Music, Theatre, and Diplomacy: The Paris Opéra during the Second Empire

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Abstract

One of the first accomplishments of the Second Empire (1852–70) was to bring the Opéra under the control of a committee of the most highly placed politicians in the land. While this had far-reaching consequences for the development of repertory in the capital and beyond, it also opened up the possibility of using the Opéra as a *locus* of diplomatic activity, and major works and productions were made to work for diplomatic purposes. The Opéra emerged as a site of four types of diplomatic activities: the spectacle of state visits, the celebration and monumentalizing of military victories, the restoration and maintenance of good relations, and the promotion of Napoléon's imperial project. Occasionally, as at the end of the "Crimean war," the Opéra served as one of the sites for a series of prolonged negotiations that would lead to formal treaties.

Keywords

Paris – Opéra – second empire – Napoléon III – diplomacy – Crimean War

Paris was a central player in nineteenth-century European and global diplomacy, and the Opéra – in its various forms – one of the central locations of diplomatic activity in the capital.¹ The Second Empire, from Napoléon III's

1 The Opéra was called both the Académie Impériale de Musique and Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra during the Second Empire. For reasons of clarity, it is simply referred to here as the Opéra. See Wild, N. *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens au xix^e siècle: les théâtres et la musique* (Paris: Amateurs des Livres, 1989), revised and enlarged as *Dictionnaire des théâtres parisiens (1807–1914)* (Lyon: Symétrie, 2012), 305–6.

re-establishment of empire in December 1852 to the collapse of the regime in the wake of the defeat at Sedan in 1870, saw a massive increase in France's involvement beyond its frontiers – from the Italian peninsula to Mexico, from Algeria to Japan. Much of the resulting diplomatic activity was centered on three sites: the *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères*, in its brand-new building on the Quai d'Orsay, whichever imperial palace was being used by the emperor – usually either the Tuileries, Saint-Cloud or Versailles – and the Opéra, at the Salle Le Peletier. While the Quai d'Orsay was used for the detail of formal diplomacy, and the imperial court for the most elaborate ceremonial, the Opéra was the basis for the deployment of various forms of soft power by the French state, by visiting legations and by the resident *corps diplomatique*.² By the beginning of the Second Empire France had embassies across the globe, and almost every country had, or shared in the case of smaller ones (Honduras, El Salvador, and the principality of Schaumburg-Lippe [Lower Saxony] all shared the same arrangements), an ambassadorial presence in at least Paris and frequently in a network of branches across the nation. At any time, there were between sixty and seventy nations with embassies in Paris, each with managerial, administrative, and clerical staff, most of whom had the means and the motivation to join the audience at the Opéra.³ Looking at the Second-Empire Opéra as a site of diplomacy not only reveals music's critical power as a diplomatic tool, but also encourages the more general understanding of music and theater as embedded in politics and culture rather than simply adorning or reflecting them.

The Second Empire represented an important change in the management of the Opéra, a change that opened up significantly more space for its use as a site of diplomatic activity.⁴ Previous régimes had allowed room for varying degrees of negotiation between the state, the directors of the Opéra and the creative teams they supported; such negotiations ranged from very close (mostly financial) control during the Restorations (1814/15 to 1830) and Ancien Régime to something akin to a laissez-faire attitude in the immediate aftermath of the 1789 Revolution and during the July Monarchy (1830–48). Similar negotiations were also possible between the multiplicity of theatrical and lyric institutions;

2 For a discussion of the origins of the term “soft power” see Everist, M. “Opera, Soft Power, and Anglo-French Relations in the Crimea,” In *Opera as Institution: Networks and Professions (1700–1914)*, eds. C. Scuderi and I. Zechner (Berlin: lit-Verlag, 2019), 96n.4.

3 Foreign ambassadors to the imperial court and French ambassadors abroad were listed annually in the *Almanach impérial*. For the last publication during the Second Empire, see *Almanach impérial pour M.D.CCC.LXVIII présenté à leurs majestés* (Paris: Veuve Berger-Levrault et Fils, 1868), 112–21.

4 For the introduction to the concept of “sites of diplomacy,” see Neumann, I. *Diplomatic Sites: A Critical Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4–7, especially his consideration of the 1807 treaties of Tilsit (4).

this in turn permitted a degree of artistic mobility (between genres, artists, and works) within the context of the careful organization of the theatrical artworld that had been established by legislation enacted by Napoléon in 1806/07). This space permitted a free circulation of power in a Foucauldian “everywhere.”⁵ The Second Empire closed much of this system down by, in 1854, removing the Opéra from the network that had characterized the Parisian lyric theater in previous generations, and placing it under the control of a *Commission supérieure permanente ... du théâtre impérial de l'Opéra* established by imperial decree. The oversight and as it turned out day-to-day running of the Opéra was therefore entrusted to a group of highly-placed politicians of whom three had clear diplomatic responsibilities: Charles-Auguste, Comte de Morny was to become ambassador to Russia in 1856 and Jules Baroche would become Ministre des Affaires Étrangères in 1860, taking over from Alexandre Walewski who had filled the role from 1856.⁶ The *Commission* ensured both an imperial arm-lock on the Opéra but also a clear relationship between the institution and the diplomatic imperatives of the state. One critical consequence of the state's stranglehold on the Opéra via the *Commission* was that – in contradistinction to the separation between artistic and diplomatic actors that Jessica Gienow-Hecht sees in diplomatic uses of musical cultures between the *deutscher Sprachraum* and the United States of America in the same period and later – in Paris during the Second Empire, there were no corresponding examples of artists deviating from the diplomatic obligations of the state.⁷

To an extent, the separation of the Opéra from the rest of the theatrical artworld was a formal recognition of the premier status that the institution had enjoyed for decades if not centuries.⁸ Clearly recognized as the *premier théâtre*

5 These relationships are mapped out in Everist, M. “The Music of Power: Parisian Opera and the Politics of Genre, 1806–64,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67 (2014), 685–734. Such relationships had existed since at least the end of the sixteenth century and were paramount in the eighteenth. See Welch, E.R. *A Theater of Diplomacy: International Relations and the Performing Arts in Early Modern France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); and Bloechl, O. *Opera and the Political Imaginary in Old Regime France* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

6 The consequences for the Opéra of the actions of *Commission supérieure* are the basis of Everist, M. *The Empire at the Opéra: Theatre, Power and Music in Second Empire Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

7 Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E. *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

8 The use of the term “artworld” is here a deliberate reference to the concepts of agency and collaboration adumbrated by Howard S. Becker. See Becker, H. *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982; 25th anniversary edition, updated and expanded, 2008). It also serves as a gesture towards the demystification of such tropes as those of “composer as genius” which play little or no role in the analysis of music's place in Second-Empire diplomacy.

lyrique, with the Opéra Comique as its junior partner, the Opéra also enjoyed a higher status than the Théâtre Français (Comédie Française). Even at the level of newspaper listings the Opéra was always listed first, then the Théâtre Français, followed by the Opéra Comique, Théâtre Italien, Théâtre Lyrique, and so on; whether this was a result of the fractionally greater age of the Opéra or the ceremonial and diplomatic possibilities it afforded is unclear. There can be no doubt however, that if “from the diplomat’s point of view, what is at stake is how to lay out the site so that it is optimal for others to use,”⁹ then the Opéra’s physical location made it a logical preference over the Théâtre Français; not only in terms of its more generous spaces for movement within the building but also because of the network of covered *passages* – the Galerie de l’horloge and the Galerie du baromètre between the south side of the salle Le Peletier and the Boulevard des Italiens.¹⁰

If the term “diplomacy” is taken to mean a way “to conduct relationships for gain while avoiding conflict,”¹¹ overall practices in the nineteenth century fit well with the understanding of music and diplomacy in the early-modern period, where the practice of reciprocal visit and gift-culture was commonly animated by individuals.¹² However, for Second-Empire Paris with its direct state-control of the Opéra, there are closer analogies to be found in practices of the superpowers in the Cold War era. Overriding this difference in organization and approach, the concern for what has been called “the diplomatic sublime” characterizes almost every political move at the Opéra:¹³ the idea that visiting

9 Neumann, I. *Diplomatic Sites*, 6.

10 For an account of the architecture of the Salle Le Peletier, see Cherbuy, E. “La genèse de l’opéra Le Peletier: un opéra provisoire pour le xix^e siècle.” *Livraisons de l’histoire de l’architecture* 26 (2013), 157–73; but even here, the *passages de l’Opéra* are not mentioned. Given that the passages were demolished in 1925, Georges Cain’s first hand recollections from the early twentieth century are a far cry from the glories of the Second Empire; he does however describe how the “Petite Bourse du soir” – “the evening stock-exchange” took place before, after and in the intervals in the passages. Cain, G. *À travers Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 1909), 331–49.

11 Gienow-Hecht, J.C.E. *Sound Diplomacy*, 4.

12 See for example Ahrendt, R., M. Ferraguto, and D. Mahiet, eds. *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); “Music and Diplomacy” Special Issue, *Early Music* 40 (2012); and such studies of diplomacy and other art forms in the early modern period as Jansson, M. *Art and Diplomacy: Seventeenth-Century English Decorated Royal Letters to Russia and the Far East* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015); and Biedermann, Z., A. Gerritsen, and G. Riello, eds. *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

13 The “diplomatic sublime” is a term coined by Neumann, and is glossed as “attempts by one diplomatic party to draw on a wide range of resources, *including aesthetic ones*, to overwhelm other parties with one’s greatness [emphasis added]” (*Diplomatic Sites*, 122).

diplomats and others can be awed and bedazzled by spectacular display, especially if it can be passed off as the everyday.¹⁴ The concept of the diplomatic sublime aligns well with the largely non-reciprocal nature of Second-Empire diplomacy sited at the Opéra: the use of ostensibly soft power to amaze and impress by the power of the spectacle.

The sites of diplomacy represented by the Opéra on the rue Le Peletier fell into four principal groups: the various forms of state visit; the military ceremony; acts of reconciliation; and diplomatic acts that overlapped with national undertakings. Military ceremonies, and the reception of foreign heads of state and their representatives called forth various levels of the diplomatic sublime, ranging from polite welcome to unbridled displays of artistic and aesthetic pageantry. Although diplomatic acts of reconciliation are better documented in 20th- and 21st-century conflicts, during the Second Empire they ranged from using the Opéra as a pretext for re-opening diplomatic conversations with Russia at the end of the Crimean War or opening the auditorium to such a work as Wagner's *Tannhäuser* to support reconciliation with Austro-Hungary after the Second Italian War of Independence.¹⁵

A Diplomatic Site

One of the main objectives of nineteenth-century Parisian theatrical legislation was to ensure that institutions avoided duplication of repertory, and therefore generate unwanted competition. So while the Opéra Comique was dedicated to works of the same name – with spoken dialogue and a wide range of subject matter – and the Théâtre Italien to works from the peninsula in their original language and with mostly italophone casts, the Opéra was the home for five-act *grand opéra* usually on a historical theme with a substantial divertissement and orchestrally-accompanied recitative, shorter works designed to accompany a ballet (*petits opéras*) and the type of *ballet pantomime* that gave

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- 14 Neumann traces the importance of downplaying the spectacular back to Longinus: "People who could have these advantages if they chose but disdain them out of magnanimity are admired much more than those who actually possess them (*Diplomatic Sites*, 126)" For the Longinus quotation, see Russell, D.A., ed. *Longinus: On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1864; R 1982), 7.
 - 15 Unequivocal examples of the use of music or theater in acts of diplomatic reconciliation are rare before 1900. For a telling exception, see the account of the diplomatic and reconciliatory qualities of Andreas Rauch's *Currus triumphalis* of 1648 in Weaver, A.H. "The Materiality of Musical Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe: Representation and Negotiation in Andreas Rauch's *Currus triumphalis musicus* (1648)." *Journal of Musicology* 35 (2018), 460–97.

rise to such works as *Giselle* or *La sylphide*.¹⁶ This hierarchy of genres changed under specific diplomatic circumstances however, with *grand opéra* almost invariably unsuccessful, *ballet-pantomime* significantly more popular, and *petit opéra* just about tolerated because it was essential for the ballet to function. Far more important to diplomacy were the cantatas – that were used right the way across the city – and the use of national anthems and other occasional works.¹⁷ These substitutions were paralleled in the spoken theater, where *comédie*, *tragédie*, and *comédie-vaudeville* yielded to the ceremonial *ode*.

The Opéra was a central part of the diplomatic ecosystem of European politics. It was frequently used as a formal means of deploying soft power to various political ends, but even on evenings when it was not being used for a specific diplomatic event, it was populated by an audience of which diplomats formed a significant part. A study of those who subscribed to boxes at the Opéra for the season 1866–67 (the only period for which the data is recoverable) indicates that 12 percent of the boxes were held by diplomats: one in eight of the subscribers were therefore members of the *corps diplomatique*.¹⁸ This figure however fails to account for those who were not subscribers – but comparing the list of names and the boxes to which they were allocated given in Louis-Pierre-Marie Palianti's *Petites archives des théâtres de Paris*, published a year before, suggests that most of the diplomats listed in official publications did not in fact subscribe (the only ones who did were ambassadors from Bavaria, Austria and Great Britain).¹⁹ This suggests that diplomats swelled the numbers in the boxes well beyond the figure indicated by the proportion of subscribers.

Whether the number of diplomats at the Opéra on a single night was closer to 10 percent or to 20 percent is an easier question than the detail of the exact types of interaction that took place during the five hours that the audience was in the building.²⁰ Even less possible is the reconstruction of conversations that

16 For *petit opéra*, see Everist, M. “Grand Opéra – Petit Opéra: Parisian Opera and Ballet from the Restoration to the Second Empire.” *19th-Century Music* 33 (2010), 195–231. For *ballet-pantomime*, Smith, M. *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).

17 In their specifically ceremonial and diplomatic significance, the nineteenth-century *cantata* has much in common with the *serenata* of seventeenth-century Venice. See Giovani, G. “Serenatas in the Service of Diplomacy in Baroque Venice,” In *Music and Diplomacy*, eds. R. Arendt, M. Ferraguto, and D. Mahiet, 45–67.

18 Huebner, S. “Opera Audiences in Paris 1830–1870.” *Music and Letters* 70 (1989), 208.

19 Palianti, L.-P.-M. *Petites archives des théâtres de Paris: Souvenirs de dix ans du 1^{er} janvier 1885 au 31 décembre 1864 et des six premiers mois de 1865* (Paris: Gosselin, 1865), 11–13.

20 Average performance times ran from around 3' 50" for an evening consisting of a *petit opéra* and a *ballet* to 4' 15" for such a work as Fromental Halévy's *La juive*, to which should be added

took place at the formal and informal dinners that usually preceded attendance at the Opéra. Examples discussed in this article suggest that formal visits between officials at the highest level – say between the Emperor and a visiting Head of State – would normally consist of visits between boxes during the entr'acte; but in terms of the matters discussed this was as confidential as an imperial audience in the throne room of the Tuileries. The examples are silent concerning the discussions in the corridors, the exchange of places in boxes for surreptitious off-the-record conversations that could smooth the path for formal negotiations at the Quai d'Orsay or one of the established embassies in the city the following day. The very nature of such discussions – that they do not leave a written trace – makes the reconstruction of this part of the past anecdotal at best. Nevertheless, in a city that could boast both the most intense diplomatic activity on the continent and the most far-reaching exploitation of music in the theater, the documentary record reveals more of the relationship between music, theater, and diplomacy in Second-Empire Paris than for most other European capitals.

In an environment where the repertory of the Opéra could be and was dictated by a small committee of the most senior of Napoléon III's senior ministers, it was possible to use the institution's programming to convey representations of international relations and strengthen diplomatic bonds. The most striking of these was the revival in French of *Sainte-Claire* by Ernst II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha in late-September 1855. The work was an important background to Anglo-French diplomatic initiatives in the closing months of the Crimean War, by virtue of the fact that Ernst II was Queen Victoria's brother in law, brother of the Prince Consort Albert. *Sainte-Claire*, with a libretto that spoke to contemporary concerns, was performed by the stars of the Paris Opéra. The original German version of the opera had emerged six months after the beginning of the Crimean War; the French version premiered on 27 September 1855 came less than three weeks after the Russian collapse at Sebastopol.²¹ Although no German-speaking state was involved in the Crimean War, Ernst II and his librettist (Charlotte Birch-Pfeiffer, translated by Gustav Oppelt) brought their

time before and after the performance, and during the entr'actes, in order to profit from the social and professional opportunities offered by the generous space in the building and in the Passages de l'Opéra. See, for example, *Journal de régie de l'Opéra*, 4 January 1861 (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra [hereafter *F-Po*] RE-11).

- 21 *Sainte-Claire* / (Santa-Chiara) / Opéra en trois actes / Musique de / S.A.R. Ernest, Duc de Saxe-Cobourg-Gotha / Paroles imitées de l'allemand de M^{me} Birch-Pfeiffer / et appropriées à la scène française / par / Gustave Oppelt / Représenté pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le théâtre de l'Académie Impériale / de Musique, le 27 septembre 1855. / ... / Paris / Michel Lévy Frères, libraires-éditeurs / Rue Vivienne, 2 bis / – / 1855.

opera as close as possible to the scene of the action. Set at the court of Peter the Great in 1715, the opera takes as its point of departure the unhappy marriage between Peter the Great's son, Alexis, and Charlotte of Wolfenbüttel which was contracted in 1711. Charlotte's origins immediately bring the narrative closer to Gotha – which is separated from Wolfenbüttel only by the Harz Mountains – where the operatic Charlotte met Victor de Saint-Auban and triggered the romantic interest in the plot. Victor and his friend, Alphonse de Laborde, are French soldiers attached to the Russian Court, and their hunting down of the miscreant Russian heir apparent gave the opera an even greater resonance in 1855 when it appeared at the Opéra than it had the previous year in Gotha. Although only in rehearsal, it was co-terminus with Victoria's state visit in August 1855. Performances of *Sainte-Claire* regularly occupied the stage between the end of Victoria's state visit and the return of English officials for the Council of War in January 1856.²²

In the following years, the programming of Joseph-Michel-François-Xavier-Jean, Prince Poniatowski's *Pierre de Médicis* similarly had resonances with the world of diplomacy and soft power. Despite enjoying success as a composer of Italian opera alongside a diplomatic career, Poniatowski was hardly known in Parisian musical circles when he composed *Pierre de Médicis*. He had established himself in the city as Florentine minister plenipotentiary in 1853, but had resigned that post the following year and taken French citizenship; he was made a member of the Senate in 1855 and undertook diplomatic missions to East Asia in 1862–63. The *Ministre d'État* himself was driving acceptance of *Pierre de Médicis* at the Opéra in opposition to Royer's disgust at the libretto and distrust of the composer. Royer reported to the Minister that the libretto "is of a puerile naivety and would not be welcomed in this condition by a French public," and while he had heard two of Poniatowski's compositions from the opera at the piano he was concerned that "an opera destined to hold the attention of the elite of Parisian society always ready to criticize even masterpieces is a great undertaking."²³

22 *Sainte-Claire* was performed nine times between late September and early November. With a possible total of only 35 performances during that period, performances of *Sainte-Claire* represented approximately a quarter. For further discussion of the context of *Sainte-Claire* in the context of the Second Empire politics of genre, see Everist, M. *Empire at the Opéra*, 51–52.

23 "est d'une naïveté puérile et ne saurait être admise dans cet état par un public français ... c'est une grande affaire qu'un opéra destiné à tenir un haleine pendant toute une soirée l'élite de la société parisienne toujours disposés à critiquer même les chefs d'œuvre." Letter from Royer to *Ministre d'État* Fould, undated but cMay 1858 (*F-Pan AJ*¹³ 443 [III] cited in *ibid.*, 53).

The production of *Pierre de Médicis* took place a few weeks after the formation of the United Provinces of Central Italy, led by Tuscany, and days before Napoleon III agreed to recognize the Piedmontese annexation of Sardinia. Under consideration at the Opéra at least since May 1858, the gestation, rehearsal, and performance of Poniatowski's opera encompassed the entire period of the Second Italian War of Independence, and it could be seen directly to reflect the banishment and abdication of Grand Duke Leopoldo II, to whom Poniatowski had been responsible. The driving force in *Pierre de Médicis* is the odious behavior of Leopoldo II's predecessor, Piero II de Medici, and his banishment and replacement by his brother Giuliano de Medici (all fictitious).²⁴ It is difficult to ignore the parallels in the plot between Piero II and Leopoldo II – deposition and banishment four hundred years apart – at a point when Poniatowski himself had no country to which to return (the Grand Duchy of Tuscany effectively ceased to exist after December 1859). *Pierre de Médicis* then undertook similar diplomatic and cultural work to *Sainte-Claire*, also promoted by the *Commission supérieure* at the Opéra during the Second Empire.

The clear diplomatic pedigrees of *Pierre de Médicis* and *Sainte-Claire* help explain one of the biggest mysteries in the music of the Second Empire: the catastrophic failure of the “Paris” version of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* in 1861, initially intended as an instrument of reconciliation with Austria and its representatives. The Second Italian War of Independence had ended with the Treaty of Zurich in November, with the Austro-Hungarian Empire much diminished in the region. The engagement of the French state with the artistic interests of the influential wife of the Austrian ambassador, Pauline von Metternich, and the mounting of a work by a composer close to her interests constituted a major contribution to restoring regular relations between the French and Austrian Empires. Although the project was a diplomatic success, Wagner's personal behavior to his supporters and to the musicians with whom he was working, together with the inopportune publication in November 1860 of translations of four of his libretti prefaced by an incendiary *Lettre sur la musique*, had already led to ridicule in the press.²⁵ While the support of liberals had mitigated the

24 Pierre / de Médicis / Opéra en 4 actes & 7 tableaux / Paroles de MM. / De Saint-Georges et Émilien Pacini / Musique du prince / J. Poniatowski / Ballet de M. Petipa / Représenté pour la première fois sur le théâtre de l'académie / Impériale de musique le 9 mars 1860 / ... / Paris / M^{me} V^e Jonas, éditeur du théâtre imperial de l'opéra / Rue Mandar, 4, et Rue Montmartre, 77. / ... / 1860.

25 “[Lettre sur la musique] à Monsieur Frédéric Villot.” *Quatre poèmes d'opéras traduits en prose française précédés d'une lettre sur la musique: le vaisseau fantôme, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan et Iseult* (Paris: Librairie Nouvelle; Bourdilliat, 1861).

failure of the three concerts Wagner had given in the early 1860s, his relationship with the Napoleonic court, mediated by his alliance with Pauline von Metternich, further alienated pragmatic liberals such as Émile Ollivier and especially the Comtesse d'Agoult. By 1861, Wagner's and *Le Tannhauser's* alignment with French and Austrian imperial attempts to shore up failing diplomatic efforts proved to be an insurmountable liability. The journalist, poet, and novelist, Edmond Texier summed up a general feeling when he wrote that "a foreigner and an emperor cannot dictate success in our Paris,"²⁶ and even Ollivier – still loyal despite Wagner's defection to the Metternichs and the Imperial family – could smile as he wrote of the premiere that "What was amusing was that the leaders of the *claque* were the Princesse de Metternich, the Emperor and me. The work was no less admirable for it. The German tenor [Albert] Neuman [Niemann] sang miserably and behaved worse."²⁷ However much Wagner, his supporters, and perhaps posterity, blamed Parisian audiences, the press, and the operatic conventions in place, the response to the production of *Rienzi* at the Théâtre Lyrique eight years later strongly suggests the importance of political circumstances in the *Tannhauser* premiere. *Rienzi* was mounted at the Théâtre Lyrique with none of the attendant political, reconciliatory, or diplomatic difficulties, and the response, although critical, was focused solely on questions of music, poetry, and drama in the same way as most premieres.²⁸

Diplomatic Variations

The Opéra under the Second Empire thus remained available to diplomats and state officials as a social hub imbricated within a complex ecosystem of aesthetic, commercial, and political exchanges. Diplomats played a part not only as audience members, but also as administrators, patrons, librettists, translators, and composers. In this context, the Second Empire made varied use of the

26 "Une étrangère et un empereur ne peuvent pas décréter le succès dans notre Paris." Adam, J. *Mes premières armes littéraires et politiques* (Paris: Lemerre, 1904), 302. The feminine form "une étrangère" makes clear that Texier is referring to the Princess Metternich and not to Wagner (Everist, M. *The Empire at the Opéra*, 54).

27 "Ce qu'il y a de comique, c'est que les chefs de claque étaient la princesse de Metternich, l'Empereur et moi. L'œuvre n'en est pas moins admirable. Le ténor allemand Neuman a misérablement chanté et s'est plus misérablement encore conduit" (Ollivier, E. *Journal*, 1846–1869, 2 vols, eds. T. Zeldin and A. Troisier de Diaz [Paris: Julliard, 1961], 2:28, cited in *ibid.*).

28 Everist, M. "Wagner and Paris: The Case of *Rienzi* (1869)." *19th-Century Music* 41 (2017), 29–30. The article includes a review of the literature on *Le Tannhauser* and Paris (3–7).

Opéra for distinct diplomatic ends – to host state visits, hold military ceremonies, foster or restore goodwill, and advance its imperial project.

Although the Opéra was frequently the site of welcome for foreign heads of state or their representatives, the difference in reception could be marked. Such differences were the result of various pressures: the state of diplomatic relations between France and its diplomatic guests, personal preference on the part of the visiting diplomat or head of state, or cultural distances that required careful negotiation. When Maximilian II, King of Bavaria, visited Paris in 1857, for example, his presence was briefly and politely noted in the press, and this lukewarm enthusiasm may well have been because he spent every evening of his week's visit at different theaters.²⁹ By contrast, the visit of Queen Isabella II of Spain in August 1864 was celebrated with a formal gala event. In addition to the decoration of the building with supplementary lighting and banks of flowers, the evening was characterized by the formal participation of the *corps diplomatique* and construction of a special temporary box for the imperial and royal guests in the middle of the stalls resulting in the sacrifice of much other seating.³⁰ The members of the royal and imperial households sat just in front of the newly-constructed box, the *corps diplomatique* in boxes to the right, and ministers to the left. Members of Napoléon III's personal bodyguard – the *cent-gardes* – were stationed on either side of the imperial and royal box and on either side of the stage.³¹ Unlike some other gala events discussed here, the musical reflection of the event consisted of nothing more than the Spanish national anthem, and the one-act *ballet-pantomime* by Henri Meilhac, Ludovic Halévy, and Jules-Henry Vernoy, comte de Saint-Georges, *Néméa*, with music by Aloysius Ludwig Minkus. While the amorphous, exotic-fantastic scenario was ideal for the political contexts within which the event was enmeshed,³² the focus on *ballet-pantomime* at the expense of *grand opéra* – and to an extent *petit opéra* – demonstrates a clear preference for the former genre in performances where diplomacy took priority over aesthetics.

29 Between Sunday, 24 May and Friday, 29 May, Maximilian II visited the Théâtre du Vaudeville, the Théâtre des Variétés, the Opéra (twice), and the Gymnase Dramatique. The first visit to the Opéra was for a performance of the *ballet-pantomime* by Saint-Georges and Mazilier, *Le corsaire*, with music by Adolphe Adam while the second was to hear just the first two acts of the French translation of Verdi's *Il trovatore* as *Le trouvère* (*Le ménestrel*, 31 May 1857).

30 Material for these additional boxes may have been recovered from the similar undertakings for the Japanese legation two years earlier (see below). Details of the arrangements of this temporary structure and a ground plan, showing the new boxes superimposed over the *stalles de parterre*, are in Paris, Archives nationales [hereafter *F-Pan*] AJ¹³ 529 (IV).

31 The detail was given in *Le moniteur universel*, 19 August 1864, and reprinted across the press.

32 *Journal de régie de l'Opéra*, 18 August 1864 (*F-Po* RE-14).

Political circumstances explain the differences between the reception given the Bavarian and Spanish heads of state. In 1857, Maximillian II of Bavaria was comfortably allied with the Austrians, a position that remained unchanged until the Austro-Prussian War of 1866; in other words, there was no active diplomatic business on the geopolitical agenda to be conducted. However, when Isabella II visited the Opéra, France and Spain had just concluded a protracted military campaign in Southeast Asia with the result that France had enlarged its colonial territories in what was to be called *Cochinchine* with the addition of the regions of Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh, and Dinh Tuong, and the ports of Tourane, Quang Yen, and Ba Lac. The campaign had been made possible by the freeing-up of French forces at the end of the Second Opium War and – critically for this discussion – the addition of Spanish forces from the Spanish East Indies (the Philippines after 1901). The benefit to the Spanish was unfettered navigation along the Mekong and to the three key ports of Tourane, Quang Yen, and Ba Lac.³³ The conclusion of the campaign with successful military and commercial outcomes for both France and Spain was sealed with the Treaty of Saigon in June 1862. The display of soft power at the Opéra in August 1864 mirrored the demonstration of hard power at the Treaty of Saigon in June 1862.

A very different type of engagement with what would have been considered the “Orient” had characterized the visits of the Japanese ambassadorial mission to the Opéra two years earlier. This was the first Japanese legation to Europe since 1620, and it aimed to visit its two major allies – Great Britain and France (with France the junior partner) – as well as the Netherlands, Prussia, Russia, and Portugal.³⁴ Early stages of the visit were characterized by hesitation and poor planning, but after arrival in Paris on 7 April 1862, the ambassadors were eventually received by Napoléon III in the throne room of the Tuileries on 13 of the month. The first formal discussions took place on 16 April, and the day ended with a visit to the Opéra. The resuscitation of Poniatowski’s *Pierre de Médicis*, discussed above, was clearly carefully chosen: Poniatowski was to lead a French legation to Japan at the end of the year, even before the Japanese ambassadors returned home.³⁵ Relations between Japan and Franco-British

33 Franchini, P. *Les guerres d'Indochine*. 2 vols. (Paris: Pygmalion, 1988), 1:67–70 and 82–87; Brocheux, P., and D. Hémerly. *Indochine: la colonisation ambiguë* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994), 25–35.

34 Medzini, M. *French Policy in Japan during the Closing Years of the Tokugawa Regime* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1971), 35–37.

35 *Journal de régie de l'Opéra*, 16 April 1862 (F-Po RE-12). Vici, A.B. *I Poniatowski e Roma* (Florence: Edam 1971), 473, cited in Golianek, R.D. “Politics, Music and Cosmopolitanism: the Operatic Output of Joseph Poniatowski (1816–1873) in its Social and Political Contexts.” *Studia musicologica* 52 (2011), 162.

interests worsened even while the Japanese ambassadors were in Europe, and Poniatowski was to be part of the team shadowing the activities of the French *consul général*, Duchesne de Bellecourt, and overseeing the deteriorating situation in Japan.³⁶ Although the Opéra had even gone to the trouble of building a special set of boxes in the middle of the stalls for the Japanese ambassadors, its plan backfired spectacularly. The following morning, Pierre-Étienne-Théodore Ballieu, a low-ranking *commis* in the *Ministère de la Marine* attempted to set up a further visit for Friday, 25 April; he suggested, however, that the date “will depend on the composition of the program, since the more ballet there is the more [the Japanese ambassadors] will be satisfied” – perhaps the most explicit statement of the importance of *ballet-pantomime* at the expense of *opéra* to be found.³⁷ The second performance consisted of *L'étoile de Messine*, the *ballet-pantomime* by Paul Foucher and Pasquale Borri with a score by comte Nicolò Gabrielli di Quercita, prefaced by Jules-Eugène-Abraham Alary's *petit opéra* (so only two acts instead of five), *La voix humaine*. This was a very different proposition to the four hours and ten minutes that *Pierre de Médicis* lasted, notwithstanding the *divertissement*, “Les amours de Diane,” embedded in the second act, and clearly responded to the Japanese preference for dance over lyric theater.

Celebrating Military Power

Celebrations of French military power were designed as much for the benefit of the local *corps diplomatique* as they were for visiting dignitaries. Ostensibly planned as demonstrations for the advantage of the French public in all its forms, such illustrations of the diplomatic sublime sent back unequivocal messages to foreign ministries across the world via the Parisian *corps diplomatique*. Accordingly, no military campaign during the Second Empire failed to be reflected at the Opéra: the Crimean War, the Second Italian War of Independence, the Second Opium War in China, and campaigns in Mexico and Algeria all found some echo in the Salle Le Peletier.³⁸ It might be thought that such military successes would have been eclipsed by the first major

36 Medzini, M. *French Policy in Japan*, 39–49.

37 “Cela dépendra un peu de la composition du spectacle, car plus il y aura de ballet, plus ils seront satisfaits.” Letter from Pierre-Étienne-Théodore Ballieu to Emile Perrin, undated but shortly after 16 April 1862; *F-Pan AJ*¹³ 529 (IV).

38 The siege of Puebla in 1863 is a case in point. For the detail of the campaign and Parisian responses, see Everist, M. “Opera, Soft Power, and Anglo-French Relations in the Crimea,” 99.

changes to the land-mass of metropolitan France since 1815: the annexation – “*inclusion*” was the preferred public term – of Nice and Savoie, formally agreed after treaty and plebiscite in July 1860. The Opéra commissioned a cantata entitled *L'annexion* from François-Joseph-Pierre-André Méry with music by Jules Cohen. But this was a modest affair, a strophic work of three stanzas and refrain by a composer who had yet to make any mark in the capital; *L'annexion* was only performed once – on 15 June 1860 – in between the acts of a performance of *Guillaume Tell* whose main purpose was an opportunity for Charles-Marie Wicart to make his *début* in the role of Arnold. Two of the three solo roles in the cantata were sung by the artists taking the roles of Guillaume Tell and Jenny, and presumably sang them in costume. The relative low key of this event may well have been the consequence of the fact that almost every theater in the city mounted a work in celebration of the new acquisition. When the *Ministre d'État* reported to the Secretary General of the *Maison de l'Empereur* early the following month, he was able to give a full list of all the works that had been given in its honor (table 1).

The list reveals not only the range of institutions that participated in this kind of events, but also their approach to the question of genre: the Théâtre Français (the Comédie-Française) simply included an *ode* entitled *L'annexion* by Auguste Barthélémy while the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin offered *L'aigle au sommet des Alpes* by Méry; and the Théâtres de la Gaîté, des Folies Dramatiques, and du Cirque Impérial all offered short topical *comédies-vaudevilles*; but the Opéra deployed the most popular genre, the cantata, shared with seven other theaters including the Opéra-Comique and the Théâtre-Lyrique. The most articulate statements of international self-presentation at the Opéra were frequently expressed through the use of such works as *L'annexion*: cantatas before or between the acts of *grands opéras*. Further examples responded to the French victories in the Second Italian Campaign at Solferino and Magenta (Auber's *Magenta*) and to Napoléon III's travels in Algeria in 1865 (Delibes, *Alger!*).³⁹

The most elaborate diplomatic role played by the Opéra during the Second Empire was during the Crimean War; some of the events staged there were characterized by the presence of Queen Victoria of Britain, her retinue, her ministers, and representatives. Paris staged a number of key events with the two principal allies against the Russian Empire, of which there were three phases: a state visit in August 1855, the celebration of the fall of Sebastopol, and the end of the conflict in September the same year, followed by negotiations

39 Ibid., 99–102.

TABLE 1. Cantatas and Related Works celebrating the annexation of Nice and Savoie, July–August 1860)

<i>Institution</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Composer</i>
[Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra]	<i>L'annexion</i>	Cantate	Méry	Jules Cohen
[Théâtre] Français	<i>L'annexion</i>	Stances	Barthelémy	
Opéra C[omi]que	<i>L'annexion de la Savoie</i>	Cantate	Beaumont	Matou
Th[éâtre-Lyrique]	<i>France, Nice et Savoie</i>	[Cantate]	Bordet	Beaudoin
[Théâtre d] Vaudeville	<i>Chant des Nicois</i>		Amat	
[Théâtre du] Palais R[oyal]	<i>Nice et Savoie</i>	[Cantate]	Lefevre	Mangeant
[Théâtre de la] P[ort]e St-M[artin]	<i>L'aigle au sommet des Alpes</i>	Ode	Méry	
[Théâtre de la] Gaîté	<i>L'enfant de la Savoie</i>	Vaudev[ille]	Dutertre & Vulpian	
[Théâtre du] Cirque [Impérial]	<i>Jusqu'aux Alpes</i>	[Vaudeville]	Monnier	
[Théâtre du] Cirque [Impérial]	<i>France et Savoie</i>	Cantate	Hostein & De Groot	
[Théâtre des] Folies Dram[atiques]	<i>Le mariage de Fanchon</i>	Vaud[eville]	Thierry	
[Théâtre] Déjazet	<i>France et Savoie</i>	Scène	Bridault	Barbier
[Théâtre des petits] Lazzaris	<i>France, Nice et Savoie</i>	Cantate	Bordet	Beaudoin
[Théâtre de] Belleville	<i>Nice et Savoie</i>	Cantate	Delteil	

in January 1856 that were part of the peace-making process. The fulcrum of the visit in August 1855 was a gala performance at the Opéra which included the institution's entire personnel from the *premiers sujets* down to the supernumeraries in a show that included opera extracts, a truncated version of the ballet *La fonti*, and a cantata “God Save the Queen” featuring the massed forces of the Opéra.

The end of the siege of Sebastopol occurred just a few weeks after the end of the state visit, and was celebrated across the city; at the Opéra there was a

gratis performance of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* and a new cantata, *La prise de Sébastopol*, with words by Henri Trianon and music by Auber. *La prise de Sébastopol* resurfaced during the final stage of the celebrations focused on the meetings in January 1856 that led to the Treaty of Paris at the end of March. During the visit of the English participants, Lord Cowley, the British ambassador to France and the Duke of Cambridge, there were two *gratis* performances for the returning *Armée de l'Orient* and a gala performance in the presence of the Duke of Cambridge of *Les Huguenots* on January 19.⁴⁰ However tempting it might be to read a military parallel into the staging of *Les Huguenots*, with its various combinations of military displays, nearly 20 years after its 1836 premiere the new revival was animated more by the presence of the soprano Sophie Cruvelli than by any sense that the work paralleled events in the Crimea.⁴¹

Normalizing Relations

If the Opéra could be used as a site of engagement for the two principal allies during the Crimean War, it could also be used as a tool for rebuilding the much longer-standing relationship with the Russian Empire after hostilities had ceased: in short, the use of theater and music as reconciliation. Less than a year after the signature of the Treaty of Paris, the Opéra was being used by Achille Fould and his opposite number in the Russian Imperial Household, Count Vladimir Adlerberg, to attempt a rapprochement between Paris and St Petersburg. Adlerberg explained to Fould that he had been contacted by the Comte de Morny, then president of the *Corps législatif* and a member of the *Commission supérieure*, and said that he had been

informed by Monsieur le Comte de Morny of the desire that your excellency expressed to him to enter into communication with the Household of the Emperor, my esteemed master, with regard to the arrangements that it would be timely to make in common, with a view to putting an end to the onerous inconveniences for the theatrical managements of Paris

⁴⁰ The various musical events around the different stages of negotiating the end of the Crimean War are discussed in greater detail in *ibid.*, 102–11, of which the two preceding paragraphs are a summary.

⁴¹ Cruvelli took the role of Valentine for the first time, and her international fame was matched by the interest generated in her Prussian birth and Italian past, which exactly mirrored those of the work's composer.

and St Petersburg, that result from competition between them, in terms of maintaining Italian [opera] troupes and artists for the ballet.⁴²

The subject of the approach could have been any diplomatic cause, with its understated allusion to “the arrangements that it would be timely to make in common” and to the desirability of putting an end to the “onerous inconveniences.” This attempt at using the Opéra as a diplomatic tool – indeed, treating the Paris and St. Petersburg ballets as proxies for formal diplomacy – was however a charade, since the reply from the director of the Opéra, Royer, to Fould was that the Opéra in Paris and in St. Petersburg had been engaging for years in just the sorts of swapping of information to which Adlerberg had been alluding.⁴³ Nothing in Royer’s response however stopped Fould using the moment for diplomatic expediency and telling Adlerberg – in even less coded language than the latter had originally used – that “this new state of affairs is too desirable not to seek its assurance by all the means in our power.”⁴⁴ The Opéra’s administration was thus ostensibly used as a reconciliatory tool – although at the level of the respective imperial households rather than foreign ministries or embassies – designed to return two of the four largest European powers to something like normality after three years of hostilities.

Colonial and Political Projects

Such questions of international diplomacy could easily be conflated with a subsidiary sense of the term “diplomacy” as the management of purely national relations, where the Opéra could again serve as the locus of soft power. A case in point concerns the presence of the ex-emir of Algeria, Abd-el-Kader (Abdelkader ibn Muhieddine) at a performance at the Opéra in October 1852. At one level the event might seem like nothing more than the routine use of

42 “informé par Monsieur le Comte de Morny, du désir que Votre Excellence lui avait exprimé, d’entrer en communication avec le Ministère de la Maison de l’empereur, mon auguste Maître, relativement aux dispositions qu’il serait opportun de prendre d’un commun accord, dans le but de mettre fin aux inconvénients onéreux pour les directions théâtrales de Paris et de Petersburg, résultant de la concurrence qui existe entre elles, à l’égard de l’entretien des troupes Italiennes et des premiers sujets pour les ballets” Letter from Count Adlerberg to Fould, 2 February 1857 (*F-Pan* F²¹ 957), cited and discussed in Everist, M. *The Empire at the Opera*, 30–31.

43 Letter from Royer to Fould, 12 March 1857 (*F-Pan* F²¹ 957).

44 “Ce nouvel état de choses est trop désirable pour que nous ne cherchions pas à l’assurer par tous les moyens en notre pouvoir.” Letter from Fould to Adlerberg, 28 March 1857 (*F-Pan* F²¹ 957).

the Opéra as a display of soft power for overseas dignitaries. Certainly, reviews in the press made it appear so:

A person whose presence was completely unexpected, the Emir Abd-El-Kader, accompanied by two Arabs and two aides de camp from the *Ministre de Guerre*, engendered lively attention. He was placed in the last of the boxes on the first level, adjacent to the columns, opposite the Prince-Président, to whom he went to pay homage in one of the intervals.⁴⁵

However, there are two related contexts that give this perhaps routine event a diplomatic significance of the first order. The first is the history of Abd-el-Kader's leadership of the opposition to the French occupations and colonizations of Algeria, and his incarceration, since 1848 in the Château d'Amboise; the second is the campaign of the Prince-Président, Louis-Napoléon to gather support for the vote to establish him as the Emperor Napoléon III.⁴⁶

When the French invaded Algeria in 1830, the latter was an autonomous state within the Ottoman Empire. Abd-el-Kader's father was entrusted with a series of guerrilla attacks on the French army, but it was his son who succeeded in uniting regional tribes and delivering body blows to the occupying forces. Abd-el-Kader's success was such that he was able to conclude the so-called *Traité Desmichels* in 1834 and – after French attempts to undermine that agreement – the Treaty of Tafna in 1837. But only two years later, the French again declared war and after nearly a decade of hostilities Abd-el-Kader was forced into submission in December 1847.⁴⁷ Despite promises that the French would

45 “Un personnage dont la présence était tout à fait imprévue, l'émir Abd-el-Kader, accompagné de deux Arabes et de deux aides de camp du ministre de la guerre, excitait vivement l'attention. Il était placé dans la dernière loge des premières de face touchant aux colonnes, en regard du Prince-Président, auquel il est allé rendre hommage dans un entr'acte.” *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 31 October 1852.

46 Despite the fanciful analogy with the relationship between Charlemagne and Witikind, the best account of the relationship between the future Napoléon III and Abd-el-Kader remains de Civry, E. *Napoléon III et Abd-el-Kader – Charlemagne et Witikind: étude historique et politique, biographie de l'Émir contenant un grand nombre de lettres et de documents inédits* (Paris: Martinon, 1853).

47 Contemporary accounts of Abd-el-Kader's political and military strengths are Bellemare, A. *Abd el-Kader: sa vie politique et militaire* (Paris: Hachette, 1863; Bouchène, 2003); and Churchill, C.H. *The Life of Abdel Kader, Ex-Sultan of the Arabs of Algeria, Written from his own Dictation, and Compiled from other Authentic Sources* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867). The standard modern account is Étienne B., and F. Pouillon. *Abd el-Kader le magnanime* (Paris: Gallimard; Institut du monde arabe, 2003).

allow him to settle either in Alexandria or Acre, Abd-el-Kader was imprisoned first in Toulon, then in Pau, and finally in the Château d'Amboise, where he remained until the Prince-Président, Louis-Napoléon, eventually signed his release.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Louis-Napoléon's *coup d'état* in December 1851 had set in train the establishment of a modified constitution with universal suffrage at its head, and most of 1852 was occupied with its implementation and elections, with the idea of the re-establishment of Empire always in the background. From the beginning of September 1852 until his triumphal return to Paris on 16 October, Louis-Napoléon toured the French provinces, advocating and testing the waters for the return of empire. While in Bordeaux, on 8 October, he laid out elements of his foreign policy which involved the peaceful assimilation of Algeria and France, and attempts to resolve a ragged conflict that went back a quarter of a century. On 16 October he returned to the capital on the very same day that he visited Amboise, and ended Abd-el-Kader's five-year captivity.⁴⁹

Abd-el-Kader's first move after his liberation was a visit to Paris, formally to pay homage to the Prince-Président. By this time, plans had already been laid for a plebiscite to confirm the re-establishment of the Empire; voting was to take place on 7 November. When Abd-el-Kader arrived in Paris on 28 October, his first port of call was the Opéra; it is unclear if he knew ahead of time exactly what was about to take place, and at least one contemporary report suggests that he first of all declined the invitation to attend, for reasons of fatigue, but then agreed once he realized that the Prince-Président would be present.⁵⁰ The literature on Abd-el-Kader describes the endless ceremonies in his honor, but the reality is that the occasion was the opportunity for the state to use the Opéra to celebrate not only Louis-Napoléon's return to Paris but also his imminent promotion to Emperor.⁵¹ In a successful attempt to outshine the Comédie Française, who had conducted its own celebrations the previous week, the Salle Le Peletier was decked out in every imaginable presentation of imperial eagles, crowned letter 'N', imperial devices traced out in gas lights. Above Louis-Napoléon's box was the imperial crown, the scepter, and the hand of justice on a mantle of ermine. When the Prince-Président arrived in his box,

48 Focusing on the female members of Abd-el-Kader's entourage during his captivity in Amboise, Amel Chaouati gives a good account of conditions there. Chaouati, A. *Les algériennes du château d'Amboise* (Ciboure: La Cheminante, 2013).

49 The best account of the meeting between Napoléon III and Abd-el-Kader at Amboise is in Churchill, C.H. *Life of Abdel Kader*, 290–91.

50 Ibid., 292.

51 Charles de Mazade gives an astute summary of the collision of the political and diplomatic trajectories in "Revue de la quinzaine." *Revue des deux mondes*, 31 October 1852.

the entire audience shouted “Vive Napoléon! Vive l'Empereur!” The presence of Abd-el-Kader directly opposite made explicit that potential imperial power could be inflected with an emperor's clemency.⁵²

The program began with the first act of Auber's *petit opéra* *Le philtre* and ended with the second act of the ballet *La filleule des fées* and both acts of another ballet *Stella, ou La fête de Piedigrotta*; all of these were pieces currently in the Opéra's repertory.⁵³ But the highlight of the evening was a cantata for soloists, chorus and orchestra entitled *La France sauvée*,⁵⁴ with poetry by Philoxène Boyer and the music by Victor Massé. Only recently returned from travels associated with the *Prix de Rome*, Massé had enjoyed his first success, *Galathée*, at the Opéra-Comique in April 1852, and was only eclipsed by his *Les noces de Jeanette* early in 1853. The choice brought together the two major venues for Parisian music in the theater in a single event. The cantata was obviously not staged, but the chorus all remained in costume, and there was a degree of scenic engagement as “a dark cloud served as a backdrop to the décor. During the final piece of music, the curtain is illuminated by a sparkling light, and a crowned eagle appears in the middle of a radiant sun. Groups of nymphs, holding an oak branch in their hands enter the circle [formed by the chorus] and place themselves in front of the chorus.”⁵⁵ Nothing was left to chance, and the combination of conventional soft power, coupled to the demonstration of clemency with regard to Abd-el-Kader, contributed to a majority of around seven million in favor of Louis-Napoléon's elevation to the rank of emperor, and formal establishment of empire a year to the day after the *coup d'état*: 2 December 1852.

Abd-el-Kader's presence at the Opéra prompts questions of voyeurism, the relationship between visitors in national dress and the rest of the audience in conventional attire. No record survives, for example of the reaction in the Salle Le Peletier to the costumes of the Japanese legation in 1862, but surviving engravings make it clear that their public dress was far removed from the conventional for the Parisian theater (figure 1).

52 There is a full description in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 31 October 1852.

53 The full program is recoverable from *Journal de régie de l'Opéra*, 28 October 1852 (F-Po RE-04). Saint-Georges' and Alfred de Saint-Jullien's *La filleule des fées* had a score by Adolphe Adam while Arthur Saint-Léon's *Stella* had music by Cesare Pugni.

54 Although unpublished, *La France sauvée* survives in Massé's autograph (F-Po RES-170). The work consists of a prelude, a chorus, and two arias with chorus, separated by four recitatives.

55 “Un nuage sombre formait le fond de la décoration. Pendant le dernier chant, la toile s'est éclairé d'une vive lumière et un aigle couronné est apparu au milieu d'un soleil rayonnant. Des groupes de nymphes tenant à la main une branche de chêne sont entrées par le milieu du cercle et se sont placées devant les chœurs.” *Journal de régie de l'Opéra*, 28 October 1852 [F-Po RE-04]).

FIGURE 1 Reception of Japanese ambassadors at the Tuileries, 13 April 1862 (Gustave Janet and Charles Yriate, *L'illustration*, 19 April 1862)

Although public descriptions of Abd-el-Kader at the Opéra were more reserved, private accounts such as that of Baron de Viel-Castel, the director of the Louvre, made it clear that his dress was the object of immense curiosity.⁵⁶ Isabel Burton, writing much later, described what many had witnessed in Paris: “his dignified bearing and cool self-possession are characteristics of his life. He dresses purely in white, and is enveloped in the usual snowy burnous.”⁵⁷ This certainly made an impression on the misanthropic Viel-Castel as well as the rest of the audience. Whether this was behind the possible attempts to make Abd-el-Kader’s presence less visible in Paris is unclear.⁵⁸ When Queen Jumbé-Souli of Mohéli visited Paris in 1868 as part of the French attempts to bring the

⁵⁶ de Salviac, M.-R.-H. Baron de Viel-Castel. *Mémoires du comte Horace de Viel Castel sur la règne de Napoléon III (1851–1864)* 6 vols. (Paris; author, 1883–1884) 2:110. Viel-Castel was able to dine with Abd-el-Kader about a week later, and left an intimate description (115).

⁵⁷ Burton, I. *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land* 2 vols. (London: King, 1875), 2:125–26.

⁵⁸ A reference to these attempts is in *Paris: Archives Nationales, F²¹ 953 à F²¹ 1339 (Théâtres) – Inventaire* (Paris: Typescript, n.d.), 22, referring to F-Pan F²¹ 1046 (2). No document of the sort appears on inspection, however.

island of Moheli under its protection, one of the *aides de camp* of the *Ministre de la Marine* wrote to the Opéra in an attempt to set up a visit for the Queen. He was anxious – in addition to finding an evening when Thomas' *Hamlet* was not being played (in other words, an evening when ballet was predominant) – that she should be given a *baignoire* (a ground-floor box) as opposed to a more visible upper-level box. This was “because the charming and Arab costume of this woman would attract everyone's attention which would embarrass her greatly” (figure 2).⁵⁹

The context of figure 2 is also important; it was the consequence of the initial overtures made in 1863 by the French to colonize the Kingdom of Moheli, attempts that were rebuffed in 1863, and again, despite the charms of the Opéra, in 1868; the nation was put under French protection in 1886 and formally annexed in 1909.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the histories of both Queen Jumbe-Souli of Moheli and Abd-el-Kader point up the tension between the benefit of public display and presence as opposed to – of equal diplomatic importance – the desire for privacy and the respect for the other. But they also point up the hopelessly-imbalanced nature of the diplomatic relationship, with colonialist objects (in the case of Queen Jumbe-Souli) or victims (Abd-el-Kader) placed under the spell of the diplomatic sublime.

There are three conclusions to draw from the role of the Paris Opéra as a *locus* of diplomatic activity during the Second Empire. First, the fact that a building, and the institution that it housed, was used with such a level of intensity for a purpose for which it was not ostensibly planned is remarkable in itself. Second, it is striking that the repertory that was traditionally associated with the Opéra was sidelined in favor of other types of work. And finally, the culture of diplomacy at the Opéra in the Second Empire was contingent on the differing types of political engagement that were in play at any time, and cannot be read as a single monolithic discourse.

It is unsurprising that the most visible diplomatic interventions took place at the most prestigious public building in Paris, that they should be documented so fully in the press, and given so much practical attention by the Opéra. But such public events as have been discussed in this article, especially those that were designed to appeal to the diplomatic sublime, need to be set alongside

59 “parce que le costume arabe et charmant de cette femme attirerait tous les regards ce qui la gênerait beaucoup” (*F-Pan* AJ¹³ 529 [1v]). The photograph is by Désiré Charnay and dates from October 1863 (*F-Pn* Département des Cartes et Plans, Société de géographie, Sg We 396 [34]).

60 Charnay left a memoir of his impressions of the formal reception accorded the French diplomats by Queen Jumbe-Souli of Moheli. See Charnay, D. “Madagascar à vol d'oiseau.” *Le Tour du monde: journal des voyages et des voyageurs* 5 (1864), 193–231, especially 229–30.

FIGURE 2 Photograph of Queen Jumbe-Souli of Moheli (Désiré Charnay, October 1863 (F-Pn Département des Cartes et Plans, Société de géographie, Sg We 396 [34])

the invisible, undocumented exchanges of diplomatic power that the public displays conceal. Rare accounts of less formal encounters that could be found in a single box at the Opéra of any of the nights it gave performances, give an idea of how diplomats at all levels – and the junior perhaps of as much interest than the senior – could function.

The repertory that the Opéra was charged with promoting during the Second Empire consisted of *grand opéras* usually in five acts on a historical subject with an extensive *divertissement* frequently occupying the best part of an act, *petits opéras* in two acts used to accompany a larger

ballet-pantomime, and *ballets-pantomimes – nobles et gracieuses* – themselves. What has become strikingly clear is that in diplomatic contexts the preference was for *ballets-pantomimes* first and *grand opéra* – as the failed performance of Poniatowski's *Pierre de Médicis* for the Japanese legation in 1862 strongly suggests – a distant third, with *petits opéras* in second place and present merely to accompany the ballet. Overlaid on top of this reversal of conventional practice was the much more frequent use of sometimes semi-staged cantatas, nearly always composed for ceremonial occasions.

Acts of diplomacy that made use of the Opéra cannot be treated as a single discursive entity. They range from the celebration of such military victories – largely for local consumption – as Magenta, Puebla, and Sebastopol, through state visits with clearly-defined diplomatic aims – Spain, Japan, and Great Britain, to reconciliation with Russia and Algeria. Repertory follows diplomatic initiative, with cantatas being reserved for the celebration of military success in events that spanned the entire theatrical culture of the city, and in which the Opéra played but one part among several. Full evenings dominated by ballet served the more complex technologies of diplomacy, and performances that did not disturb routine patterns attempted to smooth over the after-effects of the preservation or development of empire.

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