the writer claims, “All this is an advance in

³⁰ Nearly a year after the United States had been drawn into war, Mann appeared on a radio broadcast for the “German-American Loyalty Hour,” sponsored by the Office of War Information. In his address, Mann once again strove to present Hitler’s Germany as distinct from the “old Germany.” Speaking to those of German descent, Mann argued, “The hyphen between ‘German’ and ‘American’ must not be allowed to mean a spiritual rupture, a conflict of sentiments or of loyal obligations. It does mean something that I left Germany, that I could no longer live there. Nothing in the world, no political change, no revolution could have driven a man like myself out of Germany; only one thing, called National Socialism, only Hitler and his hordes.” “Mann Asks Germans for Loyalty to U.S.,” *New York Times*, 16 November 1942, 10.

³¹ “Opera Season,” *New York Times*, 24 November 1942, 24.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ “German Music in New York,” *New York Times*, 5 December 1942, 14.

liberalism and the public consciousness of art greater than we may now realize.”³⁴

Perhaps the greatest shift in public consciousness is the inclusion of Strauss’s music. While it was the case that all German-language operas were banned in the years during and after the First World War, there were many that sought to exclude the works of past composers from this ban. As seen earlier, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner were championed as composers who were innocent of the current political situation in Germany. Even the most ardent supporters of bringing back German-language operas, however, stopped short of encouraging the return of Strauss. This makes the inclusion of Strauss’s operas in the midst of the Second World War an indication of how attitudes had changed over the course of a few decades. While the *Times* chocked it up to a growing “liberalism” and belief in the power of music and art to transcend the political, there could also be other currents at work. When discussing German music, the issue of its particular brand of universality cannot fully be ignored. For decades, certain people had argued that German music was not exclusive to the German people, but rather the greatest cultural gift that Germans had to offer. The decision to keep German-language opera could be a sign of the music’s achieved status.

It could also, though, be a sign of the diminished influence of opera. From its beginning, opera has been described as a failing art. This rhetoric in the early twentieth century often became conflated with notions of modernism and the aftereffects of modernity. In a lengthy article from 1930, Thomas Russell Ybarra (1880–1971)—a Venezuelan American journalist and writer—tackled the perceived decline of opera in the age of “mechanization.” The greatest culprits for Ybarra were the radio and the “general

³⁴ Ibid.

‘mechanization’ and materialism of our day.’³⁵ Ybarra cited an array of figures in his article who shared his viewpoint, including the soprano Frances Alda (1879–1952), who pointed to the proliferation of radio as the death knell for the opera: “It is the old law of supply and demand . . . when people can sit in comfort in their homes and hear the great works of the masters sung by those whom they love to hear without any more trouble than turning on their radio sets, naturally the demand for opera . . . fast disappears.”³⁶ To further demonstrate the “decline” of opera, Ybarra singled out Italy and Germany as case studies, both being “land[s] of operalovers” that were experiencing diminished audiences. Although Ybarra fails to take into consideration the financial and political realities of the time, his article does point to the declining cultural significance of opera.

Downes, who saw the changes occurring in opera in a slightly different light, also considered this issue: “Will the public become any more serious or less capricious in its reactions to this form of art? Will opera continue to be principally a matter of exotic pastime, a pastime of a character and duration dictated largely by the overlords and ladies of society and finance; an affair principally for the boxes on the one hand, and the gallery on the other?”³⁷ Downes’s hope is for opera to become more “democratic” as in

³⁵ For his article, Ybarra interviewed Gatti-Casazza, who blamed the decline of opera on the lack of decent composers and singers: “The old composers of opera succeeded in their works because of a combination of genius and sincerity. Most of the moderns lack both these qualities. As a rule they possess an excellent technical knowledge of music, but they have nothing to say.” He also complained about the general decline in “mystery” around the opera that resulted from the increasing ease by which audiences could hear operas compared to earlier generations: “The radio brings to many homes the voices of operatic singers and the music of operatic composers, so an increasing number of people, becoming familiar in this way with grand opera, stay away from the theatre.” “The Twilight of the Opera Gods,” *New York Times*, 16 February 1930, 82.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Uncertainly, Opera Faces the Morrow,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1932, SM4.

Germany: “there opera, like other forms of music, is a more democratic affair. It is imbibed as daily nourishment, almost as grateful as beer, by the populace.”³⁸ Noting the declining support of the moneyed class, Downes opted for a more optimistic stance, believing that the public would rise up and lead opera to its next chapter. This was an opinion shared by the Metropolitan, which cited radio broadcasts and the Guild as tools in the process of encouraging a broader audience to visit the house. Noting a success in bringing up audience numbers for performances of Wagner, Edward Johnson (1878–1959)—Canadian tenor and general manager of the Metropolitan from 1935–1950—told the *Times* that repeated performances would ensure wider audiences. In 1937, Johnson scheduled *Salome*, *Elektra*, and *Der Rosenkavalier* in order to “help the public make an effort to apprehend Richard Strauss.”³⁹ When asked about his desire to bring back many of the older works of the stage, Johnson replied: “I look upon the Metropolitan Opera Association as an institution which should perform a function similar to that of a library or museum. We are the custodians of the lyric works of the past. All the great operas should be on display in our house, and in the proper framework.”⁴⁰ Although he does not completely forswear new works, Johnson does make clear that the primary mission of the Metropolitan was to become a guardian of the past. This attitude towards opera is not that dissimilar from the edification arguments of foreign-language opera proponents in the early nineteenth century. There are also, though, other implications for Johnson’s rhetoric. The inclusion of Strauss in this educational mission points to his new status as a figure of the past. Joining the ranks of Wagner, Beethoven, and Mozart, Strauss—at least

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ “Opera Takes on Modern Aspects,” *New York Times*, 28 November 1937, 154.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

in the eyes of Johnson—is no longer a force of modernism, but rather an artifact of what came before. Another, more powerful, impact of Johnson’s desire to turn the opera house into a museum was the weakened influence of opera in the wider world. By stripping the operas of their immediacy and presenting them as historical relics, the works invariably lost their teeth. This was already seen with both *Salome* and *Elektra*, which were viewed as quaint vestiges of the past by the 1930s. Perhaps there was no larger backlash against German-language works at the Metropolitan because no one thought they were worth the trouble. Relegated to the museum, these operas no longer had the power—or relevancy—they once possessed and therefore no longer posed any threat.⁴¹

The decision by the Metropolitan to include Strauss’s works in the repertoire during the war is further complicated by his ambiguous actions. Despite Strauss’s apparent apathy towards the German cause in World War One, the banishment of his music was still called for, since profits from the performance would implicitly help the German cause. With World War Two, there was no ignoring the fact he had joined the party of the enemy, yet his music still appeared as scheduled. If there is a larger takeaway from this decision, it is the perceived role of the music itself. What had once been heralded as one of the greatest markers of German identity was now being upheld as a means of demonstrating liberal ideals and the power of art to transcend politics. Strauss’s operas were no longer the tools of identity construction and maintenance, but rather artifacts of an earlier time and sites of cultural edification. Despite the policy of including

⁴¹ Conolly-Smith argues that film supplanted opera in cultural significance during this period. Peter Conolly-Smith, *Translating America: An Immigrant Press Visualizes American Popular Culture, 1895–1918* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 214–216.

German-language productions throughout the war, prejudice towards German Americans, as a whole, did not disappear during this conflict. Faced with this reality, many chose to relinquish their German identity and fade into the generalized American tapestry.

Although not an exact parallel, the end of World War Two saw the culmination of two processes that had roots in the nineteenth century. German Americans, following the common pattern of assimilation, reached a point where the “German” marker of identity was dropped in favor of a broader “American” identity. At roughly the same time, German music increasingly became known as simply music. Despite following independent courses, the paths of these two trajectories had intersected at times. With the end of the war, both had also reached a point where there was no going back.

Appendix

Metropolitan Opera Premieres During the “German Years” (1884–1891)

1884–1885 Season

Wagner, *Tannhäuser*: 17 November 1884
Beethoven, *Fidelio*: 19 November 1884
Weber, *Der Freischütz*: 24 November 1884
Rossini, *Guillaume Tell*: 28 November 1884
Auber, *La Muette de Portici*: 29 December 1884
Halévy, *La Juive*: 16 January 1885
Wagner, *Die Walküre*: 30 January 1885
Boieldieu, *La Dame Blanche*: 12 March 1885
Gluck, *Orfeo ed Euridice*: 11 April 1885

1885–1886 Season

Goldmark, *Die Königin von Saba*: 2 December 1885 (U.S. Premiere)
Wagner, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*: 4 January 1886 (U.S. Premiere)
Wagner, *Rienzi*: 5 February 1886

1886–1887 Season

Verdi, *Aida*: 12 November 1886
Brüll, *Das Goldene Kreuz*: 19 November 1886 (U.S. Premiere)
Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*: 1 December 1886 (U.S. Premiere)
Goldmark, *Merlin*: 3 January 1887 (U.S. Premiere)

1887–1888 Season

Wagner, *Siegfried*: 9 November 1887 (U.S. Premiere)
Nessler, *Der Trompeter von Säckingen*: 23 November 1887 (U.S. Premiere)
Weber, *Euryanthe*: 23 December 1887 (U.S. Premiere)
Spontini, *Fernand Cortez*: 6 January 1888 (U.S. Premiere)
Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*: 25 January 1888 (U.S. Premiere)

1888–1889 Season

Meyerbeer, *L'Africaine*: 7 December 1888
Wagner, *Das Rheingold*: 4 January 1889 (U.S. Premiere)
Wagner, *Tannhäuser* (Paris version): 30 January 1889 (U.S. Premiere)

Wagner, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*: 4–11 March 1889 (U.S. Premiere)¹

Das Rheingold: 4 March 1889

Die Walküre: 5 March 1889

Siegfried: 8 March 1889

Götterdämmerung: 11 March 1889

1889–1890 Season

Wagner, *Der Fliegende Holländer*: 27 November 1889

Verdi, *Un Ballo in Maschera*: 11 December 1889

Cornelius, *Der Barbier von Bagdad*: 3 January 1890 (U.S. Premiere)

Bellini, *Norma*: 27 February 1890

1890–1891 Season

Franchetti, *Asrael*: 26 November 1890 (U.S. Premiere)

Smareglia, *Il Vassallo di Szigeth*: 12 December 1890 (U.S. Premiere)

Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, *Diana von Solange*: 9 January 1891 (U.S. Premiere)

¹ This marked the first consecutive performance of the cycle in the United States, although it was performed with cuts.

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