

Laurence Senelick

# Musical Theatre as a Paradigm of Translocation

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## Abstract

“Omni-local”, a concept promoted by the classicist Emily Greenwood, is a variation on “transglobal.” It describes a work significant enough to be influential in a wide sphere but which undergoes local adaptation to ensure its reception. In the sphere of performance, this can be observed in the commedia dell’arte, opera and musical theatre. A prime example for the nineteenth century is the comic operas of Jacques Offenbach, which achieved global success, with varying effect, depending on the nature of their introduction and of the host societies. In Rio de Janeiro, they aided liberalization, abolition of slavery and the development of carnival. In Cairo, imposed from above, they were meant to promote Westernization, but ultimately made to advance Arabic culture. In Japan, they were first viewed as an outlandish novelty, but over the decades became acclimatized and assimilated into indigenous popular entertainment.

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In a recent essay on the cultural mobility of the classics, Emily Greenwood attempts to promote among literary scholars the term “omni-local.” She considers it more sophisticated than cosmopolitanism or universalism or timelessness, which make “naïve assumptions about cultural equivalence and translatability.” “To label a classic omni-local is to acknowledge its local historical origins, some of which are untranslatable, while simultaneously crediting it with a strong degree of cross-cultural adaptability that is virtual and indeterminate – to be determined by the receiving reader and audiences.”<sup>1</sup> While a classical work may circulate among different interpretative communities, once it is adopted and adapted it again becomes local and specific, and an inevitable gap opens up between the text and its adaptation.

Greenwood's concern is the transmission of Greek and Latin classics, a body of texts whose stability has often been taken for granted by scholars and popularizers alike. However, the concept of "omni-local" may be more useful in studying performance rather than texts. What the poststructuralists saw as the essential ungraspability of a work that shifts its shape and meaning with every act of reception had been foretold by theatre studies, where it is a foundational tenet. The mutability of every live performance is a given of the art form, although the methods of studying such changes are themselves transient and imperfect. In charting the fluctuations of theatrical phenomena, "omni-local" may apply, particularly in its refusal to assume the essentialism of any given performance.

In Western theatre perhaps the most obvious case of a performance that might be classified as "omni-local" is the *commedia dell' arte*. It is invariably cited as a type of performance whose basic plots and characters were constantly being mutated and naturalized and thereby enabled to colonize the imagination to create archetypes ubiquitous in their cultural manifestations. A recent dissertation by a student of mine demonstrates how, in the early eighteenth's century, the troupe of Luigi Riccoboni at the Comédie-Italienne in Paris had to balance what was expected of it as "Italians" with French taste, manners and language. (McMahan 2016) *Commedia* is transglobal in its dynamic exploitation of the porosity of borders, but it is omni-local, since each transplantation entails assimilation. I would go beyond the *commedia* to suggest that, by its very nature, pre-modern professional theatre has always been "omni-local."

By pre-modern professional theatre I mean the livelihood of devoted practitioners – minstrels, acrobats, clowns, mimes, and the like –, which traditional theatre histories have segregated as "popular entertainment." Itinerant by nature, tribal in organization, they readily crossed borders in the confidence that their skills needed little translation. The big guns of early theatre history – Greek festivals, medieval religious plays, the university drama of Renaissance, – were amateur endeavors, originally bound to a particular locale and cultural context. Not until the sixteenth century the two strands begin to entwine, with the establishment of permanent playhouses. This permanency enforces on what was once a performative *lingua franca* a greater need for adaptation. *Hamlet* has to be introduced to Germany as *Der bestrafte Brudermord*, whereas the slapstick of Jack Pudding more easily fit the hand of Hanswurst. It is ironic that Goldoni, who had fettered the *commedia* to a script, had to write his plays in French after he was hounded out of Italy.

Perhaps the best example of an omni-local genre that required less adaptation than the *commedia* is opera. Opera began in the early modern period as an experiment in reviving the classics and, although, because of its expense and technical complexity, it made its home in courtly surroundings, it too was flexible and mobile. Travelling companies carried it from town to town, finding patronage with nobility and statesmen who were looking for prestige. This "mobile professional force" had a limited repertoire, invariably written in Italian or one of its dialects, so that the same operas were performed all over the place. Francesco Cavalli's Venetian opera *Il Giasone* was "produced in Milan, Florence, Lucca, Naples, Bologna, Milan, Piacenza, Palermo, Livorno, Vicenza, Ferrara, Genoa, Ancona, Siena, Brescia, Reggio Emilia and Rome, as well as spoofed by *commedia dell' arte* actors. An opera designed for

Venice and its heterogeneous publics became a staple after it was introduced at the palace of the Spanish Viceroy of Naples” (Stein 2014, 844).

Popular libretti were widely circulated: Silvio Stampiglia’s text for *Partenope* travelled from Naples to Mexico. In the process, however, the libretto underwent alterations, with arias from earlier productions inserted, creating a *pasticcio* with music by many hands. “Scenes were cut and reordered, roles were expanded, attenuated, or deleted altogether; recitative passages were dispensable and even recomposed; and arias were added, recomposed, deleted, substituted, and appended more often than not” (Stein 2014, 848).

Opera also deferred to the demands of the patron or host; having begun in the academy, it habituated itself to the court, rising in the hierarchy of theatrical and musical genres. While the *commedia* had to relinquish its Italian dialects for pidgin French or pure gesture when it crossed borders, opera made no such sacrifices, in opera Italian remained the language being sung at court theatres, whether or not audiences could follow it. This exclusionary aspect often led to the relegation of playhouses to its specific performance, such as the Théâtre Italien in Paris and the Haymarket and the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in London.

The social exclusivity of attendance at such houses, with their high prices and dress codes for certain portions of the hall, encouraged the development of local forms such as ballad opera and *Zauberstücke*. Resistance to the Italian model came from Gluck and Rousseau in France; there and eventually in Germany and elsewhere opera began to be performed in the vernacular. What continued to abet the translocation of opera was its music. Music was the medium that enabled this exotic to be so widely exported. Music was the lubricant that allowed otherwise alien forms to glide smoothly into the otherwise resistant receptor. Music permeated through the walls of theatre to be heard from parlor pianos, street-corner hurdy-gurdies, and military bands.

Moreover, opera productions visually resembled one another. Anyone surveying the pictorial record of opera between 1840 and 1940 can identify the work and even the character portrayed because scenery and costumes remained formulaic. A set design in Stockholm for the execution scene in *La Juive* is almost identical to that recorded by a Parisian stereographic card. *Faust*, whether sung in St Petersburg or Melbourne or Montevideo by the local troupe or a touring company, looked very much the same in respect to costumes, scenery, and blocking. This consistency was abetted not only by the innate conservatism of stage managers, but by music publishers such as Choudens in France, who, when they licensed the scores for provincial or amateur performances, also provided booklets of designs of the original production.

Touring companies were, of course, a pre-eminent medium of operatic transmission, and by the twentieth century of the diffusion of more localized and more popular genres. Franz Lehár’s *Die lustige Witwe* was perhaps the first Viennese operetta to become what today we call a “blockbuster.” The Viennese musical plays of Raimund and Nestroy lose their special flavor when translated to other spheres. Yet they are the forebears of the operettas of Strauss and Lehár, which won international favor, usually in heavily adapted guises.

Nowadays we are used to megamusicals that appear all over the globe almost simultaneously, remain ensconced in theatres for years on end, and inundate the media

with their tunes, often getting a second life from movies and recordings. *Die lustige Witwe* is the forerunner of these phenomena. Within two years of its opening in Vienna on December 30, 1905, this work of a Moravian ex-military bandmaster was playing in theatres across Europe and in virtually every city in the German-speaking world, including imperial colonies in Africa and Asia. As many as five versions opened simultaneously in Buenos Aires, each in a different language. By 1908, three road companies were touring the United States, and numerous burlesques of the piece were competing for the playgoer's informed belly-laugh. When *The Merry Widow* finally arrived in Paris in 1909, it had been performed nearly 20,000 times (Rouhouse 1982, 26).

The rapid dissemination of this particular work owed something to the finesse of local adaptors, but much to modern innovation: the speed with which it crossed borders was abetted by advances in wireless telegraphy, steam-powered ocean liners, a transnational market in theatrical commodities, and the feminization of theatre audiences. As Marlis Schweitzer has demonstrated in her excellent book *Transatlantic Broadway*, up-to-date publicity and its stunts, legal restrictions that guaranteed quality in production, and new methods of sound transmission all played a part in this process (Schweitzer 2009, 189–221).

Innovative as *The Merry Widow* was in so many ways, I would argue that the global translocation of light opera actually began half a century earlier with the work of Jacques Offenbach, and without the help of electric means of transit and communication. Like Woody Allen's *Zelig*, Offenbach pops up in a myriad of ways that define the modern world (Senelick 2017). Hanna Glawari, the flirtatious merry widow, was pre-empted by Offenbach's more blatantly libidinous heroines, *la Belle Hélène*, *la Périhole* and the Grand Duchess of Gerolstein.

In his lifetime and long afterwards, Offenbach was taken to be the musical embodiment of the Second Empire, and the *galop* that ends *Orphée aux enfers* cited as the cancan emblematic of Parisian licentiousness. The cancan as shorthand for the France of Napoleon III was imprinted by Shostakovich's use of it as a leitmotiv in his score for the Soviet film *The New Babylon* (1929). It later became the sonic mnemonic for the *Belle Epoque* through Manuel Rosenthal's ballet suite *Gaité parisienne* (1938).

The controversial director Jérôme Savary speaks to Offenbach's slippery identity in his remark that “Offenbach is neither German nor French. He is above all a Parisian, like Picasso, like Chagall, like Giacometti” (Savary 2001, 9). Born in Cologne, the son of a German cantor, he was a baptized Jewish Rhinelander, who, like Heine, assimilated himself to Parisian culture in the romantic period. He had close professional relations with Vienna, where he prepared variant versions of his latest operas. Of his two attempts at grand opera both were first performed there: *Die Rheinnixen* in a German translation. The other, the unfinished *Les Contes d' Hoffmann*, drew on a German classic. In the late 1860s and mid-1870s, his *opéras-bouffes* and *opéras comiques* filled the bills of leading theatres worldwide. Philip Luez has called him “the last truly European composer before music broke into national schools.” That fellow traveller of the Frankfurt School Siegfried Kracauer went even further and named him “an international musical phenomenon” at a

time when globalization was in its infancy. His music was a “kind of Esperanto” (Luez 2001, 307 and, Kracauer 1976, 151).

Offenbach was part of the wide transmission of French theatrical and musical culture through adaptations and translations enabled in part by lack of copyright protection. However, a more powerful agent was Louis-Napoléon and his desire to make Paris the hub of world civilization. Although international exhibitions took place in other cities, the Exposition universelle of 1867 was perhaps the most influential in diffusing art as a commodity (Mainardi 1987). The affluence of and confluence to this world’s fair was unparalleled. Offenbach was to capture the moment in *La Vie Parisienne*, which opens in an up-to-date railway station and presents a sample of visitors from abroad (a Swedish count, a Brazilian *rastaquouère*).

Offenbach already had several operas playing during the exposition and in April he opened *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein*. This tale of the sexually rapacious ruler of a minor German principality and the intrigues that surround her had immense appeal to crowned heads and middle-class visitors alike. In May it was performed in Vienna in Julius Hopp’s translation, which became standard for the German-speaking world, then revived in Berlin (Jan. 1868) and Munich (Mar. 1868). It appeared in Swedish in Stockholm (Sept. 1867), English in London, and Danish in Copenhagen (both Jan. 1868), Czech in Prague (Jan. 1868), Portuguese in Rio de Janeiro (Feb. 1868). In April 1868 the London translation turned up in New York, while a new version was put on in Birmingham. To quote Lewis Carroll’s “The Walrus and the Carpenter”: “And thick and fast they came at last and more and more and more.” Spanish in Madrid (Nov. 1868) and Mexico City (Mar. 1871), Italian in Naples (Apr. 1869), Catalan in Barcelona (May 1870), Polish in Lemberg (Lvov, Dec. 1871). It was even performed by the Mormons in Salt Lake City (June 1869). Meanwhile, between 1867 and 1870, the French original was on view in Brussels, New York, New Orleans, Liège, Turin, Then Hague, Geneva, Antwerp, London, St Petersburg, Milan, Montreal, Cincinnati, Florence Tournai, Namur, Cairo, Santiago, Valparaiso, Barcelona, Ghent, Constantinople, Liverpool, and a great many other venues (Yon 2008, 13–15). When it played in Rome, the Pope is said to have exclaimed, “*Che disgrazia!* And to think I am the only sovereign who cannot attend this Grande Duchesse!” In New York, the steamship *Grand Duchess* was launched (Yon 2000, 417).

In modern parlance, the Grand Duchess “had legs.” Bismarck even credited her with exploding the pretensions of the petty German states standing in the way of the Prussian unification of Germany. What was true of this opera held true for Offenbach’s work as it spread throughout the world. During Chekhov’s stage-struck childhood and adolescence, they were the most popular plays in Russia. Offenbach’s tunes accompanied the entry of young Leopold II into Brussels for his coronation as well as the ceremonies for the union of Austria and Hungary. However, it was Offenbach’s *opéras bouffes* as a medium of erotic liberation and anarchic subversion that left the deepest mark. In Stockholm the young August Strindberg felt liberated psychically and sexually when he attended *La Belle Hélène*, on the advice of his college tutor. In Lisbon the novelist Eça de Queiroz lauded Offenbach as a “philosopher in music,” who was undermining the very society that delighted in his

operas. Nietzsche lauded him as a proper Dionysus to counteract Wagner's Apollonian pretensions (Senelick 1990, 455–68 and 2016, 1–16).

For the remainder of this paper, I want to examine three case studies of the omni-local influence of Offenbach on three societies that might seem alien to his milieu: Brazil, Egypt, and Japan.

## Rio de Janeiro

The earliest mention of Offenbach in the Latin-American press seems to be a notice of *Les Deux Aveugles*, presented by the “théâtre français” at São Januario Hall in Rio de Janeiro on November 15, 1856, directed by Florindo Joaquim de Silva; other Offenbach one-acts in French and Portuguese followed. Brazil was to prove a more hospitable haven for French comic opera than the Spanish-speaking capitals of South America. Foreign visitors had noted that the ruling class combined quasi-British *humour* with quasi-French *esprit*, particularly in regard to fashion, elegance and education. Since the native musical and dramatic conservatories were ineffective, Meyerbeer, Verdi, and Donizetti were sung at the Teatro São Pedro by superannuated European sopranos. Mildly erotic fiction had begun to appear in major journals, often directed at a female reader. Since Brazil was a patriarchal slave society, certain aspects of communal life were more porous, the populace more variegated in race and colour than in the rest of the Americas (Frevre 1964, 78 and Exquilly 1864, 21–22).

Theatre historians have traditionally cited the opening of the Alcazar Lyrique Fluminense on 17 February 1859 as the origin of the decline in audiences for “serious” drama. When its first manager went bankrupt, it was taken over by another Frenchman Joseph Arnaud Garnier, and, as a café chantant, gained a reputation as a stag resort, the terror of parents. With the introduction of vaudeville and operetta, the Alcazar built on the existing popularity for French plays and players. The epidemic began with the arrival of Mlle Aimée's comic-opera troupe at the Alcazar and was spread by the parodies of the actor Vasques at the Phenix Dramatica and productions at the Gymnasio<sup>2</sup> (Fario 2012, 219–33). Its enthusiasts were socially diverse, although primarily male, as might be expected in a Latino culture. What has been called “operetta fever” set in early and generated immense enthusiasm for the originals and the copies, which dominated all the city's theatres, to the great dismay of moralists. Yet none of Offenbach's operas was ever banned or altered by censorship.

“Operetta fever” was taken by some as a sign of the *afrancesamento* of Latin-American elites. The Rio equivalent of “intelligentsia” saw the new types of amusement as tokens of the progress and modernization that aided the belated abolition of the slave trade. Others regarded it as a sign of decadence; its unabashed commercialism was compared with that of brothels. Still others valued the French comic operas and the Spanish *zarzuelas* that came in their wake as the origin of such new forms of native Brazilian musicals as the *revista de ano* and *la burleta* (Fléchet 2014, 321). Whatever the interpretation, the introduction of Offenbach in impeccably authentic renditions by French performers made the Alcazar the foremost theatre in Rio. Professionally composed music at popular prices appealed to a wide

spectrum of “cariocas” [the local nickname for natives of Rio]. One such enthusiast wrote of the opening of *Orphée aux enfers*:

The larger part of the [Rio] populace which does not consist of blue-blooded noblemen and has no access to an easy and light genre of entertainment similar to [that] in European capitals, [and for those for whom the] lyric theatre, with its high cost and agonizing histrionics, is not an option... [At the Alcazar] the lively and cheerful *Orphée aux enfers* is being welcomed with great enthusiasm (Magaldi 2004, 98).

Another factor in Offenbach’s popularity was the element of European emigrants in the audience nostalgic for Parisian cosmopolitanism.

A growing middle class, its wealth enhanced by coffee exports, was making its presence known politically even those respectable families who refrained from attending the Alcazar could make the acquaintance of Offenbach through available sheet music, both imported and home-published. They might also hear his music sung at charity concerts for churches by French chanteuses from the Alcazar. The French companies toured the remote regions of the Brazilian Empire and even to Buenos Aires, while the lusophone troupes visited Portugal after 1880, contributing to the transatlantic traffic in entertainment. Offenbach also won popularity as a benefactor by eschewing fees for type-setters, composers and publishers responsible for printing his music. The flocking of audiences to performances of Offenbach enriched the urban economy: song-writers, café-owners, newspaper reporters and illustrators all benefitted from the craze.

An unintended consequence of the vogue for Offenbach was its contribution to the ongoing debate about the modernization of Brazilian society. Although the central issue was the abolition of slavery, along with social and moral reform through public education, civil rights and democratic institutions, free expression was essential to these developments. Music and lyrics, gossip about plays and players could be widely disseminated even to those who might not have the opportunity to see the spectacles themselves. Offenbach inspired native wit and introduced the public to a Gallic sophistication that promoted broader views.

The *galop infernale* that ends *Orphée* had a special appeal. For years before the opera opened, Musard-style public balls had concluded with a cancan, performed with due propriety but aimed at enlivening stodgy family audiences. After Offenbach’s work revealed the *galop* to be an expression of riotous dissent, it was taken up by liberals to play out discontent with the government of Pedro II and the war with Paraguay. Local events and public figures were pilloried by the *galop*; a group of insubordinate students was encouraged to dance the cancan to reverse the prison sentence threatened by a local magistrate. Despite the occasional complaint that the overheated dance ill suited “our tropical temperatures,” the Carnival Societies (Sociedades Carnavalescas) cancaned through the streets, accompanied by brass bands. What had once been a celebration of European liberalism became, with the injection of the frantic cancan, an exercise in self-indulgence and social upheaval, a topsy-turvydom that featured loose women kicking up their legs on top of the floats. Attacks on the aristocracy and black servitude accompanied such antics. In 1871, the “puff” for one carnival society announced,

Rejoice, oh outlawed race [because your] heroes possess no wealth, because although you cannot drape yourselves in golden brocade...your soul stands far above that of the civilized bacchanalian; because in the end, the cancan de rigueur will be danced (Magali 1871, 104).

It may be claimed, without exaggeration, that the modern identification of Rio with a Bacchanalian carnival in which citizens of African descent predominate owes a debt to Offenbach.

## Cairo

One of the most enduring *canards* of theatre history is that Verdi's *Aida* was performed at the opening of the Suez Canal in 1868. In fact he had been invited to write an inaugural hymn for that occasion, but had declined; as for his opera, the Siege of Paris delayed its performance in Cairo until Christmas Eve 1871.<sup>3</sup> The honor of celebrating the initiation of the Canal falls to Offenbach.

The theatrical movement in Egypt was imposed from above. The Khedive, Ismā'il Pasha (1830–95), educated in France, promoted what he called “euphoria for progress.” “My land is no longer in Africa,” he announced. “We now represent a piece of Europe” (Flores 2008, 133). His modernization was Gallocentric, and, following a visit to the Paris Exposition in 1867, he attempted to reshape Cairo in the image of the French capital. A casino, café-concerts, and a playhouse for French *vaudevilles* were imposed on this Islamic if cosmopolitan city. The Khedive, in his role as patron of the arts, had a private entrance for himself and his retinue to the Théâtre de la Comédie through the Azbakkiya garden. The harem was permitted to watch the performances through a grille. It was managed by a Frenchified Armenian, named Séraphin Manasse, who had already toured a French troupe to Istanbul.<sup>4</sup>

It should come as no surprise that the opening production was a work by Offenbach, *La Belle Hélène*, although the choice of a piece based on Greek mythology is peculiar. However, it happened to be Ismā'il's favorite *opéra bouffe*, or, rather his favorite vehicle for Hortense Schneider. While in Paris, he had attended every performance of *La Grande Duchesse* and, it was rumoured, had an affair with the diva. However, the costumes for Helen of Troy were more revealing than those for the Grand Duchess. The largest contingent of Europeans in Egypt was in Cairo (47.316), which could provide an audience for the new theatres but could not be guaranteed to have had a classical education. To familiarize the ladies of the harem and the monolingual courtiers with the repertoire the Khedive ordered everyone on the staff of the government bureaucracy who knew French to drop official business and collaborate in translating this and other *opéras bouffes* into Arabic. The Greek Paolina Draneht, superintendent of the Khedival Opera Theatre from 1867 to 1879, had authorization to translate into Arabic a boxful of Italian opera libretti to be performed the coming winter season in Cairo. “These libretti or poems are in general the work of distinguished poets and it would be a service to the public to enable them to understand and enjoy their beauties” (Sadgrove 1996, 52–53).

Consequently, the first translation of a European play into Arabic (and incidentally the first Arabic work published in Egypt) was *Hilāna al-Jamīla* (*Beautiful Helen*) printed at



Būlāq on 17 Ramaḍān 1285 (December 31<sup>st</sup> and January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1869) three days before the first performance. It is more a paraphrase than an accurate rendition, with puns and ambiguities glossed over, and meant as a synopsis to be followed during the performance.<sup>5</sup> It was evidently put together by a committee under the supervision of Rifā'a Rāfi aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī, a “giant in Arabic intellectual life,” who had already written about theatre in a book on French culture and translated hundreds of other works for the Khedive's grandfather Muhammed 'Ali. The Arabic newspapers urged the public to buy this translation and those that followed. Subsidized by the Khedive, journalists explained that theatres help train and cultivate the soul to adopt good morals, and, to this end, the translation of libretti would educate the native public. The newspaper *Wādī al-Nīl* devoted two editorials to this; the second, published in January 1869, dealt with *Helen* as “the creation of a new literary genre... a useful means to order Arab morals.”

This excellent innovation spread at first with the translation of the play (*la'ba*) [*La Belle Hélène*]. It was distributed last year amongst literary productions. It appeared in the most beautiful form. By order of the Khedive, the famous man of letters, Rifā'a Bey Effendi, took charge of the translation, to make it comprehensible to the lovers of such plays. Translations of several theatrical works followed it... All this is like the appearance of the crescent moon, which achieves perfection gradually (Sandgrove 1996, 52–53).

While self-righteous Europeans were condemning *opéra bouffe* as deleterious to morality, Egypt was praising its value in national edification.

The Khedival Comedy Theatre was inaugurated by *Hélène* on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1869, with his son Prince Tawfiq and over 300 spectators, made up of senior government officials, prominent Europeans, consuls, financiers, businessmen and members of the press. It created a furore in Cairo. The spendthrift Khedive's expenditure from the privy purse to bribe journalists and entertain guests, including the Empress Eugénie and, later, the Prince and Princess of Wales, was so prodigal that it provoked Larose, the manager of the French theatre, to write a farce called *C'est le Vice-roi qui paie*. It enjoyed a single performance before it was suppressed and Larose reprimanded.

Ismā'īl also bestowed a munificent subvention on Manasse to engage a theatrical troupe of thirty-two artists from France to perform *opéra bouffe*, comedy and vaudeville (many sources report that Schneider was the prima donna, but, although invited she demurred, and the leading lady was Céline Montaland). The repertoire was identical to that of the Vaudeville and the Palais-Royal, with operettas from the Variétés and Folies-Dramatiques. They played to packed houses, made up of Europeans, French-speaking officers and bureaucrats, and a middle-class Arab component, dressed in “stambouline” attire (long black frock-coats) and tarboosh. Schneider's other hits, *La Grande Duchesse*, *Barbe-bleue*, and Hervé's *L'Œil crevé* appeared in turn. (*La Périchole* was performed in French-occupied Algeria in November 1869, but since its main butt is a Viceroy thwarted in love it is no wonder that the Khedive eschewed it.) These and the numerous translations of opera libretti were said to have a positive effect on the development of “Arabic Morale.” Whether it extended far beyond court circles is questionable. A contemporary commented, “even Schneider, fit interpreter as she is of the melodious indecencies of Offenbach, cannot [sic] amuse a population which, from prince to peasant, has ever been accustomed to the greater

levities and license of its own Ghawazee and Almehs, who outstrip any civilized competition however daring” (De Leon 1869, 748–49).

Whatever the influence, it was short-lived. In April 1869 a bomb was found under the Khedive’s seat in the royal box; it was alleged that Manesse had planted it himself to claim a reward. The manager was exiled and the Khedive stayed away from the theatre.<sup>6</sup> In the 1870s an economic depression forced cut-backs on the arts, and in 1879 Ismā’il was deposed by Tawfiq. The British occupation in 1882 ended the brief reign of French theatrical culture in urban Egypt.

It re-emerged in the 1920s in a more assimilated fashion. The political unrest that followed the Great War, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and intensive nationalist mobilization against the British created an atmosphere congenial to artistic innovation. Sayiid Darwīš (1892–1923), an outspoken bohemian active in the rebellion of 1919, was the most popular composer in Egypt. Between 1917 and 1923 he wrote 30 musicals or operettas, which were rapidly put on stage. The sources were almost always French. The two most relevant to the Offenbach connection are *al-‘Ašara at-ṭayibba* (*The Good Ten*, 1920), with lyrics by Badi’ Ḥayri, and *Šahrazād* (1921), both libretti by the playwright Muḥammed Taymūr. *The Good Ten* is almost a scene for scene, line for line copy of *Barbe-bleue*, though with fewer musical numbers. Because the setting has been transferred to Osmanic Egypt, love duets, which in *Barbe-bleue* come across as lightly ironic, take on emotional intensity. Boulotte’s coquettishness is transformed into forceful militancy. Autochthonous Egyptians are the heroes, the Turkish governance provides the villains. Although the work is suffused with local color, the dialogue realistic and expressive, it was not well received by the literati; a group of authors sharply criticized it for helping the “enemy.”

*Šahrazād*, with dialogue by the famous actor-director ‘Aziz ‘Īd and lyrics by the popular folk poet Maḥmūd Bayram at-Tūnisi, has nothing to do with the Arabian Nights; it is an exact copy of *La Grande Duchesse*. The original title was *Šahwazād*, which means lust, but the censorship office objected. In fact, the lyrics are far more erotic than those of Offenbach’s collaborators Meilhac and Halévy, who preferred innuendo. Again the positive characters are Egyptian, with the first scene between the Fritz and Wanda surrogates more patriotic than amorous; again the villains are Turkish, but the blatant patriotism also casts aspersions on the British.

These operas have enjoyed a long afterlife through radio broadcasts, theatrical revivals and music cassettes, playing a major role in the formation of modern Egyptian culture. These models ensured that native opera would have a political bent. The francophilia of literate Egyptians of the 1920s was later obliterated by a negative interpretation of foreign influence; the French source was played down, to avoid charges of colonialism. These days Sayyid is lauded as an icon of Egyptian anti-imperialism. In the words of Alexander Flores, “Intercultural osmosis is not admitted” (Flores 2008, 138–69).

## Yokohama-Tokyo-Osaka

The treaty port of Yokohama, heavily settled by non-Japanese, saw the introduction of many Western novelties to Japan: newspapers, photography, ice cream, beer, horse racing,

cricket, rugby – and comic opera. The coming of Offenbach to Japan was enabled by the creation of fitting performance spaces and the itineraries of light-opera companies, which originated in Australia. Before 1870 shows were performed in Yokohama hotel rooms, technical institutes, warehouses, Professor Risley's Royal Olympic Theatre (a circus), mostly by resident amateurs or touring professionals. The Gaiety Theatre opened on 6 December 1870 on Honmachi Street and then moved to a public hall in the Yamate district.<sup>7</sup> The earliest appearance of Offenbach was an amateur *Barbe-bleue* staged at the Gaiety on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1873. The first foreign professional ensemble, the L'Auney-Céphas Buffo Opera Company, arrived in April 1876, offering performances of *La Périchole* (3), *Le Violoneux* (1), *Barbe-bleue* (3), *La Grande Duchesse* (2), and *La Belle Hélène* (Mamiko 1996, 164–67). Standard histories cite a performance of the trial scene in *The Merchant of Venice* by the Bungei-Kyokai (Literary Society) in 1904 as the inaugural moment of the *shingeki* or New Drama movement, wherein Japanese actors began to imitate or slavishly follow the acting style of the Western theatre as it was introduced into the country. However, in the period 1878–79 the fashionable zangiri Theatre (*zangiri* means “closed cropped,” the hair style of a samurai whose topknot has been cut off) offered modern domestic dramas that copied foreign models in reaction to changes in everyday life. First seen in Tokyo in 1872, the innovations were introduced in names and dialogue, though not the acting style, which remained pure kabuki; it was a short-lived fad, fading out by 1882 (Leiter 1997, Tschudin 1995 and Hennion 2009).

Most of the Zangiri plays were written by the renowned Kawatake Mokuami (Yoshimura Yoshisaburō, 1816–93), and performed by Onoe Kikugorō V (1844–1903), a kabuki star who preferred realism and Western novelties. Mokuami wrote eleven plays in the genre including *Ningen Banji Kane no Yokonaka*, an adaptation of Bulwer-Lytton's *Money*, played by male kabuki actors in February 1879 at the Shintomi-za.

At this point a cohort of foreign artistes, the Royal English Opera Company, arrived at the Gaiety Theatre. It had been organized by a popular Australian tenor Howard Vernon (1848–1921), and had already toured Hong Kong and Shanghai. Between June and August 1879, it offered its repertoire of light opera by Wallace, Balfe, Benedict, Lecocq, Donizetti and Offenbach (*La Grande Duchesse*, *Geneviève de Brabant*, *La Rose de Saint-Flour*). Each was performed for only one night, with a bonus of an outdoor entertainment at Yamate Park. In *La Grande Duchesse* General Boum was played by a Dutchman, Her Hageman, the others by Australians, including the soprano Elcia May, with the music entrusted to an amateur French couple, M. and Mme Hirlemann. Miss May had once run her own opera company, which settled in Shanghai in 1876, introducing *La Grande Duchesse*, *Der Freischütz*, and Lecocq's *Giroflé-Girofla*. By May 1879 it was foundering, unable to round up enough talent among expatriates to stage a full opera, and so she joined Vernon ('Shanghai' 1879, 652).

The theatrical columnist for *L'Écho du Japon* found the troupe lived up to their advance billing, but the English-language *Japan Gazette* was more critical:

What can we say of a mutilated version done into English and then performed to the inspiring accompaniment of a thin wiry piano by such glorious artists as the gentleman who undertook the part of Prince Paul. Verily he deserved the ironical cheers and recall for his intrepidity in leading so forlorn a hope.

The *prima donna* herself, who dressed the part magnificently but who scarcely possesses sufficient *physique* to do justice to the role in its entirety, has a good light soprano voice and we hope to hear her in some work more suited to her powers.<sup>8</sup>

The Japanese newspapers were unfavorable, reporting on the bad behavior of the audiences and reflecting a native prejudice that the “players must be low-class.” Kabuki actors paid a visit when the company staged *La Fille du Régiment*. However, the visitors from Tokyo were discommoded by a nine o’clock curtain, which prevented them from catching the last train from Yokohama. Another visitor was ex-President Ulysses S. Grant, who presented a curtain to the Shintomi-za, to which Vernon’s company moved in September to offer three nights of *La Grande Duchesse*.

This novelty from overseas inspired the impresario Morita Kan-ya XII to commission a play from Mokuami to incorporate it. *Kyōryū Kidan Seiyō Kabuki (An Amazing Story about Drifters and Western Kabuki)* was advertised for a run at the Shintomi-za from September 1 to September 25, 1879. Act Four was set in Paris where two Japanese visit a theatre when the scene naturally changes to a play-within-a-play in which three operettas are shown: Act I of *La Duchesse*, Donizetti’s *La Fille du Régiment*, and Lecocq’s *La Fille de Mme Angot* (expressly abridged versions, with playing time of one hour for each as requested by Morita). The main roles were played by Vernon’s cohort of foreigners, but minor characters and the chorus, including American Indians and Englishmen, were assumed by ten Japanese actors of the Shintomi-za.<sup>9</sup>

This hybrid was scheduled to run for six weeks, but turned out to be a dismal failure. The Japanese audience, which included ten actors from the Tokyo Shintomi-za and an artist who made lightning sketches, watched with breathless silence and rapt attention every action or note of their countrymen in the walk-on roles, but greeted the fortissimo that accompanied the *prima donna*’s aria’s last notes with shouts of laughter.<sup>10</sup> Receipts were poor, leading to a deficit of 20,000 yen, a huge loss. The heavy debt led the entrepreneur to lose interest in Western theatre. Vernon and his players departed in late October, although Miss May was still around in November to perform in scenes from Shakespeare.

In the case of Japan, music failed to serve as the lubricant, but, instead, created a culture clash. The grafting on French *opéra bouffe* on to the *zangiri* style may have failed as a box-office draw, but the floodgates were opened for French and English light opera companies to pour in during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Vernon’s troupe returned in 1880. In 1889 alone, Japan was visited by Amy Sherwyn with her English Opera company, the Royal Compagnie Italienne, the Carandini Operatic & Ballad Company, the Loftus Company, P. Maurel’s troupe, the Mascotte Opera Company, the Emilie Melville ensemble, the Petite Troupe Française, Salinger’s English Opera Bouffe and the Stanley Company. Their repertoires included many other full-length and one-act Offenbach operas, including, invariably, *La Grande Duchesse*. Renamed *General Boum*, it became a mainstay of the Asakusa Opera repertoire in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The Asakusa Opera, from its founding in Tokyo in 1917 to its demise in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, offered raffish farragos of Western operas, including Offenbach (*Orphée* was a great hit) to a heterogeneous public of nursemaids, bored citizens, trend-setters, and drifters off the street. Its glory days were revived by the Casino Follies, a

network of theatres, music halls and cinemas, which won huge demotic audiences with Western style revues, European fashions and the display of bare female limbs. In 1929 the show *Okaru and Kampei* married Offenbach to an episode from the kabuki epic of the 47 Ronin; it featured Kosiji Fubuki, one of the *otokoyaku* or male impersonators from the wildly popular all-female Takarazuka troupe. The Takarazuka, founded in 1913 by the railway magnate Ichizō Kobayashi to get tourists to stay on his Osaka train to the end of the line, had based its entertainments on traditional Japanese themes and stories. Under the influence of the Casino Follies, European styles and genres began to dominate. Its audience, largely school-girls and housewives, safely enamoured of the cross-dressed heroes, has now grown to include aficionados of Las Vegas-style revue and kitschy musicals based on Western classics (Greenwood 2016, 43–44).

A dotted line might be drawn from the misalliance of Offenbach and kabuki to the Taisho-era adaptation of Offenbach to the plebeian tastes of the Asakusa Opera to the Western-intoxicated Casino Follies to the internationally celebrated Takarazuka. In 1993 the Snow Troupe (one of four situated in different cities) inaugurated *Heaven and Hell. The Tale of Offenbach*, a musical romance by Shinji Ueda with music by Takio Terada and Yūko Yoshida, which garbled the history of the opening of *Orphée* in 1855 with a frame-story set in a Manhattan rehearsal studio. The four troupes combined in 1996 to offer an Offenbach medley in a grand revue *Melodies and Memories*, and in 2008 the Moon Troupe ambitiously presented a *Tales of Hoffmann*, adapted by Tani Masazumi.

## To sum up

Cultures take what they need from imports or innovations, applying their own emphases and coloration; the original features may remain identifiable beneath the cosmetic alterations. These various translocations of Offenbach and, specifically, *La Grande Duchesse*, demonstrate the working of the “omni-local” idea. Whether embraced or rejected, they were regarded as harbingers of modernization, the vanguard of reform or freedom of thought in otherwise conservative societies. As prime examples of commercial theatre, easily transferred from nation to nation, they also made professional the element of commodified entertainment. Recognizable for all their metamorphoses, they served as a model, an incentive, an inspiration, or an alternative. The circulation in our time of the mega-musical or the “blockbuster” are only the latest avatars of the “omni-local” phenomenon.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Greenwood, Emily. Spring 2016. “Reception studies: the cultural mobility of classics.” In *Dædalus*, 43–44. She first launched this concept in “Afterword: omni-local classical receptions.” In 2013. *Classical Receptions Journal* 5 / 3, 354–361.

<sup>2</sup> The novelist Machado de Assis, usually a champion of national theatre, rhapsodized over Mlle Aimée as ‘a blonde demon, a flimsy, svelte, graceful silhouette, a face half-woman, half-angel, sharp eyes, a nose worthy of Sappho, an amorously fresh mouth, which seems to have been shaped by two poems of Ovid.’ Quoted in Ruben José Souza Brito, “O teatro cómico e musicado: operetas, mágicas, revista de ano e burletas.” In João

- Robert Fario, ed. 2012. “História do teatro brasileiro.” In *Das origens ao teatro profissional da primario metade do século XX*. São Paulo: Ed. SESCSP, I, 219–33. My translation.
- <sup>3</sup> A Théâtre Khédivial de l’Opéra had been built to entertain the ruling families who were to attend the opening of the Suez Canal; designed by Avoscani on the site of the Prince Azbak’s palace, it was built, decorated and furnished in five months at a cost of £160.000 Egyptian pounds, to seat between 800 and 850. It opened on November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1869 with *Rigoletto*.
- <sup>4</sup> For Manasse’s fascinating career, see Adam Mestyan. 2011. “A garden with mellow fruits of refinement: music theatre and cultural politics in Cairo and Istanbul, 1867–1892”. Ph.D. Diss., Central European University, Budapest, Ch. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> A copy of the text was discovered in 2014 by Amani Gamal Ibrahim, a student at Helwan University in Cairo, and published the following year, edited by Dr Sayyid Ali Ismail (General Egyptian Book Organization).
- <sup>6</sup> Manasse returned to Turkey to resume his impresarial activities; Turkish translations of Offenbach libretti began to appear in the mid-1870s.
- <sup>7</sup> It survived to 1923, a cinema in its latter phases.
- <sup>8</sup> Chronique théâtrale. *L’Écho du Japon* (June 9, 1879) and *The Japan Gazette* (June 9, 1879), quoted in Kobitsu Matsuo, 1988. *Nihon Shingeki Rinen-shi (The History of the Idea of Japanese New Theatre)*. Tokyo: Hakusuish, 257–60. My account is reliant chiefly on Kobitsu, 228–29, 253–70, 862–72 and Taro, Akiba (1975) *Toto Meiji Engekishi*. Tokyo: Ōtari Shuppan and Kinka, Kamura. 1975. *Morita Kan-ya*. Tokyo: Shintaishusha, 1943 and Masahiko, Masumoto. 1986. *Yokohama Gaiety Theatre*, 2, ed., Yokohama: Iwasaki Museum and Yoshio, Ōzasa. 1985. *Nihon Gendai Engeki-shi (The History of Modern Japanese Theatre)*. Tokyo: Hakusuisha, 28–34. Translation is provided by the late Aya Mihara.
- <sup>9</sup> I have in my collection an *ukiyo-e* triptych commemorating the event: the left portion of the print shows Kabuki actors in European dress playing *Money*, while in the right the European actors, with a red-nosed General Boum, perform *La Grande Duchesse*.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Japan Weekly Mail* (Sept. 6 and Sept. 13, 1879), quoted in Kobitsu, 254–55, 863, 870–71. ‘Of all the elements of Europeanization, European music is the one for which the Japanese have been slowest to evince any taste.’ Chamberlain, Basil Hall. 1905. *Things Japanese, being notes on various subjects connected with Japan for the use of travellers and others*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Revised. London: John Murray, 343.

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