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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Italian Operetta and the Publishing Industry: The Case of Sonzogno, 1874–1916

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Abstract

This article explores the importance of the Casa Sonzogno publishing house for the Italian operetta market from the second half of the nineteenth century until the eve of the First World War, including its offshoot company Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno. The article focuses particularly on Casa Sonzogno's policies of importation, translation and intermedial adaptation of foreign (mainly French) light music-theatre works, especially in the context of the wider social, economic and technological environment of Milan at the turn of the twentieth century, and considers Sonzogno's concorsi for young composers. The article then addresses the experimental activities of the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno (1909–15), notably across opera, operetta and cinema. Casa Sonzogno's centrality to the establishment of an Italian operetta market, I argue, both highlights the crucial role of publishers in the Italian operetta industry, and offers an alternative theatrical history to familiar narratives focused on Casa Ricordi and Italian opera.

Keywords: Sonzogno; Operetta publishing; Operetta market; Early cinema; Milan

In 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of the First World War, the Milan-based film-production company Musical Films released an adaptation of Ruggero Leoncavallo and Giovacchino Forzano's operetta *La reginetta delle rose.* The film, around 70 minutes long, was directed by the choreographer, costume designer and cultural entrepreneur Luigi Sapelli, who had already earned international acclaim under the pseudonym 'Caramba' and was one of the most influential and revered figures on the Italian operetta scene of the time.[1] Shown in cinemas with Leoncavallo's music played live, Caramba's film was the operetta's only filmic adaptation to feature the original creator-protagonists, with Ester Soarez reprising her role as Lilian, Luigi Hornac as Max and Ruggero Galli as Don Pedro.[2]

Musical Films had been founded in February of that same year by the music publisher Lorenzo (Renzo) Sonzogno (1877–1920), nephew of the more celebrated Edoardo (1836–1920). Its explicit purpose, according to the chronology of the Casa musicale Sonzogno compiled in the 1990s by Mario Morini and Piero Ostali – still a paramount source in

[1] For further details on the film and selected contemporary criticism, see Vittorio Martinelli, *Il cinema muto italiano: I film degli anni d'oro. 1914, Seconda parte* (Turin, 1993), 168–70. For more on Caramba, see Francesca Romana Rietti, 'Sapelli, Luigi', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 90 (2018), accessible online at https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/luigi-sapelli_ (last accessed 16 June 2024).

[2] Robert I. Letellier, *Operetta: A Sourcebook*, vol. 2 (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2015), 1206.

studies of Casa Sonzogno – was that of producing musical *films d'arte*.[3] This constituted something of a pioneering step for the Italian market of the time: while in 1914 the national film industry was already fully committed to 'elevating' cinema by emulating high culture (including several adaptations of operas), a film adaptation of an *operetta* was still unprecedented.[4] Even the soon-to-become main markets for operetta films such as Germany and the United States would not start producing them in great numbers before the mid-1920s.[5] *La reginetta*'s 'experiment' was apparently inspired by Max Reinhardt's recent film *The Miracle*, a colossal 'wordless mystery spectacle' with copious special effects and music by Engelbert Humperdinck, first screened in Berlin and London in 1911.[6] The foundation of Musical Films itself, meanwhile, was the latest in a long series of projects undertaken by Renzo Sonzogno in an attempt to expand and diversify the Italian market for operetta and light music-theatre production, either by acquiring new foreign products, or (as in this case) by repurposing the capital of artists and works already associated with his music-publishing company. Indeed, in 1912 the *Corriere del teatro* had already acknowledged Renzo as the main advocate of Italian operetta, praising his tireless efforts not only to establish the genre in Italy and counter what they described as a 'flood' of foreign, often tasteless works 'swamping' the Italian market, but also to foster native works – *La reginetta* among them – capable of triumphing abroad.[7]

Renzo Sonzogno had, in fact, played an important role in organising the successful premiere of *La reginetta delle rose*, which had taken place in Rome's Teatro Costanzi in June 1912. With its colourful characters – including the heir to the throne of the country of 'Portowa' and a charming London flower girl – juxtaposed with elements of technological modernity spotlighted in numbers such as the 'duettino del telefono', *La reginetta* was a transparent homage to Viennese operetta, not least to Lehár's wildly popular *Die lustige Witwe*, which had first been performed in Italy in 1907. But the operetta can also be read as a fascinating synthesis of elements of Leoncavallo's previous work, roving across musical realism, lyricism and light music theatre.[8] Both composer and publisher were proud of this work, especially Leoncavallo, who, after a first rather negative and opportunistic approach to the genre, had become invested in operetta not – as some later critics insinuated – because of his struggle to succeed as an opera composer, but from an earnest desire to find a genuinely 'Italian way' into the genre.[9] The composer considered *La reginetta* a significant advance on his previous (equally successful) operetta *Malbruk* (1910), a 'fantasia comica' that, already at its 1910 premiere at Milan's Teatro Lirico, had been hailed by critic Fulvio Testi for

[3] Mario Morini and Piero Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', in *Casa musicale Sonzogno: Cronologie, saggi, testimonianze*, ed. Mario Morini, Nandi Ostali and Piero Ostali Jr, vol. 1 (Milan, 1995), 367–8. The 1995 volume provides two chronologies that constitute an unavoidable starting point for research into the different activities of the Casa musicale since its foundation and until the disappearance of all Sonzogno directors in 1920. In the case of the film chronology (a critical source for the latter part of this article), the period covered ranges from Renzo Sonzogno's experiments in 1914 until the 1990s.

[4] Christy Thomas Adams, 'From Operatic Stage to Silent Screen: Casa Ricordi and Film d'Arte Italiana's 1911 *Aida*', *Opera Quarterly* 32/2–3 (2016), 192–220, at 193–6.

[5] Derek B. Scott, 'Operetta Films', in *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta* (Cambridge, 2019), 272–85, at 272–3. As Scott points out, research on these very early experiments that pre-date the advent of sound cinema is of paramount historical value in and of itself, while also offering insights into later productions.

[6] Margaret Shewring, 'Reinhard's "Miracle" at Olympia: A Record and a Reconstruction', *New Theatre Quarterly* 9 (1987), 3–23, at 4–5.

[7] Gabriele Gabrielli, 'Notiziario', *Corriere del teatro* (August 1912), 10.

[8] See evaluations of Leoncavallo's work in Bruno Traversetti, *L'operetta* (Milan, 1985), 124–6; and Ernesto G. Oppicelli, *L'operetta: Da Hervé al musical* (Genoa, 1985), 180–1.

[9] On Leoncavallo's initial negative opinion of operetta, see Konrad Dryden, *Leoncavallo: His Life and Works* (London, 2007), 83. Raffaello De Rensis is among those who view Leoncavallo's move into operetta as motivated primarily by financial need; see *Per Umberto Giordano e Ruggero Leoncavallo* (Siena, 1949), 26–7.

having avoided the vulgarity that affected contemporary comic music-theatrical works and operettas, and for having raised such genres to a new standard.[10] According to Leoncavallo, while *Malbruk* was a work merely approaching the genre, *La reginetta* was his first 'authentic operetta', a seamless blend of sentimentalism and modernity.[11]

Yet if all the work's creators had a significant financial stake in its success, this collective investment was in all cases mediated by Renzo Sonzogno. Leoncavallo had been contracted to the Casa Sonzogno since the 1890s and was by the 1910s a very experienced conductor and composer for venues beyond the opera house – especially for the *caffè-concerto*, which he had also represented on the lyric stage in his opera *Zazà* (1900). In fact, in early 1914 the composer had signed an agreement whereby, subject to a one-off payment of 10,000 Lit., all his music could be used for filmic adaptations, and he had promised to compose music specifically for the company's *films d'arte*. Similarly, *La reginetta*'s librettist Giovacchino Forzano, already an expert in genres such as *rivista* and *varietà*, had been employed since 1912 as the director of a theatrical-production company called La Novissima.[12] This had itself been founded by Renzo Sonzogno, and specialised in operettas and short comic works.[13] At the time of the foundation of Musical Films, in other words, the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno had become a pivotal presence in the Italian operetta market, driving key structural and artistic changes in the sector when the genre was at its apex and bringing leading composers and librettists on board. Certainly, the film of *La reginetta* was dubbed a 'colossal success' and would be revived for a war benefit event in Rome in 1916, its transparently Viennese influences evidently no obstacle to public acclaim in a fraught wartime propaganda context (Figure 1).

Regrettably, the film of *La reginetta delle rose*, apart from a few short fragments, is lost; and while the foundation of Musical Films was enthusiastically received and *La reginetta* won positive reviews following performances in several Italian cities, the artistic life of the company was short-lived. Both the company and its film output (roughly ten films, all produced in 1914) quickly disappeared from the public eye, with plans to open a North American branch of Renzo's publishing business and organise screenings on Broadway in New York City never fulfilled.[14] The hostilities in Europe, the legal controversies constantly surrounding the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno, and the rapid growth of specialised film and opera-film companies in the inter-war period arguably all contributed to its rapid disappearance.[15] A comprehensive examination of the travails of Musical Films and the broader *cineoperetta* phenomenon lies beyond the scope this article.[16] For present purposes, however, the true significance of the film version of *La reginetta delle rose* and the Musical Films company is that these were only the latest and technologically most ambitious initiatives on the part of the Sonzogno family to engage with the operetta industry and to take advantage of new economic pathways and media to market their products.

[10] Fulvio Testi, 'Teatri milanesi', *Il teatro illustrato* (April 1910), 2.

[11] Dryden, *Leoncavallo*, 132–4.

[12] See, for instance, 'Teatri di varietà', *Il teatro illustrato* (November 1911), 16; and *Il teatro italiano nel 1913* (Milan, 1914), 352.

[13] Matteo Pavesi, 'Cesare Lucidi attrezzista alla Musical Films', in *Un secolo di cinema a Milano*, ed. Raffaele De Berti (Milan, 1996), 74–5. See also Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 362–8; and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia dei film', in *Casa musicale Sonzogno: Cronologie, saggi, testimonianze*, 869.

[14] *International Music and Drama* (1915), 2–3.

[15] Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia dei film', 872.

[16] See Emanuele Senici's article in this special issue for a further consideration of the medial status of filmed opera and operetta.

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Figure 1. Poster (detail), Rome, 1916, Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina, shelf mark F. GUERRA A.XX.III.I 293. | Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina, Rome. Further reproduction prohibited.

For Renzo Sonzogno's success did not come out of nowhere. Since the final decades of the previous century, a significant portion of the music-theatre business in Italy had been transitioning into a mass entertainment industry, with both opera and (to an even greater extent) operetta having to become more commercial in order to survive in the increasingly competitive cultural market. This reflected the tremendous growth of Italian society and the Northern Italian economy since unification, which led to expanded and more diverse

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audiences with new expectations and needs in terms of both culture and entertainment.[17] Both music-theatre composers and publishers thus took on the complex role of furthering the 'Italian' tradition in a socio-cultural context that had changed so radically as to require an almost total reinvention of the ways opera was conceptualised and consumed.[18] Milan, a prime urban and industrial centre, had managed to maintain its status as capital of the Italian operatic industry by adapting to the changing cultural and economic climate, and had become one of Italy's main arenas in terms of opera and operetta production and consumption. The publishing empire founded by Edoardo Sonzogno in 1874 – whose main competitor throughout this period was Casa Ricordi – had become one of the main agents behind the production of music-theatre works that could meet the changing tastes of the Italian public, especially through the importation and adaptation of foreign products. These were the circumstances in which, by 1914, the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno had become the Italian representative of Parisian, Viennese and Berlin operetta and light music-theatre publishers such as Choudens, Heugel, Fürstner, Weinberger, Döblinger and Schuberth (Figure 2).[19]

Advertisements for the Sonzogno firm's operettas in specialist periodicals such as *L'opera comica* – such as the one pictured in Figure 2 – as well in as the Casa Sonzogno's own, very short-lived periodical *Proscenium*, show Renzo's company to have been actively importing, adapting and producing the latest successes from Vienna, Paris and beyond (including works by 'minor' or 'peripheral' composers); at the same time, it was publishing and producing operettas by Italian composers on a regular basis, from the 'old guard' of Leoncavallo to the new generation of Alfredo Cuscinà, Giuseppe Pietri and Franco Leoni.[20] In 1911, Renzo had also acquired a significant corpus of titles from the catalogue of the Suvini Zerboni music-publishing house (highly specialised in operettas, *opéras-féeries* and opera-ballets).[21] This acquisition granted him the rights to translate, adapt and produce works by Heinrich Reinhardt, Leo Fall, Howard Talbot and Heinrich Berté, among many others.[22] With regard to his catalogue of Italian composers, Renzo would moreover invest significantly in the production of Italian operettas, both establishing a dedicated *concorso* for new operettas – discussed in detail below – and exploiting the company's capital, structure and networks to support aspiring composers. Crucially, however, in all of these ventures Renzo was following a template first laid down by his uncle Edoardo.

As I argue in this article, the Casa musicale Sonzogno – both the original firm founded by Edoardo and its successor led by Renzo – represents a crucial case study in the diffusion of operetta in Italy. Scholarship on the nineteenth-century Italian operatic market has often centred on Casa Ricordi as its prime representative and most influential mediator, especially contributions such as Stefano Baia Curioni's 2011 study that have focused more on the production, management and publishing aspects.[23] As a highly significant cultural agent and mediator in its own right, however, Casa Sonzogno offers us a precious insight into a still largely unexplored area and period of the Italian cultural market. The present

[17] Matteo Paoletti, *A Huge Revolution of Theatrical Commerce: Walter Mocchi and the Italian Musical Theatre Business in South America* (Cambridge, 2020), 5–6.

[18] Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera: Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan, 2011), 129–30.

[19] *Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno: Repertorio teatrale giugno–luglio 1911* (Vienna and Milan, 1911), Paris, Archives Nationales, 409AP/15. See also the ads at the end of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Il cavaliere della rosa*, It. transl. by Ottone Schanzer (Milan, 1911), 132–6.

[20] 'Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno', *L'opera comica* (May 1914), 4; and 'La nostra attività', *Proscenium* (May 1914), 1.

[21] For more on the Suvini Zerboni publishing enterprise, see Paoletti, 'The Operetta Seasons Considerably Decreased Our Losses: Art and Business from Italian Ledgers of the early 1900s', in *Genre Beyond Borders: Reassessing Operetta*, ed. Bruno Bower, Elisabeth Honn Hoegberg and Sonja Starkmeth (Abingdon, 2024), 13–27, at 14.

[22] [Letter Lorenzo Sonzogno to Gabriel Astruc] 7 October 1911, Paris, Archives Nationales, shelf mark 409AP/15.

[23] Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 16–17.

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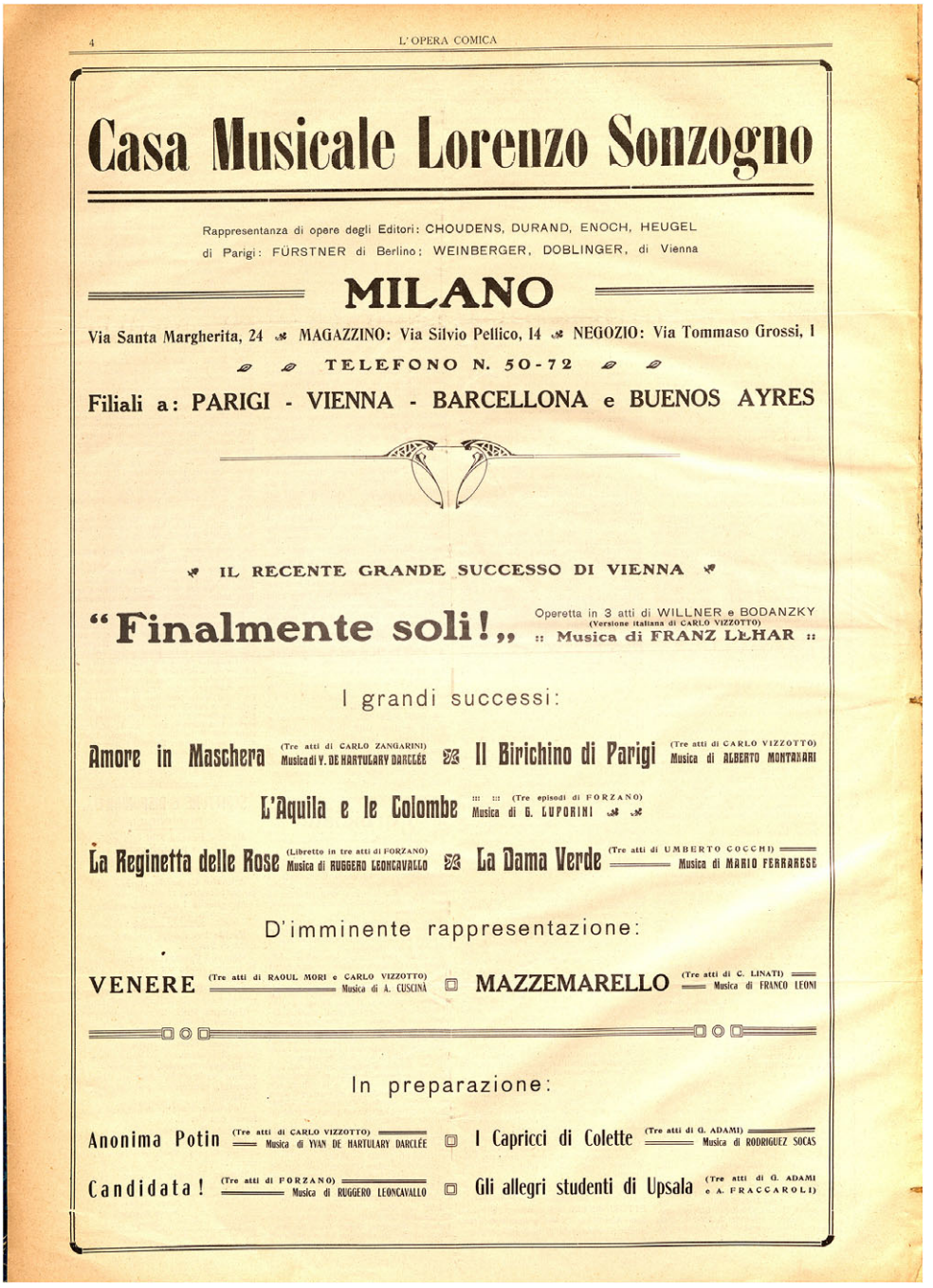

4 L'OPERA COMICA

Casa Musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno

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Figure 2. Advertisement for the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno and its repertoire. From *L'opera comica* (15 April 1914), 4. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Braidense, Milan | Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Pinacoteca di Brera – Biblioteca Braidense, Milano. Further reproduction prohibited.

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contribution aims to contextualise Renzo Sonzogno's Musical Films initiative within the broader activities of the Casa musicale Sonzogno since its foundation (1874), as well as within the market for operetta and light music theatre of the time (the two being, as I shall discuss, often indistinguishable). An insight into the competition between the Sonzogno and Ricordi 'giants' in relation to operetta can also add a new layer in our understanding of the publishers' role in the cultural landscape and market of the time by enriching existing narratives that present them as almost exclusively concerned with opera (even if in different directions), while refining our understanding of Italian music publishing as a whole at this time. In other words, the experience of *cineoperette*, even if short-lived and largely forgotten, ultimately points us to the overall significance of the Sonzogno firm in the processes of operetta importation and adaptation in terms of language, audience and media – processes that sit at the very heart of the genre's codification and regulation.

Building an empire

Throughout its long and varied history, the Casa musicale Sonzogno was always characterised by a specific interest in foreign and light music theatre, in conjunction with the systematic use of cutting-edge media, technology and formats. And yet, despite its relevance throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond, this element of the company's profile has mostly been neglected in traditional historiography. What is usually remembered are a few specific aspects, such as the famed *concorso* for one-act operas that launched Mascagni's career with *Cavalleria rusticana* (and rejected Puccini's first operatic attempt with *Le villi*), and the firm's support of the Giovane Scuola more broadly. Yet its activities and legacies are much richer than this renowned episode suggests.

The founder of both a successful publishing house (1861) and a music publishing business (1874), Edoardo Sonzogno started his long career and activity in a very different period from his nephew Lorenzo, in the immediate aftermath of Italian unification. However, the market (especially in Milan) was as competitive then as it would be at the *fin de siècle*, making the survival of a publishing house – particularly a music-publishing house – a very delicate affair. In the 1870s, the Italian operatic market was passing through a particularly difficult period of change. On the one hand, the financial support underpinning the management of opera houses had significantly weakened after Italian unification and the concomitant passage from aristocratic patronage to municipal funding caused the decline or repurposing of several theatres.[24] The idea that theatres had to be subsidised by public institutions was particularly controversial in Milan, the new country's economic capital, where many considered the expenditure for theatre and music not a mere luxury but a significant contribution to the city's economy, and supported the more 'modern', 'American' model that privileged private patronage over public subsidy. Casa Sonzogno, a prime example of industrial and cultural entrepreneurship, fully embraced this position and often used it to critique Ricordi's supposedly 'oligopolistic' model.[25] On the other hand, despite the backbone of the repertoire still being Italian, the myth of Italian opera, which had managed to survive and thrive throughout the century despite

[24] Jutta Toelle, 'Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon*, ed. Cormac Newark and William Weber (Oxford, 2020), 226–41, at 2–3.

[25] Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 160; and Irene Piazzoni, 'L'editoria musicale e teatrale', in *La città dell'editoria: Dal libro tipografico all'opera digitale (1880–2020)*, ed. Giorgio Montecchi (Milan, 2001), 63–8, at 63.

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the international profile of many Italian composers and many libretto subjects, was now perceived to be threatened on all sides by the 'contamination' of foreign elements that affected all aspects of cultural and intellectual life – from French realism to symbolism, from light music-theatre genres to Wagnerism.[26] What is more, far from the central and urban *teatri massimi*, a multitude of venues were scattered across the peninsula (such as town halls, temporary stages, *politeama* and urban *teatri minori*) that also offered *spettacoli d'arte varia* blurring the very notions of opera and music theatre.[27] It is also in venues such as these that Italian audiences had first come into contact with operetta, mainly with the French hits of the genre brought by touring companies such as the Meynadier and the celebrated Grégoire brothers.[28] Despite their peripheral character and proportionally lower financial investment, these venues and events were at the core of the music-theatre experience for a significant portion of the Italian population across a range of social classes and geographical provenances.

The music-publishing market in newly unified Italy emerged from this period of change massively empowered. One of the defining features of the resulting system of opera production was the growing power and agency of publishers, the new gatekeepers (as scholars such as John Rosselli have long recognised).[29] Through the control over the production and dissemination of operatic works that derived from their ownership of the musical materials and associated rights, publishers reduced or eliminated the space in which other traditional intermediaries such as impresarios and journalists could act.[30] In this way, they came to form the productive core of the operatic industry and exerted a startling level of control over it, especially in terms of mediation between the repertoire and its audience(s) and in the ultimate formation of a repertoire or canon.[31] With its centrality in political and cultural debates, its growing and diversifying population and workforce, and its pivotal role in setting the standards for entrepreneurship and productivity in many sectors of Italian industry – not to mention its role as the headquarters of some of the leading music-publishing and publishing companies of the time – the city of Milan became the prime arena where Sonzogno acted, expanded and sought to dominate his competitors.[32] The city also boasted an especially rich and varied musical-theatrical landscape, with a plethora of theatres and other venues working in parallel with the historical *teatri maggiori*, several musical associations and a particularly large community of music-theatre artists, professionals, journalists and entrepreneurs.[33] It was, in the words of the French government emissary Eugène d'Harcourt, Italy's 'real musical capital'

[26] Carlotta Sorba, 'Between Cosmopolitanism and Nationhood: Italian Opera in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Modern Italy* 19/1 (2014), 53–67. On the perceived 'contamination' of Italian opera, see Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890–1915* (Boston, 2007), 14–18; and Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity* (Cambridge, 2009), 18–21.

[27] Carlotta Sorba, 'The Origins of the Entertainment Industry: The Operetta in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11/3 (2006), 282–302, at 287–8.

[28] Elena Oliva, *L'operetta parigina a Milano, Firenze e Napoli (1860–1890): Esordi, sistema produttivo e ricezione* (Lucca, 2020), 41–8.

[29] John Rosselli, 'Il sistema produttivo 1780–1880', in *Storia dell'opera italiana*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, vol. 2 (Turin, 1987), 162–3.

[30] Jutta Toelle, 'Opera as Business? From *Impresari* to the Publishing Industry', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17/4 (2012), 448–59, at 455–6.

[31] Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, 2015), 3–5; and Christy Thomas Adams, 'Music Publishing in Puccini's Italy', in *Puccini in Context*, ed. Alexandra Wilson (Cambridge, 2023), 122–9.

[32] Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 208–13; and Alda Gigli Marchetti, 'Impresa e lavoro: L'industria tipografica milanese dalla fine dell'ottocento al fascismo', in Montecchi, ed., *La città dell'editoria*, 23–4.

[33] Piazzoni, 'L'editoria musicale e teatrale', 63–4; and Toelle, 'Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900', 9.

(*la veritable capitale musicale*), where all business deals related to music theatre were discussed and concluded – or to use another common image from *c.*1900, the country's 'theatrical stock exchange' (*borsa teatrale*).[34] To survive in such a complex context, Sonzogno needed to find a niche in which to invest and repurpose the capital he had already accumulated, and to use the large-scale structure and network he had built in the previous decade with his thriving publishing house.[35]

An expansion of the operatic repertoire seemed the most plausible option, especially if undertaken in conjunction with aggressive and experimental policies in terms of theatre management and journalism. As Stefano Baia Curioni has observed, Sonzogno's great skill lay in interpreting the rules of the publishing game established by Ricordi in light of the changing market.[36] Yet this was a very difficult undertaking. Given that most of the Italian operatic repertoire and most artists, as well as the most prestigious opera house (La Scala), were owned and/or controlled by rival publisher Ricordi (who had also gradually absorbed several other music-publishing houses, including his former ally Lucca), Sonzogno chose very early on to profit from the tools and contacts he had acquired in Paris, where he had frequently sojourned since the late 1860s, and to expand the repertoire in an international direction. Only later, in the 1890s, through his celebrated *concorsi* for one-act operas and his activity as an impresario (on which more later), would he try to renew and expand the repertoire and pool of artists from the inside.[37]

From the very first months of the Casa musicale (February 1874), Edoardo Sonzogno thus proceeded to sign an extraordinary number of contracts with Parisian publishers (such as Choudens, Colombier, Heugel and Brandus) in order to acquire the rights for the translation, publication and performance of many *opérettes*, *opéras bouffes*, *opéras-féeries* and *opéras comiques* by the most popular composers of the time, including Auber, Offenbach, Lecocq, Delibes, Hervé and many others.[38] These contracts were loosely based on a *Convenzione* that had been regulating the exchange of artworks between France and Italy since 1862 but, at the same time, can be seen as establishing a broader copyright system which – as Derek Scott has already noted – was necessary for a deeply transnational genre such as operetta.[39] Sonzogno was also able to synchronise these operations with the changing tastes of the audience (or at least, of some audience layers) and the increasing popularity of foreign works, in a way capitalising on the work already accomplished or achieved in parallel by members of the Lucca publishing house (especially Giovanna Lucca). The Italian premiere of Gounod's *Faust*, for example, which had taken place in La Scala under the management of Lucca (also in 1862), had triggered a

[34] For these descriptions of Milan see, respectively, Eugène d'Harcourt, *La musique actuelle en Italie* (Paris, 1909), 37, and Gustavo Strafforello, La Patria: *Geografia dell'Italia*, vol. 8 (Turin, 1894), 263–4.

[35] Alessandra Palidda, 'L'impresario editore e l'editore impresario: Edoardo Sonzogno e "Il teatro illustrato"', in *Notizie, novelle e note: Figure e temi del giornalismo italiano dell'Ottocento*, ed. Morena Corradi and Silvia Valisa (Milan, 2021), 134–6.

[36] Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 155.

[37] Bianca Maria Antolini, 'L'editoria musicale in Italia negli anni di Puccini', in *Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*, conference proceedings, Lucca, 25–9 November 1994, ed. Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco (Lucca, 1997), 331–4. See also Marco Capra, 'La Casa editrice Sonzogno tra giornalismo e impresariato', in Morini et al., eds., *Casa musicale Sonzogno: Cronologie, saggi, testimonianze*, vol. 1, (Milan, 1995), 243–5; and 'Sonzogno', in *Dizionario degli editori musicali italiani 1750–1930*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Pisa, 2000), 333.

[38] *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate e repertorio delle opere, operette e balli* (Milan, 1916), xiii, Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 293–301; and Piazzoni, 'L'editoria musicale e teatrale', 65.

[39] 'Convenzione tra l'Italia e la Francia per la reciproca guarentigia della proprietà letteraria ed artistica', in *Raccolta dei trattati e delle convenzioni conchiusi fra il regno d'Italia e i governi esteri*, vol. 1 (Turin, 1865), 111–17. On operetta and copyright, see Derek B. Scott, 'Early 20th-Century Operetta from the German Stage: A Cosmopolitan Genre', *The Musical Quarterly* 99/2 (2016), 254–79, at 257–8.

wave of enthusiasm for foreign music theatre, as well as lively debate among both critics and composers.[40]

The detailed content of the contracts Sonzogno signed starting in the 1870s is still largely unknown, and many revealing documents were probably lost in the tragic destruction of the firm's main archive in 1943, when a series of incendiary bombs destroyed the historical factory of Via Pasquirolo, thus making the study of many aspects of the Sonzogno company particularly difficult.[41] The 1862 *Convenzione* already protected the translation and arrangement of music-theatre works as direct emanations of the artists' creative and intellectual property. Yet, as was common for international law of the time, it also left many grey areas where publishers such as Sonzogno (and Ricordi) could easily find room for manoeuvre.[42] Many of the contracts Sonzogno signed in the 1870s arguably fed into the binational system already outlined by Matthew Franke, whereby French publishers (such as Choudens) prepared Italian translations of both their librettos and vocal scores so that they could introduce the works to various international markets, from Russia to South America, and yet retain a certain degree of control. Foreign publishers, even if obliged to pay the French firms a fee or percentage, could often earn enough through sale or rental to turn a profit, and could add a new title page and graphic design. While longer-established publishing firms (including Ricordi and Lucca) were rather resistant to this binational system, Sonzogno chose to seize the opportunity and he made systematic use of his resources to revise existing materials and to produce his own adaptations. In the 1880s, for instance (when, thanks to the success of his *concorso* and impresario activities, the Casa musicale was financially secure), Sonzogno published lavish editions of French *opéra-comique* librettos with new, elaborately decorated cover pages; their title pages showed, however, a basic design and the double indication of the Parisian and Milanese publishers (Figure 3).

Sonzogno's approach here was varied. Many of his librettos proposed a partially or entirely new translation that provided a more idiomatic Italian text, or one that fitted more easily within the metrical structures traditionally used for comic opera (in which case the subtitle *traduzione ritmica* would often appear on the frontispiece); often the firm replaced the spoken dialogues with the *scene* and recitatives that were more suited to local audiences and included an illustrated title page and sometimes in-text illustrations.[43] These operations were mostly carried out by long-established members of the publishing house, many of whom had been working with French products and their Italian adaptation since the 1860s. The most notable example was arguably Amintore Galli: Risorgimento fighter, composer, bandmaster, music critic for the broadsheet newspaper *Il secolo*, and soon-to-be composition professor at the Milan Conservatory, where he would teach, among many others, the future operetta composer Giuseppe Pietri.[44]

The international and in-house operations carried out by Edoardo in the 1870s provided the Casa musicale with a fund of novelty pieces that could be easily expended. This operation arguably constituted the largest importation of French comic works into the Italian market since the much more fragmentary and unregulated work of the travelling troupes that had

[40] See, for example, the comments published by Ricordi ten years after the premiere in 'Il *Faust* di Gounod', *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (June 1872), 199–201. For an evaluation of the impact of *Gounod*'s Faust on contemporary composers, see Giorgio Pestelli, 'Musicisti di fronte al Faust di Goethe', in *Cultura musicale e Nuova cultura tecnologica* (Turin, 2018), 25–6.

[41] Laura Barile, *Elite e divulgazione nell'editoria italiana dall'Unità al fascismo* (Bologna, 1991), 64.

[42] Thomas Adams, 'Music Publishing in Puccini's Italy', 124.

[43] See, for instance, François Planard and Henri de Saint-Georges, *Il lampo: Dramma lirico in tre atti*, *traduzione ritmica* by Angelo Zanardini, *scene* and recitatives by Amintore Galli (Milan, 1884); and Georges Boyer, *Il ritratto di Manon: Opera in un atto*, *traduzione ritmica* by Amintore Galli (Milan, 1894).

[44] See Capra, 'La Casa editrice Sonzogno tra giornalismo e impresariato', 254; and Giampiero Tintori, *Amintore Galli musicista e musicologo* (Milan, 1988), 31–4.

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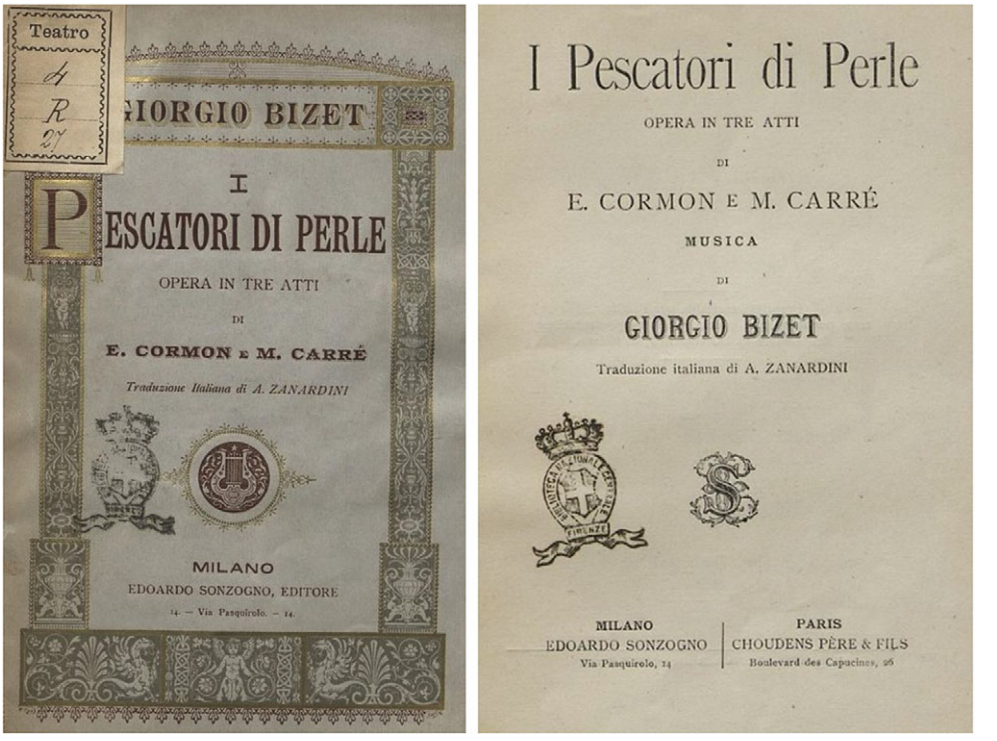

Figure 3. Cover and title page of the 1885 edition of *I pescatori di perle* (*Les pêcheurs de perles*) with the double indication Sonzogno/Choudens. Florence, Biblioteca nazionale centrale, shelf mark TH. 4.R 27. | Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Biblioteca nazionale centrale, Florence. Further reproduction prohibited.

been visiting Italian cities and towns since the late 1850s, and it occasioned a plurality of encounters that allowed many Italian artists, especially the younger generation of composers and librettists, to familiarise themselves with and imitate different genres.[45] Unlike the work of many early operetta entrepreneurs (such as Antonio Scalvini) and of the travelling troupes – who, as Carlotta Sorba and Elena Oliva have demonstrated, generally treated editions and copyright with impunity – this operation was undertaken with the specific purpose of adapting and translating the French works into a variety of printed, standardised and legally protected products.[46] In line with the expanding role of the publisher as the artists' legal and financial representative, Edoardo Sonzogno also played a major role in stabilising and enforcing copyright law, becoming first the Italian representative of the prestigious Societé des gens de lettres and then a founding member of the Società italiana degli autori (SIA).[47] Here too, Sonzogno was both following in the footsteps of, and directly competing with, Ricordi. The countless battles he fought to protect the intellectual and artistic property of 'his' roster of writers, librettists and composers can be seen as a clear strategy to protect his investment in titles across media and formats.[48] From

[45] Diana La Gioia, *Libretti italiani d'operetta nella Biblioteca nazionale centrale di Roma* (Florence, 1979), 8–9.

[46] Oliva, *L'operetta parigina a Milano, Firenze e Napoli (1860–1890)*, 71–7; and Sorba, 'The Origins of the Entertainment Industry', 292–3.

[47] Thomas Adams, 'Music Publishing in Puccini's Italy', 124.

[48] Viola Cagninelli, 'Edoardo Sonzogno rappresentante italiano della Société des gens de lettres (1872–1878)', in *La fabbrica del libro* 14/2 (2008), 9–10.

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1874 onwards, he was equally zealous about defending his stake in operettas and other light genres of music theatre, even though traditionally these were less standardised and attracted less systematic investment.[49] For example, in a stern warning issued in 1874 from the pages of the periodical *Bibliografia italiana*, Sonzogno reminded impresarios and publishers of his legal rights to popular novels by French and Italian authors, as well as the extraordinary number of operettas, *opéras comiques*, *opéras-féeries* and *opéras bouffes* by Offenbach, Lecocq, Hervé and Delibes to which he owned the rights. The latter encompassed not only rights to translation and performance, but also to adaptation or transcription of any material coming from these works, regardless of their purpose (such as dance music and fantasias) or instrument (such as piano solo, voice and piano, and instrumental ensemble).[50]

This expansion of the operatic repertoire (mirrored by a parallel expansion in other spheres of cultural consumption, including science, education and fiction) was paired with tireless experimentation in terms of formats and media that could reach an audience wider and more diverse than ever before: from lavishly illustrated publications to a complex system of advertising, prizes and subscriptions. Such experimentation, the influence of which was felt across all products of both the publishing house and the Casa musicale, was underpinned from its very beginning by fruitfully intertwined ideological and commercial factors.[51] On the one hand, all members of the Sonzogno family and Edoardo's 'team' had been raised in the cultural and intellectual environment of the Milanese higher bourgeoisie, close to left-wing groups and the Scapigliatura. Especially during and after the Wars of Independence, this social stratum placed great value on the education and professional development of the disastrously illiterate and unskilled Italian people, and on the inclusion of the lower social strata into the cultural discourse of the new Italian state.[52] Some of the defining features of this social class and their attitude to cultural patronage and dissemination have been effectively summarised by Laura Barile, who describes them as 'passionate, entrepreneurial, hostile to high finance; deeply local in their generosity of charity and entrepreneurial initiatives; lovers of both civic poetry and opera; those people that, from within Milan's administrative bodies, contributed in turning the city into Italy's moral capital'.[53] On the other hand, both the Sonzogno publishing house and the Casa musicale in particular were guaranteed a much higher chance of survival by a widening of the customer base, supported by a renewed entrepreneurial attitude that sat well with the Sonzognos' commercially minded approach.[54] Through policies such as the importation and adaptation of international goods and the systematic interlocking of his products across genres and users, Edoardo Sonzogno was able to build not merely a commercial niche, but rather a vast 'knowledge network' (*circuito del sapere*), to borrow Silvia Valisa's phrase, for the circulation of both news and culture that foreshadowed more familiar twentieth-century media empires.[55]

[49] *Bollettino degli atti e notizie della Società italiana degli autori (SIA)* (September 1883), 61.

[50] *Bibliografia italiana*, (July 1874), 70.

[51] La Gioia, *Libretti italiani d'operetta*, 47–8.

[52] See, for instance, the declarations in *Emporio pittoresco: Illustrazione universale* 12/551 (1875), 134, and *Bollettino bibliografico illustrato dello stabilimento Sonzogno* (January 1883), 1. See also Otto Cima, *Mezzo secolo di caricatura milanese 1860–1910* (Milan, 1928), 39–40; Barile, *Elite e divulgazione*, 51–2; and Silvia Valisa, 'Making News: The Sonzogno Affair (1875) and the Print Networks in Liberal Italy', *California Italian Studies* 8/2 (2008), 1–3.

[53] Laura Barile, *'Il Secolo' 1865–1923: Storia di due generazioni di democrazia lombarda* (Milan, 1980), 7–8.

[54] Hans-Joachim Wagner, *Fremde Welten: Die Oper des italienischen Verismo* (Stuttgart, 1999), 51.

[55] See the adverts in *Bollettino bibliografico illustrato* 1/3 (March 1883), n.p.; and *Il teatro illustrato* (December 1882), n.p. Also, Silvia Valisa, 'Casa editrice Sonzogno: Mediazione culturale, circuiti del sapere ed innovazione tecnologica nell'Italia unificata (1861–1887)', in *The Printed Media in Fin-de-Siècle Italy: Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, ed. Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani and Jennifer Burns (London, 2011), 93; and Palidda, 'L'impresario editore e l'editore impresario', 133.

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This search for new media was also paired with a constant receptivity in terms of technology and its use in the cultural market, an attitude that had – again – in Milan one of its main playing fields, and in Ricordi one of its main agents with regard to music publishing.[56] In his frequent visits to Paris, Edoardo had gained both contacts and cultural products, and also the latest technological novelties. After the *Exposition universelle* of 1878, for instance, Sonzogno became the first Italian publisher to acquire a *presse rotative à plieuse* Marinoni, one the most advanced rotary presses of the time and one of the main reasons behind the success of the *Petit journal* (one of Sonzogno's main business partners in Paris).[57] The spectacle of the rotary presses printing 18,000 duplex copies of *Il secolo* every hour was so unique that the Sonzogno factory became an attraction for locals and tourists alike.[58] According to Giacomo Bobbio, director of the *Tipografia del Senato* (National Typography), already in 1879 the publishing house could be considered cutting-edge in terms of paper production (with its own *cartiera* or paper factory on Lake Orta) and binding.[59] By the early 1880s, the Sonzogno firm was thus organised as an independent trust capable of catering for all phases of production, from the manufacturing of the paper to the printing and illustration, from the translation and adaptation of foreign texts to the circuits employed for advertisement and circulation.[60] In the same period, Casa Ricordi was also undergoing a process of rationalisation and expansion, opening new branches in Palermo and Paris, absorbing Casa Lucca (1888) and investing in the modernisation of its headquarters and machinery. Yet its focus on music publishing made it significantly smaller than Sonzogno: by the 1890s, the Milanese factory of Casa Ricordi employed around 200 workers, while Casa Sonzogno, divided into several departments, gave work to more than 500 individuals and consumed an average of six tons of paper every day.[61]

Capitalising on its agreements and contacts obtained abroad, as well as on its extraordinary technological means and circulation network, the Casa musicale Sonzogno had thus created numerous opportunities to import dozens of Parisian (and, later, Viennese) operettas and other pieces of light music theatre into the Italian market during the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Musical publications covered a large spectrum that catered for different musical practices in both private, domestic settings and public, commercial ones –from vocal scores and piano adaptations of full works or excerpts to arrangements as shorter pieces for various instruments and ensembles. These products were circulated both as freestanding publications and as supplements to periodicals, and in instalments with a function akin to the *feuilleton.* Many of them, often made more appealing with illustrations or lavish title pages, were also given as gifts to the subscribers and to periodicals and book series.[62]

From 1875 onwards, in a further attempt to challenge Ricordi's monopoly and to save money and time, Edoardo Sonzogno also chose to become directly involved in opera

[56] Gigli Marchetti, 'Impresa e lavoro', 23–4.

[57] See also contemporary advertisements in *Le petit journal*, (May 1869), n.p., 'Macchine tipografiche Marinoni', *L'esposizione di Parigi del 1878 illustrata* 31 (1878), 242–5, 'Macchine tipografiche e litografiche', *L'esposizione di Parigi del 1878 illustrata* 78 (1879), 622–3, and in *Bollettino bibliografico illustrato dello stabilimento Sonzogno*, (April 1884), 32; and Giacomo Bobbio, *I materiali e i prodotti tipografici* (Rome, 1879), 68.

[58] Valisa, 'Casa editrice Sonzogno', 95–6.

[59] Bobbio, *I materiali e i prodotti tipografici*, 129 and 143.

[60] Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 216.

[61] Gigli Marchetti, 'Impresa e lavoro', 27; also, the illustrations in *Bollettino bibliografico illustrato dello stabilimento Sonzogno* (December 1886), 10–16.

[62] See, for instance, the periodicals *Teatro musicale giocoso*, *La musica popolare* and *Pantheon dei pianisti*; the *Album di danze pel 1876* advertised in *Emporio pittoresco: Illustrazione universale* (January 1876), 36; the *Romanza nell'opera I dragoni di Villars*, published as a supplement to *Il tesoro delle famiglie*, 125 (1876); and the advertisement detailing the prizes for subscribers in *Il teatro illustrato* (December 1881), n.p.

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production by organising either single performances or whole seasons at various Milanese *teatri minori* such as the Santa Radegonda and the Dal Verme, where he presented French comic works in Italian translation.[63] Around the same time, Giulio Ricordi was in fact struggling to deal with impresarios and other theatre managers, especially in the *teatri maggiori* such as La Scala, as well as to navigate the bureaucracy of public funding.[64] Throughout the 1880s, meanwhile, Sonzogno organised performances in various Italian theatres, often choosing run-down or peripheral *teatri minori* that had been left in a dire financial situation by the lack of public subsidy, such as Rome's Teatro Costanzi, Turin's Teatro Carignano, Naples's Teatro Sannazzaro and Florence's Teatro Pagliano.[65] By the mid-1890s, he had managed at least one season in every major Italian city, often working with different theatres simultaneously, and subsidising many of these ventures from his own pocket.[66]

Expansion and diversification

During the 1880s and 1890s, two major events further strengthened the theatrical system Sonzogno had been building since 1874. First, in 1883 Sonzogno launched his very successful *concorso* for one-act operas from the pages of *Il teatro illustrato*, which renewed his repertoire nationally and created what Jutta Toelle has described as 'a new canon from the top down'.[67] As well as providing significant financial prizes, Sonzogno guaranteed the winning works a series of performances to be organised and funded by his Casa musicale. With members of the jury comprising some of the firm's longer-standing collaborators (including Amintore Galli, who was also *Il teatro illustrato*'s chief editor), Sonzogno managed to channel some of his existing activities into what was arguably his most successful initiative.[68] In 1888, Sonzogno launched an expanded version of the *concorso*, with two works awarded financial prizes and three being performed at Rome's Teatro Costanzi, while in early 1891 *Cavalleria rusticana*, winner of the 1890 competition, became the first Sonzogno work to be performed (initially not to great acclaim) at La Scala.[69] The second major event was Sonzogno's aquisition in 1894 of his own theatre in Milan – while he simultaneously refurbished and managed the Teatro Mercadante in Naples. The former Cannobiana, which had been built at the same time as La Scala and inaugurated in 1779, was modernised and renamed the Teatro Lirico Internazionale. The name denoted a particularly open-minded and international attitude, and Sonzogno used it to stage both foreign works in translation and the fruits of his own *concorsi.*[70] With his rapidly growing roster of Italian young composers and pioneering works, Sonzogno could then reverse the system, staging performances of Italian works in theatres all over Europe and beyond, and signing contracts with foreign publishers to have 'his' works translated and performed abroad.[71] These activities were embedded from the start in the circuits of dissemination and advertisement provided by his periodicals and musical

[63] *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, xiii; and Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 297–9.
[64] Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 160–1.
[65] Toelle, 'Opera as Business?', 457.
[66] Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 214–15.
[67] 'Incoraggiamento ai giovani compositori italiani: Concorso', *Il teatro illustrato* 3/28 (April 1883), 50; and Toelle, 'Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900', 8–9.
[68] Capra, 'La Casa editrice Sonzogno tra giornalismo e impresariato', 259.
[69] 'Incoraggiamento ai giovani compositori italiani. Concorso', *Il teatro illustrato e La musica popolare* 8/91 (July 1888), 98; and Wagner, *Fremde Welten*, 375–6.
[70] *La vita italiana*, Vol. 1 (November 1894-January 1895), 215, Valisa, 'Casa editrice Sonzogno', 103; and Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 160–1.
[71] Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 297–303; and Dryden, *Leoncavallo*, 47–9.

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publications from the 1860s and 1870s. Performances both in Italy and abroad were enthusiastically reviewed in newspapers and magazines and their musical material was instantly repurposed in various formats to suit the audience's reactions and practices.

A particularly well-documented early example that can demonstrate the Sonzogno system in action is the *opéra comique Les dragons de Villars*, composed by Aimé Maillart to a libretto by Lockroy (Joseph-Philippe Simon) and Eugène Cormon, which premiered at the Théâtre Lyrique in 1856 and was published by Brandus in 1857.[72] Having obtained the rights for the Italian translation, publication and performance from Brandus in July 1874, Sonzogno chose this work to open his first French season at the Santa Radegonda theatre: translated as *I dragoni di Villars*, the work premiered there in late February 1875.[73] Enthusiastic reviews appeared in periodicals such as *Emporio pittoresco*, and in short order the complete vocal score, immediately followed by the libretto, was advertised as part of the series *Teatro musicale giocoso* in March of the same year.[74] The process of adaptation (probably undertaken by figures such as Galli, who could deal with both textual and musical elements) modified the work's format in quite an invasive way, eliminating many spoken dialogues and adopting Italian verses (*senari* and *ottonari*) that suited closed vocal numbers such as *canzoni* and *romanze.*[75] *Pezzi staccati* arranged for both voice and piano and piano solo also started to appear, sold either individually or as part of collections, and very often appended to periodical publications. A *Strenna* (Christmas volume) of dance pieces published at the end of 1875, for instance, offered a polka composed by Galli on themes from the *opéra comique* alongside similar pieces from works by Adam, Auber, Lecoq and Offenbach.[76] Similarly, in 1876 *Il tesoro delle famiglie* offered the vocal score of the *romanza* 'Ah, non parlar: ten prega il labbro mio'.[77] These products continued to be both sold or gifted to subscribers throughout the 1870s and 1880s, when a new edition of the score curated by Galli also appeared.[78] Possibly also to publicise this new product, in late 1882 Sonzogno's magazine *La musica popolare* contained the *romanza* already published in 1876, while *Il teatro illustrato* offered the *villanella* 'Qui giammai non s'udia'.[79] Finally, in 1883 Sonzogno staged a new production of the opera at the Carcano and published a new edition of the libretto including a lavishly illustrated title page.[80]

This vast productive industry is especially relevant to operetta, especially against the background of the genre's rather slow and difficult local development in Italy. As Elena Oliva also explores elsewhere in this special issue, Italian troupes (such as the Scalvini and Bergonzoni-Lupi companies) had tried to follow in the footsteps of the French travelling artists since the late 1860s by offering both translations of French operettas and original, often rather low-quality works; these were often parodies of foreign works in vernacular languages, and were not infrequently paired with inexpensive productions of Italian comic

[72] Eugène Cormon, Lockroy and Aimé Maillart, *Les dragons de Villars*, *opéra comique en 3 actes*, vocal score (Paris, 1857).

[73] Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 296; and *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, xiii.

[74] See the advertisement and the 'Cronaca teatrale' in *Emporio pittoresco: Illustrazione universale* 12/551 (March 1875), 119 and 143, respectively.

[75] Eugène Cormon and Lockroy, *I dragoni di Villars*, It. transl. by anonymous (Milan, 1875), 6–13.

[76] 'Strenna – Album di Danze pel 1876', advertisement in *Emporio pittoresco: Illustrazione universale* 13/594 (January 1876), 36.

[77] Cormon and Lockroy, *I dragoni di Villars*, 18; and *Il tesoro delle famiglie* 9/125 (1876), n.p.

[78] See, for instance, the adverts in *Emporio pittoresco: Illustrazione universale* 12/550 (March 1875), 132, and 12/552 (March 1875), 155.

[79] 'La nostra musica', *La musica popolare* (September 1882), 99–100; and *Il teatro illustrato* (November 1882), n.p.

[80] *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* (October 1883), 374, 'Note varie', *La musica popolare* (November 1883), 183; and Cormon and Lockroy, *I dragoni di Villars*, 2nd edn (Milan, 1883).

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operas, spoken theatre and popular entertainment.[81] But these artists had struggled to challenge both the foreign monopoly on new works and the 'national' model provided by opera – especially in such a delicate period of repertoire formation – and to catch the interest of composers and critics.[82] Since at least the 1880s, French and Italian operetta performers had been following a very different circuit to opera performers, which included many temporary and multi-purpose spaces that contributed to the genre's inherent hybridity and its struggle to surface.[83] In this context, Sonzogno's operations can be considered highly significant, as they sought from an early stage to provide operettas and similar genres with more stable venues for performance and printed formats for dissemination – while also providing them with an outlet in one of the theatrical capitals of the time. Sonzogno's investment in the genre seemed to slow down only in the 1890s, arguably because of the widespread success the *verismo* operas by his 'stable' of composers were obtaining throughout Italy and Europe; but also because of the growing profile of operetta companies (such as the Maresca, Scognamiglio and Calligaris-Gravina) that specialised in subgenres such as parody and *operetta-féerie* and often catered for every aspect of their production.[84] Yet this slowdown was only temporary. Interest in operetta – this time with a view towards nurturing an Italian version of the genre – would characterise many policies adopted by the Casa musicale Sonzogno in the early twentieth century in its attempt to become a total, modern media industry that could capture the interests of the emerging Italian bourgeoisie.

As Carlotta Sorba has already noted, operetta came to constitute a significant part of the Sonzogno catalogue from at least the late 1880s (long before Ricordi showed an interest in the genre), when it already included more than 150 titles that triggered a vast array of commercial and cultural initiatives.[85] To date, a comprehensive census of Sonzogno's operetta productions and publications has never been conducted, doubtless due to the destruction of the Sonzogno archive; as a result, neither the scale nor the detailed features of these commercial operations are entirely clear. Nevertheless, these productions can be considered of prime importance as they significantly increased and standardised the presence of French light works, most of all *operette* and *opéra comique*, in the Italian peninsula (and this despite the invasive nature of many adaptations).[86] The presence of such genres across the national network of *teatri minori* satisfied the public's voracious appetite for entertainment even as it fuelled virulent, often contradictory debates about the quality and character of venues, audiences and genres. The growing success of light music theatre on a national scale prompted repeated comparison with opera. Critics (many writing for the specialised press owned by or affiliated to music publishers) frequently condemned the audiences crowding the *teatri minori*, in contrast to traditional opera-goers taking part in the social and musical rituals of opera-going in the historical *teatri maggiori*: operetta audiences were depicted as rowdy, lascivious and uncultured, with the musical spectacle needed to satisfy their expectations lacking practically any artistic component.[87] In 1874, for instance (the same year as the foundation of Sonzogno's Casa musicale), the performance of *La figlia di Madama Angot* (Lecoq's work in translation) by the Bergonzoni troupe at the Teatro Dal Verme was described by the critic of Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* as just the latest

[81] Paoletti, 'The Operetta Seasons Considerably Decreased Our Losses', 15; and Oliva, *L'operetta parigina a Milano, Firenze e Napoli (1860–1890)*, 83–9.

[82] Oppicelli, *L'operetta*, 177–8; and De Lucca, 'Operetta in Italy', 220–3.

[83] Sorba, 'The Origins of the Entertainment Industry', 287–8.

[84] Oppicelli, *L'operetta*, 179; and Capra, 'La Casa editrice Sonzogno tra giornalismo e impresariato', 272–3.

[85] Sorba, 'The Origins of the Entertainment Industry', 294–5.

[86] Toelle, 'Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900', 7–8; and Innocenzo Cappa, 'Prefazione', in *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, vi.

[87] De Lucca, 'Operetta in Italy', 223–4.

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French drollery (*buffoneria*). The soiree's only merit had been its elevation of Lecoq's music through its Italian adaptation and its performance by more skilled artists than the French 'parodies' usually enjoyed, but the audience, intent on smoking and drinking beer throughout, had not noticed.[88] The increased presence of light music-theatre genres and the surrounding debate are even more significant if we consider that around the same years, the ecosystem of traditional opera was also undergoing a huge transformation due to the codification (mainly steered by music publishers) of canonical works supposedly representing the national tradition, and the difficult coexistence of what Carlotta Sorba has described as a 'theatre of production' and a 'repertory theatre'.[89] The Sonzogno productions were also instrumental (an 'inestimable cultural contribution', to use the words of Marco Capra) in bringing about systemic encounters between light music-theatre repertoire and young Italian composers, especially those who entered Edoardo Sonzogno's sphere of influence.[90]

At the turn of the twentieth century, then, the Casa musicale Sonzogno had expanded significantly, building both a varied and dynamic repertoire and a system for its implementation that capitalised on the network of international contacts that Sonzogno had cultivated in the decades prior, especially with regard to light, comic music theatre. This period had been an intense and fast-paced one for the Italian cultural market in terms of production, networks, formats, media and audiences, and the experience of the Sonzogno publishing house offers a prime case study for exploring some of its underpinning dynamics. In fact, Edoardo Sonzogno has already been described by media historians as the Italian pioneer of the modern cultural industry.[91] Crucially, as we have seen, although often excluded from traditional narratives about the Casa Sonzogno, light music theatre played a key role in Edoardo's vertiginous ascent – while also fuelling an attitude of open-mindedness to national traditions and genres, and high versus low culture, which, although clearly dictated by commercial logic, would be shared by all the directors of Casa Sonzogno.

The capital of modernity

Sonzogno's ascent and policies, however, were also significantly moulded around the distinctive socio-cultural context of Milan, the city where the firm, despite its European and even global expansion, kept its headquarters and factory. Already a prime arena for the cultural and publishing markets and a major pole for the debates on copyright and public subsidy, since the 1870s the city had been experiencing an intense phase of urbanisation and modernisation that made it especially hungry for light musical entertainment and music theatre. In 1881 and 1906, Milan hosted large-scale *Esposizioni* that showcased to millions of visitors the latest developments in industry and technology, celebrated the city's strategic location, dynamism and European vocation, and provided a new kind of spectacle that repurposed technological investments and targeted the new urban masses.[92] In those years, Milan's booming industrial sector was also attracting thousands of workers from the nearby countryside, as well as from the rural and impoverished South. These workers had come to form a coherent lower bourgeoisie that constituted a distinct urban public with its own

[88] 'Rivista milanese', *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* 29/31 (August 1874), 252–3.

[89] Carlotta Sorba, 'Theaters, Markets, and Canonic Implications in the Italian Opera System, 1820–1880', in Newark and Weber, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Operatic Canon*, 207–25, at 219–22; and Toelle, 'Opera as Business?', 455.

[90] Capra, 'La Casa editrice Sonzogno tra giornalismo e impresariato', 268.

[91] Raffaele De Berti, 'Milano tra i due secoli', in De Berti, ed., *Un secolo di cinema a Milano*, 21.

[92] *Guida del visitatore alla Esposizione industriale italiana del 1881 in Milano* (Milan, 1881), 7, Ercole A. Marescotti and Eduardo Ximenes, *Milano e l'Esposizione internazionale del Sempione*, 1906 (Milan, 1906), 6; and De Berti, 'Milano tra i due secoli', 23.

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capabilities and demands in terms of cultural consumption.[93] This new social grouping represented a very promising audience for Sonzogno, who oriented many of his printed products towards them.[94]

In a similar fashion to other industry-driven European cities (including Naples, as Ditlev Rindom explores elsewhere in this special issue), Milan's cultural and entertainment landscape had also entered an intense phase of expansion and diversification that saw these urban masses as one of its main poles, and it was changing in response to this public's shifting population and mobility.[95] Long-established venues expanded beyond their original purpose, while new multi-purpose venues appeared, untraditional in their location, format, repertoire and audience.[96] At the other hand of the spectrum, La Scala, following a harsh dispute between Sonzogno and Ricordi over its control and management, would soon enter a tormented process of transition (the famous *questione della Scala* that dominated Milan's *fin-de-siècle* operatic life) – which would turn it into an anti-commercial institution managed by the city's higher capitalistic bourgeoisie.[97] To the traditional 'temples of culture' and codified genres carrying the weight of the city's historical memory, Milan's new, 'modern' cultural geography (lasting at least until the eve of the First World War) preferred functional spaces that could offer cheap entertainment in accessible formats.[98] The city centre, for instance, saw the birth of numerous *caffè-concerto*, such as Biffi and Cova, that offered short concert performances accompanied by refreshments and conversation in a glamorous, self-consciously cultured atmosphere.[99] A particularly representative venue in this sense was the Teatro Eden, built as *caffè-concerto* and *teatro di varietà* near the Sforza Castle, which offered spaces catering to different types of leisure and entertainment, from concerts to roller skating, from spoken theatre to swimming. Another was the Teatro Dal Verme, built not far from the Eden on the site of a multi-purpose wooden *politeama*: the Dal Verme (frequently managed by Sonzogno in the 1880s) hosted opera, operetta, spoken theatre and popular entertainment, and it attracted a variegated and notoriously open-minded audience from across the social classes.[100] At the same time, a variety of smaller and humbler venues opened in the suburbs of the growing city, attracting a mostly local audience with a mixture of spoken and dialect theatre, musical performances and *varietà*: already in the late 1880s, police reports reveal that Milan hosted an average of 2,000 theatrical events per year, of which only 10 per cent could be described as operatic.[101] Apart from a very limited group of box owners and aficionados of the genre who spent almost every evening at the opera, the vast majority of theatre-goers enjoyed an eclectic and intense experience by continuously juxtaposing different performances in different venues.[102] It is precisely in these years –

[93] Alberto Abruzzese, *Forme estetiche e società di massa* (Venice, 1992), 41–9; Domenico Manzella and Emilio Pozzi, *I teatri di Milano* (Milan, 1971), 135; and De Berti, 'Milano tra i due secoli', 20–1.

[94] Mario Ricciardi, 'I Sonzogno. Una storia di tipografi, editori, imprenditori', in *La casa editrice Sonzogno*, exhibition catalogue, Biblioteca comunale di Milano, 15 March–13 April 1985 (Milano, 1985), 12–13. See also Paoletti, *Mascagni, Mocchi, Sonzogno: La Società teatrale internazionale (1908–1931) e i suoi protagonisti* (PhD dissertation, University of Bologna, 2015), 15–17.

[95] Abruzzese, *Forme estetiche e società di massa*, 79–86.

[96] Sileno Salvagnini, 'Luoghi dello spettacolo e immaginario tra otto e novecento in Italia', in *La meccanica del visible*, ed. Antonio Costa (Florence, 1983), 49–50, and Manzella and Pozzi, *I teatri di Milano*, 135–6.

[97] Marco Santoro, 'Imprenditoria culturale nella Milano di fine ottocento', in *Scene di fine ottocento: L'Italia fin de siècle a teatro*, ed. Carlotta Sorba (Rome, 2004), 101–45, at 116–18; and Toelle, 'Opera as Business?', 457–8.

[98] Elena Mosconi, 'Uno spazio composito: Il politeama', in *Spettatori italiani: Riti e ambienti del consumo cinematografico (1900–1950)*, ed. Francesco Casetti and Elena Mosconi (Rome, 2006), 17–29, at 20.

[99] Manzella and Pozzi, *I teatri di Milano*, 137–8; Paoletti, *Mascagni, Mocchi, Sonzogno*, 19; and Elena Mosconi, 'Transiti: Cinema e varietà', in Casetti and Mosconi, eds., *Spettatori italiani*, 33–56, at 36.

[100] See Manzella and Pozzi, *I teatri di Milano*, 113–4; and Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 160.

[101] Toelle, 'Operatic Canons and Repertories in Italy c. 1900', 4.

[102] Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 355–6.

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when the audience was at is most diverse, when a wide range of new venues was offering spectacular entertainments comprising different genres and traditions – that scholars such as Raffaele De Berti have pinpointed the beginning of Italian mass culture.[103]

Telling, in this respect, is the fact that Milan was also becoming an important locus for the dawning Italian film industry, which, like the opera industry, was also polycentric and tightly linked to specific urban environments.[104] Since the 1890s, the city had been a major centre for photography, not only hosting several specialised manufacturers and clubs, but also publishing some of the first periodicals.[105] It was through events, clubs and publications such as these that cinema made its entrance in the Lombard capital in early 1896. After a private screening of the new-fangled Lumière *cinèmatographe* at the local Circolo Fotografico, in the space of merely 10 days commercial screenings started to be offered at the popular Teatro Milanese.[106] With cinema's growing popularity and cheap tickets, film showings took place with increasing frequency in several *politeama* and *teatri minori* in the city centre, especially the Dal Verme, Fossati and Carcano, and in some of the most popular *caffè-concerto* such as the Eden.[107]

With its rich geography of venues, voracious and diversified audience, technological capability and abundance of texts and agents, Milan represented the perfect terrain for cinematic experimentation, as it had already done for music theatre. It is therefore not surprising that the great Milanese music publishers started very early on to show an interest in cinematic adaptations of their contracted works. Tito Ricordi, for instance, promoted several partnerships with film companies after taking over the direction of Casa Ricordi in 1911. Highly innovative, the resulting projects led, as Christy Thomas Adams has argued, to some of the first explorations of the features, risks and potential profit of a cross-fertilisation between opera and cinema, including the production not only of filmic adaptations, but also of specially composed original film scores (such as Pietro Mascagni's score for *Rapsodia satanica*).[108] Once again, yet in a completely changed context, music publishers were pushing the market into a new phase, also offering the rising film industry a wave of financial and creative support.

The Teatro Lirico, which had belonged to the Sonzogno firm since 1894, started hosting film screenings with the accompaniment of live music only in 1913. Yet an interest in the filmic medium in conjunction with music theatre – the final frontier, so to speak, in the process of intermedial adaptation that had characterised the Casa musicale from its very beginning – can be observed already in the first decade of the twentieth century. These years saw the Casa Sonzogno embark on several ventures: in 1907, for instance, it had agreed to the film company Ambrosio Film (founded by the Turin-based photographer and cultural entrepreneur Arturo Ambrosio) producing a filmic adaptation of Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* (*I Pagliacci*) that is widely regarded as the first opera film.[109] Already in 1909 these ventures had expanded into the international sphere, from a short film of *Pagliacci* with sound

[103] De Berti, 'Milano tra i due secoli', 22.

[104] Aldo Bernardini, 'Introduzione', in *C'era il cinema: L'Italia al cinema tra otto e novecento*, ed. Flavia De Lucis and Aldo Bernardini (Reggio Emilia, 1996), 7.

[105] Raffaele De Berti, 'L'arrivo del cinema a Milano e le prime proiezioni', in De Berti, ed., *Un secolo di cinema a Milano*, 29.

[106] Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano: Ambiente, spettacoli e spettatori 1896/1904* (Rome, 1980), 33–4.

[107] De Berti, 'L'arrivo del cinema a Milano', 39–40. See also Mosconi, 'Uno spazio composito', 22–3; and 'Transiti: Cinema e varietà', 36–7.

[108] Thomas Adams, 'From Operatic Stage to Silent Screen', 192–3; and 'Music Publishers and Synchronised Scores: Mascagni, Ricordi and *Rapsodia satanica*', *Music and the Moving Image* 16/2 (2023), 36–44, at 36–7.

[109] Luca Cottini, *The Art of Objects: The Birth of Italian Industrial Culture, 1878–1928* (Toronto, 2018), 67–8; and Gian Piero Brunetta, *The History of Italian Cinema: A Guide to Italian Film From its Origins to the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, 2009), 29–30.

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synchronised through the new American Lubin system (sadly now lost) to a filmic production of *Cavalleria rusticana* as part of the *Série d'Art* film series organised by the Parisian company Éclair.[110] These experiences, as well as the overall context of Milan as an intermedial powerhouse of culture and entertainment, undoubtedly prepared the terrain for Lorenzo Sonzogno's later experiments with operetta and film in a particularly conflicted phase of the Casa musicale's life, while also demonstrating the ongoing competition between Sonzogno and Ricordi to capitalise on the latest media for operettistic circulation.

After Edoardo: conflict and experimentation

In 1904, Edoardo Sonzogno launched his last *concorso* for new operas (this time also open to foreigners and won by the French composer Gabriel Dupont).[111] In the same year he founded his last illustrated periodical, *Varietas*, which, in a very similar fashion to Ricordi's *Ars et labor* and Treves's *Il secolo XX*, blended popular culture and entertainment, positivism and an interest in technology, with a growing nationalistic agenda, and made full use of the latest developments in photography and lithography.[112] *Varietas* is significant in so far as it launched several further *concorsi* that testify to Edoardo's constant receptivity towards new media and formats, and at the same time his continuing need for expansion and diversification. In 1904, for instance, there was a *concorso fotografico permanente* that invited submissions from the whole of Italy and promoted the knowledge of national landscapes and activities.[113] In 1906, it was the turn of a *concorso* for a new opera libretto, its 560 submissions judged by a jury that included the 'old guard' of Galli and Arrigo Boito alongside younger intellectuals and artists such as Angiolo Orvieto and Gerolamo Rovetta.[114] And an operetta *concorso* was just around the corner – but this time it would not be Edoardo driving the pace of change.

In 1909, just after announcing a last *concorso* for a *canzone* or other short composition for voice and orchestra, and after almost five decades of uninterrupted and strenuous activity, Edoardo Sonzogno decided to retire.[115] Unmarried and childless, he left the management of his empire to his two nephews: the book and periodical publishing to Riccardo; the Casa musicale to Lorenzo (Renzo). Due to harsh conflicts with the latter, however, Edoardo stripped him of his role by late 1910;[116] Lorenzo retaliated by founding his own company, the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno, and entered into open competition with his uncle and cousin.[117] Part of his strategy was to acquire the rights for many foreign comic operas and operettas, including works by Wolf-Ferrari, Johann Strauss, Humperdinck and Léhar.[118] As well (ironically) as continuing his uncle's policies in terms of international repertoire expansion, Renzo was also riding the ongoing wave of popularity enjoyed by operetta, whose repertoire was growing thanks to the numerous Silver Age French and Viennese

[110] Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia dei film', 869; James Keolker, *Last Acts: The Operas of Puccini and His Italian Contemporaries from Alfano to Zandonai* (Napa, CA, 2000), 302–3; and Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinema*, tome 3, vol. 1 (Paris, 1946), 37.

[111] 'Eco dei teatri', *Il secolo* 39/13680 (May 1904), n.p.

[112] Gabriele D'Autilia, *Storia della fotografia in Italia: Dal 1839 a oggi* (Turin, 2012), 25–7; also, the advertisement in *Giornale illustrato dei viaggi* (May 1904), 159.

[113] See, for example, 'Concorso fotografico permanente', *Varietas: Rivista mensile illustrata* (July 1906), 632–9.

[114] 'Un nuovo poeta', *Varietas* (December 1906), 1097–9, and *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, xvii–xviii.

[115] Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 351.

[116] [Letter Edoardo Sonzogno to Gabriel Astruc] 10 December 1910, Paris, Archives Nationales, shelf mark 409AP/15.

[117] Nandi Ostali, 'Storia della Casa editrice Sonzogno e della Casa musicale Sonzogno', in *Casa musicale Sonzogno: Cronologie, saggi, testimonianze*, 11.

[118] La Gioia, *Libretti italiani d'operetta*, 48.

works, and whose productions had become increasingly lavish and expensive, in certain ways bringing them closer to opera. Particularly significant in the case of Milan had been the Italian premiere of Lehar's *Die lustige Witwe* as *La vedova allegra*, which had opened at the Teatro Dal Verme and enjoyed uninterrupted success for a record 500 performances.[119]

Hence, while Riccardo Sonzogno chose to focus on the mature, larger-scale operatic works of living composers (including the Giovane Scuola), Renzo invested more and more in operetta, actively supporting its Italian production by both established and emerging composers. Already in November 1912, he announced the foundation of the aforementioned company La Novissima, directed by Forzano, and in March 1913 he launched the latest (and last) incarnation of a *concorso* Sonzogno, for a three-act operetta.[120] In line with the previous competitions, the (sole) winner was to receive a substantial monetary prize (5,000 Lit.) and a series of performances by the members of La Novissima. Renzo gathered a judging commission that included experts from outside the firm's circle of collaborators and from within Ricordi's sphere of influence, from composer Alberto Franchetti to critic and librettist Renato Simoni. The conflict with Ricordi, revived in the 1890s when Edoardo Sonzogno managed La Scala for three years, may have partially informed this decision. Nevertheless, the commission was deemed fair and well-balanced even by the contributors to a periodical dedicated to operetta such as *L'opera comica*, and it clearly sought to balance established opera composers with figures (such as Simoni) who were also directly engaged with operetta production.[121] In May 1914, from the pages of his brand-new house periodical *Proscenium*, Renzo Sonzogno proudly announced that thanks to his Casa musicale's tireless work, the world of Italian operetta was flourishing and the cohort of Italian operetta composers (*operettisti italiani*) was continuously expanding: 'the Italian *piccola lirica* is vigorously making its way [through the music-theatre scene] and, with faith and enthusiasm, is aiming for [its] leadership'.[122]

And yet, in October 1914, the jury of the operetta *concorso* announced its highly controversial decision to not award the prize to any of the numerous (more than 80) applicants, apparently due to the lack of a truly excellent work. Perhaps, this outcome was due to the personal and legal controversies that tormented the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno, already undermined by a deficient organisation; or perhaps it was the impending war that lay behind this failure.[123] Yet it is hard not to see this episode as telling, as evidence of the profound conflicts around the question of 'Italianising' operetta that were already dividing the operetta industry and the Italian establishment, who never did truly settle on what a suitable 'native' form of the genre ought to look and sound like. The competition's failure – in contrast to the one-act opera *concorsi* in the 1880s and 1890s that had attracted the interest of Puccini and Mascagni – also raises questions over the mechanics of the operetta industry more generally at this time. By the 1910s such schemes were arguably out of date; when operetta was no longer a novelty waiting to be launched but rather a thriving and increasingly geographically dispersed phenomenon, even a firm such as Sonzogno struggled to truly monopolise the genre.

Despite the embarrassing failure of the operetta *concorso*, Renzo Sonzogno continued to invest in the composition and production of numerous operettas, both on the international and national fronts. In a very similar fashion to his uncle, he facilitated encounters between

[119] See De Lucca, 'Operetta in Italy', 224–5 for more on the initial Italian reception of Lehár's work.

[120] Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 362.

[121] 'Notiziario', *L'opera comica* (December 1914), n.p.; and Giuseppe Barigazzi, *La Scala racconta*, ed. Silvia Barigazzi (Milan, 2014), 236–7.

[122] 'Dunque, la piccola lirica italiana gagliardamente si fa strada e con fede ed entusiasmo si avvia alla conquista del primato'; 'La nostra attività', *Proscenium* 1/1 (May 1914), 1.

[123] Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 363–8.

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Italian composers and foreign works and organising performances and seasons in Italy and abroad. In March 1913, for instance, after acquiring the rights for Léhar's *Endlich allein* (Figure 2), Renzo announced forthcoming operetta seasons (with both foreign works in translation and Italian pieces) in Budapest and Paris, while in May 1913 he curated a successful season of Italian operettas at Paris's Théâtre Réjane.[124] To maintain a certain amount of control over the production of the works, Renzo also purchased the co-ownership of theatrical companies such as Caramba-Scognamiglio and Città di Milano, with whom he curated the premieres of foreign and Italian operettas such as Jean Gilbert's *La casta Susanna* (*Die keusche Susanne*, Kursaal, Montecatini, July 1911), Yvan de Hartulary Darclée's *Capriccio antico* (Kursaal-Diana, Milan, February 1912) and Alberto Montanari's *Il birichino di Parigi* (Teatro Duse, Bologna, November 1912).[125] During the war, Renzo was even accused of 'Germanophilia' and extreme commercial opportunism by the left-wing French newspaper *L'action française* because of his strong promotion of Austrian culture and music through the many operettas (mainly by Lehár and Strauss) that he still produced in both Italy and France. According to the compiler, Renzo was in league with the impresario of the Monte Carlo Opéra Raoul Gunsbourg and even planning to circulate Austrian and German operettas disguised as the works of young Italian composers.[126]

Despite the accusations and critiques, however, Renzo can be considered one of the key instrumental figures behind both the promotion of foreign operetta and (even more importantly) the support of a local Italian repertory. In spite of the archival challenges which attend the study of the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno, there are clear traces pointing to the expansion of existing policies to the operetta world, by then a much more competitive and specialised market. Renzo supported young composers experimenting with the genre through the Casa's traditionally intertwined activities of publishing and theatre management, rapidly gathering an unparalleled catalogue of both foreign and Italian works.[127] The 1915 edition of the libretto of Giuseppe Pietri's *Addio giovinezza* and the 1916 *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, for instance, together show a rich supply of operetta libretti and musical materials for sale from the leading French, Austrian and German composers, and the Italian pioneers of the old and new generation, from Leoncavallo to Lombardo, Leoni, Gentili and Ferrarese.[128] These traces are particularly revealing in light of the broader structural changes the Italian operetta world would undergo in the 1920s – as Marco Ladd discusses elsewhere in this issue – when the vertical integration the Sonzogno firm had pioneered would be challenged by bona fide operetta specialists such as Carlo Lombardo. In this context, it is unsurprising that the Casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno made full use of the tools offered by developing industries such as cinema, while continuing to exploit its existing capital by attempting a cross-fertilisation between operetta and other media.

Apex and decline

Despite navigating a complex cultural market tinged with nationalistic hysteria and financial difficulties, Renzo Sonzogno tried to capitalise on his roster of works and artists by pursuing partnerships with established film companies and professionals, who – especially

[124] *Rassegna contemporanea* (March 1913), 893; and Morini and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 364.

[125] La Gioia, *Libretti italiani d'operetta*, 48; and Oppicelli, *L'operetta*, 184. Darclée's Romanian first name was regularly Italianised to 'Ivan'.

[126] Leon Daudet, 'Gunsbourg, agent d'un consortium viennois', *L'action française* (March 1917), n.p.

[127] 'Date importanti della casa musicale Lorenzo Sonzogno', in *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, xix–xxii.

[128] *Catalogo delle edizioni pubblicate*, 97–108; and Alessandro De Stefani, *Addio giovinezza!* (Milan, 1916), 4–11.

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in the infancy of the Italian cinema industry – were highly specialised and in control of many technical means. A particularly notable partnership was that with the company of Luca Comerio, one of the greatest pioneers of the Milanese (indeed entire Italian) film industry, to realise the filmic adaptation of the grand ballet *Excelsior*. Originally created in 1881 (the same year as the *Esposizione nazionale*) for La Scala by Luigi Manzotti to music by Romualdo Marenco, *Excelsior* is still remembered as one of the most enduring and successful works in the history of Italian ballet.[129] The film version, as Elena Mosconi has written, was shot outdoors in the suburbs of Milan in one of the most daring operations of the time; it was distributed between 1913 and 1914 but enjoyed almost no circulation outside big centres such as Rome and Milan due to the difficulties of synchronising the images with live music.[130] Another partnership Sonzogno sought was that with the company Italica Ars (Rome) to produce the filmic adaptation of the 1893 ballet *L'histoire d'un Pierrot*, with music by Mario Costa on a pantomime by Fernand Beissier, under the director Baldassarre Negroni (1914).[131] Agreements were also announced, though not implemented, with other major film companies such as Cines and Cenisio, at the same time that periodicals long focused on music theatre began to worry openly about the threat posed by cinema.[132] In this very same period, the Sonzogno family would also continue to strengthen links between the Giovane Scuola and operetta, notably publishing works such as Puccini's *La rondine* (1917) and Mascagni's *Sì* (1919).

Even if Lorenzo Sonzogno had built a rich catalogue of works and a dense network of collaborators and venues by 1914, founding a film company such as Musical Films and producing filmic adaptations of operettas such as *La reginetta delle rose* were – as noted previously – bold moves, which he undertook, in line with the policies already pursued by his uncle, for a mixture of ideological and commercial reasons. On the one hand, he arguably wished to continue the process of diversification and popularisation of his products, especially of the operettas in which he had invested so much, and which were increasingly treated as important components of Italian cultural life. On the other hand, he needed to make full use of the technologies, audiences and markets of his time in order to capitalise as much as possible on his investments, especially when working in open competition with other publishers (and now, with film producers and other cultural and entertainment entrepreneurs as well); it was, as Matteo Pavesi has called it, a 'multi-media project at 360 degrees' (*un progetto multimediale a tutto campo*).[133] In this sense, the 1914 film of *La reginetta delle rose* can be seen not only as a meaningful experiment for the market of Italian operetta of the time, but also as the culmination of Renzo Sonzogno's (and, indeed, of the whole Casa musicale Sonzogno's) projects. On the one hand, the operetta was the product of the tireless work in the genre by one of the most popular composers belonging to the 'Sonzogno stable' – a composer who had shown appreciation both for the *piccola lirica* and for the possibilities offered by the cross-fertilisation between the musical-theatrical and filmic industries. On the other hand, *La reginetta*'s film constituted the Casa musicale Sonzogno's ultimate attempt to experiment with music theatre across changing media, formats, venues and audiences: it took Sonzongo's longstanding interest in operetta adaptation to new heights of technological ambition.

[129] Gavin Williams, '*Excelsior* as Mass Ornament: The Reproduction of Gesture', in *Nineteenth-Century Opera and the Scientific Imagination*, ed. David Trippett and Benjamin Walton (Cambridge, 2019), 251–68, at 260.

[130] Elena Mosconi, *L'impressione del film: Contributi per una storia culturale del cinema italiano, 1895–1945* (Milan, 2006), 70–2; and Claudia Rosiny, *Tanz Film: Intermediale Beziehungen zwischen Mediengeschichte und moderner Tanzästhetik* (Bielefeld, 2013), 47–8.

[131] Claudio Camerini, 'Histoire d'un Pierrot', *Immagine: Note di storia del cinema* 3/1 (1984), 23–6; and Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia dei film', 869.

[132] Aldo Bernardini, *Cinema muto italiano: Protagonisti* (Bologna, 2018), 286–7.

[133] Pavesi, 'Cesare Lucidi attrezzista alla Musical Films', 74.

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To ensure that any cultural enterprise survived a season of such deep change was a major undertaking, and the history of the Casa Sonzogno in these years was ultimately tinged by administrative faults and inner conflicts that made the task particularly difficult.[134] In 1920, both Lorenzo and Edoardo Sonzogno passed away (Riccardo had died already in 1915), and the Casa musicale Sonzogno entered a period of structural crisis, even risking bankruptcy in 1923.[135] Renzo's 1920 obituary in *Musica d'oggi* would describe his Casa musicale's main purpose as 'the introduction in Italy of foreign and Italian operetta', reflecting the genre's eminence by this time as well as Sonzogno's longstanding interests in different media and new forms of technology.[136] Although the reborn Casa musicale Sonzogno under the direction of Piero Ostali went on to participate in many filmic experiments based on the works it owned (from entire filmic adaptations to soundtracks), the process of expansion and experimentation across repertoires and media slowed down markedly. Without the charisma and the capital of the Sonzogno family, and in different market conditions shaped by the war and eventually by fascism, such activities became significantly more challenging. In its four decades of life, however, and especially at the turn of the twentieth century, the Casa musicale Sonzogno was nonetheless an extraordinary agent for the expansion of the operatic repertoire across genres, audiences, formats and national canons. From the first importation of French light works in the 1870s to their dissemination and repurposing in different formats, to the production and intermedial adaptation of 'national' operettas, the Sonzogno directors and team created many, if not most, of the opportunities for operetta to enter the Italian cultural market.

The historical neglect by musicologists of the Sonzogno firm, then, echoes the neglect of both Italian operetta and operetta in Italy. Overlooked in favour of Ricordi and Italian opera, the literal destruction and historiographical exclusion of Sonzogno's historical archive has left Italian music history with a narrow account of this period. Conversely, the inclusion in music-theatre historiography of the Casa musicale Sonzogno's engagement with operetta can enrich existing discourses. Its story (still awaiting a comprehensive study) can help both musicologists and cultural historians to understand the multifaceted role music publishers played in the changing market of the long nineteenth century, as well as their resulting authority and agency on questions of taste and repertoire formation. Even if the Casa Sonzogno has been acknowledged by musicologists, fuller engagement would at the very least help us to understand its relevance beyond the established narratives of the *concorso* for one-act operas and the patronage of the Giovane Scuola. Similarly, a study of the rivalry between Sonzogno and Ricordi in the light music-theatre arena adds a new layer of understanding to the seemingly well-known yet still partially understood Milanese duopoly.

This article's focus on Sonzogno's cultural and economic strategies is particularly salient in the case of the Italian operetta market, which has long been overlooked due to its geographical and generic ambiguities. A deeper understanding of the dynamics of operetta production – especially the policies of major companies such as Sonzogno's that amount to cultural or media empires – would enrich ongoing debates around the negotiation of the boundaries between art and entertainment by focusing on fundamental figures such as publishers, as well as clarify the underlying tension between 'national' and 'foreign', and between 'tradition' and 'contamination' that populate many coeval discourses. The Sonzogno experience with operetta can thus help to articulate for operetta a specific value and place in the Italian cultural landscape of its time – secured by visibility and investment and an acute awareness of commercial and artistic factors. A deeper knowledge of cultural agents such as Sonzogno ultimately constitutes a prime tool for understanding the vital

[134] Ostali Jr, 'Cronologia dei film', 872.

[135] Ostali Jr, 'Storia della Casa editrice Sonzogno e della Casa musicale Sonzogno', 12.

[136] 'Necrologio', *Musica d'oggi* 2/4 (1920), 123.

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interactions between audiences, a range of cultural geographies and different production systems during a period of deep national change. While interest in and knowledge of Sonzogno's multi-layered activity has been growing in recent years, it is only with greater studies across diverse media and art forms that we can hope to fully reveal the company's significance in the history of Italian operetta and Italian culture. These would, in turn, serve to re-insert operetta as a key element in Italy's thriving entertainment throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one that Sonzogno both nurtured and actively sought to exploit.

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